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# Amoral characters beyond good and evil in the nineteenth century French novel

Basil McVoy Duncan

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AMORAL CHARACTERS  
BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL  
IN THE  
NINETEENTH CENTURY  
FRENCH NOVEL

BY

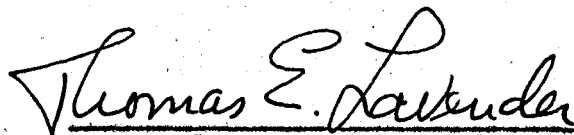
BASIL MCVOY DUNCAN, JR.

A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND  
IN CANDIDACY  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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Department of French  
and the Graduate School by

  
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Professor of French

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## PREFACE

Although French literature is unique in that every period presents interesting material for research, perhaps the most fascinating is that period which involves the Revolution, Empire, and Restoration. The very proximity of these political developments has had a profound effect on the novelists who lived and wrote at this time, and they have not failed to bequeath their observations on the resulting society. These observations naturally include many consequences not recorded by the historians, consequences which they also as individuals have experienced.

Important among these novelists are Benjamin Constant, Stendhal, Honoré de Balzac, and Paul Bourget who not only reveal the direct or indirect influences of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Chateaubriand but whose works reflect a similar interest in a particular character type evident in the society of this period--the amoral character "beyond good and evil". Rivaling Friedrich Nietzsche's superman,

he is a parvenu par les femmes beyond the spurious good and evil of the prevalent common morality. Having created his own morality which permits no condemnation of the flesh, he possesses an ascetic "will to power".

In establishing the peculiar amorality of these characters and the forces which have inspired their creators to portray this type, I have applied only those aspects of the authors' personalities and experiences which are comparable and would definitely seem influential. Any further consideration of their lives would be superfluous. With this in mind I also have refrained from any analysis of the plots unessential for an understanding of the characters themselves and irrelevant to the purpose of this thesis.

I should like to acknowledge the advice and assistance of Professor Thomas E. Lavender whose guidance throughout this year has been greatly appreciated. In addition I also should like to recognize the library staff of the University of Richmond for their assistance and co-operation.

B.M.D., Jr.  
July, 1955

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION..... 1

CHAPTER

I. ADOLPHE..... 10

II. JULIEN SOREL AND FABRICE DEL DONGO..... 27

III. EUGÈNE DE RASTIGNAC..... 47

IV. ROBERT GRESLOU..... 66

BIBLIOGRAPHY

VITA

## INTRODUCTION

Immorality or the specific study of the immoral character has marked the French novel since its earliest beginnings. Certainly the subject has been a pet among many of the French novelists. Acknowledgment and criticism of this fact on the part of writers and students of other more fastidious literatures have served merely to further this reputation and to cause the two, immorality and the French novel, to become synonymous.

In La Princesse de Clèves, which appeared in 1678, Madame de la Fayette undertook the first psychological study of a character guilty, through self-condemnation, of immoral thought, a character in conflict with an ever present conscience. She effectively transported Polyeucte from the Corneillian tragedy and placed her in the roman d'analyse. In 1731 Abbé Prévost revealed the degradation of young Des Grieux resulting from his amour fatale with Manon Lescaut. The intensity of this

illicit passion absorbs their beings by devouring their souls and ultimately their existences. Not unlike the plight of Madame de la Fayette's protagonist is that of Julie in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse published in 1761. Although her affair with Saint-Preux is platonic and of a love made pure, the reader is no less aware that she is the wife of M. de Wolmar. Emma Bovary also is a wife, but her affairs are three and none of them platonic. The aspirations and exaltations nurtured by romanticism and misplaced in the practical life of this mediocre soul produce her ironic fate. Madame Bovary, considered by many the greatest French novel ever written, in 1857 treated the subject of immorality in such a manner as to be called Histoire des adultères d'une femme de province by M. Ernest Pinard, L'Avocat Impérial, in the Réquisitoire of the Ministère Public against Gustave Flaubert, the author. Nor can it be denied that Émile Zola, "the grave digger of the Second Empire [who] found bitter rejoicing in the somber poetry of vice and too often cultivated ugliness"<sup>1</sup>, has

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<sup>1</sup>Henri Peyre, The Contemporary French Novel, (Oxford University Press, Inc., New York, 1955), p.8 and p. 125.



made his contribution to this controversial study in Les Rougon-Macquart, especially in Nana.

With the possible exception of Manon Lescaut, it is essential to note that each of these characters, and in each case a woman, while immoral in either thought or action, or perhaps both, is in no respect amoral. Each thinks or acts contrary to her conscience and moral law. Herein lies the psychological conflict. The amoral character, however, exists beyond the sphere in which moral distinctions or judgments prevail and apply. For him immorality is nonexistent, and if he has a conscience, it offers no argument. The amoral character, therefore, is seldom, although capable of being so, the unintelligent criminal type. His immoral or illicit thoughts and acts are thoroughly coated in a deterministic rationalization and are thus justified. Unlike the immoral character his evil is not necessarily inherent as a disease or weakness, nor the spontaneous result of an unexpected development or situation; rather, it is a premeditated evil based on an intricate and thorough analysis with a decided purpose and destination.

Although the earlier protagonists were obviously women, in 1804 Chateaubriand introduced in René the male

protagonist who possessed many of the romantic traits and characteristics which were to distinguish shortly thereafter the amoral young men so prominent in the novels of the nineteenth century. The first of five, later to be considered at length, is Adolphe whose unfortunate love affair is related in the novel of the same name published in 1816. The planned seduction of Ellénore and the results of this game in his effort to combat boredom in a monotonous and unrewarding world are cleverly revealed by Benjamin Constant in the first real roman d'analyse since La Princesse de Clèves. In Stendhal's Le Rouge et Le Noir, which appeared in 1830, Julien Sorel, disgusted with the apparent mediocrity of society and ambitious for glory, embarks upon his chasse au bonheur by exploiting the women who serve his scheme. Fabrice del Dongo, less profound but most assuredly as energetic and ambitious as Julien in his pursuit of glory and happiness, finds little happiness in glory and destroys what happiness he finds in love. The unparalleled energy of Napoléon and the ardent soul of Italy worshipped in Le Rouge et Le Noir are experienced in La Chartreuse de Parme nine years later. Eugène de Rastignac's ambition with dark motives and destructive passions which permeates

Honoré de Balzac's La Comédie Humaine (1829-1850), embraces exploitations not unlike those of the less patient Julien. His, nevertheless, are more rewarding. Finally, Robert Greslou, an egotistical superman lost in the philosophy of determinism and believing that morality lies in strength, uses society as an instrument for the enhancement of his individual power in Paul Bourget's Le Disciple (1889).

Adolphe, Julien, Fabrice, Rastignac, and Robert all have inherited those romantic traits so characteristic of René. They are all misunderstood by an insensitive and unsympathetic world, they are all above and beyond the dull and unenergetic society in which they must live, and they are all unfortunate individuals too privileged to follow the common way of the masses. Like Faust they exclaim that "Feeling is all" and as possessors of Rousseau's belle âme, which spontaneously, unconsciously, and almost inevitably does the right thing, they reason from the heart rather than the mind. Defending the innate goodness of emotion, they believe "la froide raison n'a jamais rien fait d'illustre, et l'on ne triomphe des passions qu'en les opposant l'une à l'autre."<sup>2</sup> Although

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<sup>2</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse, (Librairie Garnier Frères, Paris, [n.d.]) Part IV, Lettre XII, p. 416.

each is amoral in that he is seeking an egotistical satisfaction and happiness, and has the will to obtain it oblivious to moral law and conscience, this subjugation to such sensibilité, to such love of strong emotions, distinguishes each from other amoral protagonists.

In addition, however, "these characters are little Napoleóns. They live temperamentally in the midst of a highly organized society, but they set aside its conventions of right and wrong in favor, not of aesthetic enjoyment, but of power."<sup>3</sup> With the exception of Robert Grosvenor, they all anticipate Friedrich Nietzsche's superman, Zarathustra, who voices the philosopher's doctrine that "All that proceeds from power is good, all that springs from weakness is bad."<sup>4</sup> Robert Grosvenor is both the product and the condemnation of this doctrine. Energy, intellect, pride, the love of danger and strife when a purpose is involved--the dominant marks of Nietzsche's superman--are the dominant marks of these amoral characters. Like Zarathustra, they live dangerously, believe morality

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<sup>3</sup>Irving Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1919), p. 192.

<sup>4</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, Translated by Thomas Common, ("The Modern Library", Boni and Liveright, New York, [n.d.]), p. 11.

is the weapon used by the weak to limit the strong, and place themselves "beyond good and evil".

Since these young men make their appearances in the same era, it is important to understand the society which certainly influenced not only their ideas and schemes, but also their fates. This society of the nineteenth century had witnessed the guillotining of Louis XVI during the Reign of Terror, had seen Napoléon crown himself Empereur des Français only to fall after little more than a decade, and had seen him reappear for one hundred glorious days ending in the battle of Waterloo. Then it had experienced under the intolerant Louis XVIII the years of the Restoration, the brief reign of Charles X, the Revolution of 1848 and the consequent abdication of Louis-Philippe, the Second Empire under Louis-Napoléon, and the ultimate establishment of the Republic.

For France these were years of change, and her social structure was not the least to be affected. Napoléon and his wars gave rise to a new aristocracy composed of now wealthy merchants, bankers, and farmers. The bourgeoisie, taking advantage of the reorganized educational system, aspired to greater and more grandiose heights all anxious to become wealthy as a result of the

rapidly increasing industry. During the Restoration this same aristocracy endeavored to keep pace with the renovated nobility, and the bourgeoisie became more eager to profit from any and every available device in its endless attempt to join the ranks of these. These years of the Revolution and the Empire, the Restoration and the July Monarchy were for Paris years of speculation, of intrigue, of innumerable private struggles, of desperate poverty and newly acquired wealth. These were years of nostalgic dreams of the past and ambitious dreams of a future in no way similar. From this clash between Royalists and Republicans, between past and future, emerged the philosophers and scientists, the artists and writers. Among these were Victor Cousin, who borrowed from each doctrine what he believed to find good and useful in it; his celebrated disciples Jouffroy and Jules Simon; Auguste Comte and his positive philosophy; Saint-Simon and Proudhon, who developed and defended their socialistic theories; and the remarkable Joseph de Maistre, who presented in majestic language his belief in the "divine right" of an absolute monarch. These were years of energy, originality, sarcasm, scientific positivism, and the destruction of religious sentiment. These were the years of Adolphe,

Julien, Fabrice, Rastignac, and Robert.

In the following chapters the intention is not merely that of analyzing and comparing these protagonists as well as establishing their peculiar amorality, it is also that of determining the origin of their individual characteristics or the forces which have motivated their creators. In this attempt the search for the novelist in his works, in the protagonists themselves, has not been excluded. Although in some cases, especially that of Stendhal, the novelist fascinates us even more than his fictitious character, the fact remains that his character often reveals more and far greater truths than an acknowledged autobiography. This approach, therefore, must involve in addition a philosophical and psychological study of the authors as displayed, if such is the case, in their protagonists since "most great works of fiction become endowed with metaphysical and moral significance as the story mirrors the author's view of the world."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Speyre, op. cit., p. 7.

## CHAPTER I

### ADOLPHE

The story of Adolphe, a young man with impressions primitives et fougueses, is related in three stages.

The first of these is his decision to initiate and execute a plan, a plan to conquer and seduce Ellénore. The second is the realization that the outcome of this plan is not victory and happiness, as expected, but a disenchanting bond that grows stronger while he weakens. The third and final stage, the real outcome of the plan, is the break with Ellénore.

In considering Adolphe as an amoral character "beyond good and evil", the reader is primarily interested in the first stage of his story. It is important to know why he has undertaken such a plan and if he has done so as an energetic intellectual, as a lover of danger with a definite pursuit. If so, what is this pursuit? And has he been directed in it by his heart rather than his



reason? Adolphe himself reveals some of the answers in the first paragraph of the novel:

Je venais de finir à vingt-deux ans mes études à l'université de Göttingue. L'intention de mon père, ministre de l'électeur de \*\*\*, était que je parcourusse les pays les plus remarquables de l'Europe. Il voulait ensuite m'appeler auprès de lui, me faire entrer dans le département dont la direction lui était confiée, et me préparer à le remplacer un jour. J'avais obtenu, par un travail assez opiniâtre, au milieu d'une vie très dissipée, des succès qui m'avaient distingué de mes compagnons d'étude, et qui avaient fait concevoir à mon père sur moi des espérances probablement fort exagérées.<sup>1</sup>

This young man of twenty-two, if not an intellectual, certainly is of superior intelligence. Although he confesses to having worked at his studies rather stubbornly in order to distinguish himself from his fellow students, he also confesses to having led, at the same time, a very dissipated life. It is difficult to believe that he has spent his evenings pouring over his books. Certainly his success was not entirely due to hard work. In spite of his life of dissipation he has succeeded in completing his studies at the University and with distinction. Seemingly this would suggest an intellectual tendency and, assuredly, the tendency of an energetic young man. This honor, how-

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<sup>1</sup>Benjamin Constant, Adolphe, (Presses Universitaires de France, 1947), p. 29.

ever, either does not inspire Adolphe to follow in his father's footsteps or he is not yet aware of his ability. He states that his father's hopes for his future are probably strongly exaggerated; his reaction to these hopes confirms the assumption that he is capable, but simply is not interested. Furthermore, it reveals that he is directed by his heart rather than his reason.

Je ne demandais alors qu'à me livrer à ces impressions primitives et fougueses qui jettent l'âme hors de la sphère commune, et lui inspirent le dédain de tous les objets qui l'environnent.<sup>2</sup>

Adolphe, disapproving and eager to escape his father's strict adherence to exterior conventions which allow the philosophy concerning women that "cela leur fait si peu de mal, et à nous tant de plaisir"<sup>3</sup>, hastens from the University to spend a few months at the Court of a little German principality. But here his belle âme finds little or no satisfaction.

Pendant quelques mois, je ne remarquai rien qui pût captiver mon attention. J'étais reconnaissant de l'obligeance qu'on me témoignait; mais tantôt ma timidité m'empêchait d'en profiter, tantôt la fatigue d'une agitation sans but me faisait préférer la solitude aux plaisirs insipides que l'on m'invitait à partager. Je n'avais de haine contre personne, mais peu de gens m'inspiraient de l'intérêt...<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

It is in this monotonous solitude that Adolphe becomes aware of the goal he is seeking and determines to pursue it. Disgusted with the insignificant and mediocre men about him and armed with the memory of the woman who had first developed his ideas and encouraged his revolt against the convenances, he relies on his intellect, as well as his heart, and begins to analyse everything with it. He notices that a young acquaintance is overcome by an excess of joy and happiness when he finally succeeds in winning the love of a lady he earnestly has been pursuing. Struck by this display of exhilaration and excitement, Adolphe suddenly sees in it his own goal.

Tourment  d'une  motion vague, je veux  tre aim , me disais-je, et je regardais autour de moi; je ne voyais personne qui m'inspir t de l'amour, personne qui me par t susceptible d'en prendre; j'interrogeais mon c ur et mes go ts: je ne me sentais aucun mouvement de pr f rence.<sup>5</sup>

If Adolphe is incapable of love himself, he is unaware of it. That he finds none who inspires this passion does not, however, concern him so much as the fact that he wants to be loved. This is his goal. He is confident that when it is once achieved, he will experience the exhilaration of his friend. Adolphe's solution to the

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

monotony and émotion vague which torment him would seem rather egotistical and would suggest that he is, in reality, an individual incapable of love. Now that he has become aware of his goal, he must pursue it. The following declaration brings to light still another characteristic in his strange personality.

Je formais mille projets; j'inventais mille moyens de conquête, avec cette fatuité sans expérience qui se croit sûre du succès parce qu'elle n'a rien essayé.<sup>6</sup>

Adolphe's self-portrait as a sensitive intellectual, guided by a belle âme and unable to find satisfaction among those who acknowledge and respect certain conventions, now divulges the energy of a "little Napoléon", a lover of danger who purposely plots a pursuit in conquest of a definite goal. He becomes a preview of Nietzsche's superman. He will pursue Ellénore, the mistress of a certain Comte de P\*\*\*, who is ten years older than himself and the mother of the Count's two illegitimate children. He does not love, but he wants to be loved. He will force Ellénore to love him, and this he will accomplish by seducing her. Ellénore's own attitude toward her position in society not only makes his scheme more dangerous and,

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

consequently, more exciting, but it also makes her a more attractive goal and a worthy conquest.

Ellénore, en un mot, était en lutte constante contre sa destinée... Cette opposition entre ses sentiments et la place qu'elle occupait dans le monde avait rendu son humeur fort inégale. Souvent elle était rêveuse et taciturne; quelquefois elle parlait avec impétuosité... Mais, par cela même, il y avait dans sa manière quelque chose de fougueux et d'inattendu qui la rendait plus piquante qu'elle n'aurait dû l'être naturellement. La bizarrerie de sa position suppléait en elle à la nouveauté des idées. On l'examinait avec intérêt et curiosité comme un bel orage.<sup>7</sup>

With the assistance of his unusual and strange charm Adolphe eagerly undertakes his seduction of Ellénore.

Quiconque aurait lu dans mon cœur, en son absence, m'aurait pris pour un séducteur froid et peu sensible; quiconque m'eût aperçu à ses côtés eût cru reconnaître en moi un amant novice, interdit et passionné.<sup>8</sup>

When his plan fails to proceed as rapidly as he has anticipated, Adolphe becomes anxious and impatient. His vanity cannot survive a rebuff. He must succeed. To assure this success he embraces a new device. He writes Ellénore threatening suicide.

"Si vous ne me promettez pas, lui dis-je en la conduisant, de me recevoir demain chez vous à onze heures, je pars à l'instant, j'abandonne mon pays, ma famille et mon père, je romps tous mes liens, j'abjure tous mes devoirs et je vais, n'importe où, finir au plus tôt une vie que vous vous plaisez à empoisonner. --Adolphe!"<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 52, 54.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

Ellénore now must abandon her struggle and admit her love for Adolphe. He relates his final success in these few words: "Elle se donna enfin tout entière."<sup>10</sup> Not long after, however, he confesses: "Ellénore était sans doute un vif plaisir dans mon existence, mais elle n'était plus un but: elle était devenue un lien."<sup>11</sup> With this confession Adolphe's story reaches the end of the first stage. Believing that victory in this undertaking would bring triumph and happiness, he has initiated and executed his plan to conquer and seduce Ellénore. He has pursued and attained his goal only to find that he does not, after all, really want to be loved, for now his goal, Ellénore's love for him, has become a bond.

The second and third stages of the story, the period of disenchantment resulting in the desired but unexpected break with Ellénore, disclose Adolphe's remorse. This remorse does not express his regret for having deceived Ellénore; to the contrary, he regrets the bond that ties him. His disillusioning experience has in no way altered his personality. With the same intense vitality with which he planned the conquest and seduction, he now considers, analyzes, and plans the breaking of this bond. Although

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 86.    <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

his illusions about his feelings for Ellénore have vanished, he is unable to make up his mind to leave her. Realizing that he soon must return home, he promises himself that he will use this opportunity to end the affair. When the time arrives, he postpones his return for six months. This delay is the source of a breach between Ellénore and the Count, and she decides to sacrifice her children to follow Adolphe. He cannot bring himself to prevent her.

On vit dans ma conduite celle d'un séducteur, d'un ingrat qui avait violé l'hospitalité, et sacrifié, pour contenter une fantaisie momentanée, le repos de deux personnes, dont il aurait dû respecter l'une et ménager l'autre.<sup>12</sup>

Finally Adolphe departs for his home, promising Ellénore that he will return after a brief stay. When his stay exceeds brevity, she follows him to his native town. Having discovered that his father is on the verge of ordering her expulsion and remembering the sacrifices that she has made for him, out of generosity and pity he runs away with her first to Bohemia, then to Warsaw. The bond becomes more and more difficult for Adolphe to bear, but he still hesitates to break it in spite of letters from his father to the effect that:

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

...l'on ne gagne rien à prolonger une situation dont on rougit. Vous consommez inutilement les plus belles années de votre jeunesse, et cette perte est irréparable.<sup>13</sup>

Adolphe recognizes the truth in the words of his father, but aware that the world his father proposes is incompatible with his, he can only repeat to himself the thought he confesses in his story: "Je n'étais qu'un homme faible, reconnaissant et dominé; je n'étais soutenu par aucune impulsion qui partît du coeur."<sup>14</sup> And as if in explanation, he adds:

Il y a dans les liaisons qui se prolongent quelque chose de si profond! Elles deviennent à notre insu une partie si intime de notre existence! Nous formons de loin, avec calme, la résolution de les rompre, nous croyons attendre avec impatience l'époque de l'exécuter; mais quand ce moment arrive, il nous remplit de terreur; et telle est la bizarrerie de notre coeur misérable, que nous quittons avec un déchirement horrible ceux près de qui nous demeurions sans plaisir.<sup>15</sup>

The friction between Adolphe and Ellénore grows until finally she learns that he is plotting to leave her. She sees the letter which he has written to Baron de T\*\*\*, a close friend and associate of his father, announcing his plan to break the bond at once. This shock precipitates her death. The bond is broken.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 132.    <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 111.    <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 119.



Je sentis le dernier lien se rompre, et l'affreuse réalité se placer à jamais entre elle et moi. Combien elle me pesait, cette liberté que j'avais tant regrettée! Combien elle manquait à mon coeur, cette dépendance qui m'avait révolté souvent! Naguère, toutes mes actions avaient un but; j'étais sûr, par chacune d'elles, d'épargner une peine ou de causer un plaisir. Je m'en plaignais alors: j'étais impatienté qu'un oeil ami observât mes démarches, que le bonheur d'un autre y fût attaché. Personne maintenant ne les observait; elles n'intéressaient personne; nul ne me disputait mon temps ni mes heures; aucune voix ne me rappelait quand je sortais. J'étais libre, en effet, je n'étais plus aimé: j'étais étranger pour tout le monde.<sup>16</sup>

To understand Adolphe completely, one must have a complete understanding of his creator, Benjamin Constant. Although he firmly denied it in public, failing to deceive his friends, Constant had written in his Journal Intime: "Je vais commencer un roman qui sera mon histoire." Adolphe is an autobiographical novel; however, it possesses a quality seldom discovered in others of the same nature. Constant has so successfully combined fact and art that, while they exist separately and distinctly, they appear the same unless diligently sought.

Just as Constant's intimate friends were revolted by the character of Adolphe on hearing his novel read aloud to them prior to its publication in 1816, the public was revolted with the character of Benjamin Constant. Be-

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

cause of his unconventional attitude toward life, it never gave him its full confidence and respect. Like Adolphe he possessed a restless soul avid for pleasures and sensations, and this soul apparently was no easier to satisfy. A decided individualist himself, he defended the individual against the state. He favored a government strong enough to protect the individual, but limited to the degree that it might not persecute him. He greatly admired the United States.

This individualism took various forms, and among these was his taste for gambling. At the early age of twelve he had given the idea some thought as is shown in his letter to his grandmother.

... Savez-vous, ma chère grand'mère, que je vais dans le monde deux fois par semaine? J'ai un bel habit, une épée, un chapeau sous le bras, une main sur la poitrine, l'autre sur la hanche. Je vois, j'écoute! Jusqu'à ce moment, je n'envie pas les plaisirs du grand monde. Ils ont tous l'air de ne pas l'aimer beaucoup. Cependant le jeu et l'or que j'y vois rouler me causent quelque émotion; je voudrais en gagner pour mille besoins que l'on a le tort de traiter de fantaisies. ...<sup>17</sup>

This letter also reveals other attitudes on the part of Constant not unlike those displayed by his hero. A singular mixture of egoism and sensibilité, he had an

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<sup>17</sup> André Le Breton, Le Roman Français au XIX<sup>e</sup> Siècle, (Boivin et Cie, Éditeurs, Paris, [n.d.]), p. 198.

ardent and versatile imagination. Not only was he an incorrigible gambler and a duellist, but a passionate lover who moved rapidly from one affair to another. Paul Bourget has spoken of "cette coexistence, dans une même âme, de la lucidité d'esprit la plus inefficace et du pire désordre sensuel ou sentimental."<sup>18</sup> Constant and Adolphe meet this definition.

In the novel itself the author has not failed to recognize this series of affairs, since it would seem that Ellénore is not just one, but a composite of his mistresses—Madame Johannot, Mrs. Trevor, Madame de Staël, Anna Lindsay, Madame Récamier, and even his wives, Wilhelmina von Crama and Charlotte von Hardenberg. Of these his primary attention has been devoted to Madame de Staël and his unfortunate experience with her. Qualities of the others have been added unsuccessfully in an attempt to conceal her identity. Mr. Martin Turnell quotes Mr. Harold Nicolson's argument that "Constant disguised the emotional conflict between himself and Madame de Staël (which is the essential theme of Adolphe) by setting his story within the external frame-

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<sup>18</sup>Paul Bourget, Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine, (Plon-Nourrit et Cie, Paris, 1926), Tome I, p. 27.

work of his affair with Anna Lindsay.<sup>19</sup> Other scholars contend that Ellénore is Anna Lindsay and no other. From the available information concerning Constant's numerous affairs, it would appear that Mr. Nicolson's theory is the most probable.

Constant's liaison with Madame Johannot, while extremely brief, made an indelible impression on him. At the age of forty-four he reminisces in his Cahier rouge that "...I still feel grateful to her for the happiness that she brought me when I was eighteen."<sup>20</sup> Equally brief, but uneventful, was his next affair with Mrs. Trevor, the wife of a British diplomat.

Among the habitual visitors in the home of Madame de Staël, Constant did not delay in becoming her lover. This affair lasted seven years. On the occasion of her banishment by Napoleón, he accompanied her to Weimar, Germany. The letter from Zacharias Werner, a member of her court, to his friend Schneffer in which he states that Madame de Staël was "une reine, et tous les hommes d'intelligence qui vivent dans son cercle ne peuvent en sortir,

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<sup>19</sup>Martin Turnell, The Novel in France, (New Directions, New York; Western Printing Services, Ltd., Bristol, Great Britain, 1951), p. 92.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

car elle les y retient par une sorte de magie"<sup>21</sup> would explain Constant's decision to leave with her. This magic, however, lost its force or, more likely, became too forceful. In 1811 the breach occurred. Whether this was due to her refusal to marry him if it necessitated dropping her famous name, as speculated by some, or due to Constant's political activities and rumoured passion for Madame Récamier, as advanced by others, is not established. It is acknowledged, however, that Madame de Staël was the dominant partner in this liaison, just as Ellénore is portrayed in her affair with Adolphe.

The way in which Constant modified her character--in so far as he did draw on her--is interesting. He may have felt that in real life Mme de Staël was the dominant partner in the relationship and that it was she who was responsible for the waste of his great gifts. In the novel he takes his revenge. Ellénore is endowed only with the 'esprit ordinaire' which belonged in life to Anna Lindsay, and after intolerable suffering on both sides, it is Adolphe who destroys her though he ruins himself in the process.<sup>22</sup>

Although the character of Ellénore remains a source of controversy, there is unanimous agreement on the secondary characters. Adolphe's father, the woman "dont l'esprit...

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<sup>21</sup>Sainte-Beuve, Portraits de Femmes, (Librairie Garnier Frères, Paris, 1845), p. 147.

<sup>22</sup>Turnell, op. cit., p. 107.

avait commencé à développer le mien"<sup>23</sup> when he was only seventeen, and Ellénore's friend who intervenes in an attempt to revive the awkward relationship are all identified by M. de Sismondi, a member of Madame de Staël's court, whose letter of September 9, 1816 to la comtesse d'Albany is quoted by Sainte-Beuve in his Causeries du Lundi.

Le père de Benjamin était exactement tel qu'il l'a dépeint. La femme âgée avec laquelle il a vécu dans sa jeunesse, qu'il a beaucoup aimée, et qu'il a vu mourir, est une madame de Charrière, auteur de quelques jolis romans. L'amie officieuse qui, prétendant le réconcilier avec Ellénore, les brouille davantage, est madame Récamier.<sup>24</sup>

Although Constant's dissipated life plus the striking similarity between personalities and situations in this life and those in the novel are sufficient to establish his identity with that of Adolphe, there are still other incidents that strengthen this confirmation. Among these is Adolphe's final device in his attempt to conquer Ellénore, for Constant himself "had frequently taken a hint from Werther, and threatened suicide with the best

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<sup>23</sup>Constant, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>24</sup>An excerpt from Causeries du Lundi serves as introduction to the edition of Adolphe cited on page 11.

possible results."<sup>25</sup>

The most striking parallel of all between the two is divulged in Adolphe's final words: "J'étais étranger pour tout le monde."<sup>26</sup> As in the case of Adolphe, Constant's need of liberty became his goal in life, but once he obtained this liberty there no longer existed any need for pursuit, and helpless, he too became an "outsider".

Ellénore's death causes Adolphe no grief, for he has never loved her. Nor does he regret that he has been the cause of her death. In fact, he never gives this thought consideration. His sole preoccupation is with his newly acquired freedom and how it affects him. Once again he fails to find the happiness he seeks. But Adolphe, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, being incapable of love, is incapable of grief. "Beyond good and evil", he is beyond regret. His destiny is guided, as it has always been, only by those emotions peculiar to his Rousseauian belle âme forever seeking the exhilaration and satisfaction which do not exist in the world around

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<sup>25</sup>George Saintsbury, Essays on French Novelists, (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1891), p. 151.

<sup>26</sup>Constant, op. cit., p. 222.

him. He must continue, as he has always continued, an "étranger pour tout le monde".

Ye look aloft when ye long for exaltation; and I look downward because I am exalted.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Nietzsche, op. cit., p. 56.



## CHAPTER II

### JULIEN SOREL AND FABRICE DEL DONGO

In the succession of amoral characters "beyond good and evil" Stendhal's Julien Sorel of Le Rouge et Le Noir and Fabrice del Dongo of La Chartreuse de Parme are perhaps the most fascinating. Their creator's private diary, his Journal which leaves few questions unanswered, and prolific correspondence tolerate no doubt that Julien and Fabrice are Stendhal himself. Any analysis of one, therefore, must be an analysis of the three. The opinions and feelings of the author which do not exist in the character of one are readily supplied in that of the other, thereby producing a thorough study.

Although the episodes in the life of Julien parallel more closely Stendhal's own life, the impressions and some of the experiences of the novelist in Italy are relived

through Fabrice. The lives of Julien and Stendhal both have their beginnings in a small provincial town. Julien's youth is spent in the fictitious Verrières, a town in many ways not unlike Stendhal's Grenoble. In his respective town each grows up with the memory of a dead mother almost passionately loved, and with an intense hatred for an unfeeling and unsympathetic father. Fabrice, on the other hand, is born in Italy, but there is the same hatred for the man who serves him as father. Fabrice would rather believe that he is the illegitimate son of his mother and the French officer who stayed in their home in 1796. The betrayal of his brother convinces him that this is true. Stendhal first became acquainted with Italy when he was posted in Milan during Napoléon's second Italian Campaign and returns to live there from 1814 to 1821. In general, however, the characteristics displayed by the two young men are the same.

Like Constant's Adolphe they have inherited Rousseau's belle âme. They are, consequently, victims of a most intense sensibilité at odds with incompatible circumstances. One reality in life wholly concerns them and this reality is themselves. As such victims they merely mirror the sentiments of their creator. These are expressed in his Journal on February 11, 1805:

I've known for a long time that I'm overly sensitive, that the life I lead has a thousand asperities which torture me; these asperities will be removed by an income of 10,000 francs. A fortune isn't necessary to me as it is (in the same way) to another, and it's more necessary because of my excessive delicacy--a delicacy that is lifted to the height of happiness or dropped to the depth of despair by the inflection of a word or a scarcely noticed gesture. I hide that under my hussar's cloak.<sup>1</sup>

All his life Stendhal was occupied with the study of the "lofty soul" in respect to his own feelings. On March 29, 1805, he entered the following in his Journal:

My genius for the lofty emotional, based on the lofty philosophy of...Rousseau's Héloïse... has possessed me utterly up till now.<sup>2</sup>

Stendhal's unlimited admiration for La Nouvelle Héloïse did not surpass, nevertheless, his keen interest in Choderlos de Laclos' Les Liaisons Dangereuses in which love as a frivolous game of pleasure exists in direct contrast with Rousseau's love experienced through lofty emotions. Just as he has absorbed this ideal of the "lofty soul" from one, he has fashioned his ideal of "energy" from that displayed by the character Valmont in the novel of the other. Stendhal's theory of energy is based on a definite

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Sage (ed. and trans.), The Private Diaries of Stendhal (Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City, New York, 1954), p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

logic and scientific analysis.

It is the immediate expression of an individual soul, that quality which proceeds directly from his own being without regard for others. Thus, it's the power to create one's own destiny; it is force of character, the reservoir of all passions, and the superior principle of all life.<sup>3</sup>

Julien and Fabrice are a combination of the "lofty soul" and "energy", and it is the combination that makes their chasse au bonheur necessary.

This same "energy" which Nietzsche later gives Zarathustra is not only possessed by Julien, Fabrice, and Stendhal, but is admired by them all in Napoléon. He symbolizes the truth in this theory. Julien worships him as a hero, studies his portrait diligently, and plans the campaigns of his own ambitious schemes in imitation of him:

Le portrait de Napoléon, se disait-il en hochant la tête, trouvé caché chez un homme qui fait profession d'une telle haine pour l'usurpateur! trouvé par M. de Rênal, tellement ultra et tellement irrité! et, pour comble d'imprudenc, sur le carton blanc, derrière le portrait, des lignes écrites de ma main! et qui ne peuvent laisser aucun doute sur l'excès de mon admiration!<sup>4</sup>

Fabrice's admiration is such that he does not hesi-

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<sup>3</sup>William H. Fineshriber, Jr., Stendhal--The Romantic Rationalist (Princeton University Press, 1932), p. 44.

<sup>4</sup>Stendhal, Le Rouge et Le Noir (Éditions du Dauphin, Paris, 1953), p. 31.

tate to abandon his home and country to join Napoléon at Waterloo, to get as close to the great man as he possibly can. To accomplish this, he will risk death and imprisonment.

--Je pars, lui dit-il, je vais rejoindre l'empereur, qui est aussi roi d'Italie; il avait tant d'amitié pour ton mari! Je passe par la Suisse. Cette nuit, à Menagio, mon ami Vasi, le marchand de baromètres, m'a donné son passeport; maintenant donne-moi quelques napoléons, car je n'en ai que deux à moi; mais s'il faut j'irai à pied.<sup>5</sup>

On August 10, 1840, Stendhal wrote the fourteen-year-old Eugénie de Montijo, the future Empress Eugénie, that:

Quant à moi, je rends grâces à Dieu d'être entré, avec mes pistolets soigneusement chargés, et amorcés, à Berlin, le 26 octobre 1806. Napoléon prit, pour y entrer, le grand uniforme de général de division. C'est peut-être la seule fois que je lui ai vu. Il marchait à vingt pas en avant des soldats; la foule silencieuse n'était qu'à deux pas de son cheval; on pouvait lui tirer des coups de fusil de toutes les fenêtres.<sup>6</sup>

Again like Constant's Adolphe all three have a goal. Their ultimate goal, of course, is happiness; but to attain this they must have another goal which will be synonymous

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<sup>5</sup>Stendhal, La Chartreuse de Parme (Éditions du Dauphin, Paris, 1953), p. 31.

<sup>6</sup>Stendhal, Correspondance, Établissement du texte et préface par Henri Martineau (Le Divin, Paris, 1933-34), Tome X, p. 244.

with the ultimate. Adolphe believed that being loved would produce this happiness. With Julien, Fabrice, and Stendhal the goal is, instead, la gloire which can be attained only through ambition in a world hostile to sensitive souls, a world composed of base and mediocre souls. On December 15, 1803, Stendhal wrote his friend Edouard Mounier:

Il me semblait que, dans l'ordre actuel de la société, les âmes élevées doivent être presque toujours malheureuses, et d'autant plus malheureuses qu'elles méprisent l'obstacle qui s'oppose à leur félicité.<sup>7</sup>

Earlier he had written in his Journal:

Let us work, for work is the father of pleasure, but let us never fret. Let us reflect sanely before deciding our course; once our decision is taken, we ought never to change our minds. With a steadfast heart, anything can be attained. Give us talent; the day will come when I'll regret the time I've wasted.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, having reached the conclusion that happiness is not within the power of his conception of love, Stendhal decides to be in love with la gloire, "a mistress I'm not likely to desert."<sup>9</sup>

Although Julien is tempted to pursue a military life,

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., Tome I, p. 160.

<sup>8</sup>Sage, op. cit., p. 11.      <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

for glory he selects "le noir" rather than "le rouge" because it offers him the better means to success. His call to enter the Church is none other than a calculating ambition. Actually he detests the Church, but since his world contains only the dupers and the duped, he must resort to hypocrisy, not because he is a hypocrite, but because his defiance so dictates. He feels the same disdain so evident in the words written by Stendhal in his diary on July 1, 1804:

At seven this morning, I went to Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin to attend prayers for M. Noël Daru. I noticed the base and occasionally malevolent physiognomy of the priests; those with the best faces had a stupid appearance.<sup>10</sup>

Forced to conform to the dictates of the Church by his detestable Aunt Séraphie when he was a child, Stendhal proudly recalls years later his reaction to the execution of two priests by "la Terreur de 93".

Voici un de mes grands torts: mon lecteur de 1880, éloigné de la fureur et du sérieux des partis, me prendra en grippe quand je lui avouerai que cette mort qui glaçait d'horreur mon grand-père, qui rendait Séraphie furibonde, qui redoublait le silence hautain et espagnol de ma tante Elisabeth, me fit plaisure. Voilà le grand mot écrit.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>11</sup>Stendhal, Vie de Henry Brulard, Nouvelle Édition établie et commentée par Henri Martineau (Le Divan, Paris, 1949), p. 188.

Fabrice first selects "le rouge" hoping to find glory at Napoléon's side in battle, but having had no more than a fleeting glimpse of the great man, too far from him on the field of battle even to be recognized, and forced to ask himself the question: "Ai-je réellement assisté à une bataille?"<sup>12</sup> he returns to Parme to pursue glory in "le noir". Later Fabrice transfers his goal from la gloire to l'amour, but "le noir" continues to serve him in his attempt to reach happiness.

Both Julien and Fabrice realize that if they are to dupe society they must work and work diligently. Julien impresses the bourgeoisie by invading the inner circle of the aristocracy through his ability to quote the New Testament in Latin and from memory. He even enters the seminary to further his religious career. Fabrice captivates his admiring followers with his moving sermons. Both pursue their goals through intelligence and talent just as Stendhal courted Parisian society with his keen wit and knowledge of the arts in his attempt to secure a political position, and thus glory.

It is important to note here that their contempt for society is not contempt for one class alone. They are

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<sup>12</sup>Stendhal, La Chartreuse de Parme, p. 65.



compelled to impress the bourgeoisie, but they have no more respect for the aristocracy they deceive. They are "outsiders" and they are aware of it constantly. They determine their actions by the relation of these to their own happiness in an effort to preserve their own individualities. They dare to deceive. This is their duty to themselves and a necessary justification of their egos. No social morality, therefore, exists for them.

This reasoning, in turn, justifies Julien's seduction of Madame de Rênal and Mathilde. He seduces them not for sexual satisfaction, but for the enhancement of his ego. If he fails, his ego and pride both must suffer. Also they are a challenge to him. By overcoming their virtues, he overpowers the society he detests. This creates in him a sense of power and superiority above all. He never really loves them, for like Adolphe he is incapable of love. If he believes momentarily that he is in love with them, this is because he, like Stendhal, is seeking the ideal mistress, a counterpart of Rousseau's Julie. He may at first believe that he has found her, but he soon is aware of his mistake. When disillusion follows possession, he reawakens and swerves no farther from his course. Once again his ambition is the important sentiment, and he feels closer to the realization of his goal

for having fulfilled his duty.

This same attitude is revealed by Stendhal throughout his diary. His primary object in undertaking the seduction of a woman is success. This concerns him far more than the pleasure involved. Like Julien he forms intricate plans in advance of his attempt, weighing his good points against those not so good. The idea of failure is detestable to him, and his mood is one of extreme melancholy and bitterness on the occasions that he does fail.

Stendhal has written in his diary under the date December 12, 1801:

To inspire in a woman a high opinion of one's learning is a sure means of gaining one's end. Heroes have intervals of fear, poltroons moments of bravery, and virtuous women moments of weakness. It's a great art to be capable of discerning and benefiting from these moments.<sup>13</sup>

Julien and Fabrice are both endowed with this capability. The result of the former's alertness is evident in the following:

Le lendemain on le réveilla à cinq heures; et, ce qui eût été cruel pour Mme de Rênal si elle l'eût su, à peine lui donna-t-il une pensée. Il avait fait son devoir, et un devoir héroïque. Rempli de bonheur par ce sentiment, il s'enferma

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<sup>13</sup>Sage, op. cit., p. 17.

à clef dans sa chambre, et se livra avec un plaisir tout nouveau à la lecture des exploits de son héros.<sup>14</sup>

Fabrice is equally alert when he sees that Clélia fears he has eaten the poisoned meal served him in prison.

Elle se précipita sur la table, la renversa; et saisissant le bras de Fabrice, lui dit:

--As-tu mangé?

Ce tutoiement ravit Fabrice. Dans son trouble Clélia oubliait pour la première fois la retenue féminine et laissait voir son amour.

Fabrice allait commencer ce fatal repas; il la prit dans ses bras et la couvrit de baisers. Ce dîner était empoisonné, pensa-t-il: si je lui dis que je n'y ai pas touché, la religion reprend ses droits et Clélia s'enfuit. Si elle me regarde au contraire comme un mourant, j'obtiendrai d'elle qu'elle ne me quitte point. Elle désire trouver un moyen de rompre son exécrable mariage, le hasard nous le présente: les geôliers vont s'assembler, ils enfonceront la porte, et voici une esclandre telle que peut-être le marquis Crescenzi en sera effrayé, et le mariage rompu.

Pendant l'instant de silence occupé par ces réflexions, Fabrice sentit déjà que Clélia cherchait à se dégager de ses embrassements.

--Je ne sens point encore de douleurs, lui dit-il, mais bientôt elles me renverseront à tes pieds; aide-moi à mourir.

--O mon unique ami! lui dit-elle, je mourrai avec toi. Elle le serra dans ses bras comme par un mouvement convulsif.

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<sup>14</sup>Stendhal, Le Rouge et Le Noir, p. 53.

Elle était si belle, à demi vêtue et dans cet état d'extrême passion, que Fabrice ne put résister à un mouvement presque involontaire. Aucune résistance ne fut opposée.

Dans l'enthousiasme de passion et de générosité qui suit un bonheur extrême, il lui dit étourdiment:

—Il ne faut pas qu'un indigne mensonge vienne souiller les premiers instants de notre bonheur: sans ton courage je ne serais plus qu'un cadavre ou je me débattrais contre d'atroces douleurs, mais j'allais commencer à dîner lorsque tu es entrée, et je n'ai point touché à ces plats.<sup>15</sup>

Although Stendhal has endowed Julien and Fabrice with the ability to benefit from these moments as well as to discern them, he himself was not always as fortunate. When he was "all soul", he frequently was overcome by an extreme bashfulness. Thinking of his future mistress, Mélanie Guilbert, he writes the following in his Journal on March 11, 1805:

I'm afraid I'm too unattractive to be loved by her. I'm afraid this fear gives me an awkward appearance; it must be conquered.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of his success, nevertheless, Julien does not entirely lack this shyness. Before Mathilde he experiences alternate feelings of humiliation and pride. Only by remembering that she is the daughter of M. de La

<sup>15</sup>Stendhal, La Chartreuse de Parme, p. 408.

<sup>16</sup>page, op. cit., p. 145.

Mole, his employer, is he able to carry out his duty. On the other hand, however, Julien does not seem to experience this difficulty with Madame de Rênal. Perhaps this is because she comes closer to the ideal mistress, to the counterpart of Julie. She certainly understands him better or she would not betray him by warning Mathilde's father and thus sacrificing her own reputation.

Stendhal apparently has given Mathilde the characteristics and sentiments of his mistress, Mélanie. Those that he discovered in his cousin's wife, Madame Pierre Daru, he has reserved for Madame de Rênal. The marked similarity between the following passages from Stendhal's Journal and Le Rouge et Le Noir would tend to justify this assumption. These lines were written in the diary covering a period of four days from May 31 to June 3, 1811.

The next day...she neither looked at me nor spoke to me;...she was a little embarrassed to know where to turn her eyes. My momentary disgrace and her slightly passionate look seemed to me to be visible to the others; and if Mme Dubignon isn't a voluntary confidante, she's undoubtedly an involuntary one.

When I went into the house, the children fell on me, and I told them a story; this story lasted at least half an hour. When I came back to the others, I found die Gräfin Palfy [Mme Daru] seated on the sofa...and the following night... my bashfulness no longer had an excuse for deferring. I thought of two or three forms of declaration.

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The path wasn't wide enough for me to walk beside the...ladies, which prevented me from looking at her as much as I would have liked to, but I saw...that there seemed to be something or other of the tender emotion of happiness...She had the happy look of love...<sup>17</sup>

Since Madame Daru is the only woman among Stendhal's various pursuits whose children or confidante are ever mentioned in the diary, the lines from the novel have a further significance. Even the name of Madame de Rênal's confidante is similar to that of Madame Daru's intimate friend.

Ses regards, le lendemain, quand il revit Mme de Rênal, étaient singuliers; il l'observait comme un ennemi avec lequel il va falloir se battre. Ces regards, si différents de ceux de la veille, firent perdre la tête à Mme de Rênal; elle avait été bonne pour lui, et il paraissait fâché. Elle ne pouvait détacher ses regards des siens.

La présence de Mme Derville permettait à Julien de moins parler et de s'occuper davantage de ce qu'il avait dans la tête...

Il abrégéa beaucoup les leçons des enfants, et ensuite, quand la présence de Madame de Rênal vint le rappeler tout à fait aux soins de sa gloire, il décida qu'il fallait absolument qu'elle permît ce soir-là que sa main restât dans la sienne...

...Les deux amies se promenèrent fort tard. Tout ce qu'elles faisaient ce soir-là semblait singulier à Julien. Elles jouissaient de ce temps, qui, pour certaines âmes délicates, semble

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 375-79.

augmenter le plaisir d'aimer.<sup>18</sup>

Stendhal's diary also reveals that when he is in Paris, he is a frequent visitor in the Daru home. Following his own rules, he openly seeks M. Daru's assistance in obtaining a political position, and secretly courts and attempts to seduce his wife. It is later due to Madame Daru that Stendhal does receive a political appointment.

That Fabrice transfers his goal from glory to love and for a while experiences the happiness he has been seeking would seem to suggest a character quite contrary to that of Stendhal. Interestingly, however, this confirms that Fabrice is Stendhal, and he is no less an amoral character "beyond good and evil" for it. It must be remembered that La Chartreuse de Parme is set in Italy, Stendhal's land of lands. Italy proves to him that his fondest and most beautiful dreams can be realized. Here beauty exists and happiness in society can be discovered. Of Italy Stendhal writes the following in his diary:

Italy is my real country, everything that reminds me of it touches my heart...I feel through every pore that this land is the home of the arts. I believe they hold the place in

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<sup>18</sup>Stendhal, Le Rouge et Le Noir, pp. 51-53.

the hearts of this people that vanity holds in those of the French...The Italian, being aware of the violent passions to which he may open the flood gates, is full of attention, and consequently, appears to be unfeeling in moments when we French, who are sure of not losing our heads, give ourselves up completely to our emotion, which thus is weaker and appears to be stronger.<sup>19</sup>

It is not so strange then that Fabrice finds, or believes he has found, the reincarnation of Rousseau's Julie in Italy. Clélia is a combination of the traits admired by Stendhal in Madame Daru and the ardent disposition of Angelina Pietragnua, his Milanese mistress. Nevertheless, there are two women in the life of Fabrice just as there are in that of Julien. In addition to Clélia, there is la duchesse Sanseverina who will sell her honor to further Fabrice's career and, like Mathilde, go to any extreme, even murder, to release the man she loves from prison. Until he meets Clélia, Fabrice wonders if he loves la duchesse or not; when he has met Clélia, he realizes that he never can. In spite of this, he continues to solicit her aid and willingly watches her destroy her own happiness for his sake. His ego is inflated knowing that he has caused her suffering just as Julien, awaiting trial for attempting to murder Madame de Rênal, enjoys refusing to

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<sup>19</sup>Sage, op. cit., pp. 351, 417, and 429.



see Mathilde, now disowned by her family and about to become the mother of his child.

There is still another similarity between Julien and Fabrice. They are both capable of killing. With the same eagerness that Julien shoots Madame de Rênal, Fabrice kills Giletti with a sword-thrust. They do not kill as innate murderers or scoundrels, but because of their "energy", an energy of emotion. Any action on their part must be the expression of a powerful feeling. It is Julien's duty to take his revenge by shooting Madame de Rênal while she is in the act of praying. He considers it an admirable action. Fabrice must kill Giletti because he represents an obstacle to his destiny. Besides, he is an unimportant member of the bourgeoisie. His death, therefore, will be no loss. That these actions reflect Stendhal's conception of energetic individualism is shown in the following words written in his Journal on November 14, 1804.

I must decide on the compass of a character before portraying it; i.e., a list of all the actions it is capable of doing.<sup>20</sup>

As it is true in the case of Adolphe, there is no

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

solution to the problems of Julien and Fabrice. When the story of each ends, and with each his life, the world is the same for them both, the same as it has always been. And they are the same; there has been no change in their attitudes. Both continue to be the slaves of their egos, both possess still the belle âme, and both pursue to the end la gloire with an energetic ambition. Julien will forfeit his life by delivering an insulting speech to the jury rather than acknowledge the existence of a social morality and thus secure freedom from a sympathetic court. He makes his decision when he sees the vulgar face of M. Valenod, one of the many persecutors in this world from whom he must hide his true feelings. He remains stubborn in his decision in spite of the forgiveness of Madame de Rênal and her efforts to obtain his release.

Fabrice, having caused his child's death by taking him away from Clélia, who wants to raise him in the pretense that he is her husband's son, brings about her death, and ultimately his own. After her death, he retires to the Chartreuse de Parme where he survives not more than a year. This world has nothing more to offer him.

Julien and Fabrice in their deaths as well as during their lives seem to ask the question so often asked by Stendhal: "que m'importent les autres?" The newspaper

story recorded by Stendhal in his diary on July 12, 1804, would seem to have special significance in connection with the fates of our amoral heroes "beyond good and evil".

Still another example of the Othello catastrophe in Italy, near Genoa. A jealous lover kills his mistress, fifteen years old and of a rare beauty; flees, writes two letters (invaluable testimonials), returns to the body of his mistress, which was in her father's oratory, about midnight and there shoots himself dead with a pistol, the same way that he killed her. Seek the truth in this fact. That's the sort of thing that makes me realize more and more that mellow Italy is the land where people feel the most deeply, the land of poets.<sup>21</sup>

Ironically Stendhal has dedicated La Chartreuse de Parme "TO THE HAPPY FEW". This dedication is the real key to the complicated personalities of Julien, Fabrice, and Stendhal. In this is revealed Rousseau's belle âme, Valmont's "energy", Zarathustra's quest for power, and the resulting ambition which will spur on la chasse au bonheur. Stendhal has summarized it himself in his diary on January 15, 1805:

You say to yourself, "I deserved a better destiny than the one I have, fate has been unjust to me." I've said that to myself a thousand times, especially when the places where I was, or the suave air of spring in mid-winter, or the sound of a street organ, made me better see this divine happiness I had imagined.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

This melancholy state, it seems to me, can be caused only by an ardent imagination. What caused it in me, I believe, was that I thought I'd find in real life the happiness I pictured to myself... as a child... This explanation, which is difficult for petty souls, is dull for them. The loftier one's soul is, the better one will understand it, the less unfeeling it will appear.<sup>22</sup>

Julien Sorel and Fabrice del Dongo will have their successors, but the reader will never again share confidences and become an accomplice to such an extent.

So must thou go again into solitude:  
for thou shalt yet become mellow.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 102-103.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, p. 157.

## CHAPTER III

### EUGÈNE DE RASTIGNAC

Among the numerous amoral characters who appear and reappear throughout Honoré de Balzac's Comédie Humaine, Eugène de Rastignac is distinct. Like his predecessors-- Adolphe, Julien and Fabrice--he becomes the master of his own morality and, as a result, his own destiny. He is not a Vautrin who, proud of his acknowledged evil, criminally revolts against society and its laws; nor is he a Rubempré who, lustful, wants money because money can buy women. Rastignac is neither criminal nor scoundrel, but he too has a goal which he will pursue with equal zest. In pursuit of this goal he will defy the existing moral laws, not because he feels that such defiance is advantageous to him, but because they do not exist for him. Rastignac, therefore, is also "beyond good and evil". Having a goal is the only characteristic he shares with Vautrin and

Rubempré, and his uniqueness, or the secret to his personality, rests in this goal. Superior to both, bitter retaliation and shallow lust never could nor will be sufficient to satisfy his demands for happiness.

Applying a method not unlike that of Adolphe and Julien, Rastignac seeks happiness through the enhancement of his own sensitive ego and the quest for individual power. As his career progresses, however, power becomes more and more his predominant concern, while his sensitive nature, the result of a "lofty soul" brought to Paris by him as a naive young man, is forced into the background. Although the "lofty soul" inevitably must yield outwardly, it continues to exist within, and is actually responsible for the same quest for power which overshadows it. Therefore, the influence of Rousseau obviously has not been denied Balzac. Just as Stendhal did before him, he greatly admired La Nouvelle Héloïse. Balzac's description of Rastignac, first introduced to the reader in Le Père Goriot, somewhat suggests this influence.

Eugène de Rastignac, ainsi se nommait-il, était un de ces jeunes gens façonnés au travail par le malheur, qui comprennent dès le jeune âge les espérances que leurs parents placent en eux, et qui se préparent une belle destinée en calculant déjà la portée de leurs études et les adaptant par avance au mouvement futur de la société, pour être les premiers à la pressurer... Eugène de Rastignac avait un visage tout méridional, le teint

blanc, des cheveux noirs, des yeux bleus. Sa tournure, ses manières, sa pose habituelle dénotaient le fils d'une famille noble, où l'éducation première n'avait comporté que des traditions de bon goût. S'il était ménager de ses habits, si les jours ordinaires il achevait d'user les vêtements de l'an passé, néanmoins il pouvait sortir quelquefois mis comme l'est un jeune homme élégant. Ordinairement il portait une vieille redingote, un mauvais gilet, la méchante cravate noire, flétrie, mal nouée de l'étudiant, un pantalon à l'avenant et des bottes ressemelées... Eugène de Rastignac était revenu dans une disposition d'esprit que doivent avoir connue les jeunes gens supérieurs, ou ceux auxquels une position difficile communique momentanément les qualités des hommes d'élite.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to possessing the same belle âme and sensibilité revealed in Adolphe, Julien, and Fabrice, Rastignac is driven by an "energy" similar to that of his predecessors. It is not the energy created by the desire for new and different thrills, nor is it that displayed by Valmont in Les Liaisons Dangereuses. It is, instead, the energy recognized in Balzac's own creative drive, and it will, like that of Julien, be exposed in selfish ambition. Although Balzac has given Rastignac this same energy so evident in his own ambition for greater things, he also, like Stendhal, admired this characteristic, as he did others, in Napoléon. On a statuette of the Emperor, cherished among

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<sup>1</sup>H. de Balzac, Le Père Goriot, (Bibliothèque Larousse, Paris, 1907), pp. 11, 15, and 29.

his possessions, Balzac inscribed: "Ce qu'il a commencé par l'épée, je l'acheverai par la plume."<sup>2</sup> Consequently, Rastignac has become another "little Napoléon".

Rastignac's method of enhancing his ego and obtaining power in the search for happiness already has been mentioned as comparable to that of Adolphe and Julien. More specifically, however, he comes closer to duplicating the latter. As Julien did before him, he will endeavor to penetrate the aristocracy of the faubourg Saint-Germain, and his intelligence and delicate charm will aid him in his attempt. Also like Julien

..,il remarqua combien les femmes ont d'influence sur la vie sociale et avisa soudain à se lancer dans le monde, afin d'y conquérir des protectrices: devaient-elles manquer à un jeune homme ardent et spirituel, dont l'esprit et l'ardeur étaient rehaussés par une tournure élégante et par une sorte de beauté nerveuse à laquelle les femmes se laissent prendre volontiers?<sup>3</sup>

Because he is more patient and less daring than Julien, his method will be more rewarding. That he ultimately finds happiness is questionable.

The recognition of Rastignac as an amoral character "beyond good and evil" is important in that the reader,

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<sup>2</sup>Albert Thibaudet, Histoire de la Littérature Française (Librairie Stock, Delamain et Boutelleau, Paris, 1936), p. 224.

<sup>3</sup>H. de Balzac, op. cit., p. 30.



like Balzac, is able to observe his complete development. Of the five young men under consideration he is the only one who does not share his inner thoughts. The reader must listen carefully to his words and watch closely his actions. Although the advantage of being a conspirator afforded the reader by Adolphe and Julien is here denied, this objective study of the protagonist shows more clearly that he cannot avoid or be separated from the social background in which he exists. The least movement he makes must affect the others around him.

Eugène de Rastignac comes to Paris in 1819 to study law, an advantage made possible for him by his provincial family. His father, mother, aunt, brothers and sisters all make extreme sacrifices that he may have a room in Madame Vauquer's boardinghouse and sufficient clothes. It is not long, however, before Rastignac finds that poverty is the only trait he has in common with his fellow boarders. Because he feels far superior to them in every other respect and is miserable among them, he decides that his happiness can exist only among those dwellers of the elegant fau-  
bourg Saint-Germain which he intends to invade when the first opportunity presents itself.

This opportunity unexpectedly arrives in the form of Goriot's daughter, Madame de Restaud. Relying on his

distant relationship to the influential Madame la vicomtesse de Beauséant, he goes forth to inaugurate his recently determined plan.

Eugène marchait avec mille précautions pour ne se point crotter; mais il marchait en pensant à ce qu'il dirait à Mme de Restaud, il s'approvisionnait d'esprit, il inventait les réparties d'une conversation imaginaire, il préparait ses mots fins, ses phrases à la Talleyrand, en supposant de petites circonstances favorables à la déclaration sur laquelle il fondait son avenir.<sup>4</sup>

But Madame de Restaud already has a lover, and is not in the least interested in Rastignac. Later the reader learns to what extent she is really involved with this man. Nevertheless, Rastignac is not long discouraged. Having seen the interior of Madame de Restaud's home, "le démon du luxe le mordit au coeur, la fièvre du gain le prit, la soif de l'or lui sécha la gorge."<sup>5</sup> Now he resolves to seek the advice of Madame de Beauséant as to how he can best become a part of that grandeur. Perhaps she can introduce him to a wealthy young lady, elegant and beautiful, who is in need of a lover. Madame de Beauséant is flattered because he seeks her assistance and willingly gives him the advice sought.

...traitez ce monde comme il le mérite. Vous voulez parvenir, je vous aiderai. Vous sonderez

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 49.    <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

combien est profonde la corruption féminine, vous toiserez la largeur de la misérable vanité des hommes... Plus froidement vous calculerez, plus avant vous irez. Frappez sans pitié, vous serez craint. N'acceptez les hommes et les femmes que comme des chevaux de poste que vous laisserez crever à chaque relais, vous arriverez ainsi au faite de vos désirs... que le père Goriot vous introduise près de Mme Delphine de Nucingen. La belle Mme de Nucingen sera pour vous une enseignne. Soyez l'homme qu'elle distingue, les femmes raffoleront de vous... Vous aurez des succès. A Paris, le succès est tout, c'est la clef du pouvoir.<sup>6</sup>

Rastignac contemplates profoundly these words of his relative which seem to echo the same thoughts he himself has had earlier. He has chosen the right course, but it is absolutely necessary that he succeed in winning the interest of Madame de Nucingen. This time he must not fail. The idea of becoming her lover is especially appealing for several reasons. The first of these is in accord with his quest for power. Madame de Nucingen's husband possesses a large fortune. Rastignac agrees with Vautrin that "la fortune est la vertu!"<sup>7</sup> And in a whisper he speculates: "Si Mme de Nucingen s'intéresse à moi, je lui apprendrai à gouverner son mari. Ce mari fait des affaires d'or, il pourra m'aider à ramasser tout d'un coup une fortune."<sup>8</sup> But equally important to him as his quest for

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 67-71.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 72. <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

power is his ego. It pleases him to know that Madame de Nucingen is also Goriot's daughter. To gain his recognition in society through her will be just retaliation for the treatment he has received from Madame de Restaud. Since Madame de Restaud prides herself in the fact that she is included among the intimate friends of Madame de Beauséant, whereas her sister is not, Rastignac eagerly anticipates the moment when he will introduce Madame de Nucingen to his relative. This should impress Madame de Restaud.

To gain his introduction to Delphine, Rastignac now must befriend Old Goriot whom he has scorned. He wastes no time in undertaking this enterprise, nor does he deceive the other boarders at Madame Vauquer's. But the introduction alone will not suffice. To assure success, he must have money for new clothes and for hiring a coach. In his selfish desperation he writes his mother and sisters asking them to endeavor to send it to him. Realizing that the amount he demands does not exist, he asks his mother to sell some of her jewels and to encourage his aunt to do the same. To prevent a refusal, he insists that it is a matter of life and death pertinent to the future happiness of them all. He drops these letters in the mailbox, exclaiming: "Je réussirai!" Le mot du joueur, du grand capitaine, mot fataliste qui perd plus d'hommes qu'il n'en

sauve,"<sup>9</sup>

Rastignac succeeds in winning the friendship of Old Goriot and, as expected, receives the letter from his mother containing the needed money. She has sold her jewels, and his aunt also has made a considerable sacrifice. With this letter he receives another from his sister Laure who sends him the money saved by her and his younger sister for some long desired object. This involves a considerable sacrifice on their part too. The matter of life and death soon becomes new clothes for Rastignac, and equally as soon he meets Delphine. Fortunately for him this attempt is successful.

As Madame de Beauséant predicted, Rastignac soon is the center of attention of other prominent ladies. Even Madame de Restaud makes it clear that she would be happy to receive his visits. Rastignac, however, cannot forget the fortune of the Baron de Nucingen, and decides to continue his pursuit in this direction. The elegantly furnished apartment given him by Madame de Nucingen is of no little importance in influencing this decision. He thinks with scorn of the detestable room in Madame Vauquer's boardinghouse. Nor does he consider for a moment the pre-

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

carious position in which he is placed by accepting such a gift. Quoting Chateaubriand, he rationalizes that "Le français aime le péril, parce qu'il y trouve la gloire"<sup>10</sup> and that "avoir une maîtresse et une position quasi royale, c'est le signe de puissance."<sup>11</sup> When Delphine gives him a watch, this rationalization goes further.

Tout m'a réussi! Quand on s'aime bien pour toujours, l'on peut s'aider, je puis recevoir cela. D'ailleurs je parviendrai, certes, et pourrai tout rendre au centuple. Il n'y a dans cette liaison ni crime, ni rien qui puisse faire froncer le sourcil à la vertu la plus sévère. Combien d'honnêtes gens contractent des unions semblables! Nous ne trompons personne; et ce qui nous avilit, c'est le mensonge. Mentir, n'est-ce pas abdiquer? Elle s'est depuis longtemps séparée de son mari. D'ailleurs, je lui dirai, moi, à cet Alsacien, de me céder une femme qu'il lui est impossible de rendre heureuse.<sup>12</sup>

When Madame de Nucingen refuses to rush with Rastignac to the bedside of her dying father because she fears that such a delay will make her late for Madame de Beauséant's soirée, he is suddenly aware of the fallacy in his belief that she possesses a "lofty soul". He suddenly realizes that she is no less ambitious and persistent in her own goal than he. His ego is inflated by the thought that he now must dupe a dupe.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 105.    <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

Déjà son éducation commencée avait porté ses fruits. Il aimait égoïstement déjà. Son tact lui avait permis de reconnaître la nature du coeur de Delphine, il pressentait qu'elle était capable de marcher sur le corps de son père pour aller au bal, et il n'avait ni la force de jouer le rôle d'un raisonneur, ni le courage de lui déplaire, ni la vertu de la quitter.<sup>13</sup>

Neither Madame de Nucingen nor her sister Madame de Restaud are present when Old Goriot dies. Nor are they concerned with the arrangements for his interment. Rastignac and his young acquaintance, Doctor Bianchon, pay for these and stand alone together at the cemetery. The carriages of the two sisters are present, but have no occupants. This is their only display of grief, if it can be called such.

This experience witnesses a change in Rastignac which will determine and direct his future course. Formerly he believed that he would find an understanding of his "lofty soul" among those of the faubourg Saint-Germain, but now he realizes that he never can share this extreme sensibilité. It is unique with him. He has been wrong in his belief that where there is material beauty there must also exist spiritual beauty. For this reason he suppresses his "lofty soul" and musters his strength to pursue the one

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

remaining satisfaction, the only source of happiness left him--power. Now like Julien he becomes a superman disgusted with the mediocrity of a society which he must dupe for the sake of his own ego.

Rastignac, resté seul, fit quelques pas vers le haut du cimetière et vit Paris tortueusement couché le long des deux rives de la Seine, où commençaient à briller les lumières. Ses yeux s'attachèrent presque avidement entre la colonne de la place Vendôme et le dôme des Invalides, là où vivait ce beau monde dans lequel il avait voulu pénétrer. Il lança sur cette ruche bourdonnante un regard qui semblait par avance en pomper le miel, et dit ces mots grandioses:

—A nous deux maintenant!

Et, pour premier acte du défi qu'il portait à la Société, Rastignac alla dîner chez Mme de Nucingen.<sup>14</sup>

Before the conclusion of Le Père Goriot the reader learns that Rastignac is already advising Madame de Nucingen concerning the wealth given her by her father at the time of her marriage and presently tied up in a business venture, an investment made by her husband. Since this money is momentarily inaccessible, Rastignac determines to become acquainted with this investment. While protecting her interest, he will not overlook his own.

The reader encounters Rastignac again in Splendeurs

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 240.



et Misères des Courtisanes when in 1821 he meets Lucien de Rubempré, the chevalier servant of Madame de Bargeton, at the Opera. There is evident friction between the two at this time, but in 1824 in Illusions Perdues when Rastignac, still the lover of Madame de Nucingen, sees Rubempré again, he becomes the latter's companion of pleasure. He befriends Rubempré in an attempt to help him escape the domination of the canon Herrera who is no other than the Vautrin of Le Père Goriot. This friendship ends in 1830 when Rastignac, just as he did Old Goriot's, follows Rubempré's interment.

The reader also learns in L'Interdiction that in 1828 Rastignac grows tired of Madame de Nucingen and tries to please la marquise d'Espard. In Étude de Femme he directs his attentions to Madame de Listomère. These affairs, however, evidently do not represent a complete break with the Nucingen household in light of later developments.

In 1831 in La Peau de Chagrin Rastignac introduces the cold and heartless Foedora to the poverty-stricken young writer, Raphaël de Valentin. She succeeds in interrupting and distracting him from his work, but will not give him the assistance he needs and that she is capable of giving. Realizing that there is no hope, Raphaël

informs Rastignac of his decision to commit suicide. Rastignac advises him to die like a man of genius, to kill himself through dissipation.

In La Cousine Bette and Le député d'Arcis the reader learns that in 1838 Rastignac has been made a Count and has married Augusta de Nucingen. She is, of course, the daughter of his former mistress, Delphine. This step is consistent with his earlier plans, and proves that he has not forgotten his goal, nor the Nucingen fortune. Perhaps he had this in mind when he left Madame de Nucingen in 1835. Now his interests include not only the wealth of Delphine but also that of her husband. This wealth represents the power he seeks.

After the Revolution of July he enters politics under the patronage of M. de Marsay, Minister of France, who makes him Under-Secretary of State. These developments are revealed in Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan, Une fille d'Eve, and Une Ténébreuse Affaire. The reader also discovers in La Maison Nucingen that in 1826 he has gained a considerable fortune as a result of Baron de Nucingen's crooked business venture in the mines of Wortschin. He thereby profits from his earlier interest in the affairs of Madame de Nucingen.

In 1845 Rastignac attains his goal, and the power

for which he has sought so long is his. In Les Comédiens sans le Savoir Rastignac appears as the first Minister of the land, a man of great wealth and a peer of France. At last he has obtained the reward of patience and thus satisfied the demands of his ego. He is, finally, superior to all, and they must acknowledge this. He has tackled and defeated the society he detests.

Rastignac differs from his predecessors as an amoral character "beyond good and evil" in that he does succeed in completely attaining his goal, but the reader will never know if, consequently, he experiences the ultimate goal, happiness, or if he finds this a hollow victory. In spite of his selfish ambition the reader must feel a kind of triumph in his success. Although he disapproves of Rastignac, he cannot sympathize with those he has used to further this ambition. In this respect also does his situation differ from that of Adolphe, Julien, and Fabrice.

Although it cannot be said that Rastignac, like Adolphe and Julien, is the image of his creator, it cannot be denied that Balzac has given him some of his own traits and characteristics. It would be wrong to suggest that Balzac was an amoral person; however, this in no way diminishes the evident similarities which do exist. The

author certainly recalls his own youth when he introduces Rastignac to the dreadful city of Paris as a naive young man fresh from the tranquility of the province. Rastignac's room in Madame Vauquer's boardinghouse is not unlike the attic in which Balzac began his career as a writer. Then there are certain similarities in their personalities. He too was subject to a certain sensibilité.

...Yet I shall never describe my character better than has already been done by a great man. Re-read the Confessions and you will find it throughout...<sup>15</sup>

It previously has been stated that Rastignac's ambition or "energy" represented Balzac's own creative drive. The following from the author's letter to his favorite sister Laure, which sounds not unlike Stendhal, would seem to confirm this.

And this mill-stone rotation they call living!  
If there were only someone to give a touch of warmth to this cold existence! I have not yet produced the flowers of life and I am in the only season when they bloom!...I have only two passions--love and glory--and nothing is yet satisfied, nothing ever will be...<sup>16</sup>

Rastignac's financial struggles likewise reflect Balzac's own money problem. That the problem of money is

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<sup>15</sup> André Maurois, Seven Faces of Love (Didier, Publishers, New York, 1944), p. 157.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

actually fundamental in the Comédie Humaine not only signifies that it was the great problem in Balzac's age but confirms the seriousness of this problem with the man himself. In addition:

...money is very often regarded as a means to an end and it becomes the symbol of the deepest aspirations of a particular society. The idea that money is power is the dynamic behind many of the novels. Money means women, luxury and happiness-- the realization of the dreams of the son of the ill-paid official which he projected into his characters.<sup>17</sup>

Another interesting confirmation that Balzac had himself in mind when he first introduced Rastignac into the Comédie Humaine is the name he gives his character's sister. This name--Laure--has special significance for Balzac. Not only is it the name of his own sister, as has been mentioned previously, but is also the name of his first two mistresses. Of these the first was Madame de Berny, a woman of forty-five, who apparently had a tremendous literary influence on the novelist. He seems to have relied heavily on her advice. There seems to be a touch of her personality in Rastignac's distant relative Madame de Beauséant. The second woman in his life was the Duchesse d'Abrantès, a woman no younger than Madame de Berny who

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<sup>17</sup>Martin Turnell, op. cit., p. 217.

had known the Emperor Napoléon and, therefore, taught Balzac much about the period of the Empire. Then there was Madame Zulma Carraud, a school friend of his sister who seems to have made little or no contribution to Balzac's development. After her there was the Duchesse de Castries who furnished a basis for many of his critical characterizations of women.

Madame de Castries was a coquette, happy to arouse desires, firmly resolved not to satisfy them. Like all wealthy women she cost him plenty of money, for in order to please her he wanted to have a tilbury, two servants, two horses, a loge at the Opera, and to live on the scale of a man of fashion.<sup>18</sup>

Her description and the effect she had on Balzac is duplicated in the character of Madame de Nucingen.

It is important to note that Rastignac's affairs are also with older women, and like his creator he marries a younger woman when he finally decides to do so. Balzac's last adventure was with Madame Hanska, a beautiful Polish woman. Much later she became Madame de Balzac.

Although these similarities between novelist and protagonist exist, it is doubtful that Balzac purposely created Rastignac as an autobiographical character. Since

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<sup>18</sup>André Maurois, op. cit., p. 162.

he possesses other characteristics obviously foreign to Balzac's personality, it must be assumed that the novelist primarily is portraying a type observed in his experiences in Paris, a type easily distinguished in this particular period in France. Rastignac is a "Romantic misfit in an urban civilization".<sup>19</sup> He is a Romantic misfit who must become a superman superior to moral law in order to make a place for himself. Power alone can assure this place and possibly his happiness.

He who climbeth on the highest mountain,  
laugheth at all tragic plays and tragic  
realities.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Martin Turnell, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>20</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, p. 56.

## CHAPTER IV

### ROBERT GRESLOU

Robert Greslou, the last in this succession of amoral characters "beyond good and evil" as observed in the nineteenth century French novel, is a sensitive young man who

...n'a que lui-même pour dieu, pour principe et pour fin. Il a emprunté à la philosophie naturelle de ce temps la grande loi de la concurrence vitale, et il l'applique à l'oeuvre de sa fortune avec une ardeur de positivisme qui fait de lui un barbare civilisé, la plus dangereuse des espèces.<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing as an adolescent his own individuality and unable to arouse the needed understanding of his parents, Robert Greslou refuses to respond to what interest in him is shown, and drifts into an impenetrable isolation.

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Bourget, Le Disciple (Nelson, Éditeurs, Paris, 1936), p. 7.



Mais cet instinct, après s'être appliqué à ma mère, grandissait, grandissait, s'appliquant à mes camarades et à mes maîtres. Je me sentais différent d'eux, d'une différence que je résumai d'un mot: je croyais les comprendre tout entiers et je ne croyais pas qu'ils me comprissent.<sup>2</sup>

Robert is not only aware of his extreme individual sensibilité, which is recognized at once by the reader, but discovers this sentiment of the solitary soul in the only companionship left his exaggerated imagination--reading.

Je l'ai retrouvé transformé en maladie et en sécheresse dans l'Adolphe de Benjamin Constant, agressif et ironique dans Beyle.<sup>3</sup>

Becoming more and more engrossed in the analysis of his soul to the exclusion of all else, Robert is led to the discovery of writings by various philosophers of his own day, and as a result of their teachings, as the reader will see, acquires the personality of a "barbare civilisé". In contemplating this personality in his dedication of Le Disciple "à un jeune homme" of France, Paul Bourget describes Robert Greslou in greater detail.

Ce jeune homme-là, c'est un monstre, n'est-ce pas? Car c'est être un monstre que d'avoir vingt-cinq ans et, pour âme, une machine à calcul au service d'une machine à plaisir...Ce nihiliste délicat, comme il est effrayante à rencontrer et comme il abonde! A vingt-cinq ans il a fait le

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 119.    <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

tour de toutes les idées. Son esprit critique, précocement éveillé, a compris les résultats derniers des plus subtiles philosophes de cet âge. Ne lui parlez pas d'impiété, de matérialisme. Il sait que le mot matière n'a pas de sens précis, et il est d'autre part trop intelligent pour ne pas admettre que toutes les religions ont pu être légitimes à leur heure. Seulement il n'a jamais cru, il ne croira jamais à aucune, pas plus qu'il ne croira jamais à quoi que ce soit, sinon au jeu amusé de son esprit qu'il a transformé en un outil de perversité élégante. Le bien et le mal, la beauté et la laideur, le vice et la vertu lui paraissent des objets de simple curiosité. L'âme humaine tout entière est, pour lui, une mécanique savant et dont le démontage l'intéresse comme un objet d'expérience. Pour lui, rien n'est vrai, rien n'est faux, rien n'est moral, rien n'est immoral. C'est un égoïste subtil et raffiné dont tout l'ambition... consiste à "adorer son moi" à le parer de sensations nouvelles.<sup>4</sup>

Among the philosophical writings which most appeal to Robert and seem to offer reason or excuse for his uniqueness are those of M. Adrien Sixte. The first of these is his Psychologie de Dieu, a "thèse...établie, appuyée, développée avec une âpreté d'athéisme qui rappellerait les fureurs de Lucrèce contra les croyances de son temps".<sup>5</sup> Later he has written his Anatomie de la volonté in the preface of which he has placed the significant statement: "Les attaches sociales doivent être réduites à leur minimum pour celui qui veut connaître et dire la vérité dans le domaine des sciences psychologiques."<sup>6</sup> This

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 7-8.    <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 25..    <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

work is soon followed by his Théorie des passions.

In these three books are found M. Sixte's complete doctrine. Acknowledging that the mind is unable to understand some causes and substances, he concludes that the individual, therefore, must be concerned only with coordinating the phenomena. Since the soul is one group of these phenomena, they can be the object of scientific analysis and knowledge. He goes further in applying the law of evolution to the diverse sensations and morals which constitute the human heart, declaring that they are the last result or the supreme metamorphosis of very simple instincts. Consequently "l'univers moral reproduit exactement l'univers physique et que le premier n'est que la conscience douloureuse ou extatique du second."<sup>7</sup>

Completely absorbed by this deterministic doctrine and having formulated a theory of his own which he expounds in a thesis entitled Contribution à l'étude de la multiplicité du Moi, Robert Greslou thereby becomes the disciple of Adrien Sixte. His theory naturally is based on that of the old philosopher and eventually will instigate the pursuit of his goal. Robert reveals this doctrine and his goal in his Confession d'Un Jeune Homme d'Aujourd'hui.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

...je constate que ma faculté dominante, celle qui s'est trouvée présente à travers toutes les crises de ma vie, petites ou grandes, comme elle se retrouve présente aujourd'hui, a été la faculté, j'entends le pouvoir et le besoin du dédoublement. Il y a toujours eu en moi deux personnes distinctes: une qui allait, venait, agissait, sentait, et une autre qui regardait la première aller, venir, agir, sentir, avec une impassible curiosité... Car mon véritable moi n'est, à proprement parler, ni celui qui souffre, ni celui qui regarde. Il est composé des deux, et j'ai eu de cette dualité une perception très nette... J'ai considéré jadis comme un état supérieur cette double nature: des crises spasmodiques de passion jointes à cette énergie continue de pensée abstraite. J'ai eu pour rêve d'être à la fois fiévreux et lucide, le sujet et l'objet, comme disent les Allemands de mon analyse, le sujet qui s'étudie lui-même et trouve dans cette étude un moyen d'exaltation à la fois et de développement scientifique.<sup>8</sup>

Although Robert's goal is the experience of this exaltation resulting from the parallelism of "la vie vécue" and "la vie pensée", it is also the power which this accomplishment will produce. Therefore, he resolves to inaugurate and complete an experiment.

L'esprit est une créature vivante, comme les autres, et chez qui toute puissance s'accompagne, comme chez les autres, d'un besoin. Il faudrait retourner le vieux proverbe et dire: Pouvoir, c'est vouloir. Une faculté aboutit toujours à la volonté de l'exercer.<sup>9</sup>

When Robert is employed by M. le marquis de Jussat-Randon to tutor his younger son, Lucien, he finds pleasure

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 94 and 98.    <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

in the prospect of a quiet life in the summer château on Lake Aydat.

La perspective de cet exil ne m'effrayait pas. La doctrine d'après laquelle je devais régler mon existence était si nette dans ma tête! J'étais résolu à ne vivre qu'en moi, à n'habiter que moi à défendre ce moi contre toute intrusion du dehors.<sup>10</sup>

It is in this atmosphere of solitude and tranquility, however, that Robert discovers the means to his goal and determines his method of attaining it. Both means and method are those of Adolphe, Julien, Fabrice, and Rastignac.

Je me rappelais le Julien Sorel de Rouge et Noir, arrivant chez M. de Rênal... l'idée de la séduction de Mlle de Jussat entra en effet dans mon esprit... la résolution de séduire cette enfant sans l'aimer, par pure curiosité de psychologue, pour le plaisir d'agir, de manier une âme vivante, moi aussi, d'y contempler à même et directement ce mécanisme des passions jusque-là étudié dans les livres, pour la vanité d'enrichir mon intelligence d'une expérience nouvelle.<sup>11</sup>

In undertaking this seduction of Charlotte de Jussat, the nineteen-year-old daughter of his employer, Robert also anticipates the pleasure of duping her proud brother, Count André. In this manner he can express his superiority and power over the mediocre souls he detests and of whom the Count is undoubtedly one.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 152, 154, and 176.

Certes, entre mon cerveau et celui du comte André, il y a la même indifférence qu'entre le mien et le vôtre, mon cher maître, plus grande encore, puisque je peux, moi, vous comprendre, et que je le défie de suivre un seul de mes raisonnements, même celui que je fais, à cette minute, sur nos rapports. Pour parler franc, je suis un civilisé, il n'est qu'un barbare... Aucune des idées émises par le comte n'avait à mes yeux la moindre valeur. C'étaient pour moi de pures sottises, et voici qu'au lieu de simplement mépriser ces sottises comme j'aurais fait dans n'importe quelle autre occasion, je me mis à les haïr sur sa bouche.<sup>12</sup>

To assure success in gaining Charlotte's affection, Robert determines to put into practice an idea expounded in Adrien Sixte's Théorie des Passions: "Il y a dans ce phénomène de la pitié un élément physique et qui, chez les femmes particulièrement, confine à l'émotion sexuelle."<sup>13</sup> Having successfully aroused her pity by pretending to be unhappy, he furthers his plan by telling her that his grief is the result of an unfortunate love affair. Jealousy as well as pity now serves its purpose. Charlotte, afraid of her own affection for the young man and aware of the differences in their social backgrounds, leaves the chateau to find distraction in a journey of indefinite duration.

When she returns several months later, her engagement to marry M. de Plane, a friend of Count André, is

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 161 and 168.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

announced. This unexpected event interrupts Robert's original plan, making it necessary for him to adopt one assuring immediate results. Following the example set by Adolphe, he writes Charlotte threatening suicide. In an attempt to prevent this action, Charlotte enters his room at mid-night. The scene which occurs there reminds the reader of that between Fabrice and Clélia in La Chartreuse de Parme.

"...Dieu soit loué, je ne suis pas arrivée trop tard...Mort! je vous ai cru mort!...Ah! c'est horrible...Mais c'est fini, n'est-ce pas? Dites que vous m'obéirez, dites que vous n'attenterez pas à vos jours. Jurez, jurez-le-moi."

Elle prit ma main dans les siennes par un geste suppliant. Ses doigts étaient glacés. C'était quelque chose de si décisif que cette entrée, une telle preuve d'amour dans un instant où je me trouvais moi-même si exalté, que je ne réfléchis pas, et, sans lui répondre, je me souviens que je la pris dans mes bras en pleurant, que mes lèvres cherchèrent ses lèvres, que je lui donnai, à travers ces larmes, le plus brûlant, le plus tendre des baisers, le plus sincère; que ce fut une seconde d'extase infinie, de félicité suprême, et aussi qu'elle s'arracha de moi, ayant, sur son visage toujours égaré, toute la honte de ce qu'elle venait de permettre.<sup>14</sup>

When Charlotte draws back from him, Robert shows her the vial of black poison saying:

"Partez, et merci d'être venue. Avant un quart d'heure j'aurai cessé de sentir ce que je sens, cette intolérable privation de vous depuis tant de mois..."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 281.

The effect of these last words on Charlotte's reason as well as her emotions is reflected in her response.

--"Moi aussi, dit-elle, j'ai trop souffert, j'ai trop souffert, j'ai trop lutté...Non", continua-t-elle en s'avancant vers moi et me prenant le bras, "pas seul, pas seul...Nous mourrons ensemble...Mourir, oui, mourir là, près de vous, avec vous...Ah! il y a si longtemps que je vous aime, si longtemps...Je peux bien vous le dire maintenant, puisque je paye ce droit de ma vie...Vous voulez bien me prendre avec vous, nous en aller ensemble tous deux, tous deux?..."<sup>16</sup>

Victory is Robert's. The goal which he has so diligently pursued at last is his.

--"Oui", lui répondais-je, "ensemble, nous mourrons ensemble. Je vous le jure. Mais pas tout de suite...Ah! laissez-moi le temps de sentir que vous m'aimez..." Nos lèvres s'étaient unies de nouveau, mais cette fois elle me rendait mes baisers. Je la serrai contre moi. Je la sentis qui défaillait sous cette étreinte. Je l'entraînai jusqu'à mon lit, ainsi enlacée à moi, et elle s'abandonna tout entière.<sup>17</sup>

When Robert has experienced the exaltation of his scientific experiment and, consequently, established his theory, he breaks his promise to Charlotte by refusing to join her in suicide. He must continue living to increase the power which is now his. Filled with disgust and loathing, Charlotte leaves his room. The following day he

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 282.      <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 283.



writes her that he must see her one last time before his departure. Although she does not answer his note, that night he finds the door to her room unlocked. She is waiting for him.

--"Vous m'avez, monsieur, fait commettre trois actions indignes...La première a eu pour excuse que je ne vous ai pas cru capable d'une infamie comme celle que vous avez employée...D'ailleurs, je saurai l'expier," ajouta-t-elle comme se parlant à elle-même. "La Seconde? Je ne lui cherche pas d'excuse..."Et son visage s'empourpra d'un flot de honte. "Il m'a été trop insupportable de penser que vous aviez agi ainsi. J'ai voulu être sûre de ce que vous étiez. J'ai voulu vous connaître...Vous m'aviez dit que vous teniez votre journal...J'ai voulu le lire...Je l'ai lu...Je suis entrée chez vous quand vous n'y étiez pas. J'ai fouillé vos papiers. J'ai forcé la serrure d'un cahier...Oui, moi, j'ai fait cela!...J'en ai été trop punie, puisque j'ai lu dans ces pages ce que j'y ai lu...La troisième...En vous la disant j'acquitte la dette que j'ai contractée avec vous par la seconde. La troisième..."et elle hésita, "sous le coup de l'indignation qui m'a saisie, j'ai écrit à mon frère. Il sait tout."

--"Ah!" m'écrirai-je, "vous êtes perdue..."

--"Vous savez ce que j'ai juré," interrompit-elle... "Taisez-vous...Je ne peux plus me perdre," continua-t-elle, "et personne ne fera plus rien ni pour ni contre moi. Mon frère saura cela aussi, et ce que j'ai résolu. La lettre lui arrivera demain matin. Je devais vous prévenir, puisque vous tenez à votre vie. Et maintenant, allez-vous-en."<sup>18</sup>

The next day after his departure Robert learns of the suicide of Charlotte and is arrested for her murder.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 300.

When M. Adrien Sixte has read this confession sent to him by the young man who now awaits trial in prison, he suddenly feels that he alone is responsible for the crime and silently wonders how many other lives his writings have and are still influencing. In his desperation he automatically turns to God for assistance.

At the trial honor compels Count André to inform the jury of his sister's letter, now destroyed, advising him of her plan to commit suicide. At the same time he refuses to divulge her reason for doing so. Robert is acquitted of the murder of Mlle de Jussat only to be shot in the street by Count André immediately following the trial.

Later as M. Adrien Sixte watches Robert's mother kneel by his side and pray, he has this thought:

Et, si ce Père Céleste n'existait pas, aurions-nous cette faim et cette soif de lui dans ces heures-là?

--"Tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne m'avais pas trouvé!..." A cette minute même et grâce à cette lucidité de pensée qui accompagne les savants dans toutes les crises, Adrien Sixte se rappela cette phrase admirable de Pascal dans son Mystère de Jésus, --et quand la mère se releva, elle put le voir qui pleurait.<sup>19</sup>

In creating Robert Greslou Paul Bourget has dedi-

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 354.

cated his efforts to a definite purpose, a purpose of considerable profundity when compared with those which inspired the creators of the other characters already discussed. Benjamin Constant and Stendhal were concerned primarily with giving the reader the fruits of their own self-analysis, and Balzac in revealing the observations of the age in which he lived. All three accomplished their purposes admirably. Paul Bourget, however, goes beyond self-analysis and observation to become, without attempting to reform, a moralist of the decadence. "The world to him was out of joint, introspective, analytic, lustful, faithless, shallow, and dilettant."<sup>20</sup> In his famous dedication of Le Disciple, he warns the youth of France of the danger in philosophizing too much, the danger of accepting at face value the doctrines and theories introduced and furthered during the nineteenth century.

These doctrines and theories anticipated by Adolphe, Julien, Fabrice, and Rastignac are easily distinguished in the character of Robert Greslou who proves that there is but one step from the dream to the lie. The dream which becomes a lie is inevitably born in isolation, for it is in

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<sup>20</sup> Benjamin W. Wells, A Century of Fiction (Dodd, Mead and Company, New York, 1898), p. 368.

this isolation that youth juggles with ideas beyond comprehension and, as a result, becomes pessimistic. The same pessimism, so characteristic of Schopenhauer, is seriously considered by Bourget in 1885,

Mais l'existence du pessimisme dans l'âme de la jeunesse contemporaine n'est-elle pas reconnue aujourd'hui par ceux-là même à qui cet esprit de négation et de dépression répugne le plus? Je crois avoir été un des premiers à signaler cette reprise inattendue de ce que l'on appelait, en 1830, le mal du siècle. On pensait en avoir fini avec la race d'Obermann et de René.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the pessimism of Schopenhauer the reader also recognizes in Robert Greslou the scepticism of Ernest Renan. Bourget refers to the same in discussing the "dilettantisme" of this intellectual egotist and scientific philosopher.

...il y faut un scepticisme raffiné à la fois et systématique, avec un art de transformer ce scepticisme en instrument de jouissance. Le dilettantisme devient alors une science délicate de la métamorphose intellectuelle et sentimentale. Quelques hommes supérieurs en ont donné d'illustres exemples, mais la souplesse même dont ils ont fait preuve a empreint leur gloire d'un je ne sais quoi de trouble et d'inquiétant.<sup>22</sup>

Also revealed in the character of Robert Greslou is the "determinism" of Taine. Bourget summarizes the basis

<sup>21</sup>Paul Bourget, Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine, p. xxi.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

of this philosophy in the following paragraph.

Considéré dans ce qu'il a d'essentiel, ce système se ramène à concevoir le moi comme constitué par une série de petits faits qui sont des phénomènes de conscience, et la nature comme formée par une série parallèle de petits faits qui sont des phénomènes de mouvement. Le philosophe est catégorique sur ces deux points: "Il n'y a rien de réel dans le moi," dit-il, "sauf la file de ses événements."<sup>23</sup>

Obviously Bourget has not neglected the scientific method of Émile Zola in the composite of doctrines and theories which produce the weird personality of Robert Greslou, but perhaps the strongest influence has been that of Friedrich Nietzsche. Certainly the major points in his philosophy are evident in the young man whose constant tendency is "à vivre et à me regarder vivre."<sup>24</sup> Robert firmly believes in his rationalized morality or the combination of moral theory and practice by which he lives and which is responsible for his determined will to obtain power. Because he is different from and superior to others, he shuns Christianity which is

an artful device, consciously and sub-consciously evolved for the self-preservation and advantage of the inferior classes of society, who have thus, to the detriment of the race, gained an abnormal and temporary ascendancy over the better class of men,

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>24</sup>Paul Bourget, Le Disciple, p. 174.

to whom the mastership belongs.<sup>25</sup>

In short, he is a superman above the slave-morality which others foolishly worship.

To assume that Robert Greslou is an autobiographical character would be no less ridiculous than to have contended that Rastignac is Balzac. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that Paul Bourget, like Robert Greslou, as a young man reared on intellectualism did possess a passion for philosophical and psychological discussions. Previous to the publication of Le Disciple he himself was considered a devout disciple of the men whose doctrines and theories are scorned in the character of Robert. These same ideas are supported in his earlier novels. Therefore his sudden realization that the principles of order must be renewed in the youth of his country is duplicated in the character of M. Adrien Sixte. Within the same novel exist the two attitudes toward morality experienced by the author during his life, and in this respect alone both characters can be considered autobiographical. Paul Bourget's primary purpose in creating Robert Greslou has been to illustrate the resulting dis-

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<sup>25</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil (The MacMillan Company, New York, 1907), p. xi.

aster when the morality of religion is replaced by a morality "beyond good and evil" in the hope that therein lies glory, power, and happiness.

Thou hast made danger thy calling; therein there is nothing contemptible. Now thou perishest by thy calling: therefore will I bury thee with mine own hands.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, p. 34.

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Born in Norfolk, Virginia on July 26, 1930, the writer lived in that city until the fall of 1946 when, with his family, he moved to Virginia Beach, Virginia. He attended both elementary and secondary school in Norfolk, graduating from Granby High School in June, 1948. In June, 1952 he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Hampden-Sydney College where he was a member of Eta Sigma Phi, honorary classical language fraternity; Sigma Upsilon, honorary literary fraternity; and Kappa Alpha Order, social fraternity. He is a member of the United States Coast Guard Reserve. From February, 1953, until June, 1954, he taught English in Kempsville High School, Princess Anne County, Virginia. He was married on August 28, 1954, to Bruce Flourney, also from Norfolk and Virginia Beach. He entered the Graduate School of the University of Richmond in September, 1954, and will resume his teaching career as Master of French and Spanish at Saint Andrew's School, Middletown, Delaware, in September, 1955.