SAINTSBURY GEORGE

A HISTORY OF THE FRENCH NOVEL. VOLUME 2. TO THE CLOSE OF THE 19TH CENTURY

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Содержание

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PREFACE

"The second chantry" (for it would be absurd to keep "temple") of this work "is not like the first"; in one respect especially, which seems to deserve notice in its Preface or porch – if a chantry may be permitted a porch. In Volume I. – though many of its subjects (not quite all) had been handled by me before in more or less summary fashion, or in reviews of individual books, or in other connections than that of the novel – only Hamilton, Lesage, Marivaux, and the minor "Sensibility" men and women had formed the subjects of separate and somewhat detailed studies, wholly or mainly as novelists. The case is altered in respect of the present volume. The *Essays on French Novelists*, to which I there referred, contain a larger number of such studies appertaining to the present division – studies busied with Charles de Bernard, Gautier, Murger, Flaubert, Dumas, Sandeau, Cherbuliez, Feuillet. On Balzac I have previously

written two papers of some length, one as an Introduction to Messrs. Dent's almost complete translation of the *Comédie*, with shorter sequels for each book, the other an article in the *Quarterly Review* for 1907. Some dozen or more years ago I contributed to an American edition[1] of translations of Mérimée by various hands, a long "Introduction" to that most remarkable writer, and I had, somewhat earlier, written on Maupassant for the *Fortnightly Review*. One or two additional dealings of some substance with the subject might be mentioned, such as another Introduction to *Corinne*, but not to *Delphine*. These, however, and passages in more general *Histories*, hardly need specification.

On the other hand, I have never dealt, substantively and in detail, with Chateaubriand, Paul de Kock, Victor Hugo, Beyle, George Sand, or Zola[2] as novelists, nor with any of the very large number of minors not already mentioned, including some, such as Nodier and Gérard de Nerval, whom, for one thing or another, I should myself very decidedly put above minority. And, further, my former dealings with the authors in the first list given above having been undertaken without any view to a general history of the French novel, it became not merely proper but easy for me to "triangulate" them anew. So that though there may be more previous work of mine in print on the

[1] It is perhaps worth while to observe that I did not "edit" this, and that I had nothing whatever to do with any part of it except the *Introduction* and my earlier translation of the *Chronique de Charles IX*, which was, I believe, reprinted in it.

[2] In very great strictness an exception should perhaps be made for notice of him, and of some others, in *The Later Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh and London, 1907).

subjects of the present volume than on those of the last, there will, I hope, be found here actually less, and very considerably less, *réchauffé*– hardly any, in fact (save a few translations[3] and some passages on Gautier and Maupassant) – of the amount and character which seemed excusable, and more than excusable, in the case of the "Sensibility" chapter there. The book, if not actually a "Pisgah-sight reversed," taken from Lebanon instead of Pisgah after more than forty years' journey, not in the wilderness, but in the Promised Land itself, attempts to be so; and uses no more than fairly "reminiscential" (as Sir Thomas Browne would say) notes, taken on that journey itself.

It was very naturally, and by persons of weight, put to me whether I could not extend this history to, or nearer to, the present day. I put my negative to this briefly in the earlier preface: it may be perhaps courteous to others, who may be disposed to regret the refusal, to give it somewhat more fully here. One reason – perhaps sufficient in itself – can be very frankly stated. I do not *know* enough of the French novel of the last twenty years or so. During the whole of that time I have had no reasons, of

[3] There will, for pretty obvious reasons, be fewer of these than in the former volume. The texts are much more accessible; there is no difficulty about the language, such as people, however unnecessarily, sometimes feel about French up to the sixteenth century; and the space is wanted for other things. If I have kept one or two of my old ones it is because they have won approval from persons whose approval is worth having, and are now out of print: while I have added one or two others – to please myself. Translations – in some cases more than one or two – already exist, for those who read English only, of nearly the whole of Balzac, of all Victor Hugo's novels, of a great many of Dumas's, and of others almost innumerable.

duty or profit, to oblige such knowledge. I have had a great many other things to do, and I have found greater recreation in re-reading old books than in experimenting on new ones. I might, no doubt, in the last year or two have made up the deficiency to some extent, but I was indisposed to do so for two, yea, three reasons, which seemed to me sufficient.

In the first place, I have found, both by some actual experiment of my own, and, as it seems to me, by a considerable examination of the experiments of other people, that to co-ordinate satisfactorily accounts of contemporary or very recent work with accounts of older is so difficult as to be nearly impossible. The *foci* are too different to be easily adjusted, and the result is almost always out of composition, if not of drawing.

Secondly, though I know I am here kicking against certain pricks, it does not appear to me, either from what I have read or from criticisms on what I have not, that any definitely new and decisively illustrated school of novels has arisen since the death of M. Zola.

Thirdly, it would be impossible to deal with the subject, save in an absurdly incomplete fashion, without discussing living persons. To doing this, in a book, I have an unfashionable but unalterable objection. The productions of such persons, as they appear, are, by now established custom, proper subjects for "reviewing" in accordance with the decencies of literature, and such reviews may sometimes, with the same proviso, be extended to studies of their work up to date. But even these latter should,

I think, be reserved for very exceptional cases.

A slight difference of method may be observed in the treatment of authors in Chapter X. and onwards, this treatment being not only somewhat less judicial and more "impressionist," but also more general and less buckrammed out with abstracts of particular works.[4] There appeared to me to be more than one reason for this, all such reasons being independent of, though by no means ignoring, the mechanical pressure of ever-lessening space. In the first place, a very much larger number of readers may be presumed to be more or less familiar with the subjects of discussion, thus not only making elaborate "statement of case" and production of supporting evidence unnecessary, but exposing the purely judicial attitude to the charge of "no jurisdiction." Moreover, there is behind all this, as it seems to me, a really important principle, which is not a mere repetition, but a noteworthy extension, of that recently laid down. I rather doubt whether the absolute historico-critical verdict and sentence can ever be pronounced on work that is, even in the widest sense, contemporary. The "firm perspective of the past" can in very few instances be acquired: and those few, who by good luck have acquired something of it, should not presume too much on this gift of fortune. General opinion of a man is during his lifetime often wrong, for some time after his death almost always so: and the absolute balance is very seldom reached till a full generation –

[4] The chief exceptions are Dumas *fils*, the earliest, and Maupassant, the greatest except Flaubert and far more voluminous than Flaubert himself.

something more than the conventional thirty years – has passed. Meanwhile, though all readers who have anything critical in them will be constantly revising their impressions, it is well not to put one's own out as more than impressions. It is only a very few years since I myself came to what I may call a provisionally final estimate of Zola, and I find that there is some slight alteration even in that which, from the first, I formed of Maupassant. I can hardly hope that readers of this part of the work will not be brought into collision with expressions of mine, more frequently than was the case in the first volume or even the first part of this. But I can at least assure them that I have no intention of playing Sir Oracle, or of trailing my coat.

The actual arrangement of this volume has been the subject of a good deal of "pondering and deliberation," almost as much as Sir Thomas Bertram gave to a matter no doubt of more importance. There was a considerable temptation to recur to the system on which I have written some other literary histories – that of "Books" and "Interchapters." This I had abandoned, in the first volume, because it was not so much difficult of application as hardly relevant. Here the relevance is much greater. The single century divides itself, without the slightest violence offered, into four parts, which, if I had that capacity or partiality for flowery writing, the absence of which in me some critics have deplored, I might almost call Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. There is the season, of little positive crop but important seed-sowing, – the season in which the greater writers, Chateaubriand and Mme.

de Staël, perform their office. Here, too, quite humble folk – Pigault-Lebrun completing what has been already dealt with, Ducray-Duminil and others doing work to be dealt with here, and Paul de Kock most of all, get the novel of ordinary life ready in various ways: while others still, Nodier, Hugo, Vigny, Mérimée, and, with however different literary value, Arlincourt, implant the New Romance. There is the sudden, magnificent, and long-continued outburst of all the kinds in and after 1830. There is the autumn of the Second Empire, continuing and adding to the fruits and flowers of summer: and there is the gradual decadence of the last quarter of the century, with some late blossoming and second-crop fruitage – the medlars of the novel – and the dying off of the great producers of the past. But the breach of uniformity in formal arrangement of the divisions would perhaps be too great to the eye without being absolutely necessary to the sense, and I have endeavoured to make the necessary recapitulation with a single "halt" of chapter-length[5] at the exact middle. It will readily be understood that the loss of my own library has been even more severely felt in this volume than in the earlier one, while circumstances, public and private, have made access to larger collections more difficult. But I have

[5] The most unexpected chorus of approval with which Volume I. was received by reviewers, and which makes me think, in regard to this, of that unpleasant song of the Koreish "After Bedr, Ohod," leaves little necessity for defending points attacked. I have made a few addenda and corrigenda to Volume I. to cover exceptions, and the "Interchapter" or its equivalent should contain something on one larger matter – the small account taken here of French *criticism* of the novel.

endeavoured to "make good" as much as possible, and grumbling or complaining supplies worse than no armour against Fate.

I have sometimes, perhaps rashly, during the writing of this book wondered "What next"? By luck for myself – whether also for my readers it would be ill even to wonder – I have been permitted to execute all the literary schemes I ever formed, save two. The first of these (omitting a work on "Transubstantiation" which I planned at the age of thirteen but did not carry far) was a *History of the English Scholastics*, which I thought of some ten years later, which was not unfavoured by good authority, and which I should certainly have attempted, if other people at Oxford in my time had not been so much cleverer than myself that I could not get a fellowship. It has, strangely enough, never been done yet by anybody; it would be a useful corrective to the exoteric chatter which has sometimes recently gone by the name of philosophy; and perhaps it might shake Signor Benedetto Croce (whom it is hardly necessary to say I do *not* include among the "chatterers") in his opinion that though, as he once too kindly said, I am a *valente letterato*, I am sadly *digiúno di filosofia*.[6] But it is "too late a week" for this. And I have lost my library.

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[6] I wonder whether he was right, or whether the late Edward Caird was when he said, "I don't think I ever had a pupil [and he was among the first inter-collegiate-lecturers] with more of the philosophical *ethos* than you have. But you're too fond of getting into logical coaches and letting yourself be carried away in them." I think this was provoked by a very undergraduate essay arguing that Truth, as actually realised, was uninteresting, while the possible forms of Falsehood, as conceivably realisable in other circumstances, were of the highest interest.

Then there was a *History of Wine*, which was actually commissioned, planned, and begun just before I was appointed to my Chair at Edinburgh, and which I gave up, not from any personal pusillanimity or loss of interest in the subject, but partly because I had too much else to do, and because I thought it unfair to expose that respectable institution to the venom of the most unscrupulous of all fanatics – those of teetotalism. I could take this up with pleasure: but I have lost my cellar.

What I should really like to do would be to translate *in extenso* Dr. Sommer's re-edition of the Vulgate Arthuriad. But I should probably die before I had done half of it; no publisher would undertake the risk of it; and if any did, "Dora," reluctant to die, would no doubt put us both in 'prison for using so much paper. Therefore I had better be content with the divine suggestion, and not spoil it by my human failure to execute.

And so I may say, for good, *Valete* to the public, abandoning the rest of the leave-taking to their discretion.[7]

GEORGE SAINTSBURY.

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[7] I have to give, not only my usual thanks to Professors Elton, Ker, and Gregory Smith for reading my proofs, and making most valuable suggestions, but a special acknowledgment to Professor Ker, at whose request Miss Elsie Hitchcock most kindly looked up for me, at the British Museum, the exact title of that striking novel of M. H. Cochin (*v. inf.* p. 554 *note*). I have, in the proper places, already thanked the authorities of the *Reviews* above mentioned; but I should like also to recognise here the liberality of Messrs. Rivington in putting the contents of my *Essays on French Novelists* entirely at my disposal. And I am under another special obligation to Dr. Hagbert Wright for giving me, of his own motion, knowledge and reading of the fresh batch of seventeenth-century novels noticed below (pp. xiv-xvi).

1 Royal Crescent, Bath,
Christmas, 1918.

CHAPTER I
MADAME DE STAËL AND CHATEAUBRIAND

Reasons for beginning with Mme. de Staël.

It has often been thought, and sometimes said, that the period of the French Revolution and of the Napoleonic wars – extending as it does strictly to more than a quarter of a century, while four decades were more than completed before a distinct turn of tide – is, for France, the least individual and least satisfactorily productive time in all her great literature. And it is, to a large extent, true. But the loss of individuality implies the presence of indiscernibility; and not to go out of our own department, there are at least three writers who, if but partially, cancel this entry to discredit. Of one of them – the lowest in general literature, if not quite in our division of it – Pigault-Lebrun – we have spoken in the last volume. The other two – much less craftsmanlike novelists merely as such, but immeasurably greater as man and woman of letters – remain for discussion in the first chapter of this. In pure chronological order Chateaubriand should come first, as well as in other "ranks" of various kinds. But History, though it may never neglect, may sometimes overrule Chronology by help of a larger and higher point of view: sex

and birth hardly count here, and the departmental primes the intrinsic literary importance. Chateaubriand, too, was a little younger than Madame de Staël in years, though his actual publication, in anything like our kind, came before hers. And he reached much farther than she did, though curiously enough some of his worst faults were more of the eighteenth century than hers. She helped to finish "Sensibility"; she transformed "Philosophism" into something more modern; she borrowed a good deal (especially in the region of aesthetics) that was to be importantly germinal from Germany. But she had practically nothing of that sense of the past and of the strange which was to rejuvenate all literature, and which he had; while she died before the great French Romantic outburst began. So let us begin with her.[8]

Delphine.

[8] Although, except in special cases, biographical notices are not given here, the reader may be reminded that she was born in 1766, the daughter of Necker and of Gibbon's early love, Susanne Curchod; married at twenty the Swedish ambassador, Baron of Staël-Holstein; sympathised at first with the Revolution, but was horrified at the murder of the king, and escaped, with some difficulty, from Paris to England, where, as well as in' Germany and at Coppet, her own house in Switzerland, she passed the time till French things settled down under Napoleon. With him she tried to get on, as a duplicate of himself in petticoats and the realm of mind. But this was clearly impossible, and she had once more to retire to Coppet. She had separated, though without positive quarrel, from her husband, whom, however, she attended on his death-bed; and the exact character of her *liaisons* with others, especially M. de Narbonne and Benjamin Constant, is not easy to determine. In 1812 she married, privately, a young officer, Rocca by name, returned to Paris before and after the Hundred Days, and died there in 1817.

"This dismal trash, which has nearly dislocated the jaws of every critic who has read it," was the extremely rude judgment pronounced by Sydney Smith on Madame de Staël's *Delphine*. Sydney was a good-natured person and a gentleman, nor had he, merely as a Whig, any reason to quarrel with the lady's general attitude to politics – a circumstance which, one regrets to say, did in those days, on both sides, rather improperly qualify the attitude of gentlemen to literary ladies as well as to each other. It is true that the author of *Corinne* and of *Delphine* itself had been rather a thorn in the side of the English Whigs by dint of some of her opinions, by much of her conduct, and, above all, by certain peculiarities which may be noticed presently. But Sydney, though a Whig, was not "a *vile* Whig," for which reason the Upper Powers, in his later years, made him something rather indistinguishable from a Tory. And that blunt common sense, which in his case cohabited with the finest *un*common wit, must have found itself, in this instance, by no means at variance with its housemate in respect of Anne Germaine Necker.

There are many *worse* books than *Delphine*. It is excellently written; there is no bad blood in it; there is no intentional licentiousness; on the contrary, there are the most desperate attempts to live up to a New Morality by no means entirely of the Wiggins kind. But there is an absence of humour which is perfectly devastating: and there is a presence of the most disastrous atmosphere of sham sentiment, sham morality, sham almost everything, that can be imagined. It was hinted in the last

volume that Madame de Staël's lover, Benjamin Constant, shows in one way the Nemesis of Sensibility; so does she herself in another. But the difference! In *Adolphe* a coal from the altar of true passion has touched lips in themselves polluted enough, and the result is what it always is in such, alas! rare cases, whether the lips were polluted or not. In *Delphine* there is a desperate pother to strike some sort of light and get some sort of heat; but the steel is naught, the flint is clay, the tinder is mouldy, and the wood is damp and rotten. No glow of brand or charcoal follows, and the lips, untouched by it, utter nothing but rhetoric and fustian and, as the Sydneian sentence speaks it, "trash."[9]

The tone.

In fact, to get any appropriate metaphorical description of it one has to change the terminology altogether. In a very great line Mr. Kipling has spoken of a metaphorical ship —

> With a drogue of dead convictions to keep her head to gale.

Madame de Staël has cast off not only that drogue, but even the other and perhaps commoner floating ballast and steadier of dead *conventions*, and is trying to beat up against the gale by help of all sorts of jury-masts and extemporised try-sails of other new conventions that are mostly blowing out of the bolt-

[9] I never can make up my mind whether I am more sorry that Madame Necker did not marry Gibbon or that Mademoiselle Necker did not, as was subsequently on the cards, marry Pitt. The results in either case – both, alas! could hardly have come off – would have been most curious.

ropes. We said that Crébillon's world was an artificial one, and one of not very respectable artifice. But it worked after a fashion; it was founded on some real, however unrespectable, facts of humanity; and it was at least amusing to the naughty players on its stage to begin with, and long afterwards to the guiltless spectators of the commonty. In *Delphine* there is not a glimmer of amusement from first to last, and the whole story is compact (if that word were not totally inapplicable) of windbags of sentiment, copy-book headings, and the strangest husks of neo-classic type-worship, stock character, and hollow generalisation. An Italian is necessarily a person of volcanic passions; an Englishman or an American (at this time the identification was particularly unlucky) has, of equal necessity, a grave and reserved physiognomy. Orthodox religion is a mistake, but a kind of moral-philosophical Deism (something of the Wolmar type) is highly extolled. You must be technically "virtuous" yourself, even if you bring a whole second volume of tedious tortures on you by being so; but you may play Lady Pandara to a friend who is a devout adulteress, may force yourself into her husband's carriage when he is carrying her off from one assignation, and may bring about his death by contriving another in your own house. In fact, the whole thing is topsy-turvy, without the slightest touch of that animation and interested curiosity which topsy-turviness sometimes contributes. But perhaps one should give a more regular account of it.

The story.

Delphine d'Albémar is a young, beautiful, rich, clever, generous, and, in the special and fashionable sense, extravagantly "sensible" widow, who opens the story (it is in the troublesome epistolary form) by handing over about a third of her fortune to render possible the marriage of a cousin of her deceased husband. This cousin, Matilde de Vernon, is also beautiful and accomplished, but a *dévote*, altogether well-regulated and well-conducted, and (though it turns out that she has strong and permanent affections) the reverse of "sensible" – in fact rather hard and disagreeable – in manner. She has a scheming mother, who has run herself deeply, though privately, into debt, and the intended husband and son-in-law, Léonce de Mandeville, also has a mother, who is half Spanish by blood and residence, and wholly so (according to the type-theory above glanced at) in family pride, personal *morgue*, and so forth. A good deal of this has descended to her son, with whom, in spite or because of it, Delphine (she has not seen him before her rash generosity) proceeds to fall frantically in love, as he does with her. The marriage, however, partly by trickery on Madame de Vernon's part, and partly owing to Delphine's more than indiscreet furthering of her friend Madame d'Ervin's intrigue with the Italian M. de Serbellane, does take place, and Mme. de Staël's idea of a nice heroine makes her station Delphine in a white veil, behind a pillar of the church, muttering reproaches at the bridegroom. No open family rupture, however, is caused; on the contrary, a remarkable and inevitably

disastrous "triple arrangement" follows (as mentioned above), for an entire volume, in which the widow and the bridegroom make despairing love to each other, refraining, however, from any impropriety, and the wife, though suffering (for she, in her apparently frigid way, really loves her husband), tolerates the proceeding after a fashion. This impossible and preposterous situation is at last broken up by the passion and violence of another admirer of Delphine – a certain M. de Valorbe. These bring about duels, wounds, and Delphine's flight to Switzerland, where she puts up in a convent with a most superfluous and in every way unrefreshing new personage, a widowed sister of Madame de Mandeville. Valorbe follows, and, to get hold of Delphine, machinates one of the most absurd scenes in the whole realm of fiction. He lures her into Austrian territory and a chamber with himself alone, locks the door and throws the key out of the window,[10] storms, rants, threatens, but proceeds to no *voie de fait*, and merely gets himself and the object of his desires arrested by the Austrians! He thus succeeds, while procuring no gratification for himself, in entirely demolishing the last shred of reputation which, virtuous as she is in her own way, Delphine's various eccentricities and escapades have left her; and she takes the veil. In the first form the authoress crowned this mass of absurdities with the suicide of the heroine and the

[10] The most obvious if not the only possible reason for this would be intended outrage, murder, and suicide; but though Valorbe is a robustious kind of idiot, he does not seem to have made up such mind as he has to this agreeable combination.

judicial shooting of the hero. Somebody remonstrated, and she made Delphine throw off her vows, engage herself to Léonce (whose unhappy wife has died from too much carrying out of the duty of a mother to her child), and go with him to his estates in La Vendée, where he is to take up arms for the king. Unfortunately, the Vendéans by no means "see" their *seigneur* marrying an apostate nun, and strong language is used. So Delphine dies, not actually by her own hand, and Léonce gets shot, more honourably than he deserves, on the patriot-royalist side.

Among the minor characters not yet referred to are an old-maid sister-in-law of Delphine's, who, though tolerably sensible in the better sense, plays the part of confidante to her brother's *mijaurée* of a widow much too indulgently; a M. Barton, Léonce's mentor, who, despite his English-looking name, is not (one is glad to find) English, but is, to one's sorrow, one of the detestable "parsons-in-tie-wigs" whom French Anglomania at this time foisted on us as characteristic of England; a sort of double of his, M. de Lerensei, a Protestant free-thinker, who, with his *divorcée* wife, puts up grass altars in their garden with inscriptions recording the happiness of their queer union; an ill-natured Mme. du Marset and her old cicisbeo, M. de Fierville, who suggest, in the dismallest way, the weakest wine of Marmontel gone stale and filtered through the dullest, though not the dirtiest, part of Laclos.

Yet the thing, "dismal trash" as Sydney almost justly called it, is perhaps worth reading once (nothing but the sternest voice of

duty could have made me read it twice) because of the existence of *Corinne*, and because also of the undoubted fact that, here as there, though much more surprisingly, a woman of unusual ability was drawing a picture of what she would have liked to be – if not of what she actually thought herself.[11] The borrowed beauty goes for nothing – it were indeed hard if one did not, in the case of a woman of letters, "let her make her dream All that she would," like Tennyson's Prince, but in this other respect. The generosity, less actually exaggerated, might also pass. That Delphine makes a frantic fool of herself for a lover whose attractions can only make male readers shrug their shoulders – for though we are *told* that Léonce is clever, brave, charming, and what not, we see nothing of it in speech or action – may be matter of taste; but that her heroine's part should seem to any woman one worth playing is indeed wonderful. Delphine behaves throughout like a child, and by no means always like a very well-brought-up child; she never seems to have the very slightest idea that "things are as they are and that their consequences will be what they will be"; and though, once more, we are *told* of passion carrying all before it, we are never *shown* it. It is all "words, words." To speak of her love in the same breath with Julie's is to break off the speech in laughter; to consider her woes and remember Clarissa's is to be ready to read another seven or eight

[11] I forget whether other characters have been identified, but Léonce does not appear to have much in him of M. de Narbonne, Corinne's chief lover of the period, who seems to have been a sort of French Chesterfield, without the wit, which nobody denies our man, or the real good-nature which he possessed.

volumes of Richardson in lieu of these three of Madame de Staël's.

And yet this lady could do something in the novel way, and, when the time came, she did it.

Corinne.

Between *Delphine* and *Corinne* Madame de Staël had, in the fullest sense of a banal phrase, "seen a great of the world." She had lost the illusions which the Duessa Revolution usually spreads among clever but not wise persons at her first appearance, and had not left her bones, as too many[12] such persons do, in the *pieuvre*-caves which the monster keeps ready. She had seen England, being "coached" by Crabb-Robinson and others, so as to give some substance to the vague *philosophe-Anglomane* flimsiness of her earlier fancy. She had seen Republicanism turn to actual Tyranny, and had made exceedingly unsuccessful attempts to captivate the tyrant. She had seen Germany, and had got something of its then not by any means poisonous, if somewhat windy, "culture"; a little romance of a kind, though she was never a real Romantic; some aesthetics; some very exoteric philosophy, etc. She had done a great deal of not very happy love-making; had been a woman of letters, a patroness of men of letters, and – most important of all – had never dismounted from her old hobby "Sensibility," though she had learnt how to put it through new paces.

[12] Perhaps, after all, *not* too many, for they all richly deserve it.

A critical reader of *Corinne* must remember all this, and he must remember something else, though the reminder has been thought to savour of brutality. It is perfectly clear to me, and always has been so from reading (in and between the lines) of her own works, of Lady Blennerhassett's monumental book on her, of M. Sorel's excellent monograph, and of scores of longer and shorter studies on and references to her English and German and Swiss and French – from her own time downwards, that the central secret, mainspring, or whatever any one may choose to call it, of Madame de Staël's life was a frantic desire for the physical beauty which she did not possess,[13] and a persistent attempt, occasionally successful, to delude herself into believing that she had achieved a sufficient substitute by literary, philosophical, political, and other exertion.

Its improved conditions.

This partly pathetic, partly, alas! ridiculous, but on the whole (with a little charity) quite commiserable endeavour, attained some success, though probably with not a little extraneous help, in *De l'Allemagne*, and the posthumous *Considérations* on the Revolution; but these books do not concern us, and illustrate only part of the writer's character, temperament, and talent, if not genius. *Corinne* gives us the rest, and nearly, if not quite, the whole. The author had no doubt tried to do this in *Delphine*, but had then had neither art nor equipment for the task, and she

[13] Eyes like the Ravenswing's, "as b-b-big as billiard balls" and of some brightness, are allowed her, but hardly any other good point.

had failed utterly. She was now well, if not perfectly, equipped, and had learnt not a little of the art to use her acquisitions. *Delphine* had been dull, absurd, preposterous; *Corinne*, if it has dull patches, saves them from being intolerable. If its sentiment is extravagant, it is never exactly preposterous or exactly absurd; for the truth and reality of passion which are absent from the other book are actually present here, though sometimes in unintentional masquerade.

In fact, *Corinne*, though the sisterhood of the two books is obvious enough, has almost, though not quite, all the faults of *Delphine* removed and some merits added, of which in the earlier novel there is not the slightest trace. The history of my own acquaintance with it is, I hope, not quite irrelevant. I read it – a very rare thing for me with a French novel (in fact I can hardly recollect another instance, except, a quaint contrast, Paul de Kock's *André le Savoyard*) – first in English, and at a very early period of life, and I then thought it nearly as great "rot" as I have always thought its predecessor. But though I had, I hope, sense enough to see its faults, I had neither age nor experience nor literature enough to appreciate its merits. I read it a good deal later in French, and, being then better qualified, *did* perceive these merits, though it still did not greatly "arride" me. Later still – in fact, only some twenty years ago – I was asked to re-edit and "introduce" the English translation. It is a popular mistake to think that an editor, like an advocate, is entitled, if not actually bound, to make the best case for his client, quite apart

from his actual opinions; but in this instance my opinion of the book mounted considerably. And it has certainly not declined since, though this *History* has necessitated a fourth study of the original, and though I shall neither repeat what I said in the Introduction referred to, nor give the impression there recorded in merely altered words. Indeed, the very purpose of the present notice, forming part, as it should, of a connected history of the whole department to which the book belongs, requires different treatment, and an application of what may be called critical "triangulation" from different stand-points.

An illustrated edition of it.

By an odd chance and counter-chance, the edition which served for this last perusal, after threatening to disserve its text, had an exactly contrary result. It was the handsome two-volume issue of 1841 copiously adorned with all sorts of ingenious initial-devices, *culs-de-lampe*, etc., and with numerous illustrative "cuts" beautifully engraved (for the most part by English engravers, such as Orrin Smith, the Williamses, etc.), excellently drawn and composed by French artists from Gros downwards, but costumed in what is now perhaps the least tolerable style of dress even to the most catholic taste – that of the Empire in France and the Regency in England – and most comically "thought."[14] At first sight this might seem to be

[14] I never pretended to be an art-critic, save as complying with Blake's negative injunction or qualification "not to be connoisseured out of my senses," and I do not know what is the technical word in the arts of design corresponding to διανοια in

a disadvantage, as calling attention to, and aggravating, certain defects of the text itself. I found it just the reverse. One was slightly distracted from, and half inclined to make allowances for, Nelvil's performances in the novel when one saw him – in a Tom-and-Jerry early chimneypot hat, a large coachman's coat flung off his shoulders and hanging down to his heels, a swallow-tail, tight pantaloons, and Hessian boots – extracting from his bosom his father's portrait and expressing filial sentiments to it. One was less likely to accuse Corinne of peevishness when one beheld the delineation of family worship in the Edgermond household from which she fled. And the faithful eyes remonstrated with the petulant brain for scoffing at excessive sentiment, when they saw how everybody was always at somebody else's feet, or supporting somebody else in a fainting condition, or resting his or her burning brow on a hand, the elbow of which rested, in its turn, on a pedestal like that of Mr. Poseidon Hicks in *Mrs. Perkins's Ball*. The plates gave a safety-valve to the letterpress in a curiously anodyne fashion which I hardly ever remember to have experienced before. Or rather, one transferred to them part, if not the whole, of the somewhat contemptuous amusement which the manners had excited, and had one's more appreciative faculties clear for the book itself.

The story.

The story of *Corinne*, though not extraordinarily "accidented"

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literature.

and, as will be seen, adulterated, or at least mixed, with a good many things that are not story at all, is fairly solid, much more so than that of *Delphine*. It turns – though the reader is not definitely informed of this till the book is half over – on the fact of an English nobleman, Lord Edgermond (dead at *temp.* of tale), having had two wives, the first an Italian. By her he had one daughter, whose actual Christian name (unless I forget) we are never told, and he lived with them in Italy till his wife's death. Then he went home and married a second wife, an English or Scotch woman (for her name seems to have been Maclinson – a well-known clan) of very prudish disposition. By her he had another daughter, Lucile – younger by a good many years than her sister. To that sister Lady Edgermond the second does not behave exactly in the traditionally novercal fashion, but she is scandalised by the girl's Italian ways, artistic and literary temperament, desire for society, etc. After Lord Edgermond's death the discord of the two becomes intolerable, and the elder Miss Edgermond, coming of age and into an independent fortune, breaks loose and returns to Italy, her stepmother stipulating that she shall drop her family name altogether and allow herself to be given out as dead. She consents (unwisely, but perhaps not unnaturally), appears in Italy under the name of "Corinne," and establishes herself without difficulty in the best Roman society as a lady of means, great beauty, irreproachable character, but given to private displays of her talents as singer, improvisatrice, actress, and what not.

But before she has thus thrown a still respectable bonnet over a not too disreputable mill, something has happened which has, in the long run, fatal consequences. Lord Edgermond has a friend, Lord Nelvil, who has a son rather younger than Corinne. Both fathers think that a marriage would be a good thing, and the elder Nelvil comes to stay with the Edgermonds to propose it. Corinne (or whatever her name was then) lays herself out in a perfectly innocent but, as he thinks, forward manner to please him, and he, being apparently (we never see him in person) not a little of an old fool, cries off this project, but tells Edgermond that he should like his son to marry Lucile when she grows up.

Without an intolerable dose of "argument," it is only possible to say here that Nelvil, after his father's death, journeys to the Continent (where he has been already engaged in a questionable *liaison*), meets Corinne, and, not at first knowing in the least who she is, falls, or thinks he falls, frantically in love with her, while she really does fall more frantically in love with him. After a sojourn, of which a little more presently, circumstances make him (or he thinks they make him) return home, and he falls, or thinks he falls,[15] out of love with Corinne and into it (after a fashion) with Lucile. Corinne undertakes an incognito journey to England to find out what is happening, but (this, though not impossible in itself, is, as told, the weakest part of the story)

[15] I hope this iteration may not seem too damnable. It is intended to bring before the reader's mind the utterly *willowish* character of Oswald, Lord Nelvil. The slightest impact of accident will bend down, the weakest wind of circumstance blow about, his plans and preferences.

never makes herself known till too late, and Nelvil, partly out of respect for his father's wishes, and partly, one fears, because Lucile is very pretty and Corinne seems to be very far off, marries the younger sister.

It would have greatly improved the book if, with or even without a "curtain," it had ended here. But Madame de Staël goes on to tell us how Nelvil, who is a soldier by profession,[16] leaves his wife and a little daughter, Juliette, and goes to "Les Iles" on active service for four years; how Lucile, not unnaturally, suspects hankering after the sister she has not seen since her childhood; how, Nelvil being invalided home, they all go to Italy, and find Corinne in a dying condition; how Lucile at first refuses to see her, but, communications being opened by the child Juliette, reconciliations follow; and how Corinne dies with Nelvil and Lucile duly kneeling at her bedside.

The minor personages of any importance are not numerous. Besides Lady Edgermond, they consist of the Comte d'Erfeuil, a French travelling companion of Nelvil's; the Prince of Castel-Forte, an Italian of the highest rank; a Mr. Edgermond, who does not make much appearance, but is more like a real Englishman in his ways and manners than Nelvil; an old Scotch nincompoop named Dickson, who, unintentionally, makes mischief wherever he goes as surely as the personage in the song made music. Lady

[16] That he seems to have unlimited leave is not perhaps, for a peer in the period, to be cavilled at; the manner in which he alternately breaks blood-vessels and is up to fighting in the tropics may be rather more so.

Edgermond, though she is neither bad nor exactly ill-natured, is the evil genius of the story. Castel-Forte, a most honourable and excellent gentleman, has so little of typical Italianism in him that, finding Corinne will not have him, he actually serves as common friend, confidant, and almost as honourable go-between, to her and Nelvil.

On the other hand, French critics have justly complained, and critics not French may endorse the complaint, that the Comte d'Erfeuil is a mere caricature of the "frivolous" French type too commonly accepted out of France. He is well-mannered, not ill-natured, and even not, personally, very conceited, but utterly shallow, incapable of a serious interest in art, letters, or anything else, blandly convinced that everything French is superlative and that nothing not French is worthy of attention. Although he appears rather frequently, he plays no real part in the story, and, unless there was some personal grudge to pay off (which is not unlikely), it is difficult to imagine why Madame de Staël should have introduced a character which certainly does her skill as a character-drawer very little credit.

The character of Nelvil.

It is, however, quite possible that she was led astray by a will-o'-the-wisp, which has often misled artists not of the very first class – the chance of an easy contrast. The light-hearted, light-minded Erfeuil was to set off the tense and serious Nelvil – a type again, as he was evidently intended to be, but a somewhat new type of Englishman. She was a devotee of Rousseau, and she

undoubtedly had the egregious Bomston before her. But, though her sojourn in England had not taught her very much about actual Englishman, she had probably read Mackenzie, and knew that the "Man of Feeling" touch had to some extent affected us. She tried to combine the two, with divers hints of hearsay and a good deal of pure fancy, and the result was Oswald, Lord Nelvil. As with that other curious contemporary of hers with whom we deal in this chapter, the result was startlingly powerful in literature. There is no doubt that the Byronic hero, whose importance of a kind is unmistakable and undeniable, is Schedoni, René, and Nelvil sliced up, pounded in a mortar, and made into a rissole with Byron's own sauce of style in rhetoric or (if anybody will have it so) poetry, but with very little more substantial ingredients. As for the worthy peer of Scotland or England, more recent estimates have seldom been favourable, and never ought to have been so. M. Sorel calls him a "snob"; but that is only one of the numerous and, according to amiable judgments, creditable instances of the inability of the French to discern exactly what "snobbishness" is.[17] My Lord Nelvil has many faults and very few merits, but among the former I do not perceive any snobbishness. He is not in the least attracted by Corinne's popularity, either with

[17] As I may have remarked elsewhere, they often seem to confuse it with "priggishness," "cant," and other amiable *cosas de Inglaterra*. (The late M. Jules Lemaître, as Professor Ker reminds me, even gave the picturesque but quite inadequate description: "Le snob est un mouton de Panurge prétentieux, un mouton qui saute à la file, mais d'un air suffisant.") We cannot disclaim the general origin, but we may protest against confusion of the particular substance.

the great vulgar or the small, and his hesitations about marrying her do not arise from any doubt (while he is still ignorant on the subject) of her social worthiness to be his wife. He *is* a prig doubtless, but he is a prig of a very peculiar character – a sort of passionate prig, or, to put it in another way, one of Baudelaire's "Enfants de la lune," who, not content with always pining after the place where he is not and the love that he has not, is constantly making not merely himself, but the place where he is and the love whom he has, uncomfortable and miserable. There can, I think, be little doubt that Madame de Staël, who frequently insists on his "irresolution" (remember that she had been in Germany and heard the Weimar people talk), meant him for a sort of modern Hamlet in very different circumstances as well as times. But it takes your Shakespeare to manage your Hamlet, and Madame de Staël was not Shakespeare, even in petticoats.

And the book's absurdities.

The absurdities of the book are sufficiently numerous. Lord Nelvil, who has not apparently had any special experience of the sea, "advises" the sailors, and takes the helm during a storm on his passage from Harwich to Emden; while these English mariners, unworthy professional descendants of that admirable man, the boatswain of the opening scenes of *The Tempest*, are actually grateful to him, and when he goes 'ashore "press themselves round him" to take leave of him (that is to say, they do this in the book; what in all probability they actually *said* would not be fit for these pages). He is always saving people –

imprisoned Jews and lunatics at a fire in Ancona; aged lazzaroni who get caught in a sudden storm-wave at Naples; and this in spite of the convenient-inconvenient blood-vessels which break when it is necessary, but still make it quite easy for him to perform these Herculean feats and resume his rather interim military duties when he pleases. As for Corinne, her exploits with her "schall" (a vestment of which Madame de Staël also was fond), and her crowning in the Capitol, where the crown tumbles off – an incident which in real life would be slightly comical, but which here only gives Nelvil an opportunity of picking it up – form a similar prelude to a long series of extravagances. The culmination of them is that altogether possible-improbable visit to England, which might have put everything right and does put everything wrong, and the incurable staginess which makes her, as above related, refuse to see Oswald and Lucile *together* till she is actually in *articulo mortis*.

And yet – "for all this and all this and twice as much as all this" – I should be sorry for any one who regards Corinne as merely a tedious and not at all brief subject for laughter. One solid claim which it possesses has been, and is still for a moment, definitely postponed; but in another point there is, if not exactly a defence, an immense counterpoise to the faults and follies just mentioned. Corinne to far too great an extent, and Oswald to an extent nearly but not quite fatal, are loaded (*affublés*, to use the word we borrowed formerly) with a mass of corporal and spiritual wiglomeration (as Mr. Carlyle used expressively and

succinctly to call it) in costume and fashion and sentiment and action and speech. But when we have stripped this off, *manet res*– reality of truth and fact and nature.

Compensations – Corinne herself.

There should be no doubt of this in Corinne's own case. It has been said from the very first that she is, as Delphine had been, if not what her creatress was, what she would have liked to be. The ideal in the former case was more than questionable, and the execution was very bad. Here the ideal is far from flawless, but it is greatly improved, and the execution is improved far more than in proportion. Corinne is not "a reasonable woman"; but reason, though very heartily to be welcomed on its rare occurrences in that division of humanity, when it does not exclude other things more to be welcomed still, is very decidedly not to be preferred to the other things themselves. Corinne has these – or most of them. She is beautiful; she is amiable; she is unselfish; without the slightest touch of prudery she has the true as well as the technical chastity; and she is really the victim of inauspicious stars, and of the misconduct of other people – the questionable wisdom of her own father; the folly of Nelvil's; the wilfulness in the bad sense, and the weakness of will in the good, of her lover; the sour virtue and *borné* temperament of Lady Edgermond. Almost all her faults and not a few of her misfortunes are due to the "sensibility" of her time, or the time a little before her; for, as has been more than hinted already, *Corinne*, though a book of far less genius, strength, and concentration than *Adolphe*, is, like it,

though from the other side, and on a far larger scale, the history of the Nemesis of Sensibility.

Nelvil again.

But Nelvil? He is, it has been said, a deplorable kind of creature – a kind of creature (to vary Dr. Johnson's doom on the unlucky mutton) ill-*bred*, ill-educated, ill- (though not quite in the ordinary sense) natured, ill-fated to an extent which he could partly, but only partly, have helped; and ill-conducted to an extent which he might have helped almost altogether. But is he unnatural? I fear – I trow – not. He is, I think, rather more natural than Edgar of Ravenswood, who is something of the same class, and who may perhaps owe a very little to him. At any rate, though he has more to do with the theatre, he is less purely theatrical than that black-plumed Master. And it seems to me that he is more differentiated from the Sensibility heroes than even Corinne herself is from the Sensibility heroines, though one sympathises with her much more than with him. *Homo est*, though scarcely *vir*. Now it is humanity which we have been always seeking, but not always finding, in the long and often brilliant list of French novels before his day. And we have found it here once more.

Its aesthetics.

But we find also something more; and this something more gives it not merely an additional but even to some extent a fresh hold upon the history of the novel itself. To say that it is in great

part a "guide-book novel," as indeed its second title[18] honestly declares, may seem nowadays a doubtful testimonial. It is not really so. For it was, with certain exceptions in German, the *first* "guide-book" novel: and though some of those exceptions may have shown greater 'literary genius than Madame de Staël's, the Germans, though they have, in certain lines, had no superiors as producers of tales, have never produced a good novel yet.[19] Moreover, the guide-book element is a great set-off to the novel. It is not – or at any rate it is not necessarily – liable to the objections to "purpose," for it is ornamental and not structural. It takes a new and important and almost illimitably fresh province of nature and of art, which is a part of nature, to be its appanage. It would be out of place here to trace the development of this system of reinforcing the novel beyond France, in Scott more particularly. It is not out of place to remind the reader that even Rousseau (to whom Madame de Staël owed so much) to some extent, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Chateaubriand to more, as far as what we may call scenery-guide-booking goes, had preceded her. But for the "art," the aesthetic addition, she was indebted only to the Germans; and almost all her French successors were indebted to her.[20]

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[18] *Corinne, ou l'Italie.*

[19] If anybody thinks *Wilhelm Meister* or the *Wahlverwandtschaften* a good novel, I am his very humble servant in begging to differ. Freytag's *Soll und Haben* is perhaps the nearest approach; but, on English or French standards, it could only get a fair second class.

[20] Corinne "walks and talks" (as the lady in the song was asked to do, but without

Although, therefore, it is hardly possible to call Madame de Staël a good novelist, she occupies a very important position in the history of the novel. She sees, or helps to see, the "sensibility" novel out, with forcible demonstration of the inconveniences of its theory. She helps to see the aesthetic novel – or the novel highly seasoned and even sandwiched with aesthetics – in. She manages to create at least one character to whom the epithets of "noble" and "pathetic" can hardly be refused; and at least one other to which that of "only too natural," if with an exceptional and faulty kind of nature, must be accorded. At a time when the most popular, prolific, and in a way craftsmanlike practitioner of the kind, Pigault-Lebrun, was dragging it through vulgarity, she keeps it at any rate clear of that. Her description is adequate: and her society-and-manners painting (not least in the *récit* giving Corinne's trials in Northumberland) is a good deal more than adequate. Moreover, she preserves the tradition of the great *philosophe* group by showing that the writer of novels can also be the author of serious and valuable literature of another kind. These are no small things to have done: and when one thinks of them one is almost able to wipe off the slate of memory that awful picture of a turbaned or "schalled" Blowsalind, with arms[21] like a "daughter of the plough," which a cruel tradition has

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requiring the offer of a blue silk gown) with her Oswald all over the churches and palaces and monuments of Rome, "doing" also Naples, Venice, etc.

[21] She was rather proud of these mighty members: and some readers may recall

perpetuated as frontispiece to some cheap editions of her works.

Chateaubriand – his peculiar position as a novelist.

There is perhaps no more difficult person to appraise in all French literature – there are not many in the literature of the world – than François René, Vicomte de Chateaubriand. It is almost more difficult than in the case of his two great disciples, Byron and Hugo, to keep his personality out of the record: and it is a not wholly agreeable personality. Old experience may perhaps attain to this, and leave to ghouls and large or small coffin-worms the business of investigating and possibly fattening on the thing. But even the oldest experience dealing with his novels (which were practically all early) may find itself considerably *tabusté*, as Rabelais has it, that is to say, "bothered" with faults which are mitigated in the *Génie du Christianisme*, comparatively (not quite) unimportant in the *Voyages*, and almost entirely whelmed in the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*. These faults are of such a complicated and various kind that the whole armour of criticism is necessary to deal with them, on the defensive in the sense of not being too much influenced by them, and on the offensive in the sense of being severe but not too severe on them.

And the remarkable interconnection of his works in fiction.

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that not least Heinesque remark of the poet who so much shocks Kaiser Wilhelm II., "Those of the Venus of Milo are not more beautiful."

The mere reader of Chateaubriand's novels generally begins with *Atala* and *René*, and not uncommonly stops there. In a certain sense this reader is wise in his generation. But he will never understand his author as a novelist if he does so; and his appreciation of the books or booklets themselves will be very incomplete. They are both not unfrequently spoken of as detached episodes of the *Génie du Christianisme*; and so they are, in the illustrative sense. They are actually, and in the purely constitutive way, episodes of another book, *Les Natchez*, while this book itself is also a novel "after a sort." The author's work in the kind is completed by the later *Les Martyrs*, which has nothing to do, in persons or time, with the others, being occupied with the end of the third century, while they deal (throwing back a little in *Atala*) with the beginning of the eighteenth. But this also is an illustrative companion or reinforcement of the *Génie*. With that book the whole body of Chateaubriand's fiction[22] is thus directly connected; and the entire collection, not a little supported by the *Voyages*, constitutes a deliberate "literary offensive," intended to counter-work the proceedings of the *philosophes*, though with aid drawn from one of them – Rousseau, – and only secondarily

[22] Including also a third short story, *Le Dernier Abencérage*, which belongs, constructively, rather to the *Voyages*. It is in a way the liveliest (at least the most "incidented") of all, but not the most interesting, and with very little *temporal* colour, though some local. It may, however, be taken as another proof of Chateaubriand's importance in the germinal way, for it starts the Romantic interest in Spanish things. The contrast with the dirty rubbish of Pigault-Lebrun's *La Folie Espagnole* is also not negligible.

designed to provide pure novel-interest. If this is forgotten, the student will find himself at sea without a rudder; and the mere reader will be in danger of exaggerating very greatly, because he does not in the least understand, the faults just referred to, and of failing altogether to appreciate the real success and merit of the work as judged on that only criterion, "Has the author done what he meant to do, and done it well, on the lines he chose?" Of course, if our reader says, "I don't care about all this, I merely want to be amused and interested," one cannot prevent him. He had, in fact, as was hinted just now, better read nothing but *Atala* and *René*, if not, indeed, *Atala* only, immense as is the literary importance of its companion. But in a history of the novel one is entitled to hope, at any rate to wish, for a somewhat better kind of customer or client.

According to Chateaubriand's own account, when he quitted England after his not altogether cheerful experiences there as an almost penniless *émigré*, he left behind him, in the charge of his landlady, exactly 2383 folio pages of MSS. enclosed in a trunk, and (by a combination of merit on the custodian's part and luck on his own) recovered them fifteen years afterwards, *Atala*, *René*, and a few other fragments having alone accompanied him. These were published independently, the *Génie* following. *Les Martyrs* was a later composition altogether, while *Les Natchez*, the *matrix* of both the shorter stories, and included, as one supposes, in the 2383 waifs, was partly rewritten and wholly published later still. A body of fiction of such a singular character is, as has been

said, not altogether easy to treat; but, without much change in the method usually pursued in this *History*, we may perhaps do best by first giving a brief argument of the various contents and then taking up the censure, in no evil sense, of the whole.

Atala.

Atala is short and almost entirely to the point. The heroine is a half-breed girl with a Spanish father and for mother an Indian of some rank in her tribe, who has subsequently married a benevolent chief. She is regarded as a native princess, and succeeds in rescuing from the usual torture and death, and fleeing with, a captive chief of another "nation." This is Chactas, important in *René* and also in the *Natchez* framework. They direct their flight northwards to the French settlements (it is late seventeenth or early eighteenth century throughout), and of course fall in love with each other. But Atala's mother, a Christian, has, in the tumult of her early misfortunes, vowed her daughter's virginity or death; and when, just before the crucial moment, a missionary opportunely or inopportunely occurs, Atala has already taken poison, with the object, it would appear, not so much of preventing as of avenging, of her own free will, a breach of the vow. The rest of the story is supplied by the vain attempts of the good father to save her, his evangelising efforts towards the pair, and the sorrows of Chactas after his beloved's death. The piece, of course, shows that exaggerated and somewhat morbid pathos of circumstance which is the common form of the early romantic efforts, whether in England,

Germany, or France. But the pathos *is* pathos; the unfamiliar scenery, unlike that of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (to whom, of course, Chateaubriand is much indebted, though he had actually seen what he describes), is not overdone, and suits the action and characters very well indeed. Chactas here is the best of all the "noble savages," and (what hardly any other of them is) positively good. Atala is really tragic and really gracious. The missionary stands to other fictitious, and perhaps some real, missionaries very much as Chactas does to other savages of story, if not of life. The proportion of the whole is good, and in the humble opinion of the present critic it is by far Chateaubriand's best thing in all perhaps but mere writing.

And even in this it is bad to beat, in him or out of him. The small space forbids mere surplusage of description, and the plot – as all plots should do, but, alas! as few succeed in doing – acts as a bellows to kindle the flame and intensify the heat of something far better than description itself – passionate character. There are many fine things – mixed, no doubt, with others not so fine – in the tempestuous scene of the death of Atala, which should have been the conclusion of the story. But this, in its own way, seems to me little short of magnificent:

> "I implored you to fly; and yet I knew I should die if you were not with me. I longed for the shadow of the forest; and yet I feared to be with you in a desert place. Ah! if the cost had only been that of quitting parents, friends, country! if – terrible as it is to say it – there had been nothing at

stake but the loss of my own soul.[23] But, O my mother! thy shade was always there – thy shade reproaching me with the torments it would suffer. I heard thy complaints; I saw the flames of Hell ready to consume thee. My nights were dry places full of ghosts; my days were desolate; the dew of the evening dried up as it touched my burning skin. I opened my lips to the breeze; and the breeze, instead of cooling me, was itself set aglow by the fire of my breath. What torment, Chactas! to see you always near me, far from all other humankind in the deepest solitude, and yet to feel that between us there was an insuperable barrier! To pass my life at your feet, to serve you as a slave, to bring you food and lay your couch in some secret corner of the universe, would have been for me supremest happiness; and this happiness was within my touch, yet I could not enjoy it. Of what plans did I not dream? What vision did not arise from this sad heart? Sometimes, as I gazed on you, I went so far as to form desires as mad as they were guilty: sometimes I could have wished that there were no living creatures on earth but you and me; sometimes, feeling that there was a divinity mocking my wicked transports, I could have wished that divinity annihilated, if only, locked in your arms, I might have sunk from abyss to abyss with the ruins of God and of the world. Even now – shall I say it? – even now, when eternity waits to engulf me, when I am about to appear before the inexorable Judge – at the very moment when my

[23] For the mother, in a fashion which the good Father-missionary most righteously and indignantly denounces as unchristian, had staked her own salvation on her daughter's obedience to the vow.

mother may be rejoicing to see my virginity devour my life – even now, by a terrible contradiction, I carry with me the regret that I have not been yours!"

At this let who will laugh or sneer, yawn or cavil. But as literature it looks back to Sappho and Catullus and the rest, and forward to all great love-poetry since, while as something that is even greater than literature – life – it carries us up to the highest Heaven and down to the nethermost Hell.

René.

René [24] has greater fame and no doubt exercised far more influence; indeed in this respect *Atala* could not do much, for it is not the eternal, but the temporal, which "influences." But, in the same humble opinion, it is extremely inferior. The French Werther[25] (for the attempt to rival Goethe on his own lines is hardly, if at all, veiled) is a younger son of a gentle family in France, whose father dies. He lives for a time with an elder brother, who seems to be "more kin than kind," and a sister

[24] Its author, in the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe*, expressed a warm wish that he had never written it, and hearty disgust at its puling admirers and imitators. This has been set down to hypocritical insincerity or the sourness of age: I see neither in it. It ought perhaps to be said that he "cut" a good deal of the original version. The confession of Amélie was at first less abrupt and so less effective, but the newer form does not seem to me to better the state of René himself.

[25] There had been a very early French imitation of *Werther* itself (of the end especially), *Les dernières aventures du sieur d'Olban*, by a certain Ramond, published in 1777, only three years after Goethe. It had a great influence on Ch. Nodier (*v. inf.*), who actually republished the thing in 1829.

Amélie, to whom he is fondly, but fraternally, attached. René has begun the trick of disappointment early, and, after a time, determines to travel, fancying when he leaves home that his sister is actually glad to get rid of him. Of course it is a case of *coelum non animum*. When he returns he is half-surprised but (for him) wholly glad to be at first warmly welcomed by Amélie; but after a little while she leaves him, takes the veil, and lets him know at the last moment that it is because her affection for him is more than sisterly, that this was the reason of her apparent joy when he left her, and that association with him is too much for her passion.[26] *She* makes an exemplary nun in a sea-side convent, and dies early of disease caught while nursing others. *He*, his wretchedness and hatred of life reaching their acme, exiles himself to Louisiana, and gets himself adopted by the tribe of the Natchez, where

[26] This "out-of-bounds" passion will of course be recognised as a Romantic trait, though it had Classical suggestions. Chateaubriand appears to have been rather specially "obsessed" by this form of it, for he not merely speaks constantly of René as *le frère d'Amélie*, but goes out of his way to make the good Father in *Atala* refer, almost ecstatically, to the happiness of the more immediate descendants of Adam who were *compelled* to marry their sisters, if they married anybody. As I have never been able to take any interest in the discussions of the Byron and Mrs. Leigh scandal, I am not sure whether this *tic* of Chateaubriand's has been noticed therein. But his influence on Byron was strong and manifold, and Byron was particularly apt to do things, naughty and other, because somebody else had done or suggested them. And of course it has, from very early days, been suggested that Amélie is an experience of Chateaubriand's own. But this, like the investigations as to time and distance and possibility in his travels and much else also, is not for us. Once more I must be permitted to say that I am writing much about French novels, little about French novelists, and least of all about those novelists' biographers, critics, and so forth. Exceptions may be admitted, but as exceptions only.

Chactas is a (though not *the*) chief.

Difference between its importance and its merit.

Now, of course, if we are content to take a bill and write down Byron and Lamartine, Senancour and *Jacopo Ortis* (otherwise Ugo Foscolo), Musset, Matthew Arnold, and *tutti quanti*, as debtors to *René*, we give the tale or episode a historical value which cannot be denied; while its positive aesthetic quality, though it may vary very much in different estimates, cannot be regarded as merely worthless. Also, once more, there is real pathos, especially as far as Amélie is concerned, though the entire unexpectedness of the revelation of her fatal passion, and the absolute lack of any details as to its origin, rise, and circumstances, injure sympathy to some extent. But that sympathy, as far as the present writer is concerned, fails altogether with regard to René himself. If his melancholy were traceable to *mutual* passion of the forbidden kind, or if it had arisen from the stunning effect of the revelation thereof on his sister's side, there would be no difficulty. But, though these circumstances may to some extent accentuate, they have nothing to do with causing the *weltschmerz* or *selbst-schmerz*, or whatever it is to be called, of this not very heroic hero. Nor has Chateaubriand taken the trouble – which Goethe, with his more critical sense of art, *did* take – to make René go through the whole course of the Preacher, or great part of it, before discovering that all was vanity. He is merely, from the beginning, a young gentleman affected with mental jaundice, who cannot or

will not discover or take psychological calomel enough to cure him. It does not seem in the least likely that if Amélie had been content to live with him as merely "in all good, all honour" a loving and comforting sister, he would have really been able to say, like Geraldine in Coleridge's original draft of *Christabel*, "I'm better now."

He is, in fact, what Werther is not – though his own followers to a large extent are – mainly if not merely a Sulky Young Man: and one cannot help imagining that if, in pretty early days, some one had been good enough to apply to him that Herb Pantagruelion, in form not exactly of a halter but of a rope's end, with which O'Brien cured Peter Simple's *mal de mer*, his *mal du siècle* would have been cured likewise.

Of course it is possible for any one to say, "You are a Philistine and a Vulgarian. You wish to regard life through a horse-collar," etc., etc. But these reproaches would leave my withers quite ungalled. I think *Ecclesiastes* one of the very greatest books in the world's literature, and *Hamlet* the greatest play, with the possible exception of the *Agamemnon*. It is the abysmal sadness quite as much as the *furor arduus* of Lucretius that makes me think him the mightiest of Latin poets. I would not give the mystical melancholy of certain poems of Donne's for half a hundred of the liveliest love-songs of the time, and could extend the list page-long and more if it would not savour of ostentation in more ways than one. But mere temperamental ἑωλοκρασια or κραιπαλη (next-day nausea), without even the exaltation of a previous orgy

to ransom it, – mere spleen and sulks and naughty-childishness, – seem to me not great things at all. You may not be able to help your spleen, but you can "cook" it; you may have qualm and headache, but in work of some sort, warlike or peaceful, there is always small beer, or brandy and soda (with even, if necessary, capsicum or bromide), for the ailment. The Renés who can do nothing but sulk, except when they blunder themselves and make other people uncomfortable in attempting to do something, who "never do a [manly] thing and never say a [kind] one," are, I confess, not to my taste.[27]

Les Natchez.

Both these stories, as will have been seen, have a distinctly religious element; in fact, a distinctly religious purpose. The larger novel-romance of which they form episodes, as well as its later and greater successor, *Les Martyrs*, increase the element in both cases, the purpose in the latter; but one of the means by which this increase is effected has certainly lost – whether it may or may not ever recover – its attraction, except to a student of literary history who is well out of his novitiate. Such a person should see at once that Chateaubriand's elaborate adoption, from Tasso and Milton, of the system of interspersed scenes of Divine and diabolic conclaves and interferences with

[27] I once had to fight it out in public with a valued and valiant friend for saying something like this in regard to Edgar of Ravenswood – no doubt, in some sort a child of René's or of Nelvil's; but I was not put to submission. And Edgar had truer causes for sulks than his spiritual ancestor had – at least before the tragedy of Amélie.

the story, is an important, if not a wholly happy, instance of that general Romantic *reversion* to earlier literary devices, and even atmospheres, of which the still rather enigmatic personage who rests enisled off Saint-Malo was so great an apostle. And it was probably effectual for its time. Classicists could not quarrel with it, for it had its precedents, indeed its origin, in Homer and Virgil; Romanticists (of that less exclusive class who admitted the Renaissance as well as the Dark and Middle Ages) could not but welcome it for its great modern defenders and examples. I cannot say that I enjoy it: but I can tolerate it, and there is no doubt at all, odd as it may seem to the merely twentieth-century reader, that it did something to revive the half-extinct religiosity which had been starved and poisoned in the later days of the *ancien régime*, forcibly suppressed under the Republic, and only officially licensed by the Napoleonic system. In *Les Martyrs* it has even a certain "grace of congruity,"[28] but in regard to *Les Natchez*, with which we are for the moment concerned, almost enough (with an example or two to come presently) has been said about it.

The book, as a whole, suffers, unquestionably and considerably, from the results of two defects in its author. He was not born, as Scott was a little later, to get the historical novel at last into full life and activity; and it would not be unfair to question whether he was a born novelist at all, though he had not

[28] Not in the strict theological meaning of this phrase, of course; but the misuse of it has aesthetic justification.

a few of the qualifications necessary to the kind, and exercised, coming as and when he did, an immense influence upon it. The subject is too obscure. Its only original *vates*, Charlevoix, though always a respectable name to persons of some acquaintance with literature and history, has never been much more, either in France or in England. The French, unluckily for themselves, never took much interest in their transatlantic possessions while they had them; and their dealings with the Indians then, and ours afterwards, and those of the Americans since, have never been exactly of the kind that give on both sides a subject such as may be found in all mediaeval and most Renaissance matters; in the Fronde; in the English Civil War; in the great struggles of France and England from 1688 to 1815; in the Jacobite risings; in La Vendée; and in other historical periods and provinces too many to mention. On the other hand, the abstract "noble savage" is a faded object of exhausted *engouement*, than which there are few things less exhilarating. The Indian *ingénu* (a very different one from Voltaire's) Outougamiz and his *ingénue* Mila are rather nice; but Celuta (the ill-fated girl who loves René and whom he marries, because in a sort of way he cannot help it) is an eminent example of that helpless kind of quiet misfortune the unprofitableness of which Mr. Arnold has confessed and registered in a famous passage. Chactas maintains a respectable amount of interest, and his visit to the court of Louis XIV. takes very fair rank among a well-known group of things of which it is not Philistine to speak as old-fashioned, because they never possessed much

attraction, except as being new- or regular-fashioned. But the villain Ondouré has almost as little of the fire of Hell as of that of Heaven, and his paramour and accomplice Akansie carries very little "conviction" with her. In short, the merit of the book, besides the faint one of having been the original framework of *Atala* and *René*, is almost limited to its atmosphere, and the alterative qualities thereof – things now in a way ancient history – requiring even a considerable dose of the not-universally-possessed historic sense to discern and appreciate them.

Outside the "Histoire de Chactas" (which might, like *Atala* and *René* themselves, have been isolated with great advantage), and excepting likewise the passages concerning Outougamiz and Mila – which possess, in considerable measure and gracious fashion, what some call the "idyllic" quality – I have found it, on more than one attempt, difficult to take much interest in *Les Natchez*, not merely for the reasons already given, but chiefly owing to them. René's appearances (and he is generally in background or foreground) serve better than anything in any other book, perhaps, to explain and justify the old notion that *accidia*[29] of his kind is not only a fault in the individual, but

[29] *I.e.* not mere "sloth," but the black-blooded and sluggish melancholy to which Dante pays so much attention in the *Inferno*. This deadly sin we inadequately translate "sloth," and (on one side of it) it is best defined in Dante's famous lines (*Inf.* vii. 121-3):Tristi fummo Nell' aer dolce che dal sol s' allegra, Portando dentro accidioso fummo.Had Amélie sinned and not repented she might have been found in the Second circle, flying alone; René, except *speciali gratia*, must have sunk to the Fourth.

a positive ill omen and nuisance[30] to others. Neither in the Indian characters (with the exceptions named) nor among the French and creole does one find relief: and when one passes from them to the "machinery" parts – where, for instance, a "perverse couple," Satan and La Renommée (*not* the ship that Trunnion took), embark on a journey in a car with winged horses – it must be an odd taste which finds things improved. In Greek verse, in Latin verse, or even in Milton's English one could stand Night, docile to the orders of Satan, condescending to deflect a hatchet which is whistling unpleasantly close to René's ear, not that he may be benefited, but preserved for more sufferings. In comparatively plain French prose – the qualification is intentional, as will be seen a little later – with a scene and time barely two hundred years off now and not a hundred then, though in a way unfamiliar – the thing won't do. "Time," at the orders of the Prince of Darkness, cutting down trees to make a stockade for the Natchez in the eighteenth century, alas! contributes again the touch of weak allegory, in neither case helping the effect; while, although the plot is by no means badly evolved, the want of interest in the characters renders it ineffective.

[30] For instance, he goes a-beaver-hunting with the Natchez, but his usual selfish moping prevents him from troubling to learn the laws of the sport, and he kills females – an act at once offensive to Indian religion, sportsmanship, and etiquette, horrifying to the consciences of his adopted countrymen, and an actual *casus belli* with the neighbouring tribes.

Les Martyrs.

The defects of *Les Martyrs*[31] are fewer in number and less in degree, while its merits are far more than proportionally greater and more numerous. Needing less historical reinforcement, it enjoys much more. *Les Natchez* is almost the last, certainly the last important novel of savage life, as distinguished from "boys' books" about savages. *Les Martyrs* is the first of a line of remarkable if not always successful classical novels from Lockhart's *Valerius* to Gissing's *Veranilda*. It has nothing really in common with the kind of classical story which lasted from *Télémaque* to *Belisarius* and later. And what is more, it is perhaps better than any of its followers except Kingsley's *Hypatia*, which is admittedly of a mixed kind – a nineteenth-century novel, with events, scenes, and *décor* of the fifth century. If it has not the spectacular and popular appeal of *The Last Days of Pompeii*, it escapes, as that does not, the main drawback of almost all the others – the "classical-dictionary" element: and if, on the other, its author knew less about Christianity than Cardinals Wiseman and Newman, he knew more about lay "humans" than the authors of *Fabiola* and *Callista*.

It is probably unnecessary to point out at any great length

[31] Its second title, *ou Le Triomphe de la Religion Chrétienne*, connects it still more closely than *Les Natchez* with *Le Génie du Christianisme*, which it immediately succeeded in composition, though this took a long time. No book (it would seem in consequence) exemplifies the mania for annotation and "justification" more extensively. In vol. i. the proportion of notes to text is 112 to 270, in vol. ii. 123 to 221, and in vol. iii., including some extracts from the Père Mambrun, 149 to 225.

that some of the drawbacks of *Les Natchez* disappear almost automatically in *Les Martyrs*. The supernatural machinery is, on the hypothesis and at the time of the book, strictly congruous and proper; while, as a matter of fact, it is in proportion rather less than more used. The time and events – those of the persecution under Diocletian – are familiar, interesting, and, in a French term for which we have no exact equivalent, *dignes*. There is no sulky spider of a René crawling about the piece; and though history is a little strained to provide incidents,[32] "that's not much," and they are not in themselves improbable in any bad sense or degree. Moreover, the classical-dictionary element, which, as has been said, is so awkward to handle, is, at least after the beginning, not too much drawn upon.

The book, in its later modern editions, is preceded not merely by several Prefaces, but by an *Examen* in the old fashion, and fortified by those elaborate citation-notes[33] from authorities ancient and modern which were a mania at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, and which sometimes divert and sometimes enrage more modern readers in work so different as *Lalla Rookh* and *The Pursuits of Literature*, while they provided at the time material for immortal jokes in such other work as the *Anti-Jacobin* poems. In the Prefaces Chateaubriand discusses the prose epic, and puts

[32] Such as Eudore's early friendship at Rome, before the persecution under Diocletian, with Augustine, who was not born till twenty years later.

[33] See note above.

himself, quite unnecessarily, under the protection of *Télémaque*: in the *Examen* he deals systematically with the objections, religious, moral, and literary, which had been made against the earlier editions of the book. But these things are now little more than curiosities for the student, though they retain some general historical importance.

The story.

The book starts (after an "Invocation," proper to its scheme but perhaps not specially attractive "to us") with an account of the household of Demodocus, a Homerid of Chios, who in Diocletian's earlier and unpersecuting days, after living happily but for too short a time in Crete with his wife Epicharis, loses her, though she leaves him one little daughter, Cymodocée, born in the sacred woods of Mount Ida itself. Demodocus is only too glad to accept an invitation to become high priest of a new Temple of Homer in Messenia, on the slopes of another mountain, less, but not so much less, famous, Ithome. Cymodocée becomes very beautiful, and receives, but rejects, the addresses of Hierocles, proconsul of Achaia, and a favourite of Galerius. One day, worshipping in the forest at a solitary Altar of the Nymphs, she meets a young stranger whom (she is of course still a pagan) she mistakes for Endymion, but who talks Christianity to her, and reveals himself as Eudore, son of Lasthenes. As it turns out, her father knows this person, who has the renown of a distinguished soldier.

From this almost any one who has read a few thousand novels

– almost any intelligent person who has read a few hundred – can lay out the probable plot. Love of Eudore and Cymodocée; conversion of the latter; jealousy and intrigues of Hierocles; adventures past and future of Eudore; transfer of scene to Rome; prevalence of Galerius over Diocletian; persecution, martyrdom, and supernatural triumph. But the "fillings up" are not banal; and the book is well worth reading from divers points of view. In the earliest part there is a little too much Homer,[34] naturally enough perhaps. The ancient world changed slowly, and we know that at this particular time Greeks (if not also Romans) rather played at archaising manners. Still, it is probably not quite safe to take the memorable, if not very resultful, journey in which Telemachus was, rather undeservedly, so lucky as to see Helen and drink Nepenthe[35] and to reproduce it with guide- and etiquette-book exactness, *c.* A. D. 300. Yet this is, as has been said, very natural; and it arouses many pleasant reminiscences.

Its "panoramic" quality.

The book, moreover, has two great qualities which were almost, if not quite, new in the novel. In the first place, it has a certain *panoramic* element which admits – which indeed necessitates – picturesqueness. Much of it is, almost as

[34] There cannot be too much Homer in Homer; there may be too much outside Homer.

[35] If one had only been Telemachus at this time! It would have been a good "Declamation" theme in the days of such things, "Should a man – for this one experience – consent to be Telemachus for the rest of his life – and after?"

necessarily, *récit* (Eudore giving the history of his travels and campaigns); but it is *récit* of a vividness which had never before been known in French, out of the most accomplished drama, and hardly at all in prose. The adventures of Eudore require this most, of course, and they get it. His early wild-oats at Rome, which earn him temporary excommunication; his service in the wars with the Franks, where, for almost the only time in literature, Pharamond and Mérovée become living creatures; his captivity with them; his triumphs in Britain and his official position in Brittany, where the entrance of the Druidess Velléda and the fatal love between them provide perhaps the most famous and actually one of the most effective of the episodes of the book – all "stand out from the canvas," as the old phrase goes. Nor is the mastery lost when *récit* becomes direct action, in the scenes of the persecution, and the final purification of the hero and crowning of the heroine in the amphitheatre. "The work burns"; and, while it is practically certain that the writer knew the Scudéry romances, the contrast of this "burning" quality becomes so striking as almost to justify, comparatively if not positively, the accusations of frigidity and languor which have been somewhat excessively brought against the earlier performances. There is not the passion of *Atala*– it would have been out of place: and there is not the soul-dissection of *René*, for there is nothing morbid enough to require the scalpel. But, on the other hand, there is the bustle – if that be not too degrading a word – which is wanting in both; the vividness of action and of change; colour, variety, suspense, what may

perhaps best be called in one word "pulse," giving, as a necessary consequence, life.

And its remarkable advance in style.

And this great advance is partly, if not mainly, achieved by another – the novelty of *style*. Chateaubriand had set out to give – has, indeed, as far as his intention goes, maintained throughout – an effort at *le style noble*, the already familiar rhetoric, of which, in French, Corneille had been the Dryden and Racine the Pope, while it had, in his own youth, sunk to the artifice of Delille in verse and the "emphasis" of Thomas in prose. He has sometimes achieved the best, and not seldom something that is by no means the worst, of this. But, consciously or unconsciously, he has more often put in the old bottles of form new wine of spirit, which has not only burst them, but by some very satisfactory miracle of literature shed itself into new receptacles, this time not at all leathery but glass of iridescent colour and graceful shape. It was almost inevitable that such a process, at such a time, and with such a language – for Chateaubriand did not go to the real "ancient mother" of pre-*grand siècle* French – should be now and then merely magniloquent, that it should sometimes fall short of, or overleap, even magniloquence and become bombast. But sometimes also, and not so seldom, it attains magnificence as well; and the promise, at least the opportunity, of such magnificence in capable followers can hardly be mistaken. As in his younger contemporary, compatriot, and, beyond all doubt, disciple, Lamennais, the results are often crude, unequal,

disappointing; insufficiently smelted ore, insufficiently ripened and cellared wine. But the quantity and quality of pure metal – the inspiriting virtue of the vintage – in them is extraordinary: and once more it must be remembered that, for the novel, all this was absolutely new. In this respect, if in no other, though perhaps he was so in others also, Chateaubriand is a Columbus of prose fiction. Neither in French nor in English, very imperfectly in German, and, so far as I know, not in any other language to even the smallest degree, had "prose-poetry" been attempted in this department. "Ossian" perhaps must have some of the credit: the Bible still more. But wherever the capital was found it was Chateaubriand who put it into the business of novel-writing and turned out the first specimens of that business with the new materials and plant procured by the funds.

Chateaubriand's Janus-position in this.

Some difficulties, which hamper any attempt to illustrate and support this high praise, cannot require much explanation to make them obvious. It has not been the custom of this book to give large untranslated extracts: and it is at least the opinion of its author that in matters of style, translation, even if it be of a much higher quality than he conceives himself able to offer, is, if not quite worthless, very inadequate. Moreover, it is (or should be) well known that the qualities of the old French *style noble*– which, as has been said, Chateaubriand deliberately adopted, as his starting-point if nothing more – are, even in their own language, and still more when reproduced in any other,

full of dangers for foreign appreciation. The no doubt largely ignorant and in any case mistaken contempt for French poetry and poetic prose which so long prevailed among us, and from which even such a critic and such a lover (to some extent) of French as Matthew Arnold was not free, was mainly concerned with this very point. To take a single instance, the part of De Quincey's "Essay on Rhetoric" which deals with French is made positively worthless by the effects of this almost racial prejudice. Literal translation of the more *flamboyant* kind of French writing has been, even with some of our greatest, an effective, if a somewhat facile, means of procuring a laugh. Furthermore, it has to be remembered that this application of ornate style to prose fiction is undoubtedly to some extent an extraneous thing in the consideration of the novel itself. It is "a grand set off" (in the old phrase) to tale-telling; but it is not precisely of its essence. It deserves to be *constaté*, recorded and set to the credit of those who practise it, and especially of those who first introduced it. But it is a question whether, in the necessarily limited space of a book like this, the consideration of it ought to occupy a large room.

Still, though the warning, "Be not too bold," should never be forgotten, it should be remembered that it was given only once and its contrary reiterated: so here goes for one of the most perilous of all possible adventures – a translation of Chateaubriand's own boldest undertaking, the description of the City of God, in which he was following not only the greatest of

the Hebrew prophets, but the Vision of Patmos itself.

("Les Martyrs," Book III., opening. The Prayer of Cyril, Bishop of Lacedaemon, has come before the Throne.)

Illustrated.

At the centre of all created worlds, in the midst of innumerable stars which serve as its bastions as well as avenues and roads to it, there floats the limitless City of God, the marvels whereof no mortal tongue can tell. The Eternal Himself laid its twelve foundations, and surrounded it with the wall of jasper that the beloved disciple saw measured by an angel with a rod of gold. Clothed with the glory of the Most High, the unseen Jerusalem is decked as a bride for her bridegroom. O monumental structures of earth! ye come not near these of the Holy City. There the richness of the matter rivals the perfection of the form. There hang, royally suspended, the galleries of diamond and sapphire feebly imitated by human skill in the gardens of Babylon. There rise triumphal arches, fashioned of brightest stars. There are linked together porticoes of suns extended across the spaces of the firmament, like the columns of Palmyra over the sands of the desert. This architecture is alive. The City of God has a soul of its own. There is no mere matter in the abiding places of the Spirit; no death in the locality of eternal existence. The grosser words which

our muse is forced to employ deceive us, for they invest with body that which is only as a divine dream, in the passing of a blissful sleep.

Gardens of delight extend round the radiant Jerusalem. A river flows from the throne of the Almighty, watering the Celestial Eden with floods of pure love and of the wisdom of God. The mystic wave divides into streams which entwine themselves, separate, rejoin, and part again, giving nourishment to the immortal vine, to the lily that is like unto the Bride, and to all the flowers which perfume the couch of the Spouse. The Tree of Life shoots up on the Hill of Incense; and, but a little farther, that of Knowledge spreads on all sides its deep-planted roots and its innumerable branches, carrying hidden in the golden leafage the secrets of the Godhead, the occult laws of Nature, the truths of morality and of the intellect, the immutable principles of good and of evil. The learning which intoxicates *us* is the common food of the Elect; for in the empire of Sovereign Intelligence the fruit of science no longer brings death. Often do the two great ancestors of the human race come and shed such tears as the Just can still let flow in the shadow of the wondrous Tree.

The light which lightens these abodes of bliss is compact of the rose of morning, of the flame of noon, of the purple of even; yet no star appears on the glowing horizon. No sun rises and no sun goes down on the country where nothing ends, where nothing begins. But an ineffable clearness, showering from all sides like a tender dew, maintains the

unbroken[36] daylight in a delectable eternity.

Of course any one who is so minded may belittle this as classically cold; even as to some extent *neo*-classically bedizened; as more like, let us say, Moore's *Epicurean* than like our greater "prose-poets" of the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. The presence in Chateaubriand of this dose of the style that was passing, and that he helped to make pass, has been admitted already: but I confess I think it is only a dose. Those who care to look up the matter for themselves might, if they do not choose to read the whole, turn to the admirable picture of camp-life on the Lower Rhine at the opening of Book VI. as a short contrast, while the story is full of others. Nor should one forget to add that Chateaubriand can, when he chooses, be epigrammatic as well as declamatory. "Such is the ugliness of man when he bids farewell to his soul and, so to speak, keeps house only with his body" is a phrase which might possibly shock La Harpe, but which is, as far as I remember, original, and is certainly crisp and effective enough.

Reassembling, then, the various points which we have endeavoured to make in respect of his position as novelist, it may once more be urged that if not precisely a great master of the complete art of novel-writing, by actual example, he shows no

[36] In the original the word which I have translated "unbroken" is *éternel*, and with the adjacent *éternité* illustrates (as do *tonnerre* and *étonnante* in Bossuet's famous passage on the death of "Madame") one of the minor but striking differences between French and English rhetoric. Save for some very special purpose, we should consider such repetition a jingle at best, a cacophony at worst: they think it a beauty.

small expertness in various parts of it: and that, as a teacher and experimenter in new developments of method and indication of new material, he has few superiors in his own country and not very many elsewhere. That in this pioneer quality, as well as in mere contemporaneousness, he may, though a greater writer, be yoked with the authoress of *Corinne* need hardly be argued, for the accounts given of the two should have sufficiently established it.

CHAPTER II
PAUL DE KOCK, OTHER MINORS OF 1800-1830, AND NODIER

The fate of popular minor novelists.

The mediocre poet has had a hard fate pronounced against him of old; but the minor novelist, perhaps because he is much more likely to get some good things in his own time, has usually a harder lot still, and in more than one way, after physical or popular death. In fact it may be said that, the more popular he is in the one day, the more utterly forgotten he is likely to be in the other. Besides the obvious facts that his popularity must always have been gained by the adoption of some more or less ephemeral fashion, and that plenty of his own kind are always ready to take his place – doing, like the heir in the old story, all they can to substitute *Requiescat in Pace* for *Resurgam* on his hatchment – there is a more mechanical reason for his occultation. The more widely he or she has been read the more certain either has been of being "read to pieces."

Examples of them.

These fates, and especially the last, have weighed upon the minor French novelists of the early nineteenth century perhaps even more heavily than upon our own: for the circulating library

was an earlier and a more widely spread institution in France than in England, and the lower and lowest middle classes were a good deal more given to reading, and especially to "light" reading, there than here. Nor can it be said that any of the writers to be now mentioned, with one possible and one certain exception, is of importance to literature as literature. But all have their importance to literary – and especially departmental-literary – history, in ways which it is hoped presently to show: and there is still amusement in some. The chief, though not the only, names that require notice here are those of Mesdames de Montolieu and (again) de Genlis, of Ducray-Duminil, born almost as early as Pigault-Lebrun, even earlier a novelist, and yoked with him by Victor Hugo in respect of his novel *Lolotte et Fanfan* in the sneer noted in the last volume;[37] the *other* Ducange, again as much "other" as the other Molière;[38] the Vicomte d'Arlincourt; and – a comparative (if, according to some, blackish) swan among these not quite positive geese – Paul de Kock. The eldest put in his work before the Revolution and the youngest before Waterloo, but the most prolific time of all was that of the first two or three decades of the century with which we are dealing.

With these, but not of them – a producer at last of real "letters" and more than any one else except Chateaubriand (more "intensively" perhaps even than he was) a pioneer of Romanticism – comes Charles Nodier.

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[37] Vol. I. pp. 458, 472, *notes*.

[38] Vol. I. p. 161.

Paul de Kock.

Major Pendennis, in a passage which will probably, at least in England, preserve the name of the author mentioned long after his own works are even more forgotten with us than they are at present, allowed, when disparaging novels generally, and wondering how his nephew could have got so much money for one, that Paul de Kock "certainly made him laugh." In his own country he had an enormous vogue, till the far greater literary powers and the wider range of the school of 1830 put the times out of joint for him, and even much later. He actually survived the Terrible Year: but something like a lustrum earlier, when running over a not small collection of cheap novels in a French country inn, I do not remember coming across anything of his. And he had long been classed as "not a serious person" (which, indeed, he certainly was not) by French criticism, not merely of the most academic sort, but of all decidedly literary kinds. People allowed him *entrain*, a word even more difficult than *verve* to English exactly, though "go" does in a rough sort of way for both. They were of course not very much shocked at his indecorums, which sometimes gave occasion for not bad jokes.[39] But if any foreigner made any great case of him they would probably have looked, if they did not speak their thoughts, very much as some

[39] When he published *Le Cocu*, it was set about that a pudibund lady had asked her book-seller for "Le Dernier de M. Paul de Kock." And this circumlocution became for a time popular, as a new name for the poor creature on the ornaments of whose head our Elizabethans joked so untiringly.

of us have looked, if we have not spoken, when foreigners take certain popular scribes and playwrights of our own time and country seriously.[40]

Let us see what his work is really like to the eyes of impartial and comparative, if not cosmopolitan, criticism.

L'Enfant de ma Femme.

Paul de Kock, whose father, a banker, was a victim, but must have been a late one, of the Terror, was born in 1794, and took very early to letters. If the date of his first book, *L'Enfant de ma Femme*, is correctly given as 1812, he must apparently have written it before he was eighteen. There is certainly nothing either in the quantity or the quality of the performance which makes this incredible, for it does not fill quite two hundred pages of the ordinary 18mo size and not very closely packed type of the usual cheap French novel, and though it is not unreadable, any tolerably clever boy might easily write it between the time when he gets his scholarship in spring and the time when he goes up in October. The author had evidently read his Pigault and adopted that writer's revised picaresque scheme. His most prominent character (the hero, Henri de Framberg, is

[40] A short essay, or at least a "middle" article, might be written on this way of regarding a prophet in his own country, coupling Béranger with Paul de Kock. Of course the former is by much a *major* prophet in verse than Paul is in prose. But the attitude of the superior French person to both is, in different degrees, the same. (Thackeray in the article referred to below, p. 62 *note*, while declaring Paul to be *the* French writer whose works are best known in England, says that his educated countrymen think him *pitoyable*. —*Works*, Oxford edition, vol. ii p. 533.)

very "small doings"), the hussar-soldier-servant, and most oddly selected "governor" of this hero as a boy, Mullern, is obviously studied off those semi-savage "old moustaches" of whom we spoke in the last volume, though he is much softened, if not in morals, in manners. In fact this softening process is quite obvious throughout. There is plenty of "impropriety" but no mere nastiness, and the impropriety itself is, so to speak, rather indicated than described. As nearly the last sentence announces, "Hymen hides the faults of love" wherever it is possible, though it would require a most complicated system of polygamy and cross-unions to enable that amiable divinity to cover them all. There is a villain, but he is a villain of straw, and outside of him there is no ill-nature. There seems to be going to be a touch of "out-of-boundness" when Henri, just about to marry his beloved Pauline, is informed that she is his sister, and when the pair, separating in horror, meet again and, let us say, forget to separate. But the information turns out to be false, and Hymen duly uses the not uncomfortable extinguisher which, as noted above, is supplied to him as well as the more usual torch.

To call the book good would be ridiculous, but a very large experience of first novels of dates before, the same as, and after its own may warrant allotment to it of possibilities of future good gifts. The history, such as it is, runs currently; there are no hitches and stops and stagnations, the plentiful improbabilities are managed in such fashion that one does not trouble about them, and there is an atmosphere, sometimes of horseplay but

almost always of good humour.

Petits Tableaux de Mœurs.

The matter which, by accident or design, goes with this in mid-century reprints of Paul, is of much later date, but it shows that, for some time, its author had been exercising himself in a way valuable to the novelist at any time but by no means as yet frequently practised. *Petits Tableaux de Mœurs* consists of about sixty short sketches of a very few pages each (usually two or three) and of almost exactly the same kind as those with which Leigh Hunt, a little earlier in England, transformed the old *Spectator* essay into the kind of thing taken up soon afterwards by "Boz" and never disused since. They are sketches of types of men, of Parisian cafés, gardens, and restaurants; fresh handlings of old subjects, such as the person who insists on taking you home to a very bad "pot-luck" dinner, and the like. Once more, there is no great brilliance in these. But they are lightly and pleasantly done; it must be obvious to every one that they are simply invaluable training for a novelist who is to leave the beaten track of picaresque adventure and tackle real ordinary life. To which it may be added, as at least possible, that Thackeray himself may have had the creation of Woolsey and Eglantine in *The Ravenswing* partly suggested by a conversation between a tailor and a hairdresser in Paul's "Le Banc de Pierre des Tuileries." As this is very short it may be worth giving:

To finish our observations, my friend and I went and

sat behind two young men dressed in the extreme of the fashion, who, with their feet placed on chairs as far as possible from those in which they were sitting, gracefully rocked themselves, and evidently hoped to attract general attention.

In a minute we heard the following conversation:

"Do you think my coat a success?" "Superb! delicious! an admirable cut!" "And the pantaloons?" "Ravishing! Your get up is really stunning." "The governor told me to spend three hours in the Grand Alley, and put myself well forward. He wants people to take up this new shape and make it fashionable. He has already one order of some consequence." "And, as for me, do you think my hair well done?" "Why, you look like a very Adonis. By the way, *my* hair is falling off. Do give me something to stop that." "You must give it nourishment. You see hairs are plants or flowers. If you don't water a flower, you can see it withering." "Very true. Then must I use pommade?" "Yes, but in moderation; just as a tree too much watered stops growing. Hair is exactly like vegetables." "And both want cutting?" "Why, yes; it's like a plantation; if you don't prune and thin the branches it kills the young shoots. Cutting helps the rise of the sap." "Do you hold with false fronts?" "I believe you! Why, I make them; it's just like putting a new roof on a house." "And that does no harm to one's head?" "Impossible! neither glue nor white of egg, which needs must hinder growth, are used. People who wear them mix their own hair with the front. They are two flocks, which unite to feed together, as M. Marty says so well in the

Solitaire."[41] "Two torrents which join in the valley: that is the image of life!"

We had heard enough, and so we left the tailor's young man and the romantic hairdresser to themselves.

Gustave.

In *Gustave ou Le Mauvais Sujet*, a book still early but some years later than *L'Enfant*, Paul de Kock got nearer to his proper or improper subject – bachelor life in Paris, in the sense of his contemporary Pierce Egan's *Life in London*.[42] The hero may be called a French Tom Jones in something (but not so much as in the original phrase) of the sense in which Klopstock was allowed to be a German Milton. He has his Allworthy in a benevolent uncle-colonel, peppery but placable; he is far more plentifully supplied than even Tom was with persons of the other sex who play the parts of Black George's daughter and Mrs. Waters, if not exactly of Lady Bellaston. A Sophia could hardly enter into the Kockian plan, but her place in that scheme (with something, one regrets to add, of Lady Bellaston's) is put in commission, and held by a leash of amiable persons – the erring Madame de Berly, who sacrifices honour and beauty and very nearly life for the rascal Gustave; Eugénie Fonbelle, a rich, accomplished,

[41] A gibe at the Vicomte d'Arlincourt's very popular novel, to be noticed below. I have not, I confess, identified the passage: but it may be in one of the plays.

[42] It would *not* be fair to compare the two as makers of literature. In that respect Theodore Hook is Paul's Plutarchian parallel, though he has more literature and less life.

and almost wholly desirable widow, whom he is actually about to marry when, luckily for her, she discovers his *fredaines*, and "calls off"; and, lastly, a peasant girl, Suzon, whom he seduces, whom he keeps for six weeks in his uncle's house, after a fashion possibly just not impossible in a large Parisian establishment; who is detected at last by the uncle; who runs away when she hears that Gustave is going to marry Eugénie, and who is at the end produced, with an infant ready-made, for Paul's favourite "curtain" of Hymen, covering (like the curtain) all faults. The book has more "scabrous" detail than *L'Enfant de ma Femme*, and (worse still) it relapses into Smollettian-Pigaultian dirt; but it displays a positive and even large increase of that singular readableness which has been noticed. One would hardly, except in cases of actual novel-famine, or after an immense interval, almost or quite involving oblivion, read a book of Paul's twice, but there is seldom any difficulty in reading him once. Only, beware his moral moods! When he is immoral it is in the bargain; if you do not want him you leave him, or do not go to him at all. But when, for instance, the unfortunate Madame de Berly has been frightfully burnt and disfigured for life by an act of her own, intended to save – and successful in saving – her *vaurien* of a lover, Paul moralises thus at the end of a chapter —

> Julie perdit en effet tous ses attraits: elle fut punie par où elle avait pêché. Juste retour des choses ici-bas.

there being absolutely no such *retour* for Gustave – one feels rather inclined, as his countrymen would say, to "conspue"

Paul.[43] It is fair, however, to say that these accesses of morality or moralising are not very frequent.

The caricatured *Anglais*.

But there is one thing of some interest about *Gustave* which has not yet been noticed. Paul de Kock was certainly not the author,[44] but he must have been one of the first, and he as certainly was one of the most effective and continuous, promoters of that curious caricature of Englishmen which everybody knows from French draughtsmen, and some from French writers, of the first half of the nineteenth century. It is only fair to say that we had long preceded it by caricaturing Frenchmen. But they had been slow in retaliating, at least in anything like the same fashion. For a long time (as is again doubtless known to many people) French literature had mostly ignored foreigners. During the late seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries few, except the aristocracy, of either country knew much of the other, and there was comparatively little (of course there was always some) difference between the manners and customs of the upper classes of both. Prévost and Crébillon, if not Marivaux,[45] knew something about England. Then arose in France a caricature, no doubt, but almost a reverential one,

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[43] Charity, outrunning knowledge, may plead "Irony perhaps?" Unfortunately there is no chance of it.

[44] I really do not know who was (see a little below). Parny in his absurd *Goddam!* (1804) has something of it.

[45] And *he* knew something of it through Addison.

due to the *philosophes*, in the drawing whereof the Englishman is indeed represented as eccentric and splenetic, but himself philosophical and by no means ridiculous. Even in the severe period of national struggle which preceded the Revolutionary war, and for some time after the beginning of that war itself, the scarecrow-comic *Anglais* was slow to make his appearance. Pigault-Lebrun himself, as was noted in the last volume, indulges in him little if at all. But things soon changed.

In the book of which we have been speaking, Gustave and a scapegrace friend of his determine to give a dinner to two young persons of the other sex, but find themselves penniless, and a fresh edition of one of the famous old *Repues Franches* (which date in French literature back to Villon and no doubt earlier) follows. With this, as such, we need not trouble ourselves. But Olivier, the friend, takes upon him the duty of providing the wine, and does so by persuading a luckless vintner that he is a "Milord."

In order to dress the part, he puts on a cravat well folded, a very long coat, and a very short waistcoat. He combs down his hair till it is quite straight, rouges the tip of his nose, takes a whip, puts on gaiters and a little pointed hat, and studies himself in the glass in order to give himself a stupid and insolent air, the result of the make-up being entirely successful. It may be difficult for the most unbiassed Englishman of to-day to recognise himself in this portrait or to find it half-way somewhere about 1860, or even, going back to actual "*temp.* of tale," to discover anything

much like it in physiognomies so different as those of Castlereagh and Wellington, of Southey and Lockhart, nay, even of Tom and Jerry.[46] But that it is the Englishman of Daumier and Gavarni, *artistement complet* already, nobody can deny.

Later in the novel (before he comes to his very problematical "settling down" with Suzon and the ready-made child) Gustave is allowed a rather superfluous scattering of probably not final wild oats in Italy and Germany, in Poland and in England. But the English meesses are too *sentimentales* (note the change from *sensibles*); he does not like the courses of horses, the combats of cocks, the bets and the punches and the plum-puddings. He is angry because people look at him when he pours his tea into the saucer. But what annoys him most of all is the custom of the ladies leaving the table after dinner, and that of preferring cemeteries for the purpose of taking the air and refreshing oneself after business. It may perhaps diminish surprise, but should increase interest, when one remembers that, after Frenchmen had got tired of Locke, and before they took to Shakespeare, their idea of our literature was largely derived

[46] The straight hair is particularly curious, for, as everybody who knows portraits of the early nineteenth century at all is aware, Englishmen of the time preferred brushed back and rather "tousled" locks. In Maclise's famous "Fraserians" there is hardly a straight-combed head among all the twenty or thirty. At the same time it is fair to say that our own book-illustrators and caricaturists, for some strange reason, did a good deal to authorise the libels. Cruikshank was no doubt a wonderful draughtsman, but I never saw (and I thank God for it) anything like many, if not most, of his faces. "Phiz" and Cattermole in (for example) their illustrations to *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* sometimes out-Cruikshank Cruikshank in this respect.

from "Les Nuits de Young" and Hervey's *Meditations among the Tombs*.

Another bit of copy-book (to revert to the Pauline moralities) is at the end of the same very unedifying novel, when the benevolent and long-suffering colonel, joining the hands of Gustave and Suzon, remarks to the latter that she has proved to him that "virtues, gentleness, wits, and beauty can serve as substitutes for birth and fortune." It would be unkind to ask which of the "virtues" presided over Suzon's original acquaintance with her future husband, or whether the same or another undertook the charge of that wonderful six weeks' abscondence of hers with him in this very uncle's house.

Edmond et sa Cousine.

But no doubt this capacity for "dropping into" morality stood Paul in good stead when he undertook (as it was almost incumbent on such a universal provider of popular fiction to do) what the French, among other nicknames for them, call *berquinades*– stories for children and the young person, more or less in the style of the *Ami des Enfants*. He diversified his *gauloiseries* with these not very seldom. An example is bound up with *Gustave* itself in some editions, and they make a very choice assortment of brimstone and treacle. The hero and heroine of *Edmond et sa Cousine* are two young people who have been betrothed from their youth up, and neither of whom objects to the situation, while Constance, the "She-cosen" (as Pepys puts it) is deeply in love with Edmond. He also is really fond of her, but

he is a bumptious and superficial snob, who, not content with the comfortable[47] income which he has, and which will be doubled at his marriage, wants to make fame and fortune in some way. He never will give sufficient scope and application to his moderate talents, and accordingly fails very plumply in music, playwriting, and painting. Then he takes to stock-exchange gambling, and of course, after the usual "devil's *arles*" of success, completely ruins himself, owes double what he has, and is about to blow out his somewhat unimportant brains. But Constance, in the truest spirit of melodrama, and having long sought him in vain under the guidance of a *quarta persona*, of whom more presently, realises almost the whole of her fortune, except a small pittance, dashes it down before him in the nick of time, and saves him for the moment.

Perhaps the straitest sect of the Berquinaders would have finished the story here, made the two marry on Constance's pittance, reconciled Edmond to honest work, and so on. Paul, however, had a soul both above and below this. Edmond, with the easy and cheap sham honour of his kind, will not "subject her to privations," still hopes for something to turn up, and in society meets with a certain family of the name of Bringuesingue – a father who is a retired mustard-maker with some money and no

[47] Paul's ideas of money are still very modest. An income of 6000 francs (£240) represents ease if not affluence; with double the amount you can "aspire to a duchess," and even the dispendious Irish-French Viscount Edward de Sommerston in *La Fille aux Trois Jupons* (*v. inf.*) starts on his career with scarcely more than three thousand a year.

brains, a mother who is a nonentity, and a daughter Clodora,[48] a not bad-looking and not unamiable girl, unfortunately dowered with the silliness of her father and the nullity of her mother combined and intensified. There is some pretty bad stock farce about M. Bringuesingue and his valet, whom he pays to scratch his nose when his master is committing solecisms; and about Edmond's adroitness in saving the situations. The result is that the Bringuesingues throw their not unwilling daughter at Edmond's head. To do him the only justice he ever deserves, he does not like to give up Constance; but she, more melodramatic than ever, contrives to imbue him with the idea that she is false to him, and he marries Clodora. Again the thing might have been stopped; but Paul once more goes on, and what, I fear, must be called his hopeless bad taste (there is no actual bad *blood* in him), and the precious stage notion that "Tom the young dog" may do anything and be forgiven, make him bring about a happy ending in a very shabby fashion. Edmond is bored by his stupid though quite harmless and affectionate wife, neglects her, and treats his parents-in-law with more contempt still. Poor Clodora dies, but persuades her parents to hand over her fortune to Edmond, and with it he marries Constance. "Hide, blushing honour! hide that wedding-day." But, you see, the Paul-de-Kockian hero was not like Lord Welter. There was hardly anything that *this* "fellow

[48] Paul's scholarship was very rudimentary, as is shown in not a few scraps of ungrammatical Latin: he never, I think, ventures on Greek. But whether he was the first to *estropier* the not ugly form "*Cleodora*," I know not. Perhaps he muddled it with "Clotilde."

couldn't do."

Paul, however, has kept his word with his subscribers by shutting out all sculduddery, even of the mildest kind, and has, if not reconciled, partly conciliated critics by throwing in some tolerable minor personages. Pélagie, Constance's lively friend, has a character which he could somehow manage without Richardsonian vulgarity. Her amiable father, an orchestra musician, who manages to find *des jolies choses* even in a damned piece, is not bad; and, above all, Pélagie's lover, and, till Edmond's misconduct, his friend, M. Ginguet – a modest Government clerk, who adores his mistress, is constantly snubbed by her, but has his flames crowned at last, – is, though not a particularly novel character, a very well-played part.

André le Savoyard.

One of the author's longer books, *André le Savoyard*, is a curious blend of the *berquinade* with what some English critics have been kind enough to call the "candour" of the more usual French novel. The candour, however, is in very small proportion to the berquinity. This, I suppose, helped it to pass the English censorship of the mid-nineteenth century; for I remember a translation (it was the first book of the author's I ever read) far away in the 'fifties, among a collection of books where nothing flagrantly scabrous would have been admitted. It begins, and for the most part continues, in an almost completely Marmontelish or Edgeworthian fashion. A selfish glutton and *petit-maître* of a French count, M. de Francornard, loses his way (with a postilion,

a valet, and his little daughter, whom he has carried off from her mother) in the hills of Savoy, and is rescued and guested by a good peasant, whom he rewards with a *petit écu* (three *livres*, not five or six). The peasant dies, and his two eldest boys set out for Paris as chimney-sweeps. The elder (eleven-year-old) André himself is befriended by a good Auvergnat water-carrier and his little daughter Manette; after which he falls in with the Francornards – now, after a fashion, a united family. He is taken into their household and made a sort of protégé by the countess, the child Adolphine being also very fond of him; while, though in another way, their *soubrette* Lucile, a pretty damsel of eighteen, is fonder still. Years pass, and the fortunate André distributes his affections between the three girls. Manette, though she ends as his wife, is more of a sister at first; Adolphine is an adored and unhoped-for idol; while Lucile (it is hardly necessary to say that it is in the scenes with her that "candour" comes in) is at first a protectress, then a schoolmistress of the school of Cupid, in process of time a mistress in the other sense, and always a very good-natured and unselfish helper. In fact, Manette is so preternaturally good (she can't even be jealous in a sufficiently human way), Adolphine so prettily and at last tragically null, that one really feels inclined to observe to André, if he were worth it, the recondite quotation

> Ne sit ancillae tibi amor pudori,

though perhaps seven years *is* a long interval in the first third of life.

Jean.

A still better instance of the modified *berquinade*– indeed, except for the absence of riotous fun, one of the best of all Paul de Kock's books – is *Jean*, also an example of his middle and ripest period. If translated into English it might have for second title "or, The History of a Good Lout." The career of Jean Durand (one of the French equivalents for John Brown or Jones or Robinson) we have from the moment of, and indeed a little before, his birth to that crowning of a virtuous young Frenchman's hopes, which consists in his marrying a pretty, amiable, sensible, and well-to-do young widow.[49] Jean is the son of a herbalist father who is an eccentric but not a fool, and a mother who is very much of a fool but not in the least eccentric. The child, who is born in the actual presence (result of the usual farcical opening) of a corporal and four fusiliers, is put out to nurse at Saint-Germain in the way they did then, brought home

[49] This cult of the widow might form the subject of a not uninteresting excursus if we were not confining ourselves to the literary sides of our matter. It has been noticed before (Vol. I. p. 368), and forms one of the most curious differences between the two countries. For, putting Mr. Weller out of the question, I have known far from sentimental critics who thought Trollope's best book by no means improved by the previous experience of Eleanor Bold. Cherolatry in France, however, is not really old: it hardly appears before the eighteenth century. It may be partly due to a more or less conscious idea that perhaps the lady may have got over the obligatory adultery at the expense of her "dear first" and may not think it necessary to repeat. A sort of "measles over."

and put out to school, but, in consequence of his mother's absurd spoiling, allowed to learn absolutely nothing, and (though he is not exactly a bad fellow) to get into very bad company. With two of the choicest specimens of this he runs away (having, again by his mother's folly, been trusted with a round sum in gold) at the age of sixteen, and executes a sort of picaresque journey in the environs of Paris, till he is brought to his senses through an actual robbery committed by the worst of his companions. He returns home to find his father dead: and having had a substantial income left him already by an aunt, with the practical control of his mother's resources, he goes on living entirely *à sa guise*. This involves no positive debauchery or ruination, but includes smoking (then, it must be remembered, almost as great a crime in French as in English middle-class circles), playing at billiards (ditto), and a free use of strong drink and strong language. He spends and gives money freely, but does not get into debt; flirts with grisettes, but falls into no discreditable entanglement, etc., etc.

His most characteristic peculiarity, however, is his absolute refusal to learn the rudiments of manners. He keeps his hat on in all companies; neglects all neatness in dress, etc.; goes (when he *does* go) among ladies with garments reeking of tobacco and a mouth full of strange oaths, and generally remains ignorant of, or recalcitrant to, every form of conventional politeness in speech and behaviour.

The only person of any sense with whom he has hitherto

come in contact, an old hairdresser named Bellequeue (it must be remembered that this profession or vocation is not as traditionally ridiculous in French literature as in ours), persuades his mother that the one chance of reforming Jean and making him like other people is to marry him off. They select an eligible *parti*, one Mademoiselle Adelaide Chopard, a young lady of great bodily height, some facial charms, not exactly a fool, but not of the most amiable disposition, and possessed of no actual accomplishment (though she thinks herself almost a "blue") except that of preserving different fruits in brandy, her father being a retired liqueur manufacturer. Jean, who has never been in the least "in love," has no particular objection to Adelaide, and none at all to the preserved cherries, apricots, etc., and the scenes of his introduction and, after a fashion, proposal to the damsel, with her first resentment at his unceremonious behaviour and later positive attraction by it, are far from bad. Luckily or unluckily – for the marriage might have turned out at least as well as most marriages of the kind – before it is brought about, this French Cymon at last meets his real Iphigenia. Walking rather late at night, he hears a cry, and a footpad (one of his own old comrades, as it happens) rushes past him with a shawl which he has snatched from two ladies. Jean counter-snatches the shawl from him and succours the ladies, one of whom strikes his attention. They ask him to put them into a cab, and go off – grateful, but giving no address. However, he picks up a reticule, which the thief in his fright has dropped, discovers in it

the address he wants, and actually ventures to call on Madame Caroline Derville, who possesses, in addition to viduity, all the other attractions catalogued above.

Another scene of farce, which is not so far short of comedy, follows between the lout and the lady, the fun being, among other things, caused by Jean's unconventional strolling about the room, looking at engravings, etc., and showing, by his remarks on things – "The Death of Tasso," "The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis," and the like – that he is utterly uneducated.

There is about half the book to come, but no more abstract can be necessary. The way in which Jean is delivered from his Adelaide and rewarded with his Caroline, if not quite probable (for Adelaide is made to blacken her own character to her rival), is not without ingenuity. And the narrative (which has Paul de Kock's curious "holding" quality for the hour or two one is likely to bestow on it) is diversified by the usual duel, by Jean's noble and rather rash conduct, in putting down his pistols to bestow sacks of five-franc pieces on his two old friends (who try to burgle and – one of them at least – would rather like to murder him), etc., etc.[50] But the real value – for it has some – of the book lies in the vivid sketches of ordinary life which it gives. The curious Cockneydom, diversified by glimpses of a suburban Arcadia, in which the French *bourgeois* of the first half of the nineteenth century seems to have passed his time; the humours

[50] He also improves his neglected education in a manner not unsuggestive of Prince Giglio. In fact, I fancy there is a good deal of half-latent parody of Paul in Thackeray.

of a *coucou* journey from Paris to Saint-Germain; all sorts of details of the Durand and Chopard households – supply these. And not the least of them is given by the bachelor ménage of Bellequeue with his eighteen-year-old *bonne* Rose, the story whereof need not sadden or shock even Mrs. Grundy, unless she scents unrecounted, indeed not even hinted at, improprieties. Bellequeue, as noted above, is by no means a fool, and achieves as near an approach to a successful "character" as Paul de Kock has ever drawn; while Rose plays the same part of piebald angel as Lucile in *André*, with a little more cleverness in her espièglerie and at least no vouched-for unlawfulnesses.

La Femme, le Mari et l'Amant.

But perhaps if any one wants a single book to judge Paul de Kock by (with one possible exception, to follow this), he cannot do better than take *La Femme, le Mari et l'Amant*, a novel again of his middle period, and one which, if it shows some of his less desirable points, shows them characteristically and with comparatively little offence, while it exhibits what the shopkeepers would, I believe, call "a range of his best lines." The autobiographic hero, Paul Deligny, is one of his nearest approaches to a gentleman, yet no one can call him insipid or priggish; the heroine, Augustine Luceval, by marriage Jenneville, is in the same way one of his nearest approaches to a lady, and, though not such a madcap as the similarly situated Frédérique of *Une Gaillarde* (*v. inf.*), by no means mawkish. It is needless to say that these are "l'Amant" and "la Femme," or that they are

happily united at the end: it may be more necessary to add that there is no scandal, but at the same time no prunes and prism, earlier. "Le Mari," M. Jenneville, is very much less of a success, being an exceedingly foolish as well as reprobate person, who not only deserts a beautiful, charming, and affectionate wife, but treats his lower-class loves shabbily, and allows himself to be swindled and fooled to the *n*th by an adventuress of fashion and a plausible speculator. On the other hand, one of this book's rather numerous grisettes, Ninie, is of the more if not most gracious of that questionable but not unappetising sisterhood. Dubois, the funny man, and Jolivet, the parsimonious reveller, who generally manages to make his friends pay the bill, are not bad common form of farce. One of the best of Paul's own special scenes, the pancake party, with a bevy of grisettes, is perhaps the liveliest of all such things, and, but for one piece of quite unnecessary Smollettism or Pigaulterie, need only scandalise the "unco guid." The whole has, in unusual measure, that curious *readableness* which has been allowed to most of our author's books. Almost inevitably there is a melodramatic end; but this, to speak rather Hibernically, is made up for by a minute and curious account, at the beginning, of the actual presentation of a melodrama, with humours of pit, box, and gallery. If the reader does not like the book he will hardly like anything else of its author's; if he does, he will find plenty of the same sort of stuff, less concentrated perhaps, elsewhere. But if he be a student, as well as a consumer, of the novel, he can hardly fail to see that, at its time and in its

kind, it is not so trivial a thing as its subjects and their treatment might, in the abstract, be pronounced to be by the grave and precise.

Mon Voisin Raymond.

Yet somebody may say, "This is all very well, but what was it that made Major Pendennis laugh?" Probably a good many things in a good many books; but I do not know any one more likely to have received that crown than the exception above mentioned, *Mon Voisin Raymond*, which also bears (to me) the recommendation of a very competent friend of mine. My experience is that you certainly do begin laughing at the very beginning, and that the laughter is kept up, if not without cessation, with very few intervals, through a remarkable series of comic scenes. The book, in fact, is Paul de Kock's *Gilbert Gurney*, and I cannot sink the critic in the patriot to such an extent as to enable me to put Theodore, even in what is, I suppose, his best long story, above, or even on a level with, Paul here.

The central point, as one sees almost at once, is that this Raymond (I think we are never told his other name), a not entirely ill-meaning person, but a *fâcheux* of almost ultra-Molièresque strength, is perpetually spoiling his unlucky neighbour's, the autobiographic Eugène Dorsan's, sport, and, though sometimes paid out in kind, bringing calamities upon him, while at last he actually capots his friend and enemy by making him one of the *derniers* already mentioned! This is very bold of Paul, and I do not know any exact parallel to it. On the

other hand, Eugène is consoled, not only by Raymond's death in the Alps (Paul de Kock is curiously fond of Switzerland as a place of punishment for his bad characters), but by the final possession of a certain Nicette, the very pearl of the grisette kind. We meet her in the first scene of the story, where Dorsan, having given the girl a guiltless sojourn of rescue in his own rooms, is detected and exposed to the malice of a cast mistress by Raymond. I am afraid that Paul rather forgot that final sentence of his own first book; for though Pélagie, Dorsan's erring and unpleasant wife, dies in the last chapter, I do not observe that an actual Hymen with Nicette "covers the fault" which, after long innocence, she has at last committed or permitted. But perhaps it would have been indecent to contract a second marriage so soon, and it is only postponed to the unwritten first chapter of the missing fifth volume.[51]

The interval between overture and finale is, as has been said or hinted, uncommonly lively, and for once, not only in the final retribution, Paul has distributed the *peine du talion* pretty equally between his personages. Dorsan has already lost another grisette mistress, Caroline (for whose sake he has neglected Nicette), and a *femme du monde*, with whom he has for a short time intrigued; while in both cases Raymond, though not exactly the cause of the deprivation, has, in his meddling way, been mixed up with it. In

[51] There might have been fifteen or fifty, for the book is more a sequence of scenes than a schematic composition: for which reason the above account of it may seem somewhat *décousu*.

yet other scenes we have a travelling magic-lantern exhibition in the Champs Élysées; a night in the Tivoli Gardens; an expedition to a party at a country house, which, of course, Raymond's folly upsets, literally as well as metaphorically; a long (rather too long) account of a musical evening at a very lower-middle-class house; a roaringly farcical interchange of dinners *en cabinet particulier* at a restaurant, in which Raymond is the victim. But, on the whole, he scores, and is a sort of double cause of the hero's last and greatest misfortune. For it is a lie of his about Nicette which determines Dorsan to make a long-postponed visit to his sister in the country, and submit at last to her efforts to get him married to the exaggeratedly *ingénue* Pélagie, and saddled with her detestable aunt, Madame de Pontchartrain. The end of the book is not quite equal to some other parts of it. But there is abundance of excellent farce, and Nicette might reconcile the veriest sentimentalist.

Le Barbier de Paris.

At one time in England – I cannot speak for the times of his greatest popularity in France – Paul de Kock's name, except for a vague knowledge of his grisette and *mauvais sujet* studies, was very mainly connected with *Le Barbier de Paris*. It was an instance of the constant mistakes which almost all countries make about foreign authors. I imagine, from a fresh and recent reading of it, that he probably did take more trouble with it than with most of his books. But, unfortunately, instances of lost labour are not confined to literature. The subject and the

author are very ill matched. It is a romance of 1632, and so in a way competing with the most successful efforts of the great Romantics. But for such a task Paul had no gifts, except his invariable one of concocting a readable story. As for style, imagination, atmosphere, and such high graces, it would be not so much cruel as absurd to "enter" the book with *Notre-Dame de Paris* or the *Contes Drolatiques*, *Le Capitaine Fracasse* or the *Chronique de Charles IX*. But even the lower ways he could not tread here. He did not know anything about the time, and his wicked Marquis de Villebelle is not early Louis Treize at all, but rather late Louis Quinze. He had not the gift (which Scott first showed and Dumas possessed in no small measure) of writing his conversations, if not in actual temporal colour of language, at any rate in a kind of *lingua franca* suitable to, or at the worst not flagrantly discordant with, *any* particular time and *any* particular state of manners. He could throw in types of the kind so much admired by no less a person than Sir Philip Sidney – a garrulous old servant, an innocent young girl, a gasconading coward, a revengeful daughter of Italy, a this and that and the other. But he could neither make individual character nor vivid historical scene. And so the thing breaks down.

The barber-hero-villain himself is the most "unconvincing" of barbers (who have profited fiction not so ill in other cases), of heroes (who are too often unconvincing), and even of villains (who have rather a habit of being so).[52] Why a man who is

[52] I think I have commented elsewhere on the difficulty of villains. It was agreeable

represented as being intensely, diabolically, wicked, but almost diabolically shrewd, should employ, and go on employing, as his instrument a blundering poltroon like the Gascon Chaudoreille, is a question which recurs almost throughout the book, and, being unanswered, is almost sufficient to damn it. And at the end the other question, why M. le Marquis de Villebelle – represented as, though also a villain, a person of superior intelligence – when he has discovered that the girl whom he has abducted and sought to ruin is really his daughter; when he has run upstairs to tell her, has knocked at her locked door, and has heard a heavy body splashing into the lake under her window, – why, instead of making his way at once to the water, he should run about the house for keys, break into the room, and at last, going to the window, draw from the fact that "an object shows itself at intervals on the surface, and appears to be still in a state of agitation," the no doubt quite logical inference that Blanche is drowning – when, and only then, he precipitates himself after her, – this question would achieve, if it were necessary, the damnation.

The Pauline grisette.

The fact is, that Paul had no turn for melodrama, history, or tragic matter of any kind. He wrote nearly a hundred novels, and I neither pretend to have read the whole of them, nor, if I

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to find confirmation, when this book was already in the printer's hands, given at an exemption tribunal by a theatrical manager. For six weeks, he said, he had advertised and done everything possible to supply the place of a good villain, with no success. And your bad stage villain *may* be comic: while your bad novel villain is only a bore.

had done so, should I feel justified in inflicting abstracts on my readers. As always happens in such cases, the feast he offers us is "pot-luck," but, as too seldom happens, the luck of the pot is quite often good. With the grisette, to whom he did much to give a niche (one can hardly call it a shrine) in literature, whom he celebrated so lovingly, and whose gradual disappearance he has so touchingly bewailed, or with any feminine person of partly grisettish kind, such as the curious and already briefly mentioned heroine of *Une Gaillarde*,[53] he is almost invariably happy. The above-mentioned Lucile is not technically a grisette (who should be a girl living on her own resources or in a shop, not in service) nor is Rose in *Jean*, but both have the requirements of the type —*minois chiffonné* (including what is absolutely indispensable, a *nez retroussé*), inexhaustible gaiety, extreme though by no means promiscuous complaisance, thorough good-nature – all the gifts, in short, of Béranger's *bonne fille*, who laughs at everything, but is perfectly capable of good sense and good service at need, and who not seldom marries and makes as good a wife as, "in a higher *spear*," the English "garrison hack" has had the credit of being. Quite a late, but a very successful example, with the complaisance limited to strictly legitimate extent, and the good-nature tempered by a shrewd determination to avenge two sisters of hers who had been weaker than herself, is the Georgette of

[53] Frédérique, Madame Dauberny (who has, without legal sanction, relieved herself of a loathsome creature whom she has married, and lives a free though not at all immoral life), was not very easy to do, and is very well done.

La Fille aux Trois Jupons, who outwits in the cleverest way three would-be gallants, two of them her sisters' actual seducers, and extracts thumping solatia from these for their victims.[54]

Others.

On the other hand, the older and, I think, more famous book which suggested the title of this —*L'Homme aux Trois Culottes*, symbolising and in a way giving a history of the times of the Revolution, the Empire, and the Restoration, and finishing with "July" – seems to me again a failure. As I have said, Paul could not manage history, least of all spread-out history like this; and the characters, or rather personages, though of the lower and lower-middle rank, which he *could* manage best, are to me totally uninteresting. Others may have been, or may be, more fortunate with them.

So, too, *Le Petit Fils de Cartouche* (which I read before coming across its first part, *Les Enfants du Boulevard*) did not inspire me with any desire to look up this earlier novel; and *La Pucelle de Belleville*, another of Paul's attempts to depict the unconventional but virtuous young person, has very slight interest as a story, and is disfigured by some real examples of the "coarse vulgarity" which has been somewhat excessively charged against its author

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[54] This, which is short and thoroughly lively, is, I imagine, the latest of Paul's good books. It is indeed so late that instead of the *jupons*, striped and black and white, of which Georgette has made irreproachable but profitable use, she appears at the *denouement* in a crinoline!

generally. *Frère Jacques* is a little better, but not much.[55]

Something has been said of "periods"; but, after all, when Paul has once "got into his stride" there is little difference on the average. I have read, for instance, in succession, *M. Dupont*, which, even in the Belgian piracy, is of 1838, and *Les Demoiselles de Magazin*, which must be some quarter of a century later – so late, indeed, that Madame Patti is mentioned in it. The title-hero of the first – a most respectable man – has an *ingénue*, who loves somebody else, forced upon him, experiences more recalcitrance than is usually allowed in such cases, and at last, with Paul's usual unpoetical injustice, is butchered to make way for the Adolphe of the piece, who does not so very distinctly deserve his Eugénie. It contains also one Zélie, who is perhaps the author's most impudent, but by no means most unamusing or most disagreeable, grisette. *Les Demoiselles de Magazin* gives us a whole posy of these curious flower-weeds of the garden of girls – pretty, middling, and ugly, astonishingly virtuous, not virtuous at all, and *couci-couci* (one of them, by the way, is nicknamed "Bouci-Boula," because she is plump and plain), but all good-natured, and on occasion almost noble-sentimented; a guileless provincial; his friend, who has a mania for testing his wife's fidelity, and who accomplishes one of Paul's favourite fairy-tale or rather pantomime endings by coming down with fifteen

[55] The most interesting thing in it is a longish account by Jacques of his association with a travelling quack and fortune-teller, which at once reminds one of *Japhet in Search of a Father*. The resemblances and the differences are almost equally characteristic.

thousand francs for an old mistress (she has lost her beauty by the bite of a parrot, and is the mother of the extraordinarily virtuous Marie); a scapegrace "young first" or half-first; a superior ditto, who is an artist, who rejects the advances of Marie's mother, and finally marries Marie herself, etc. etc. You might change over some of the personages and scenes of the two books; but they are scarcely unequal in such merit as they possess, and both lazily readable in the fashion so often noted.

If any one asks where this readableness comes from, I do not think the answer is very difficult to give, and it will of itself supply a fuller explanation (the words apology or excuse are not really necessary) for the space here allotted to its possessor. It comes, no doubt, in the first place, from sheer and unanalysable narrative faculty, the secret of the business, the mystery in one sense of the mystery in the other. But it also comes, as it seems to me, from the fact that Paul de Kock is the very first of French novelists who, though he has no closely woven plot, no striking character, no vivid conversation or arresting phrases, is thoroughly *real*, and in the good, not the bad, sense *quotidian*. The statement may surprise some people and shock others, but I believe it can be as fully sustained as that other statement about the most different subject possible, the *Astrée*, which was quoted from Madame de Sévigné in the last volume. Paul knew the world he dealt with as well almost as Dickens[56] knew his very different but somewhat corresponding one; and, unlike Dickens,

[56] Of course I am not comparing him with Paul on any other point.

the Frenchman had the good sense to meddle very little[57] with worlds that he did not know. Of course it would be simply *bête* to take it for granted that the majority of Parisian shop- and work- and servant-girls have or had either the beauty or the amiability or the less praiseworthy qualities of his grisettes. But somehow or other one feels that the general *ethos* of the class has been caught.[58] His *bourgeois* interiors and outings have the same real and not merely stagy quality; though his melodramatic or pantomimic endings may smack of "the boards" a little. The world to which he holds up the mirror may be a rather vulgar sort of Vanity Fair, but there are unfortunately few places more real than Vanity Fair, and few things less unreal than vulgarity.

The last sentence may lead to a remark of a graver kind than has been often indulged in here. Thackeray defined his own plan in *Vanity Fair* itself as at least partly an attempt to show people "living without God in the world." There certainly is not much godliness in the book, but he could not keep it out altogether; he would have been false to nature (which he never was) if

[57] Except in regard to the historical and other matters noticed above, hardly at all.

[58] For a picture of an actual grisette, drawn by perhaps the greatest master of artistic realism (adjective and substantive so seldom found in company!) who ever lived, see that *Britannia* article of Thackeray's before referred to – an article, for a long time, unreprinted, and therefore, till a comparatively short time ago, practically unknown. This and its companion articles from the *Britannia* and the *Corsair*, all of 1840-41, but summarising ten or twelve years' knowledge of Paris, form, with the same author's *Paris Sketch Book* (but as representing a more mature state of his genius), the best commentary on Paul de Kock. They may be found together in the third volume of the Oxford Thackeray edited by the present writer.

he had. In Paul de Kock's extensive work, on the other hand, the exclusion is complete. It is not that there is any expressed Voltairianism as there is in Pigault. But though the people are married in church as well as at the *mairie*, and I remember one casual remark about a mother and her daughter going to mass, the whole spiritual region – religious, theological, ecclesiastical, and what not – is left blank. I do not remember so much as a *curé* figuring personally, though there may be one. And it is worth noting that Paul was born in 1794, and therefore passed his earliest childhood in the time when the Republic had actually gagged, if not stifled, religion in France – when children grew up, in some cases at any rate, without ever hearing the name of God, except perhaps in phrases like *pardieu* or *parbleu*. It is not my business or my intention to make reflections or draw inferences; I merely indicate the fact.

Another fact – perhaps so obvious already that it hardly needs stating – is that Paul de Kock is not exactly the person to "take a course of," unless under such conditions as those under which Mr. Carlyle took a course of a far superior writer, Marryat, and was (one regrets to remember) very ungrateful for the good it did him. He is (what some of his too critical countrymen have so falsely called Dumas) a mere *amuseur*, and his amusement is somewhat lacking in variety. Nevertheless, few critical readers[59]

[59] Unless they start from the position that an English writer on the French novel is bound to follow – or at least to pay express attention to – French criticism of it. This position I respectfully but unalterably decline to accept. A critical tub that has no bottom of its own is the very worst Danaid's vessel in all the household gear of

of the present history will, I think, consider the space given to him here as wasted. He was a really powerful schoolmaster to bring the popular novel into still further popularity; and he made a distinct advance upon such persons as Pigault-Lebrun and Ducray-Duminil – upon the former in comparative decency, if not of subject, of expression; upon the latter in getting close to actual life; and upon both in what may be called the *furniture* of his novels – the scene-painting, property-arranging, and general staging. This has been most unfairly assigned to Balzac as originator, not merely in France, but generally, whereas, not to mention our own men, Paul began to write nearly a decade before the beginning of those curious efforts, half-prenatal, of Balzac's, which we shall deal with later, and nearly two decades before *Les Chouans*. And, horrifying as the statement may be to some, I venture to say that his mere *mise en scène* is sometimes, if not always, better than Balzac's own, though he may be to that younger contemporary of his as a China orange to Lombard Street in respect of plot, character, thought, conversation, and all the higher elements, as they are commonly taken to be, of the novel.

The minors before 1830.

It has been said that the filling-up of this chapter, as to the rank and file of the novelists of 1800-1830, has been a matter of some difficulty in the peculiar circumstances of the case. I

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literature.

have, however, been enabled to read, for the first time or afresh, examples not merely of those writers who have preserved any notoriety, but of some who have not, and to assure myself on fair grounds that I need not wait for further exploration. The authors now to be dealt with have already been named. But I may add another novelist on the very eve of 1830, Auguste Ricard, whose name I never saw in any history of literature, but whose work fell almost by accident into my hands, and seems worth taking as "pot-luck."

Mme. de Montolieu —*Caroline de Lichtfield*.

Isabelle de Montolieu – a Swiss by birth but a French-woman by extraction, and Madame de Crousaz by her first marriage – was a friend of Gibbon's friend Georges Deyverdun, and indeed of Gibbon himself, who, she says, actually offered to father her novel. Odd as this seems, there really is in *Caroline de Lichtfield*[60] not merely something which distinguishes it from the ordinary "sensibility" tale of its time (it was first printed at Lausanne in 1786), but a kind of crispness of thought now and then which sometimes does suggest Gibbon, in something the same way as that in which Fanny Burney suggests Johnson. This is indeed mixed with a certain amount of mere "sensibility" jargon,[61] as

[60] The scene and society are German, but the author knows the name to have been originally English.

[61] Such, perhaps, as Gibbon himself may have used while he "sighed as a lover" and before he "obeyed as a son." It should perhaps be said that Mme. de Montolieu produced many other books, mostly translations – among the latter a French version

when a lover, making a surprisingly honest confession to his beloved, observes that he is going "to destroy those sentiments which had made him forget how unworthy he was of them," or when the lady (who has been quite guiltless, and has at last fallen in love with her own husband) tells this latter of her weakness in these very engaging words: "Yes! I did love Lindorf; *at least I think I recognise some relation between the sentiments I had for him and those that I feel at present*!"

Its advance on "Sensibility."

A kind of affection was avowed in the last volume for the "Phoebus" of the "heroics," and something similar may be confessed for this "Jupiter Pluvius," this mixture of tears and stateliness, in the Sentimentalists. But Madame de Montolieu has emerged from the most *larmoyante* kind of "sensible" comedy. If her book had been cut a little shorter, and if (which can be easily done by the reader) the eccentric survival of a *histoire*, appended instead of episodically inserted, were lopped off, *Caroline de Lichtfield* would not be a bad story. The heroine, having lost her mother, has been brought up to the age of fifteen by an amiable canoness, who (to speak rather Hibernically) ought to have been her mother but wasn't, because the actual mother was so much richer. She bears no malice, however, even to the father who, well preserved in looks, manners, and selfishness, is Great Chamberlain to Frederick the Great.

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of *The Swiss Family Robinson*.

That very unsacred majesty has another favourite, a certain Count von Walstein, who is ambassador of Prussia at St. Petersburg. It pleases Frederick, and of course his chamberlain, that Caroline, young as she is, shall marry Walstein. As the girl is told that her intended is not more than thirty, and knows his position (she has, naturally, been brought up without the slightest idea of choosing for herself), she is not displeased. She will be a countess and an ambassadress; she will have infinite jewels; her husband will probably be handsome and agreeable; he will certainly dance with her, and may very possibly not object to joining in innocent sports like butterfly-catching. So she sets off to Berlin quite cheerfully, and the meeting takes place. Alas! the count is a "civil count" (as Beatrice says) enough, but he is the reverse of handsome and charming. He has only one eye; he has a huge scar on his cheek; a wig (men, remember, were beginning to "wear their own hair"), a bent figure, and a leaden complexion. Caroline, promptly and not unnaturally, "screams and disappears like lightning." Nor can any way be found out of this extremely awkward situation. The count (who is a thoroughly good fellow) would give Caroline up, though he has taken a great fancy to her, and even the selfish Lichtfield tries (or *says* he tries) to alter his master's determination. But Frederick of course persists, and with a peculiarly Frederician enjoyment in conferring an ostensible honour which is in reality a punishment, sees the marriage ceremony carried out under his own eye. Caroline, however, exemplifies in combination certain

old adages to the effect that there is "No will, no wit like a woman's." She submits quite decently in public, but immediately after the ceremony writes a letter[62] to her husband (whose character she has partly, though imperfectly, gauged) requesting permission to retire to the canoness till she is a little older, under a covert but quite clearly intelligible threat of suicide in case of refusal. There are of course difficulties, but the count, like a man and a gentleman, consents at once; the father, *bon gré mal gré*, has to do so, and the King, a tyrant who has had his way, gives a sulky and qualified acquiescence. What follows need only be very rapidly sketched. After a little time Caroline sees, at her old-new home, an engaging young man, a Herr von Lindorf; and matters, though she is quite virtuous, are going far when she receives an enormous epistle[1*] from her lover, confessing that he himself is the author of her husband's disfigurement (under circumstances discreditable to himself and creditable to Walstein), enclosing, too, a very handsome portrait of the count *as he was*, and but for this disfigurement might be still. What happens then nobody ought to need, or if he does he does not deserve, to be told. There is no greatness about this book, but to any one who has an eye for consequences it will probably seem to have some future in it. It shows the breaking of the Sensibility mould and the running of the materials into a new pattern as early as 1786. In 1886 M. Feuillet or M. Theuriet would of course have

[62] In dealing with "Sensibility" earlier, it was pointed out how extensively things were dealt with by *letter*. In such cases as these the fashion came in rather usefully.

clothed the story-skeleton differently, but one can quite imagine either making use of a skeleton by no means much altered. M. Rod would have given it an unhappy ending, but one can see it in his form likewise.[63]

Madame de Genlis *iterum*.

Of Stéphanie Félicité, Comtesse de Genlis, it were tempting to say a good deal personally if we did biographies here when they can easily be found elsewhere. How she became a canoness at six years old, and shortly afterwards had for her ordinary dress (with something supplementary, one hopes) the costume of a Cupid, including quiver and wings; how she combined the offices of governess to the Orleans children and mistress to their father; how she also combined the voluptuousness and the philanthropy of her century by taking baths of milk and afterwards giving that milk to the poor;[64] how, rather late in life, she attained the very Crown-Imperial of governess-ship in being chosen by Napoleon to teach him and his Court how to behave; and how she wrote infinite books – many of them taking the form of fiction – on education, history, religion, everything, can only be summarised. The last item of the summary alone concerns us, and that must be dealt with summarily too. *Mlle. de Clermont*– a sort of historico-"sensible" story in style, and evidently imitated

[63] The treatment of the authors here mentioned, *infra*, will, I hope, show that the introduction of their names is not merely "promiscuous."

[64] I am quite prepared to be told that this was somebody else or nobody at all. "Moi, je dis Madame de Genlis."

from *La Princesse de Clèves*– is about the best thing she did as literature; but we dealt with that in the last volume[65] among its congeners. In my youth all girls and some boys knew *Adèle et Théodore* and *Les Veillées du Château*. From a later book, *Les Battuécas*, George Sand is said to have said that she learnt Socialism: and the fact is that Stéphanie Félicité had seen so much, felt so much, read so much, and done so much that, having also a quick feminine wit, she could put into her immense body of work all sorts of crude second-hand notions. The two last things that I read of hers to complete my idea of her were *Le Comte de Corke* and *Les Chevaliers du Cygne*, books at least possessing an element of surprise in their titles. The first is a collection of short tales, the title-piece inspired and prefaced by an account of the Boyle family, and all rather like a duller and more spun-out Miss Edgeworth, the common relation to Marmontel accounting for this. The concluding stories of each volume, "Les Amants sans Amour" and "Sanclair," are about the best. *Les Chevaliers du Cygne* is a book likely to stir up the Old Adam in some persons. It was, for some mysterious reason, intended as a sort of appendix – for "grown-ups" – to the *Veillées du Château*, and is supposed to have incorporated parabolically many of the lessons of the French Revolution (it appeared in 1795). But though its three volumes and eleven hundred pages deal with Charlemagne, and the Empress Irene, and the Caliph "Aaron" (Haroun), and Oliver (Roland is dead at Roncevaux), and Ogier, and other great

[65] P. 436.

and beloved names; though the authoress, who was an untiring picker-up of scraps of information, has actually consulted (at least she quotes) Sainte-Palaye; there is no faintest flavour of anything really Carlovingian or Byzantine or Oriental about the book, and the whole treatment is in the *pre*-historical-novel style. Indeed the writer of the *Veillées* was altogether of the *veille*– the day just expired – or of the transitional and half-understood present – never of the past seen in some perspective, of the real new day, or, still less, of the morrow.

The minor popular novel – Ducray-Duminil —*Le Petit Carilloneur*.

The batch of books into which we are now going to dip does not represent the height of society and the interests of education like Madame de Genlis; nor high society again and at least strivings after the new day, like the noble author of the *Solitaire* who will follow them. They are, in fact, the minors of the class in which Pigault-Lebrun earlier and Paul de Kock later represent such "majority" as it possesses. But they ought not to be neglected here: and I am bound to say that the very considerable trouble they cost me has not been wholly vain.[66] The most noted of the whole group, and one of the earliest, Ducray-Duminil's

[66] The kind endeavours of the Librarian of the London Library to obtain some in Paris itself were fruitless, but the old saying about neglecting things at your own door came true. My friend Mr. Kipling urged me to try Mr. George Gregory of Bath, and Mr. Gregory procured me almost all the books I am noticing in this division.

Lolotte et Fanfan, escaped[67] a long search; but the possession and careful study of the four volumes of his *Petit Carillonneur* (1819) has, I think, enabled me to form a pretty clear notion of what not merely *Lolotte* (the second title of which is *Histoire de Deux Enfants abandonnés dans une île déserte*), but *Victor ou L'Enfant de la Forêt*, *Cælina ou L'Enfant du Mystère*, *Jules ou le Toit paternel*, or any other of the author's score or so of novels would be like.

The book, I confess, was rather hard to read at first, for Ducray-Duminil is a sort of Pigault-Lebrun *des enfants*; he writes rather kitchen French; the historic present (as in all these books) loses its one excuse by the wearisome abundance of it, and the first hundred pages (in which little Dominique, having been unceremoniously tumbled out of a cabriolet[68] by wicked men, and left to the chances of divine and human assistance, is made to earn his living by framed-bell-ringing in the streets of Paris) became something of a *corvée*. But the author is really a sort of deacon, though in no high division of his craft. He expands and duplicates his situations with no inconsiderable cunning, and the way in which new friends, new enemies, and new should-be-indifferent persons are perpetually trying to find out whether the boy is really the Dominique d'Alinvil of Marseilles, whose

[67] The British Museum (see Preface) being inaccessible to me.

[68] Readers will doubtless remember that the too wild career of this kind of vehicle, charioteered by wicked aristocrats, has been among the thousand-and-three causes assigned for the French Revolution.

father and mother have been foully made away with, or not, shows command of its own particular kind of ingenuity. Intrigues of all sorts – violent and other (for his wicked relative, the Comtesse d'Alinvil, is always trying to play Potiphar's wife to him, and there is a certain Mademoiselle Gothon who would not figure as she does here in a book by Mr. Thomas Day) – beset him constantly; he is induced not merely to trust his enemies, but to distrust his friends; there is a good deal of underground work and of the explained supernatural; a benevolent musician; an excellent curé; a rather "coming" but agreeable Adrienne de Surval, who, close to the end of the book, hides her trouble in the bosom of her aunt while Dominique presses her hand to his heart (the aunt seems here superfluous), etc., etc. Altogether the book is, to the historian, a not unsatisfactory one, and joins its evidence to that of Pigault as showing that new sources of interest and new ways of dealing with them are being asked for and found. In filling up the map of general novel-development and admitting English examples, we may assign to its author a place between Mrs. Radcliffe and the *Family Herald*: confining ourselves to French only, he has again, like Pigault, something of the credit of making a new start. He may appeal to the taste of the vulgar (which is not quite the same sort of thing as "a vulgar taste"), but he sees that the novel is capable of providing general pastime, and he does his best to make it do so.

V. Ducange.

L'Artiste et le Soldat.

"The other Ducange," whose patronymic appears to have been Brahain, and who perhaps took the name of the great scholar[69] for the sake of contrast, was even more famous for his melodramas[70] than for his fiction, one piece especially, "Trente Ans, ou La Vie d'un Joueur," having been among the triumphs of the Porte-Saint-Martin and of Frédérick Lemaître. As a novelist he did not write for children like Ducray-Duminil, and one of his novels contains a boastful preface scoffing at and glorying in the accusations of impropriety brought against him. I have found nothing very shocking in those books of his which I have read, and I certainly have not thought it necessary to extend my acquaintance in search of it. He seems to have been a quarrelsome sort of person, for he got into trouble not only with the moralists, not only with the Restoration government, but with the Academy, which he attacked; and he is rather fond of "scratchy" references such as "On peut mériter encore quelque intérêt sans être un Amadis, un Vic-van-Vor [poor Fergus!], un Han, ou un Vampire." But his intrinsic merit as a novelist did not at first seem to me great. A book worse *charpenté* than that just quoted from, *L'Artiste et le Soldat*, I have seldom read. The first

[69] Of course the author of the glossaries himself was, by actual surname, Dufresne, Ducange being a seignory.

[70] It should be observed that a very large number of these minor novels, besides those specially mentioned as having undergone the process, from Ducray's downwards, were melodramatised.

of its five volumes is entirely occupied with the story (not badly, though much too voluminously told) of a captain who has lost his leg at Waterloo, and though tended by a pretty and charming daughter, is in great straits till helped by a mysterious Black Nun, who loves *les militaires*, and has been entrusted with money to help them by the Empress Josephine. The second, "without with your leave or by your leave" of any kind,[71] jumps back to give us, under a different name for a long time, the early history of this captain, which occupies two whole volumes and part of a third (the fourth of the book). Then another abrupt shift introduces us to the "artist," the younger brother, who bears a *third* name, itself explained by another jump back of great length. Then a lover turns up for Suzanne, the captain's daughter, and we end the fifth volume with a wedding procession in ten distinct carriages.

Ludovica.

Ludovica ou Le Testament de Waterloo, a much later book, was, the author tells us, finished in June 1830 under the fiendish tyranny of "all-powerful bigots, implacable Jesuits, and restored marquises"; but the glorious days of July came; a new dynasty, "jeune, forte, sincère" (Louis Philippe "young and sincere"!), was on the throne; the ship of state entered the vast sea of liberty; France revived; all Europe seemed to start from its shroud – and *Ludovica* got published. But the author's joy was a little dashed

[71] That is to say, in the text: the second title of the whole book, "*ou Les Enfants de Maître Jacques*," does in some sort give a warning, though it is with Maître Jacques rather than with his children that the fresh start is made.

by the sense that, unlike its half-score of forerunners, the book had not to battle with the bigots and the Jesuits and the "restored marquises" – the last a phrase which has considerable charms of suggestion.

All this, of course, has its absurd side; but it shows, by way of redemption, that Ducange, in one of the many agreeable phrases of his country, "did not go to it with a dead hand." He seems, indeed, to have been a thoroughly "live" person, if not a very wise one: and *Ludovica* begins with a rousing situation – a crowd and block in the streets of Paris, brought about by nobody quite knows what, but ending in a pistol-shot, a dead body, the flight of the assassin, the dispersal of the crowd by the *gendarmes*, and finally the discovery by a young painter, who has just returned from seeing his mother at Versailles, of a very youthful, very pretty, and very terrified girl, speaking an unknown tongue, and not understanding French, who has fled for refuge into a dark alley ending in a flight of cellar-steps. It is to the point that among the confused cries attending the disturbance have been some about a girl being carried off.

It must be admitted that this is not unpromising, and I really think *Ludovica* (with a caution as to the excessive prolixity of its kind and time) might be recommended to lovers of the detective novel, of which it is a rather early sample. I have confessed, in a later chapter, that this particular "wanity" is not my favourite; but I found myself getting through M. Victor Ducange's six volumes – burdened rather than ballasted as they are by political outbursts,

rather "thorn-crackling" attempts at humour, and the like – with considerably less effort than has sometimes attended similar excursions. If they had been three instead of six I hardly think I should have felt the collar at all. The superiority to *L'Artiste et le Soldat* is remarkable. When honest Jules Janin attributed to Ducange "une érudition peu commune," he must either have been confusing Victor with Charles, or, which is more probable, exhibiting his own lack of the quality he refers to. Ducange does quote tags of Latin: but erudition which makes Proserpine the daughter of *Cybele*, though certainly *peu commune* in one sense, is not so in the other. The purposes and the jokes, as has been said, may bore; and though the style is better than Ducray's, it would not of itself "over-stimulate." But the man is really almost prodigal of incident, and does not manage it badly.

Here, you have Ludovica's father and mother (the former of whom has been crimped to perform a marriage under the impression that he is a priest, whereas he is really a colonel of dragoons) escaping through a hole at the back of a picture from a skylighted billiard-room. There, an enterprising young man, "sitting out" at a ball, to attend which he has disguised himself, kisses his partner,[72] and by that pleasing operation dislodges half his borrowed moustache. It falls, alas! on her hand, she takes it for a spider, screams, and so attracts an unwelcome public.

[72] He has, though unknown and supposed to be an intruder, carried her off from an English adorer – a sort of Lovelace-Byron, whose name is Lord Gousberycharipay (an advance on Paul de Kock and even Parny in the nomenclature of the English peerage), and who inserts h's before French words!

Later in the same evening he finds himself shut up in the young lady's bedroom, and hears her and her mother talking secrets which very nearly concern him. The carrying off of Ludovica from Poland to Paris is very smartly managed (I am not sure that the great Alexander or one of his "young men" did not borrow some details from it for the arrest of D'Artagnan and Porthos after their return from England), and the way in which she and a double of hers, Trinette van Poupenheim, are mixed up is really clever. So is the general cross-purposing. Cabmen turn up just when they should; and though letters dropped out of pockets are as common as blackberries, I know few better excuses for such carelessness than the fact that you have pulled the letter out with a silk wrapper, which you proceed to fold tenderly round the beautiful neck of a damsel in a cab somewhere about midnight. A holograph will made on the eve of Waterloo and preserved for fifteen years by the faithful depositary; a good doctor, of course; many bad Jesuits, of course; another, and this time virtuous, though very impudent, carrying-off of the *other* young woman from the clutches of the hated *congréganistes*;[73] a boghei;[74] a jokei; a third *enlèvement* of the real Ludovica, who escapes by a cellar-trap; and many other agreeable things, end in the complete defeat of the wicked and the marriage of the good to the tune of

[73] If novels do not exaggerate the unpopularity of these persons (strictly the lay members of the S.J., but often used for the whole body of religious orders and their lay partisans), the success of "July" needs little further explanation.

[74] That is to say, not a bogey, but a buggy.

four couples, the thing being thus done to the last in Ducange's usual handsome manner.[75] I do not know whether *Ludovica* was melodramatised. *Le Jésuite* of the same year by Ducange and the great Pixérécourt looks rather like it; and so does *Il y a Seize Ans* of a year later, which he seems to have written alone. But if it was not it ought to have been. The half-moustache-spider-kissing-screaming scene, and the brilliant youth retreating through the laughing crowd with the other half of his decoration, might have reconciled even me to the theatre.

Auguste Ricard —*L'Ouvreuse de Loges*.

A short account of the last novel (except *Le Solitaire*) mentioned above must stand for sample, not merely of the dozen other works of its author, Auguste Ricard, but for many more advertised on the fly-leaves of this time, and long since made "alms for oblivion." Their titles, *Le Portier*, *La Grisette*, *Le Marchand de Coco*, by Ricard himself, on one side, *L'Homme des Ruines*, *Bleack-* (sic) *Beard*, *La Chambre Rouge* (by a certain Dinocourt) on the other, almost tell their whole story – the story of a range (to use English terms once more) between the cheap followers of Anne Radcliffe and G. W. M. Reynolds. *L'Ouvreuse de Loges*, through which I have conscientiously worked, inclines

[75] Here is another instance. Ludovica's father and a bad Russo-Prussian colonel have to be finished off at Waterloo. One might suppose that Waterloo itself would suffice. But no: they must engage in single combat, and even then not kill each other, the Russian's head being carried off by some kind of a cannon-ball and the Frenchman's breast pierced by half a dozen Prussian lances. This is really "good measure."

to the latter kind, being anti-monarchic, anti-clerical, anti-aristocratic (though it admits that these aristocrats are terrible fellows for behaving in a way which the *roturier* cannot imitate, however hard he tries), and anti-things-in-general. Its title-heroine is a bad old woman, who "keeps the door" in the Elizabethan sense as well as theatrically. Its real hero is a *ci-devant* duke; malversator under the Republic; supposed but not real victim of the Septembriseurs; atheist; winner and loser of several fortunes; and at last *particulier* of Paris under a feigned name, with an apartment full of *bric-à-brac*, a drawer full of little packets of money, after the expenditure of the last of which he proposes to blow his brains out; tall man of stature and of his hands, etc., etc. The book is in a way one of purpose, inculcating the danger of wooing opera-girls, and instancing it with three very weak young men, another duke, a rich young *parvenu*, and a musician. Of these the first and the last are, with their wives, rather arbitrarily saved from the clutches into which they have fallen, by the mysterious "M. Luc," while the other comes to a very bad end. The novel, which is in five volumes, is, like most of those mentioned in this section, not of the kind that one would read by preference. But it is a very fair specimen of the "below stairs" romance which sometimes prepares the way for others, fit to take their places above stairs. And so it has its place here.[76]

[76] Ousting others which deserved the place better? It may be so, but one may perhaps "find the whole" without particularising everything. Of short books especially, from Fiévée's *Dot de Suzette* (1798), which charmed society in its day, to Eugénie Foa's *Petit Robinson de Paris* (1840), which amused *me* when I was about ten years old, there

The importance of these minors not inconsiderable.

It has been pointed out more than once that though neglect of such books as these may be perfectly natural and probable in the average reader, such neglect – and still more any contempt of them – is, though it may not be unnatural, utterly unscholarly and uncritical from the point of view of history. Their authors themselves learnt something from their own mistaken experiments, and their successors learnt a good deal more. They found that "sculduddery" was not a necessary attraction. Ducray does not avail himself of it, and Ducange seems to have left it off. They did not give up, but they came less and less to depend upon, extravagant incident, violent peripeteias, cheap supernaturalities, etc. But the most important thing about them perhaps is the evidence they give of learning what has been called their "business." Already, to a great extent if not wholly, that earliest obsession and preoccupation of the novelist – the idle anxiety to answer the question, "How do you know all these things?" – has begun to disappear. This is rather less the case with another foolish fancy – the belief that it is necessary to account not merely for what we call the consequents, but for the antecedents of all the characters (at least those of any importance) that you introduce. There can be no doubt that this was one of the objects, as it was part of the original cause, of the mistaken *Histoire* system, which made you, when or soon

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were no end if one talked.

after you introduced a personage, "tell us all about it," as the children say, in a separate inset tale. You did not now do this, but you made, as in the capital instance of Victor Ducange, huge diversions, retrospects, episodes, in the body of the story itself. This method, being much less skippable than the inset by those who did not want it, was not likely to continue, and so applied the cure to its own ill. And yet further, as novels multiplied, the supposed necessity of very great length tended to disappear. The seven or eight volumes of the eighteenth century, which had replaced the twelves and twenties of the seventeenth, shrank to six (*Ludovica*), five (*L'Artiste et Le Soldat* and *l'Ouvreuse de Loges*), four (*Le Petit Carillonneur*), and then three or two, though later the historical kind swelled again, and the almost invariable single volume did not establish itself till the middle of the century. As a consequence again of this, the enormous delay over single situations tended, though very slowly, to disappear. It is one of the merits of Pigault-Lebrun that he is not a great sinner in verbosity and prolixity: his contemporary minors of this volume are far more peccant in this kind.

The Vicomte d'Arlincourt —*Le Solitaire*.

Le Solitaire is a book which I have been "going to read" for some fifty years, but by some accident did not till the present occasion. I knew it generally as one of the vedettes of Romanticism, and as extremely popular in its own day: also as having been, with its author's other work in poem and play and prose fiction, the subject of some ridicule. But till I

read it, and some things about it, I never knew how well it deserved that ridicule and yet how very popular it was, and how really important is its position in the history of the Romantic movement, and so of the French novel and French literature generally. It was published at the end of January 1821, and at the end of November a seventh edition appeared, with an elaborate *Io Triumphe!* from the publisher. Not only had there been those seven editions (which, it must be remembered in fairness, represent at least seventy at the other end of the century[77]), but it had been translated into four foreign languages; *fourteen* dramas had been based on it, some half of which had been at least conditionally accepted for performance; painters of distinction were at work on subjects from it; it had reached the stages of Madrid and of London (where one critic had called it "a very beautiful composition"), while French approval had been practically unanimous. Nay, a game had been founded thereon, and – crowning, but perhaps rather ominous honour – somebody had actually published a burlesque imitation.

I have seldom read greater rubbish than *Le Solitaire*. It is a historical-romantic story (the idolatrous preface refers both to Scott and to Byron), and bears also strong, if sometimes distinctly unfortunate, resemblances to Mrs. Radcliffe, the Germans, and Chateaubriand. The scene is that of Charles the Bold's defeat at Morat: and the "Solitary" is Charles himself – the identification of his body after the decisive overthrow at

[77] *V. inf.* on M. Ohnet's books.

Nancy *was* a little doubtful – who has hidden there partly to expiate, by good deeds, his crime of massacring the monks of the adjoining Abbey of Underlach, and partly to avail himself of a local tradition as to a *Fantôme Sanglant*, who haunts the neighbourhood, and can be conveniently played by the aid of a crimson mantle. The slaughter of the monks, however, is not the only event or circumstance which links Underlach to the crimes of Charles, for it is now inhabited by a Baron d'Herstall (whose daughter, seduced by the Duke, has died early) and his niece, Elodie de Saint-Maur, whose father, a former favourite of the Burgundian, that prince has killed in one of his fits of rage. Throw in a local priest, Anselm, and you have what may be called the chief characters; but a good Count Ecbert de Norindall, a wicked Prince of Palzo, and divers others figure. Everybody, including the mysterious Bleeding-Phantom-Solitary-Duke himself, falls in love with Elodie,[78] and she is literally "carried off" (that is to say, shouldered) several times, once by the alarming person in the crimson shroud, but always rescued, till it is time for her to die and be followed by him. There are endless "alarums and excursions"; some of the *not* explained supernatural; woods, caves, ruins, underground passages – entirely at discretion. Catherine Morland would have been perfectly happy with it.

[78] Many people have probably noticed the frequency of this name – not a very pretty one in itself, and with no particular historical or other attraction – in France and French of the earlier nineteenth century. It was certainly due to *Le Solitaire*.

It is not, however, because it contains these things that it has been called "rubbish." A book might contain them all – Mrs. Radcliffe's own do, with the aggravation of the explained wonders – and not be that. It is because of the extraordinary silliness of the style and sentiments. I should imagine that M. d'Arlincourt was trying to write like his brother viscount, the author of *Les Martyrs*, and a pretty mess he has made of it. "Le char de la nuit roulait silencieux sur les plaines du ciel" (p. 3). "L'entrée du jour venait de s'élancer radieuse du palais de l'Aurore." "L'amante de l'Érèbe et la mère des Songes[79] avait achevé la moitié de sa course ténébreuse," etc., etc. The historic present is constantly battling with the more ordinary tenses – the very same sentence sometimes contains both. And this half-blown bladder of a style conveys sentiments as feebly pompous as itself. The actual story, though no great thing, is, if you could strip it of its froth and fustian, not so very bad: as told it is deplorable.

At the same time its mere existence – much more the fury of acceptance which for the moment greeted it – shows what that moment wanted. It wanted Romance, and in default of better it took *Le Solitaire*.

An occasional contrast of an almost violent kind may be permitted in a work requiring something more than

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[79] If any proper moral reader is disturbed at this conjunction of *amante* and *mère*, he will be glad to know that M. d'Arlincourt elsewhere regularises the situation and calls Night "*l'épouse* d'Érèbe."

merely catalogue-composition. It can hardly be found more appropriately than by concluding this chapter, which began with the account of Paul de Kock, by one of Charles Nodier.

Nodier.

To the student and lover of literature there is scarcely a more interesting figure in French literary history, though there are many greater. Except a few scraps (which, by one of the odd ways of the book-world, actually do not appear in some editions of his *Œuvres Choisies*), he did nothing which had the quality of positive greatness in it. But he was a considerable influence: and even more of a "sign." Younger than Chateaubriand and Madame de Staël, but far older than any of the men of 1830 proper, he may be said in a way to have, in his single person, played in France that part of schoolmaster to Romanticism, which had been distributed over two generations and many personalities in England; and which Germany, after a fashion, did without, at the cost of a few undisciplined and quickly overbloomed master-years. Although he was born in 1780, nine years before the Revolution itself, he underwent German and English influences early, "took" Wertherism, Terrorism,[80] and other maladies of that *fin de siècle* with the utmost facility, and produced divers ultra-Romantic things long before 1830 itself. But he had any number of literary and other avocations or distractions. He was a kind of entomologist and botanist, a

[80] In the Radcliffian-literary not the Robespierrean-political sense. For the Wertherism, *v. sup.* on Chateaubriand, p. 24 note.

kind of philologist (one is a little astonished to find that rather curious and very charlatanish person and parson Sir Herbert Croft, whose secretary Nodier was for a time, dignified in French books by the name of "*philologue* Anglais"), a good deal more than a kind of bibliographer (he spent the last twenty years of his life as Librarian of the Arsenal), and an enthusiastic and stimulating, though not exactly trustworthy, critic. But he concerns us here, of course, for his prose fiction, which, if not very bulky, is numerous in its individual examples, and is animated in the best of them by a spirit almost new in French and, though often not sufficiently caught and concentrated, present to almost the highest degrees in at least three examples – the last part of *La Fée aux Miettes*, *La Légende de Sœur Béatrix*, and, above all, *Inès de las Sierras*.

For those who delight in literary filiations and genealogies, the kind of story in which Nodier excelled (and in which, though some of his own were written after 1830, he may truly be considered as "schoolmaster" to Mérimée and Gautier and Gérard de Nerval and all their fellows), may be, without violence or exaggeration, said to be a new form of the French fairy-tale, divested of common form, and readjusted with the help of the German *Märchen* and fantasy-pieces. *Le Diable Amoureux* had, no doubt, set the fashion of this kind earlier; but that story, charming as it is, is still scarcely "Romantic." Nodier is so wholly; and it is fair to remember that Hoffmann himself was rather a contemporary of his, and subject to the same influences, than a

predecessor.[81]

His short stories.

The best collection of Nodier's short tales contains nine pieces: *Trilby*, *Le Songe d'Or*, *Baptiste Montauban*, *La Fée aux Miettes*, *La Combe de l'Homme mort*, *Inès de las Sierras*, *Smarra*, *La Neuvaine de la Chandeleur*, and *La Légende de Sœur Béatrix*. Of these I believe *Trilby*, *La Fée aux Miettes*, and *Smarra* have been the greatest favourites, and were pretty certainly the most influential in France. My own special delights are *Le Songe d'Or*, *Inès de las Sierras*, and *Sœur Béatrix*, with part of the *Fée*. But none is without its attractions, and the Preface to the *Fée aux Miettes*, which is almost a separate piece, has something of the quintessential in that curious quality which Nodier possesses almost alone in French or with Gérard de Nerval and Louis Bertrand only. English readers may "perceive a good deal of [Charles] Lamb in it," with touches of Sterne and De Quincey and Poe.

Trilby.

It is much to be feared that more people in England nowadays associate the name of "Trilby" with the late Mr. Du Maurier than with Nodier, and that more still associate it with the notion of a

[81] He was four years older than Nodier, but did not begin to write fiction nearly so early. The *Phantasiestücke* are of 1814, while Nodier had been writing stories, under German influence, as early as 1803. It is, however, also fair to say that all those now to be noticed are later than 1814, and even than Hoffmann's later collections, the *Elixiere des Teufels* and *Nachtstücke*.

hat than with either of the men of genius who used it in literature.

> So mighty Byron, dead and turned to clay,
> Gave name to collars for full many a day;
> And Ramillies, grave of Gallic boasts so big,
> Found most perpetuation in a wig.[82]

The original story united divers attractions for its first readers in 1822, combining the older fashion of Ossian with the newer one of Scott, infusing the supernatural, which was one great bait of the coming Romanticism, and steeping the whole cake in the tears of the newer rather than the older "Sensibility." "Trilby, le Lutin d'Argaïl"[83] (Nodier himself explains that he alters the spelling here with pure phonetic intent, so as to keep the pronunciation for French eyes *and* ears[84]), is a spirit who haunts the cabin of the fisherman Dougal to make a sort of sylph-like love to his wife Jeannie. He means and does no harm, but he

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[82] The prudent as well as judicious poet who wrote these lines provided a variant to suit those who, basing their position on "Ramillies *cock*," maintain that it was a hat, not a wig, that was named after Villeroy's defeat. For "grave – big" read "where Gallic hopes fell flat," and for "wig" "hat" *simpliciter*, and the thing is done. But Thackeray has "Ramillies *wig*" and Scott implies it.

[83] Nodier, who had been in Scotland and, as has been said, was a philologist of the better class, is scrupulously exact in spelling proper names as a rule. Perhaps Loch Fyne is not exactly "Le Lac Beau" (I have not the Gaelic). But from Pentland to Solway (literally) he makes no blunder, and he actually knows all about "Argyle's Bowling Green."

[84] If phonetics had never done anything worse than this they would not be as loathsome to literature as they sometimes are.

is naturally a nuisance to the husband, on whom he plays tricks to keep him away from home, and at length rather frightens the wife. They procure, from a neighbouring monastery, a famous exorcist monk, who, though he cannot directly punish Trilby, lays on him sentence of exclusion from the home of the pair, unless one of them invites him, under penalty of imprisonment for a thousand years. How the story turns to Jeannie's death and Trilby's duress can be easily imagined, and may be read with pleasure. I confess that to me it seems pretty, but just a little mawkish.[85] Perhaps I am a brute.

Le Songe d'Or.

Le Songe d'Or, on the other hand, though in a way tragic, and capable of being allegorised almost *ad infinitum* in its sense of some of the riddles of the painful earth, is not in the least sentimental, and is told, till just upon the end, with a certain tender irony. The author called it "Fable Levantine," and the venerable Lo[c]kman is introduced in it. But I have read it several times without caring (perhaps this was reprehensible) to ascertain whether it is in the recognised Lokman bunch or not. All I know is that here Nodier and not Lokman has told it, and that the result is delightful. First a beautiful "kardouon," the prettiest of lizards, all azure and ruby and gold, finds in the desert a heap of gold-pieces. He breaks his teeth on them, but is sure that such nice-looking things must be good to eat – probably

[85] On the other hand, compared with its slightly elder contemporary, *Le Solitaire* (*v. sup.*), it is a masterpiece.

slices of a root which some careless person has left too long in the sun – and that, if properly treated, they will make a famous winter provision. So he conveys them with much care and exertion, one by one, to a soft bed of fresh moss, just the thing to catch the dew, under the shadow of a fine old tree. And, being naturally tired, he goes to sleep beside them. And this is the history of the kardouon.

Now there was in that neighbourhood a poor woodcutter named Xaïloun – deformed, and not much more than half-witted, but amiable – who had taken a great fancy to the kardouon as being a beautiful beast, and likely to make a charming friend. But the kardouon, after the manner of shy lizards, had by no means reciprocated this affection, and took shelter behind stones and tree-stumps when advances were made to him. So that the children, and even his own family, including his mother, used to jeer at Xaïloun and tell him to go to his friend. On this particular occasion, the day after the kardouon's *trouvaille*, Xaïloun actually found the usually wide-awake animal sleeping. And as the place, with the moss and the great tree-shadow and a running stream close by, was very attractive, Xaïloun lay down by the lizard to wait till he should wake. But as he himself might go to sleep, and the animal, accustomed to the sun, might get a chill in the shade, Xaïloun put his own coat over him. And he too slept, after thinking how nice the kardouon's friendship would be when they *both* woke. And this is the history of Xaïloun.

Next day again there came a fakir named Abhoc, who was on

a pretended pilgrimage, but really on the look-out for what he might get. He saw a windfall at once, was sure that neither of its sleeping guardians could keep it from him, and very piously thanked the Almighty for rewarding his past devotion and self-sacrifice by opening a merry and splendid life to him. But as, with such custodians, the treasure could be "lifted" without the slightest difficulty, he too lay down by it, and went to sleep, dreaming of Schiraz wine in golden cups and a harem peopled with mortal houris. And this is the history of the fakir Abhoc.

A day and a night passed, and the morrow came. Again there passed a wise doctor of laws, Abhac by name, who was editing a text to which a hundred and thirty-two different interpretations had been given by Eastern Cokes and Littletons. He had just hit upon the hundred and thirty-third – of course the true one – when the sight described already struck him and put the discovery quite out of his head, to be lost for ever. As became a jurist, he was rather a more practical person than the woodcutter or the fakir, if not than the lizard. His human predecessors were, evidently, thieves, and must be brought to justice, but it would be well to secure "pieces of conviction." So he began to wrap up the coins in his turban and carry them away. But there were so many, and it was so heavy, that he grew very weary. So he too laid him down and slept. And this is the history of the doctor Abhac.

But on the fifth day there appeared a much more formidable person than the others, and also a much more criminous. This was the "King of the Desert" – bandit and blackmailer of

caravans. Being apparently a bandit of letters, he reflected that, though lizards, being, after all, miniature dragons, were immemorial guardians of treasure, they could not have any right in it, but were most inconveniently likely to wake if any noise were made. The others were three to one – too heavy odds by daylight. But if he sat down by them till night came he could stab them one by one while they were asleep, and perhaps breakfast on the kardouon – said to be quite good meat. And he went to sleep himself. And this is the history of the King of the Desert.

But next day again the venerable Lokman passed by, and *he* saw that the tree was a upas tree and the sleepers were dead. And he understood it all, and he passed his hand through his beard and fell on his face, and gave glory to God. And then he buried the three covetous ones in separate graves under the upas itself. But he put Xaïloun in a safer place, that his friends might come and do right to him; and he buried the kardouon apart on a little slope facing the sun, such as lizards love, and near Xaïloun. And, lastly, having stroked his beard again, he buried the treasure too. But he was very old: and he was very weary when he had finished this, and God took him.

And on the seventh day there came an angel and promised Xaïloun Paradise, and made a mark on his tomb with a feather from his own wing. And he kissed the forehead of Lokman and made him rise from the dead, and took him to the seventh heaven itself. And this is the history of the angel. It all happened ages ago, and though the name of Lokman has lived always through

them, so has the shadow of the upas tree.

And this is the history of the world.

Only a child's goody-goody tale? Possibly. But for my part I know no better philosophy and, at least as Nodier told it, not much better literature.

Minors.

Baptiste Montauban and *La Combe de l'Homme mort* are, though scarcely shorter than *Le Songe d'Or*, slighter. The first is a pathetic but not quite consummate story of "love and madness" in a much better sense than that in which Nodier's eccentric employer, Sir Herbert Croft, used the words as his title for the history of Parson Hackman and Miss Ray.[86] The second ("combe," the omission of which from the official French dictionaries Nodier characteristically denounces, is our own "combe" – a deep valley; from, I suppose, the Celtic Cwm; and pronounced by Devonshire folk in a manner which no other Englishman, born east of the line between the mouths of the Parret and the Axe, can master) is a good but not supreme

[86] Two little passages towards the end are very precious. A certain bridegroom (I abridge a little) is "perfectly healthy, perfectly self-possessed, a great talker, a successful man of business, with some knowledge of physics, chemistry, jurisprudence, politics, statistics, and phrenology; enjoying all the requirements of a deputy; and for the rest, a liberal, an anti-romantic, a philanthropist, a very good fellow – and absolutely intolerable." This person later changes the humble home of tragedy into a "school of mutual instruction, where the children learn to hate and envy each other and to read and write, which was all they needed to become detestable creatures." These words "please the soul well."

diablerie of a not uncommon kind. *La Neuvaine de la Chandeleur* is longer, and from some points of view the most pathetic of all. A young man, hearing some girls talk of a much-elaborated ceremony like those of Hallowe'en in Scotland and of St. Agnes' Eve in Keats, by which (in this case) *both* sexes can see their fated lovers, tries it, and discerns, in dream or vision, his ideal as well as his fate. She turns out to be an actual girl whom he has never seen, but whom both his father and her father – old friends – earnestly desire that he should marry. He travels to her home, is enthusiastically greeted, and finds her even more bewitching than her wraith or whatever it is to be called. But she is evidently in bad health, and dies the same night of aneurism. Not guested in the house, but trysted in the morning, he goes there, and seeing preparations in the street for a funeral, asks of some one, being only half alarmed, "*Qui est mort?*" The answer is, "Mademoiselle Cecile Savernier."

Had these words terminated the story it would have been nearly perfect. Two more pages of the luckless lover's progress to resignation from despair and projected suicide seem to me to blunt the poignancy.

La Fée aux Miettes.

In fact, acknowledging most humbly that I could not write even the worst and shortest of Nodier's stories, I am bound to say that I think he was not to be trusted with a long one. *La Fée aux Miettes* is at once an awful and a delightful example. The story of the mad shipwright Michel, who fell in love with the old dwarf

beggar – so unlike her of Bednal Green or King Cophetua's love – at the church door of Avranches; who followed her to Greenock and got inextricably mixed between her and the Queen of Sheba; who for some time passed his nights in making love to Belkis and his days in attending to the wisdom of the Fairy of the Crumbs (she always brought him his breakfast after the Sabaean Nights); who at last identified the two in one final rapture, after seeking for a Singing Mandrake; and who spent the rest (if not, indeed, the whole) of his days in the Glasgow Lunatic Asylum; – is at times so ineffably charming that one is almost afraid oneself to repeat the refrain —

> C'est moi, c'est moi, c'est moi!
> Je suis la Mandragore!
> La fille des beaux jours qui s'éveille à l'aurore —
> Et qui chante pour toi!

though, after all, every one whose life has been worth living has listened for the song all that life – and has heard it sometimes.

To find any fault with the matrix of this opal is probably blasphemous. But I own that I could do without the Shandean prologue and epilogue of the narrator and his man-servant Daniel Cameron. And though, as a tomfool myself, I would fain not find any of the actions of my kind alien from me, I do find some of the tomfoolery with which Nodier has seasoned the story superfluous. Why call a damsel "Folly Girlfree"? What would a Frenchman say if an English story-teller christened some girl

of Gaul "Sottise Librefille"? "Sir Jap Muzzleburn," the Bailiff of the Isle of Man, and his black poodle-equerry, Master Blatt, amuse me but little; and Master Finewood, the shipbuilder, – whose rejected six sons-in-law, lairds of high estate, run away with his thirty thousand guineas, and are checkmated by six sturdy shipwrights, – less. I have no doubt it is my fault, my very great fault, but I wish they would *go*, and leave me with Michel and La Fée, or rather allow me to *be* Michel *with* La Fée.

Smarra and *Sœur Béatrix*.

Smarra– which made a great impression on its contemporaries and had a strong influence on the Romantic movement generally – is a fantasia of nightmare based on the beginning of *The Golden Ass*, with, again, a sort of prologue and epilogue of modern love. It is undoubtedly a fine piece of work of its kind and beautifully written. But in itself it seems to me a little too much of a *tour de force*, and its kind a little rococo. Again, *mea maxima culpa* perhaps. On the other hand, *Sœur Béatrix* is a most charmingly told version of a very wide-spread story – that of Our Lady taking the place of an erring sister during her sojourn in the world, and restoring her to it without any scandal when she returns repentant and miserable after years of absence. It could not be better done.

Inès de las Sierras.

But the jewel of the book, and of Nodier's work, to me, is *Inès de las Sierras*– at least its first and larger part; for Nodier, in one of those exasperatingly uncritical whims of his which have been

noticed, and which probably prevented him from ever writing a really good novel of length, has attached an otiose explanation *à la* Mrs. Radcliffe, which, if it may please the weakest kind of weak brethren, may almost disgust another, and as to which I myself exercise the critic's *cadi*-rights by simply ignoring and banishing what I think superfluous. As for what remains, once more, it could not be done better.

Three French officers, at the moment of disturbance of the French garrisons in the north of Spain, owing to Napoleon's Russian disasters (perhaps also to more local events, which it was not necessary for Nodier to mention), are sent on remount duty from Gerona to Barcelona, where there is a great horse-fair on. They are delayed by bad weather and other accidents, and are obliged to stop half-way after nightfall. But the halting-place is choke-full of other travellers on their way to the same fair, and neither at inn nor in private house is there any room whatever, though there is no lack of "provant." Everybody tells them that they can only put up at "the castle of Ghismondo." Taking this for a Spanish folkword, they get rather angry. But, finding that there *is* a place of the name close by in the hills – ruinous, haunted, but actual – they take plenty of food, wine, and torches, etc., and persuade, with no little difficulty, their *arriero* and even their companion and the real hirer of the vehicle (a theatrical manager, who has allowed them to accompany him, when they could get no other) to dare the night adventure. On the way the *arriero* tells them the legend, how, centuries before, Ghismondo

de las Sierras, ruined by debauchery, established himself in this his last possession, with one squire, one page (both of the worst characters), his beautiful niece Inès, whom he has seduced, and a few desperate followers, who help him to live by brigandage. Every night the three chiefs drank themselves senseless, and were regularly dragged to bed by their men. But one Christmas Eve at midnight, Inès, struck with remorse, entered the hall of orgies, and implored them to repent, actually kneeling before Ghismondo, and placing her hand on his heart. To which the ruffian replied by stabbing her, and leaving her for the men-at-arms to find, a corpse, among the drunken but live bodies. For a whole twelvemonth the three see, in dreams, their victim come and lay a burning hand on their hearts; and at its end, on the same day and at the same hour, the dream comes true – the phantom appears, speaks *once*, "Here am I!" sits with them, eats and drinks, even sings and dances, but finally lays the flaming hand of the dream on each heart; and they die in torture – the men-at-arms entering as usual, only to find *four* corpses. (Now it is actually Christmas Eve – the Spanish *Noche Buena*– at "*temp.* of tale.")

So far the story, though admirably told, in a fashion which mere summary cannot convey, is, it may be said, not more than "as per usual." Not so what follows.

The four travellers – the unnamed captain who tells the story; his two lieutenants, Boutraix, a bluff Voltairian, with an immense capacity for food and drink, and Sergy, a young and romantic

Celadon, *plus* the actor-manager Bascara, who is orthodox – with the *arriero*, arrive at last at the castle, which is Udolphish enough, and with some difficulty reach, over broken staircases and through ruined corridors, the great banqueting-hall.[87]

Here – for it is less ruinous that the rest of the building and actually contains furniture and mouldering pictures – they make themselves tolerably comfortable with their torches, a huge fire made up from broken stairs and panels, abundance of provisions, and two dozen of wine, less a supply for the *arriero*, who prudently remains in the stables, alleging that the demons that haunt those places are fairly familiar to him and not very mischievous. As the baggage has got very wet during the day, the dresses and properties of Bascara's company are taken out and put to air. Well filled with food and drink, the free-thinker Boutraix proposes that they shall equip themselves from these with costumes not unsuitable to the knight, squire, and page of the legend, and they do so, Bascara refusing to take part in the game, and protesting strongly against their irreverence. At last midnight comes, and they cry, "Where is Inès de las Sierras?" lifting their glasses to her health. Suddenly there sounds from the dark end of the great hall the fateful "Here am I!" and there comes forward a figure in a white shroud, which seats itself in the vacant place assigned by tradition to Inès herself. She

[87] The description is worth comparing with that of Gautier's *Château de la Misère*– the difference between all but complete ruin and mere, though extreme, disrepair being admirably, and by the later master in all probability designedly, worked out.

is extraordinarily beautiful, and is, under the white covering, dressed in a fashion resembling the mouldering portrait which they have seen in the gallery. She speaks too, half rallying them, as if surprised at *their* surprise; she calls herself Inès de las Sierras; she throws on the table a bracelet with the family arms, which they have also seen dimly emblazoned or sculptured about the castle; she eats; and, as a final piece of conviction, she tears her dress open and shows the scar on her breast. Then she drinks response to the toast they had in mockery proposed; she accepts graciously the advances of the amorous Sergy; she sings divinely, and she dances more divinely still. The whole scene is described supremely well, but the description of the dance is one of the very earliest and very finest pieces of Romantic French prose. One may try, however rashly, to translate it:

> (*She has found a set of castanets in her girdle.*)
>
> She rose and made a beginning by grave and measured steps, displaying, with a mixture of grace and majesty, the perfection of her figure and the nobility of her attitudes. As she shifted her position and put herself in new aspects, our admiration turned to amazement, as though another and another beautiful woman had come within our view, so constantly did she surpass herself in the inexhaustible variety of her steps and her movements. First, in rapid transition, we saw her pass from a serious dignity to transports of pleasure, at first moderate, but growing more and more animated; then to soft and voluptuous languors; then to the delirium of joy, and then to some strange ecstasy

more delirious still. Next, she disappeared in the far-off darkness of the huge hall, and the clash of the castanets grew feeble in proportion to the distance, and diminished ever till, as we ceased to see, so we ceased to hear her. But again it came back from the distance, increasing always by degrees, till it burst out full as she reappeared in a flood of light at the spot where we least expected her. And then she came so near that she touched us with her dress, clashing the castanets with a maddening volubility, till they weakened once more and twittered like cicalas, while now and then across their monotonous racket she uttered shrill yet tender cries which pierced to our own souls. Afterwards she retired once more, but plunged herself only half in the darkness, appearing and disappearing by turns, now flying from our gaze and now desiring to be seen,[88] while later still you neither saw nor heard her save for a far-off plaintive note like the sigh of a dying girl. And we remained aghast, throbbing with admiration and fear, longing for the moment when her veil, fluttering with the dance-movement, should be lighted up by the torches, when her voice should warn us of her return, with a joyful cry, to which we answered involuntarily, because it made us vibrate with a crowd of secret harmonies. Then she came back; she spun round like a flower stripped from its stalk by the wind; she sprang from the ground as if it rested only with her to quit earth for ever; she dropped again as if it was only her will which kept her from touching it at all; she did not bound from the floor – you would have thought that she shot from it – that some

[88] *Et fugit ad salices et se cupit ante videri.*

> mysterious law of her destiny forbade her to touch it, save in order to fly from it. And her head, bent with an expression of caressing impatience, and her arms, gracefully opened, as though in appealing prayer, seemed to implore us to save her.

The captain himself is on the point of yielding to the temptation, but is anticipated by Sergy, whose embrace she returns, but sinks into a chair, and then, seeming to forget the presence of the others altogether, invites him to follow her through tortuous and ruined passages (which she describes) to a sepulchre, which she inhabits, with owls for her only live companions. Then she rises, picks up her shroud-like mantle, and vanishes in the darkness with a weird laugh and the famous words, "*Qui m'aime me suive.*"

The other three have the utmost difficulty in preventing Sergy (by main force at first) from obeying. And the captain tries rationalism, suggesting first that the pretended Inès is a bait for some gang of assassins or at least brigands, then that the whole thing is a trick of Bascara's to "produce" a new cantatrice. But Boutraix, who has been entirely converted from his Voltairianism by the shock, sets aside the first idea like a soldier, and Bascara rebuts the second like a sensible man. Brigands certainly would give no such warning of their presence, and a wise manager does not expose his prima donna's throat to cohabitation in ruins with skeletons and owls. They finally agree on silence, and shortly afterwards the three officers leave Spain. Sergy is killed

at Lutzen, murmuring the name of Inès. Boutraix, who has never relapsed, takes the cowl, and the captain retires after the war to his own small estate, where he means to stay. He ends by saying *Voilà tout*.

Alas! it is not all, and it is not the end. Some rather idle talk with the auditors follows, and then there is the above-mentioned Radcliffian explanation, telling how Inès was a real Las Sierras of a Mexican branch, who had actually made her début as an actress, had been, as was at first thought, murdered by a worthless lover, but recovered. Her wits, however, were gone, and having escaped from the kind restraint under which she was put, she had wandered to the castle of her ancestors, afterwards completely recovering her senses and returning to the profession in the company of Bascara himself.

Now I think that, if I took the trouble to do so, I could point out improbabilities in this second story sufficient to damn it on its own showing.[89] But, as has been said already, I prefer to leave it alone. I never admired George Vavasour in Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* But I own that I agree with him heartily in his opinion that "making a conjurer explain his tricks" is despicably poor fun.

Still, the story, which ends at "Voilà tout" and which for me does so end "for good and all," is simply magnificent. I have put it elsewhere with *Wandering Willie's Tale*, which it more specially resembles in the way in which the ordinary

[89] Note, too, a hint at a never filled in romance of the captain's own.

turns into the extraordinary. It falls short of Scott in vividness, character, manners, and impressiveness, but surpasses him in beauty[90] of style and imagery. In particular, Nodier has here, in a manner which I hardly remember elsewhere, achieved the blending of two kinds of "terror" – the ordinary kind which, as it is trivially called, "frightens" one, and the other[91] terror which accompanies the intenser pleasures of sight and sound and feeling, and heightens them by force of contrast. The scene of Inès' actual appearance would have been the easiest thing in the world to spoil, and therefore was the most difficult thing in the world to do right. But it is absolutely right. In particular, the way in which her conduct in at once admitting Sergy's attentions, and finally inviting him to "follow," is guarded from the very slightest suggestion of the professional "comingness" of a common courtesan, and made the spontaneous action of a thing divine or diabolic, is really wonderful.

At the same time, the adverse criticism made here, with that on *La Fée aux Miettes* and a few other foregoing remarks, will probably prepare the reader for the repeated and final judgment that Nodier was very unlikely to produce a good long story. And, though I have not read *quite* all that he wrote, I certainly think that he never did.

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[90] I must ask for special emphasis on "beauty." Nothing can be *finer* or *fitter* than the style of Steenie's ghostly experiences. And the famous Claverhouse passage *is* beautiful.

[91] As Rossetti saw it in "Sibylla Palmifera":"Under the arch of Life, where Love and Death, *Terror* and Mystery guard her shrine, I saw Beauty enthroned."

Nodier's special quality.

In adding new and important masterpieces to the glittering chain of short cameo-like narratives which form the peculiar glory of French literature, he did greatly. And his performance and example were greater still in respect of the *quality* which he infused into those best pieces of his work which have been examined here. It is hardly too much to say that this quality had been almost dormant – a sleeping beauty among the lively bevies of that literature's graces – ever since the Middle Ages, with some touches of waking – hardly more than motions in a dream – at the Renaissance. The comic Phantasy had been wakeful and active enough; the graver and more serious tragic Imagination had been, though with some limitations, busy at times. But this third sister – Our Lady of Dreams, one might call her in imitation of a famous fancy – had not shown herself much in French merriment or in French sadness: the light of common day there had been too much for her. Yet in Charles Nodier she found the magician who could wake her from sleep: and she told him what she had thought while sleeping.[92]

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[92] Perhaps there are few writers mentioned in this book to whose lovers exactly the same kind of apology is desirable as it is in the case of Nodier. "Where," I hear reproaching voices crying, "is *Jean Sbogar*? Where is *Laure Ruthwen ou les Vampires* in novel-plural or *Le Vampire* in melodrama-singular? Where are a score or a hundred other books, pieces, pages, paragraphs, passages from five to fifty words long?" They are not here, and I could not find room for them here. "But you found more room for Paul de Kock?" Yes: and I have tried to show why.

CHAPTER III
VICTOR HUGO

Limitations.

At the present day, and perhaps in all days hitherto, the greatest writer of the nineteenth century in France for length of practice, diversity of administration of genius, height of intention, and (for a long time at least) magnitude and altitude of fame, enjoys, and has enjoyed, more popular repute in England for his work in prose fiction than for any other part of it. With the comparative side of this estimate the present writer can indeed nowise agree; and the reasons of his disagreement should be made good in the present chapter. But this is the first opportunity he has had of considering, with fair room and verge, the justice of the latter part of Tennyson's compliment "Victor *in Romance*"; and it will pretty certainly be the last. As for a general judgment of the positive and relative value and qualities of the wonderful procession of work – certainly deserving that adjective whatever other or others may be added – which covers the space of a full half-century from *Han d'Islande* to *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*, it would, according to the notions of criticism here followed, be improper to attempt that till after the procession itself has been carefully surveyed.

Nor will it be necessary to preface, to follow, or, except very

rarely and slightly, to accompany this survey with remarks on the non-literary characteristics of this French Titan of literature. The object often of frantic political and bitter personal abuse; for a long time of almost equally frantic and much sillier political and personal idolatry; himself the victim – in consequence partly of his own faults, partly of ignoble jealousy of greatness, but perhaps most of all of the inevitable reaction from this foolish cult – of the most unsparing rummage into those faults, and the weaknesses which accompany them, that any poet or prose writer, even Pope, has experienced – Victor Hugo still, though he has had many a *vates* in both senses of *sacer*, may almost be allowed *carere* critico *sacro*,[93] in the best sense, on the whole of his life and work. I have no pretensions to fill or bridge the whole of the gap here. It will be quite task enough for the present, leaving the life almost alone, to attempt the part of the work which contains prose fiction. Nothing said of this will in the least affect what I have often said elsewhere, and shall hold to as long as I hold anything, in regard to the poetry – that its author is the greatest poet of France, and one of the great poets of the world.

Han d'Islande.

To deal with Hugo's first published, though not first written, novel requires, in almost the highest degree, what Mr. Matthew Arnold called "a purged considerate mind." There are, I believe, some people (I myself know at least one of great excellence) who,

[93] Mr. Swinburne's magnificent pæans are "vatical" certainly, but scarcely critical, save now and then. Mr. Stevenson wrote on the Romances, but not on "the whole."

having had the good luck to read *Han d'Islande* as schoolboys, and finding its vein congenial to theirs, have, as in such cases is not impossible, kept it unscathed in their liking. But this does not happen to every one. I do not think, though I am not quite certain, that when I first read it myself I was exactly what may be called a schoolboy pure and simple (that is to say, under fifteen). But if I did not read it in upper school-boyhood (that is to say, before eighteen), I certainly did, not much later. I own that at that time, whatever my exact age was, I found it so uninteresting that I do not believe I read it through. Nor, except in the last respect, have I improved with it – for it would be presumptuous to say, "has it improved with me" – since. The author apologised for it in two successive prefaces shortly after its appearance, and in yet another after that of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, ten years later. None of them, it is to be feared, "touches the spot." The first, indeed, is hardly an apology at all, but a sort of *goguenard* "showing off" of the kind not uncommon with youth; the second, a little more serious, contains rather interesting hits[94] of again youthful jealousy at the popularity of Pigault-Lebrun and Ducray-Duminil; the third and much later one is a very early instance of the Victorian philosophising. "There must be," we are told with the solemnity which for some sixty years excited such a curious mixture of amazement and amusement, "in every work of the mind – drama or novel – there must be many things felt, many things observed, and many things divined," and while

[94] See note in Vol. I. p. 472 of this *History*, and in the present volume, *sup.* p. 40.

in *Han* there is only one thing felt – a young man's love – and one observed – a girl's ditto – the rest is all divined, is "the fantastic imagination of an adolescent."

One impeticoses the gratility of the explanation, and refrains, as far as may be, from saying, "Words! words!" Unluckily, the book does very little indeed to supply deeds to match. The feeling and the observation furnish forth a most unstimulating love-story; at least the present critic, who has an unabashed fondness for love-stories, has never been able to feel the slightest interest either in Ordener Guldenlew or in Ethel Schumacker, except in so far as the lady is probably the first of the since innumerable and sometimes agreeable heroines of her name in fiction. As for the "divining," the "intention," and the "imagination," they have been exerted to sadly little purpose. The absurd nomenclature, definitely excused in one of the prefaces, may have a slight historic interest as the first attempt, almost a hopeless failure, at that *science des noms* with which Hugo was later credited, and which he certainly sometimes displayed. It is hardly necessary to say much about Spladgest and Oglypiglaf, Musdaemon and Orugix. They are pure schoolboyisms. But it is perhaps fair to relieve the author from the reproach, which has been thrown on him by some of his English translators, of having metamorphosed "Hans" into "Han." He himself explains distinctly that the name was a nickname, taken from the grunt or growl (the word is in France applied to the well-known noise made by a paviour lifting and bringing down his rammer) of the

monster.

But that monster himself! A more impossible improbability and a more improbable impossibility never conceived itself in the brain of even an as yet failure of an artist. Han appears to have done all sorts of nasty things, such as eating the insides of babies when they were alive and drinking the blood of enemies when they were not dead, out of the skulls of his own offspring, which he had extracted from *their* dead bodies by a process like peeling a banana: also to have achieved some terrible ones, such as burning cathedrals and barracks, upsetting rocks on whole battalions, and so forth. But the only chances we have of seeing him at real business show him to us as overcoming, with some trouble, an infirm old man, and *not* overcoming at all, after a struggle of long duration, a not portentously powerful young one. His white bear, and not he, seems to have had the chief merit of despatching six surely rather incompetent hunters who followed the rash "Kennybol": and of his two final achievements, that of poniarding two men in a court of justice might have been brought about by anybody who was careless enough of his own life, and that of setting his gaol on fire by any one who, with the same carelessness, had a corrupt gaoler to supply him with the means.

It would be equally tedious and superfluous to go through the minor characters and incidents. The virtuous and imprisoned statesman Schumacker, Ethel's father, excites no sympathy: his malignant and finally defeated enemy, the Chancellor Ahlefeld, no interest. That enemy's most *un*virtuous wife and her paramour

Musdaemon —*the* villain of the piece as Han is the monster – as to whom one wonders whether he could ever have been as attractive as a lover as he is unattractive as a villain, are both puppets. Indeed, one would hardly pay any attention to the book at all if it did not hold a position in the work of a man of the highest genius partly similar to, and partly contrasted with, that of *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*. But *St. Irvyne* and *Zastrozzi* are much shorter than *Han d'Islande*, and Shelley, whether by accident, wisdom (*nemo omnibus horis insanit*), or the direct intervention of Apollo, never resumed the task for which his genius was so obviously unsuited.

Still, it must be said for Hugo that, even at this time, he could have – in a manner actually had – put in evidence of not absolute incompetence for the task.

Bug-Jargal.

Bug-Jargal was, as glanced at above, written, according to its author's own statement, two years before *Han*, when he was only sixteen; was partially printed (in the *Constitutionnel*) and (in fear of a piracy) rewritten in fifteen days and published, seven years after its composition, and almost as many before *Notre-Dame de Paris* appeared. Taking it as it stands, there is nothing of the sixteen years or of the fifteen days to be seen in it. It is altogether superior to *Han*, and though it has not the nightmare magnificence and the phantasmagoric variety of *Notre-Dame*, it is, not merely because it is much shorter, a far better told, more coherent, and more generally human story.

The jester-obi Habibrah has indeed the caricature-grotesquery of Han himself, and of Quasimodo, and long afterwards of Gwynplaine, as well as the devilry of the first named and of Thénardier in *Les Misérables*; but we do not see too much of him, and nothing that he does is exactly absurd or utterly improbable. The heroine – so far as there is a heroine in Marie d'Auverney, wife of the part-hero-narrator, but separated from him on the very day of their marriage by the rebellion of San Domingo – is very slight; but then, according to the story, she is not wanted to be anything more. The cruelty, treachery, etc., of the half-caste Biassou are not overdone, nor is the tropical scenery, nor indeed anything else. Even the character of Bug-Jargal himself, a modernised Oroonoko (whom probably Hugo did not know) and a more direct descendant of persons and things in Rousseau, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, and to some extent the "sensibility" novelists generally (whom he certainly did know), is kept within bounds. And, what is perhaps most extraordinary of all, the half-comic interludes in the narrative where Auverney's comrades talk while he makes breaks in his story, contain few of Hugo's usually disastrous attempts at humour. It is impossible to say that the book is of any great importance or of any enthralling interest. But it is the most workmanlike of all Hugo's work in prose fiction, and, except *Les Travailleurs de La Mer* and *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*, which have greater faults as well as greater beauties, the most readable, if not, like them, the most likely to be re-read.

Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné.

Its merits are certainly not ill set off by the two shorter pieces, both of fairly early date, but the one a little before and the other a little after *Notre-Dame de Paris*, which usually accompany it in the collected editions. Of these *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné* is, with its tedious preface, almost two-thirds as long as *Bug-Jargal* itself; the other, *Claude Gueux*, contents itself with thirty pages. Both are pieces with a purpose – manifestos of one of Hugo's most consistent and most irrational crazes – the objection to capital punishment.[95] There is no need to argue against this, the immortal "Que MM. les assassins," etc., being, though in fact the weakest of a thousand refutations, sufficient, once for all, to explode it. But it is not irrelevant to point out that the two pieces themselves are very battering-rams against their own theory. We are not told – the objection to this omission was made at the time, of course, and Hugo's would-be lofty waving-off of this is one of the earliest of many such – what the condemned person's crime was. But the upshot of his lucubrations during these latest hours of his is this, that such hours are almost more uncomfortable than the minutes of the actual execution can possibly be. As this is exactly one of the points on which the advocates of the punishment, whether from the point of view of deterrence or from that of retribution, chiefly rely, it seems something of a blunder to bring it out with all the power of a poet and a rhetorician. We *want* "M. l'Assassin," in fact, to be

[95] These crazes were not in origin, though they probably were in influence, political: Hugo held more than one of them while he was still a Royalist.

made very uncomfortable – as uncomfortable as possible – and we want M. l'Assassin, in intention or deliberation, to be warned that he will be so made. "Serve him right" sums up the one view, "De te fabula" the other. In fact cheap copies of *Le Dernier Jour*, supplied to all about to commit murder, would be highly valuable. Putting aside its purpose, the mere literary power is of course considerable if not consummate; it hardly pretends to be a "furnished" *story*.

Claude Gueux.

The piece, however, is tragic enough: it could hardly fail to be so in the hands of such a master of tragedy, just as it could hardly fail to be illogical in the hands of such a paralogician. But *Claude Gueux*, though it ends with a murder and an attempt at suicide and an execution, is really, though far from intentionally, a farce. The hero, made (by the "fault of society," of course) a criminal, though not a serious one, thinks himself persecuted by the prison director, and murders that official. The reader who does not know the book will suppose that he has been treated as Charles Reade's wicked governor treated Josephs and Robinson and the other victims in *It is Never too Late to Mend*. Not at all. The redoubtable Claude had, like the great Victor himself and other quite respectable men, an equally redoubtable appetite, and the prison rations were not sufficient for him. As he was a sort of leader or prison shop-steward, and his fellow-convicts looked up to him, a young fellow who was not a great eater used to give Claude part of his allowance. The director, discovering

this, removed the young man into another ward – an action possibly rather spiteful, possibly also only a slight excess, or no excess at all, of red-tapeism in discipline. Claude not merely asks reasons for this, – which, of course, even if respectfully done, was an act of clear insubordination on any but anarchist principles, – but repeats the enquiry. The director more than once puts the question by, but inflicts no penalty. Whereupon Claude makes a harangue to the shop (which appears, in some astounding fashion, to have been left without any supervision between the director's visits), repeats once more, on the director's entrance, his insubordinate enquiry, again has it put by, and thereupon splits the unfortunate official's skull with a hatchet, digging also a pair of scissors, which once belonged to his (left-handed) wife, into his own throat. And the wretches actually cure this hardly fallen angel, and then guillotine him, which he takes most sweetly, placing at the last moment in the hand of the attendant priest, with the words *Pour les pauvres*, a five-franc piece, which one of the Sisters of the prison hospital had given him! After this Hugo, not contented with the tragedy of the edacious murderer, gives us seven pages of his favourite rhetoric in *saccadé* paragraphs on the general question.

As so often with him, one hardly knows which particular question to ask first, "Did ever such a genius make such a fool of himself?" or "Was ever such an artist given to such hopeless slips in the most rudimentary processes of art?"

But it is, of course, not till we come to *Notre-Dame de Paris* that any serious discussion of Hugo's claims as a novelist is possible. Hitherto, while in novel at least he has very doubtfully been an *enfant sublime*, he has most unquestionably been an *enfant*. Whatever faults may be chargeable on his third novel or romance proper, they include no more childishness than he displayed throughout his life, and not nearly so much as he often did later.

The book, moreover, to adopt and adapt the language of another matter, whether disputably or indisputably great in itself, is unquestionably so "by position." It is one of the chief manifestos – there are some who have held, and perhaps would still hold, that it is *the* chief manifesto and example – of one of the most remarkable and momentous of literary movements – the great French Romantic revolt of *mil-huit-cent-trente*. It had for a time enormous popularity, extending to many who had not the slightest interest in it as such a manifesto; it affected not merely its own literature, but others, and other arts besides literature, both in its own and other countries. To whatever extent this popularity may have been affected – first by the transference of interest from the author's "letters" to his politics and sociology, and secondly, by the reaction in general esteem which followed his death – it is not very necessary to enquire. One certainly sees fewer, indeed, positively few, references to it and to its contents now. But it was so bright a planet when it first came into ken; it exercised its influence so long and so largely; that even if it

now glows fainter it is worth exploring, and the analysis of the composition of its light is worth putting on record.

The story easy to anticipate.

In the case of a book which, whether it has or has not undergone some occultation as suggested, is still kept on sale not merely in the original, but in cheap translations into every European tongue, there is probably no need to include an actual "argument" in this analysis. As a novel or at least romance, *Notre-Dame de Paris* contains a story of the late fifteenth century, the chief characters of which are the Spanish gipsy[96] dancing-girl Esmeralda, with her goat Djali; Quasimodo, the hunchbacked dwarf and bell-ringer of the cathedral; one of its archdeacons, Claude Frollo, theologian, philosopher, expert in, but contemner of, physical and astrological science, and above all, alchemist, if not sorcerer; the handsome and gallant, but "not intelligent" and not very chivalrous soldier Phœbus de Chateaupers, with minors not a few, "supers" very many, and the dramatist Pierre Gringoire as a sort of half-chorus, half-actor throughout. The evolution of this story could not be very difficult to anticipate in any case; almost any one who had even a slight knowledge of its actual author's other work could make a guess at the *scenario*. The end must be tragic; the *beau cavalier* must be the rather unworthy object of Esmeralda's affection, and she herself that of the (one need hardly say very different) affections of Frollo

[96] She is of course not really Spanish or a gipsy, but is presented as such at first.

and Quasimodo; a charge of sorcery, based on the tricks she has taught Djali, must be fatal to her; and poetic justice must overtake Frollo, who has instigated the persecution but has half exchanged it for, half-combined it with, later attempts of a different kind upon her. Although this *scenario* may not have been then quite so easy for any schoolboy to anticipate, as it has been later, the course of the romantic novel from Walpole to Scott in English, not to mention German and other things, had made it open enough to everybody to construct. The only thing to be done, and to do, now was, and is, to see, on the author's own famous critical principles,[97] how he availed himself of the *publica materies*.

Importance of the actual *title*.

Perhaps the first impression of any reader who is not merely not an expert in criticism, but who has not yet learnt its first, last, and hardest lesson, shirked by not a few who seem to be experts – to suspend judgment till the case is fully heard – may be unfavourable. It is true that the title *Notre-Dame de Paris*, so stupidly and unfairly disguised by the addition-substitution of "*The Hunchback* of Notre Dame" in English translations – quite honestly and quite legitimately warns any intelligent reader what to expect. It is the cathedral itself, its visible appearance and its invisible *aura*, atmosphere, history, spirit, inspiration which gives the author – and is taken by him as giving – his real subject.

[97] Stated in the Preface to *Cromwell*, the critical division of his fourfold attack on neo-Classicism, as *Les Orientales* were the poetical, *Hernani* was the dramatic, and *Notre-Dame* itself the prose-narrative.

Esmeralda and Quasimodo, Frollo and Gringoire are almost as much minors and supers in comparison with It or Her as Phœbus de Chateaupers and the younger Frollo and the rest are in relation to the four protagonists themselves. The most ambitious piece of *dianoia*– of thought as contrasted with incident, character, or description – is that embodied in the famous chapter, *Ceci tuera cela*, where the fatal effect of literature (at least printed literature) on architecture is inculcated. The situation, precincts, construction, constitution of the church form the centre of such action as there is, and supply by far the larger part of its scene. Therefore nobody has a right to complain of a very large proportion of purely architectural detail.

The working out of the one under the other.

But the question is whether, in the actual employment, and still more in what we may call the administration, of this and other diluents or obstruents of story, the artist has or has not made blunders in his art; and it is very difficult not to answer this in the affirmative. There were many excuses for him. The "guide-book novel" had already, and not so very long before, been triumphantly introduced by *Corinne*. It had been enormously popularised by Scott. The close alliance and almost assimilation of art and history with literature was one of the supremest articles of faith of Romanticism, and "the Gothic" was a sort of symbol, shibboleth, and sacrament at once of Romanticism itself. But Victor Hugo, like Falstaff, has, in this and other respects, abused his power of pressing subjects into service

almost, if not quite, damnably. Whether out of pure wilfulness, out of mistaken theory, or out of a mixture[98] of these and other influences, he has made the first volume almost as little of a story as it could possibly be, while remaining a story at all. Seventy mortal pages, pretty well packed in the standard two-volume edition, which in all contains less than six hundred, dawdle over the not particularly well-told business of Gringoire's interrupted mystery, the arrival of the Flemish ambassadors, and the election of the Pope of Unreason. The vision of Esmeralda lightens the darkness and quickens the movement, and this brightness and liveliness continue till she saves her unlucky dramatist from the murderous diversions of the Cour des Miracles. But the means by which she does this – the old privilege of matrimony – leads to nothing but a single scene, which might have been effective, but which Hugo only leaves flat, while it has no further importance in the story whatsoever. After it we hop or struggle full forty pages through the public street of architecture pure and simple.

The story recovers itself latterly.

At first sight "Coup d'œil impartial sur l'Ancienne Magistrature" may seem to give even more promise of November than of May. But there *is* action here, and it really has something to do with the story. Also, the subsequent treatment of the recluse or anchoress of the severest type in the Place Notre-Dame itself

[98] It is scarcely excessive to say that this mixture of wilful temper and unbridled theorising was the Saturnian influence, or the "infortune of Mart," in Hugo's horoscope throughout.

(or practically so), though it is much too long and is lengthened by matters with which Hugo knows least of all how to deal, has still more claim to attention, for it leads directly on not merely to the parentage of Esmeralda, but to the tragedy of her fate. And almost the whole of the second volume is, whether the best novel-matter or not, at any rate genuine novel-matter. If almost the whole of the first had been boiled down (as Scott at his best would have boiled it) into a preliminary chapter or two, the position of the book as qualified to stand in its kind could not have been questioned. But its faults and merits in that kind would still have remained matters of very considerable question.

But the characters?

In respect of one fault, the side of the defence can surely be taken only by generous, but hardly judicious or judicial devotees. Hugo's singular affection for the monster – he had Stephano to justify him, but unfortunately did not possess either the humour of that drunken Neapolitan butler or the power of his and Caliban's creator – had made a mere grotesque of *Han*, but had been reduced within more artistic limits in *Bug*. In *Le Dernier Jour* and *Claude Gueux* it was excluded by the subjects and objects alike.[99] Here it is, if not an *intellectus*, at any rate *sibi permissus*; and, as it does not in the earlier cases, it takes the not extremely artistic form of violent contrast which was to be made more violent later in *L'Homme Qui Rit*. If any one will consider

[99] Unless anybody chooses to say that the gallows and the guillotine are Hugo's monsters here.

Caliban and Miranda as they are presented in *The Tempest*, with Quasimodo and Esmeralda as *they* are presented here, he will see at once the difference of great art and great failure of art.

Then, too, there emerges another of our author's persistent obsessions, the exaggeration of what we may call the individual combat. He had probably intended something of this kind in *Han*, but the mistake there in telling about it instead of telling it has been already pointed out. Neither Bug-Jargal nor Habibrah does anything glaringly and longwindedly impossible. But the one-man defence of Notre-Dame by Quasimodo against the *truands* is a tissue not so much of impossibilities – they, as it has been said of old, hardly matter – as of the foolish-incredible. Why did the numerous other denizens of the church and its cloisters do nothing during all this time? Why did the *truands*, who, though they were all scoundrels, were certainly not all fools, confine themselves to this frontal assault of so huge a building? Why did the little rascal Jean Frollo not take some one with him? These are not questions of mere dull common sense; it is only dull absence of common sense which will think them so. Scott, who, once more, was not too careful in stopping loose places, managed the attacks of Tillietudlem and Torquilstone without giving any scope for objections of this kind.

Hugo's strong point was never character, and it certainly is not so here. Esmeralda is beautiful, amiable, pathetic, and unfortunate; but the most uncharitable interpretation of Mr. Pope's famous libel never was more justified than in her case.

Her salvage of Gringoire and its sequel give about the only situations in which she is a real person,[100] and they are purely episodic. Gringoire himself is as much out of place as any literary man who ever went into Parliament. Some may think better of Claude Frollo, who may be said to be the Miltonic-Byronic-Satanic hero. I own I do not. His mere specification – that of the ascetic scholar assailed by physical temptation – will pass muster well enough, the working out of it hardly.

His brother, the *vaurien* Jean, has, I believe, been a favourite with others or the same, and certainly a Villonesque student is not out of place in the fifteenth century. Nor is a turned-up nose, even if it be artificially and prematurely reddened, unpardonable. But at the same time it is not in itself a passport, and Jean Frollo does not appear to have left even the smallest *Testament* or so much as a single line (though some snatches of song are assigned to him) reminding us of the "Dames des Temps Jadis" or the "Belle Heaulmière." Perhaps even Victor never presumed more unfortunately on victory than in bringing in Louis XI., especially in one scene, which directly challenges comparison with *Quentin Durward*. While, though Scott's *jeunes premiers* are not, as he himself well knew and frankly confessed, his greatest triumphs, he has never given us anything of the kind so personally impersonal as Phœbus de Chateaupers.

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[100] The failure of the riskiest and most important scene of the whole (where her surrender of herself to Phœbus is counteracted by Frollo's stabbing the soldier, the act itself leading to Esmeralda's incarceration) is glaring.

Per contra there are of course to be set passages which are actually fine prose and some of which might have made magnificent poetry; a real or at least – what is as good as or better than a real – a fantastic resurrection of Old Paris; and, above all, an atmosphere of "sunset and eclipse," of night and thunder and levin-flashes, which no one of catholic taste would willingly surrender. Only, ungrateful as it may seem, uncritical as some may deem it, it is impossible not to sigh, "Oh! why were not the best things of this treated in verse, and why were not the other things left alone altogether?"

The thirty years' interval.

For a very long stretch of time – one that could hardly be paralleled except in a literary life so unusually extended as his – it might have seemed that one of those *voix intérieures*, which he was during its course to celebrate in undying verse, had whispered to Hugo some such warning as that conveyed in the words of the close of the last paragraph, and that he, usually the most indocile of men, had listened to it. For all but three decades he confined his production – at least in the sense of substantial publication[101]– to poetry almost invariably splendid, drama always grandiose and sometimes grand, and prose-writing of a chiefly political kind, which even sympathisers (one would suppose) can hardly regard as of much value now if they have any

[101] *Le Beau Pécopin* in his *Rhine*-book is, of course, fairly substantial in one sense, but it is only an episode or inset-tale in something else, which is neither novel or romance.

critical faculty. Even the tremendous shock of disappointment, discomfiture, and exile which resulted from the success of Napoleon the Third, though it started a new wave and gust of oceanic and cyclonic force, range, and volume in his soul, found little prose vent, except the wretched stuff of *Napoléon le Petit*, to chequer the fulgurant outburst of the *Châtiments*, the apocalyptic magnificence of the *Contemplations*, and the almost unmatched vigour, variety, and vividness of the *Légende des Siècles*.

At last, in 1862, a full decade after the cataclysm, his largest and probably his most popular work of fiction made its appearance in the return to romance-writing, entitled *Les Misérables*. I daresay biographies say when it was begun; it is at any rate clear that even Victor Hugo must have taken some years, especially in view of his other work, to produce such a mass of matter.[102] Probably not very many people now living, at least in England, remember very clearly the immense effect it produced even with us, who were then apt to regard Hugo as at best a very chequered genius and at worst an almost charlatanish rhetorician.

Les Misérables.

It was no doubt lucky for its popularity that it fell in with a general movement, in England as well as elsewhere, which

[102] It must be four or five times the length of Scott's average, more than twice that of the longest books with which Dickens and Thackeray used to occupy nearly two years in monthly instalments, and very nearly, if not quite, that of Dumas' longest and most "spun-out" achievements in *Monte Cristo*, the *Vicomte de Bragelonne* and *La Comtesse de Charny*.

had with us been, if not brought about, aided by influences in literature as different as those of Dickens and Carlyle, through Kingsley and others downwards, – the movement which has been called perhaps more truly than sympathetically, "the cult of the lower [not to say the criminal] classes." In France, if not in England, this cult had been oddly combined with a dash of rather adulterated Romanticism, and long before Hugo, Sues and Sands, as will be seen later, had in their different manner been priests and priestesses of it. In his own case the adoption of the subject "keyed on" in no small degree to the mood in which he wrote the *Dernier Jour* and *Claude Gueux*, while a good deal of the "Old Paris" mania (I use the word nowise contumeliously) of *Notre-Dame* survived, and even the "Cour des Miracles" found itself modernised.

Whether the popularity above mentioned has kept itself up or not, I cannot say. Of one comparatively recent edition, not so far as I know published at intervals, I have been told that the first volume is out of print, but none of the others, a thing rather voiceful to the understanding. I know that, to me, it is the hardest book to read through of any that I know by a great writer. *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Clélie* are certainly longer, *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* are probably so. *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne* is almost as long. There are finer things in it than in any of them, (except the deaths of Lovelace and Porthos and the kidnapping of General Monk) from the pure novel point of view, and not a few passages which ought to have been verse and, even prose as

they are, soar far over anything that Mademoiselle de Scudéry or Samuel Richardson or Alexandre Dumas could possibly have written in either harmony. The Scudéry books are infinitely duller, and the Richardson ones much less varied.

But none of these others besets the path of the reader with things to which the obstacles interposed by Quilp in the way of Sampson Brass were down-pillows, as is the case with *Les Misérables*. It is as if Victor Hugo had said, "You shall read this at your peril," and had made good the threat by dint of every blunder in novel-writing which he could possibly commit. With his old and almost invariable fault (there is a little of it even in *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, and only *Quatre-Vingt-Treize* avoids it entirely), he delays any real interest till the book, huge as it is, is almost half way through. Twenty pages on Bishop Myriel – that rather piebald angel who makes the way impossible for any successor by his fantastic and indecent "apostolicism" in living; who tells, *not* like St. Athanasius, an allowable equivocation to save his valuable self, but a downright lie to save a worthless rascal; and who admits defeat in argument by the stale sophisms of a moribund *conventionnel*– might have been tolerable. We have, in the compactest edition I know, about a hundred and fifty. The ruin and desertion of Fantine would have been worth twenty more. We have from fifty to a hundred to tell us the story of four rather impossibly beautiful *grisettes*, and as many, alas! too possible, but not interesting, rascals of students. It is difficult to say how much is wasted on the wildly improbable transformation

of Jean Valjean, convict and pauper, into "M. Madeleine," *maire* and (*nummis gallicis*) millionaire, through making sham jet. All this, by any one who really knew his craft, would have been sketched rapidly in fluent preliminary, and subsequent piecemeal retrospect, so as to start with Valjean's escape from Thénardier and his adoption of Cosette.

The actual matter of this purely preliminary kind extends, as has been ascertained by rough but sufficient calculation of the sort previously employed, to at least three-quarters of an average novel of Sir Walter's: it would probably run to two or three times the length of a modern "six-shilling." But Hugo is not satisfied with it. A point, an important point, doubtless, but one that could have been despatched in a few lines, connects the novel proper with the Battle of Waterloo. To that battle itself, even the preliminary matter in its earliest part is some years posterior: the main action, of course, is still more so. But Victor must give us *his* account of this great engagement, and he gives it in about a hundred pages of the most succinct reproduction. For my part, I should be glad to have it "mixed with much wine," even if the wine were of that luscious and headachy south-of-France character which he himself is said to have preferred to Bordeaux or Champagne, Sauterne or even Burgundy. Nay, without this I like it well enough and quarrel with nothing in it, though it is in many respects (from the famous hollow way which nobody else ever heard of downwards) very much of a dream-battle. Victor does quite as much justice as

any one could expect him to do – and, thank heaven, there are still some Englishmen who are perfectly indifferent whether justice is done to them or not in these matters, leaving it to poorer persons in such ways who may be glad of it – to English fighting; while if he represents Wellington as a mere calculator and Napoleon as a hero, we can murmur politely (like a Roman Catholic bishop, more real in many ways than His Greatness of Digue), "Perhaps so, my dear sir, perhaps so." But what has it all got to do here? Even when Montalais and her lover sat on the wall and talked for half a volume or so in the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*; even when His Majesty Louis XIV. and his (one regrets to use the good old English word) pimp, M. le Duc de Saint-Aignan, exhausted the resources of carpentry and the stores of printer's ink to gain access to the apartment of Mlle. de la Vallière, the superabundance, though trivial, was relevant: this is not. When Thénardier tried to rob and was no doubt quite ready to murder, but did, as a matter of fact, help to resuscitate, the gallant French Republican soldier, who was so glad to receive the title of baron from an emperor who had by abdication resigned any right to give it that he ever possessed, it might have been Malplaquet or Leipsic, Fontenoy or Vittoria, for any relevance the details of the battle possessed to the course of the story.

Now relevance (to make a short paragraph of the kind Hugo himself loved) is a mighty goddess in novelry.

And so it continues, though, to be absolutely just, the later parts are not exposed to quite the same objections as the earlier.

These objections transform themselves, however, into other varieties, and are reinforced by fresh faults. The most inexcusable digressions, on subjects as remote from each other as convents and sewers, insist on poking themselves in. The central, or what ought to be the central, interest itself turns on the ridiculous *émeute* of Saint-Merry, a thing "without a purpose or an aim," a mere caricature of a revolution. The *gamin* Gavroche puts in a strong plea for mercy, and his sister Eponine, if Hugo had chosen to take more trouble with her, might have been a great, and is actually the most interesting, character. But Cosette – the cosseted Cosette – Hugo did not know our word or he would have seen the danger – is merely a pretty and rather selfish little doll, and her precious lover Marius is almost ineffable.

Novel-heroes who are failures throng my mind like ghosts on the other shore of the river whom Charon will not ferry over; but I can single out none of them who is, without positively evil qualities, so absolutely intolerable as Marius.[103] Others have more such qualities; but he has no good ones. His very bravery is a sort of moral and intellectual running amuck because he thinks he shall not get Cosette. Having, apparently, for many years thought and cared nothing about his father, he becomes frantically filial on discovering that he has inherited from him, as above, a very doubtful and certainly most un-"citizen" – like

[103] I am not forgetting or contradicting what was said above (page 26) of René. But René *does* very little except when he kills the she-beavers; Marius is always doing something, and doing it offensively.

title of Baron. Thereupon (taking care, however, to have cards printed with the title on them) he becomes a violent republican.

He then proceeds to be extremely rude to his indulgent but royalist grandfather, retires to a mount of very peculiar sacredness, where he comes in contact with the Thénardier family, discovers a plot against Valjean, appeals to the civil arm to protect the victim, but, for reasons which seem good to him, turns tail, breaks his arranged part, and is very nearly accessory to a murder. At the other end of the story, carrying out his general character of prig-pedant, as selfish as self-righteous, he meets Valjean's rather foolish and fantastic self-sacrifice with illiberal suspicion, and practically kills the poor old creature by separating him from Cosette. When the *éclaircissement* comes, it appears to me – as Mr. Carlyle said of Loyola that he ought to have consented to be damned – that Marius ought to have consented at least to be kicked.

Of course it may be said, "You should not give judgments on things with which you are evidently out of sympathy." But I do not acknowledge any palpable hit. If certain purposes of the opposite kind were obtruded here in the same fashion – if Victor (as he might have done in earlier days) had hymned Royalism instead of Republicanism, or (as perhaps he would never have done) had indulged in praise of severe laws and restricted education,[104] and other things, I should be "in sympathy," but I

[104] The "Je ne sais pas lire" argument has more than once suggested to me a certain historical comparison. There have probably never been in all history two more

hope and believe that I should not be "out of" criticism. Unless strictly adjusted to the scale and degree suitable to a novel – as Sir Walter has, I think, restricted his Mariolatry and his Jacobitism, and so forth – I should bar them as I bar these.[105] And it is the fact that they are not so restricted, with the concomitant faults which, again purely from the point of view of novel-criticism as such, I have ventured to find, that makes me consider *Les Misérables* a failure as a novel. Once again, too, I find few of the really good and great things – which in so vast a book by such a writer are there, and could not fail to be there – to be essentially and specially good and great according to the novel standard. They are, with the rarest exceptions, the stuff of drama or of poetry, not of novel. That there are such exceptions – the treacherous feast of the students to the mistresses they are about to desert; the escapes of Valjean from the ambushes laid for him by Thénardier and Javert; some of the Saint-Merry fighting; the guesting of the children by Gavroche in the elephant; and others – is true. But they are oases in a desert; and, save when they would be better done in poetry, they do not after all seem to me to be much better done than they might have been by others – the comparative weakness of Hugo in conversation of the kind

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abominable scoundrels for cold-blooded cruelty, the worst of all vices, than Eccelino da Romano and the late Mr. Broadhead, patron saint and great exemplar of Trade-Unionism. Broadhead could certainly read. Could Ezzelin? I do not know. But if he could not, the Hugonic belief in the efficacy of reading is not strongly supported. If he could, it is definitely damaged.

[105] *Vide* what is said below on *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*.

suitable for prose fiction making itself felt. That at least is what the present writer's notion of criticism puts into his mouth to say; and he can say no other.

Les Travailleurs de la Mer.

Les Travailleurs de la Mer, on the other hand, is, according to some persons, among whom that present writer desires to be included, the summit of Victor Hugo's achievements in prose fiction. It has his "signatures" of absurdity in fair measure. There is the celebrated "Bug-Pipe" which a Highlander of the garrison of Guernsey sold (I am afraid contrary to military law) to the hero, and on which that hero performed the "*melancholy* air" of "Bonny Dundee."[106] There is the equally celebrated "First of the Fourth" (Première de la Quatrième), which is believed to be Hugonic for the Firth of Forth. There are some others. There is an elaborate presentation of a quite impossibly named clergyman, who is, it seems, an anticipator of "le Puseysme" and an actual high-churchman, who talks as never high-churchman talked from Laud to Pusey himself, but rather

[106] After the lapse of more than half a century some readers may have forgotten, and more may never have heard, the anecdote connected with this. It was rashly and somewhat foolishly pointed out to the poet-romancer himself that the air of "Bonny Dundee" was the very reverse of melancholy, and that he must have mistaken the name. His reply was the most categoric declaration possible of his general attitude, in such cases, "Et moi, je l'appelle 'Bonny Dundee.'" *Victor locutus est: causa finita est* (he liked tags of not recondite Latin himself). And the leading case governs those of the bug-pipe and the (later) wapentake and *justicier-quorum*, and all the other wondrous things of which but a few can be mentioned here.

like the Reverend Gabriel Kettledrummle (with whom Hugo was probably acquainted "in translations, Sir! in translations").[107] Gilliatt, the hero, is a not very human prig outside those extraordinary performances, of which more later, and his consummate end. Déruchette, the heroine, is, like Cosette, a pretty nullity.[108] As always, the author *will* not "get under way"; and short as the book is, and valuable as is its shortness, it could be cut down to two-thirds at least with advantage. Clubin and Rantaine, the villains, are pure melodrama; Mess Lethierry, the good old man, is rather an old fool, and not so very good. The real business of the book – the salvage by Gilliatt of the steamer wrecked on the Douvres – is, as a schoolboy would say, or would have said, "jolly impossible." But the book as a whole is, despite or because of its tragic quality, almost impossibly "jolly."

The *genius loci.*

For here – as he did previously (by the help of the form that was more his own and of Jersey) in the *Contemplations*– he had now got in prose, by that of the smaller, more isolated,

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[107] I do not know whether any one has ever attempted to estimate his actual debt to Scott. There are better classics of inquiry, but in the class many worse subjects.

[108] In the opening scene she is something worse. If her writing "Gilliatt" in the snow had been a sort of rustic challenge of the "malo me petit, et fugit ad salices" kind, there might have been something (not much) to say for her. But she did not know Gilliatt; she did not want to know him; and the proceeding was either mere silly childishness, or else one of those pieces of bad taste of which her great creator was unluckily by no means incapable.

and less contaminated[109] island, into his own proper country, the dominion of the Angel of the Visions of the Sea. He has told us in his own grandiloquent way, which so often led him wrong, that when he settled to exile in the Channel Islands, his son François observed, "Je traduirai Shakespeare," and *he* said, "Je contemplerai l'océan." He did; and good came of it. Students of his biography may know that in the dwelling which he called Hauteville House (a name which, I regret to say, already and properly belonged to another) he slept and mainly lived in a high garret with much glass window, overlooking the strait between Guernsey and Sark. These "gazebos," as they used to be called, are common in St. Peter Port, and I myself enjoyed the possession of a more modest and quite unfamous one for some time. They are worth inhabiting and looking from, be the weather fair or foul. Moreover, he was, I believe, a very good walker, and in both the islands made the best of opportunities which are unmatched elsewhere. Whether he boated much I do not know.

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[109] I use this adjective in no contumelious sense, and certainly not because I have lived in Guernsey and only visited Jersey. To the impartial denizen of either, the rivalry of the two is as amusing as is that of Edinburgh and Glasgow, of Liverpool and Manchester, or of Bradford and Leeds. But, at any rate at the time of which I am speaking, Jersey was much more haunted by outsiders (in several senses of that word) than Guernsey. Residents – whether for the purposes unblushingly avowed by that sometime favourite of the stage, Mr. Eccles, or for the reasons less horrifying to the United Kingdom Alliance – found themselves more at home in "Caesarea" than in "Sarnia," and the "five-pounder," as the summer tripper was despiteously called by natives, liked to go as far as he could for his money, and found St. Helier's "livelier" than St. Peter Port.

The profusion of nautical terms with which he "deaves" us (as the old Scotch word has it) would rather lead me to think *not*. He was in this inferior to Prospero; but I hope it is not blasphemy to say that, *mutatis mutandis*, he had something of the banished Duke of Milan in him, and that, in the one case as in the other, it was the island that brought it out. And he acknowledged it in his Dedication to "Guernesey —*sevère et douce*."

Guernsey at the time.

Sevère et Douce! I lived in Guernsey as a Master at Elizabeth College from 1868, two years after Victor Hugo wrote that dedication, to 1874, when he still kept house there, but had not, since the "Année Terrible," occupied it much. I suppose the "severity" must be granted to an island of solid granite and to the rocks and tides and sea-mists that surround it. But in the ordinary life there in my time there was little to "asperate" the *douceur*. Perhaps it does not require so very much to sweeten things in general between the ages of twenty-three and twenty-nine. But the things in general themselves were dulcet enough. The beauty of the place – extraordinarily varied in its triangle of some half-score miles or a little less on each side – was not then in the least interfered with by the excessive commercial glass-housing which, I believe, has come in since. For what my friend of many days, the late Mr. Reynolds of Brasenose and East Ham, a constant visitor in summer, used to call "necessary luxuries," it was still unique. When I went there you could buy not undrinkable or poisonous Hollands at four shillings a gallon,

and brandy – not, of course, exactly cognac or *fine champagne*, but deserving the same epithets – for six. If you were a luxurious person, you paid half-a-crown a bottle for the genuine produce of the Charente, little or not at all inferior to Martell or Hennessy, and a florin for excellent Scotch or Irish whiskey.[110] Fourpence half-penny gave you a quarter-pound slab of gold-leaf tobacco, than which I never wish to smoke better.

But this easy supplying of the bodily needs of the "horse with wings" and his "heavy rider" was as nothing to other things which strengthened the wings of the spirit and lightened the weight of the burden it bore. I have not been a great traveller outside the kingdom of England: and you may doubtless, in the whole of Europe or of the globe, find more magnificent things than you can possibly find in an island of the dimensions given. But for a miniature and manageable assemblage of amenities I do not think you can easily beat Guernsey. The town of St. Peter Port, and its two castles, Fort George above and Castle Cornet below, looking on the strait above mentioned, with the curiously contrasted islets of Herm and Jethou in its midst; the wonderful coast, first south- and then westward, set with tiny coves of perfection like Bec-du-

[110] Really good wines were proportionally cheap; but the little isle was not quite so good at beer, except some remarkable old ale, which one small brewery had ventured on, and which my friends of the 22nd Regiment discovered and (very wisely) drank up. – It may surprise honest fanatics and annoy others to hear that, despite the cheapness and abundance of their bugbear, there was no serious crime of any kind in Guernsey during the six years I knew it, and no disorder worth speaking of, even among sailors and newly arrived troops.

Nez, and larger bays, across the mouth of which, after a storm and in calm sunny weather, you see lines of foam stretching from headland to headland, out of the white clots of which the weakest imagination can fancy Aphrodite rising and floating shorewards, to vanish as she touches the beach; the great western promontory of Pleinmont, a scarcely lessened Land's End, with the Hanois rocks beyond; the tamer but still not tame western, northern, and north-eastern coasts, with the Druid-haunted level of L'Ancresse and the minor port of St. Samson – all these furnish, even to the well-girt man, an extraordinary number[111] of walks, ranging from an hour's to a day's and more there and back; while in the valleys of the interior you find scenery which might be as far from the sea as Warwickshire, or on the heights springs which tell you that they must have come from the neighbourhood of the Mount of Dol or the Forest of Broceliande.

With such colour and form of locality to serve, not merely as inspiration but as actual scene and setting, such genius as Hugo's could hardly fail. The thing is sad and delightful and great.

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[111] The shape of the island; the position of its only "residential" town of any size in the middle of one of the coasts, so that the roads spread fan-wise from it; the absence of any large flat space except in the northern parish of "The Vale"; the geological formation which tends, as in Devonshire, to sink the roads into deep and sometimes "water" lanes; lastly, perhaps, the extreme subdivision of property, which multiplies the ways of communication – these things contribute to this "*pedestrian*-paradise" character. There are many places where, with plenty of good walking "objectives," you can get to none of them without a disgusting repetition of the same initial grind. In Guernsey, except as regards the sea, which never wearies, there is no such even partial monotony.

As life, you may say, it could not have happened; as literature it could not but have happened, and has happened, at its best, divinely well. The contrast of the long agony of effort and its triumph on the Douvres, with the swift collapse of any possible reward at St. Samson, is simply a windfall of the Muses to this spoiled and, it must be confessed, often self-spoiling child of theirs. There are, of course, absurdities still, and of a different kind from the bug-pipe. I have always wished to know what the experiences of the fortunate and reverend but sheepish Ebenezer had been at Oxford – he must certainly have held a King Charles scholarship in his day – during that full-blooded time of the Regency. The circumstances of the marriage are almost purely Hugonian, though it does Hugo credit that he admires the service which he travesties so remarkably. But the *Dieu* (not *diable*) *au corps* which he now enjoys enables him to change into a beauty (in the wholly natural gabble of Mess Lethierry on the recovery of the *la Durande*) those long speeches which have been already noted as blots. And, beauty or blot, it would not have mattered. All is in the contrast of the mighty but conquered Douvres and the comparatively insignificant rocklet – there are hundreds like it on every granite coast – where Death the Consoler sets on Gilliatt's head the only crown possible for his impossible feat, and where the dislike of the ignorant peasantry, the brute resistance of machinery and material, the violence of the storm, the devilish ambush of the *pieuvre*, and all other evils are terminated and evaded and sanctified by the embrace and the euthanasia of the

sea. Perhaps it is poetry rather than novel or even romance – in substance it is too abstract and elemental for either of the less majestical branches of inventive literature. But it is great. "By God! 'tis good," and, to lengthen somewhat Ben's famous challenge, "if you like, you may" put it with, and not so far from, in whatever order you please – the deaths of Cleopatra and of Colonel Newcome.

The book is therefore a success; but that success is an evident *tour de force*, and it is nearly as evident to any student of the subject that such a *tour de force* was not likely to be repeated, and that the thing owed its actual salvage to a rather strict limitation of subject and treatment – a limitation hitherto unknown in the writer and itself unlikely to recur. Also that there were certain things in it – especially the travesties of names and subjects of which the author practically knew nothing – the repetition and extension of which *was* likely to be damaging, if not fatal. In two or three years the "fatality" of which Victor Hugo himself was dangerously fond of talking (the warning of Herodotus in the dawn about things which it is not lawful to mention has been too often neglected) had its revenge.

L'Homme Qui Rit.

L'Homme Qui Rit is probably the maddest book in recognised literature; certainly the maddest written by an author of supreme genius without the faintest notion that he was making himself ridiculous. The genius is still there, and passage on passage shows us the real "prose-poetry," that is to say, the prose which ought

to have been written in verse. The scheme of the quartette – Ursus, the misanthrope-Good-Samaritan; Homo, the amiable wolf; Gwynplaine, the tortured and guiltless child and youth; Dea, the adorable maiden – is unexceptionable *per se*, and it could have been worked out in verse or drama perfectly, though the actual termination – Gwynplaine's suicide in the sea after Dea's death – is perhaps too close and too easy a "variation of the same thing" on Gilliatt's parallel self-immolation after Déruchette's marriage.[112] Not a few opening or episodic parts – the picture of the caravan; the struggle of the child Gwynplaine with the elements to save not so much himself as the baby Dea; the revulsions of his temptations and persecutions later; and yet others[113]– show the poet and the master.

But the way in which these things are merged in and spoilt by a torrent of silliness, sciolism, and sheer nonsense is, even after one has known the book for forty years and more, still astounding.

One could laugh almost indulgently over the "bug-pipe" and the "First of the Fourth"; one could, being of those who win, laugh quite indulgently over the little outbursts of spite in *Les*

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[112] It is well known that even among great writers this habit of duplication is often, though very far from always, present. Hugo is specially liable to it. The oddest example I remember is that the approach to the Dutch ship at the end of *L'Homme Qui Rit* reproduces on the Thames almost exactly the details of the iron gate of the sewers on the Seine, where Thénardier treacherously exposes Valjean to the clutches of Javert, in *Les Misérables*, though of course the use made of it is quite different.

[113] It must be remembered that this also belongs to the Channel Islands division: and the Angel of the Sea has still some part in it.

Travailleurs at the institutions and ways of the country which had, despite some rather unpardonable liberties, given its regular and royal asylum to the exiled republican and almost anarchist author. Certainly, also, one can laugh over *L'Homme Qui Rit* and its picture of the English aristocracy. But of such laughter, as of all carnal pleasures (to steal from Kingsley), cometh satiety, and the satiety is rather early reached in this same book. One of the chief "persons of distinction" in many ways whom I have ever come across, the late Mr. G. S. Venables – a lawyer of no mean expertness; one of the earliest and one of the greatest of those "gentlemen of the Press" who at the middle of the nineteenth century lifted journalism out of the gutter; a familiar of every kind of the best society, and a person of infinite though somewhat saturnine wit – had a phrase of contempt for absurd utterances by persons who ought to have known better. "It was," he said, "like a drunk child." The major part of *L'Homme Qui Rit* is like the utterance of a drunk child who had something of the pseudo-Homeric Margites in him, who "knew a great many things and knew them all badly." I could fill fifty pages here easily enough, and with a kind of low amusement to myself and perhaps others, by enumerating the absurdities of *L'Homme Qui Rit*. As far as I remember, when the book appeared, divers good people (the bad people merely sneered) took immense pains to discover how and why this great man of letters made so much greater a fool of himself. This was quite lost labour; and without attempting the explanation at all, a very small selection of the

facts, being in a manner indispensable, may be given.

The mysterious society of "Comprachicos" (Spanish for "child-buyers"), on whose malpractices the whole book is founded; the entirely false conception of the English House of Lords, which gives much of the superstructure; the confusion of English and French times and seasons, manners and customs, which enables the writer to muddle up Henri-Trois and Louis-Quinze, Good Queen Bess and Good Queen Anne: these and other things of the kind can be passed over. For things like some of them occur in much saner novelists than Hugo; and Sir Walter himself is notoriously not free from indisputable anachronisms.[114] But you have barely reached the fiftieth page when you come to a "Lord Linnæus Clancharlie, Baron Clancharlie et Hunkerville, Marquis de Corleone en Sicile," whose English peerage dates from Edward *the Elder* (the origin of his Sicilian title is not stated, but it was probably conferred by Hiero or Dionysius), and whose name "Clancharlie" has nothing whatever to do with Scotland or Ireland. This worthy peer (who, as a Cromwellian, exiled himself after the Restoration) had, like others of the godly, a bastard son, enjoying at "*temp.* of tale" the remarkable courtesy title of "Lord David Dirry-Moir," but

[114] Those of *Ivanhoe* and *Kenilworth* have enraged pedants and amused the elect for a century. But I do not remember much notice being taken of that jump of half a millennium and one year more in *The Talisman*, where Count Henry of Champagne "smiles like a sparkling goblet of his own wine." This was in 1192, while the ever-blessed Dom Pérignon did not make champagne "sparkle" till 1693. Idolatry may suggest that "sparkling" is a perpetual epithet of wine; but I fear this will not do.

called by the rabble, with whom his sporting tastes make him a great favourite, "Tom-Jim-Jack." Most "love-children" of peers would be contented (if they ever had them) with courtesy titles; but Lord David has been further favoured by Fortune and King James II., who has first induced the *comprachicos* to trepan and mutilate Clancharlie's real heir (afterwards Gwynplaine, the eponymous hero of the book), and has then made Lord David a "*pair substitué*"[115] on condition that he marries one of the king's natural daughters, the Duchess Josiane, a duchess with no duchy ever mentioned. In regard to her Hugo proceeds to exhibit his etymological powers, ignoring entirely the agreeable heroine of *Bevis of Hampton*, and suggesting either an abbreviation of "Josefa y Ana" (at this time, we are gravely informed, there was a prevalent English fashion of taking Spanish names) or else a feminine of "Josias." Moreover, among dozens of other instances of this Bedlam nomenclature, we have a "combat of box" between the Irishman "Phelem-ghe-Madone" (because Irishmen are often Roman Catholics?) and the Scotchman "Helmsgail" (there is a place called Helms*dale* in Scotland, and if "gael" why not "gail"?), to the latter of whom a knee is given by "Lord Desertum" (Desart? Dysart? what?).

And so it goes on. There is the immortal scene (or rather half-volume) in which, Hugo having heard or read of *peine forte et dure*, we find sheriffs who discharge the duty of Old Bailey

[115] *Substitué* means "entailed" in technical French. But I know no instance of this kind of "contingent remainder" in England.

judges, fragments of Law Latin (it is really a pity that he did not get hold of our inimitable Law *French*), and above all, and pervading all, that most fearful wildfowl the "wapentake," with his "iron weapon." He, with his satellite the justicier-quorum (but, one weeps to see, not "custalorum" or "rotalorum"), is concerned with the torture of Hardquanonne[116]– the original malefactor[117] in Gwynplaine's case – and thereby restores Gwynplaine to his (unsubstituted) rank in the English peerage, when he himself is anticipating similar treatment. There is the presentation by the librarian of the House of Lords of a "little red book" which is the passport to the House itself: and the very unmannerly reception by his brother peers, from which he is in a manner rescued by the chivalrous Lord David Dirry-Moir at the price of a box on the ears for depriving him of his "substitution." There is the misconduct of the Duchess Josiane, divinely beautiful and diabolically wicked, who covets the monster Gwynplaine as a lover, and discards him when, on his peerification, he is commanded to her by Queen Anne as a husband. And then, after all this tedious insanity and a great deal more, there is the finale of the despair of Gwynplaine, of

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[116] A compound (as Victor himself might suggest) of "Hardyknut" and "Sine qua non"? Or "Hardbake"?

[117] He has been found out through the agency of one "Barkilphedro" (Barkis-Phaedrus?), an Irishman of familiar sept, who is "Decanter of the Bottles of the Sea," and who finds, in one of his trovers, a derelict gourd of confession thrown overboard by the Comprachicos when wrecked (in another half-volume earlier) all over the Channel from Portland to Alderney.

his recovery of the dying Dea in a ship just starting for Holland, of her own death, and of his suicide in the all-healing sea – a "reconciliation" not far short of the greatest things in literature.

Now I am not of those unhappy ones who cannot away with the mixture of tragedy and farce. I have not only read too much, but lived too long for that. But then the farce must be in life conceivable and in literature conscious. Shakespeare, and even men much inferior to Shakespeare, have been able to provide for this stipulation munificently.

With Victor Hugo, generally more or less and intensively here, it was unfortunately different. His irony was almost always his weakest point; or rather it was a kind of hit-or-miss weapon, with which he cut himself as often as he cut his inimical objects or persons. The intense absurdity of his personified wapentakes, of his Tom-Jim-Jacks, of his courtesy-title bastards, he deliberately declined (as in the anecdote above given) to see. But these things, done and evidently thought fine by the doer, almost put to rout the most determined and expert sifter of the faults and merits of genius. You cannot enjoy a Garden of Eden when at every other step you plunge into a morass of mire. You cannot drink a draught of nectar, arranged on the plan of certain glasses of liqueur, in superimposed layers of different savour and colour, when every other layer is "stummed" folly or nauseous bad taste. A novel is not like a book of poems, where, as you see that you have hit on a failure, you turn the page and find a success. To which it may be added finally that while erudition of *any* kind is

a doubtful set-off to fiction, the presentation of ragbag erudition of this kind is, to speak moderately and in his own words of something else, "a rather hideous thing."[118]

Still, with readers of a certain quality, the good omens may to some extent shame the ill even here. The death of Dea, with its sequel, is very nearly perfect; it only wants the verse of which its author was such an absolute master, instead of the prose, where he alternately triumphed and bungled, to make it so. And one need not be a common paradoxer to take either side on the question whether on the whole the omen, if not the actuality, of *L'Homme Qui Rit* or that of *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* was the happier. For, while the earlier and better book showed how faults were hardening and might grow worse still, the later showed how these very faults, attaining their utmost possible development, could not entirely stifle the rarer gifts. I do not remember that anybody in 1869 took this apparently aleatory side of the argument. If he did he was justified in 1874.

Quatre-Vingt-Treize.

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[118] Perhaps there is no more conspicuous instance of irritating futility in this way than the famous αναγκη and αναγνεια of *Notre-Dame*. Of course anybody who knows no Greek can see that the first four letters of the two words are the same. But anybody who knows some Greek knows that the similarity is purely *literal*, such as exists between "Chateaubriand" and "Chat Botté" and that the αν has a different origin in the two cases. Moreover, αναγνεια, "uncleanness," is about the last word one would choose to express the *liaison* of thought – "The dread constraint of physical passion" or "Lust is Fate" – which Hugo wishes to indicate. It is a mere jingle, suggestive of a schoolboy turning over the dictionary.

One enormous advantage of *Quatre-Vingt-Treize* over its immediate predecessor lay on the surface – an advantage enormous in all cases, but almost incalculable in this particular one. In *L'Homme Qui Rit* Victor Hugo had been dealing with a subject about which he knew practically nothing, and about which he was prepared to believe, or even practise, anything. Here, though he was still prepared to believe a great deal, he yet knew a very great deal more. A little room for his eccentricities remained, and long after the truth had become a matter of registered history, he could accept the legendary lies about the *Vengeur*; but there was no danger of his giving us French wapentakes brandishing iron-weapons, or calling a French noble by any appellation comparable to Lord Linnæus[119] Clancharlie.

But, it may be said, is not the removal of these annoyances more than compensated, in the bad sense, by things inseparable from such a subject, as treated by such an author? – the glorification of "Quatre-Vingt-Treize" itself, and, in particular, of the Convention – that remarkable assembly which seems to have made up its mind to prove for all time that, in democracies, the scum comes to the top? – that assembly in which Fabre d'Eglantine stood for poetry, Marat for humanitarianism, Robespierre for justice, Hébert and Chaumette for decency, Siéyès and Chabot for different forms of religion, the composers

[119] That the only person at all likely to be "name-father" of this name was not born till a considerable time after his name-child's death would perhaps be worth remarking in another writer. In Hugo it hardly counts.

of the Republican Calendar[120] for common sense? where the only suggestion of a great man was Danton, and the only substitutes for an honest one were the prigs and pedants of the Gironde? To which the only critical answer must be, even when the critic does not contest the correctness of this description – "Why, no!"

It is better, no doubt, that a novelist, and that everybody else, should be a *bien-pensant*; but, as in the case of the poet, it will not necessarily affect his goodness in his art if he is not. He had, indeed, best not air his opinions, whatever they are, at too great length; but *what* they are matters little or nothing. A Tory critic who cannot admire Shelley or Swinburne, Dickens or Thackeray, because of their politics, is merely an ass, an animal unfortunately to be found in the stables or paddocks of every party. On the other hand, absurdities and faults of taste matter very much.

Now from these latter, which had nearly ruined *L'Homme Qui Rit*, *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*, if not entirely free, suffers comparatively little. The early and celebrated incident of the carronade running amuck shows characteristic neglect of burlesque possibilities (and, as I believe some experts have maintained, of actual ones), but it has the qualities of the Hugonian defects. An arm-chair critic may ask, Where was the English fleet in the Channel when a French one was allowed to

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[120] Let me do even *them* one justice in this connection. They did not suppose that the only way to make people get up earlier was to make these people's clocks and watches tell lies.

come out and slowly mob the *Claymore* to destruction, without, as far as one sees, any interference or counter-effort, though the expedition of that remarkable corvette formed part of an elaborate and carefully prepared offensive?[121] Undoubtedly, the Convention scenes must be allowed – even by sympathisers with the Revolution – to be clumsy stopgaps, unnecessary to the action and possessed of little intrinsic value in themselves. The old fault of verbosity and "watering out" recurs; and so does the reappearance, with very slight change, of figures and situations. Cimourdain in character is very much of a more respectable Claude Frollo; and in conduct, *mutatis* not so very many *mutandis*, almost as much of a less respectable Javert. The death of Gauvain is far less effective than that of Sydney Carton, which had preceded it; and the enormous harangue of the Marquis to the nephew who is about to liberate him, though it may be intended to heighten the *peripeteia*, merely gives fresh evidence of Hugo's want of proportion and of his flux of rhetoric.

All this and more is true; yet *Quatre-Vingt-Treize* is, "in its *fine* wrong way," a great book, and with *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, completes the pillars, such as they are, which support Hugo's position as a novelist. The rescue of the children by Lantenac is superb, though you may find twenty cavils against

[121] There is a smaller point which might be taken up. Undoubtedly there were many double traitors on both sides in the other Great War. But, like all their kind, they had a knack for being found out. Dumas would, I think, have given us something satisfactory as to the "aristocrat" at Jersey who betrayed the *Claymore* to the Revolutionary authorities.

it easily: and the whole presentation of the Marquis, except perhaps the speech referred to, is one of the best pictures of the *ancienne noblesse* in literature, one which – to reverse the contrast just made – annihilates Dickens's caricature thereof in *A Tale of Two Cities*. The single-handed defence of La Tourgue by "L'Imanus" has of course a good deal of the hyperbole which began with Quasimodo's similar act in *Notre-Dame*; but the reader who cannot "let himself go" with it is to be pitied. Nowhere is Hugo's child-worship more agreeably shown than in the three first chapters of the third volume. And, sinking particulars for a more general view, one may say that through the whole book, to an extent surpassing even *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* as such, there is the great Victorian *souffle* and surge, the rush as of mighty winds and mightier waters, which carries the reader resistlessly through and over all obstacles.

Final remarks.

Yet although Hugo thus terminated his career as a novelist, if not in the odour of sanctity, at any rate in a comfortable cloud of incense due to a comparative success; although he had (it is true on a much smaller scale) even transcended that success in *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*; although, as a mere novice, he had proved himself a more than tolerable tale-teller in *Bug-Jargal*, it is not possible, for any critical historian of the novel as such, to pronounce him a great artist, or even a tolerable craftsman, in the kind as a whole. It has already been several times remarked in detail, and may now be repeated in general, that the things which

we enjoy in his books of this kind are seldom things which it is the special business of the novelist to produce, and practically never those which are his chief business. In no single instance perhaps, with the doubtful exception of Gilliatt's battle with brute matter and elemental forces, is "the tale the thing" purely as tale. Very seldom do we even want to know what is going to happen – the childishly simple, but also childishly genuine demand of the reader of romance as such, if not even of the novel also. Scarcely once do we – at least do I – take that interest in the development of character which is the special subject of appetite of readers of the novel, as such and by itself. The baits and the rewards are now splendour of style; now magnificence of imagery; sometimes grandeur of idea; often pathos; not seldom the delight of battle in this or that sense. These are all excellent seasonings of novelry; but they are not the root of the matter, the *pièce de résistance* of the feast.

Unfortunately, too, Hugo not merely cannot, or at any rate does not, give the hungry sheep their proper food – an interesting story worked out by interesting characters – but will persist in giving them things as suitable (granting them to be in the abstract nourishing) as turnips to the carnivora or legs of mutton to the sheep which walk on them. It would, of course, not be just to press too strongly the objections to the novel of purpose, though to the present writer they seem almost insuperable. But it is not merely purpose in the ordinary sense which leads Victor astray, or rather (for he was much too wilful a person to be

led) which he invents for himself to follow, with his eyes open, and knowing perfectly well what he is doing. His digressions are not *parabases* of the kind which some people object to in Fielding and still more in Thackeray – addresses to the reader on points more or less intimately connected with the subject itself. A certain exception has been made in favour of some of the architectural parts of *Notre-Dame de Paris*, but it has been admitted that this will not cover "Ceci Tuera Cela" nor much else. For the presence of the history of the sewers of Paris in *Les Misérables* and any number of other things; for not a little of the first volume of *Les Travailleurs* itself; for about half, if not more, of *L'Homme Qui Rit*, starting from Ursus's Black-book of fancy pleasances, palaces, and estates belonging to the fellow-peers of Lord Linnæus Clancharlie and Hunkerville; for not a few chapters even of *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*, there is no excuse at all. They are simply repulsive or at least unwelcome "pledgets" of unsucculent matter stuck into the body of fiction, as (but with how different results!) *lardons* or pistachios or truffles are stuck into another kind of composition.

It is partly, but not wholly, due to this deplorable habit of irrelevant divagation that Hugo will never allow his stories to "march" (at least to begin with marching),[122] *Quatre-Vingt-Treize* being here the only exception among the longer romances, for

[122] It is impossible, with him, not to think of Baudelaire's great line in *L'Albatros* (which some may have read even before *Les Travailleurs*) —"Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de *marcher*,"though the sense is not absolutely coextensive.

even *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* never gets into stride till nearly the whole of the first volume is passed. But the habit, however great a nuisance it may be to the reader, is of some interest to the student and the historian, for the very reason that it does not seem to be wholly an outcome of the other habit of digression. It would thus be, in part at least, a survival of that odd old "inability to begin" which we noticed several times in the last volume, aggravated by the irrepressible wilfulness of the writer, and by his determination not to do like other people, who *had* by this time mostly got over the difficulty.

If any further "dull moral" is wanted it may be the obvious lesson that overpowering popularity of a particular form is sometimes a misfortune, as that of allegory was in the Middle Ages and that of didactics in the eighteenth century. If it had not been almost incumbent on any Frenchman who aimed at achieving popularity in the mid-nineteenth century to attempt the novel, it is not very likely that Hugo would have attempted it. It may be doubted whether we should have lost any of the best things – we should only have had them in the compacter and higher shape of more *Orientales*, more *Chants du Crépuscule*, more *Légendes*, and so forth. We should have lost the easily losable laugh over bug-pipe and wapentake – for though Hugo sometimes *thought* sillily in verse he did not often let silliness touch his expression in the more majestical harmony – and we should have been spared an immensely greater body of matter which now provokes a yawn or a sigh.

This is, it may be said, after all a question of taste. Perhaps. But it can hardly be denied by any critical student of fiction that while Hugo's novel-work has added much splendid matter to literature, it has practically nowhere advanced, nor even satisfactorily exemplified, the art of the novel. It is here as an exception – marvellous, magnificent, and as such to be fully treated; actually an honour to the art of which it discards the requirements, but an exception merely and one which proves, inasmuch as it justifies, the cautions it defies.[123]

[123] If I have spoken above "so that the Congregation be thereby offended," let me point out that there is no other way of dealing with the subject critically, except perhaps by leaving a page blank save for such words, in the middle of it, as "Victor Hugo is Victor Hugo; and he is for each reader to take or to leave." *He* would, I think, have rather liked this; *I* should not, as a person, dislike it; but I fear it might not suit with my duty as a critic and a historian.

CHAPTER IV
BEYLE AND BALZAC

There may possibly be some readers who might prefer that the two novelists whose names head this chapter should be treated each in a chapter to himself. But after trying several plans (for I can assure such readers that the arrangement of this History has been the reverse of haphazard) I have thought it best to yoke them. That they have more in common with each other, not merely than either has with Hugo or Dumas, or even George Sand, but than either of these three has with the others, few will deny. And as a *practising* novelist Beyle has hardly substance enough to stand by himself, though as an influence – for a time and that no short one and still existing – scarcely any writer in our whole list has been more efficacious. It is not my purpose, nor, I think, my duty, to say much about their relations to each other; indeed Beyle delayed his novel-work so long, and Balzac codified his own so carefully and so early, that the examination of the question would need to be meticulous, and might even be a little futile in a general history, though it is an interesting subject for a monograph. It is enough to say that, *generally*, both belong to the analytical rather than to the synthetical branch of novel-writing, and may almost be said between them to have introduced the analytical romance; that they compose their palettes of sombre

and neutral rather than of brilliant colours; that actual "story interest" is not what they, as a rule,[124] aim at. Finally – though this may be a proposition likely to be disputed with some heat in one case if not in both – their conception of humanity has a certain "other-worldliness" about it, though it is as far as possible from being what is usually understood by the adjective "unworldly" and though the forms thereof in the two only partially coincide.

Beyle – his peculiarity.

Of the books of Henri Beyle, otherwise Stendhal,[125] to say that they are not like anything else will only seem banal to those who bring the banality with them. To annoy these further by opposing pedantry to banality, one might say that the aseity is quintessential. There never – to be a man of great power, almost genius, a commanding influence, and something like the founder of a characteristic school of literature – was such a *habitans in sicco* as Beyle; indeed his substance and his atmosphere are not so much dry as *desiccated*. The dryness is not like that which was attributed in the last volume to Hamilton, which is the dryness of wine: it is almost the dryness of ashes. By bringing some

[124] Of course there are exceptions, *Le Rouge et le Noir* and *La Peau de Chagrin* being perhaps the chief among long novels; while some of Balzac's short stories possess the quality in almost the highest degree.

[125] He tried several pseudonyms, but settled on this. Unfortunately, he sometimes (not always) made it "*De* Stendhal," without anything before the "De," and more unfortunately still, in the days of his Napoleonic employment he, if he had not called himself, had allowed himself to be called "M. *de* Beyle" – an assumption which though dropped, was not forgotten in the days of his later anti-aristocratism.

humour of your own[126] you may confection a sort of grim comedy out of parts of his work, but that is all. At the same time, he has an astonishing command of such reality, and even vitality, as will (one cannot say survive but) remain over the process of desiccation.

That Beyle was not such a passionless person as he gave himself out to be in his published works was of course always suspected, and more than suspected, by readers with any knowledge of human nature. It was finally proved by the autobiographic *Vie de Henri Brulard*, and the other remains which were at last given to the world, nearly half a century after the author's death, by M. Casimir Stryienski. But the great part which he played in producing a new kind of novel is properly concerned with the earlier and larger division of the work, though the posthumous stuff reinforces this.

Armance.

Some one, I believe, has said – many people may have said – that you never get a much truer notion, though you may afterwards get a clearer and fuller, of a writer than from his earliest work.[127] *Armance*, Beyle's first published novel,[128] though

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[126] Beyle himself recognized the necessity of the reader's collaboration.

[127] This does not apply to poets as much as to prose writers: a fact for which reasons could perhaps be given. And it certainly does not apply to Balzac.

[128] He was now forty-four, and had published not a few volumes, mostly small, of other kinds – travel description (which he did uncommonly well), and miscellaneous writing, and criticism, including the famous *Racine et Shakespeare*, an *avant-coureur*

by no means the one which has received most attention, is certainly illuminating. Or rather, perhaps one should say that it poses the puzzle which Beyle himself put briefly in the words quoted by his editor and biographer: "Qu'ai-j'été? que suis-je? En vérité je serais bien embarrassé de le dire." To tell equal truth, it is but a dull book in itself, surcharged with a vague political spite, containing no personage whom we are permitted to like (it would be quite possible to like Armance de Zohiloff if we were only told less *about* her and allowed to see and hear more *of* her), and possessing, for a hero, one of the most obnoxious and foolish prigs that I can remember in any novel. Octave de Malivert unites varieties of detestableness in a way which might be interesting if (to speak with only apparent flippancy) it were made so. He is commonplace in his adoration of his mother and his neglect (though his historian calls it "respect") of his father; he is constantly a prig, as when he is shocked at people for paying more attention to him when they hear that his parents are going to be indemnified to a large extent for the thefts of their property at the Revolution; he is such a sneak and such a snob that he is always eavesdropping to hear what people say about him; such

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of Romanticism which contained, besides matter on its title-subjects, some sound estimate of Scott as a writer and some very unsound abuse about him as a man. This last drew from Byron, who had met Beyle earlier at Milan, a letter of expostulation and vindication which did that noble poet infinite credit, but of which Beyle, by no means to *his* credit, took notice. He was only too like Hazlitt in more ways than one: though few books with practically the same title can be more different than *De l'Amour* and *Liber Amoris*.

a bounder that he disturbs his neighbours by talking loud at the play; such a brute that he deliberately kills a rather harmless coxcomb of a marquis who rebukes him for making this *tapage*; and such a still greater brute (for in the duel he had himself been wounded) that he throws out of the window an unfortunate lackey who gets in his way at a party where Octave has, as usual, lost his temper. Finally, he is a combination of prig, sneak, cad, brute, and fool when (having picked up and read a forged letter which is not addressed to him, though it has been put by enemies in his way) he believes, without any enquiry, that his unlucky cousin Armance, to whom he is at last engaged, is deceiving him, but marries her all the same, lives with her (she loves him frantically) for a few days, and then, pretending to go to the succour of the Greeks, poisons himself on board ship – rather more, as far as one can make out, in order to annoy her than for any other reason. That there are the elements, and something more than the elements, of a powerful story in this is of course evident; there nearly always are such elements in Beyle, and that is why he has his place here. But, as has been said, the story is almost as dull as it is disagreeable. Unluckily, too, it is, like most of his other books, pervaded by an unpleasant suggestion that the disagreeableness is intimately connected with the author's own nature. As with Julien Sorel (*v. inf.*) so with Octave de Malivert, one feels that, though Beyle would never have behaved exactly like his book-child, that book-child has a great deal too much of the uncanny and semi-diabolical doubles of some occult stories

in it – is, in fact, an incarnation of the bad Beyle, the seamy side of Beyle, the creature that Beyle might have been but for the grace of that God in whom he did not believe. Which things, however one may have schooled oneself not to let book and author interfere with each other, are not comfortable.

It ought, however, to be said that *Armance* is an early and remarkable Romantic experiment in several ways, not least in the foreign mottoes, English, Portuguese, Spanish, and German, which are prefixed to the chapters. Unluckily some of them[129] are obviously retranslated from French versions unverified by the originals, and once there is a most curious blunder. Pope's description of Belinda's neck and cross, not quite in the original words but otherwise exact, is attributed to – Schiller!

La Chartreuse de Parme.

I have read, I believe, as much criticism as most men, possibly, indeed, a little more than most, and I ought long ago to have been beyond the reach of shocking, startling, or any other movement of surprise at any critical utterance whatsoever. But I own that an access of *fou rire* once came upon me when I was told in a printed page that *La Chartreuse de Parme* was a "very lively and very amusing book." A book of great and peculiar power it most undoubtedly is, a book standing out in the formidable genealogy of "psychological" novels as (*salva reverentia*) certain names stand out from the others in the greater list that opens the first

[129] As for instance, those from Dekker and Massiger; Camoens and Ercilla are allowed their native tongues "neat."

chapter of St. Matthew. But "lively"? and "amusing"? Wondrous hot indeed is this snow, and more lustrous than any ebony are the clerestories towards the south-north of this structure.

The Waterloo episode.
The subject and general colour.

To begin with, there rests on the whole book that oppression of *récit* which has been not unfrequently dwelt upon in the last volume, and sometimes this. Of the 440 pages, tightly printed, of the usual reprint, I should say that two-thirds at least are solid, or merely broken by one or two paragraphs, which are seldom conversational. This, it may be said, is a purely mechanical objection. But it is not so. Although the action is laid in the time contemporary with the writer and writing, from the fall of Napoleon onwards, and in the country (Italy) that he knew best, the whole cast and scheme are historical, the method is that of a lecturer at a panorama, who describes and points while the panorama itself passes a long way off behind a screen of clear but thick glass. In two or perhaps three mostly minute parts or scenes this description may seem unjust. One, the first, the longest, and the best, is perhaps also the best-known of all Beyle's work: it is the sketch of the *débâcle* after Waterloo. (It is not wonderful that Beyle should know something about retreats, for, though he was not at Waterloo, he had come through the Moscow trial.) This is a really marvellous thing and intensely interesting, though, as is almost always the case with the author, strangely unexciting. The interest is purely intellectual, and is actually increased by

comparison with Hugo's imaginative account of the battle itself; but you do not care the snap of a finger whether the hero, Fabrice, gets off or not. Another patch later, where this same Fabrice is attacked by, and after a rough-and-tumble struggle kills, his saltimbanque rival in the affections of a low-class actress, and then has a series of escapes from the Austrian police on the banks of the Po, has a little more of the exciting about it. So perhaps for some – I am not sure that it has for me – may have the final, or provisionally final, escape from the Farnese Tower. And there is, even outside of these passages, a good deal of scattered incident.

But these interesting plums, such as even they are, are stuck in an enormous pudding of presentation of the intrigues and vicissitudes of a petty Italian court,[130] in which, and in the persons who take part in them, I at least find it difficult to take the very slightest interest. Fabrice del Dongo himself,[131] with whom every woman falls in love, and who candidly confesses that he does not know whether he has ever been really in love with any woman – though there is one possible exception precedent, his aunt, the Duchess of Sanseverina, and one subsequent, Clélia Conti, who saves him from prison, as above – is depicted with extraordinary science of human nature. But it is a science which, once more, excludes passion, humour, gusto – all the *fluids* of

[130] The actual "Chartreuse" of Parma only makes its appearance on the very last page of the book, when the hero, resigning his arch bishopric, retires to it.

[131] He is the younger son of a rich and noble family, but his father disowns and his older brother denounces him quite early. It is characteristic of Beyle that we hear very little of the father and are practically never even introduced to the brother.

real or fictitious life. Fabrice is like (only "much more also") the simulacra of humanity that were popular in music-halls a few years ago. He walks, talks, fights, eats, drinks, *thinks* even, and makes love if he does not feel it, exactly like a human being. Except the "fluids" just mentioned, it is impossible to mention anything human that he lacks. But he lacks these, and by not having them lacks everything that moves the reader.

And so it is more or less with all of them: with the Duchess and Clélia least perhaps, but even with them to some extent; with the Duchess's first *cicisbeo* and then husband, Count Mosca, prime minister of the Duke of Parma; with his master, the feebly cruel and feebly tyrannical Ranuce-Ernest IV.; with the opposition intriguers at court; with the Archbishop, to whom Fabrice is made, by the influence of Count and Duchess, coadjutor and actual successor; with Clélia's father and her very much belated husband – with all of them in short. You cannot say they are "out"; on the contrary they do and say exactly what in the circumstances they would do and say. Their creator's remarks about them are sometimes of a marvellous subtlety, expressed in a laconism which seems to regard Marivaudage or Meredithese with an aristocratic disdain. But at other times this laconic letter literally killeth. Perhaps two examples of the two effects should be given:

> (*Fabrice has found favour in the eyes and arms of the actress Marietta*)
>
> The love of this pretty Marietta gave Fabrice all the

charms of the sweetest friendship. *And this made him think of the happiness of the same kind which he might have found with the Duchess herself.*

If this is not "piercing to the accepted hells beneath" with a diamond-pointed plunger, I know not what is.

But much later, quite towards the end of the book, the author has to tell how Fabrice again and Clélia "forgot all but love" in one of their stolen meetings to arrange his escape.

(*He has, by the way, told a lie to make her think he is poisoned*)

She was so beautiful – half-dressed and in a state of extreme passion as she was – that Fabrice could not resist an almost involuntary movement. No resistance was opposed.[132]

Now I am not (see *Addenda and Corrigenda* of the last volume) avid of expatiations of the Laclosian kind. But this is really a little too much of the "Spanish-fleet-taken-and-burnt-as-per-margin" order.

L'Abbesse de Castro, etc.

Much the same characteristics, but necessarily on a small scale, appear in the short stories usually found under the title of the first and longest of them, *L'Abbesse de Castro*. Two of these, *Mina de Wangel* and *Le Philtre*, are *historiettes* of the

[132] These four words somehow make me think of Samuel Newcome's comment on the unfortunate dinner where "Farintosh" did not appear: "Scarcely anything was drank."

passion which is absent from *La Chartreuse de Parme*; but each is tainted with the *macabre* touch which Beyle affected or which (for that word is hardly fair) was natural to him. In one a German girl of high rank and great wealth falls in love with a married man, separates him from his wife by a gross deception, lives with him for a time; and when he leaves her on finding out the fraud, blows her brains out. In the other a Spanish lady, seduced and maltreated by a creole circus-rider of the worst character, declares to a more honourable lover her incurable passion for the scoundrel and takes the veil. The rest are stories of the Italian Renaissance, grimy and gory as usual. Vittoria Accoramboni herself figures, but there is no evidence that Beyle (although he had some knowledge of English literature[133]) knew at the time our glorious "White Devil," and his story dwells little on her faults and much on the punishment of her murderers. *L'Abbesse de Castro* itself, *La Duchesse de Palliano*, *San Francesco à Ripa*, *Vanina Vanini* are all of the same type and all full of the gloomier items seen by the Dreamer of Fair Women —

> Scaffolds, still sheets of water, divers woes,
> Ranges of glimmering vaults with iron grates,

and blood everywhere. And these unmerry tales are always recounted *ab extra*; in fact, many of them are real or pretended abstracts from chronicles of the very kind which furnished

[133] See note above.

Browning with the matter of *The Ring and the Book*. It is, however, more apt and more curious to compare them with the scenes of Gerard's experiences with the princess in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, as instances of different handling of the same matter by two novelists of talent almost, if not quite, reaching genius.

Le Rouge et le Noir.

This singular aloofness, this separation of subject and spectator by a vast and impenetrable though translucent wall, as in a museum or a *morgue*, is characteristic of all Beyle's books more or less. In fact, he somewhere confesses – the confession having, as always in persons of anything like his stamp, the nature of a boast – that he cannot write otherwise than in *récit*, that the broken conversational or dramatic method is impossible to him. But an almost startling change – or perhaps it would be more accurate to say reinforcement – of this method appears in what seems to me by far the most remarkable and epoch-making of his books, *Le Rouge et le Noir*. That there is a strong autobiographic element in this, though vigorously and almost violently "transposed," must have been evident to any critical reader long ago. It became not merely evident but *evidenced* by the fresh matter published thirty years since.

Beyle's masterpiece, and why.

The book is a long one; it drags in parts; and, long as it is, there is stuff in it for a much longer – indeed preferably for two

or three. It is not only a *roman passionnel*, as Beyle understood passion, not only a collection of Parisian and Provincial scenes, but a romance of secret diplomacy, and one of Seminarist life, with constant side-excursions of Voltairianism, in religion, of the revolutionary element in politics which Voltaire did not ostensibly favour, however much he may have been responsible for it, of private cynicism, and above all and most consistently of all, of that psychological realism, which is perhaps a more different thing from psychological reality than our clever ones for two generations have been willing to admit, or, perhaps, able to perceive.

That – to adopt a division which foolish folk have sneered at directly and indirectly, but which is valuable and almost necessary in the case of second-class literature – it is rather an unpleasant than a pleasant book, must be pretty well apparent from what has been already said of its author and itself. That it is a powerful one follows almost in the same way. But what has to be said, for the first, if not also the last, time in reference to Beyle's fiction, is that it is interesting.

Julien Sorel and Mathilde de la Mole.

The interest depends almost entirely – I really do not think it would be rash to say entirely – upon the hero and one of the heroines. The other personages are dramatically and psychologically competent, but Beyle has – perhaps save in one or two cases intentionally – made them something of *comparses* or "supers." There may be two opinions about the other heroine,

Madame de Rênal, Julien Sorel's first and last love, his victim in two senses and directly the cause of his death, though he was not directly the cause of hers. She seems to me merely what the French call a *femmelette*, feebly amorous, feebly fond of her children, feebly estranged from and unfaithful to her husband, feebly though fatally jealous of and a traitress to her lover – feebly everything. Shakespeare or Miss Austen[134] could have made such a character interesting, Beyle could not. Nor do the other "seconds" – Julien's brutal peasant father and brothers, the notables of Verrières, the husband, M. de Rênal (himself a *gentillâtre*, as well as a man of business, a bully, and a blockhead), and the hero's just failure of a father-in-law, the Marquis de la Mole – seem to me to come up to the mark. But, after all, they furnish forth the action, and are necessary in their various ways to set forth the character of that hero and his second love, almost in the mediaeval sense his wife and his widow, Mathilde de la Mole, heiress, great lady, *fille folle de son corps*, and, in a kind of way, Queen Whims.

Julien Sorel, allowance being made for his date, is one of the most remarkable heroes of fiction. He is physically handsome, in fact beautiful,[135] intellectually very clever, and possessed, in especial, of a marvellous memory; also, though not well educated early, capable of learning anything in a very short time – but presented in these favourable lights without any exaggeration.

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[134] Both would have declined to meddle with her, I think, but for different reasons.

[135] Beyle, who had himself no good looks, is particularly lavish of them to his heroes.

A distinguished Lord Justice was said by his admirers, at the beginning of his manhood, to have obtained more marks in examinations than any youthful person in the United Kingdom: and Julien, with equal opportunities, would probably have done the same in France. Morally, in no limited sense of the word, he does not possess a single good quality, and does possess most bad ones, with the possible exceptions of gluttony and avarice. That, being in each case a family tutor or *employé* under trust, he seduces the wife of his first employer and the daughter of the second, cannot, in the peculiar circumstances, be said to count. This is, as it were, the starting-point, the necessary handicap, in the competition of this kind of novel. It is as he is, and in reference to what he does, after this is put aside, that he has to be considered. He is not a stage villain, though he has the peculiar, and in the circumstances important, if highly-to-be-deprecated habit of carrying pocket-pistols. He is not a Byronic hero with a terrible but misty past. He is not like Valmont of the *Liaisons Dangereuses*,[136] a professional and passionless lady-killer. He is not a swindler nor (though he sometimes comes near to this also) a conspirator like Count Fosco of *The Woman in White*. One might make a long list of such negatives if it were worth while. He is only an utterly selfish, arrogant, envious, and generally

[136] Perhaps one of the rare biographical details which, as has been explained, may "force the *consigne*" here, is that Beyle in his youth, and almost up to middle age, was acquainted with an old lady who had the very unenviable reputation of having actually "sat for" Madame de Merteuil.

bad-blooded[137] young man, whom circumstances partly, and his own misdeeds helping them, first corrupt and then destroy. You never sympathise with him for one moment, except in a peculiar fashion to be noted presently; but at the same time he neither quite bores you nor quite disgusts you. *Homo est*, and it is Beyle's having made him so that makes Beyle a sort of genius and much more than a sort of novelist.

But I am not certain that Mathilde is not even a greater creation, though again it is, except quite towards the end, equally impossible to like her. *Femina est*, though sometimes *furens*, oftener still *furiosa* (in a still wider sense than that in which Mr. Norris has[138] ingeniously "feminated" Orlando *Furioso*), and, in part of her conduct already alluded to, as destitute of any morality as Julien himself. Although there could hardly be (and no doubt had better not be) many like her, she is real and true, and there are not a few redeeming features in her artistically and even personally. She is, as has been said, both rich and noble, the famous lover of the third Valois Marguerite being an (I suppose collateral) ancestor of hers.[139] Her father is not merely a patrician

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[137] This bad bloodedness, or κακοηθεια, of Beyle's heroes is really curious. It would have qualified them later to be Temperance fanatics or Trade Union demagogues. The special difference of all three is an intense dislike of somebody else "having something."

[138] In that merry and wise book *Clarissa Furiosa*.

[139] She keeps the anniversary of his execution, and imitates Marguerite in procuring and treasuring, at the end of the story, Julien's severed head. (It may be well to note that Dumas had not yet written *La Reine Margot*.)

but a Minister at the close of the French Restoration; she may marry any one she likes; and has, in fact, a train of admirers whom she alternately cajoles and snubs. Julien is taken into the household as half private secretary, half librarian; is especially favoured by her father, and treated by her brother (one of Beyle's few thoroughly good fellows) almost on equal terms. But his bad blood and his want of breeding make him stiff and mysterious, and Mathilde takes a perverse fancy to him, the growth of which is skilfully drawn. Although she is nothing so little as a Lélia or an Indiana or a Valentine (*vide* next chapter), she is idiosyncratically romantic, and at last it is a case of ladders up to the window, "the irreparable," and various wild performances on her part and her lover's. But this is all comparatively banal. Beyle's touch of genius only reappears later. An extraordinary but (when one comes to think of it) not in the least unnatural series of "ups and downs" follows. Julien's bad blood and vulgar nature make him presume on the advantage he has obtained; Mathilde's *morgue* and hot-headedness make her feel degraded by what she has given. She neglects him and he becomes quite frantic about *her*; he takes sudden dudgeon and she becomes frantically desirous of *him*. This spiritual or emotional man-and-woman-in-the-weather-house business continues; but at last, with ambages and minor peripeteias impossible to abstract, it so comes about that the great and proud Marquis de La Mole, startlingly but not quite improbably, chooses to recognise this traitor and seducer as a possible by-blow of nobility, gets him

a commission, endows him handsomely, and all but gives his consent to a marriage.

Then the final revolution comes. With again extraordinary but, as it is told, again not inconceivable audacity, Julien refers for character to his first mistress in both senses, Madame de Rênal, and she "gives him away." The marquis breaks off the treaties, and Julien, leaving his quarters, journeys down to Verrières and shoots Madame de Rênal (with the pocket-pistols) in church. She does not die, and is not even very seriously wounded; but he is tried, is (according, it would seem, to a state of French law, which contrasts most remarkably with one's recent knowledge of it) condemned, and after a time is executed for a murder which has not been committed. Mathilde (who is to bear him a child and always considers herself his wife) and Madame de Rênal both visit him in prison, the former making immense efforts to save him. But Julien, consistently with his character all through, is now rather bored by Mathilde and exceedingly fond of Madame de Rênal, who dies shortly after him. What becomes of Mathilde we are not told, except that she devotes herself to her paulo-post-future infant. The mere summary may seem rather preposterous; the book is in a way so. But it is also, in no ordinary sense, once more real and true. It has sometimes been regarded as a childish, but I believe it to be a true, criterion of novels that the reader should feel as if he would like to have had personal dealings with the personages. I should very much like to have shot[140] Julien

[140] In proper duel, of course; not as he shot his mistress.

Sorel, though it would have been rather an honour for him. And I should very much like to have made Mathilde fall in love with me. As for Madame de Rênal, she was only good for suckling fools and telling tales out of school. But I do not find fault with Beyle for drawing her, and she, too, is very human.

In fact the book, pleasant or unpleasant, if we reflect on what the French novel was at the time, deserves a very high place. Compare it with others, and nowhere, except in Balzac, will you find anything like it for firm analysis of character, while I confess that it seems to me to be more strictly human of this world, and at the same time more original,[141] than a good deal of the *Comédie*.

The resuscitated work —*Lamiel*.

The question, "Would a novelist in altered circumstances have given us more or better novels?" is sometimes treated as *ultra vires* or *nihil ad rem* on the critic's part. I myself have been accused rather of limiting than of extending the province of the literary critic; yet I think this question is, sometimes at least, in place. If so, it can seldom be more in place than with Beyle, first because of the unusually mperfect character of his actual published work; and secondly, because of the still more unusual abundance of half-done work, or of fragments of self-criticism, which what has been called the "Beyle resurrection" of the close of the last century has furnished. Indeed the unfinished

[141] Its great defect is the utter absence of any poetical element. But, as Mérimée (than whom there could hardly be, in this case, a critic more competent or more friendly) said, poetry was, to Beyle, *lettre close*.

and scarcely more than half-drafted novel of *Lamiel* almost by itself suggests the question and supplies the answer. That answer – except from favourers of the grime-novel which, oddly enough, whether by coincidence or common causation became so popular at about the time of this "resurrection" – can hardly be favourable. *Lamiel* is a very grubby little book. The eponymous heroine is adopted as a child by a parish beadle and his wife, who do not at all maltreat her, except by bringing her up in ways of extreme propriety, which she detests, taking delight in the histories of Mandrin, Cartouche and Co. At early maidenhood she is pitched upon as *lectrice*, and in a way favourite, by the great lady of the neighbourhood, the Duchess of Miossens; and in this position first attracts the attention of a peculiarly diabolical little dwarf doctor, who, bar the comic[142] element, reminds one rather of Quilp. His designs are, however, baulked in a most Beylian manner; for Lamiel (who, by a pleasing chance, was at first called "Amiel" – a delightfully *other* Amiel!) coolly bestows some money upon a peasant to "teach her what love is," and literally asks the Gebirian question about the ocean, "Is this all?" after receiving the lesson. Further, in the more and more unfinished parts of the book, she levants for a time with the young duke, quits him, becomes a professional hetaera in Paris, but never takes any fancy to the business of her avocation till

[142] It seems curiously enough, that Beyle did mean to make the book *gai*. It is a a very odd kind of gaiety!

she meets an all-conquering criminal, Valbayre.[143] The scenario tells us that, Valbayre having been caught by justice, she sets fire to the Palace thereof, and her own bones are discovered in the ashes.

This, though Beyle at least meant to season the misanthropy with irony (he might be compared with Meredith for some slightly cryptic views of "the Comic Spirit"), is rather poor stuff, and certainly shows no improvement or likelihood of improvement on the earlier productions. It is even somewhat lamentable, not so much for the presence of grime as because of the absence of any other attraction. *Le Rouge et le Noir* is not exactly rose-pink, but it derives hardly any, if any, interest from its smirches of mud and blood and blackness. In *Lamiel* there is little else. Moreover, that unchallengeable "possibility of humanity" which redeems not merely *Le Rouge et le Noir* but the less exciting books, is wanting here. Sansfin, the doctor, is a mere monstrosity in mind as well as in body, and, except perhaps when she ejaculates (as more briefly reported above), "Comment! ce fameux amour, *ce n'est que ça*?" Lamiel herself is not made interesting.

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[143] This attraction of the *forçat* is one of the most curious features in all French Romanticism. It was perhaps partly one of the general results of the Revolutionary insanity earlier, partly a symptom or sequel of Byronism. But the way it raged not only among folks like Eugène Sue, but among men and women of great talent and sometimes genius – George Sand, Balzac, Dumas, Victor Hugo – the last and greatest carrying it on for nearly two generations – is a real curiousity of literature. (The later and different crime-novel of Gaboriau & Co. will be dealt with in its place.)

The *Nouvelles Inédites.*

The *Vie de Henri Brulard*, of high importance for a History of Novelists, is in strictness outside the subject of a historian of the Novel, though it might be adduced to strengthen the remarks made on Rousseau's *Confessions*.[144] And the rest of the "resurrected" matter is also more autobiographical, or at best illustrative of Beyle's restless and "masterless" habit of pulling his work to pieces – of "never being able to be ready" (as a deservedly unpopular language has it) – than contributory to positive novel-achievement. But the first and by far the most substantive of the *Nouvelles Inédites*, which his amiable but not very strong-minded literary executor, Colomb, published soon after his death, needs a little notice.

Le Chasseur Vert.

Le Chasseur Vert [145] (which had three other titles, three successive prefaces, and in its finished, or rather unfinished, form is the salvage of five folio volumes of MS., the rest being at best sketched and at worst illegible) contains, in what we have of it, the account of the tribulations of a young sub-lieutenant of Lancers (with a great deal of money, a cynical but rather agreeable banker-papa, an adoring mother, and the record of an

[144] *V. sup.* vol. i. p. 39.

[145] A pseudonymous person has "reconstituted" the story under the title of *Lucien Leeuwen* (the hero's name). But some not inconsiderable experience of reconstitutions of this kind determined me to waste no further portion of my waning life on any one of them.

expulsion from the Polytechnique for supposed Republicanism) suddenly pitchforked into garrison, soon after the Revolution of July, at Nancy. Here, in the early years of the July monarchy, the whole of decent society is Legitimist; a very small but not easily suppressible minority Republican; while officialdom, civil and military, forms a peculiar *juste milieu*, supporting itself by espionage and by what Their Majesties of the present moment, the Trade Unions, call "victimisation," but in a constant state of alarm for its position, and "looking over its shoulder" with a sort of threefold squint, at the white flag, the eagles – and the guillotine. Nothing really happens, but it takes 240 pages to bring us to an actual meeting between Lieutenant Lucien Leeuwen and his previously at distance adored widow, the Marquise de Chasteller.

The book is not a *very* good novel, even as a fragment, and probably nothing would ever have made it so as a whole. But there is good novel-stuff in it, and it is important to a student of the novel and almost indispensable to a student of this novelist. Of the cynical papa – who, when his son comes to him in a "high-falutin" mood, requests him to go to his (the papa's) opera-box, to replace his sire with some agreeable girl-officials of that same institution, and to spend at least 200 francs on a supper for them at the Rocher – one would gladly see more. Of the barrack (or rather *not*-barrack) society at Nancy, the sight given, though not agreeable, is interesting, and to any one who knew something of our old army, especially before the abolition of

purchase, very curious. There is no mess-room and apparently no common life at all, except on duty and at the "pension" hotel-meals, to which, – rather, it would seem, at the arbitrary will of the colonel than by "regulation," – you have to subscribe, though you may, and indeed must, live in lodgings exactly like a *particulier*. Of the social-political life of the place we see rather too much, for Beyle, not content with making the politics which he does not like make themselves ridiculous – or perhaps not being able to do so – himself tells us frequently that they *are* ridiculous, which is not equally effective. So also, instead of putting severe or "spiritual" speeches in Lucien's mouth, he tells us that they *were* spiritual or severe, an assurance which, of course, we receive with due politeness, but which does not give us as much personal delectation as might be supplied by the other method. No doubt this and other things are almost direct results of that preference for *récit* over semi-dramatic evolution of the story by deed and word, which has been noticed. But they are damaging results all the same: and, after making the fairest allowance for its incomplete condition, the thing may be said to support, even more than *Lamiel* does, the conclusion already based upon the self-published stories (and most of all upon that best of them, *Le Rouge et le Noir*) that Beyle could never have given us a thoroughly hit-off novel.

Beyle's place in the story.

Still, there is always something unfair in making use of "Remains," and for my part I do not think that, unless they are

of extraordinary merit, they should ever be published. "Death *should* clear all scores" in this way as in others. Yet no really critical person will think the worse of Beyle's published work because of these *anecdota*, though they may, as actually before us, be taken as throwing some light on what is not so good in the *publicata*. There can be no doubt that Beyle occupies a very important position in the history of the novel, and not of the French novel only, as the first, or almost the first, analyst of the ugly for fictitious purposes, and as showing singular power in his analysis. Unfortunately his synthetic gifts were not equally great. He had strange difficulty in making his stories *march*; he only now and then got them to *run*; and though the real life of his characters has been acknowledged, it is after all a sort of "Life-in-Death," a new manifestation of the evil power of that mysterious entity whom Coleridge, if he did not discover, first named and produced in quasi-flesh, though he left us without any indication of more than one tiny and accidental part of her dread kingdom.

He has thus the position of *père de famille*, whether (to repeat the old joke) of a *famille déplorable* in the moral, not the sentimental, sense, must, I suppose, be left matter of opinion. The plentiful crop of monographs about him since M. Stryienski's Pompeian explorations and publications is in a manner – if only in a manner – justified by the numerous followers – not always or perhaps often conscious followers, and so even more important – in his footsteps. Nobody can say that

the picaresque novelists, whether in their original country or when the fashion had spread, were given to *berquinades* or fairy-tales. Nobody can say that the tale-writers who preceded and followed them were apostles of virtue or painters of Golden-Age scenes. But, with some exceptions (chiefly Italian) among the latter, they did not, unless their aim were definitely tragical – an epithet which one could show, on irrefragable Aristotelian principles, to be rarely if ever applicable to Beyle and his school – they did not, as the common phrase goes, "take a gloomy view" only. There were cakes and ale; and the cakes did not always give internal pains, nor the ale a bad headache. As even Hazlitt (who has been selected, not without reason, as in many ways like Beyle) said of himself on his death-bed, rather to some folks' surprise though not to mine, most of the characters "had a happy life," though the happiness might be chequered: and some of them were "good." It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that in Beyle's books happiness does not exist, and virtue has hardly a place. There are some characters who may be said to be neutral or "on the line"; they may be not definitely unhappy or definitely bad. But this is about as far as he ever goes in that direction. And accordingly he and his followers have the fault of one-sidedness; they may (he did) see life steadily, but they do not see it whole. There is no need to preach a sermon on the text: in this book there is full need to record the fact.[146]

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[146] It may be desirable to glance at Beyle's avowed or obvious "intentions" in most if not all his novels – in the *Chartreuse* to differentiate Italian from French character,

in *Le Rouge et le Noir* to embody the Macchiavellian-Napoleonic principle which has been of late so tediously phrased (after the Germans) as "will to" something and the like. These intentions may interest some: for me, I must confess, they definitely get in the way of the interest. For essays, "good": for novels, "no."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.