

A World Abandoned by God

Narrative and Secularism

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Introduction

The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God.

—Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*

There is something about narrative that puts the world in doubt.

—James Wood, *The Broken Estate*

THE IDEA OF A GOD, IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, IS A FUNDAMENTAL PART of human experience—a given, almost. And yet, for over one hundred and fifty years, we have lived in a world that has become increasingly secular. The goal of this book is to reconcile these facts, or rather to examine their interaction and, in so doing, to understand the idea and the experience of secularism.

The book does not offer a broad history of secularization or secular culture, nor does it analyze exhaustively the particular social, economic, and political systems that have been associated with secularism. Rather, it examines secularism as an idea and an impression and, what is more, as an idea especially clearly articulated through the novel form. Georg Lukács's assertion that the novel is the epic of a world abandoned by God does not mean that God abandoned the world, leaving human beings to recount that abandonment through the novel. Instead, God's abandonment is built into and out of the very structure of the novel. Rather than a secular culture producing the novel form, or the novel form initiating the idea of a secular culture, the two stand in a synergistic relation to one another. Thus the departure of God becomes the formal substance and undertone of the novel, and the novel in turn informs our understanding of secularism and its crises, uncertainties, and potentials.

Especially in nineteenth-century Europe, secularism was an idea in motion, formed, disseminated, and received both with bursts of creativity and with gloom. It was seen as a code for intellectual clarity and for spiritual emptiness, sometimes for both at once. It was also

considered as a philosophical condition, a view of a world in need of, or open to, a different narrative. European literary criticism of that century generally reads secularism as a condition of absence or loss—the emotional equivalent, as it were, of postmodern antifoundationalism. As J. Hillis Miller writes in the introduction to *The Disappearance of God*, “The lines of connection between us and God have broken down, or God himself has slipped away from the places where he used to be. He no longer inheres in the world as the force binding together all men and all things. Only if God would return or if we could somehow reach him might our broken world be unified again. But this has not yet happened. God keeps himself hidden. There seems to be no way to re-establish connection.”¹

In this formulation, the departure of God from the landscape means the departure of a spiritual force and a spiritual cement: a force to which (or to whom) we connect and that connects us to one another. In narrative terms, this God is author and embodiment of coherence and of meaning: the power that engenders incidents and connects them. Given the absence of such a power, it is not surprising that the secular world would stand in need of the mourning function of poetry (Miller) and the distinctly reparative function of narrative (Lukács, Brooks, and others).²

Despite critical assessments such as these, however, secularism is not a random spiritual disaster, not a cosmic accident, but a human creation. There was no single morning when the world woke up, sensed a curious absence, and understood that God had departed. Instead, secularism developed as an impression and an idea—an idea that was introduced and absorbed into European culture for numerous reasons. If the secular world were nothing but a series of abandonments, nothing but the vale of tears described by Miller, then it could not have taken root. The notion of a secular world became so thoroughly incorporated into modern thought because it held considerable attraction, and here we come to a point that is crucial for narrative and other acts of human ingenuity: the elimination of God from master narratives—indeed, the elimination of master narratives entirely—constitutes not simply a menace but also a significant series of opportunities. The notion of a God who controls the entire world, who inscribes all people and all moments in a narrative of divine providence or of divine punishment and reward, leaves no space for human manipulation and no room for individual accomplishment as we have come to understand it in the modern era. Secularism and attendant philosophies such as capitalism prom-

ise a way to be exceptional—to expand the boundaries and indeed the very quality and volume of self.

Although this book does not propose a complete philosophical analysis of secular modernity, any examination of secularism as narrative structure, or secularism as idea, demands some mention of the idea and ideologies of modernity. Fredric Jameson, in the recent *A Singular Modernity*, writes, “Modernity is not a concept, philosophical or otherwise, but a narrative category.”³ It is also a narrative impulse, or a ground on which narrative can be deployed. François Lyotard writes in *The Postmodern Condition*: “A collectivity that takes narrative as its key form of competence has no need to remember its past. It finds the raw material for its social bond not only in the meaning of the narratives it recounts, but also in the act of reciting them. The narratives’ reference may seem to belong to the past, but in reality it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation.”⁴ If modernity constitutes and legitimates itself through the recitation of narrative, meta or not, secularism is both the moment of emptiness that precedes that recitation and the consciousness that lends it authority. Indeed, in this sense, secularism, the sense of a present more practiced and at the same time more jaded than the past by narrative formulations, aligns with postmodernism. Lyotard of course described postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives.”⁵ Secularism resides in that space between pleasure in narrative and distrust in narrative, between a vision of narrative as legitimating, and narrative as manipulative and retrograde. In this book, I am concerned with secularism—the idea of the absence of a supreme structuring power—as a cornerstone both of modern epistemological models and of social and political power relations; in this sense, I would propose a secular unconscious as corollary to the “political unconscious” described by Jameson.⁶ This study thus comes in line with those critics who envisioned fundamentally theological or spiritual stakes of modernity, and who saw the novel both as arena for and chronicle of them. Mikhail Bakhtin, one such critic, saw in the dialogism of the novel a departure from the (absolutist) ideologies of monologism.⁷ Walter Benjamin (in contrast to Lyotard) sees the novel as connected to the “secular productive forces of history” and to the decline of storytelling and the human interaction it represents,⁸ while for Paul Ricoeur, “What is ultimately at stake in the case of the structural identity of the narrative function as well as in that of the truth claim of every narrative work, is the temporal character of human experience.”⁹

The desire to live in an ordered world and the desire to determine the order of that world clash explosively and thus guarantee the paradoxical nature of what we understand as secularism. Tension between these desires brings out the extremes of human behavior, fantasy, narrative, and political production.¹⁰ These extremes, these crises, can be best read through narrative and, more particularly, through the narrator-character relationship. Through that relationship, we see how individuals view the world around them, how they see their role in their own destinies, as well as how they treat each other, and on the basis of what spiritual axioms. We also observe individual fantasies about God and supreme power, whether those are fantasies of replacement and incarnation or fantasies of being cared and provided for. We see too how those various fantasies can be used or exploited: that is, how the name of God or the possibility of spiritual solace is wielded as a discursive instrument, in narrative production and in political manipulation. The narrator-character relationship, in other words, reveals fundamental ideological structures that subtend modern power systems and ideas about spiritual connection.

In considering secularism as a narrative structure, even a narrative strategy, I will also explore the role of secularism in political manipulation. I want to propose that there is much to be gained in authorial power by declaring not only the advent of the secular world but, even more, by declaring that advent to be a problem for humankind. There is also much to be gained in political and personal power by declaring the imminence of such a world, and it is just this junction of the authorial and the political that is central to this book.

The more disorder is present and dangerous, the easier it is for the reparative hand of the author to peddle his product. James Wood writes: "Fiction was always fictional, it was not in the same order of truth as the Gospel narratives. During the nineteenth century, these two positions began to soften and merge."¹¹ Much as the dissolution of Gospel truths made possible the elevated status of narrative, it is the imminence of disorder that necessitates the reparative hand of the politician. Generations of monarchs and tsars used the same discursive principle as the novelists: in a world abandoned by God, or more precisely in a world about to be abandoned by God, the leader who perceives and promises to impede that abandonment cuts an irresistible figure. The menace of secularism is thus an important component of narrative and political "emplotment" as

Hayden White describes it.¹² It enables both leader and author to profit by the threat of a looming disorder to create a sense of emptiness and need; indeed, the absence of God has proven as versatile an instrument of manipulation and political control as the presence of God had been.¹³

Both aspects of secularism—as menace and as open door—demand that the idea of it remain in a state of becoming. Throughout the transition to a nonreligious culture, some sense of the divine must remain intact. There must be some familiarity with transcendent order so that the author or politician can claim the power and the value that derive from spiritual connection. If not, the fundamental theoretical binarisms on which political dominance is based (the one who knows versus the one who does not, the one with total power versus the one with limited power, great versus small, true versus false) lose their reason for being. Some remnant of structure must be in place for the politician to come across as a spiritual leader rather than a loose cannon in a chaotic world—and for there to be some recognizable order for the leader to maintain, some truth for the philosopher to access.

The novel's special role in the study of literature is both intriguing and worthwhile because of its disclosure of fundamental ideas, desires, and modes of conduct that the world outside literature has numerous reasons for, and numerous means of, concealing. A politician who claims that the nation needs to focus on God and traditional religious values, for instance, can hardly announce that the very specter of secular disorder that he claims to despise is simultaneously his ace in the hole, the "problem" that justifies his presence. Similarly, and somewhat paradoxically, a politician who warns his people of another nation's religious fanaticism can hardly proclaim that such a fanaticism, curiously portrayed as a sort of godlessness, is the perfect foil for his own purported spiritual exemplarity. The novel form, by contrast, implies the evolution of secularism through its various and subtle permutations as an idea, as an experience, and as a political instrument. Layering its worlds of action, novelistic construction gives us a framework for reading problems political and philosophical. Indeed, this layering can be rendered and in some sense created only in narrative, be that narrative philosophical, historical, psychological, religious, or fictional. Gary Morson wrote that narrative problems are theological in nature, but it is also true that theological and philosophical problems are narrative, and narratological, in nature.¹⁴ Narratology, in other words, pro-

vides a language and a framework for analyzing issues of freedom and spirituality, for which the nineteenth century, *in medias res*, had no such clear vocabulary.¹⁵ As the basic discourse for modern understandings of self, history, and social relations, narrative is crucial to our conception of both God and individual freedom. For that purpose, as the richest and most varied source of narrative production, the modern novel embodies the most fruitful repertory of ideas about God, meaning, and individual agency. The vocabulary and conceptual structures of narrative criticism, furthermore, can offer invaluable insight into personal and political power structures.

This study examines a number of features distinctive to fictional narrative, such as the narrator's vision of and distance from the characters, the tension between what he or she perceives and what the characters see, the function of chance, logical inconsistency, multiple narrative strands, closure or its absence, the discourses of sacred or scientific order, as well as the narrator's qualms, disclaimers, superstitions, and audacities to the extent they are distinctively expressive of the uncertainties (and opportunities) that emerge in a world without God. These features, the building blocks of narrative theory, provide the vocabulary and the forms with which to illuminate the evolution of ideas that subtend modern sociopolitical climates. Throughout this study, I concentrate primarily on the relationship between character and narrator, or between character and situation. In five novels by French and Russian authors, the characters have a particular vision of the role of sacred order in the world, whether they celebrate it, deny it, or try to circumvent or align themselves with it. And in each, the narrator's vision of the place of sacred order in the world is often different or distinct from that of the characters. These disparities or similarities enact (in a most theatrical sense) the very tensions, disillusionments, fantasies, fabrications, political injustices, superstitions, and grandiosities that were benchmarks on the road of secular culture. Through this study, I do not propose that a secular culture produced the novel form, or that the novel form initiated the idea of a secular culture. Rather, much as the evolutions of "modernity" and the novel form fed into and shaped one another, so here do I propose a synergy of secularism and the novel.

The book is divided into five chapters, each of which reads one novel of the nineteenth century as a chronicle or portrait of the transition to a secular culture. The authors and their novels are major representatives both of national novelistic tradition and of the

spiritual problematic. The first chapter, "Navigating the Secular World," focuses on Stendhal's *The Red and the Black*. Written in 1830, this novel is the most profoundly skeptical about the ultimate livability of a world without God. Julien Sorel's determination is consistently subverted by the intrusion of other agencies, any of which might represent the epic supernatural, the force of biological destiny, or the random hand of coincidence. Thus the hero inhabits a sort of semisecular limbo, unable either to disengage himself from these intrusions or to engage with them in a way that would give his life spiritual, narrative, ontological coherence. In conveying this limbo, the novel poses two foundational questions about secularism: If we lose hold of the idea of God, what can take its place? And what is at risk and what to be gained? Also at issue is the idea that secularism is a series of conceptual aporia fabricated in the service of narrative production. Secularism in this novel, emanating from an amalgam of disingenuousness and skepticism, opens the door to numerous narratives, including the novel itself. And yet what looms in the doorway epitomizes the arbitrariness and ultimate insufficiency of *all* stories, articulating a substantial ambivalence about first causes, last words, and the very enterprise of narrative production.

The second chapter, "Flaubert's Superior Joke," reads Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) as a nightmarish enactment of the transition to a secular world. Emma Bovary's dreams of celestial intervention encounter only the ironic, elusive, and rigorously secular hand of the narrator at every turn. The narrator has the last word, but instead of lucidity, he offers a landscape hopeless and dismal. The reader, like Emma, is also to be demoralized, at best confronted with a malicious and vaporous God. But here, God's absence or distance is more than a metaphor for a narrative mode. A distant and contemptuous God, of a world in which secularism ambushes and disillusiones and in which dispassionate human authority dominates, is Flaubert's principal thematic and formal concern and, to a large extent, that of French realism in its entirety. When religion is represented as obtuse and secularism as a vacuous hopelessness, the elimination of God from human experience provides a bottomless dramatic source of authorial Schadenfreude.

The third chapter, "Faith in Realism," concentrates on Turgenyev's *A Nest of Gentry* (1858), which traces the distinctions and intersections between narrative production as instrument of ideological and political manipulation and as defense mechanism and articulation of faith. Throughout, disingenuous manipulators arbitrarily de-

termine the plot, while the principal characters insist on humble acceptance and faith-driven reconciliation. The narrator isn't sure whether to celebrate or to pity those who continue to dignify the machinations of others in the name of God's will. As he deliberates, he employs a series of tentative narrative gestures that indicate on the one hand a reluctance to wield authorial power and on the other hand a desire to demonstrate, by example, the snares of excessive submissiveness and self-restraint. In some sense, there can be no fools in the hands of a narrator who echoes his characters and refuses recourse to authorial "objectivity." And yet, when affirmation of belief means embracing the most unsacred of deceptions and audacities, religion can become a hindrance, an anachronism unsuited to the modern world.

The fourth chapter, "The Joy of Mystification," returns to France, to Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Bewitched* (1851). The novel paints the transition to a nonreligious culture as spiritual disaster, as cultural and social calamity, even as public health menace. The narrator subverts every component of worldly modern thought. His scientific "elucidations" so reproduce the discourse of possession, magic, and the supernatural that they become almost parodic and useless; the discourse of science, ostensibly a vehicle of nascent secular elucidation, functions as a Trojan horse re-enveloping the modern world with shades of mystery. And yet, in the end, the drama of narrative production becomes the principal focus of the novel, placing human pomposity above religious principle and demonstrating the often disingenuous motives behind the desire to incarnate spiritual understanding. The narrator who laments secularism because it has dismantled a particular social order sometimes discloses more about his own self-importance than about the disorder of the world around him. Such a narrator treads a seductive but ultimately untenable conceptual border: the border between desire for personal grandeur and the desire to have that grandeur enabled and validated through his association with God.

The final chapter, "The Narrator Who Knew Too Much," analyzes Dostoevsky's *Demons*—sometimes translated as *The Possessed* (1872). Here, inconsistencies in narrative distance and situation, sometimes perceived as signs of authorial carelessness, in fact parody human pretense to wield or even understand the hand of God. The chronicler's alternation between reckless authorial machination and scrupulous hesitation embodies both the Westernist political scandal of arbitrary manipulation and power and the literary scandal of false

modesty and gratuitous self-reference, implying that the person who proclaims his humble limitations may be as disingenuous and self-serving as the person who strides with enthusiasm into the place of God. In its narrative construction, then, *Demons* represents problems of the intersection between finite and infinite that are fundamental to the political and philosophical substance of the novel. In so doing, it elucidates the crises produced on national and international levels when a mortal proclaims a fusion with God.

Because I am interested in secularism as an impression and an experience rather than in a genealogy of secularism as historical phenomenon, I have chosen novels that articulate a diverse series of responses to that experience. Other nineteenth-century novels could also have performed that function, such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Flaubert's *L'Education sentimentale*, Zola's *La faute de l'abbé Mouret*, or Balzac's *La peau de chagrin*, among others. As the novels considered here are representative without being exhaustive or definitive, so too are the national literatures selected. France and Russia represent two strains of responses to secularism. England, Germany, and Italy could also serve as examples, as could countries outside the Western tradition; the way of reading used here, because it relies on tight correlations between cultural circumstance and narrative construction, is valid for other national literatures and other eras. I have chosen to focus on France and Russia for a number of reasons; these countries anchor the European continent at both ends and were the sites of its most important revolutions. They have rich nineteenth-century realist novelistic traditions and numerous literary, political, social, and artistic connections between them. And yet these cultures remain in stark contrast in their ideas about God, sacred order, fate, and the force of the individual: in its political structures and its philosophical foundations, France welcomed a secular culture much earlier than Russia. The rise of industrialization and discoveries in science, liberalism, Marxism, and anticlericalism, as well as the dismantling of monarchic regimes went hand in hand with a diminishing absolute authority and a corollary loss of a master voice. Nineteenth-century French narrative is inextricably, even enthusiastically, intertwined with this loss. Like the scientist and the philosopher, the novelist *is* one of a multitude of voices that come to stand as replacements for a vanished religious order.

In nineteenth-century Russia, such a substitution, with its accompanying dissolution of master narratives and eventual dominance of the individual voice, elicited a much greater cultural ambivalence.

In Russia, whose respect for, even awe of, an abiding superior force lasted well into the twentieth century and whose serfs were not emancipated until 1861, the authorial voice was never the welcome emblem of individual power that it was in France. Rather, the disappearance of God was an occasion for uneasiness and resistance; the authorial voice sounded an alarm, a warning about individual dominance and its perils. Even those cultures (or individuals) that renounce the idea of secularism, as it turns out, must contend with it.¹⁶

As for the historical frame of reference, arguably, the narrative logic of secularism described here is already at work in earlier centuries, in the works of Defoe, Cervantes, and others.¹⁷ The logic of secularism is also at work in the novels of the twentieth century. I have chosen to focus on nineteenth-century Europe because it was then—and there—that the gradual elimination of God from narratives of reason and explanation most demonstrably dovetailed with a momentous alteration in the spiritual, philosophical, and political landscape. With the rearrangement of governments, progress in the realm of science, the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the evolution of capitalist economic systems, loss of ecclesiastical power, an emerging bourgeoisie, the development of cities, and the end of the feudal system, secularism in the nineteenth century is the closest it ever comes to being an actual historical process. And inherent in Nietzsche's "God is Dead" of 1882 is the specter of secularism as a circumstance or situation rather than an epistemological foundation.¹⁸ In fiction of the nineteenth century, secularism emerges as a thematic as well as structural concern; the result is an interaction of form and content that enriches the examination of secularism as experience, idea, crisis, opportunity, and narrative instrument.¹⁹

Finally, a word about the decision to focus on the novel form. Other forms of representation such as photography, film, and music could also claim a connection with secular culture (indeed, Walter Benjamin posits just such a connection in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*). Analyses of these forms as generators/interpreters of secular culture are certainly worthwhile. The decision to concentrate on the novel rather than on other forms of narrative is an attempt to reconcile and restructure other primarily literary analyses of the move toward a secular culture. These studies also accord a particular value and status to the novel as theater, if not blueprint, for the manifestations of social and political power. At the same time, the claims made here regard-

ing novelistic construction are equally valid for other forms of narrative, particularly political addresses, religious sermons, and written histories, for the precise reason that arguments for the political or theological resonance of novelistic construction can only underscore the novelistic resonance of political and theological discourse. While this is a literary study, it is also a study of those discourses and of the many stories we tell ourselves.

The elimination of God from the modern landscape constitutes one of the momentous conceptual metamorphoses in history and stands as a testament to the symbiosis between ideas and experience. In this book, I intend above all to offer an innovative way of reading and of using narratological analysis that can better enable us to understand that metamorphosis—and to read not only the nineteenth-century political scene, but our own as well.

1

Navigating the Secular World

IN 1830, THE QUESTION OF WHAT SORT OF EXPLANATORY NARRATIVES WERE viable or believable was much at the fore of French cultural consciousness. For one, political posturing since the Revolution had compromised the notion of an absolute truth, of a definitive version of how the world is and how it should be. The ideological rationales of the ancien régime gave way to those of the Revolution, were then revived, and then phased out once more. Within the Restoration period, laws were introduced and then abandoned, then introduced again.¹ The multiplicity of confessions, allowed by the Revolution's nominal separation of church and state, was compromised in 1814 and resuscitated in 1830. These continuous mutations, and the various justifications mounted to sustain them, put in question the entire notion of a final truth or formula. Meanwhile, in the philosophical-spiritual domain, secular modes of understanding were coming increasingly to dominate religious modes. Positivist philosophies moved to replace religion as a means of explanation, to replace sacred forces with social forces, God with science, fate with biological determinism. Given these substitutions and the political and legal turbulence of the Restoration, God as a means of explanation began to seem both archaic and somewhat disingenuous. In the midst of these evolutions was published Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* (*Le rouge et le noir*).

The historical particulars of 1830, recounted in *Le rouge*, are emblematic of the tensions intrinsic to the idea of secularism. *Le rouge et le noir*, like a world without a master plot, both embodies and inspires a number of explanatory narratives. But it also underscores the arbitrariness and ultimate insufficiency of all these narratives—at a historical moment when, for reasons political, economic, and philosophical, organization is most desired. It undermines even those modes of narrative production that do not seem to be “productions” at all, such as science, psychology, the logical discernment

of cause and effect, intuition, as well as biblical narratives and the idea of destiny. In an environment in which problems of who or what (if anything) structures the world had a particular philosophical as well as political import, this novel, in the name of realism, carefully undermines the viability of all explanatory narratives. In an ironic subversion suitable to the historical moment, it radically undermines the theoretical bases of secular culture as well as the convictions of the ecclesiastics, and, in so doing, questions the nature and function of narrative.

The transition to secularism poses the problem of where meaning is to be situated: in the outside world, within the domain of the mind, or somewhere in between. This is the problem to which Hegel (among others) responded when he tried to reconcile freedom and the “demands of union with cosmic spirit,” or the opposition between mind and world as the source of meaning. As Charles Taylor writes, “A disenchanted world is correlative to a self-defining subject, and the winning through to a self-defining identity was accompanied by a sense of exhilaration and power, that the subject need no longer define his perfection or vice, his equilibrium or disharmony, in relation to an external order. With the forging of this modern subjectivity there comes a new notion of freedom, and a newly central role attributed to freedom, which seems to have proved itself definitive and irreversible.”²

The question of what drives Julien Sorel’s ascent and descent stands at the base of *Le rouge* plot criticism. Critics generally recognize that Julien does not ascend the social scale on his own steam but rather on a tide of outside forces. For Miller, Brombert, Blin, and others, those outside forces mean the social machine, the vicissitudes of Restoration culture, and the sentimental caprices of others.³ It is Madame de Rênal’s love and not Julien’s strategies that produces his amorous success. It is Chélan who puts Julien in Besançon, the marquis via Pirard who brings him to Paris, this marquis’ boredom that invents the blue suit, and Mathilde’s unplanned pregnancy that turns him into the chevalier de La Vernaye. The “outside forces” that decide Julien’s existence can also be read as forces of the unconscious (Felman, Crouzet) or, should Julien in fact be the son of an aristocrat, of some biological determinism. But these outside forces, it is worth noting, have in common an element that embodies both the pursuit and the subversion of explanatory apparatuses. This is the force of chance.

When Julien is with the Rênals, he is chosen to ride at the head of

the king's parade. It constitutes a moment of great pride for Julien, particularly at the instant when he barely escapes falling into the mud: "His joy exceeded all measure when, as they passed by the old rampart, the noise of the little cannon caused his horse to shy out of line. By great good luck [*par un grand hasard*], he did not fall off, and from that moment on he felt himself a hero."⁴ "From that moment on": his pride comes from the fact that he remains on the horse. But in fact, the subtle intrusion of *hasard* contradicts Julien's understanding of the moment as his own creation and explicitly dissipates the notion of personal agency. The act cannot be entirely "heroic" when it is as much an enactment, an intrusion from without, as an act; and yet, the incident contributes to Julien's sense of his competence and his place in the world. What is more, it contributes to others' sense of him: at dinner with the Valenod, the guests admire him: "These fine gentry, who knew Julien only by reputation and from seeing him on horseback when the king of ____ came to town, were his most enthusiastic admirers" (112; 141).

Hasard, again and again, intervenes at the precise moments when Julien is most proud of his competence, most sure of himself. In the salon with Madame de Fervaques, for instance, the narrator writes: "He had taken an action, he was less miserable; his eyes fell by accident [*par hasard*] on the Russia-leather briefcase in which Prince Korasoff had placed the fifty-three love letters that were his gift to Julien" (328; 404). And then, on the next page, the narrator reveals that "accident [*le hasard*] had revealed to Julien the path to eloquence" (329; 405). It is true that Julien has acted, that he has done something. But chance has twice intervened to carry Julien through that course of action, handing him both eloquence in the salon and the turn of the head that enables him to remember the letters. Again, though, the eloquence that chance makes accessible inspires Fervaques to admire Julien, and Julien to admire himself. Here, there is a sense that the personal triumph is neither. Indeed, the idea of the personal is complicated, as chance intrudes on the very parameters of Julien.

In his study of chance in nineteenth-century fiction, David Bell underscores the importance of the auspicious (chance) occasion. He writes, "What the strategist forgets or neglects is quite simply the fortuitous nature present at the founding of the law, the unpredictable propensities that gave the law its particular shape and signal its temporary (because nonoriginary) status."⁵ Chance produces space, signifies opportunity: Bell describes Stendhal's characters (in *La*

Chartreuse in particular) as strategists or tacticians according to their understanding of this freedom.⁶ In *Le rouge*, chance is both the foundation of the plot and the condition of narrative: the sign, as it were, under which the novel is set. Chance places the narrative on a continuous circular pursuit of meaning that becomes, for character and reader, the principal concern of the novel.

THE EPIC FORCE OF CHANCE

To more precisely cast the use of chance in *Le rouge*, I turn to Georg Lukács's account of the transition from the epic to the novel. This transition, as he recounts it in *The Theory of the Novel*, turns on the character's dependence on outside forces:

Achilles or Odysseus, Dante or Arjuna—precisely because they are guided along their paths by gods—realise that if they lacked this guidance, if they were without divine help, they would be powerless and helpless in the face of mighty enemies. The relationship between the objective and subjective worlds is maintained in adequate balance: the hero is rightly conscious of the superiority of the opposing outside world; yet despite this innermost modesty he can triumph in the end because his lesser strength is guided to victory by the highest power in the world.⁷

In the epic, the “highest power in the world” sustains the hero, who in turn depends upon that power to guide his path. That “highest power” acts both as a spiritual guide for the character and as a cement that unifies the narrative—that connects the episodes to one another and the epic character to the world of action. In the novel, though, this cement comes undone and the nature of the protagonist's path turns suddenly solitary: “The first great novel of world literature stands at the beginning of the time when the Christian God began to forsake the world; when man became lonely and could find meaning and substance only in his own soul, whose home was nowhere; when the world, released from its paradoxical anchorage in a beyond that is truly present, was abandoned to its immanent meaninglessness.”⁸ The novelistic world is thus one in which the spiritual connection of the hero to the outside world is dissolved, in which the “highest power in the world” (the gods of the epic) gives way to an “immanent meaninglessness.” The novelistic character, or a character in a world without God, responds to this meaningless-

ness by generating a meaning or substance of his or her own: “The inner importance of the individual has reached its historical apogee: the individual is no longer significant as the carrier of transcendent worlds, as he was in abstract idealism, he now carries his value exclusively within himself.”⁹

In turning to *The Theory of the Novel*, I mean to discuss the characters’ dependence on or independence from outside forces as Lukács does, in spiritual terms. The transferal of “value” from the outside to the inside could be read as a rite of passage or as a gesture of pride, but Lukács narrates it as a response to a world situation. In the preface to *The Theory of the Novel*, he declares the stakes of his discussion by pointing out that for Hegel “Art becomes problematic precisely because reality has become non-problematic. The idea put forth in *The Theory of the Novel*, although formally similar, is in fact the complete opposite of this: the problems of the novel form are here the mirror-image of a world gone out of joint. This is why the ‘prose’ of life is here only a symptom, among many others, of the fact that reality no longer constitutes a favourable soil for art. . . . And this is not for artistic but for historico-philosophical reasons.”¹⁰ Michael Holzman reads the moment in the preface when Lukács writes that “the author was not looking for a new literary form, but, quite explicitly, for a ‘new world’” (20), with this statement: “That ‘new world’ was as little social as literary, and if it was not as specifically sectarian as that of Lukács’s friend Buber, it was most certainly religious.”¹¹ Holzman then speaks of reading *The Theory of the Novel* “as a wish, as, in a way, a novel or a fantasy, a search through literary history for exactly those lost Blessed Ages, for immanence, for God.”¹²

Based on the schematic criteria that Lukács outlines, Julien Sorel fits the description of a novelistic character, both in his ideological and his historical positions. For one, Julien has an incredulous disposition, a suspicion of institutional religion, a sense that the Church is nothing but a profitable business, and a mistrust of ecclesiastics. What is more, he resists the notions of God and transcendence in a more fundamental sense. He believes that what happens around him—his social circumstances, the conduct of others, the decisions that are made for him—is not the work of God, not an indication of the world as it is meant to be, not about a cosmic master plan, but about social mores and rules, rules whose uniformity is born of artificial manipulation rather than divine ordinance. This belief pushes Julien to position himself as a manipulator and a

climber, qualities that he admires in Napoleon. He sees his successes as his own doing (“the credit is all mine”) and remains contemptuous of superstition, even his own. He embodies romantic irony as René Bourgeois describes it: “Romantic irony . . . is a philosophical disposition, wherein the world is a theater on which one must play one’s role quite deliberately, keeping in mind another universe, one born of the imagination, which stands at once in opposition to and in correspondence with the first.”¹³ In *Le rouge*, we can understand these opposing worlds as the outside context as Julien understands it and the inner landscape within which he operates. As the narrator writes, “Julien . . . had sworn an oath never to say anything except what seemed false to him” (114; 143); he has promised that the part played on the outside stage will be held at a distance from his inner feelings.

On the one hand, his is the ironic disposition of a cynical mind under Restoration culture, where the entire political structure can be read as a theater with rapidly changing sets and costumes. But more profoundly, Julien’s is a secular disposition, a strategic self-sufficiency created for a world without an intrinsic or sacred order, without God. Restoration culture, as critics have observed, resembles an elaborate *mise-en-scène*, but one without substantial connection to some spiritual force.¹⁴ And when there is no guidance, and thus no substantial source of meaning and direction, the moment comes when the character “carries his value exclusively within himself.” Kierkegaard outlines this transposition of meaning from the world into the character in *Either/Or*: “Our age . . . must turn the single individual over to himself completely in such a way that, strictly speaking, he becomes his own creator.”¹⁵ Unfortunately, as repeated intrusions of chance demonstrate, the world Julien inhabits is not entirely novelistic, in Lukács’s sense of the word, and does not turn Julien completely over to himself, but rather contains a subtle residue of epic structure. Personal freedom and the concept of action must be rethought when chance intrudes (and in this novel chance moments *are* presented as intrusions) on individual agency. When, in the episode where Julien holds Madame de Rênal’s hand (“Julien thought it was his *duty* to make sure that the hand was not withdrawn when he touched it” (42; 51, italics in text)), the narrator writes that Julien “had found, almost by accident [*presque par hasard*], enough blind courage to take a single action” (44; 54), *hasard* comes in to contradict the sense of duty. “Almost” shifts the locus of compulsion, of duty, placing Julien somewhere between free

choice and unconscious beholdenness to another dimension. Another such intervention, and in some sense the most subversive to Julien's sense of success, appears in the episode that leads him to declare: "My novel is finished, and the credit is all mine. I was able to make myself loved by that monster of pride, he thought, glancing at Mathilde; her father cannot live without her nor she without me" (359; 444, tm).¹⁶ Here again, though, chance has intervened. In that victorious moment in the library, when Julien "makes himself loved by that monster of pride" ("So there she is, that proud beauty, at my feet!" [338; 418]), the narrator writes, "Only accident [*le hasard tout seul*] had brought about this outburst" (339; 419). Again and again, an active and independent *hasard* orchestrates Julien's experiences: "A lucky accident [*Un heureux hasard*] brought Julien into the presence of M. Valenod" (51; 64); "As luck would have it [*Le hasard voulut que*], Abbé de Frilair was on duty that evening" (164; 204); "The singular person whom chance [*le hasard*] had rendered absolute mistress of all his happiness" (296; 365); "The excesses of zeal, of which chance [*le hasard*] had made him the witness" (313; 385, tm).

When chance has a substantial hand in his success, Julien, though he alone is accountable for his actions, cannot claim responsibility, anymore than Achilles or Odysseus can claim sole responsibility for their victories. With the support of chance, as Lukács would put it, Julien "can triumph in the end because his lesser strength is guided to victory by the highest power in the world." But whereas this guidance is fundamental to the epic, it becomes doubly subversive in this chronicle of manipulation and studied orchestration. In Homer, the gods were there to underwrite the virtues of Achilles or Odysseus, not to compromise them. Chance in *Le rouge*, though, functions not to guide Julien but to intrude on and dismantle his fantasies of autonomous manipulation at precisely those moments when the fantasies are at their pinnacle. This inscrutable force prevails at the moments when Julien becomes most enthusiastic about his own value, giving Bourgeois' ironic world another dimension, that of chance, superimposed on and trumping Julien's vision (he carries "exclusively within himself" a value that in fact comes from without). But even more ironic is that this inscrutable force *is* that of chance: the precise antithesis of fate, of epic structure, of everything that made Lukács's epic world a secure and meaningful arena in which to operate.

CHANCE AND THE AUTONOMOUS SUBJECT,
OR THE DOUBLE BIND OF SECULARISM

Sandy Petrey places chance in a political context by finding in it an embodiment of the arbitrary, performative, and content-free nature of Restoration ideology and laws. In a more abstract sense, chance embodies the spiritual situation of a culture from which transcendence has departed but in which secular logic has not taken root. Chance reminds (or threatens) Julien and the reader that an entire alternate world stands outside the realm of human machinations and interpretations. In contrast to the providentialist reading of history that precedes the Restoration, chance dismantles or contradicts the predication of causal chains, of determinism, of all manner of modes of reason, secular and religious, because it renders cause, linear narration, and understanding largely immaterial.¹⁷ The result is a sort of vacuum, a relentless orchestrated failure of modern (and ancient) epistemological strategies that places Julien in a double predicament. On the one hand, the repeated intrusions of chance deprive Julien of the autonomous existential certitude that Lukács finds in the novelistic hero. On the other hand, because the principle of chance is not in fact a principle, not a conferrer of meaning, and furthermore because Julien does not even see chance in operation, the narrative is denied the organic structure and seamless direction that Lukács finds in the epic. When Julien decides to go riding, writes the narrator, “acting only on himself and not at all on Mathilde’s mind or heart, he was leaving up to chance [*au hasard*] the disposition of his own destiny” (296; 365). And yet, we know by this time that the disposition of Julien’s own destiny is up to chance no matter what he does and no matter how he envisions his actions.

This chronicle of 1830 traces cultural and individual responses to the transition to a nonreligious consciousness. In order to do this, the novel creates that space of transition, creates the particular semiepic and semisecular 1830 that it chronicles. This, again, is the same space of transition to which Hegel responded when he tried to reconcile freedom and the “demands of union with cosmic spirit.” Writes Charles Taylor, in a description reminiscent of Lukács and Kierkegaard:

From the standpoint of the autonomous, finite subject, the larger course of events which affects him is distinguished from what he does as what

happens to him: his fate. This fate is quite distinct from himself, in the sense that it is not at all an expression of him, something one can only find in what he does. From this point of view, that of separation, the injunction of an earlier time to reconcile oneself to fate, to come to see its necessity and hence make peace with it, can only be understood as a call to surrender, not as an invitation to deeper insight. But the course of things is in some sense an expression of cosmic spirit; and hence to see it as quite other is to define oneself in opposition to cosmic spirit. On the other hand, to be united to infinite spirit, even more to see oneself as its vehicle, would be to recognize in one's fate an expression of a reality from which one could not dissociate oneself.¹⁸

Le rouge casts chance as a metaphor for this ambivalence about connection to the outside world and, what is more, casts fiction as the arena for its dramatization. Julien follows the directions of chance like the ancient Stoic's dog tied to the wagon; and yet, he has neither the Stoic's attitude of resigned submission nor the Hegelian's deep understanding of the wagon's course and its logic. Implied in the intrusions of chance, which both comprise and undo the "Chronicle of 1830," is an ironic ambivalence about the transition to a secular world. This chronicle expresses on the one hand a desire to be rid of the constraints of the philosophical and ontological structures of the past and, on the other hand, a reluctance to abandon those form-giving structures.

LIVING IN LIMBO: CHANCE AND PROVIDENCE

Chance, as we said, prevents the reader from situating meaning solidly within the world of action or within the world of the mind. The characters, too, seem to sense this problematic function and are much occupied with negotiating the cosmic (or random) spirit of the outside world. Julien regards such spirits with a mistrust that morphs into philosophical detachment: "Hitherto, he had been angry only with his destiny [*le hasard*] and with society" (62; 78); "A poor devil like me, dropped by fate [*par le hasard*] in the lowest rank of society, will never get a chance like this again" (270; 333). And, before he meets his father for the last time: "Chance [*le hasard*] has placed us near one another on the earth" (398; 496). While Julien maintains a sort of brave denial, Mathilde on the other hand sees chance as a fairy godmother: "What could she want? Fortune, noble birth, intelligence, beauty (as everyone kept telling her and as she

believed herself) had been piled on her by the hand of fate [*les mains du hasard*]. Such were the thoughts of the most envied heiress of the Faubourg Saint-Germain” (250; 309). And again: “Between Julien and me there is no contract to be signed, no lawyer, everything is heroic, everything is up to the free play of chance [*tout sera fils du hasard*]” (252; 311). And then, bemoaning the modern age: “A man’s life was one continual train of dangers [*hasards*]. Nowadays civilization has eliminated danger [*a chassé le hasard*], and the unexpected never happens” (265–66; 327). In the end, there is no great distinction between the respective superstitions of these characters, for the chance that Julien and Mathilde ponder (or welcome or fear) is eclipsed by the narrative chance that actually acts upon them.

While Julien embraces the idea of being his own creator and Mathilde enjoys being the favored daughter of chance, the ecclesiastics, on the other hand, want to weave chance into a sacred narrative of destiny. At the beginning of the second part of the novel, Julien has left the seminary for the Hotel de La Mole. He declares to the abbé Pirard, “My father hated me ever since I was in the cradle; it was one of my greatest griefs; but I shall no longer complain of fortune [*je ne me plaindrai plus du hasard*], I have found another father in you, sir” (191; 236). To this, Pirard responds, “‘Very well, very well,’ said the abbé in some embarrassment; then he recalled [*rencontrant fort à propos*] a timely expression from his days as director of the seminary: ‘you must never speak of fortune, my child, always say Providence instead [*il ne faut jamais dire le hasard, mon enfant, dites toujours la Providence*]’” (191; 236, tm). Julien has no response to this statement and the narrator no comment.

Pirard’s replacement of chance with Providence exemplifies the sort of narrative production, or reduction, that Bell decried in his examination of chance. When Pirard insists on Providence, having “recalled a timely expression of the seminary director,” he does not stipulate that his bond with Julien in particular is the work of Providence. He insists instead, in a semantic gesture that seems almost instinctual, that Julien should substitute Providence for chance in every case. Pirard’s principled rejection of Julien’s way of speaking comes from a long-lived and powerfully developed theoretical point of view, but his manner of articulating it, I would propose, does not so much replace chance with Providence as absorb the one into the other. Pirard, in his capacity as seminary director (and thus as former seminarian who learned from his seminary director, who in

turn learned from another, etc.), intends a spiritual paternalism, but in the end, he seems only to fob his student off with a slogan—a slogan that seems surprisingly rote and insubstantial in its application.

Helmut Thielicke writes in *Nihilism*: “Accident is the ‘other side’ of fate itself,” and, “Fate and chance are the same thing, only seen from different sides.”¹⁹ Thielicke’s book starts, tellingly, with a consideration of “nihil” and “ism,” or nothingness (nihil) and absoluteness of position (ism), and the collapse of chance into fate can be read in connection with this reconciliation. When, in the second part of *Le rouge*, Madame de Fervaques makes a cryptic comment about love, Julien thinks: “Either that means nothing or it means everything. These are some of the secrets of language that will be forever hidden from us poor provincials (333; 412).” One of the secrets of language that looms in the *hasard-Providence* episode, in the Fervaques episode, and in the rest of *Le rouge* is the intimate connection—and in a sense the ultimate interchangeability—between meaning everything and meaning nothing. If *a* is *b*, goes the mathematical principle, then *b* is *a*, and while Pirard’s substitution intends to minimize chance in favor of Providence, it simultaneously and unintentionally elides the distinction between these propositions. If Providence is a vehicle of meaning and chance a repository of meaninglessness, in other words, then the replacement of chance with Providence brings meaning and meaninglessness into a precariously close proximity. Chance become Providence gains a sudden significance, a sudden substance, but by the same token, that Providence that once was chance retains the sense or shade of meaninglessness—a meaninglessness that, in this novel, continues to surface.

PROVIDENCE AND THE BUSINESS OF NARRATIVE PRODUCTION

Pirard’s substitution of chance for Providence is a testament both to the need for and the futility of narratives: the scramble for the condensation of chance into Providence, of disorder into order, and the continual appearance of more chance, more disorder, to be so condensed. On the one hand, the facile emptiness of the substitution is important for the criticism of Restoration politics that subtends this narration. During the Restoration, as Petrey described: “The characters of *Le Rouge et le Noir* continuously do for themselves exactly what the regime of Louis XVIII and Charles X did for itself,

convert quintessentially performative operations into incontrovertibly referential truths.”²⁰ Among those performative operations was the insertion of the discourse of sacred order into social and historical narratives.²¹ Aside from its political resonance, though, and aside from its critical implications for the Church and its discourse, Pirard’s substitution presents the taming of chance, by whatever means, as an act of narrative production, and vice versa. At the start of the chapter entitled: “A Plot [*Un Complot*],” the narrator inserts this epigraph: “Random words, accidental encounters [*des rencontres par effet du hasard*] turn into conclusive evidence in the mind of an imaginative man, if he has a bit of fire in his heart” (256; 317). *Le rouge et le noir* both demands and chronicles the production of narrative strands, the synthesis of “random words” into a chain—for the characters and for the reader. At the same time, it impedes that same production with a deliberate series of disparate elements that both demand and resist connection.

The entire plot of *Le rouge*, indeed, constitutes a sort of mosaic on which any structure remains a false imposition and in which the search for first causes must remain unsatisfied. Writes Victor Brombert, “Rapid shifts of point of view, calling for several layers of simultaneous interpretation, almost totally abolish explicatory transitions.”²² For Shoshana Felman, these “rapid shifts” permeate the novel’s lexicon: “Taking apart (yet with apparent lucidity) rational clarity and the security of univocal meaning, Stendhalien language makes reading itself an adventuresome experience, risky and uncomfortable.”²³ And not just paragraphs and words, but the entire narrative is comprised of various disembodied sections—of bounds from one episode to another, from one moment to another. In the episode of the secret note, the narrator compares politics in the novel to a pistol shot in a concert (“The noise is shattering without being forceful. It doesn’t harmonize with any of the other instruments” [304; 376]). To continue this musical comparison, the world of *Le rouge* can be read as a discordant orchestra; without what Brombert called explicatory transitions, the novel resonates not so much as a symphonic whole as a compendium of various melodies, one on top of the other. The cacophonous composition of scenes, for instance, the introduction of Falcoz and Giraud, the episode of the secret note and Castanède’s inexplicable opposition to the note’s delivery, the adjudication scene and the visit of Geronimo, the encounter with Don Diego Bustos, introduced and then abandoned, the continuous alterations in sentiment, Julien’s love for Ma-

dame de Rênal, then for Mathilde, then, suddenly, once more for Madame de Rênal, produce this discordance. So does the continued focus on the present, which Michel Crouzet names the “perpetual discovery which would be the law of the narrative,”²⁴ and which Brombert described as crucial not just to the narration but to the characters’ experience: “Stendhal’s heroes discover themselves existentially, through their reactions; and they even discover their reactions as a surprise.”²⁵

The novel’s simultaneous demand for and resistance to consolidation finds further articulation in its continuous erasure of memory. For instance, once at the Rênal house: “[Julien] forgot everything, including his purpose in coming” (22; 25). When M. de Rênal goes away, “[Madame de Rênal] had quite forgotten his existence” (40; 48). Further on, Julien: “If he had stopped seeing M. de Rênal, in a week he would have forgotten him, his house, his dogs, his children, and his whole family” (50; 62). Norbert meets Julien and the next morning “had forgotten his existence” (199; 246, tm). As for his sister, when Julien returns from Strasbourg: “Mathilde had almost forgotten him” (325; 400). On the one hand, these persistent erasures serve to undermine the sentimental bases of romanticism: there can be no permanent adoration when the brain and heart have no retention. But more than this, these erasures undermine the sense of a narration that builds. Crouzet’s comparison with the surrealists is perhaps the most apt, for the novel is comprised of these suspensions, bounds from one moment to the other—moments that enter into one another, act on one another, obscure one another, but resist composition and condensation, resist conversion into Providence or even into a reasonable narrative.

The fundamental disembodiment that permeates this novel contradicts the sense that understanding is cumulative, and in so doing undermines the predictive and explicatory function of the past. It also turns the process of reading into an exercise in connecting dots that resist connection. Given these leaps and gaps and interruptions, any synthesis would necessarily be an imposition, and an incomplete one. Readers would necessarily, as Carol Mossman proposes, “extract one series of messages while ignoring the other.”²⁶ At best, the narrator indicates, the mind can generate possible narratives, none of which are complete and none of which come close to encompassing the world in its disconnection and disorder. We can consider for instance the shooting of Madame de Rênal and the punishment that ensues, about which D. A. Miller said: “Each separate motive on its

own merits is insufficient, and all the motives taken together do not command a cohesive psychological case.”²⁷ The various plot elements that lead up to the shooting can each be made to make sense, but resist an encompassing narrative. The marquis reacting to Madame de Rênal’s letter, for instance, can read as the moral father outraged at Julien’s conduct, or, alternatively, as the hypocritical aristocrat pleased at the excuse to banish the peasant. As for Julien, he can represent the jealous lover furious with the Church, the parvenu obsessed with Mathilde, the lover obsessed with Madame de Rênal, the son obsessed with Madame de Rênal, the paranoiac worried about his reputation, the egomaniac who does not want to be misunderstood, or the self-destructive madman. The death sentence, finally, can be read as bourgeois vengeance on the upstart peasant, Valenod’s punishment of his rival, the result of Frilair’s clumsiness, the simple intrusion of judicial principle, a senseless aberration, and so on. The entire scene, if not the entire novel, reads as a complicated compendium of intersecting and superimposed circles, stories, and readings. Like the sort of children’s book that divides into horizontal sections so that the head of a bear can rest on the body of a horse and the legs of a chicken, *Le rouge et le noir* encourages such curious combinations and resists a condensing explanatory narrative.

We know that the transition to secularism poses the problem of where meaning is to be situated, within the character or in the outside world. Chance, both as a dramatic instrument and as a narrative principle, precludes a harmonic vision of the outside world. It turns what Lukács named “the highest power in the world” into a largely amorphous force and so encourages what Taylor described as “disenchantment.” And as cited earlier, Lukács wrote that the “individual, no longer significant as the carrier of transcendent worlds . . . now carries his value exclusively within himself.” Julien, a novelistic hero (“my novel is finished”) certainly seems to want the novel to be about him (“the credit is all mine”), as do readers; *Le rouge* is often called a psychological novel. But it is important to see that the strand of psychological interpretation in this novel, like all its strands of interpretation, is systematically broken or blurred at important points by a disorder that intrudes on the subject from within and without. This blurring undermines the conceptual parameters of character and also impedes the “winning through to self-identity” even in the midst of disenchantment.

CHANCE, THE UNCONSCIOUS, AND THE
DEAD END OF SELF-REVELATION

Some readers propose that chance, in such sentences as “he had had almost by accident [*par hasard*] the blind courage to act” and “accident [*le hasard*] had revealed to Julien the path to eloquence” could be read as indicating the operation of the unconscious rather than the epic intrusion of another dimension.²⁸ This reading is entirely possible, but not as valuable an instrument of comprehension as it seems. One problem is that aside from moments in which chance could be read as code for the unconscious, it is connected in other instances to a force outside (it would be hard for instance to declare that Julien’s unconscious made him remain on the horse); so even the operation of the unconscious would not disable the other sorts of chance that intrude upon him. Another more fundamental problem is that chance, no matter what it is and where it is situated, has already been placed in an ironic contradiction with Julien’s understanding, his sense of character, his pride. Therefore, even when we read certain moments of chance to mean that Julien’s unconscious is in operation, the fact remains that that unconscious is inaccessible to him, unassimilable, enigmatic. Nineteenth-century psychological discourse, in fact, long describes the unconscious less as an integral part of one’s character than as an inscrutable alternate dimension. Henri Ellenberger’s *The Discovery of the Unconscious* traces the history of this dimension. Of Schopenhauer, he writes, “man is an irrational being guided by internal forces, which are unknown to him and of which he is scarcely aware.”²⁹ Carus described an unconscious that “is turned toward the future and toward the past but does not know of the present.”³⁰ (This idea could be read as an oracular description of the psyche, an alternative to *Le rouge’s* focus on chance and Providence.) Carus focused, as Jung would, on the un-beholdenness of the unconscious to constraints of time, space, and direct experience. Von Hartmann understood the unconscious in terms of an energy force, as a “highly intelligent though blind dynamism underlying the visible universe”³¹ and Nietzsche conceived of psychic energy as being dammed up and discharged in the same way as physical energy.³² Darwin situates this energy in the nervous system, but echoes the sense that it constitutes an independent mechanism: “Certain actions which we recognize as expressive of certain states of the mind are the direct result of the constitution of the ner-

vous system, and have been from the first independent of the will, and, to a large extent, of habit.”³³

In the course of the century, the unconscious replaced the supernatural as principal character in scenes of drama and madness. Chevreul, in experiments with divining rods and pendulums, attributed to unconscious thoughts and movements phenomena that had been previously attributed to “spirits.”³⁴ Bergson and Janet (both of whom, as Ellenberger writes, “revealed their deep-seated preoccupation with religion late in life”),³⁵ wrote of the automatic nature of unconscious reasoning. Freud would later describe the instincts as “representatives of all the forces originating in the interior of the body and transmitted to the mental apparatus” and, in a more poetic moment, as “an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things;”³⁶ he also introduced the concept of displaceable or sublimated energies.³⁷ Georg Groddeck, demonstrating that writings on the unconscious used the discourse of the supernatural well into the twentieth century, insisted that “man is animated by the Unknown, that there is within him . . . some wondrous force which directs both what he himself does, and what happens to him. The affirmation ‘I live’ is only conditionally correct, it expresses only a small and superficial part of the fundamental principle, ‘Man is lived by the It.’”³⁸

In their readings of *Le rouge*, Shoshana Felman and Michel Crouzet cite the unconscious, much as Bell cites chance, as an obstacle rather than a key to planned understanding. Felman describes Julien’s actions in terms of madness, defining madness as a “de-rangement, a mental sickness,”³⁹ and as senselessness with respect to an established order: “Madness is relative: it is senseless with respect to sense, which denies it and is then denied by it in turn.”⁴⁰ Crouzet writes, “This [the sublime] is the dimension from which I want to study Julien Sorel: this character [*personnage*], but is he in fact a character, he whom one cannot grasp without interpreting, without mutilating, this non-character [*non-caractère*] endlessly covered and described in contradictions. His only coherence comes perhaps not from a psychological but from a poetic reading, where he could be understood for his effects. The sublime would be that constant that gives him, in his brilliance and incoherence, a formal definition.”⁴¹ And then: “Psychoanalysis, perhaps because it misrepresents or flattens the Sublime, seems deadly for this concept-form so suited to romantic modernity.”⁴² The unconscious, as fountain of ideas and images, retains the element of the inexplicable or uncon-

tainable. It is not surprising, since psychology is a form of narrative, that the introduction of the science of the mind, as well as of narrative production, accompanies the fading of the sacred master plot. But the unconscious, as we see, like generated narratives, like the replacement of chance with Providence, does not elucidate enigma, but rather transposes it. Psychoanalysis, like psychoanalytic criticism, resonates thus as a Band-Aid over an abyss, for whether Julien throws himself in a fit of madness or is pushed by a cosmic hand, the rise of the unconscious as Stendhal frames it here functions as a Trojan horse returning the vast unreadable to the modern world.

Let us consider the disclosure of Julien's character that operates in the course of the novel. From the start, the narrator predicates a distinction between the character Julien discloses to the outside world and the character that he in fact is (the distinction described in Bourgeois' romantic irony). This distinction, underscored in the numerous references to hypocrisy, to role-playing, to the desire to "rely only on those parts of my character that I've thoroughly tested" (37; 59), to "never to say anything except what seemed false to him," suppose a "him" obscured under the charade—a character conscious of a core concealed within. In the Hôtel de La Mole, Julien is employed as a scribe: he copies the words of the marquis. This occupation, which is also emblematic of his *modus operandi* (Julien has previously copied Napoleon, Rousseau, Molière, etc.), rests on the distinction between the scripted and unscripted on which the narrator has insisted from the start. In a sense, the entire Hôtel de La Mole is about that distinction and about speculation on what Julien would do in spontaneous moments, in the absence of mimesis, deception, verbatim recitations, and other calculated performances. Critics have commented on the value and substance in this obscured spontaneous Julien. For instance, for D. A. Miller: "The moments when plots falter coincide with moments when Julien seems most closely in touch with himself, at a primary level of being."⁴³ And for Brombert: "[Julien] is persistently wrong about his feelings and, above all, charmingly unaware of his real qualities."⁴⁴ These comments and the narrator's insinuations presume that there is a fundamental Julien, a primary level that can be uncovered. This focus is appropriate to the historical moment; character, as Lukács said, stands as the nucleus of modern fiction, and much of the novel seems to maintain this principle.

For months, Julien is unable to transcend the Hôtel de La Mole, unable to depart. In London, he is praised for his "cool expression,

a thousand miles from the sensation of the moment' (222; 276, italics in text). And even in Strasbourg he continues to copy, only this time from Korasoff and not the marquis. However, within the frame of his mimetic occupation, there are moments when Julien can escape, when he eludes the bounds of calculation and mimesis. And these moments, curiously, invariably produce senselessness rather than a comprehensible core. The first instance of unplanned originality appears in Julien's first series of copies: "The marquis entered, glanced at the copies, and noted with amazement that Julien wrote *cela* with two l's, *cella*" (195; 241). This spontaneous nonsense word becomes a signature feature of Julien: at dinner, the marquis introduces him as "my secretary, and he writes *cela* with two l's" (196; 243). But this signature feature, this first departure from the script, in this scene, in this house, and in French, has no meaning. As Jared Stark points out, the unscripted Julien (the two l's indicate the presence of Julien Sorel, *sur-l*, Sorel), is the embodiment of senselessness.⁴⁵

Another moment of spontaneous revelation comes when Julien draws a sword on Mathilde—an action that is instantly cut short (the sword, no more than the pen, can function as an instrument of self-expression in the house of La Mole). Another such instance is when Julien discusses Napoleon with Mathilde (abandoning one script to discuss another), and another is when he declares his adoration for her. But the final and most important such moment is his response to Madame de Rênal's letter. When this document arrives, Julien runs from the house, never to return, no longer the scribe. This is his most spontaneous action and it is also, significantly, his most unreadable. From the moment he steps out of the house, his actions are dramatic, erratic, and peculiar. The narrator writes: "On this swift journey he was unable to write to Mathilde, as he had intended to do; his hand formed nothing on the paper but illegible scrawls [*traits illisibles*]" (362; 449). Unable to read or represent himself as other than the manipulated and mediated character that he was in the Paris mansion, Julien cannot make sense. This predicament continues in Verrières at the arms merchant, where Julien "had great difficulty in making him understand he wanted pair of pistols" (362; 449). Not a word is said, from Paris to the church, and the gun transaction seems to be enacted almost without human participation. The inauthentic and mimetic structure of the house of La Mole is broken and the "unscripted" Julien is released. From the Hôtel de La Mole to the shooting in Verrières, Julien is positioned to move

from the mimetic to the spontaneous, from the calculated to the natural, from the surface to the nucleus. But when he does move thus, there is nothing to read.

This progression of incidents—the duties as scribe, the restrictions, and then the moment of spontaneous action—prepare the gradual disclosure of what Miller named the “primary level.” And yet, the wordless shooting of Madame de Rênal is the most incomprehensible action in the entire novel. What does this action articulate? What is being revealed? For some it is a frustration with God, who had “stolen” Madame de Rênal. For others it is the loss of Mathilde. For some it is the fact that his actual character is exposed, or that his actual character is discounted. Just as during the parade, chance (Providence) intruded at the moment he became a hero, here that outside force (madness, chance, the unconscious, romantic obsession) intrudes at the moment he is to express himself, at the moment the story becomes, in the most fundamental sense, about him. If indeed this is the core of Julien, the essence of his character, a “winning through to a self-defining identity,” it is a core or an identity that announces nothing but its unreadable nature. The road from La Mole to Verrières undoes what it pretends to reveal, sending the reader to search elsewhere for an explanatory chain.

LOUIS JENREL, OR THE ORACLE

What Lukács named the “highest power in the world” has morphed into chance, and thus loses its form-giving power. Its constant presence, however, precludes “the inner importance of the individual” from “reaching its historical apogee.” Though the individual is supremely important to himself and to the reader, intrusions from without continue to undermine his discoveries and determine his movements. Lucidity, once proclaimed, is denied and individual vision remains incomplete. Because this is so, though, because both Julien and the reader are systematically blocked in the pursuit of understanding, we should consider the place of the narrator in this spiritual and epistemological limbo. After all, the intrusion of chance and coincidence, the superimposition of various dimensions of action, the subversion of predictions, and the complication of character readings depend on third-person narration. When the marquis introduces Julien as the secretary “whom I’ve just added to my staff, and propose to make a man of, if that [*cella*] can

be done” (196; 243), his pun, his senselessness, has to be spelled out. In the coach to Verrières, it is the confusion in Julien’s writing (*traits illisibles*) that indicates his internal chaos. On the one hand, then, the narrator stands as reporter for a disordered world. On the other hand, the incomplete nature of the individual vision extends to this narrator, making him a participant in rather than a dominator of the culture he documents. The narrator occupies an uncertain space, between mastery and subversion of mastery, between the pronouncement of last words and the retraction or substitution of those last words, postulation of first causes and erasure of those causes.

In order to examine the role of the narrator, and by extension of narrative production, we must turn to the piece of paper that Julien finds in the church on his way to the Rênal house. For though it seems that there exists no absolute word, no superstructure to this world, there is a slender formal element that in some sense decides, or seems to decide, the course of the entire narrative: a subtle Providence, as it were, in the form of the oracle: “He found the church dark and deserted . . . All alone in the church, he took a seat in the finest pew. It bore M. de Rênal’s coat of arms. On the lectern, Julien noted a scrap of printed paper, set out there as if for him to read. He glanced at it and saw: *Details of the execution and last moments of Louis Jenrel, executed at Besançon, on the —* The paper was torn. On the other side were the first words of a line: *The first step . . .*” (20; 25, italics in text). The oracle, if we can name it that, has most commonly been read as a fanciful detail, rather than as a fundamental force in the plot. Michal Peled Ginsburg writes, “At first sight it seems as if this piece of paper functions as an oracle announcing, at the very beginning, what will inevitably happen at the end . . . At the end of the novel we should be able to recognize how ‘the first step’ started a chain of events that led with some logic and necessity to the last step—the violent murder attempt and the execution. But this reading is totally unconvincing. Why would the totally formal resemblance between Julien Sorel and Louis Jenrel (their names are the anagrams of each other—a formal resemblance that Julien does not even fully grasp) predict a similarity in their fates? . . . In other words, the oracle-text is presented as almost pure form, as empty of content as possible.”⁴⁶

The principal objection here is that there is no reason to read this paper as an oracle, that an anagram in a church with blood-colored curtains does not constitute a prediction, much less point to a causal

chain. Ginsburg's objection, entirely valid, brings us back—and it seems that this was the narrator's intention—to the notions of Providence and chance. In some sense, as an explanatory narrative, the oracle embodies the uselessness of explanatory narratives, but this uselessness, this ultimate fusion of chance with Providence, is, I would propose, the point of the novel. The oracle ends—or rather eludes—the search for a line of reasoning through insertion of a causal or at least predictive chain of the sort common in the epic. But even if the paper is not an oracle, even if it is just a coincidence, the fact remains that the shooting and execution would be no more or less assimilable, no more or less explicable as a pure mundane coincidence than as an oracular prediction. In the end, what matters is the fundamentally unassimilable nature of the shooting, the sense that it originates or is readable only in another, ever elusive dimension.

The ultimate fusion of chance and Providence sets in motion an eternal circle of perception similar to that embodied in Julien's prison meditations—a circle of reason and senselessness, first causes and multiple causes, or causes and coincidences. On the one hand, this circle derides the production of master plots, or derides the mind that is prepared to read coincidence as oracle. And this derision in turn undercuts all the master plots that have ever been produced, all the cosmic reasons that have been located and used as explanations from time immemorial, by virtue of its emptiness, its thin presence. On the other hand, because the fact remains that Julien does come to the same end as Louis Jenrel, because the slim formal element that is the oracle-coincidence is the closest we come to a prediction of that “unpredictable” execution, the intrusion of the oracle implies in some sense that a master plot cannot be avoided. This second scenario constitutes a particularly radical act for Restoration culture and a particularly anachronistic epistemological subversion. While readers ponder sources and reasons, while Restoration politicians and ecclesiastics claim an understanding of God's will, while Machiavellian manipulators orchestrate their social ascents (“Nowadays civilization has eliminated danger [*le hasard*], and the unexpected never happens”), this novel introduces a real Providence, a master cause. The real Providence is the one that no one (character) sees, or that no one (reader) can believe. During the Restoration, as Petrey described, the answer to the question “why” is often absent. But here, that “why” is resuscitated—taken out of the hands of politicians, ecclesiastics, and parvenus, and

placed, in some strange sense, in the hands of God. Throughout this novel, the more Restoration politics fabricate a vision of the world, the more the real world recedes. Conversion of chance into Providence seems only to generate more chance, and the more characters (and readers) come to understand the “entire story,” the more the “entire story” is displaced. This displacement, I propose, (re)inserts an element of the enigmatic in a culture that depends on and values pure manipulation. If the Restoration means a disingenuous free-for-all, then the oracle represents a fantasy of retribution, of transcendent order, of a means to make truth visible and dominant—a fantasy, ironically, of Providence.

NARRATIVE PRODUCTIONS: MANUFACTURING A VISION OF GOD

The oracle-coincidence serves as an effective instrument of indirect political comment. But as a form-giving instrument, as an actual source of reason, the oracle is rather insubstantial. Emile Talbot writes that the narrator of *Le rouge et le noir* “enjoys highlighting the arbitrariness of his role.”⁴⁷ But the author of Julien’s chronicle is not a Flaubert who guides the hand of God and sends his character to a depressingly unsurprising death. In the end, it is not the arbitrariness of the narrator’s role but of narration itself that this narrator underscores again and again. The narrator introduces the oracle and frames it with crimson curtains, but at the same time renders it as slim and coincidental an element as possible. What is more, by the time Julien comes to the same end as Louis Jenrel, the narrator has undermined and all but ridiculed the dramatic and narrative mechanisms that made the oracle possible. We can return, for instance, to the crimson curtains that set the sinister scene for Julien. These curtains, the narrator insists during the course of the novel, are put there by ecclesiastics wanting to produce an impression. The narrator is blatant about this: indeed, the church where the oracle is found functions primarily as an arena where spiritual dramas are mounted. We see the bishop of Agde practice his benedictions before the king’s parade. We see in the seminary a sort of actor’s workshop where the students practice “significant” acts: “In the seminary there’s a way of eating a boiled egg which declares how far one has progressed down the saintly path” (145; 180). The narrator discloses the human hands behind the stage set of the spiritual world and traces the building of that set: the cathedral before it is

decorated, the bishop without his miter and without his benedictions in order, Julien with spurs under his robe, the seminarians in the process of learning, Julien as a priest-to-be, thus establishing that human hands manufacture and sustain the spiritual world.

The church produces an entire vision of the universe—a vision of transcendence and spiritual ambiance. Julien, for instance, understands that the masses depend on his robe to sustain their vision of heaven: “How will [their seat in heaven] be made visible to them? By the difference between my exterior and that of a layman” (145; 181). This robe (and the decorated church, the benediction, the discourse of Providence, etc.) is a sort of blue suit for the spiritual world. When Julien (or someone else, anyone) puts it on, an entire atmosphere of sacred order and spiritual hierarchy is mounted. This atmosphere, synthetic as it is, and conscious as Julien is of its synthetic nature, is quite convincing to him. Just as the fiction of the chevalier de Beauvoisis, the blue suit, and the name of la Vernaye persuade Julien that he could be the son of some distant nobleman, so the vacuous emblems of the spiritual world work on him in spite of their emptiness. For instance, though Julien sees the bishop of Agde practicing his benedictions and so understands the plastic nature of this action, some months later, this same gesture puts him at ease: “[Pirard] glanced upward and made a sign of the cross. At the sight of this holy symbol Julien felt a slight easing of the profound horror that had frozen him since he entered this house” (137; 171). Julien is similarly affected by the decoration in the church of Verrières: “Because of a festival, all the windows of the building had been covered with scarlet cloth. As a result, the sun struck through in shafts of brilliant light, creating an impressive and religious atmosphere” (20; 24–25). Later, he participates in the decoration of the Besançon cathedral and so sees the process: “It was necessary, in one single morning, to cover all the Gothic columns lining the nave and the two aisles with a sort of red damask that was to be no less than thirty feet high” (153; 191), but nonetheless remains susceptible to its charms. “Fool that I am! I see a Gothic cathedral, ancient stained glass; my heart in its weakness forms from those windows a picture of the priest” (401; 500). The actor or producer in the drama of the spiritual world can become the audience, a Pavlovian consumer of his own product. Indeed, in a moment of *mise-en-abîme*, during the episode of the secret note, the marquis de La Mole quotes a fable of La Fontaine, *The Sculptor and the Statue of Jupiter* (*Le statuaire et la statue de Jupiter*): “Shall it be a god, a table, or a pot?”

[“*Sera-t-il dieu, table ou cuvette?*”] (307; 378). This fable describes a sculptor intimidated by the God he himself has made, and is worth quoting in its entirety:

A block of marble was so fair, / A Sculptor purchased it whole. / “What will my chisel prepare?” / He asked, “Deity, table, bowl?”

A god; he’ll even have, I say, / A bolt of lightning in his hand. / Tremble, humans; make vows and pray! / Behold the master of the land!

So perfectly the artist did portray / His statue’s each and every trait, / That everyone who saw it claimed with no delay: / Jove lacked only power to orate.

Of this artist it was even said: / On finishing his imitation, / He was first to quake in dread / And terror of his own creation.

To match this sculptor’s flaw / The poet of antiquity was excellent, / In his great fear, respect, and awe / Of those very gods he did invent.

He was a child in this. / Children always fuss and fret. / Ever take things amiss / Lest their dolls become upset.

The heart is quick to heed the mind / And so it became the fountainhead / Whence pagan error, always blind, / To so many peoples swiftly spread.

Passionate was their embrace / Of their own fantasy’s desire: / Pygmalion’s love did grace / The Venus he himself did sire.

All try to change to gold, / The dreams that pass before their eyes: / To truths man is always ice cold; / And always eager to swallow lies.⁴⁸

DISTRACTION, OR THE UNBEARABLE ARBITRARINESS OF THE *ARBITRAIRE DU RÉCIT*

Because religion in Restoration France is so inextricably interwoven with economic and political manipulation, the novel’s subtle undermining of ecclesiastic dominance and lucidity can be read as pure social criticism. But, I maintain, *Le rouge’s* criticism of this production has to do with atmosphere, with the dismantling not just of

power structures but also of instruments of understanding and forgiving. The narrator, significantly, seems as unable to master the narration as do the ecclesiastics, as unable to comprehend the outside world as Julien. The oracle-coincidence that intrudes on the church, for instance, could easily be read as the instrument of a manipulative, elusive, and secular author. And yet, this narrator practices neither elusion nor manipulation, but rather distractedness and contradiction. When the narrator decorates the church for dramatic purposes as the ecclesiastics decorate it for political purposes, he shows his own hand. He is also almost parodic in his use of foreshadowing: when Julien comes to the Rênal house the narrator writes, “He had just ducked his head [*plonger la tête*] in the public fountain. To her great joy, she discovered the timid manner of a young girl in this terrible tutor [*fatal précepteur*]” (22; 27). At the end, of course, the fatal Julien plunges his head, as did Louis Jenrel, into another public aperture.

The fact that the oracle contains as much coincidence as it does sacred direction underscores the emptiness and gratuitousness of these gestures. Furthermore, and here we recall Ginsburg’s objection that “while the end meets the beginning, the events that mediate fail to constitute a coherent sequence,” the oracle is not even the sole reference to an epic or supernatural order that the narrator inserts. Superimposed on the oracle and the falling head is the moment in the opera house, when Mathilde is in her box and Julien, returned from Strasbourg and courting Madame de Fervaques, forces himself not to turn in her direction: “Drunk with love and pleasure, he took an oath not to speak to her. In my opinion, this was one of the finest traits of his character; a man capable of imposing such restraint on his own impulses may go far, *si fata sinant*” (342; 425, italics in text). Julien’s plans and desires, warns the narrator, are useless when the *fata* are in operation. In an epic, these *fata* would mean the gods. Indeed, *si fata sinant*, much more than the oracle, resonates as a subtle reminder of the narrator’s dominance. But then again, these dramatic *fata* already have competition: the oracle is already in place. In other words, the narrator introduces this demure prediction (*si fata sinant*) in such a way that the reader marvels not so much at his mastery of the scene, but at the emptiness, multitude, and contradiction of his gestures. With these gestures, the narrator undermines his role and positions himself with the ecclesiastic, the scientist, and Julien, as another generator of fractional narratives.

The insertion of *si fata sinant* in a narrative that already contains a crimson-curtained oracle amounts to a layering of Providence upon Providence, narrative instrument upon narrative instrument. With these instruments, *Le rouge* combines the various sorts of Providence that have driven narratives from time immemorial: dramatic anachronisms epic and tragic that, competing in multitude, underscore the mimetic clumsiness of modern narrative production. As Peter Brooks writes, “The climactic moment of *Le Rouge et le Noir* may be an instance of what is known in classical rhetoric as a ‘metalepsis of the author’: assigning to the author’s agency an action that should normally have been given an agency in the text.”⁴⁹ And yet: “Constantly referring to the worlds of misunderstanding between his characters, the missed chances and might-have-beens, the narrator repeatedly adumbrates other novels, texts of the might-have-been-written.”⁵⁰ The “texts of the might-have-been-written” amount to “texts of the might-have-been-explained,” which amount in turn to a “could-not-be-explained,” impervious to readerly comprehension and authorial mastery.

The process of reading *Le rouge*, again, reproduces the process of living in Stendhal’s multidimensional and semisecular universe, but so, it seems, does the process of writing it. All these processes are based on the production of sense-making narratives, the discernment or fabrication of cause and effect. And all those narratives are at the same time bound to be erroneous—bound to discount or misread the actual forces that determine the world of action. The superimposition and intertwining of narrative strands blurs rather than fortifies the narrator’s authority. This blurring, this presentation of the narrator as a juggler of narrative strands rather than as some master puppeteer, finds particularly concrete articulation in the descriptions of the Rênal children. When the family is introduced, there are three sons, but when Julien arrives, there seem to be only two. Mossman and Lukacher write that this reduction—the temporary erasure of the middle son—represents the entrance of Julien and the filial nature of his relationship with Madame de Rênal.⁵¹ Indeed, this reading makes sense, as Julien’s departure for the seminary restores the original structure.⁵² But these mutations also act as a visible representation of the intersection of narrative strands—strands that compromise and undermine one another, that can only be considered one at a time because the mind is bound to a continuous motion from one reason to another, from one narrative to another. There is no master picture, in other words, but only an

endless number of stories, a sense of reason that vacillates without resolution from one place to another. One reading eliminates another, which in turn eliminates another. At the end, when Madame de Rênal dies embracing her children, we do not know how many there are. With the variable children, the oracle-coincidence, Providence and chance, and *si fata sinant*, the narrator shows his hand, or hands, subtly but repeatedly. He shows his authorial gestures to be gestures, spectacles, and performances. On the one hand, this narrator is the undisputed master of his chronicle of 1830, but the question remains: what chronicle is that? What has happened? Even the narrator does not seem to have the answer.

I have started this study with *Le rouge et le noir* because the novel articulates subtle and varied responses to participation in a secular culture: subverting readings, welcoming the arbitrary, separating character from social status, recuperating and undermining sacred order. The closest we can come in this novel to an explanatory narrative is something that seems to promise explanation but in fact does not: a disclosure of character that leaves the reader wondering what is so lucid about psychology, or a *mise-en-scène* of sacred spectacle that makes the sacred ludicrous, an evocation of God that ridicules religion, moments of spiritual contemplation that end up being the result of coincidence, or an oracle that leaves one wondering what was so comforting and harmonic about the epic world. There is a substantial distinction between creating disorder to celebrate authorial manipulation and creating disorder to warn what havoc the human hand can wreak. In the first scenario, the narrator derides the very form and structure of the world he produces. In the second, it is human pretense to authorial status that the narrator mocks. In the first scenario, forces of unsteadiness dismantle the entire frame and leave only the author standing. In the second, the author retains an ambivalence about the implications of that dismantling, about the loneliness that it implies. *Le rouge et le noir* stands in a space between these narrative attitudes, between vaunting and mistrust of narrative production, between celebration and subversion of the individual voice. That space of transition, that inclination to and ambivalence about narrative production, I would propose, accords *Le rouge* a particular sort of emotional and philosophical realism—the realism of gradual transition to a secular consciousness.