Stendhal

The Red and the Black

Read by Bill Homewood
Chapter 1

You must not for a moment expect...

Chapter 2

This young cleric was sent from Besançon...

Chapter 3

The reproaches of M. de Rênal...

Chapter 4

As he approached his mill, Père Sorel called Julien in his stentorian voice...

Chapter 5

‘What!’ M. de Rênal indignantly exclaimed...

Chapter 6

Never in her life had a purely agreeable sensation...

Chapter 7

Madame de Rênal felt ashamed of this way of looking at things...
‘I was thinking, Sir,’ he said to him one day…

Julien knew nothing apart from these matters…

Chapter 8

Julien replied to these fresh remonstrances…

Madame de Rênal tried to work…

As it is our intention to flatter no one...

Chapter 9

When Madame Derville repeated her suggestion…

Despite the wisdom of these reflections...

‘It is a secret!’ repeated Madame de Rênal…

Chapter 10

Julien made a speedy escape and climbed up among the big woods...

Chapter 11

His kisses, filled with passion…

Chapter 12

‘Since my husband, who does not know…’

Julien related to him, with suitable omissions…

Chapter 13

Julien was struck by her quavering voice and by the look in her eyes…

The sudden resolution he had just made formed a pleasing distraction…
Chapter 14
Madame de Rênal could not get over her astonishment ...

Chapter 15
Julien had every right to praise his own courage...

Chapter 16
The foolish idea of his being regarded as a servile lover...

Chapter 17
In the foreground appeared the highly complicated intrigues...

Chapter 18
The work of organising the Guard of Honour...

Chapter 19
‘Avoid my presence,’ she said to Julien one day...

Chapter 20
‘Do not go and quarrel with M. Valenod…’
Chapter 21

‘I am used to Louise,’ he said to himself, ‘she knows all my affairs…’

‘God! Why is not my wife dead!’

‘You speak like the fool that you are,’ cried M. de Rênal…

Madame de Rênal meanwhile had run up…

This threat was uttered with gladness…

Chapter 22

His missive dispatched…

This was too much for Julien…

Before leaving the house Julien received four or five invitations…

‘You aristocrats, you have every reason to be proud,’ he said…

M. Valenod was what is called, a hundred leagues from Paris…

Chapter 23

Julien did not fail to attend the auction…

‘Signor Zingarelli,’ went on the young singer…

One thing astonished Julien: the weeks of solitude spent at Verrières…

On the morning after his return, at six o’clock…

M. de Rênal presently returned; he was beside himself…

Cruel necessity, with its hand of iron, bent Julien’s will…

Chapter 24
Julien, lost in thought, was comparing…

Amanda observed his courage; it formed a charming contrast…

**Chapter 25**

Julien advanced with an uncertain step…

He looked upwards and made the sign of the Cross…

‘This is a bold and healthy mind,’ he said to himself…

**Chapter 26**

Having half mastered these several truths…

The moment that Julien became aware of his own folly…

What pains did he not take to arrive at that expression…

Julien perceived the immensity of the danger…

**Chapter 27**

No sooner had M. Castanede gone up to his own room…

**Chapter 28**

Next morning at daybreak, Julien made his way to the Cathedral…

‘At last, he is going to tell me his secret,’ thought Julien…

His distraction was nevertheless half conquered…

**Chapter 29**

But why speak of his friends, his enemies?

On the first day, the examiners appointed…
Despite his brilliant existence in Paris…
Without knowing it, the stern abbé Pirard loved this Seminary…
Julien was silently watching the abbé…
The prelate, growing more and more pleased…
On the following morning, Julien detected something strange…

Chapter 30

Some time after this, Julien received a letter in an unknown hand…
The most prudent course was to retire…
‘I am going to draw up the ladder,’ he said…
Without a thought of what he was telling her…
Madame de Rênal could refuse nothing in the face of this idea…
In telling Julien of the incident of the ladder…
While Julien was devouring his supper with a keen appetite…

Book 2: Chapter 1

A pious old peasant woman’s cow dies…
The discussion was endless…
‘If after a few months you are of no use to him…’
‘It seems to me,’ said Julien, blushing deeply…
‘I, for example, a peaceable and insignificant man…’

Chapter 2
‘You are perhaps going to become a fop,’ the abbé said to him...

The men assembled in this drawing-room...

The Marquis must have spoken of the kind of education...

Chapter 3

On the following day Julien attended two lectures on theology...

Chapter 4

It was for this reason that Julien sometimes remained to the end...

Mademoiselle de La Mole was the centre of a little group...

Julien quitted the circle round the sofa...

Julien felt a sting of irritation, and yet she was right...

‘The Marquis does not like scribblers, I warn you...

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

‘This is my name,’ said the man of fashion...

One thing astonished Julien vastly...

Chapter 7

M. de La Mole became interested in this singular character...

Some time after this, the Marquis was at length able to leave...

‘Not bad,’ said the Marquis, with a laugh...

Chapter 8
‘I know to whom I am indebted for such kindness,’ replied Julien...

‘You can tell me, Sir, as you have been here all the winter,’ she said…

‘What fault would anyone have to find with my remark?’

A swarm of young men with moustaches had gathered round…

Chapter 9

The crowd was immense…

Mademoiselle de La Mole, entirely forgetting what she owed…

Julien was on a pinnacle of happiness…

‘It is quite true,’ he said to himself…

Chapter 10

‘Let us take a turn in the garden,’ said the Academician…

In course of time his conversations with this girl…

This state of affairs, and the singular doubts which Julien felt…

Chapter 11

Mathilde’s vivid, picturesque point of view affected her speech…

Chapter 12

These last words made her pensive again…

Obedient as Norbert was, his sister’s meaning was so unmistakable…

Chapter 13

It was after he had lost himself in dreams…
He had kept his departure secret...

‘I am very glad you are not going,’ the Marquis said to him...

‘Tartuffe also was ruined by a woman…’

Chapter 14

A few months since, Mathilde had despaired of meeting anyone...

Mademoiselle de La Mole’s letter had so flattered Julien’s vanity...

Chapter 15

‘At the worst,’ Julien told himself finally...

This brief exonerating memoir, arranged in the form of a tale...

Chapter 16

The head of the ladder touched the ground...

Mathilde, who was still greatly embarrassed...

Chapter 17

During the very night after their vow of eternal separation...

Chapter 18

Mathilde seemed adorable to him...

On the preceding days, in the artlessness of his misery...

Chapter 19

The result of this night of madness was that she imagined...

‘My death will increase the scorn that she feels for me!’ he exclaimed…
As in the darkness he explored the loose earth with his hand…

Chapter 20

The critical observations which he had been making…

Chapter 21

When Julien was able to leave the library…

Chapter 22

‘One thing that will prevent you from feeling bored on your journey…’

Chapter 23

They arrived in a large room of a distinctly gloomy aspect…

Chapter 24

‘Politics,’ the author resumes…

Chapter 25

‘And I shall say to you in the plainest of words…’

‘You need not be afraid of his waking…’

Chapter 26

The Prince found him decidedly melancholy…

Chapter 27

‘You, Sir,’ M. de La Mole said to the interrupter…

Chapter 28

‘And now,’ the Prince went on as they left the shop…

Chapter 29

‘When the Maréchale flew into a passion…’
The dinner hour was approaching, he was to see Mathilde again!

Mathilde had almost forgotten him during his absence…

Chapter 26

Some hours later the risen sun surprised him…

Chapter 27

Like everyone of inferior intelligence whom chance brings into touch…

Chapter 28

Throughout the time usurped in Julien’s life by the Fervaques episode…

Chapter 29

One morning, the porter brought to him...

Chapter 30

‘Failing any other sentiment, gratitude would suffice…’

Chapter 31

He paced up and down his little room, wild with joy…

Chapter 32

‘I mean to write to my father,’ Mathilde said to him one day…

Chapter 33

The genius of Tartuffe came to Julien’s aid…
As Julien did not in any way alter his air of cold astonishment...

**Chapter 34**

In a moment of ill humour she wrote to her father...

Forced by his daughter’s letter, M. de La Mole...

**Chapter 35**

His impassive air, his severe and almost cruel eyes...

‘Where is Madame de Rênal’s letter?’ said Julien coldly...

**Chapter 36**

A magistrate appeared in the prison...

About nine o’clock in the evening...

This man was as menial and submissive as possible...

**Chapter 37**

Fouqué arrived; the simple, honest fellow was shattered by grief...

**Chapter 38**

Mathilde went alone and on foot through the streets of Besançon...

‘Everything becomes clear,’ she thought...

**Chapter 39**

Ambition was dead in his heart, another passion had risen...

**Chapter 40**

At the sight of these lines, M. de Frilair was almost out of his mind...
Chapter 41
On entering the court, he was struck by the elegance...
This thought obliterated all the rest...
For twenty minutes Julien continued to speak in this strain...

Chapter 42
At this moment Julien was playing upon Mathilde’s nature...
Mathilde kept on saying to him in a faint voice...

Chapter 43
‘Very well! You swear, by the love that you bear me...’

Chapter 44
The old man’s severe reproaches began as soon as they were left...
‘There is no such thing as “natural law”...’
He was disturbed by all his memories of that Bible...

Chapter 45
The death of M. de Croisenois altered all Julien’s ideas...
‘Your conversion would strike an echo in their hearts...’
Two days earlier, he had said to Fouqué...
To The Happy Few...

Total time: 22:04:30
Julien Sorel, the son of a country timber merchant, always carries a portrait of his hero Napoleon Bonaparte, and dreams of military glory. More delicate than his bullying brothers, he takes a post as Latin tutor to the children of the Mayor of Verrières, M. de Rênal: a greedy, pompous, vain and sanctimonious man. Young Julien is attracted to, and fascinated by, M. de Rênal’s beautiful wife...

Julien turned sharply round, and, struck by the charm of Madame de Rênal’s expression, forgot part of his shyness. A moment later, astounded by her beauty, he forgot everything, even his purpose in coming.

Mme de Rênal, even when the plot takes him far away from Verrières, is an ever-present, and redeeming, influence on Julien’s thinking and choices. Their liaison forms the spine of the story, and her admiring devotion to this vain, self-obsessed and ambitious young man is at once surprising and moving: “I have proved myself not unworthy of Julien,” she said to herself, with a sweet and secret relish.’

All the principal characters in the book analyse forensically their own manners and behaviour, and are ever aware of the social implications of a word here, a gesture there, a turn of the head, a costume:

‘My wife certainly has a head on her shoulders!’ the Mayor of Verrières remarked to himself... ‘Although I said so to her, to maintain my own superiority, it had never occurred to me that if I do not take this little priest Sorel, who, they tell me, knows his Latin like an angel, the governor of the poorhouse, that restless spirit,
might very well have the same idea, and snatch him from me. I can hear the tone of conceit with which he would speak of his children’s tutor.’

Of course Stendhal pre-dates Sigmund Freud, but the scalpel he takes to his characters’ psyches might be described as Freudian, particularly when it comes to their affections and loves. The hero of Anatole, a play by Arthur Schnitzler, who was a contemporary of Freud, is a similar study of vanity and chauvinistic arrogance in an unlovable, irritating young man. Throughout the history of literature and drama, we have enjoyed laughing at the folly of conceit in young men and women. There are many such examples in Restoration theatre, and, for example, in Chekhov. It is a common misconception that at all times we have to love our heroes, whatever their foibles. The truth is that we can love hating them, too – and that often this is more fun.

Julien Sorel’s relationship with Mme de Rênal is the first of a number of scandals which dog Julien as he pursues his ambitions. He finds a foothold in the Church – a respectable career which he hopes might enable him to move into Parisian high society, as the splendid military career of his dreams seems out of the question for a slight peasant boy. Artful, ever insinuating himself into useful company, Julien gains the support of influential figures in the Church. Still a young man, he at last makes it to Paris. There, while continuing his theological training as a priest, he takes up the post of secretary to the politically influential Comte de la Mole, for whom he carries out a number of difficult tasks, which include diplomatic trips to England and Germany. He is cynically fascinated by the affectations and style of high society, and much of the novel is taken up with Julien’s running analytical commentary to himself on all he sees.

Along the way, the young priest is helped by a number of influential people in both the Church and Society – in particular he owes a great deal to two men: his mentor, the lugubrious Abbé Pirard, and his master, the tremendously powerful and extremely perceptive Comte de la Mole. Despite his country background, Julien
soon becomes a sophisticate in bourgeois society, a popular guest at dinner and the opera, an expert in intellectual and literary small-talk, a respectable horseman and even an accomplished swordsman. The Comte’s coquettish snob of a daughter Mathilde becomes his second great passion. She is ‘extremely fair and very comely’, with ‘scintillating’ eyes. ‘“Madame de Rênal, too, had the most beautiful eyes,” he said to himself; “…but they had nothing in common with these.”’ Despite her terror of losing her place in society by forming a liaison with ‘the young peasant’, Julien campaigns brilliantly and…

After prolonged uncertainties, which might have appeared to a superficial observer to be due to the most decided hatred, so hard was it for the feeling of self-respect which a woman owes to herself, to yield to so masterful a will, Mathilde finally became his mistress.

Stendhal’s comic timing and turn of phrase is exquisite and irresistible, especially when it comes to the craft of seduction. On another occasion: ‘Far from responding to her lover’s eagerness, she was like a barely-animated corpse…’

In Paris, Julien, ever aware of the importance of correct dress, is challenged by the extreme subtleties of the dress codes: ‘…By dint of a survey of Count Norbert’s person, Julien discovered that he was wearing boots and spurs; “And I ought to be wearing shoes, evidently as his inferior.”’ Coupled with his arrogance is a strong sense of humiliation about his real social position: ‘“…that class of young people who, born in a lowly and poverty-stricken class, had the chance to educate themselves and the courage to associate with those circles which arrogance of the rich calls society.”’

Julien’s fanatical study of the mores and manners of the time, his cunning and ambition, coupled with naiveté, tortured self-analysis, and an often misplaced sense of duty and honour, entertain and dismay the listener as we accompany him into all sorts of crises of his own making. Finally, ‘mounted upon the finest horse in Alsace’, he achieves the extraordinary rank of ‘Monsieur le Chevalier Julien Sorel
de la Vernaye, Lieutenant of the Fifteenth Regiment of Hussars’.

Even as he reflects on this triumph, he receives a letter which pitches him back into the maelstrom he has already created, leading to the novel’s surprising denouement.

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The book has been filmed eight times for cinema and television, most famously in 1954 when Claude Autant-Lara’s film, starring Gérard Philipe, won the French Cinema Critics’ Award, and in 1993 when Ewan McGregor starred in a BBC TV mini-series.

In the title, the Red represents the Army, and the Black represents the Church – the choice between on the one hand aspiring to military glory and on the other to Christian humility – the primary struggle in Julien Sorel’s mind throughout the story.

In the printed book, most chapters begin with quotations purporting to be from famous authors. In many cases Stendhal himself wrote the quotations, including the portentous ‘The truth, the harsh truth’ attributed to Dante, with which the book begins. In fact the book’s abiding feature is ‘the truth’. No character is allowed to be perfect, and his or her imperfections are scrutinised mercilessly for their grim dramatic value, in the way a satirical journalist might compose a portrait of an unloved politician. The satire in the book is cruel rather than affectionate; we laugh somewhat guiltily as Stendhal mocks the hubris, the sanctimoniousness, the vanity and the cant of all those Julien encounters, and of our hero himself.

One might be inclined to see The Red and the Black merely as an exposé of the shameful hypocrisy of society in the post-Napoleonic period. France, no longer in the throes of a revolution, once again found itself talking about nothing in particular in the country inns, the churches and the drawing-rooms of Paris. It is a brilliant love story, of course, a fascinating psychological portrait, a highly researched study of manners and an extraordinary social and political history of early-19th-century France. But the book is even more than this: in the end it is a rueful and chastening look at the human condition, at all of us, with our foibles, jealousies, ambitions and imperfections.
Stendhal was the nom-de-plume of Marie-Henri Beyle, who was born in Grenoble in 1783. His first schoolteacher was a Jesuit priest. He served in the army under Napoleon, but on the restoration of the monarchy moved to Italy, where he started his career as a travel writer. His great love of the Arts, and his declared ecstatic dizziness at the overwhelming beauty and magnificence of Italian paintings, frescoes, statues and architecture, particularly in Florence, led to the recent coining of the expression: ‘the Stendhal Syndrome’. On his return to Paris in 1821 he moved into Society, had several publicized affaires and published *The Red and the Black* in 1830. *The Red and the Black* is considered by many to be one of his two masterpieces, the other being *The Charterhouse of Parma*, also a romance in which the central hero treads a path between the military and the ecclesiastical. He took a diplomatic post in Italy, but in 1841 became ill and returned to Paris, where he died of a stroke in 1842.

Notes by Bill Homewood
Bill Homewood’s West End credits include leads in Jesus Christ Superstar, Grand Hotel, Phantom of the Opera, The Boys From Syracuse; A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Twelfth Night and The Hollow Crown (Royal Shakespeare Company). His innumerable television series include The Professionals, Berkeley Square, A Wing and a Prayer, The Renford Rejects, London’s Burning, Casualty, Coronation Street, Crocodile Shoes, The Bill and Spy Trap. Bill also directs theatre in the USA, the UK and France, where he runs a ranch with his wife Estelle Kohler. His recordings for Naxos AudioBooks include Les Misérables, King Solomon’s Mines and The Count of Monte Cristo.

Credits

Translation by C.K. Scott Moncrieff

Edited by Andrew Riches

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Stendhal

The Red and the Black

Read by Bill Homewood

Young Julien Sorel, the son of a country timber merchant, carries a portrait of his hero Napoleon Bonaparte and dreams of military glory. A brilliant career in the Church leads him into Parisian high society, where, ‘mounted upon the finest horse in Alsace’, he gains high military office and wins the heart of the aristocratic Mlle Mathilde de la Mole. Julien’s cunning and ambition lead him into all sorts of scrapes, but it is the struggle between his passion for two beautiful women – the quixotic Mathilde and the loyal Mme de Rênal – which ultimately decides his destiny.

Bill Homewood is well known for his appearances in numerous television shows and leading roles in the West End and for the Royal Shakespeare Company. His other recordings for Naxos AudioBooks include Les Misérables, King Solomon’s Mines and The Count of Monte Cristo.

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