THE 'SUPERFLUOUS MAN' IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH LITERATURE

Susan M. Bedry

M.Litt.

University of Glasgow
Departments of French and Slavonic Languages and Literatures

June 1997

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

ABSTRACT

The 'Superfluous Man' in Nineteenth-Century French Literature

The 'superfluous man' is a hero-type of paramount importance in nineteenth-century Russian literature. The term denotes a hero who is endowed with exceptional intelligence and sensibility and who is socially and politically idealistic, but who nevertheless remains fundamentally powerless to act - both because of the repressive nature of contemporary society and because of personal weakness. Although deeply disenchanted by the failure of contemporary society to meet his ideals, he is unable either to reconcile himself to this failure or to effect change. He is usually noble by heritage, but considers himself superior on the basis of his intelligence, sensibility, and talent rather than rank and is, in fact, deeply alienated from conventional society. With no role in the existing social structure and no constructive outlet for his abilities and idealism, he is reduced to futile transgression against social mores. Despite the futile nature of his rebellion, however, the superfluous man is of immense literary and social significance, for he is, above all, a powerful literary symbol of the breakdown of the traditional societal elite of the nobility and the formation of a new elite based, not on rank, but on intelligence, education, and political and social radicalism - an 'intelligentsia'.

It is my contention that not only does a figure analogous to the 'superfluous man' exist in nineteenth-century French literature, but also that he is of similar significance as an indicator of the decline of the traditional societal elite of the nobility and the emergence of an identifiable intellectual elite in nineteenth-century France. Thus, by using critical categories commonly used to describe phases in Russian literature, we can examine aspects of nineteenth-century French literature and society from a new, unusual, and profitable angle. This thesis examines thirteen nineteenth-century Russian and French literary heroes within the context of the Russian model to establish both the existence of a French 'superfluous man' and his significance to the rise of a French intellectual elite.

SUSAN M. BEDRY

Thanks to the Departments of French and Slavonic
Languages and Literatures at the University of Glasgow.
Special thanks to Professor C. Smethurst and Mr. N. Parsons.

This is dedicated to my family.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. The 'Superfluous Man' and the Problem of the 'Heroic'

They fled to the stony hills,
To the dark caves.
When a prince flies to the mountain,
There he is turned to stone;
When a second flies,
There he is turned to stone;
When a third flies,
There he is turned to stone.
Since that time there are no more heroes
in the Russian land.[1]

Who is the superfluous man? He is the typical exception...
he is too typical to be an exception and too exceptional to be a type.[2]

The 'superfluous man' (Russian *lishni chelovek*) is a hero-type whose importance in nineteenth-century Russian literature can hardly be overestimated. Defined by the *Dictionary of Russian Literature* as 'a hero who is sensitive to social and ethical problems, but who fails to act, partly because of personal weakness, partly because of political and social restraints on his freedom of action',[3] he is endowed with exceptional intelligence and sensibility and is socially and politically progressive; he is, nevertheless, fundamentally impotent, unable to act in any meaningful direction. Although deeply disenchanted with the failure of contemporary society to meet his ideals, he is unable either to reconcile himself to this failure or to effect change. Usually noble by heritage, he considers himself superior on the basis of his intelligence, sensibility, and talent rather than rank and is, in fact, deeply alienated from conventional society. With no role in the existing social structure and no constructive outlet for his abilities, he is reduced to futile transgression against social mores.

Peter L. Thorslev notes that: 'The hero as he appears in literature bears with him the ethos of the age, the unspoken assumptions, the philosophical presuppositions in the context of which his existence becomes meaningful. His life mirrors not so much the events of the age as its tastes, its values, its aspirations and hopes for the future.'[4] The superfluous man, however, is a hero who is defined by his lack of 'heroic' achievement and by his 'unheroic'

---

[1] *Tale of the Ruin of the Russian Land* (apocryphal; quoted by C.M. Bowra in 'The Hero', in *The Hero in Literature*, Victor Brombert, Ed., (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett, 1969), pp. 22-52).

[2] Ivanov-Razumnik, quoted by John Mersereau Jr. in *Mikhail Lermontov* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962), p. 149.

[3] William E. Harkins, *Dictionary of Russian Literature* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1957), p. 373.

[4] Peter L. Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 19.

qualities; and he thus brings into question not only the very nature of heroism, but also the nature of a society where the best and the brightest are reduced to superfluity. The overwhelming dominance in nineteenth-century Russian literature of the futile and frustrated superfluous man - whose existence is meaningless, whose aspirations and hopes for the future are inevitably abortive - is thus of great significance. As F.D. Reeve notes:

> The superfluous man is not a do-nothing but a man who is morally alienated, who has lived out all the experience his society can offer. He has used up his society but cannot alter it or be reconciled to it. As a channel marker shows the limits of navigable water, so he shows the bounds of the extremes of social behavior. He does not represent his age. He moves against it.[5]

Despite - *because of* - the abortive nature of his rebellion, the superfluous man is of immense literary and social significance. He is, of course, a powerful condemnation of the nature of nineteenth-century Russian society; but his import does not end with contemporary social and political criticism - were that so, he would have little to say to the modern reader. The superfluous man does not 'bear with him the ethos of the age'; he revolts against it in a search for the ethos of the future. In 'moving against his age', he becomes the recognizable ancestor of the intellectual hero in literature - the 'redemptive revolutionary hero', who 'fights paradoxically against a social order and for a society'[6] - and a powerful literary indicator of the breakdown of the traditional societal elite of the nobility and the formation of a new elite based, not on rank, but on intelligence, education, and political and social radicalism: an *intelligentsia*. As Richard Freeborn notes: 'The history of the Russian intelligentsia was to be written initially in the Russian novel.'[7]

---

[5] F.D. Reeve, *The Russian Novel* (London: Frederick Muller, 1967), p. 55.

[6] Victor Brombert, 'Introduction: The Idea of the Hero' in *The Hero in Literature*, Victor Brombert, Ed. (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1969), p. 13.

[7] Richard Freeborn, *The Rise of the Russian Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 117.

2. Extending National Boundaries: the 'Superfluous Man' in French Literature

> 'Superfluous men' can be found anywhere and everywhere, in all ages, among all nations. [...] There are epochs which especially foster the appearance of the superfluous man - and just such an epoch in Russian social life was the hundred years from the middle of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century.[8]

Although the 'superfluous man' is typically considered as an exclusively Russian type, it is my contention that the corresponding epoch in French social life not only produced a figure analogous to the Russian superfluous man, but also that he is of similar significance as a precursor of the modern intellectual hero in French literature - and of the emergence of an identifiable intellectual elite in nineteenth-century France.

Indeed, several scholars have come tantalizingly close to the concept of the 'superfluous man' in their analyses of the hero - especially the 'romantic hero' - in nineteenth-century French literature. For example, George Ross Ridge classes the French romantic hero into five roles and a pseudo-role, and concludes that the sole aspect which all romantic heroes share is self-consciousness:

> The hero has a romantic sensibility which the herdsmen do not possess, and he is self-conscious because he is aware of this fundamental difference. [...] The romantic hero is self-consciously unique; he knows that he is different from and does not belong to the herd, society. He is, in truth, outside society.[9]

In his appraisal of the romantic 'anti-hero' (his 'pseudo-role') especially, Ridge approaches the concept of the superfluous man:

> The romantic hero and the anti-hero are both motivated by self-consciousness, i.e., awareness plus the romantic sensibility, though they evince far different traits. The anti-hero, too, is self-conscious and does possess heroic potentiality. He is aware of the forces which mould him and the social forces against which he struggles. But self-consciousness is differently orientated in the anti-hero, since it represents his ironic appraisal of self in the social context. [...] The anti-hero always observes himself and he wryly comments upon his own weakness. He withers under his own debilitating irony, turned within.[10]

Glyn Holmes attempts to establish a sub-type of romantic hero, based on Constant's *Adolphe*, which he calls the 'Adolphe type'. His description of the crucial traits of this 'type', like that of Ridge, is strikingly similar to those of the 'superfluous man':

---

[8] Ivanov-Razumnik, quoted by Mersereau, p. 149.

[9] George Ross Ridge, *The Hero in French Romantic Literature* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1959), p. 6.

[10] Ridge (1959), p. 128.

> All are young men, born into a class of society which protects them from the harsher aspects of life, and who, upon entry into society, have little idea what to do in life, and show virtually no interest in pursuing what the society of their time might regard as a useful career. They subsequently find themselves in opposition to many of the conventions and attitudes adopted by the society of the time, into which they are unable to integrate. They consider themselves superior to the herd and, feeling themselves to be morally isolated from most of their contemporaries, develop a tendency towards introversion and self-analysis. They are also unable to acquire a firm religious faith, and this fact, coupled with their inability to integrate into society, leads them to seek fulfilment in personally conceived ideals.[11]

Victor Brombert also comes very close indeed to the concept of a French 'superfluous man' in nineteenth-century society and literature:

> The emergence of the intellectual hero, and the key position he occupies in the modern French novel, can no doubt also be attributed to the growing prestige of an intellectual elite which, beginning in the late eighteenth century, saw itself further and further estranged in a society whose culture it inherited, but whose moral and aesthetic criteria it felt compelled to reject. Literature reflects the pride of this new aristocracy of the intellect. Rousseau's Saint-Preux, Stendhal's Julian Sorel, the ambitious young men of Balzac, Vigny's Chatterton and Stello, combine passionate temperaments with a fierce nobility that no longer marks a nobility of the blood or heroic deeds, but a nobility of the mind. The typical Romantic hero - often non-heroic, self-conscious and hyper-nervous - asserts himself less through physical prowess or striking adventures than through the distinction of his spirit. The irremediable clash between his social condition and his spiritual vocation predestines him to tragedy.[12]

It is clear that a literary type similar to the Russian superfluous man *does* exist in French literature; indeed, George Sand invented the strikingly similar term *homme inutile* to describe her hero Jacques (*Jacques*, 1834). However, when this question of parallels is discussed (and, to my knowledge, it has only been discussed in the context of *Russian* literary criticism) it is usually if not always in the context of *derivation*; in other words, that the Russian superfluous man shares certain qualities with nineteenth-century French heroes because of the huge influence which French literature wielded in Russia at the time. Although this is true up to a point, it smacks of cultural elitism - and does not take into account the vitality of the Russian literary tradition which had begun, by the nineteenth century, to blaze a trail independent of European examples. I wish to turn this tradition of criticism on its head: to show, not that the Russian 'superfluous man' can be considered as

---

[11] Glyn Holmes, *The 'Adolphe Type' in French Fiction in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Quebec: Editions Naaman, 1977), p. 9.

[12] Victor Brombert, *The Intellectual Hero: Studies in the French Novel 1880-1955* (London: Faber and Faber,1961), p. 14.

similar to his French counterparts, but instead that a series of French nineteenth-century literary heroes can be considered as 'superfluous men'. This does not involve direct influence (Russian literature, of course, only really impacted upon the European tradition in the last few decades of the nineteenth century[13]) but an examination of how similar social, historical, and literary trends produced analogous hero-types. Thus, by using critical categories commonly used to describe phases in Russian literature, we can illuminate aspects of nineteenth-century French literature from a new, unusual, and profitable angle.

[13] See F.J.W. Hemmings' *The Russian Novel in France 1884-1914* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950) for an excellent examination of this.

3. The Historical Background of the 'Superfluous Man'

To establish more than a superficial similarity between these two groups of alienated and world-weary heroes - as well as to fully understand the significance of the superfluous man - it is necessary to briefly outline the historical background to his emergence, and to place him within the context of two interlinked social trends: a) the decline of the traditional hereditary nobility and the concurrent rise of individualism within the class structure, and b) the growing prestige and importance of an increasingly independent and critical breed of writers and thinkers. Although the histories of Russia and France during this period are, of course, widely divergent, there are significant similarities which led, in each case, to the emergence of the superfluous man and, eventually, to the formation of a distinct intellectual elite.

a) The decline of the nobility and the rise of individualism within the class structure

The decline of the Russian nobility did not begin with the Emancipation of the serfs in 1861; although the Emancipation did a great deal to hasten the economic disintegration of the traditional landowning gentry, the real roots of the decay were as much philosophical and psychological as economic - and must be traced back to the eighteenth century.

Historically, the Russian nobility was based on the concept of service to the state, as Marc Raeff notes:

> The Russian nobleman of the eighteenth century quite clearly was exclusively a servant of the state. [...] The stress was on the nobleman's usefulness to the state and to society at large, not his worth as a private individual or his role as a member of a special group. Outside service a Russian nobleman in the eighteenth century had no socially meaningful and acceptable outlet for his talents, energy, and activities.[14]

This emphasis on service meant that a nobleman was wholly dependent on the state for his person, property, and family status; nobility was a state that could be lost, and noblemen who did not serve were considered undeserving of their rank. Another important byproduct of the service mentality was a certain feeling of rootlessness among the service nobility; both military and civil service entailed moving to wherever the state dictated, and thus broke the bonds of the landowning gentry with their family estates. Against this background, Peter the Great's extensive reorganization of the service system assumes paramount importance: in 1722, Peter systematized the service principle by creating the Table of Ranks, with fourteen grades of civil servants, based on German titles and equivalent to military ranks.

---

[14] Marc Raeff, *Origins of the Russian intelligentsia: the eighteenth-century nobility* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966), p. 120.

Most significantly, the service system was changed to admit talented commoners, who could then achieve personal or hereditary nobility after a successful service career. This revolutionary 'equalization' was to have huge consequences: new concepts of merit, hierarchy, and reward entered the psychology of the nobility, and the function of service was now to prove one's *personal* merit and talent, rather than to fulfil a preordained role for which, by virtue of birth, one was already suited. This new emphasis thus amounted to an endorsement of individualism over class identity, as Raeff notes:

> The merit clause of the Table of Ranks provided both the stimulus and the foundation for the development of individualism. It was the first time, since the Times of Troubles at least, that an individual's worth was given public recognition and status in Russia [...], but at the same time a new element of personal insecurity was introduced: no one could feel he had a place and role in society (and the state) until he had secured it by dint of his own efforts and work.[15]

After the institution of the Table of Ranks, the service role of the Russian nobility continued to be redefined and diminished. In 1736, compulsory state service for noblemen was limited to a period of twenty-five years, and in 1762, the nobility was freed completely from compulsory service and those serving were allowed to resign. Although the decrees of 1736 and 1762 can be (and often are) seen as triumphs for the nobility over the state, the newly optional status of state service signalled, in effect, the state's autonomy from the nobility and would lead to the emergence of a burgeoning bureaucratic class. This new 'caste' of bureaucrats and career officials - many of whom, by the mid-nineteenth century, would be non-noble - would usurp the nobility's traditional role within the state, 'taking over the positions of prominence and securing rewards, recognition, and high status, while the nobility was withdrawing from direct participation in the business of the state.'[16]

During the remainder of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth, the traditional rights and privileges of the gentry were to be eroded and their social and political roles modified,[17] while their viability as an economic class - tenuous even before the Emancipation - was further diminished, as J.N. Westwood notes:

> Long before the Emancipation many had been leading lives far in excess of their incomes. On the eve of Emancipation two-thirds of their property had already

---

[15] Raeff, p. 41.

[16] Raeff, p. 107.

[17] For example, the abolition in 1730 of the law of entail (established by Peter the Great to safeguard the estates of the nobility) restored the tradition that all children of a nobleman shared in his estate and led to the fragmentation and sale of many properties, further reducing the connection of the nobility to the land. After Emancipation, too, this trend continued: for example, in 1863 restrictions on corporal punishment were introduced, followed in 1874 by universal liability to conscription.

been mortgaged to government banks. Over the century, in effect, state funds had been diverted as mortgage loans to landowners who used them less for productive investment than for maintaining their standard of living. For many of these improvident gentry, Emancipation meant the paying-off of their mortgages through the indemnities which the government allotted for the land transferred by the nobles to the peasantry. But in the long term, Emancipation only made things worse for the average landowner.[18]

As in Russia, the decline of the French nobility cannot be ascribed to one single, catastrophic event, but was instead a gradual process with its roots in the eighteenth century - and one that offers intriguing parallels with the situation outlined above.

Although the Russian nobility is often considered as intrinsically different from those of Western Europe by virtue of its status as a 'service' nobility, more basis for comparison exists than typically thought. Firstly, the Russian nobility did, despite its service status, set great store on hereditary rank.[19] Secondly, not only was service the origin of many French noble families, but the tradition of ennobling 'servants' of common birth was well established in France. Historically, the French nobility was composed of three groups: the *noblesse de parage*, based on land possession and originating in feudal times; the *noblesse d'épée*, ennobled for military service; and the later *noblesse de robe*, ennobled for high judicial or legal service. (Napoleon was therefore to follow an established tradition in creating his *noblesse impériale*.) The concept of service - although never codified, as it was in Russia - was, historically, of paramount importance to the psychology of the French nobility, as Michael Confino notes:

Au milieu du XVe siècle le gentilhomme bourguignon Gilbert de Lanoy instruisait ses lecteurs nobles que les 'richesses' devaient être acquises 'honorablement', et il ajoutait qu'aucune source de richesse n'était plus honorable que le service du prince. Un représentant de la noblesse aux Etats Généraux de 1588 déclarait qu'il représentait non seulement les nobles de son temps, mais aussi toutes les générations aristocratiques qui les avaient précédés, et que c'était 'l'exemple ancestral de la générosité héritée qui inspirait à leurs descendants de servir l'Etat'. Un magistrat de province écrivait en 1602 au Chancelier de France 'qu'un lignage distingué obligeait l'homme de servir l'Etat.' Au milieu du XVIIIe siècle, Montesquieu disait, comme on sait, qu'une noblesse héréditaire était essentielle pour maintenir le caractère du régime monarchique; mais il ajoutait aussi que les hommes de naissance distinguée

[18] J.N. Westwood, *Endurance and Endeavor - Russian History 1812-1971* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 175.

[19] There was, within the Russian gentry (as within most, if not all nobilities) a clear 'pecking order', with families who could claim descent from Rurik or ancient Lithuanian princely families at the top. Peter never intended to 'wipe the slate clean' with the Table of Ranks: firstly, there was no existing change for existing noble families, who were never seriously threatened with disentitlement; secondly, those who had reached the eighth rank (and who therefore obtained a hereditary, rather than personal, title) could *unconditionally* transmit that title to their offspring, who were not obliged to work their way up through the ranks to obtain noble status.

> poursuivraient 'naturellement' honneur et prestige au service de leur maître royal. [...] Pour les grands seigneurs, le service représentait une question de prestige et une voie d'accès aux allées de pouvoir. Le 'prolétariat nobiliaire' le considérait comme une nécessité financière et - par voie de mimétisme social - comme un moyen de 'vivre noblement', c'est-à-dire de prétendre que lui aussi participait au genre de vie canonisé par les familles illustres (et riches) de sa classe.'[20]

And this notion of the role of service continued into the eighteenth century, as G. Chaussinand-Nogaret notes:

> Servir - et c'est là un des principes essentiels de définition de la noblesse au XVIIIe siècle - est l'ambition de tous, ou presque. Si l'on ne sert pas, ce n'est pas, sauf exception, par calcul, par volonté de non-engagement, mais par impossibilité ou par déception: défaut de fortune ou carrière bouchée. Le droit au service est considéré comme un privilège essentiel du statut nobiliaire et explique en partie l'hostilité de la noblesse - hostilité relative et qui comporte bien des nuances - à la roture de service. Servir le roi est à la fois un droit, un devoir, et un honneur, et un gentilhomme ne saurait se soustraire à ces obligations morales. Seules la pauvreté, les limites du recrutement et l'injustice du système maintiennent certains dans l'inactivité.[21]

Thus, service, although never a legal obligation, as in Russia, did indeed play a fundamental role in defining the status - social, political, economic, and psychological - of the French nobility within the state.

Throughout the eighteenth century, although the outward structure of French society remained the same as that of the preceding century, the hereditary nobility was, in fact, in the process of being progressively pushed out of its traditional service roles. The hereditary nobility had already lost a great deal of its economic power to both the *noblesse de robe* and to the rapidly rising bourgeoisie, which had succeeded in consolidating the advantages acquired under Louis XIV. Already alienated from their traditional power bases - provincial estates - by Louis XIV, many impoverished noblemen sold off their estates to the peasantry and became alienated from the land. As France became ever more commercially and industrially oriented, the hereditary nobility found itself gradually overtaken in the sphere of economic and political influence. The traditional nobility was already in decline by the Revolution of 1789.

Following the Revolution and throughout the nineteenth century, of course, the social upheavals accompanying each of the successive governments of the first Empire, the Restoration, the July Monarchy, the Second Republic, the Second Empire, and the Third

---

[20] Michael Confino, 'A propos de la notion de service dans la noblesse russe aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles', *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, XXXIV (1-2), janvier-juin 1993, pp. 47-58 (pp. 53-4).

[21] G. Chaussinand-Nogaret, *La noblesse au XVIIIe siècle. De la féodalité aux Lumières* (Paris: Hachette, 1976), p. 73.

Republic, meant that the situation of the hereditary nobility was to become ever more precarious and marginalized. A significant number of nobles did retain considerable influence and wealth, of course. However, the nobility *as a class* was fast losing its defining roles - economic, political, and social - in French society.

Thus, both the Russian and the French nobilities found themselves gradually pushed out of their traditional roles, progressively alienated from both the central government and from the provincial power base of their estates, and slowly losing economic viability as a class. In each country, noblemen were gradually beginning to see themselves as part of a *cultural* elite; and to preserve his status, a nobleman had to carve out a role for himself independent of traditional state service, hereditary rank or land ownership.

b) The rise of an independent 'class' of writers and thinkers

In his anxiety to modernize (and westernize, for at the time the two terms were considered synonymous) Russia, Peter the Great laid a great stress on a modern and Western education. Inevitably, a 'modern' education became the hallmark of a highly-placed nobleman and a goal to which not only the poorer gentry, but also the nascent middle class of bureaucrats, professionals, and clergy aspired.[22] This led to a further weakening of the class-based system and altered the very foundations of the traditional system of hierarchy.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the concept of what constituted a nobleman had changed from a narrow, exclusively hereditary notion to a much broader and indefinite image, the primary component of which was a superior education and a modern social and cultural outlook; indeed, by the nineteenth century, a commoner who had acquired both the desired level of education and the necessary cultural philosophy was quite easily admitted into the ranks of the nobility both socially and legally.[23] Thus, the primary role of a nobleman was no longer found in government service - although the majority of noblemen continued to serve - but in cultural leadership, as a bringer of social enlightenment and cultural and educational sophistication. *An elite based on non-hereditary criteria had begun to form.*

Inevitably, the values and goals of this embryonic intelligentsia - who now regarded their rightful role as much broader than simply propping up the state - began to clash with the government. Indeed, following on from Alexander Radishchev's *A Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow* (1790), the theme of civic criticism in literature, muted in the eighteenth century, would come to the forefront until, by the mid-nineteenth century, it was

[22] Although a shopkeeper and merchant class did exist in Russia, it had nowhere near the influence (or size) of the French petite bourgeoisie.

[23] Although this is not to suggest that he was equated with the 'grandes familles' who proudly traced their noble origins back to Rurik.

seen as the primary purpose of literature. As Joe Andrew notes, both opposition and government would come to view literature 'as a kind of "alternative government", a second voice which was able, if only indirectly, to offer some kind of challenge to established ideas and behavior when more obvious political methods were virtually impossible.'[24]

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, not only had the intelligentsia arrived as a powerful social and political force, but it was entirely emancipated from the traditional nobility, whose values and goals it no longer shared. As Freeborn notes:

> After the Crimean War [...], commitment in literature was an essential ingredient for success. The Russian defeat in the Crimean War not only left the Russian government on the defensive and anxious to contemplate such a major, even revolutionary, reform as the abolition of serfdom, but it led also to the emergence of a new generation of the intelligentsia which sought to repudiate all authority save that sanctioned by the laws of the natural sciences. [...] The gentry or nobility, as the 'official' class, were challenged by a new educated stratum of Russian society drawn mainly from the children of priests, civil servants, and professional people. These, who came to be known as 'raznochintsy' (literally, 'of different ranks'), had nothing to lose from the abolition of serfdom, as had the privileged nobility, and could emancipate themselves by denying all precedence or asserting their own personal freedom.[25]

In France, too, the foundations for an intellectual elite were laid by the government itself in the eighteenth century, as Theodore Zeldin notes:

> The basis for this new role for the intellectuals had been laid in the eighteenth century. Around 1700 the 'man of letters' usually lived in a state of insecurity and constraint, shackled by an arbitrary censorship exercised simultaneously by the king, the *parlement* and the Sorbonne. He often had to use pseudonyms or conceal his identity altogether. Only in the second half of the century did a few of them manage to live by their pens. These successes did a good deal to raise the status of what was becoming almost a profession. The government began employing writers to influence public opinion, 'to prepare the way for legislation', as Moreau described his own function. But it was slow to accept advice from them. [...] The first stage in their ascent was for them to win honour, respect and security. They did not think of power yet. [...] However, as the censorship relaxed, books on politics gave the writers increasing authority. Foreign admirers in particular did much to raise their status. It was the *philosophes*, not the nobles, whom the visitors from abroad came to see. [...] On the eve of the Revolution in 1778, Mercier wrote, 'the influence of writers is such that they can today proclaim their power and no longer disguise the legitimate authority they have over men's minds.'[26]

---

[24] Joe Andrew, *Russian Writers and Society in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1982), p. x.

[25] Freeborn (1973), p. 130.

[26] Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 428-9.

Thus, by the Revolution of 1789, the establishment of a distinct intellectual elite had already begun. Following the Revolution and throughout the nineteenth century, this nascent elite would become progressively influential - and progressively alienated from the state. 'It was now open to any man to have ideas and publish and propagate them. It is in this way that the intellectual in politics arrived.'[27] As with the Russian intelligentsia, social and political awareness had become - and still is - an integral part of the French intellectual elite, as Brombert notes:

> In spite of new historical contingencies, the word 'intellectual' continues [...] to bear the traces of its ideological origin. The French concept of the intellectual thus remains bound up with the notion of a social, political, and moral crisis. Better still: it implies *the notion of a permanent state of crisis*. Given this state of crisis, the intellectual considers it his obligation to intervene. This sense of moral duty may reach a particularly high pitch during certain periods but it constitutes a permanent trait. [...] The intellectual's intervention thus follows a predictable pattern: he considers himself a *voice*. And not merely a voice crying out in protest (Aron calls it the mentality of 'permanent opposition'), but a voice that proclaims itself a *conscience*.[28]

And, as with the Russian intelligentsia, the composition and aims of the new intellectual elite would no longer correspond with the traditional nobility, as 'ever-increasing numbers of moneyless young men of humble birth launched into literary and artistic careers - a phenomenon which can be attributed to political and social changes, the victory of the Romantic movement, the spread of socialistic ideas, the cult of success, and more generally to the "democratization" of literature'.[29]

The question of whether or not the French intellectual elite - or, indeed, *any* non-Russian intellectual elite - can be considered an 'intelligentsia' is a thorny one, for no real consensus exists on a definition. Although the term has gained common currency as simply denoting a class of intellectuals regarded as possessing culture and political initiative, Russian uses of the word often imply both political radicalism and 'progressiveness' - which in the context of nineteenth-century Russia connotes western European influence. Frank F. Seeley, building on the work of A.J. Toynbee, suggests that a primary characteristic of an intelligentsia is that it acts as a channel for the introduction into its own nation of an alien culture, 'when the intrusive culture is recognized as in some sense superior to the native culture and yet the native culture is not submerged, but persists as a living force seeking to

---

[27] Zeldin, p. 431.

[28] Brombert (1961), pp. 32-3.

[29] Brombert (1961), p. 37.

come to terms with the intrusive culture'.[30] In Russia, of course, it was western European and especially French culture that was 'intrusive'; it would seem, therefore, that the French intellectual elite would not qualify for consideration as an intelligentsia under this criterion. However, French intellectuals *did* consistently assume both the role of enlightened cosmopolitan and the burden of cultural ambassadorship for foreign ideas, although they never acknowledged the superiority of a foreign culture in its entirety as happened in Russia.[31] Crucially, this was recognized by the French establishment; indeed, that he was 'an enemy of the national soul' eventually became a major stigma against the intellectual, as Brombert notes:

> Needless to add that what to some is scandalously anti-patriotic, others interpret as a praiseworthy cosmopolitanism or a generous internationalism. Barrès calls all intellectuals déracinés. Lucien Herr, in the *Revue Blanche*, rejoins that they are désintéressés. Déracinés or désintéressés, uprooted or selfless - the argument implies nothing less than a difference of perspective. To the ones, the intellectual is the sworn enemy of the collective discipline, the enemy of the established social order. [...] To the others, this supposed corrosive and subversive force is but the proof of their moral dynamism, of the integrity of their critical stand and of their competence to serve as liaison agents between one culture and another.[32]

Thus, although any resolution of whether or not the French intellectual elite is a true intelligentsia falls outside the scope of this article, it is clear that sufficient parallels exist to make comparison not only possible, but worthwhile.

Seeley has divided the rise of the Russian intelligentsia into three 'stages': *happy growth, estrangement,* and *reintegration*, at the beginning of which 'the government regards the intelligentsia as an instrument for running the state and maintaining the powers and privileges of the rulers' and at the end of which the intelligentsia has evolved into 'a vanguard of intellectuals and leaders of the national life' in its own right.[33] As we have seen, the period of 'happy growth' lasted throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century, as a distinct class of writers and thinkers began to form in both Russia and France, while 'reintegration' may be considered as wholly accomplished by the last few decades of the nineteenth century. This, then, leaves the bulk of the nineteenth century to the period of *estrangement* - 'the period of uncertainty and comparative inaction marking the transition of

---

[30] Frank F. Seeley, *From the Heyday of the Superfluous Man to Chekhov - Essays on 19th-century Russian Literature.* (Nottingham: Astra Press, 1994), pp. 1-2.

[31] This is already evident in the eighteenth-century (see, for example, Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques ou lettres sur les Anglais*) and continues into the ninteenth; consider the immense popularity and influence of Mme. de Staël's *De la littérature* and *De l'Allemagne*; the 'Scots bard' Ossian; Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*; the philosophies of Schiller and Schopenhauer; Byronism.

[32] Brombert (1961), p. 31.

[33] Seeley (1994), pp. 3-4.

the intelligentsia from its 18th-century function as an instrument of the autocracy to its 19th-century function as protagonist of a new order'[34] - in both nations. This period of 'uncertainty and comparative inaction' is, of course, the era of the superfluous man.[35]

[34] Seeley (1994), pp. 5-6.

[35] Although some literary historians have extended the concept of the superfluous man even to twentieth-century Soviet literature, we are concerned here with his *nineteenth-century* function as transitional figure and precursor of a new elite.

4. Method of Analysis

The evolving nature of the Russian superfluous man has long been recognized; A.N. Dobrolyubov was perhaps the first - in 1859 - to attempt to codify the connections between various heroes in his 'What is Oblomovshchina?'.[36] The idea of 'types' or 'stages' of superfluous man is, therefore, widely accepted as both valid and useful. Seeley has proposed three 'main varieties' of superfluous man in Russian literature as he evolves under the pressure of historical circumstance: the 'skeptics and dandies' of the 1820's; the 'demons of revolt' of the 1830's; and the 'preachers' of the 1840's.[37] I shall use his largely solid analysis as a 'jumping-off point' in proposing four 'generations' of superfluous men in both Russian and French literature - *dandies, rebels, visionaries,* and *dreamers* - with the following reservations.

Firstly and most obviously, my analysis will involve non-Russian literature and history and the inclusion of a fourth 'generation'; it is, therefore, broader in both time and scope.

Secondly, I shall not follow Seeley's lead in including both literary heroes and real, historical figures; this is, after all, a study of the superfluous man as he appears *in literature* - however much validity he may have as a historically significant figure. Thirdly, I shall not attempt to fix my 'generations' firmly to individual decades, as Seeley does. This is partly, of course, because the timeline is necessarily somewhat different in French literature; the main reason, however, is that, in my opinion, it is the historical and chronological *progression* of the 'generations' - the fact that they appear in the same order, during roughly the same eras, in both Russian and French literature - which is significant, not the exact moment of their appearance.[38]

Lastly and most importantly, Seeley identifies, for each of his 'varieties', one 'central characteristic'. Although I accept the validity of his 'central characteristics' - and, indeed, build upon them in my analysis - I do not believe that they are sufficient, on their own, either to analyze fully the superfluous man in each of his 'generations' or to forge a comprehensive link between the generations. I have, therefore, established seven 'identifying characteristics' which are shared - albeit in varying forms and degrees - by *all* superfluous men, and which, taken collectively, reveal his essential nature more completely.

These seven fundamental aspects or characteristics which I have identified - *Ambiguity of familial and social status, Contempt of bourgeois ideals, Intellectualism and*

---

[36] A.N. Dobrolyubov, 'What is Oblomovshchina?' in *Selected Philosophical Essays* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), pp. 174-217.

[37] Seeley (1994), p. 6.

[38] Seeley does recognize his over-simplification as a possible problem (see p. 6).

sensibility, Civic sense, Seeking of soulmates, Foreign influence, and *Femininity* - thus serve both to identify the superfluous man and to reflect the evolution from one generation to the next. As I examine each generation in turn, I shall concentrate on both his 'inheritance' - what he has acquired from his predecessors - and the 'legacy' which he leaves to his successors: future generations of superfluous men and, of course, his eventual progeny, the intellectual hero.

As I am primarily concerned with the establishment of a type, I shall not be considering either questions of literary style or biographical matters; studies which address these questions are abundantly available for most, if not all, of the works which I address. Instead, I shall concentrate upon the heroes themselves, endeavoring to place them, firstly, within the context of the development of the superfluous man, and, secondly, within the broader literary and social context of the development of the intellectual hero in literature and the intellectual elite in society.

This schematic method of analysis is not, of course, without its pitfalls. I am - like Seeley - vulnerable to charges of generalization and over-simplification. The 'evolution' of the superfluous man is, like any process of evolutionary change, a continuum; and any attempt to establish boundaries is thus open to criticism by its very nature. For clarity's sake, I have established boundaries along the most valid and historically verifiable lines. For clarity's sake, too, I have chosen heroes who most completely exemplify the characteristics of the superfluous man in general and of each 'generation' in particular; there are many, many more in both Russian and French literature who fall along the continuum but are not included. Despite its inherent limitations, however, the approach is valid in that it reveals the *main line of development* by which the superfluous man develops into the intellectual in literature and in society.

To represent the first generation of superfluous man - the 'dandy' - I have chosen Griboyedev's Chatsky (*Woe from Wit*, 1822-4), Pushkin's Onegin (*Eugene Onegin*, 1823-31), Chateaubriand's René (*René*, 1802), Senancour's Obermann (*Obermann*, 1804), and Constant's Adolphe (*Adolphe*, 1816). The second generation - the 'rebel' - will be represented by Lermontov's Pechorin (*A Hero of Our Time*, 1840) and Musset's Lorenzo (*Lorenzaccio*, 1834); the third - the 'visionary' - by Turgenev's Rudin (*Rudin*, 1857), Sand's Horace (*Horace*, 1842), Flaubert's Frédéric (*L'Education sentimentale*, 1869), and Zola's Lazare (*La Joie de vivre*, 1884). The fourth and final generation - the 'dreamer' - will be represented by Goncharov's Oblomov (*Oblomov*, 1859) and Huysmans' Des Esseintes (*A Rebours*, 1884).

CHAPTER 1: THE 'DANDY'

1. The Dandy's Inheritance

In Russian literature, Griboyedev's Chatsky (*Woe from Wit*, 1822-4) and Pushkin's Onegin (*Eugene Onegin*, 1823-31) are the earliest examples of the nineteenth-century superfluous man, and thus form both the foundation of the type, and the template for any comparison. The French 'dandy' emerges slightly earlier than his Russian cousin; Chateaubriand's René (*René*, 1802), Senancour's Obermann (*Obermann*, 1804), and Constant's Adolphe (*Adolphe*, 1816) mark the debut of the French 'superfluous man'. The dandy's era is thus roughly the first quarter of the nineteeth century - a time of immense transition in both Russia and France.[39]

Although the histories of the two nations during this time are of course widely divergent, a broadly similar current can be identified: a period of rising hopes which are gradually stifled, leading eventually to a revolutionary movement and a crackdown by the authorities. In Russia, the early portion of the reign of Alexander I was marked for its domestic liberalism; he subdued the secret police, made some attempts to improve the position of the serfs, and began to reform the educational system. However, the latter part of his reign marked a sharp turnaround: national and liberal movements were suppressed, many of his earlier liberal efforts were abrogated, and the infamous military colonies of peasant-soldiers were established. In 1825, of course, came the accession of Nicholas I and the abortive Decembrist Uprising. In France, liberal hopes raised by the Revolutionary era and, later, the advent of Napoleon were disappointed by the First Empire and the Restoration, with their ever-increasing restrictions upon personal and press liberty. After 1824, this liberal opposition became increasingly vocal, until, in 1830, the 'Trois Glorieuses' led to the July Monarchy of Louis Philippe.

It is against this contemporary background of pre-revolutionary tension that the dandy must be seen. The stage was set for a generation of young noblemen to become frustrated idealists, raised with great expectations but unable to realize them in contemporary society. The aristocracy in each nation was largely backward-looking, anachronistic, and reactionary; and no viable alternative had yet presented itself. Already, the supreme characteristic of the superfluous man - alienation from and opposition to contemporary society - is in evidence. The dandy, however - direct descendant of the politically and socially aware eighteenth-century *philosophe* and educated and noble man of letters - is no revolutionary. Although he is profoundly alienated from society, his 'opposition' is weak,

[39] It is important to note at this point that this first generation of superfluous man should not in any case be confused with the later 'dandyism' of Baudelaire and his contemporaries. We are not concerned with their sartorial elegance (as the word has come to denote), but with their particular response to their inability to come to terms with their lack of a clearcut role in a changing society.

consisting mainly of short tirades followed by a speedy withdrawal from conflict. The period in which the dandy emerged was characterised, above all, by uncertainty, as Holmes notes:

> The effects of these forces of change, which if not immediately visible, always lay beneath the surface, were that for some Frenchmen, their time appeared to be one of transition, of soul-searching and the need to assert one's individuality, of nostalgic dreamings of the irretrievable past and vague hopes of the future, of the search for personal happiness, and, quite often, of disappointment and despair.[40]

And this uncertainty would express itself in the dandy's essentially dilettante nature. Despite his superior intelligence and sensibility and his strong ethical and moral underpinning, the dandy is wholly unable to translate his ethical convictions into either concrete form or meaningful action. The nucleus of the superfluous 'dandy' is the worship of self; this is, of course, very clearly related to the psychological changes in the nobility as a class which led to the rise of individualism within the class structure. Although the individualism of the dandy represents a positive development, a fresh stage of self-consciousness, it is still, at this stage, fundamentally shallow. The dandy has no 'reserves'; when seriously challenged or threatened by society, his perilously thin philosophical foundation is exposed, and he capitulates - Chatsky flees Moscow; Onegin murders Lensky; Adolphe sacrifices Ellénore; René escapes to America; Obermann buries himself in the wilds of Switzerland.

The dandy can only flout public opinion up to a point. He is not robust enough to bear his own weapon - contempt - turned upon himself; at this stage, the individuality and the convictions of the superfluous man form a fragile inheritance indeed:

> Durant les quinze premières années du dix-neuvième siècle, non-seulement le sentiment de la rêverie fut gêné et empêché par le tumulte des camps, mais encore le sentiment de l'ambition fut entièrement dénaturé dans les âmes fortes. Excité, mais non développé, il se restreignit dans son essor en ne rencontrant que des objets vains et puérils. L'homme qui était tout dans l'Etat avait arrangé les choses de telle façon que les plus grands hommes furent réduits à des ambitions d'enfant. Là où il n'y avait qu'un maître pour disposer de tout, il n'y avait pas d'autre manière de parvenir que de complaire au maître, et le maître ne reconnaissait qu'un seul mérite, celui de l'obéissance aveugle; cette loi de fer eut le pouvoir, propre à tous les despotismes, de retenir la nation dans une perpétuelle enfance; quand le despotisme croula irrévocablement en France, les hommes eurent quelque peine à perdre cette habitude d'asservissement qui avait effacé et confondu tous les caractères politiques dans une seule physionomie.[41]

---

[40] Holmes, p. 18.

[41] George Sand, in her preface to Senancour's *Obermann* (Paris: Charpentier, 1874), p. 11.

2. Identifying Characteristics

A. Ambiguity of familial and social status

The familial and social status of the superfluous man is extraordinarily significant. As a general rule, the superfluous man is, with very few exceptions, of noble origin. He is always the last of his line - frequently a long and illustrious line which has fallen into decline - and is usually an orphan from an early age. The superfluous man very rarely marries; if he does, the marriage proves a failure. Lastly, he inevitably fails to carry on his line with legitimate progeny. The decline of the traditional hereditary nobility is thus echoed in the superfluous man's familial status; in terms of the aristocratic 'ethos', he is unable to ensure transmission of the name. More than this, however, the ambiguity of the superfluous man's familial and social status serves to symbolize his fundamental lack of identity within society.

Crucially, the superfluous man is explicitly set in opposition to the ideals of the traditional nobility and, by extension, to conventional societal values. On a metaphorical level, this clash symbolises a conflict between society's established structures and a new spirit of individualism which threatens to pull apart these structures - between nonconformist, as opposed to orthodox, thought. With the dandy, this conflict is primarily a clash between eighteenth and nineteenth-century values; he is, after all, both the heir of the eighteenth-century liberal *philosophe* and the ancestor of the nineteenth-century radical intellectual.

As we shall see in later chapters, the familial and social status of the superfluous man will decline sharply through the four 'generations', thus forcing him to seek societal status independant of hereditary rank. The dandy, as the first superfluous man, is the least ambiguously a member of noble society. He is independently wealthy - unlike later superfluous men, he feels little material pressure. However, the dandy is already deeply alienated from his own caste; he is a spiritual, if not a physical, exile.

Chatsky's lineage is somewhat of a mystery; no specific information on his family is ever supplied apart from the fact that he is a moderately large landowner with several hundred serfs - his caste, at least, is unequivocal. He is unmarried and seems likely to remain so, after his disillusionment with Sofia. He may also be safely assumed to be an orphan and the last of his line, having inherited the family estate. Due to the semi-classical form of *Woe from Wit*, we are only allowed a swift glimpse into Chatsky's life. However, his inability to conform to the norms of noble society is evident; he has rejected both military and civil service - the only 'honorable' paths that lie open to him. Throughout the text, Chatsky's proud individualism stands in stark contrast to the rest of noble society:

CHATSKY. I would be glad to serve, but servility is sickening!
FAMUSOV. That's just the point, you all are proud!
You ought to ask what did your fathers do?
You ought to learn by copying your elders.[42]

And his contempt for the values and mores of noble society is scathing:

You may say with a sigh - 'Indeed
The world has started getting dull' -
When you look closely and compare
The present age and times gone by -
The legacy is fresh, but no one honors it;
Then he in fact was praised who most often bowed his head,
Then men won the day not by a front attack
But bent their foreheads to the floor!
Who was in need met arrogance - he lay in the dirt -
But those who were above were laced with flattery.
An age of real submissiveness and fear
And all beneath the mask of devotion to the Tsar![43]

But who're the judges? Because of their antiquity,
Their hostility toward a freer life is implacable;
They dig their opinions up out of old, forgotten papers
On the Conquest of Crimea and the Ochakov Siege.
Always ready for nagging,
They sing the same old song:
Not noticing about themselves
That whatever gets older gets worse...
Those are the men whom we, for want of real men, must
admire!
Those are our judges, the ones who watch us critically![44]

It is obvious from his parting words ('Away from Moscow! I will not come back again'[45]) that reintegration via a 'suitable' marriage or career is unlikely in the extreme.

Onegin's familial status is also relatively vague. He is certainly noble, and with the death of both his father and his uncle, he is both an orphan and the last of his line. Even before his debacle with Tatyana, a 'suitable' marriage seems unlikely ('Capricious belles of the *grande monde*!/Before all others you he left'[46]) and, like Chatsky, he has rejected the

[42] *Woe from Wit,* II, p. 108.

[43] *Woe from Wit*, II, pp. 109-10.

[44] *Woe from Wit,* II, pp. 117-8.

[45] *Woe from Wit*, IV, p. 163.

[46] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 1, XLII, p. 113.

traditional, 'honorable' options open to him. Onegin's contempt for conventional noble society is constant throughout the text:

> But one can see no change in *them*;
> in them all follows the old pattern. [...]
>
> There engages everybody in the drawing room
> such incoherent, banal rot;
> all about them is so pale, neutral;
> they even slander dully.
> In this sterile aridity of speeches,
> interrogations, talebearing, and news,
> not once does thought flash forth in a whole day and night,
> even by chance, even at random;
> the languid mind won'd smile,
> the heart won't even start in jest,
> and even some droll foolishness
> in you one will not meet with, hollow *monde*![47]

And, like Chatsky, Onegin's individualism is neither accepted nor understood:

> Why so unfavorably then
> do you refer to him?
> Because we indefatigably
> bestir ourselves, judge everything?
> Because of fiery souls the rashness
> to smug nonentity
> is either insulting or absurd?
> Because, by liking room, wit cramps?
> Because too often conversations
> we're glad to take for deeds,
> because stupidity is volatile and wicked?
> Because to grave men grave are trifles,
> and mediocrity alone
> is to our measure and not odd?[48]

There is absolutely no indication that reintegration is probable - or even possible - for Onegin.[49]

The familial status of Obermann must be deduced from context; his general level of education and lifestyle confirm that he is of noble origin. He also seems to be an orphan and the last of his line; his father, at least, is certainly dead, and the vague 'affaires' which

---

[47] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 7, XLV and XLVIII, pp. 272-3.

[48] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 8, IX, p. 285.

[49] In stark contrast to Lensky, whom the author/narrator considers likely to have settled down quite happily to the life of a provincial landowner.

summon him back to Paris are most probably concerned with the inheritance which he eventually receives. Obermann, too, finds himself deeply alienated from and unable to fulfil society's expectations:

> On voulait que je fisse ce qu'il m'était impossible de faire bien; que j'eusse un état pour son produit, que j'employasse les facultés de mon être à ce qui choque essentiellement sa nature. Aurais-je dû me plier à une condescendance momentanée; tromper un parent en lui persuadant que j'entreprenais pour l'avenir ce que je n'aurais commencé qu'avec le désir de le cesser; et vivre ainsi dans un état violent, dans une répugnance perpétuelle?[50]

There is no reason to believe that Obermann would ever willingly leave his self-imposed exile; as with Chatsky and Onegin, reintegration into noble society seems an impossibility.

Adolphe's familial status, in contrast, is clearly described. Possesser of 'une 'naissance illlustre' and 'une fortune brillante',[51] he is an only son and the last of his line. We may infer from the 'Lettre à l'éditeur' and 'Réponse' that he never marries, and that his deep alienation from noble society - established from the very beginning of the novel - continues despite his apparent 'reintegration'. Indeed, that Adolphe's sensibility is deeply incompatible with society's expectations is signalled from the very first page, and his values continue to clash with those of conventional society throughout the narrative. It is, after all, his failure to enjoy a casual liaison with Ellénore after the style of his father which motivates the entire plot of the novel, and like Chatsky, he explicitly rejects the option of serving society in a traditional, 'honorable' aristocratic function.

The familial status of René is the most explicit of all our dandies. That René is noble is beyond doubt: he is described on the opening page of *René* as an 'Européen bien né'; in *Les Natchez*, we are told that 'René tenait à une famille puissante'; and his first thought at Amélie's flight to a convent is that she may have conceived a passion for a man 'qu'elle n'osait avouer'.[52] However, the ambiguous nature of René's status is revealed from the start:

> J'ai coûté la vie à ma mère en venant au monde; j'ai été tiré de son sein avec le fer. J'avais un frère que mon père bénit, parce qu'il voyait en lui son fils aîné. Pour moi, livré de bonne heure à des mains étrangères, je fus élevé loin du toit paternel.[53]

---

[50] *Obermann*, p. 22.

[51] *Adolphe,* p. 77.

[52] *René,* p. 162; according to Pierre Barbéris, the original text was even more revealing: 'René soupçonne un moment sa soeur d'avoir conçu une passion pour un homme d'un rang inférieur, et qu'elle n'osait avouer à cause de l'orgueil de notre famille.' (*René de Chateaubriand - un nouveau roman* (Paris: Larousse, 1973), p. 155.)

[53] *René,* p.145.

And after his father's death, he is alienated even further from his heritage:

> Il fallut quitter le toit paternel, devenu l'héritage de mon frère: je me retirai avec Amélie chez de vieux parents.[54]

René is unusual among our superfluous men in that he has both a brother and a sister and does later marry. He may, nevertheless, be considered as the last of his line: Amélie, of course, dies childless, and the nameless older brother disappears from the text after having sold off the ancestral home.[55] René's marriage is neither 'suitable' nor successful:

> En arrivant chez les Natchez, René avait été obligé de prendre une épouse, pour se conformer aux moeurs des Indiens; mais il ne vivait point avec elle.[56]

> On dit que, pressé par les deux vieillards, il retourna chez son épouse, mais sans y trouver le bonheur.[57]

Although we learn in the epilogue to *Atala* that this marriage did prove fruitful, this is wholly negated by the fact that his granddaughter - herself a homeless exile - is burying a dead child who is, in fact, not only the last of René's own line, but the last of his adoptive family - the Natchez.[58]

René, like our other dandies, is wholly unable to reconcile himself to society, refusing to accept the role expected of him:

> Ce n'était ni un langage élevé, ni un sentiment profond qu'on demandait de moi. Je n'étais occupé qu'à rapetisser ma vie, pour la mettre au niveau de la société. Traité partout d'esprit romanesque, honteux du rôle que je jouais, dégoûté de plus en plus des choses et des hommes, je pris le parti de me retirer.[59]

Reintegration into conventional society is, for René, impossible; he is, tragically, no more capable of successfully integrating into his adoptive society of the Natchez.

Despite his noble heritage, then, the dandy's familial and social status is already profoundly ambiguous. The dandy's sense of individuality, of *uniqueness*, is paramount; he

---

[54] *René*, p. 147.

[55] Thus betraying the aristocratic 'ethos' no less than René himself.

[56] *René*, p. 143.

[57] *René*, p. 172.

[58] If one considers that only male children carry on a family *name*, René is, of course, unequivocally the last of his line.

[59] *René*, pp. 152-3.

no longer defines himself solely in terms of class, and he rejects the role which society expects him to fulfil. However, he is unable to make a complete break; he simply lacks the strength to carve out a new role for himself independent of society's approval. None of our dandies can face the prospect of capitulation to society; but neither can they face the prospect of becoming a complete social pariah. All of our dandies are shown to be powerless against the sheer weight of society against the individual. This is, perhaps, most explicit in *Adolphe*, as Dennis Wood notes:

> Running through *Adolphe* is the theme of the intolerable constraints which modern society lays upon individuals, to such an extent that they may be in danger of becoming alienated from themselves. [...] Society, as critics have often remarked, comes to function almost as a character in *Adolphe*: from beginning to end there is a sense of its power and corrosive effect on the individual. Adolphe has a *coeur naturel.* [...] Spontaneously he reacts against society's artificiality and hypocrisy, but at length he is brought under its sway.[60]

but the same theme is present in *Woe from Wit, Eugene Onegin, Obermann,* and *René.* The dandy is unable to shake off the influence of his eighteenth-century 'inheritance'. As Frederick Garber notes, 'The hero is free, presumably, to choose what values he sees fit for the role he has assumed, since his total rejection of the social order creates a new relationship of self and outer world, new boundaries, and thus new standards of value. A delightful irresponsibility seems on the verge of being accepted. [...] But somehow it never appears to happen.'[61] The dandy has rejected the past; but he is, as of yet, unable defy its authority.

> Cependant qu'avais-je appris jusqu'alors avec tant de fatigue? Rien de certain parmi les anciens, rien de beau parmi les modernes. Le passé et le présent sont deux statues incomplètes: l'une a été retirée toute mutilée du débris des âges; l'autre n'a pas encore reçu sa perfection de l'avenir.[62]

---

[60] Dennis Wood, *Benjamin Constant - Adolphe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 21.

[61] Frederick Garber, 'Self, Society, Value, and the Romantic Hero', in *The Hero in Literature*, Ed. Victor Brombert (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1969), pp. 213-227 (p. 224).

[62] *René*, p. 150.

B. Contempt of bourgeois ideals

If the superfluous man cannot identify with the traditional values of the aristocracy, he has even less respect for the mercenary, mediocre, and vulgar 'bourgeois' ideal; he is no more a part of the 'new' society than he is of the 'old'.[63] This first generation of superfluous man faces little threat from the bourgeoisie. The dandy is independantly wealthy and feels little material pressure[64] ; his education is of a standard achieved by few non-nobles; his birthright guarantees him a rank and a role in society (even if he chooses to reject it). Yet the dandy already feels the need to consciously underline his *difference,* and one of the ways in which he accomplishes this is by proclaiming his indifference to all things financial - even when this has adverse consequences for him.

That Chatsky has no more respect for the emerging aristocracy of wealth than for the traditional aristocracy of birth is evident:

> You show us where our country's fathers are
> Whom we must now accept as paragons!
> Aren't these the men, made rich by robbery,
> Who found a way around the law through friendships and
> Relations, after they had built themselves real mansions
> Where they go on and on in feasts and dissipation
> And where their foreign clients try unsuccessfully
> To revive the foulest features of a bygone age?
> And who in Moscow hasn't had his mouth stopped up
> With dinners, snacks and dancing?
> Aren't they like the one you took me to, for some
> Strange reasons of your own, when I was very little,
> To pay respects to?[65]

Chatsky's scorn for the obsequious social climber Molchalin (who faithfully follows his father's advice to ingratiate himself with everybody from the master of the house to the superintendent's dog) is palpable:

> MOLCHALIN. A man my age mustn't
> Dare form a personal judgement.
> CHATSKY. For Heaven's sake, you and I aren't children;
> Why are only other men's opinions sacred?
> MOLCHALIN. You know one must depend on what others think.

---

[63] Although there was at this point no real 'bourgeoisie' in Russia as there was in France, I am using the term 'bourgeois' - with its connotations of philistinism and vulgarity - to denote a general attitude or value system , rather than a specific class.

[64] Chatsky is 'not rich' by the standards of the old princess; René is supposedly penniless after having been excluded from his father's estate; Obermann is briefly 'ruined' - until he receives a legacy. However, these financial 'troubles' seem to have had no impact on their lifestyles whatsoever.

[65] *Woe from Wit,* II, pp. 117-18.

CHATSKY. And why this 'must'?
MOLCHALIN. We're not so high in rank.[66]

And it is implied that his aversion to the culture of money extends even to his own affairs; he is, according to Famusov, 'negligent' and runs his estate 'carelessly'.[67]

Onegin's dandy lifestyle itself implies a conscious separation from the mundane world of the middle classes:

> And my Onegin? Half asleep,
> he drives from ball to bed,
> while indefatigable Petersburg
> is roused already by the drum.
> The merchant's up, the hawker's on his way,
> the cabby to the hack stand drags,
> The Okta girl hastes with her jug,
> the morning snow creaks under her.
> Morn's pleasant hubbub has awoken,
> enclosed are shutters, chimney smoke
> ascends in a blue column,
> and the baker, a punctual German,
> in cotton cap, has more than once
> already opened his *vasisdas*.[68]

and his disdain of financial affairs, like Chatsky's, extends to his own concerns:

> 'Twas then his father died.
> Before Onegin there assembled
> a greedy host of creditors.
> Each has a mind and notion of his own.
> Eugene, detesting litigations,
> contented with his lot,
> relinquished the inheritance to them,
> perceiving no great loss therein,
> or precognizing from afar
> the demise of his aged uncle.[69]

René, too, shows a marked indifference towards financial affairs of any kind. His criticism of his sister for her absence from Paris at his return from abroad is based mainly on the fact that she gives business as her reason:

---

[66] *Woe from Wit,* III, p. 130.

[67] *Woe from Wit,* II, p. 108.

[68] *Eugene Onegin,* Ch. 1, XXXV, p. 111.

[69] *Eugene Onegin,* Ch. 1, LI, p. 117. Although the last two lines of this stanza suggest that Onegin would not allow his comfort to be compromised by his ideals!

> Je lui écrivis que je comptais l'aller rejoindre; elle se hâta de me répondre pour me détourner de ce projet, sous prétexte qu'elle était incertaine du lieu où l'appelleraient ses affaires. Quelles tristes réflexions ne fis-je point alors sur l'amitié, que la présence attiédit, que l'absence efface, qui ne résiste point au malheur, et encore moins à la prospérité![70]

Amélie herself is primarily alarmed at the letter which he writes her in preparation for his suicide because of his questions 'sur des affaires dont je ne m'étais jamais occupé'.[71] As with Chatsky, the new society meets René's needs no more than the old:

> De la hauteur du génie, du respect pour la religion, de la gravité des moeurs, tout était subitement descendu à la souplesse de l'esprit, à l'impiété, à la corruption. [72]

Obermann's contempt for the world of business is evident throughout the text ('Je n'ai pu renoncer à être homme, pour être homme d'affaires'; 'L'amour du pouvoir ou des richesses est presque aussi étranger à ma nature que l'envie, la vengeance ou les haines'[73]) and extends to a supreme indifference towards his own affairs:

> Vous me disiez il y a déjà du temps: ne négligez point vos affaires, et n'allez pas perdre ce qui vous reste; vous n'êtes point de caractère à acquérir. Je crois que vous ne serez pas aujourd'hui d'un autre avis. Suis-je borné aux petits intérêts?
>
> Il n'y a plus de remède, et il est bien connu que me voilà ruiné. [...] Je ne sens pas d'inquiétude, et je ne vois pas que j'aie beaucoup perdu en perdant tout, puisque je ne jouissais de rien. Je puis devenir, il est vrai, plus malheureux que je n'étais; mais je ne deviendrai pas moins heureux.[74]

Adolphe, alone among our dandies, seems to exist in a rarefied atmosphere where the 'new' society has yet to make an impact; his bile is reserved for the hypocrisy of traditional noble society.

---

[70] *René*, p. 152.

[71] *René*, p. 157.

[72] *René*, p. 152.

[73] *Obermann*, p. 23 and p. 43.

[74] *Obermann*, p. 112 and pp. 121-2.

C. Intellectualism and sensibility

The superfluous man is by definition endowed with exceptional intelligence and sensibility; this is the root of his tragedy, for it is his inability to find a satisfying and productive outlet for his superior talents that condemns him to superfluity. Each successive 'generation' of superfluous man would place more and more emphasis on his intellectual superiority and less on his aristocratic origins, thus paving the way for the eventual emergence of the intellectual hero and an alternative elite based on intelligence, education, and political initiative, rather than on birth - an 'intelligentsia':

> Ils eurent bientôt compris qu'il [...] ne suffisait plus d'être aveugle et ponctuel dans l'exercice de la force brutale pour arriver à faire de l'arbitraire en sous-ordre, mais qu'il fallait chercher désormais sa force dans son intelligence. [...] A mesure que la monarchie, en s'ébranlant, vit ses faveurs perdre de leur prix, à mesure que la véritable puissance politique vint s'asseoir sur les bancs de l'opposition, la culture de l'esprit, l'étude de la dialectique, le développement de la pensée devint le seul moyen de réaliser des ambitions désormais plus vastes et plus nobles.[75]

The dandy regards himself as superior to others largely on the basis of his intelligence and sensibility, and places little value on wealth or social status alone. In this, the dandy is already subversive. However, the dandy's 'fatal flaw' - his essentially dilettante nature - sabotages his intellectualism. His superior intelligence and sensibility are sterile gifts, for he lacks the strength of will to take advantage of them.

Chatsky's contempt for the intellectual mediocrity of contemporary society is evident throughout *Woe from Wit*. More than this, that his criticism is politically motivated is clear from the very start:

> And what about that consumptive relative of yours,
> The foe of books, who got onto the Scholarly
> Committee and shouted for oaths
> That none know how, and no one learn, to read and write?
>
> Oh, let's talk of education.
> Are things still the way they were?
> Are they trying to recruit regiments of teachers,
> As many and as cheaply as they can?
> Not that they're so far behind in science:
> In Russia, under pain of penalty,
> We're ordered to acknowledge any man
> A geographer or a historian.[76]

[75] George Sand, in her preface to *Obermann*, p. 11.

[76] *Woe from Wit*, Act I, p. 103.

That the subversiveness of Chatsky's intellectualism - and the danger that it poses to the traditional elite - is fully recognized by the old guard is evident:

> Well, now! It's no great shame, indeed,
> For a man to take a drop too much!
> Study - that's the plague; learning - that's the reason
> That nowadays there are more madmen
> And crazy things and thoughts than there ever were before. [...]
>
> If the evil is to be undone
> The books must all be gathered up and burned.[77]

And the role which education would play in breaking down the class-based elite is foreshadowed, ironically, by the old princess herself:

> Now, in Petersburg there is the Ped-
> A-go-gic Institute - I think that's what it's called? -
> There professors practice away at schism-making
> And lack of faith. A relative of ours went there -
> When he came out, he might as well have been a pharmacist's
> Apprentice. He avoids all women, even me!
> Pays no regard to rank! A botanist, a chemist -
> That's Fyodor, my nephew and a prince.[78]

Chatsky himself, of course, is fully aware both of the political and social subversiveness of his message and of the reactionary response of society:

> Just let a young man now, one of
> The younger generation, be against all flattery,
> Not looking for a job, nor promotion to high rank -
> A man whose mind's on study, a man who yearns to know,
> Or one within whose soul the Lord Himself inspired
> A passion for creative art, beautiful, exalted -
> And they shout out: Fire! Theft!
> And he gets known among them as a dangerous dreamer.[79]

Chatsky's analysis is proved correct; he is himself condemned as a radical and a Carbonarist, labelled mad and more or less driven from Moscow.

Onegin, too, stands apart from the intellectual mediocrity of contemporary society:

> All of us had a bit of schooling
> in something and somehow:

---

[77] *Woe from Wit,* III, p. 142.

[78] *Woe from Wit,* III, pp. 142-3.

[79] *Woe from Wit,* II, pp. 117-8.

Hence education, God be praised,
is in our midst not hard to flaunt.
Onegin was, in the opinion of many
(judges resolute and stern),
a learned fellow but a pedant.[80]

Revealingly, he explicitly rejects traditional scholarship in favour of progressive economic theory, preferring Adam Smith to Homer and Theocritus;[81] that Onegin's intellectualism is politically orientated is also supported by the following:

He believed that a kindred soul
to him must be united;
that, joylessly pining away,
it daily kept awaiting him;
he believed that his friends were ready
to accept fetters to defend his honor
and that their hand would never falter
to smash the vessel of the slanderer;
that there were some chosen by fate
whose life -heaven's best gift -
and heat of thoughts incorruptible,
and genius of power over minds,
were dedicated to the good of mankind
and valorously equalled fame.[82]

Onegin's intellectualism is, however, not nearly as explicitly political as Chatsky's, and he is therefore not considered nearly as subversive by conventional society. Whereas Chatsky was branded 'a dangerous man to know',[83] Onegin is merely a 'boor', a 'crackbrain', and a 'Freemason'.[84]

Adolphe is the most overtly 'intellectual' of our dandies; indeed, whereas Chatsky and Onegin are first introduced in a social setting, Adolphe is not only placed in an intellectual context in the very first sentence of *Adolphe*, but identified as one with superior faculties:

[80] *Eugene Onegin,* Ch. 1, V, p. 97.

[81] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 1, VII, p. 98.

[82] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 2, VIII, p. 129. The last five lines of this stanza were deleted by government censors because of suspected allusions to the Decembrists. See Nabokov, Vol. 2, p. 234.

[83] *Woe from Wit*, II, p. 110.

[84] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 2, V, p. 127.

> Je venais de finir à vingt-deux ans mes études à l'université de Göttingue. [...] J'avais obtenu, par un travail assez opiniâtre, au milieu d'une vie très dissipée, des succès qui m'avaient distingué de mes compagnons d'étude.[85]

Adolphe clearly regards himself as superior primarily on the basis of his intelligence and sensibility: 'Ce monde, absorbé dans ses frivolités solennelles, ne lira pas dans un coeur tel que le mien'.[86] Later, although he feels some dissatisfaction at having forfeited, for Ellénore's sake, his place in polite society ('j'éprouvais un désir impatient de reprendre dans ma patrie et dans la société de mes égaux la place qui m'était due'[87]), he feels far greater remorse for the squandering of his talents:

> Je me rappelais les espérances de ma jeunesse, la confiance avec laquelle je croyais autrefois commander à l'avenir, les éloges accordés à mes premiers essais, l'aurore de réputation que j'avais vue briller et disparaître. Je me répétais les noms de plusieurs de mes compagnons d'étude, que j'avais traités avec un dédain superbe, et qui, par le seul effet d'un travail opiniâtre et d'une vie régulière, m'avaient laissé loin derrière eux dans la route de la fortune, de la considération et de la gloire. [...] Ce n'était pas une carrière seule que je regrettais: comme je n'avais essayé d'aucune, je les regrettais toutes. N'ayant jamais employé mes forces, je les imaginais sans bornes, et je les maudissais; j'aurais voulu que la nature m'eût créé faible et médiocre, pour me préserver au moins du remords de me dégrader volontairement.[88]

and his greatest disdain is reserved for the intellectual mediocrity of contemporary society:

> Cette ville était la résidence d'un prince, qui, comme la plupart de ceux de l'Allemagne, gouvernait avec douceur un pays de peu d'étendue, protégeait les hommes éclairés qui venaient s'y fixer, laissait à toutes les opinions une liberté parfaite, mais, qui, borné par l'ancien usage à la société de ses courtisans, ne rassemblait par là même autour de lui que des hommes en grande partie insignifiants ou médiocres. [...] Pendant quelques mois je ne remarquai rien qui pût captiver mon attention.[89]

That Adolphe's intellectualism is socially - if not politically - subversive is clear very early on:

> J'avais contracté dans mes conversations avec la femme qui la première avait développé mes idées une insurmontable aversion pour toutes les maximes communes et pour toutes les formules dogmatiques. Lors donc que

[85] *Adolphe*, p. 21.

[86] *Adolphe*, p. 41.

[87] *Adolphe*, p. 80.

[88] *Adolphe*, pp. 78-9.

[89] *Adolphe*, pp. 24.

> j'entendais la médiocrité disserter avec complaisance sur des principes bien établis, bien incontestables, en fait de morale, de convenances ou de religion, choses qu'elle met assez volontiers sur la même ligne, je me sentais poussé à la contredire, non que j'eusse adopté des opinions opposées, mais parce que j'étais impatienté d'une conviction si ferme et si lourde. [...] Les sots font de leur morale une masse compacte et indivisible, pour qu'elle se mêle le moins possible avec leurs actions et les laisse libres dans tous les détails.[90]

The subversive nature of Adolphe's intellectualism - like that of Chatsky and Onegin - is recognized as a threat by the old guard even before his liaison with Ellénore becomes obviously and embarrassingly inappropriate (and is foreshadowed by the fate of the elderly woman who, despite - because of - her 'grande force d'âme et de facultés vraiment puissantes', 'avait vu ses espérances trompées, sa jeunesse passer sans plaisir'[91]):

> Il s'etablit donc, dans le petit public qui m'environnait, une inquiétude sur mon caractère. On ne pouvait citer aucune action condamnable; on ne pouvait même m'en contester quelques-unes qui semblaient annoncer de la générosité ou du dévouement; mais on disait que j'étais un homme immoral, un homme peu sûr: deux épithètes heureusement inventées pour insinuer les faits qu'on ignore, et laisser deviner ce qu'on ne sait pas.[92]

Adolphe, society eventually concludes, is not only 'immoral' and 'peu sûr', but also 'bizarre et sauvage'.[93]

Neither Obermann nor René can be considered 'intellectual' in the same vein as Chatsky, Onegin, and Adolphe. Rather than being set apart by outstanding intelligence, they are instead endowed with exceptional sensibility. Both Obermann and René, however, base their sense of superiority wholly upon their talents and abilities and not on their noble status. Both are also profoundly alienated from the ethical - if not the intellectual - mediocrity of society.

Obermann (despite numerous disclaimers about his own intelligence ('J'ai avoué que, n'étant pas un érudit, j'avais, en effet, le malheur d'aimer mieux les choses que les mots'; 'Je n'étudie pas, je ne fais pas d'observations systématiques, et j'en serais assez peu capable'[94]) clearly feels himself to be superior on the basis of his sensibility:

> Rien de grand (je le sens profondément), rien de ce qui est possible à l'homme et sublime selon sa pensée, n'est inaccessible à ma nature.[95]

---

[90] *Adolphe*, p. 25.

[91] *Adolphe*, p. 23.

[92] *Adolphe*, p. 27.

[93] *Adolphe*, p. 40.

[94] *Obermann*, p. 114, p. 233.

[95] *Obermann*, p. 176.

And that he assigns no value to wealth or social status alone - that his sensibility is, like the intellectualism of Adolphe, socially, if not politically, subversive - is evident:

> On peut être considéré dans la vie la plus obscure. [...] On peut l'être dans la pauvreté même, quand on a une manière plus grande que son sort, quand on sait faire distinguer de ce qui serait misère dans le vulgaire, jusqu'au dénûment d'une extrême médiocrité. L'homme qui a un caractère élevé n'est point confondu parmi la foule. [...] Si c'était un vain désir de primer, l'homme supérieur craindrait l'obscurité du désert et ses privations, comme il craint la bassesse et la misère du cinquième étage; mais il craint de s'avilir, et ne craint point de n'être pas élevé: il ne répugne pas à son être de n'avoir pas un grand rôle, mais d'en avoir un qui soit contraire à sa nature.[96]

René, too, feels superior to others not because of his noble heritage, but because of his talents and sensibility; like Adolphe and Obermann, he feels that his abilities are boundless:

> La nuit, lorsque l'aquilon ébranlait ma chaumière, que les pluies tombaient en torrent sur mon toit, qu'à travers ma fenêtre je voyais la lune sillonner les nuages amoncelés, comme un pâle vaisseau qui laboure les vagues, il me semblait que la vie redoublait au fond de mon coeur, que j'aurais eu la puissance de créer des mondes.[97]

Both Amélie and Chactas acknowledge his essential superiority:

> Je suis persuadée que vous-même, mon frère, vous trouveriez le repos dans ces retraites de la religion: la terre n'offre rien qui soit digne de vous.[98]

> Mon jeune ami, les mouvements d'un coeur comme le tien ne sauraient être égaux. [...] Si tu souffres plus qu'un autre des choses de la vie, il ne faut pas t'en étonner; une grande âme doit contenir plus de douleur qu'une petite.[99]

And René's disdain for and alienation from the mediocrity of society is evident:

> Un jour je m'étais amusé à effeuiller une branche de saule sur un ruisseau, et à attacher une idée à chaque feuille que le courant entraînait. Un roi qui craint de perdre sa couronne par une révolution subite, ne ressent pas des angoisses plus vives que les miennes, à chaque accident qui menaçait les débris de mon rameau. O faiblesse des mortels! O enfance du coeur humain qui ne vieillit jamais! Voilà donc à quel degré de puérilité notre superbe

---

[96] *Obermann*, p. 354.

[97] *René*, p. 156.

[98] *René*, p. 160.

[99] *René*, p. 151.

raison peut descendre! Et encore est-il vrai que bien des hommes attachent leur destinée à des choses d'aussi peu de valeur que mes feuilles de saule.[100]

Despite - and because of - his formidable intelligence and sensibility, however, the dandy is unable to find a satisfying role for himself in contemporary society. This is partly due to the repressive and stagnant nature of society in the first quarter of the nineteenth century; but part of the blame lies in the dandy's nature itself. Despite his talent and ability, the dandy is fatally hampered by his lack of will. Chatsky, Onegin, and Adolphe often seem most concerned with making an impression and to prefer to contribute an apt *bon mot* than to engage in any serious study. As Dennis Wood notes: 'Adolphe's witticisms and mockery are not the mark of a strong-minded and steadfast dissident, and in that lies the germ of his ultimate downfall'[101] - and this judgement applies equally well to Chatsky and Onegin. Obermann and René simply accept their impotence: 'René dit: Si je pouvais vouloir, je pourrais faire; Obermann dit: A quoi bon vouloir? je ne pourrais pas.'[102]

Thus, although he is able to identify the ills of contemporary society easily enough, the dandy's total lack of sufficient will to *act* renders his intellectualism impotent. Obermann himself notes at one point that: 'Pouvoir sans savoir est fort dangereux; savoir sans pouvoir est inutile et triste';[103] and the tragedy of not just Obermann, but also Chatsky, Onegin, René, and Adolphe is very clearly that of 'savoir sans pouvoir'.

[100] *René,* p. 155.

[101] Wood, p. 78.

[102] George Sand in her preface to *Obermann*, p. 3.

[103] *Obermann,* p. 402.

D. Civic Sense

All superfluous men exhibit some kind of civic sense; their intellectualism is inseparably linked with political and social awareness. Futile as it is - for by definition, the superfluous man is unable to translate conviction into action - it is nevertheless vital, for it is in his civic sense that the superfluous man most strongly presages the politically radical and socially reformist intellectual hero.

The dandy's civic sense is, like his intellectualism, somewhat wavering and unsteady; his loudly proclaimed convictions are built on shaky philosophical ground, bear little fruit, and are often muted at the first sign of opposition. However, even this relatively feeble civic sense is still in stark contrast to other noble characters, and - crucially - all of our dandies can be seen as politically or socially subversive: radical, if not revolutionary.

Chatsky, of course, is the most explicitly political of our dandies - and is clearly recognized as such by society:[104]

> FAMUSOV. Oh for God's sake! He's a Carbonarist!
> CHATSKY. No, nowadays the world is changed.
> FAMUSOV. A dangerous man to know.
> CHATSKY. Each man breathes more freely
> And doesn't rush to join the regiment of fools.
> FAMUSOV. The way he talks! as if it were in writing!
> CHATSKY. Stares at the ceiling in his patrons' houses,
> Shows up just to sit, shuffle his feet, eat dinner,
> Hold someone's chair, pick up a handkerchief.
> FAMUSOV. He's out to propagate new freedom!
> CHATSKY. Some men go traveling, some live on their estates...
> FAMUSOV. Why, he denies authority!
> CHATSKY. They serve a cause, and not a master...
> FAMUSOV. I would most stringently prevent these gentlemen
> From getting within gunshot of the capitals.[105]

And, indeed, several commentators have suggested that he flees from Moscow, not because of his disillusionment with Sofia, but out of fear of arrest.[106]

Onegin, in the final version of the novel at least, is much less overtly politicized than Chatsky. However, the deleted portions of *Onegin's Journey* show him to be, if not a Decembrist himself (one commentator records that Pushkin told a contemporary that

---

[104] And, of course, by the censor: *Woe from Wit* was not published in its entirety in Russia until the Academy edition of Griboyedev's complete works in 1911-17, although it was widely circulated in manuscript form.

[105] *Woe from Wit,* II, p. 108-110.

[106] Skalozub's threat to Repetilov (IV, p. 153) is very thinly veiled indeed.

'Onegin will either perish in the Caucasus or join the Decembrist movement'[107]) then at least a sympathizer such as Chatsky. Not only do the deleted stanzas openly criticize government policy - Vladimir Nabokov notes that in 1853, Katenin wrote to the editor Annenkov:

> Concerning the eighth chapter of *Onegin*, I heard from the late poet in 1832 that besides the Nizhni market and the Odessa port, Eugene saw the military settlements organized by Count Arakcheev (camps of militarized peasants in Novgorod and Staraya Russia) and here occurred remarks, judgements, expressions that were too violent for publication and that he decided were best assigned to eternal oblivion.[108]

but both Alexander I and Paul I are mocked:

> A ruler weal and wily,
> a baldish fop, a foe of toil,
> fortuitously by Fame befriended,
> over us reigned then.
>
> Play regiment of Titan Peter,
> a bodyguard of old mustaches,
> who formerly betrayed a tyrant
> to a ferocious gang of deathsmen.[109]

The final edition of *René* contains little of an explicitly political nature, stressing instead his metaphysical incompatibility with contemporary society. However, as Colin Smethurst notes, both the first edition of *René* and *Les Natchez* show René in a different light:

> In *Les Natchez*, for example, rumours are spread in New Orleans that René is the political leader of the Natchez Indians, an anti-colonial figher: 'Adario, Chactas même, et René surtout, étaient représentés comme les auteurs d'une conspiration permanente, comme des hommes qui...s'opposaient à l'établissement des concessionnaires'. René is brought to trial and, just as Julian Sorel in *Le Rouge et le Noir* at his own trial proudly assumes the political role rumour accuses him of adopting, so René makes a virulent anti-colonial speech denouncing the 'vil ramas d'hommes enlevés à la corruption de l'Europe, [qui] a dépouillé de ses terres une nation indépendante'. René is delighted to be unjustly condemned: 'se sentir innocent et être condamné par la loi, était, dans la nature des idées de René, une espèce de triomphe sur l'ordre social.' [...]

---

[107] 'To Captain Yuzefovich, Pushkin said one day, June, 1829, in the Caucasus: "Onegin will either perish in the Caucasus or join the Decembrist movement." Commentators suggest that [...] there is some confusion after all these years: Pushkin probably meant to say that after having been connected with the Decembrist movement Onegin was banished to the Caucasus and killed there.' See Nabokov, Vol. 3, p. 312.

[108] Nabokov, Vol 3, pp. 256-7.

[109] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 10, I and XII See Nabokov, Vol. 3, p. 315.

> These are the buried possibilities of the René figure which have been deliberately toned down in *René*.[110]

The incest theme - present in both *René* and *Atala* - can also be interpreted as a marker of René's status as not only social outcast, but social subverter:

> Breaking the taboo threatens the state. In this context, it is possible to understand both René and Chactas as potential disturbers of political and social order. [...] The focusing on incest can be seen as transposing the potential political revolt in René to a different register, with the incest implying an attempt to create a world apart from the rules of society. [...] To the extent that incest subverts the social order, the positive excitement generated by description of incestuous relationships is a way of refusing that order and preferring an alternative mode of social organization.[111]

That Oberman's rejection of contemporary society is socially and politically motivated is clear: 'retenu par l'ami, accusé par le moraliste, condamné par ma patrie, coupable aux yeux de l'homme social'[112], his flight further and further into the wilds of Switzerland - like that of René to the wilds of America - is a clear rejection of the existing social order:

> Sur les terres basses, c'est une nécessité que l'homme naturel soit sans cesse altéré, en respirant cette atmosphère sociale si épaisse, si orageuse, si pleine de fermentation, toujours ébranlée par le bruit des arts, le fracas des plaisirs ostensibles, les cris de la haine et les perpétuels gémissements de l'anxiété et des douleurs. Mais là, sur ces monts déserts, où le ciel est immense, où l'air est plus fixe, et les temps moins rapides, et la vie plus permanente; là, la nature entière exprime éloquemment un ordre plus grand, une harmonie plus visible, un ensemble éternel. Là, l'homme retrouve sa forme altérable, mais indestructible; il respire l'air sauvage loin des émanations sociales; son être est à lui comme à l'univers: il vit d'une vie réelle dans l'unité sublime.[113]

Even his consideration of suicide is an explicitly political act:

> Si ce pouvait être un crime d'abandonner la vie, c'est vous [la société] que j'accuserais, vous dont les innovations funestes m'ont conduit à vouloir la mort, que sans vous j'eusse éloignée. [...] Opprimez ma vie, la loi est souvent aussi le droit le plus fort; mais la mort est la borne que je veux poser à votre pouvoir. Ailleurs vous commanderez, ici il faut prouver. [...] Toute société est fondée sur une réunion de facultés et un échange de services; mais quand

---

[110] Colin Smethurst, *Chateaubriand: Atala and René* (London: Grant & Cutler Ltd., 1995), p. 63.

[111] Smethurst, p. 72 and p. 74.

[112] *Obermann*, pp. 160-1.

[113] *Obermann*, pp. 58-9.

> je nuis à la société, ne refuse-t-elle pas de me protéger? Si donc elle ne fait rien pour moi, ou si elle fait beaucoup contre moi, j'ai aussi le doit de refuser de la servir. Notre pacte ne lui convient plus, elle le rompt; il ne me convient plus, je le romps aussi: je ne me révolte pas, je sors.[114]

Adolphe is the least political of our five dandies; but even he is quite deliberately socially subversive, as his volatile behavior in both Germany and Poland shows. His youthful admiration of the elderly lady had developed in him, we are told: 'une insurmontable aversion pour toutes les maximes communes et pour toutes les formules dogmatiques'.[115] And, of course, his continuing defense of Ellénore in the face of (for him) intolerable pressure from society - and, indeed, his attraction for her in the first place - has a great deal to do with her status as outsider and exile, and can therefore be interpreted as an act of protest, if not revolt.

Despite the sincerity of his sentiments and the strength of his moral and ethical convictions, however, the dandy falters when it comes to action. His philosophical underpinning is simply too weak; he is, despite his violent disclaimers to the contrary, still too close to his noble ancestors - and he is thus wholly unable to stand against society for long. Chatsky is splendid in his tirades, but accomplishes nothing except his own social exile from both Petersburg and Moscow. Onegin eases his serfs' burden by allowing them to pay quitrent, rather than labor - but would never consider freeing them completely, and indeed, does so more in a spirit of mischievous experimentation than of honest reform. Adolphe rails against the hypocrisy of society even as he surrenders to it. René and Obermann simply flee; the grand courtroom speech of the one, and the virulent suicide note of the other, come to nothing. Adolphe notes that 'Cette société d'ailleurs n'a rien à craindre'.[116] Not yet - but the civic sense of the dandy, unsteady though it is, nevertheless lays the foundation for future generations of superfluous men and the eventual emergence of the intellectual hero.

---

[114] *Obermann*, p. 166-7.

[115] *Adolphe*, p. 25.

[116] *Adolphe*, p. 26.

E. Seeking of soulmates

Although by definition profoundly isolated, most superfluous men would seek either to find others who think and feel as they do or to convert others to their way of thinking. Tragically, the superfluous man's search is destined to be futile, for he is defined by his 'apartness'. A successful break from the fetters of his isolation would signify reintegration into society - and would therefore negate his identity altogether. The invisible barrier which separates the superfluous man from society thus extends even to his personal relationships.

Although the dandy is more or less sincere in his wish for love and friendship, he is not at all a convincing proselyte of his cause; his overwhelming self-obsession succeeds in further alienating others, rather than in attracting them. The dandy is truly selfish; his positive individualism and sense of self-worth - *amour de soi* - is, tragically, accompanied by and overpowered by *amour-propre.* Fatally hampered by his lack of willpower, he is only able to relate to others in terms of himself; and he is no more able to risk society's censure for the sake of friendship than he was for the sake of politics, ethics or morals.

Chatsky's thoughtless outbursts succeed in alienating Sofia (along with everybody else) almost as soon as he arrives, and (although given plenty of hints), his self-love prevents him from recognizing her relationship with Molchalin. His anger at Sofia at the end of the play is thus not only hypocritical in the extreme - as Sofia realizes, it is Chatsky himself who is to blame for their split:

> Maybe I behaved quite thoughtlessly,
> I know it and I'm sorry; but how did I betray him?
> Who's he that I be censured for infidelity?!...
> He left the house - our place seemed very boring to him -
> And he rarely came to visit us;
> Later, he pretended he was in love,
> Again demanding and distressed!
> Witty, clever, eloquent,
> Especially happy in a crowd,
> He got a fancy notion of himself...
> A real desire for travelling came over him.
> Oh, if a person loves someone,
> Why search for wit and go on such a lengthy trip?[117]

but also betrays his self-obsession; his otherwise somewhat justifiable resentment is heavily tinged with embarrassment at the thought of the possible damage to *his* reputation:

> And you! O God in Heaven! *Whom* have you picked out!
> When I consider it, why *whom* have you preferred!..

[117] *Woe from Wit*, I, p. 100.

Will you become his friend again after full consideration?
What's the point of ruining oneself?
Just think, you always can take care of him,
And diaper him and send him on an errand.
To be a boy and servant, a little lady's page -
This is the ideal of all the Moscow men!
Enough!...I pride myself on breaking off with you.[118]

Onegin's relationships also betray both his inability to relate to others and his fear of society's ridicule. He only returns Tatyana's love when he discovers her in her new role of society queen:

Can it be the same Tatyana...
that little girl whom he
had in her humble lot disdained -
can she have been with him just now
so bland, so bold?...

What has stirred at the bottom
of a soul cold and sluggish?
Vexation? Vanity? Or once again
youth's worry - love?[119]

- a fact not missed by Tatyana herself:

Then - is it not so? - in the wilderness,
far from futile Hearsay,
I was not to your liking...Why, then, *now*
do you pursue me?
Why have you marked me out?
Might it not be because in the *grand monde*
I am obliged now to appear;
because I'm wealthy and of noble rank?
because my husband has been maimed in battles;
because for that the Court is kind to us?
Might it not be because my disrepute
would be remarked by everybody now
and in society might bring
you scandalous prestige?[120]

Onegin's treatment of Lensky throughout the text also demonstrates his selfishness: he falls into the friendship merely because he is bored; he is deliberately patronizing and hurtful;

[118] *Woe from Wit*, IV, p. 162.

[119] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 8, XX and XXI, p. 291.

[120] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 8, XLIV, p. 305.

he provokes the events that lead to the fateful duel merely in a spirit of malicious experimentation. And, of course, although Lensky forgives Onegin - for friendship's sake - when he would have been justified in calling him out, Onegin cannot find the strength of will to do the same:

> He might have manifested feelings
> instead of bristling like a beast;
> he ought to have disarmed
> the youthful heart. 'But now
> too late; the time has flown away...
> Moreover,' he reflects, 'in this affair
> an old duelist has intervened;
> he's malicious, he's a gossiper, he's glib...
>
> Of course, contempt shoudl be
> the price of his droll sallies;
> but the whisper, the snickering of fools...'
> And here it is - public opinion!
> Honor's mainspring, our idol!
> And here is what the world twirls on![121]

Rather than risk ridicule by the society which he professes to scorn, Onegin first gratuitously insults Lensky by oversleeping and bringing his valet as a second - and then shoots to kill.

Adolphe, like Chatsky and Onegin, is at least partly responsible for his own isolation:

> Quelquefois je cherchais à contraindre mon ennui; je me réfugiais dans une taciturnité profonde: on prenait cette taciturnité pour du dédain. D'autres fois, lassé moi-même de mon silence, je me laissais aller à quelques plaisanteries, et mon esprit, mis en mouvement, m'entraînait au-delà de toute mesure. Je révélais en un jour tous les ridicules que j'avais observés durant un mois.[122]

He only woos Ellénore out of a sense of bored experimentation ('Offerte à mes regards dans un moment où mon coeur avait besoin d'amour, ma vanité de succès, Ellénore me parut une conquête digne de moi'[123]) and throughout their relationship, his treatment of her betrays both selfishness and weakness:

---

[121] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 6, XI, p. 232.

[122] *Adolphe*, p. 25.

[123] *Adolphe*, p. 32.

> Plus d'une fois elle forma le projet de briser un lien qui ne répandait sur sa vie que de l'inquiétude et du trouble; plus d'une fois je l'apaisai par mes supplications, mes désaveux et mes pleurs.[124]

> Je ne fais que du mal à Ellénore; mon sentiment, tel qu'il est, ne peut la satisfaire. Je me sacrifie pour elle sans fruit pour son bonheur; et moi, je vis ici sans utilité, sans indépendance, n'ayant pas un instant de libre, ne pouvant respirer une heure en paix. [...] Je me plaignis de ma vie contrainte, de ma jeunesse consumée dans l'inaction, du despotisme qu'elle exerçait sur toutes mes démarches.[125]

Adolphe lacks the strength of will either to defy society by remaining with Ellénore, or to break with her of his own initiative. Like Onegin, Adolphe would rather be responsible for a death than risk public ridicule by the society that he repudiates.

Although René 'ne trouvais l'aise et le contentement qu'auprès de [sa] soeur Amélie'[126], his attitude towards his sister is wilfully and blindly selfish. He keeps her from becoming a nun as long as he possibly can, although he realizes that he is 'le seul lien qui la retînt dans le monde'[127]; he is positively furious at her for refusing to divulge her reasons for eventually taking the veil ('je fus révolté de l'obstination d'Amélie, du mystère de ses paroles, et de son peu de confiance en mon amitié'[128]); and he goes so far as to consider committing suicide during Amélie's induction into the convent:

> Cette froide fermeté qu'on opposait à l'ardeur de mon amitié, me jeta dans de violents transports. Tantôt j'étais près de retourner sur mes pas; tantôt je voulais rester, uniquement pour troubler le sacrifice. L'enfer me suscitait jusqu'à la pensée de me poignarder dans l'église, et de mêler mes dernières soupirs aux voeux qui m'arrachaient ma soeur.[129]

René is, like Onegin and Adolphe, directly responsible for a death; his outburst during the ceremony pushes Amélie to sacrifice her life in a quest for forgiveness.

Obermann's self-obsession dominates throughout the text; for him, there really is 'only one person, one subject - I'.[130] We never learn why Obermann flees from his 'soulmate':

---

[124] *Adolphe,* p. 44.

[125] *Adolphe,* p. 53.

[126] *René,* p. 145 and p. 157.

[127] *René,* p. 147.

[128] *René,* p. 162.

[129] *René,* pp. 163-4.

[130] Seeley (1994), p. 9.

> Vous qui me connaissez, qui m'entendez, mais qui, plus heureux et plus sage, cédez sans impatience aux habitudes de la vie, vous savez quels sont en moi, dans l'éloignement où nous sommes destinés à vivre, les besoins qui ne peuvent être satisfaits. Il est une chose qui me console, c'est de vous avoir: ce sentiment ne cessera point. Mais, nous nous le sommes toujours dit, il faut que mon ami sente comme moi; il faut que notre destinée soit la même; il faut qu'on puisse passer ensemble la vie. Combien de fois j'ai regretté que nous ne fussions pas ainsi l'un à l'autre! Avec qui l'intimité sans réserve pourra-t-elle m'être aussi douce, m'être aussi naturelle? [...] Vous êtes le point où j'aime à me reposer dans l'inquiétude qui m'égare, où j'aime à revenir lorsque j'ai parcouru toutes choses, et que je me suis trouvé seul dans le monde. Si nous vivions ensemble, si nous nous suffisions, je m'arrêterais là, je connaîtrais le repos, je ferais quelque chose sur la terre, et ma vie commencerait. Mais il faut que j'attende, que je cherche, que je me hâte vers l'inconnu, et que, sans savoir où je vais, je fuie le présent comme si j'avais quelque espoir dans l'avenir.[131]

But it seems likely that he has fled to escape society's scorn; indeed, Obermann seems to realize that he is incapable of openly flouting society, even for true friendship:

> Je vivrai misérable et presque ridicule sur une terre assujettie aux caprices de ce monde éphémère; opposant à mes ennuis cette conviction qui me place intérieurement auprès de l'homme tel qu'il serait. Et s'il rencontre quelqu'un d'un caractère assez peu flexible pour que son être, formé sur le modèle antérieur, ne puisse être livré aux empreintes sociales, si, dis-je, le hasard me fait rencontrer un tel homme, nous nous entendrons, il me restera; je serai à lui pour toujours; nous reporterons l'un vers l'autre nos rapports avec le reste du monde; et, quittés des autres hommes, dont nous plaindrons les vains besoins, nous suivrons, s'il se peut, une vie plus naturelle, plus égale. Cependant qui pourra dire si elle serait plus heureuse, sans accord avec les choses?[132]

Later, he settles for second-best - in the full realization that he has gained a companion, rather than a soulmate:

> Fonsalbe sera un ami, et un ami dans ma solitude. Je ne dis pas un ami tel que nous l'entendions autrefois. Nous ne sommes plus dans un âge du héroïsme. Il s'agit de passer doucement ses jours. [...] Laissons les amis selon l'antiquité, et les amis selon les villes. Imaginez un terme moyen. Que cela? direz-vous. Et moi je vous dis que c'est beaucoup.[133]

---

[131] *Obermann*, pp. 47-8.

[132] *Obermann*, pp. 59-60.

[133] *Obermann*, p. 373.

The dandy's alienation is profound, and his efforts to break it sincere; but, as Nabokov remarks of Adolphe in passing: 'his is a checkered nature, now knight, now cad'.[134] The dandy's essential lack of willpower renders him unable to form or sustain friendship or love in the face of social scorn, ridicule, or approbation. Richard Freeborn notes about Onegin that:

> The despotism of social orthodoxy is as important as Fate, it would seem, in determining Onegin's character and his subsequent behavior in the novel. The effect of Fate in the context of social relations is both to condition man to the hierarchical structure and to emphasize the insignificance of his human individuality.[135]

and this applies equally well to our other dandies. The individuality of the superfluous man is far too fragile, as of yet, to break completely with social norms. He is thus doubly condemned to his isolation - first by society, and then by himself.

> Tout a passé devant moi; tout m'appelle, et tout m'abandonne. Je suis seul; les forces de mon coeur ne sont point communiquées, elles réagissent dans lui, elles attendent: me voilà dans le monde, errant, solitaire au milieu de la foule qui ne m'est rien; comme l'homme frappé dès longtemps d'une surdité accidentelle, et dont l'oeil avide se fixe sur tous ces êtres muets qui passent et s'agitent devant lui. Il voit tout, et tout lui est refusé; il devine les sons qu'il aime, il les cherche, et ne les entend pas, il souffre le silence de toutes choses au milieu du bruit du monde. [...] Il est séparé de l'ensemble des êtres, il n'y a plus de contact: tout existe en vain devant lui, il vit seul, il est absent dans le monde vivant.[136]

[134] Nabokov, Vol. 3, p. 101.

[135] Freeborn (1973), pp. 25-6.

[136] *Obermann*, pp. 100-1.

F. Foreign influence

The superfluous man is fundamentally cosmopolitan in a way that marks a significant departure from the 'Grand Tour' mentality of the eighteenth-century nobility. He does not travel to 'finish' his education, nor to acquire interesting mememtos, nor to polish his French or English - he may, in fact, never travel abroad at all. He is, however, deeply influenced by *foreign concepts and ideas* - what we shall term the 'profound foreign' - which are alien (and therefore threatening) to the traditional nobility - and this is the difference between being cosmopolitan and being merely well-travelled.

As we shall see, the attitude of the superfluous man towards the foreign will undergo a subtle change with each successive generation. What remains constant (and consistently futile) throughout is the conviction that the 'foreign' has something to offer which he cannot find in his own society - the belief that a place exists where he will be a 'stranger' only in the literal sense of the word.

The dandy is thus 'cosmopolitan' in a way that has little to do with his London dress sense, and the fact that both his experimentation and his response to opposition largely take the form of flight *to* the foreign and *away* from the familiar takes on a wider significance.

All five of our dandies look to the foreign for enlightenment. Chatsky has 'roamed the world' for three years without seeing 'a hundreth part' of it; Onegin too has journeyed for three years,[137] and has a reading list of an exclusively foreign nature[138] ; René travels to Greece, Rome, London, and Scotland before finally leaving for the 'nouvel Eden' of America; Obermann, of course, heads for Switzerland; and the very first lines of Chapter One of *Adolphe* inform us that Adolphe has just finished his studies at the University of Göttingen, and is about to set off on a tour of 'les pays les plus remarquables de l'Europe'.

More than this, all five of our dandies flee to seek refuge: Chatsky to 'search through the world/To find a little corner for a wounded heart' after his exile from Moscow; Onegin to parts unknown after his murder of Lensky; René to America after the public disclosure of Amélie's incestuous passion; Obermann further and further into Switzerland in his search for 'd'autres moeurs et une autre nature'[139]; Adolphe to Germany and to Poland

---

[137] Although probably not abroad, as Nabokov notes: 'Onegin's journey from the time of his leaving Petersburg to his returning to it in August, 1824, also lasts three years, but has he been abroad *between* his departure from his country seat and his departure from Petersburg for his Russian tour? That Pushkin *might* have thought of sending his man abroad is suggested to us by two considerations: (1) in a canceled stanza (Seven : XXV alt. :13) Onegin sets out from his country seat to seek relief from *tedium vitae* 'in distant parts', which sounds more like an allusion to foreign countries than to Russian provinces; and (2) in a canceled stanza of the *Journey* (V) the first quatrain might be understood as Onegin's returning to Petersburg from western Europe [...] after wandering about like a Malmoth.' (Vol. 3, pp. 258-9)

[138] Including, incidentally, both *Adolphe* and *René*.

[139] *Obermann*, p. 33.

escape from the stifling society of his father, and to Italy (we learn in the 'Avis de L'Editeur') after Ellénore's death.

Tragically, the dandy finds no more satisfaction abroad than he does at home - he is left with the choice of being an exile abroad or a stranger in his own land. Biancamaria Fontana observes that: 'At the beginning of the novel Adolphe was described as a "stranger". The term referred literally to his being a foreigner in a German town, but it is difficult for a modern reader not to be reminded of Camus' alienated hero.'[140] She fails to note, however, that Adolphe is marked out as a 'stranger' even before this, in the 'Avis de L'Editeur': 'Il y avait dans la même auberge un *étranger* qui se trouvait forcé d'y séjourner' and confirmed in this role after Ellénore's death: 'J'étais libre, en effet, je n'étais plus aimé: j'étais *étranger* pour tout le monde'.[141] Not just Adolphe, but all of our dandies are condemned to be perpetual 'strangers', social and philosophical exiles wherever they flee.

> How long they've shunned me now as if I were a stranger![142]
>
> But who's that in the chosen throng,
> standing silent and nebulous?
> To everyone he seems a stranger.[143]
>
> Je me trouvai bientôt plus isolé dans ma patrie, que je ne l'avais été sur une terre étrangère. [...] Inconnu, je me mêlais à la foule: vaste désert d'hommes![144]
>
> Embarrassé, incertain; pressentant tout peut-être, mais ne connaissant rien; étranger à ce qui m'environnait, je n'avais d'autre caractère décidé que d'être inquiet et malheureux.[145]

---

[140] Biancamaria Fontana, *Benjamin Constant and the Post-revolutionary Mind* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 125.

[141] *Adolphe*, p. 108. (my emphasis)

[142] *Woe from Wit*, II, p. 112.

[143] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 8, VII, p. 284.

[144] *René*, pp. 152-3.

[145] *Obermann*, p. 71.

G. Femininity

All superfluous men are, to varying degrees, 'feminized'. Reflecting their fundamental impotence in the face of society, their sexual ambiguity is also a powerful symbol of their status as outsiders and transgressors. Although all superfluous men share this trait, the first and last generations - the 'dandy' and the 'dreamer' - are perhaps the most overtly feminized, and, not coincidentally, the least vital and most helpless of the four types. Foreshadowing the overt gender reversal of the dreamer, the dandy very rarely adopts the dominant 'male' role, exhibiting instead feminine or childlike behavior; significantly, four out of our five dandies are thrown into contrast with a stronger woman who serves to highlight their 'femininity'.[146]

Onegin's physical foppishness, with its 'feminine' emphasis on a sleek and polished appearance, strongly prefigures the outright androgyny of the dreamer:

> Amber on Tsargrad's pipe,
> Porcelain and bronzes on a table,
> and - of the pampered senses joy -
> perfumes in crystal cut with facets;
> combs, little files of steel,
> straight scissors, curvate ones,
> and brushes of thirty kinds -
> these for the nails, those for the teeth.
>
> My Eugene, a second [Chadaev],
> being afraid of jealous censures,
> was in his dress a pedant
> and what we've called a fop.
> He three hours, at the least,
> in front of mirrors spent,
> and from his dressing room came forth
> akin to giddy Venus
> when, having donned a masculine attire,
> the goddess drives to a masquerade.[147]

Onegin's femininity is not confined to his physical appearance; he abdicates the dominant role to the intelligent, practical, and strong Tatyana in an ironic reversal of their earlier behavior:

> There is no doubt: alas! Eugene
> in love is with Tatyana like a child.
> In throes of amorous designs

[146] Who becomes correspondingly 'masculinized' in behavior (albeit not to a great extent); again foreshadowing the outright gender reversal of the 'dreamer' type.

[147] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 1, XXIV and XXV, pp. 105-6.

he spends both day and night...
She does not notice him,
no matter how he strives - even to death..
Onegin is beginning to grow pale;
she does not see or does not care;
Onegin droops - and almost,
in fact, is phthisical.[148]

The same role reversal is evident in *Adolphe*, too, with Adolphe characterized, variously, as both feminine and childlike, but very rarely 'masculine', while Ellénore takes on an increasingly dominant (and therefore 'masculine') role:

> Mais à mesure que je m'approchais de sa demeure, un sentiment d'humeur contre cet empire bizarre se mêlait à mes autres sentiments. Ellénore elle-même était violente.
>
> Je me plaignis de ma vie contrainte, de ma jeunesse consumée dans l'inaction, du despotisme qu'elle exerçait sur toutes mes démarches.
>
> Il y avait dans la voix et dans le ton d'Ellénore je ne sais quoi d'âpre et de violent qui annonçait plutôt une détermination ferme qu'une émotion profonde ou touchante.[149]

And, of course, it is Ellénore - who, we are told several times, wants only to be accepted by society - who has had the strength to twice openly defy society's norms, giving up not only her social position but also her lover and children, while Adolphe wavers in the wind of social opinion.

Both Obermann and René take on childlike roles:

> Je laissai à terre montre, argent, tout ce qui était sur moi, et à peu près tous mes vêtements, et je m'éloignai sans prendre soin de les cacher. Ainsi, direz-vous, le premier acte de mon indépendance fut au moins une bizarrerie, et je ressemblai à ces enfants trop contraints, qui ne font que des étourderies lorsqu'on les laisse à eux-mêmes.[150]
>
> En prononçant ces mots, Amélie me regardait avec compassion et tendresse, et couvrait mon front de ses baisers; c'était presque une mère, c'était quelque chose de plus tendre. Hélas! mon coeur se rouvrit à toutes les joies; comme un enfant, je ne demandais qu'à être consolé; je cédai à l'empire d'Amélie.[151]

---

[148] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 8, XXX and XXXI, p. 296.

[149] *Adolphe*, pp. 50; 53; 72.

[150] *Obermann*, p. 57.

[151] *René*, p. 158.

René's sexual identity, of course, is made even more ambiguous by the incestuous nature of his relationship with Amélie (where she is without any doubt the dominant partner) and by his dream of falling in love with 'une Eve tirée de moi-même'[152]; while Obermann muses at one point that: 'je ferai bien de me mettre à imaginer du moins le rôle d'un homme.'[153]

Chatsky, alone among our dandies, displays little overt feminization. However, in contrast to Sofia, it is clear that he is not quite as dominantly 'masculine' as he would like to appear. In spite of her naiveté, she is undoubtedly a strong, intelligent, and determined woman; despite Chatsky's loudly proclaimed scorn for society, it is he who knuckles under to public opinion, while Sofia flouts it more or less openly, declaring 'What's talk to me? Let them think whatever they want'.[154]

It must not be forgotten that sexual identity is also social identity; the superfluous man's sexual ambiguity - his transgression against accepted gender roles - thus symbolizes his lack of a role in society. He is not only a sexual, but also a social, outsider.

[152] *René*, p. 156. The theme of incest is, of course, heightened even further if one takes *Atala* into consideration.

[153] *Obermann*, p. 402.

[154] *Woe from Wit*, I, p. 98. Although, of course, she does not face the same consequences; her 'transgression' is purely social, without the political undertones of Chatsky's.

3. The Dandy's Legacy

The dandy represents the first stage in the evolution of the intellectual hero in literature and of the intellectual elite in society - but the first stage only. The dandy - despite his superior abilities and talents, despite his strong ethical, moral, and civic sensibilities - simply lacked the strength of will to stick to his guns in the face of societal opposition or even to formulate a coherent philosophy. As Seeley notes:

> The education and outlook of [the dandy's] generation were largely conditioned by the eighteenth century. Not one of our dandies was a revolutionary or radical. Most were progressively conservative or moderately liberal: in other words, enlightened critics of the old order rather than protagonists of a new order. And so when the old order, instead of collapsing [...], gathered itself for a formidable counter-offensive, the dandies had no base of principle from which to oppose it - no purpose of their own, no course, no clear conception even of their relation to society - only an inner conviction of their superiority and a habit of criticism, elegiac or witty, to which they continued to cling in private as far as their circumstances or their courage allowed.[155]

His reign, therefore, was to be short-lived. He was simply not robust enough to stand in opposition to society for long, and he lacked the wherewithal to break free of the old order. The dandy's response to crisis was primarily flight; when the political and social situation in each country reached the crisis point, the dandy was not equipped to deal with it. The despair of our 'enlightened critics' is palpable.

> Well, there it is - the day is gone
> And all the specters with it, all
> The smoke and fumes of all the hopes I cherished...
> What did I expect? What would I find?
> Where is this charm of meeting? Real sympathy in whom?
> A shout! Delight! Embrace! - Nothing there!
> Sitting idly in a carriage,
> Traveling across a boundless plain,
> Something seems to lie ahead:
> It's bright, it's blue, it's various...
> And you drive on an hour, or two, all day. Then suddenly
> You've galloped up to your resting place. You spend the night.
> No matter where you look, there is the same flat steppe;
> It's empty, and it's dead...Oh Lord! Too much! The more
> you think...[156]

[155] Seeley (1994), p. 13.

[156] *Woe from Wit,* IV, p. 148.

But it is sad to think that to no purpose
youth was given us,
that we betrayed it every hour,
that it duped us;
that our best wishes,
that our fresh dreamings,
in quick succession have decayed
like leaves in putrid autumn.[157]

Une langueur secrète s'emparait de mon corps. Ce dégoût de la vie que j'avais ressenti dès mon enfance, revenait avec une force nouvelle. Bientôt mon coeur ne fournit plus d'aliment à ma pensée, et je ne m'apercevais de mon existence que par un profond sentiment d'ennui. [...]Tout m'échappait à la fois, l'amitié, le monde, la retraite. J'avais essayé de tout, et tout m'avait été fatal.[158]

L'on dirait qu'une volonté ennemie s'attache à me retenir dans un état de suspension et d'entraves, à me leurrer par des choses vagues et des espérances évasives, afin de consumer ma durée entière sans qu'elle ait rien atteint, rien produit, rien possédé.[159]

Je portais au fond de mon coeur un besoin de sensibilité dont je ne m'apercevais pas, mais qui, ne trouvant point à se satisfaire, me détachait successivement de tous les objets qui tour à tour attiraient ma curiosité. [...] Je trouvais qu'aucun but ne valait la peine d'aucun effort.[160]

Nevertheless, the dandy would leave an important legacy to both future 'generations' of superfluous men and to his eventual successor, the intellectual hero. Despite his collapse in the face of opposition, the dandy leaves a tradition of individualism and independant thought allied to social, political, and moral protest.

---

[157] *Eugene Onegin*, Ch. 8, XI and XII, pp. 286-7.

[158] *René*, p. 156-7.

[159] *Obermann*, p. 154.

[160] *Adolphe*, p. 23-4.

CHAPTER 2: THE 'REBEL'

1. The Rebel's Inheritance

If the period in which the dandy emerged - the first quarter of the nineteenth century - was characterized by uncertainty, then the period of the rebel is one of deep disenchantment. The 1830's were to mark the collapse of the dandy and the ascendance of the rebel in both Russia and France. In each nation, hopes for increasing political and social liberalism would be thwarted, and the dandy's vague dissatisfaction would be replaced by open rebellion, brought on in each case by a new and repressive regime: Nicholas I in Russia, Louis-Philippe in France. Both of these leaders had been heralded as more progressive, more liberal, than their predecessors. Each, frightened by revolutionary stirrings, would become just as repressive. In both countries, the revolutionary hopes of a generation were betrayed - in 1825 in Russia, in 1830 in France - and the literary rebel would emerge to personify the frustration of a generation of idealists.

Mikhail Lermontov's Pechorin (*A Hero of Our Time*, 1841) is the template for the rebel type in Russian literature, while the best example in French literature is Alfred de Musset's Lorenzo (*Lorenzaccio*, 1834).[161]

The chronological and narrative structure of *A Hero of Our Time* is extraordinarily complex, being composed of five related stories - 'Bela', 'Maksim Maksimych', 'Taman', 'Princess Mary', and 'The Fatalist'. Each of the stories is capable of standing on its own (and indeed, three of them were first published separately). Although we will not be concentrating on the structure of the novel itself, preferring instead to focus on the *composite* portrait of Pechorin, some reference to the structure is necessary.

In essence, the first two stories - 'Bela' and 'Maksim Maksimych' - are narrated by an itinerant officer collecting travel notes. 'Bela' is his account of a tale related to him by one Maksim Maksimych, who was posted with Pechorin in the Caucasus; 'Maksim Maksimych' is his own first-hand account of a meeting between Pechorin and Maksim Maksimych. The final three stories are ostensibly written by Pechorin himself and comprise his 'Journal', which the travel writer publishes after Pechorin's death. There are, then three narrators: the traveling officer, Maksim Maksimych, and Pechorin himself. This narrative structure poses problems for the reader seeking overall patterns, for the reliability and impartiality of all three narrators is uncertain. However, we shall leave this question aside, because it does not impact directly on our subject matter here.

The chronological structure of *A Hero of Our Time* is no less complicated. The order of the stories in the finished novel does not correspond with the apparent chronological

[161] Musset's Octave (*La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, 1836) is also a good example of the rebel type; Stendhal's slightly earlier Octave de Malivert (*Armance*, 1827) can be seen to embody aspects of both the dandy and the rebel.

sequence of events, and no total consensus exists on the 'real' sequence of the events described. The most accepted chronological order is: 'Taman', 'Princess Mary', 'Bela', 'The Fatalist', 'Maksim Maksimych'.

Our knowledge of the character of Pechorin is thus built up gradually through three different narrators and in a chronological sequence which does not correspond to the sequence of the stories. The structure of the novel, instead, brings us successively closer to Pechorin's character with each episode, beginning with third- and second-hand portraits in 'Bela' and 'Maksim Maksimych' and ending with Pechorin's intimate revelations about himself in his 'Journal'.

Musset's *Lorenzaccio* is alone among our chosen works in that it is a historical drama, set in sixteenth-century Florence and based on the life of the historical Lorenzo de Medicis. Although Musset successfully evokes the atmosphere of renaissance Italy, however, the drama is unarguably imbued with the spirit of 1830's France. As Pierre Barbéris notes:

> *Lorenzaccio* perd l'essentiel de son sens si l'on ne tient pas compte de son contexte et de son arrière-plan historiques. La pièce de Musset plonge de profondes racines dans ce qui s'est passé en France depuis juillet 1830, que ce soient les événements politiques [...], ou que ce soient les événements intellectuels.[162]

Lorenzaccio is thus much more than a historical drama; the literary protagonist Lorenzo clearly owes more to contemporary intellectuals than to the historical Lorenzo de Medicis, and can be considered a valid example of the 'rebel' type of superfluous man. The narrative and chronological structure of *Lorenzaccio* is much more straightforward than that of *A Hero of Our Time*, but shares one important similarity. The narrative structure of the play, like that of Lermontov's novel, brings us progressively closer to the character of Lorenzo. Our knowledge of him is built up gradually, through the revelations of different characters, until finally Lorenzo speaks for himself.

The rebel is no longer 'conditioned by the eighteenth century' as was the dandy, but wholly a product of the nineteenth, a member of the post-Decembrist, post-July revolution generation, for whom inaction is no longer satisfactory; he has, as Seeley notes, 'uncompromisingly rejected the old order in his soul, however much he may be bound to it formally by birth and wealth'.[163] He has inherited the dandy's individualism, and he is no longer hampered from expressing it; he is characterized, above all, by his vital and powerful will. Radical though he might be in his rejection of societal norms, however, the rebel is no more of a 'revolutionary' than the dandy; in fact, he has even less of a clearly defined social

---

[162] Pierre Barbéris, *Lorenzaccio - Alfred de Musset* (Paris: Nathan, 1994), p. 65.

[163] Seeley (1994), p. 13.

or political agenda. Although he discards completely the passivity of the dandy for action and open rebellion against society, he still has no 'base of principle', no 'purpose of his own' - and he has rejected as futile what ethical ballast the dandy had. Obermann noted that 'pouvoir sans savoir est fort dangereux; savoir sans pouvoir est inutile et triste'.[164] The rebel is no longer characterized by 'savoir sans pouvoir', as was the dandy, but by 'pouvoir sans savoir'; and he is very dangerous indeed.

[164] *Obermann,* p. 402.

2. Identifying Characteristics

A. Ambiguity of familial and social status

In the last chapter, we saw that the familial and social status of the dandy was already fundamentally ambiguous. With the rebel, this ambiguity becomes pronounced, his status increasingly precarious and difficult to define. The rebel's identity - familial, societal, and personal - is profoundly uncertain. Whereas the dandy could only flout social convention up to a point, the rebel has completely broken with it. Thus, while society always seemed ready to welcome back the dandy (if only he would cooperate and conform), the rebel burns his bridges, and becomes a more complete outcast than the dandy ever could. Tellingly, while the dandy *chooses* to isolate himself from society (Chatsky, Onegin, René, Obermann, and Adolphe all flee of their own volition), the rebel is actually rejected by society in a way that they were not. In fact, the rebel - despite his pretense of complete self-determination - *is much less in control of his own environment* than any of our earlier dandies.

Pechorin's lineage is never explicitly mentioned in *A Hero of Our Time.* He is certainly noble; that much may be inferred from his wealth, education, and his position as a commissioned officer. In the lack of any information to the contrary, he may be considered as an orphan and the last of his line. Like most superfluous men, he fails to marry or to have legitimate offspring to carry on his name.

Despite his wealth and noble origin, however, Pechorin's social status is tenuous. As an army officer, Pechorin is continually uprooted and posted to various places. He has been summarily dismissed to the Caucasus from Petersburg, after some unspecified misdemeanor; posted from the Caucasus to Georgia; he is actually driven out of both Taman and Pyatigorsk, the spa town of 'Princess Mary'. He is shown as unable to integrate into *any* society at all, whether 'civilized' or 'primitive'; more than this, there is no attempt by any of the other characters to bring him into the fold, as there was with all of our dandies. While the dandy was initially welcomed, Pechorin is preceded by his reputation, met with suspicion, and never fully embraced. As Seeley notes:

> Pechorin, for all his wealth and traditions, feels himself hard-pressed by comparison. Life is constricting: he cannot just appear and enjoy like his predecessors; he must act, if only to hold off the people and circumstances crowding in on him, and hence his acts are acts of resentment and malice.[165]

Lorenzo's background, in contrast to that of Pechorin, is crystal clear; he is a Medicis, a member of the foremost political family of Florence. He is, in fact, a legitimate

[165] Seeley (1994), p. 17.

heir to the throne (in contrast to his cousin Alexandre, the reigning duke, who is illegitimate).

However, like Pechorin, Lorenzo's societal status is also fundamentally precarious. Not only has his family fallen into disrepute, losing its former power and influence, but Lorenzo himself has no real social status. As a member of the younger branch of the family, he has been cut off from his rightful position and is economically dependent on Alexandre; as the debauched duke's flunky, he is held in contempt by nearly every other character - even the corrupt Alexandre himself:

> Tu fais honte au nom de Médicis. Je ne suis qu'un bâtard, et je le porterais mieux que toi, qui es légitime! [...] Un Médicis ne se laisse point provoquer ainsi.[166]

Lorenzo, like Pechorin, is a quasi-orphan (and dies a true orphan, for he receives notice of his mother's death immediately before his own murder) and dies without legitimate progeny.[167] Like Pechorin, Lorenzo, too, has *been rejected by* society; he is exiled from Rome; he is exiled from Florence; he is murdered by a mob in Venice.

The ambiguity of the rebel's societal identity is reinforced by his contradictory *personal* identity; for whereas the dandy, for all his faults, at least possessed a unified personality, the rebel's character is profoundly split on all levels.

That Pechorin's nature is contradictory is immediately evident. His very first appearance in the novel - in Maksim Maksimych's description in 'Bela' - makes this clear:

> His name was...Grigory Alexandrovich *Pechorin*. A grand fellow he was, take it from me, only a bit odd. For instance, he'd spend the whole day out hunting in rain or cold. Everyone else would be tired or frozen, but he'd think nothing of it. Yet another time he'd sit in his room and at the least puff of wind reckon he'd caught a chill, or a shutter might bang and he'd shiver and turn pale. Yet I've seen him go for a wild boar single-handed. Sometimes you wouldn't get a word out of him for hours on end, but another time he would tell you stories that made you double up with laughter...Yes, he was a funny chap in many ways.[168]

This first impression is reinforced by the next description of Pechorin, by the itinerant author in 'Maksim Maksimych'. As Andrew Barratt and A.D.P. Briggs note:

> In fact, when this portrait is compared with the one supplied above by the captain in the previous story, they prove, in essence, to be remarkably similar.

---

[166] *Lorenzaccio*, I, 4, p. 37.

[167] Although the historical Lorenzo de Medicis had siblings. Similarly, Marie Soderini in reality survived her son. Musset's revision of historical reality holds real significance here.

[168] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 27.

> Just as Maksim Maksimych had told us in his own bluff way of a man whose behavior was a series of contradictions, so the narrator, albeit in a far more sophisticated style, draws a picture of Pechorin in which contradiction is to the fore. Whereas Maksim Maksimych had talked of the intrepid hunter who would sometimes start at the clatter of a window-shutter, the narrator observes an individual who displays the resilience of a man and the frailty of a woman, who appears both young and somewhat older, and has features dark and fair. A detailed analysis of the language would reveal a set of carefully balanced antinomies: slim/broad, strong/weak, black/white.[169]

Later, of course, Pechorin himself openly admits that he 'was born with a passion for contradiction'.[170]

The contradictory nature of Lorenzo's character, too, is emphasized early on. In the very first act, we learn that he is both a cynical débauché and a philosopher, a poet who faints at the very sight of a sword and a dangerous man, a womanizer and a 'femmelette'; and, of course, the image of Lorenzaccio - the depraved intimate of Alexandre - is soon even more explicitly juxtaposed with that of Lorenzo - selfless patriot - when he reveals his intentions to Philippe. Indeed, Lorenzo's split nature is materially represented in the form of a spectre which appears to his mother; as Barbéris notes, 'la personnalité de Lorenzo est double, elle est à jamais clivée; il ne retrouvera jamais son identité dans cet inconnu vêtu de noir qui lui ressemblait comme un frère'.[171]

The rebel's split nature is also emphasized by the great disparity between appearances and reality, a tension which runs through the whole of both *A Hero of Our Time* and *Lorenzaccio*. On the most obvious level, masks and deception play a significant role in both works; both Pechorin and Lorenzo enjoy the anonymity of costumes (for example, we see Lorenzo dressed as a nun at a masquerade, while Pechorin delights in being taken for a Circassian). Both also employ subversion and deceit. Pechorin lies his way through the text: he tricks Bela into submission by pretending to depart; he is continually eavesdropping and hiding; he lies to Grushnitsky, to Mary, to Vera. As Barratt and Briggs point out, 'There can be little doubt that Pechorin's ability to keep everyone guessing is a deliberately cultivated ploy. He has developed a wide range of devices by which to confuse and misdirect anyone observing his behavior.'[172] Lorenzo, too, is deliberately deceitful; we learn from Alexandre in the first act that 'il est glissant comme une anguille; il se fourre partout et me dit tout'[173] and we discover throughout the text that, in fact, his entire outward

---

[169] Barratt and Briggs, *A Wicked Irony: The Rhetoric of Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), p. 39.

[170] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 98.

[171] Barbéris (1994), p. 66.

[172] Barratt and Briggs, p. 28.

[173] *Lorenzaccio*, I, 4, p. 35.

persona is a sham. Even the plurality of names with which Lorenzo is addressed points to contradiction, as Robert Horville notes:

> Ce qui frappe, avant tout, dans la personnalité de Lorenzaccio, c'est son ambiguïté. Il ne cesse d'offrir de lui-même une image brouillée, instable. En quête d'une identité, il ne parvient pas à trouver son équilibre psychique. [...] Ce caractère trouble du personnage se trouve concrétisé, de manière significative, par les différents noms qu'il reçoit tout au cours de la pièce: 'Lorenzo de Médicis', c'est le nom prestigieux du descendant d'une famille noble; 'Lorenzino', c'est le nom tendre utilisé pour l'enfant d'autrefois; 'Renzino', c'est le surnom trop familier donné au compagnon de débauche; 'Lorenzetta', c'est le diminutif ambigu qui convient à l'être efféminé; 'Lorenzaccio', c'est le terme péjoratif qui s'applique à l'individu dangereux maudit par les gens honnêtes. [...] Lorenzaccio, à jouer ainsi avec les apparences, en perd son âme.[174]

Thus, the rebel's identity - familial, societal, and personal - is fundamentally precarious on all levels. The superfluous man's alienation from conventional society, already evident in the dandy, has grown until reintegration is not just unlikely, but wholly impossible.

---

[174] Robert Horville, *Lorenzaccio* (Paris: Hatier, 1994), p. 26. Intriguingly, Barratt and Briggs suggest that the wording of the 'Second Preface' may connote that 'Pechorin' is, in fact, the *narrator's* - not the central character's -name. This would, of course, undermine Pechorin's shaky identity even further. (Barratt and Briggs, pp. 45-6.)

B. Contempt of bourgeois ideals

The dandy could no more identify with the mercenary ideals of the up-and-coming middle classes than he could with the antiquated ones of the traditional hereditary nobility. The rebel, like the dandy, is still relatively wealthy and free from financial concern. However, as we have seen, the superfluous man's own social status is increasingly in doubt. Accordingly, he will begin to place less and less importance on traditional social status - the first step towards the formation of a non-class based intellectual elite. Although all superfluous men would detest the bourgeoisie *as a class*, they would increasingly accept as equals others of non-noble origin.[175]

The confined settings of *A Hero of Our Time* allow us only a glimpse into Pechorin's social life; only in 'Princess Mary' do we see Pechorin in society. Certainly, he shares the dandy's predilection for expensive and flashy outward appearances as well as his carelessness with money; like that of Onegin, his lifestyle implies a conscious separation from the prudent and mercenary 'bourgeois' ideal. Crucially, however, his chosen companion - Werner - is not noble, but a member of the professional middle classes. Although Pechorin's initial attraction to Werner may be seen as an indication of his passion for rebellion (Werner, too, is something of a social outcast), his deep affinity for him is a result of Werner's intrinsic worth. Werner, although 'like most doctors, a skeptic and a materialist', is also 'a poet of the true sort'; although poor, 'would never lift a finger for the sake of money'; he 'would rather do a favor to an enemy than a friend', because 'the latter would mean selling his generosity'.[176] In short, Pechorin, with a total disregard of social rank, accepts Werner as 'a remarkable man' - and as an equal. And, of course, Werner - despite having, like Pechorin himself, a 'wicked tongue' - has retained some of the moral sense that Pechorin himself has lost.

Lorenzo's contempt for the venality and vulgarity of the bourgeoisie is apparent throughout the text. However, the image of the bourgeoisie in *Lorenzaccio* is multi-faceted; many of the most idealistic sentiments are put into the mouths of non-nobles. Tebaldeo - surely the most unambiguously idealistic character of all - is bourgeois (and like Werner, has retained the morality which Lorenzo has lost). In addition, the nobility is shown to be just as venal and corrupt as the middle classes; consider the debauched Alexandre and Salviati, or the manipulative Cardinal Cibo.

Thus, although the rebel retains the contempt of the dandy towards the 'bourgeois' ideal and towards the bourgeoisie as a class, individual non-nobles are shown to have usurped the best qualities of the nobility - intelligence, learning, idealism, patriotism - and

---

[175] Again, although there was not at this point a real 'bourgeoisie' in Russia as in France, I am using the term in its broadest sense.

[176] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 99.

the rebel recognizes this. The value system of the rebel is thus already markedly different to that of the dandy.

C. Intellectualism and Sensibility

All superfluous men would be distinguished by their superior intelligence and sensibility - and the rebel, of course, is no exception. Although the rebel is no more of a modern 'intellectual' than the dandy - both Pechorin and Lorenzo have rejected scholarly endeavor as futile - the rebel's 'intellectualism' nevertheless represents a significant evolution from the dandy's. The rebel relies on reason to an extent unknown to the dandy; indeed, it could be said that, while the dandy was ruled more or less by the heart, the rebel is ruled by the head.

Firstly, the rebel marks a significant increase in critical self-knowledge. Although this is partly illusory - a victim of the dichotomy between appearance and reality which affects everything about the rebel - it does mark a large step forward from the dandy. Both Pechorin and Lorenzo attempt to understand the causes of their unhappiness; both analyze their situation and their mental state in a way that the dandy never did.

The second, related development in the intellectualism of the rebel is his attempt to subordinate emotion to reason. Pechorin remarks at one point that 'passions are nothing but ideas in their first stage of development', and both he and Lorenzo consciously attempt to subdue passion in favor of intellect. Although, of course, neither succeeds completely in conquering his emotions (consider Pechorin's genuine affection for Vera, or Lorenzo's conflict over Alexandre), their actions are planned and carried out with little if any regard for sentiment. The rebel prides himself on his lack of illusions about life:

> Je me suis réveillé de mes rêves, rien de plus. Je te dis le danger d'en faire. Je connais la vie, et c'est une vilaine cuisine, sois-en persuadé.[177]

and on his impunity to emotional involvement:

> The turmoil of life has left me with a few ideas, but no feelings. For a long time now I've lived by my intellect, not feeling. I weigh and analyze my emotions and actions with strict attention, but complete detachment. There are two men within me - one lives in the full sense of the word, the other reflects and judges him.[178]

The third and most significant aspect of the rebel's intellectualism, however, is his success - misguided and futile, to be sure, but nonetheless genuine - at translating ideas into action. Not only do both Pechorin and Lorenzo conceive ideas and action as part of a whole (hence Lorenzo's frustration with the idealistic, but fundamentally passive Philippe) but they

---

[177] *Lorenzaccio*, III, 3, p. 91.

[178] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 160.

are able to make the link between ideas and action which would elude all other types of superfluous man:

> Someone has said that ideas are organic creations, that the moment they are conceived they have form, this form being action. The most active man is the one who conceives most ideas.[179]

> Je sais parfaitement qu'il y en a de bons; mais à quoi servent-ils? que font-ils? comment agissent-ils? Qu'importe que la conscience soit vivante, si le bras est mort?[180]

This marks a significant step forward from the dandy, as Barbéris notes: 'L'image ancienne du héros "vengeur" a été profondément remodelée. Ce n'est plus Cinna face à Auguste: "Seigneur, je suis romain, et du sang de Pompée". Le vengeur ne se définit plus seulement par son épée.'[181] The rebel, unlike his predecessors and successors, has the ability to reason, to plan, and finally *to act upon* a resolution in order to gain a particular objective. However, as we shall see in our next section, the rebel remains tragically impotent - and fundamentally superfluous - despite his ability to combine reason with purposeful action. Freeborn notes that 'there are no rules, no systems of belief, no moral codes in Pechorin's view of life. All is anarchic'[182] - and this is the fundamental cause of the rebel's superfluity. Although he is able to identify a goal and act towards it, his action is inevitably misguided - and therefore futile. His arm is poised, ready, and, above all, *able* to strike - but, as we shall see, his conscience is dead.

---

[179] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 127.

[180] *Lorenzaccio*, III, 3, p. 92.

[181] Barbéris (1994), p. 71.

[182] Freeborn (1973), p. 71.

D. Civic Sense

Janko Lavrin calls Pechorin a 'suppressed idealist'.[183] However, the dandy was a 'suppressed idealist'. For the rebel, 'corrupted idealist' is more accurate; for we are no longer dealing with a mere suppression of good impulses, but a wholesale perversion of them. The contradictory nature of both Pechorin and Lorenzo is explicitly presented in each work as a split between idealism and corruption which has reached the very core of their characters:

> I became a moral cripple. One half of my soul had ceased to exist. It had withered and died, so I cut it off and cast it away.[184]

> Il est trop tard. Je me suis fait à mon métier. Le vice a été pour moi un vêtement; maintenant il est collé à ma peau.[185]

Society fails to recognize and utilize the strength of the rebel; the rebel fails to find a purpose, a role in life - and thus heal this inner division. Ronald Grimsley notes about Lorenzo that:

> A part of [Lorenzo's] present torment lies in the thought that this original purpose has not been fulfilled. The depraved life which was first accepted as a means of attaining a good end has become an integral part of his personality, a mode of existence desired for its own sake. [...] This, however, is not all, for if he were completely identified with this new role, some unity - albeit a demonic one - might be given to his life. His difficulty is that, is spite of its obvious corruption, his present self is still tormented by the memory of its lost innocence. [...] He has a sense of being an incomplete, partially disintegrated person, who strives in vain to 'find himself again'.[186]

and this can be seen to apply also to Pechorin.

The dandy, as we have seen, possessed a social and political conscience - but lacked the strength of will to act upon it. The rebel, in contrast, possesses a vital and energetic will - but has lost the ethical, moral, and social sense which underpinned the dandy. As Lavrin notes, 'energies, deprived of an outlet, grow destructive. An active character, unable to act, may easily be landed in mere negation, in rancorous nihilism. His strength may also turn against itself, in which case the individual runs the danger of disintegration. Such a process is rendered in *A Hero of Our Time*'[187] - and, we may add, in *Lorenzaccio*. Both Pechorin and

---

[183] Janko Lavrin, *An Introduction to the Russian Novel* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1945,) p. 21.

[184] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 130.

[185] *Lorenzaccio*, III, III, p. 93.

[186] Ronald Grimsley, 'The Character of Lorenzaccio'. *French Studies*, Vol. XI ,1957, pp. 16-25 (pp. 17-18).

[187] Lavrin, pp. 20-1.

Lorenzo exist - in stark contrast to the fundamentally passive dandy - in a sort of frenzy of *action*; but without the ability to act towards meaningful goals, their actions are doomed to remain futile - and they themselves, of course, are doomed to remain 'superfluous'.

The dandy was, in essence, 'passive, benign, and moral'.[188] When he was cruel or destructive (for example, Onegin's murder of Lensky) it was not a matter of strength or will-power, but rather the lack of it. The rebel, however, does harm not inadvertently, like the dandy, but consciously and intentionally. Like the dandy, the rebel is implacably opposed to established societal values which he views as corrupt and corrupting. Where the dandy's scorn for society grew instinctively out of his idealism, however, the rebel carefully rationalizes his rejection of contemporary society; society is the power which stifled, then twisted, his youthful promise. The rebel is thus determined to extract payment for his suffering from whoever happens into his path. Both Pechorin and Lorenzo, like Chatsky, are 'dangerous men to know' - not, however, because of their political radicalism, but simply because they refuse to recognize any social ethos. Not only does the rebel deliberately transgress against the mores of conventional society - he is determined to extract vengeance from society for its betrayal. In this context, the fact that both Pechorin and Lorenzo are murderers is extremely significant; whereas Onegin, René, and Adolphe can all be considered 'killers' in that each is - directly or indirectly - responsible for a death, they kill more or less despite themselves. Pechorin and Lorenzo, in contrast, kill deliberately and in cold blood. Of course, the rebel's vengeance, like his cruelty, is futile; he cannot strike at the causes of his unhappiness because, in fact, he has no clear idea of what they really are. As C.J.G. Turner notes: 'his sense of frustration is at least partly due to this lack of definition about the object of his hostility.'[189]

Thus, Pechorin 'plots, fights, and destroys'[190]; but his 'vengeance' is always directed against wholly inappropriate targets. The price that he exacts from, for example, Mary and Grushnitsky is wholly out of proportion to the offense - real or imagined - that each has committed. Pechorin is, directly or indirectly, responsible for three deaths and two broken hearts - but accomplishes nothing.

The theme of vengeance is also to the fore in *Lorenzaccio*; all of Lorenzo's actions are inspired by his need to avenge himself upon society for his own loss of purity and innocence. As Barbéris notes, however, the vengeance of Lorenzo - like that of Pechorin - is both misdirected:

---

[188] Mersereau , p.145.

[189] C.J.G. Turner, *Pechorin: An Essay on Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1988), p. 31.

[190] Mersereau, p. 150.

> Plutôt que d'agir de façon raisonnée, Lorenzo manifeste un activisme dispersé et sans but. Lors du serment du Colisée, il avait juré 'qu'un des tyrans de [la] patrie mourrait de [sa] main'. Il s'agit bien d'un des tyrans et non de la tyrannie, il s'agit d'un individu quelconque, et non pas d'un système. Cet individualisme correspond à une situation historique pourrie, dans laquelle on ne peut agir.[191]

and, ultimately, futile:

> Lorenzo ne sera pas confronté à l'Histoire qu'il attendait. Dans une Histoire qui a dévié de sa voie, qui a renoncé à ses ambitions, il en est réduit à des gestes iconoclastes (comme la mutilation des statues de l'arc de Constantin) avant d'être condamné à la ruse. [...] C'est pourquoi ses actes, le jour venu, ne pourront être que symboliques et ne seront sans aucune valeur que par rapport à lui-même. Lorenzo [...] demeure ponctuellement dangereux, mais il en est réduit à l'acte solitaire et fortuit.[192]

Both Pechorin and Lorenzo are aware that they have lost the ethical ballast which might have anchored their ambitions to a solid goal. Pechorin writes in his diary that 'Sometimes I despise myself - perhaps that's why I despise others? I've lost my capacity for noble impulses' and admits that 'I'd lost forever the fire of noble endeavor, that finest flower of life'[193]; Lorenzo, of course, declares that 'Le vice [...] est collé à ma peau. Je suis vraiment un ruffian'.[194] Despite the foreknowledge that his action is futile, however, the rebel *must* act; and thus *action itself* becomes for the rebel, not means towards an end, but an end in itself. As Freeborn notes, 'the activity itself - the exercise of his will and the subjection of others to it - is the facsimile of happiness and purpose with which he fills his life'.[195] As Pechorin himself remarks: 'Ambition has been crushed in me by circumstances, but it comes out in another way, for ambition is nothing more than a lust for power and my chief delight is to dominate those around me.' [196]

The rebel's one chance of finding purpose or identity lies in his quest for fulfillment, for success - ultimately, an unobtainable goal. In other words, it is the *search itself* that defines their characters. Turner touches on this obliquely:

---

[191] Barbéris (1994), p. 77.

[192] Barbéris (1994), p. 72.

[193] *A Hero of Our Time,* p. 148, p. 157.

[194] *Lorenzaccio*, III, 3, p. 93.

[195] Freeborn (1973), p. 69.

[196] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 127.

> In his most detailed analysis of [his] insatiable thirst that preys on others, Pechorin likens it to the impulse to pick a fine flower, enjoy its scent, then simply discard it. And he explains that happiness is satiated pride, while the best food for pride is the kind of domination that commands the sufferings or joys of others. But such happiness is, at best, only temporary: his pride will soon demand more flowers to pluck. Hence, in another extended simile at the end of *Princess Mary*, he likens himself to a sailor who is unable to find happiness on shore and anxiously awaits another ship to take him on another voyage. Both images [...] are significant. Both imply the poetic truism that the real pleasure in life is to be found not in the successful arrival at one's destination but in the process of overcoming obstacles that constitutes the journey. In terms of Pechorin's adventures it is the principle that the acquisition and demonstration of domination is more satisfying than its continued exercise. This was the pattern of *Bela*; it is repeated preeminently in his relationship with Mary, and can, with little stretching, be applied to all his relationships. The obverse of this pattern is made explicit by Pechorin when he writes that if Mary had been an invincible beauty then he would perhaps have been attracted by the difficulty of the enterprise; and he goes on to say that constancy of love begins when it meets with opposition. Similarly, it was only 'at the possibility of losing her', he writes, that 'Vera became for me dearer than everything in the world, dearer than my life, honor or happiness.' It is not opposition or barriers, but their collapse that causes his affections to cool.[197]

Pechorin tells Maksim Maksimych in 'Bela' that: 'My imagination knows no peace, my heart no satisfaction. I'm never satisfied. I grow used to sorrow as easily as I do to pleasure, and my life gets emptier every day. The only thing left for me is to travel. [...] At least I can be sure that with storms and bad roads to help this final solace will last me a while.'[198] It is, therefore, significant that he dies on his return from Persia. Without finding a real goal or purpose, he has used up all the temporary distractions that society has to offer. There is no more seeking for Pechorin to do - no more *action* - and his only purpose in life has gone.

Lorenzo, in contrast to Pechorin, seems to have found a purpose - the murder of a tyrant. However, after the murder has been accomplished, he realizes that his task has not fulfilled him; Lorenzo, too, is defined by his quest. After the murder, he has nothing left:

> Immediately after the murder he is filled, it is true, by a kind of expansive identification with the rest of the universe, but this emotional excitement soon gives way to a feeling of utter emptiness and *ennui*. The whole meaning of his existence has vanished with the completion of the act of murder, so that there is nothing left for him to do but to allow himself to be destroyed. His

---

[197] Turner, p. 23.

[198] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 54.

> personality still lacks continuity and coherence and he remains shut up within the loneliness of his helpless despair.[199]

Reeve asks: 'What is the nature of the relationship between society and the individual if a man like Pechorin, with all the accoutrements of the romantic hero, is basically a starved and homeless moral waif? Unlike Onegin, he is energetic, he pursues adventure, he is highly and articulately self-conscious.'[200] The final (and most intriguing) facet of the rebel's will is its fatalism. Both Pechorin and Lorenzo imagine themselves as 'fatal men'; both variously exalt in their imagined role as the arm of fate and, yet, obversely, see themselves as mere pawns of fate. This paradox is found throughout both texts and indeed, raises the fundamental question referred to by Reeve: is the superfluous man fated to be as he is by his nature or is he created by society (as he himself believes)?

That this question will be fundamental to *A Hero of Our Time* is signaled in the very first description of Pechorin by Maksim Maksimych in 'Bela':

> How well I remember that year! He led me a dance all right, though I don't hold it against him - after all, some people are fated to have unusual things happen to them.[201]

In *Taman*, too, this question is again raised; although it is, of course, Pechorin himself who sets the unhappy chain of events in motion, he muses:

> Why did fate toss me into the peaceful midst of these *honest smugglers*? I had shattered their calm, like a stone thrown into a still pool - and like a stone, too, I had nearly gone to the bottom.[202]

In *Princess Mary*, the conflict between self-determination and fatalism becomes ever more explicit; successive passages make clear that there can be no definitive answer.

> Is it my sole function in life, I thought, to be the ruin of other people's hopes? Through all my active life fate always seems to have brought me in for the dénouement of other people's dramas. As if nobody could die or despair without my help. I've been the indispensable figure of the fifth act, thrust into the pitiful role of executioner or betrayer. What was fate's purpose?[203]

> Why did you choose these fatal six paces? Do you think I'll meekly be your target? Oh no, we'll draw lots and then...then...What if your luck holds out

[199] Grimsley, p. 25.

[200] Reeve, p. 51.

[201] *A Hero of Our Time,* p. 27.

[202] *Ibid*, p. 90.

[203] *Ibid*, p. 135.

> against mine? What if my star lets me down at last? It might well do, for it's pandered to my whims long enough, and there's no more constancy in heaven than on earth.[204]
>
> I've been going over my past, and I can't help wondering why I've lived, for what purpose I was born. There must have been some purpose, I must have had some high object in life, for I feel unbounded strength within me. But I never discovered it and was carried away by the allurements of empty, unrewarding passions. I was tempered in their flames and came out cold and hard as steel, but I'd lost for ever the fire of noble endeavour, that finest flower of life. How many times since then have I been the axe in the hands of fate? Like an engine of execution, I've descended on the heads of the condemned, often without malice, but always without pity.[205]
>
> Now that I'm stuck here in this fort I often look back and wonder why I didn't choose to follow the path that fate had opened to me, where there were quiet joys and peace of mind in store for me.[206]

In *The Fatalist*, this equivocal attitude is made explicit. Pechorin both asserts his belief in self-determination:

> 'I say there's no such thing as predestination,' I said, tipping some twenty gold pieces on to the table, all that I had in my pocket.[207]

and immediately undermines it:

> Yet, for all his composure, I fancied I saw the mark of death on his pale face. I've noticed it myself, and I've heard a lot of old soldiers say the same, that a strange mark of inevitable doom can often be seen on the face of a man a few hours before he dies. Anyone with an eye for it is rarely mistaken.[208]

The question of fate - with the same conflict between free will and predestination - plays a large role in *Lorenzaccio*, too. Lorenzo, like Pechorin, feels that his fatal role has been bestowed on him by Providence (a role which is *literally* that of 'executioner'):

> Ma jeunesse a été pure comme l'or. Pendant vingt ans de silence, la foudre s'est amoncelée dans ma poitrine; et il faut que je sois réellement une étincelle du tonnerre, car tout à coup, une certaine nuit que j'étais assis dans les ruines du Colisée antique, je ne sais pourquoi je me levai; je tendis vers

---

[204] *Ibid*, p. 156.

[205] *A Hero of Our Time*, pp. 156-7.

[206] *Ibid*, p. 174.

[207] *Ibid*, p. 177.

[208] *Ibid*, pp. 177-8.

> le ciel mes bras trempés de rosée, et je jurai qu'un des tyrans de la patrie mourrait de ma main. J'étais un étudiant paisible, je ne m'occupais alors que des arts et des sciences, et il m'est impossible de dire comment cet étrange serment s'est fait en moi.[209]

but - like Pechorin - immediately undermines himself by admitting that his own pride also played a part in his resolution to commit regicide. He variously refers to himself as both 'un Satan' and 'le bras de Dieu'; and like Pechorin, feels that some great destiny was in store for him. The same dichotomy is thus evident.

Both Pechorin and Lorenzo also *test fate* by risking their lives. Of course, neither the hero nor the reader is able to draw any firm conclusions from this experiment. In *A Hero of Our Time*, this event is chronicled in 'The Fatalist': 'Just then I had an odd idea. Like Vulich, I decided to put fate to the test.'[210] Although Pechorin survives his 'test', the final words of the novel on the subject offer no answers, but merely restate the question. It would seem that Lermontov has remained true to his stated object of diagnosing without prescribing a cure, or, for that matter, defining its causes.

For Lorenzo, too, the moment arrives when he puts fate to the test; 'plus vide qu'une statue de fer-blanc'[211] after the futile murder, he leaves the sanctuary of Philippe's home in Venice to test whether anyone will have the courage to murder him for the bounty put on his head. Unlike that of Pechorin, his 'test' ends in his own death; but the same ambiguity remains, and no conclusion about the central question of the role of fate in his life is possible. The rebel's attempt to conduct one final experiment - gambling with his own life, this time - is ultimately futile and offers no answers. The rebel's willingness to view himself as the agent of fate itself may be seen as an indicator of his strength of will; the obverse of this - his acceptance of fate's role in determining events - may be interpreted either as 'an admirably ingenious petition in moral bankruptcy'[212] or (as I prefer) as genuine uncertainty about the extent to which he is in control of his own destiny.

The rebel's civic sense is thus tragically misdirected. Although he has the strength of will to accomplish great things, he is unable to ally that will to any meaningful goal. No other type of superfluous man, however, would achieve the sheer vitality of the rebel - and, despite its futility, this is his most important legacy to the future intellectual hero. D.J. Richards notes that:

> Another question which must be asked about the order of the episodes is why Lermontov should have chosen to conclude *A Hero of Our Time* with 'The

[209] *Lorenzaccio*, III, 3, pp. 87-8.

[210] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 184.

[211] *Lorenzaccio*, V, 7, p.142.

[212] Seeley (1994), p. 14.

> Fatalist'? Two reasons immediately suggest themselves. In the first place, he probably did not want to end his novel with Pechorin's death (or even Grushnitsky's) but rather with an affirmation of Pechorin's positive energy and daring. In the second place, the discussion about fatalism in this concluding section not only sets all the previous action and all the questions about Pechorin's nature against a broader background, but also quite deliberately tries to dissuade the reader from making firm judgments about man's responsibility for his actions and hence from either condemning or exonerating Pechorin for his behaviour. In this connection it is interesting to see how 'The Fatalist' re-echoes those notes of hesitation and doubt which are struck in both Forewords: the opening foreward ends with the words 'God only knows', and the second with 'I don't know'.[213]

The rebel's significance thus lies in his reliance on 'individual will and energetic action'[214]; indeed, Van Tieghem calls Lorenzo a 'hero of the pure act'.[215] Although he would not accomplish anything meaningful himself, the rebel leaves a legacy of individualism, of vigor, and - crucially - of action allied to thought.

[213] D.J. Richards, 'Lermontov: A Hero of Our Time (1840)', in *The Voice of a Giant: Essays on Seven Russian Prose Classics*, Ed. by Roger Cockrell and David Richards (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1985), p. 19.

[214] Turner, p. 42.

[215] Cited by Grimsley, p. 22.

E. Seeking of soulmates

> Je haïs les hommes pour ne pas les mépriser, car autrement la vie serait une farce trop dégoutante.[216]
>
> Je ne méprise point les hommes; le tort des livres et des historiens est de nous les montrer différents de ce qu'ils sont.[217]

The rebel, like all superfluous men, is defined by his isolation. In the last chapter, we saw that the dandy did attempt to break his solitude and to seek friendship or love, although this proved spectacularly unsuccessful. The rebel, however, has more or less accepted - even welcomed - his isolation; he prides himself on his detachment from humanity - and he is, therefore, the most alone of all superfluous men. He seeks out others solely to assert his will over them; all of his relationships are characterized by a quest for domination.

All of Pechorin's relationships are marked by domination; already evident in 'Bela', this becomes increasingly clear in 'Princess Mary'. The man who 'loves enemies, though not in the Christian way'[218] is obsessed with leaving his mark upon others:

> To inspire in others love, devotion, fear - isn't that the first symptom and the supreme triumph of power? To cause another person suffering or joy, having no right to do so - isn't that the sweetest food of pride? What is happiness but gratified pride? If I thought myself better and more powerful than everyone else in the world, I should be happy.[219]

As Turner notes:

> [Pechorin] announces first that he is incapable of friendship, on the grounds that it implies a servile relationship; he refuses to be a slave, nor does he want to lord it over another under the guise of friendship. [...] Experience has taught him, he goes on to say, that love, like friendship, means the domination of one over another. It is not surprising that he fears marriage because it would imply that he was not wholly dominant. Thus, in his ruminations about friendship and love, Pechorin is occupied most of all by the concept of domination.[220]

Lorenzo, too, is clearly intent upon domination of those around him. In the very first scene he revels in the success of his carefully laid plans of seduction, in the helplessness of

---

[216] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 96.

[217] *Lorenzaccio,* III, 3, p. 90.

[218] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 157.

[219] *A Hero of Our Time*, pp. 126-7.

[220] Turner, p. 22.

the young girl and her brother; and, of course, his apparent subordination to Alexandre is made palatable to his pride by the fact that he is secretly in control:

> Je voulais agir seul, sans le secours d'aucun homme. Je travaillais pour l'humanité; mais mon orgueil restait solitaire au milieu de tous mes rêves philanthropiques. Il fallait donc entamer par la ruse un combat singulier avec mon ennemi. Je ne voulais pas soulever les masses, ni conquérir la gloire bavarde d'un paralytique comme Cicéron; je voulais arriver à l'homme, me prendre corps à corps avec la tyrannie vivante, la tuer, et après cela porter mon épée sanglante sur la tribune, et laisser la fumée du sang d'Alexandre monter au nez des harangueurs, pour réchauffer leur cervelle ampoulée.[221]

The rebel's detachment, however, is not complete; Grimsley remarks of Lorenzo that: 'It is clear that his personal feelings are inseparable from a preoccupation with what other men think of him. He may have detached himself from them, but he cannot remain indifferent to their contempt,'[222] and the same is true of Pechorin. The rebel's sense of superiority, of difference, demands recognition from others. Thus, both Pechorin and Lorenzo imagine that their individuality will be immortalized by remembrance:

> And perhaps tomorrow I'll die, and then there'll be no one who could ever really understand me. Some will think me worse, others better than in fact I am. Some will say I was a good fellow, others that I was a swine. Neither will be right.[223]

> Il faut que le monde sache un peu qui je suis. [...] Que les hommes me comprennent ou non, qu'ils agissent ou n'agissent pas, j'aurai dit aussi ce que j'ai à dire; je leur ferai tailler leurs plumes si je ne leur fais pas nettoyer leurs piques, et l'humanité gardera sur sa joue le soufflet de mon épée marqué en traits de sang. Qu'ils m'appellent comme ils voudront, Brutus ou Erostrate, il ne me plaît pas qu'ils m'oublient.[224]

And this is, of course, the primary motivating factor of the murders which both Pechorin and Lorenzo commit in their quest for domination. As Grimsley notes:

> [Lorenzo] is spurred on to the murder by the thought that through it others will at last be compelled to realize *who* he really is. Such recognition will also serve the purpose of bringing home to other men their own chattering superficiality and pusillanimity. If others still remain incapable of understanding his character, even when the murder has been carried out, Lorenzo himself will have the satisfaction of leaving his mark on them, of

---

[221] *Lorenzaccio*, III, 3, p. 89.

[222] Grimsley, p. 24.

[223] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 157.

[224] *Lorenzaccio*, III, 3, p. 95.

> knowing that humanity will henceforth bear the impress of his sword upon its cheek; he will, in a word, know at last that *he* has at last summoned *them* to the tribunal of his will, that he has weighed them in his balances and found them wanting.[225]

The rebel is thus haunted by the need to control and dominate others; however, he is no less obsessed with self-control and self-domination.

Significantly, both Pechorin and Lorenzo are circled by a procession of other characters who illuminate successive characteristics of their personality. More than this, several of these characters can be seen to embody different aspects of the rebel and thus accentuate his hopelessly split nature.

Critics have noted the diametrically opposed characters of Werner and Grushnitsky in *A Hero of Our Time* and linked them with Pechorin's dual nature. Turner, for instance, notes that:

> It is arguable that both Grushnitsky and Werner are effectively doubles of Pechorin: Werner of the rational side of his nature and Grushnitsky of the emotional. According to Pechorin's self-analysis, one side of him lives in the full sense of the word. His passions are not dead, but he has lost the feelings that serve to guide action. A dedication to the passions to the exclusion of any more profound motivation would seem appropriate also as a description of Grushnitsky and would make Pechorin's murder of him, as an icon of the passions, into an effective symbol of his own mortification of all but the intellect. [...] [Werner] is portrayed as a double of the rational, analytical, sceptical side of Pechorin.[226]

If we accept that Grushnitsky and Pechorin 'differ not so much in quality as in degree',[227] then Pechorin's hatred and subsequent murder of Grushnitsky does indeed assume a symbolic quality; Pechorin is attempting to murder an element of his own personality.

> 'Grushnitsky,' I said, 'there's still time. Take back your slander, and I'll forgive you everything. You've not made a fool of me, so my pride is satisfied. Think, we used to be friends...'
> His face flared.
> 'Shoot!' he said, his eyes flashing. 'I despise myself and hate you. If you don't kill me, I'll stab you in the back some night. The world's too small for both of us.'
> I fired.[228]

---

[225] Grimsley, p. 24.

[226] Turner, pp. 27-8.

[227] *Ibid.*

[228] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 167.

A comparable approach can be used to illuminate Lorenzo's murder of Alexandre. Alexandre can be seen to represent the corrupt, debauched - and, of course, the passionate - side of Lorenzo's nature; the murder is thus both a homage to the once pure student who dreamed of great deeds and a final, futile attempt to banish the irrational, passionate side of his character:

> Tu me demandes pourquoi je tue Alexandre? Veux-tu donc que je m'empoisonne, ou que je saute dans l'Arno? Veux-tu donc que je sois un spectre, et qu'en frappant sur ce squelette (*il frappe sa poitrine*) il n'en sorte aucun son? Si je suis l'ombre de moi-même, veux-tu donc que je rompe le seul fil qui rattache aujourd'hui mon coeur à quelques fibres de mon coeur d'autrefois?[229]

Thus, the rebel's sheer strength of will finds expression - in the lack of any other, more satisfying outlet - in a quest for domination not only of others, but also of his own contradictory nature.

[229] *Lorenzaccio*, III, 3, p. 94.

F. Foreign influence

All superfluous men would be deeply influenced by what we have termed the 'profound foreign' - concepts and ideas, as opposed to fashions - and would share the conviction that the 'foreign' has something to offer which he cannot find in his own society - the belief that a place exists where he would be a 'stranger' only in the literal sense of the word.

Pechorin is very clearly a representative of the 'profound' foreign of ideas (as opposed to the old Princess Ligovskaya, who calls her daughter 'Mary, in the English fashion' and 'has great respect for her daughter's intelligence and learning because she's read Byron in English'). In this context, it is significant, too, that Werner - who is, as we have seen, a sort of 'double' of the rational, intellectual side of Pechorin - is quite specifically linked with both the foreign and the native; he has a German name, although he is Russian, and he has one leg shorter than the other, 'like Byron'.[230]

However, although Pechorin still conserves the outward trappings of the dandy's fascination with the foreign (for example, his carriage has a 'foreign stamp about it' and his appearance may safely assumed to be likewise) he is more of a 'stranger' than any of our dandies. Although he is intimately familiar with western European culture, he does not consider that it has anything left to offer him, and is thus forced further and further afield - to the Caucasus, 'to America, Arabia, India'[231] - in his search for understanding and integration. His search is, of course, doomed to failure. Pechorin may pride himself on his authentic Circassian dress and mastery of the Caucasian riding style ('I've been told that on horseback and in Circassian dress I look more like a Kabardian than many Kabardians themselves'[232]) but the only person who actually takes him for a Circassian is the naive Mary; he may woo and win a Circassian girl - Bela - but finds that 'a native girl's love is little better than that of a lady of rank. The ignorance and simplicity of the one are as tiresome as the coquetry of the other'.[233] More than this - for Pechorin, the 'foreign' is as unwelcoming as the 'native'. Not only is Pechorin fundamentally a stranger - as were our dandies - he is always an *intruder*. It is significant, of course, that he is in the Caucasus not as a tourist, but as an officer of a foreign power - he is at war with the very objects of his curiosity; and, of course, Pechorin, a foreigner and a stranger, is killed during his return from Persia.

---

[230] *A Hero of Our Time,* pp. 99-100.

[231] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 54.

[232] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 113.

[233] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 53-4.

In *Lorenzaccio*, the 'foreign' becomes more overtly menacing than in *A Hero of Our Time*. The conflict here is not only between the 'profound' and the 'superficial' (for despite the confined setting, it is not too difficult to see Lorenzo as a representative of the 'profound' foreign of ideas and ideals; as Barbéris notes, 'sa résistance lui est inspirée d'abord par ses origines nobles mais imprégnées de culture et d'intellectualité. [...] Il est l'ancien étudiant, le savant, le lecteur de Plutarque, un Brutus qui est passé par les livres'[234]) but also between the benign and the malignant. The real power behind Alexandre's corrupt rule - and thus the driving force of the decline of Florence - it must be remembered, is held by the 'foreign': 'Le pape et l'empereur sont accouchés d'un bâtard qui a le droit de vie et de mort sur nos enfants, et qui ne pourrait pas nommer sa mère.'[235] As Barbéris notes:

> *Lorenzaccio* reprend un très ancien schéma dramatique qui est éternel: un lieu humain (une ville, une Cour, un royaume) est en proie au mal, et quelque chose y est pourri. Que ce soit la peste, le crime, l'usurpation, l'adultère ou l'inceste, le mal, toujours, vient de l'extérieur. [...] Musset reprend cette forme de fable: le cercle étroit de Florence, où tout s'exaspère en relations tendues. Il en reprend aussi le sujet: le mal a été installé à Florence par l'étranger. Mais une modification radicale intervient: contre le mal, les défenses classiques ne fonctionnent plus. [...] La gangrène a tout gagné, et tout le monde est corrompu. La peste est dans toutes les forces sociales et dans tous les coeurs. Elle est, sous sa forme violente, la débauche, la prostitution, la conspiration. Elle est, sous une forme plus douce et plus masquée, la course à la consommation et le conformisme social.[236]

Lorenzo - like Pechorin - is a perpetual stranger and intruder:

> Au moment où j'allais tuer Clément VII, ma tête a été mise à prix à Rome; il est naturel qu'elle le soit dans toute l'Italie, aujourd'hui que j'ai tué Alexandre; si je sortais d'Italie, je serais bientôt sonné à son de trompe dans toute l'Europe, et à ma mort le bon Dieu ne manquera pas de faire placarder ma condamnation éternelle dans tous les carrefours de l'immensité.[237]

The rebel is not only rejected by the 'foreign', but destroyed by it. More than any other generation of superfluous man, he is a 'stranger' everywhere.

---

[234] Barbéris (1994), p. 71.

[235] *Lorenzaccio*, I, 5, p. 40.

[236] Barbéris (1994), pp. 67-8.

[237] *Lorenzaccio*, V, 6, p. 141.

G. Femininity

As we have seen, the superfluous man is almost always 'feminized' to a degree, emphasizing his essential powerlessness - and the rebel is no exception to this. Femininity in the rebel type - in marked contrast to his primary (self-?) image of a vital and masculine hero - serves not only to point up his contradictory nature, but also to show the essential futility of his energetic but directionless action. The rebel's femininity is thus the polar aspect - and the negation - of his 'virile' will.

That Pechorin is to be profoundly - although, it must be noted, not overtly - feminized is apparent very early on; the itinerant author's description of his 'strong physique, capable of enduring the rigors of a life spent travelling in different climates' is immediately undermined by imagery which is both childlike and feminine:

> He sat in the manner of Balzac's *femme de trente ans* sitting in her cushioned armchair at the end of a fatiguing ball. On first seeing his face I would have thought him no older than twenty-three, though later I would have taken him for thirty. There was something childlike in the way he smiled. His skin was delicate, like a woman's, and his naturally curly fair hair made a fine setting for the pale, noble brow.[238]

Later, in *Princess Mary*, Pechorin himself characterizes his treatment of Mary as 'womanish coquetry' and describes himself as childlike:

> It's absurd when you think that I'm still just a boy to look at. My face is fresh for all its paleness; my limbs are slim and supple; my hair is thick and curly; there's light in my eyes and fire in my blood.[239]

Lorenzo, too, displays markedly feminine attributes. This is noticeable not only in his physical appearance - he is pale and slender, frail and fragile - but also in his relations with Alexandre.[240] Despite his reputation as a seducer of women, he is continually emasculated and feminized - he could almost be described as court eunuch. The duke addresses Lorenzo as 'Lorenzetta', 'Renzino', and 'Renzo'; he describes him as a 'femmelette'; and there is certainly nothing manly or heroic in Alexandre's description of an ineffectual and helpless young man who is afraid of shadows and faints at the sight of a sword:

---

[238] *A Hero of Our Time*, pp. 67-8.

[239] *Ibid*, p. 112; later still, Pechorin will 'weep like a child' at the loss of Vera...

[240] Indeed, there is an undertone of quasi-incestuous homosexuality in the relationship between Lorenzo and Alexandre. Barbéris notes that Lorenzo, in two discarded scenes, had a homosexual relationship with Tebaldeo - thus further undermining his masculinity. (Barbéris (1994), p. 15)

> Regardez-moi ce petit corps maigre, ce lendemain d'orgie ambulant. Regardez-moi ces yeux plombés, ces mains fluettes et maladives à peine assez fermes pour soutenir un éventail; ce visage morne, qui sourit quelquefois mais qui n'a pas la force de rire.[241]

Indeed, the masculinity of both Pechorin and Lorenzo is deeply problematic on all levels. Both Pechorin and Lorenzo superficially resemble the classic romantic hero - in their appearance, in their freedom from social mores, in their ennui - and especially in their bravery and willingness to face personal danger. However, little is what it seems in either *A Hero of Our Time* or *Lorenzaccio*. Issues of bravery and heroism are ironically treated in both works, to the point where the heroes' virility and strength - central to their characters - are called into question.

Throughout *A Hero of Our Time*, Pechorin's bravery is equivocally presented. For example, in 'Bela', although he will take on a wild boar single-handed, he does not actually abduct Bela, but more or less has her handed over to him. In 'Princess Mary', he never truly faces danger, since he knows beforehand the plot against him. But it is in 'Taman' that Pechorin's heroic qualities are most ironically presented and the gulf between appearance and reality becomes most clear. Pechorin opens this first tale of his 'Journal' thus: 'Taman is the foulest hole among all the seacoast towns of Russia. I practically starved to death there, then on top of that someone tried to drown me.'[242] Throughout the story, he presents himself as a heroic character forced to battle for his survival. Outside this hyperbole, however, the story boils down to Pechorin confronting - and nearly losing to - a young girl and a blind child. Although he *was* genuinely at risk of drowning, it was his own inability to swim that put him in immediate danger; as far as starving, the only objective corroboration in the story is the upsetting of the teapot. Only in 'The Fatalist' do we find Pechorin honestly confronting personal danger.

Evidence of Lorenzo's bravery, too, is suspect. After having gained Alexandre's trust - and thereby access to him at all times - it is really the coincidental actions of other characters that finally push him into action; without the duke's chance whim for Catherine, Lorenzo might never have lured him to his room. Lorenzo has carefully accustomed his neighbors to sounds of struggle, thus avoiding any challenge or danger to himself; once Alexandre's presence is assured, Lorenzo steals his mail coat to make the assassination easier and makes sure that Alexandre's sword is out of reach. Finally, he kills him not in open combat, 'corps à corps', as he had imagined, but lying in bed defenseless and pretending to sleep in expectation of the entrance of Catherine.

---

[241] *Lorenzaccio*, I, 4, pp. 35-6.

[242] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 77.

We have already seen that it is in 'Taman' that Pechorin's image is most ironically treated; it is in the same story that we find him juxtaposed with a character who embodies all the qualities that he imagines (or wishes) he possesses - Yanko. As Barratt and Briggs note:

> Yanko is important. This story needs him in the way that 'Bela,' 'Princess Mary', and 'The Fatalist 'need, respectively, Kazbich, Grushnitsky, and Vulich. There has to be a male protagonist against whom Pechorin can, accurately or otherwise, gauge his own qualities and strengths. Although the two characters do not meet, Yanko clearly makes a deep long-distance impression on Pechorin. The former is what the latter would dearly like to be, a man of heroic stature who dominates those around him including a desirable and submissive young female. [...] Let it not be forgotten that 'Taman', although hidden away in the middle of *A Hero of Our Time*, is the first of Pechorin's recorded adventures. It is significant that, at this early stage, Pechorin may be seen laying down a path of behavior with which we shall become all too familiar. Here for the first time the concept of heroism - real, imagined or exaggerated, but devastating in its appeal - figures prominently as an item in Pechorin's inner life. And here, too, we first sense the great disparities which will always bedevil him: the difference between real life and fantasy, the distance between aspirations and reasonable potential, the contrast between Pechorin's unheroic nature and the lion-hearted persona in which he would love to believe.[243]

Yanko's parting words:

> I'll go and look for a job somewhere else. He won't find another daredevil chap like me, and you tell him that I'd never have left him if he'd paid better. But I go where I please, wherever the wind blows and the sea roars.[244]

are contrasted not only with Pechorin's feeble riposte at the end of the journal entry - that he is 'an itinerant officer with a travel warrant in his pocket' but also with the ending paragraph of *Princess Mary*, where Pechorin's words echo Yanko's pursuit of freedom, love of adventure, and wanderlust:

> I often look back and wonder why I didn't choose to follow the path that fate had opened to me, where there were quiet joys and peace of mind in store for me. I could never have settled to it, though. I'm like a sailor, born and bred on the deck of a privateer. Storm and battle are part of his life, and if he's cast ashore he pines in boredom, indifferent to the pleasures of shady woods and peaceful sunshine. All day long he walks the beach, listening to the steady murmur of waves and gazing for the sight of a ship in the distant haze.

---

[243] Barratt and Briggs, p. 58.

[244] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 89.

> He looks longingly at the pale strip between the ocean blue and the grey clouds, in hopes of seeing a sail, first like a seagull's wing, that then gradually stands out against the spray and runs in steadily towards the empty harbour.[245]

Of course, it is Yanko, not Pechorin, who is the seafaring adventurer; Pechorin is indulging in self-deception on a grand scale.

In *Lorenzaccio*, too, there is a character who points up the essentially problematic nature of Lorenzo's heroic masculinity. Pierre Strozzi, like Lorenzo, is noble and republican. However, his integrity has never been compromised; he feels none of the attraction towards vice of Lorenzo although he is considerably more world-wise than Philippe. Combining the idealism of Tebaldeo with the energy and strength of will of Lorenzo, Pierre attempts murder, not for the suspect motives of Lorenzo's, but for honor; and it is Pierre - not Lorenzo - who is prepared to lead an uprising against the Medicis. Although the two characters never meet, the contrast is striking.

The 'feminization' of the rebel, then, is wholly negative, emphasizing his essential impotence despite the apparent virility of his will.

Significantly, however, 'youth' - unlike 'femininity' - is not portrayed in a negative, but rather in a positive light. It is, of course, significant in this context that Tebaldeo and Philippe - and, to some extent, both Werner (who is 'weak as a child') and Grushnitsky - are identified with the youthful idealism and emotional spontaneity which Pechorin and Lorenzo lack. More than this: in both works, youth is strongly associated with idealism and purity, with the 'state of grace' in which both Pechorin and Lorenzo apparently existed before their corruption by society - and with the very qualities that they have lost irretrievably:

> That's been my lot ever since I was a boy. Everyone saw in my face evil traits that I didn't possess. But they assumed I did, and so they developed. I was modest, and was accused of being deceitful, so I kept to myself. I had a strong sense of good and evil; instead of kindness I received nothing but insults, so I grew resentful. I was sullen, while other children were gay and talkative. I felt superior to them, and was set beneath them, so I became jealous. I was ready to love the whole world, but no one understood me, so I learned to hate. I spent my blighted youth in conflict with myself and the world.. Fearing ridicule, I hid my best feelings deep within me, and there they died. I spoke the truth, but no one believed me, so I took to deceit.[246]

> J'ai été honnête. J'ai cru à la vertu, à la grandeur humaine, comme un martyr croit à son Dieu. J'ai versé plus de larmes sur la pauvre Italie que Niobé sur ses filles. [...] J'étais heureux alors; j'avais le coeur et les mains tranquilles;

---

[245] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 174.

[246] *A Hero of Our Time*, p. 130.

mon nom m'appelait au trône, et je n'avais qu'à laisser le soleil se lever et se coucher pour voir fleurir autour de moi toutes les espérances humaines.[247]

[247] *Lorenzaccio*, III, 3, pp. 87-8. Lorenzo, of course, justifies his murder of Alexandre by invoking the spectre of his vanished idealism.

3. The Rebel's Legacy

The rebel marks a huge step away from the dandy. He succeeded in shaking off the dandy's ineffectual passivity; he is energetic and vital, angry and capable. He has achieved a degree of self-knowledge unknown to the dandy - his special tragedy is that he knows very well that he has hit the bottom - and he has lost any illusions about society that the dandy may have retained. Although he has the strength of will to accomplish great things, however, his lack of ethical ballast prevents him from finding any purpose in life or role within society; his action is energetic, yes, but directionless - and therefore futile. For this reason, the rebel could no more survive or prosper than the dandy. The rebel's futile stand against society was thus as short-lived as the dandy's. Because his rebellion had no focus, it was impossible to maintain; whereas the dandy more or less faded away, the rebel self-destructs. To borrow a phrase coined for a very different 'rebel', he 'lived fast and died young'. By the 1840's, the rebel gives way to the next generation of superfluous man - the 'visionary'.

No other generation of superfluous man, however, would achieve the sheer vitality of the rebel; this is his most important legacy to the intellectual hero. Although he would not accomplish anything meaningful himself, the rebel leaves a tradition of individualistic willpower, of vigor, and - crucially - of action allied to thought.

CHAPTER 3: THE 'VISIONARY'

1. The Visionary's Inheritance

The visionary is no less a product of his times than the dandy or the rebel: as the hopes of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras raised, and then frustrated, the expectations of the dandy; as the ensuing repression and stagnation both crushed the dandy and resulted in the rebel's splendid but futile rebellion; the stifling atmosphere which surrounded the midpoint of the nineteenth century in both Russia and France produced the visionary, who can see his goal - but is unable to reach it.

In Russia, the era of the visionary roughly encompasses the last decade or so of the reign of Nicholas I (1825-55), and the first few years of Alexander II (1855-81): the time of immense transition leading up to the Emancipation. Throughout, this period was one of diametrically opposing forces: a socially rigid and economically stagnant time of social and political repression sandwiched between two periods of reform.[248] It also marked both the triumph of bureaucracy and the arrival of the 'raznochintsy' - literally, 'men of no rank' - in the respective spheres of state and culture. In France, of course, this era of turmoil (incorporating the later years of the July Monarchy, the short-lived Second Republic, and the first few years of the Second Empire) is distinguished by the decisive victory of the bourgeoisie in all spheres of social, economic, and political life, and although (for the most part) vibrant economically was a time of malaise among the young would-be intellectuals.

The visionary is best represented in Russian literature by Turgenev's Rudin (*Rudin*, 1857).[249] However, at this point in French literature the Russian 'model' fits less well than in our other three generations, due to the overwhelming dominance of the slightly divergent 'bourgeois' hero - a figure which simply did not appear on the Russian literary scene to anything like the same degree due to the lack of a real bourgeoisie in Russia. This presents a real obstacle, for the tradition of the Russian superfluous man is conventionally considered as paralleling the declining fortunes of the nobility - and thus far, the French heroes which we have studied have been compatible with this tradition. The introduction of the bourgeois hero - who, of course, is traditionally seen in the ascending, rather than the declining line - would seem to signal a definitive break between the line of Russian superfluous men and the French. However, in reality, this marks only a divergence between the two lines (which, indeed, come back together for the final generation of superfluous man). Despite some significant differences, there is a subset of the bourgeois hero - similar to what Raymond

[248] Nicholas, in the 30's, limited landlord's powers over their serfs, and built the first Russian railway; Alexander embarked on a program of modernization and reform after the Crimean War (1853-6).

[249] Although his Lavretsky (*A Nest of Gentlefolk*, 1859) and Herzen's Beltov (*Who is to Blame?*, 1845) are also good examples.

Giraud calls the 'unheroic hero'[250] - which both shares the primary characteristics of the visionary type, and fulfills the same functions - as both the immediate predecessor of the intellectual hero in French literature, and a clear signal that the dominance of the nobility as societal elite is giving way to a non-class-based intellectual elite. He can thus be legitimately considered as part of the line of French superfluous men and a valid counterpart to the noble Russian visionary.

Rather than attempting to find one figure who corresponds to Rudin in every aspect, I shall draw upon three literary heroes from the whole range of the period in France - Sand's Horace (*Horace*, 1842), Flaubert's Frédéric Moreau (*L'Education sentimentale*, 1869) and Zola's Lazare (*La Joie de vivre*, 1884).

The visionary has inherited the dandy's social and political progressiveness; from the rebel, he has inherited the ideal of individualistic, heroic action. However, the visionary's world-view centers on the *cerebral*; it is this that marks him as the direct predecessor of the intellectual hero in literature and of the intellectual in society. More idealistic than any other type of superfluous man before or after, he is able not only to visualize his ideal but also to successfully communicate it to others. The visionary has utter faith both in the power of knowledge and ideas to change the world and in his own ability to act as a 'missionary' of those ideas. Indeed, as Seeley notes, he *equates* belief in knowledge with belief in himself and his own powers.[251] This is both his greatest asset and the cause of his superfluity; for the visionary's very cerebralism induces passivity. Faced with conflict, the dandy took flight; the rebel took revenge. The visionary takes refuge in ideas - and is thus, like all superfluous men, unable to realize his potential. This dual trait of cerebralism/passivity informs every aspect of the visionary. Nevertheless, he is both the recognizable successor of the dandy and rebel, and the clear precursor of the intellectual hero.

---

[250] Raymond Giraud, *The Unheroic Hero in the Novels of Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1957).

[251] Seeley (1994), p.17.

2. Identifying Characteristics

A. Ambiguity of familial and social status

As we have seen, the social and familial status of the superfluous man is fundamentally ambiguous, reflecting the precarious nature of his identity within society. The ambiguous status of the dandy and rebel symbolized, not only their own status as social 'outsider', but also a fundamental conflict with the values of both the traditional nobility and, by extension, conventional society. With the visionary, this ambiguity becomes even more pronounced; the visionary is, more than any other type of superfluous man, profoundly 'déclassé'. Not only is he financially constrained as none of our dandies or rebels were, he has no fixed social identity at all and is more or less incapable of conforming to social protocol.

It is, of course, in their familial status that our French visionaries diverge most obviously from our Russian model; all Russian superfluous men are noble, and Rudin is no exception. Our French visionaries, however, are very explicitly bourgeois. Thus, where Rudin represents the declining fortunes of the traditional land-owning nobility, Horace, Frédéric, and Lazare are part of an entirely different social movement and cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered as synonymous to the Russian visionary on this point. However, they *can* be considered as the 'flip side' of the same coin; if the intelligentsia is to be classless (in theory, at least) Rudin is approaching it from above - Horace, Frédéric, and Lazare from below. Despite their origin, our French visionaries evince a striking similarity to Rudin in the ambiguity of their social and familial status and in their desperate - and futile - search for a satisfying role in society.

Rudin, like most superfluous men, is an orphan (his father died soon after Rudin's birth, his mother not long after he finished university) and the last of a noble line; he never marries or has children. Although noble by birth, however, he is not an integral member of noble society by any standard. 'Impecunious, unofficial, and unknown',[252] he has, in fact, lost all control over his material environment and is dependent upon others both socially and economically.

That the social and familial status of Horace, Frédéric, and Lazare is to be ambiguous is signaled from the very beginning in each text. Horace is the only son of a marriage which cut across lines of both class and fortune; Frédéric's status, too, is questionable. An only child and a quasi-orphan (his father, too, died soon after his birth), he is descended from an ancient but defunct noble family on his mother's side, while his father was 'un plébéien que

[252] *Rudin*, pp. 139.

ses parents lui avaient fait épouser'.[253] Lazare also is of vaguely noble descent on his mother's side and of resolutely common ancestry on his father's, and may be termed a quasi-orphan; his mother, of course, dies, and his father - although alive - is crippled to the point of death-in-life.

This ambiguity of birthright foreshadows the failure of all four to find an acceptable social identity. The only role possible for Rudin in noble society is that of hanger-on - a role which he rejects as unworthy of him and to which he is unable to conform - and, therefore, a role from which he is dismissed 'like a glove dropped after a ball, like a candy wrapping, like a losing ticket in a lottery'.[254] Unable to fit into noble society, Rudin - with amazing adaptability - attempts to find a place for himself elsewhere: among other, unspecified projects, he works as a manager of an estate; he goes into business; he finds a position as a teacher. Each attempt, however, fails. In the epilogue to *Rudin*, Rudin enumerates for Lezhnev his many failed undertakings, among which is, of course, his attempt to become a businessman. Lezhnev's comment: 'But, Mitya, for pity's sake, you, with your mind, could've guessed couldn't you that your business wasn't to be - forgive the pun - a businessman?' is, as Victor Ripp notes, very revealing:

> Lezhnev can dismiss four years of varied efforts with a pun. But that pun also fixes an important implicit attitude. [...] For if Lezhnev scorns the activity of being a businessman, he does so by suggesting that another activity may have gained his respect. Rudin has only made a wrong choice. He has tried to fit his large and extravagant spirit to a cramped form.[255]

Of course, Rudin will never find an activity which can accommodate his 'large and extravagant spirit'; to the end, Rudin lacks *any* clearly defined social identity - he fails, in every sense, to 'know his own place' - and remains an unknown quantity up to and including the moment of his death, when he is incorrectly identified as a nameless Pole.

Resolutely bourgeois in upbringing and environment, all three of our French visionaries are wholly alienated from - and feel themselves wholly superior to - the bourgeoisie. Théophile notes of Horace that:

> Le fait est que les habitudes modestes, l'esprit de contrôle un peu taquin, et l'obscurité un peu forcée des petites villes, étaient inconciliables avec les goûts et les besoins que l'éducation avait créés à Horace. Ses bons parents

---

[253] *L'Education sentimentale*, p. 28.

[254] *Rudin*, pp. 141.

[255] Victor Ripp, *Turgenev's Russia: from Notes of a Hunter to Fathers and Sons* (London: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 91-2.

> avaient tout fait pour qu'il en fût ainsi, et cependant ils étaient naïvement stupéfaits du résultat de leur ambition.[256]

And the same could be said of both Frédéric and Lazare. Unable to fit into their 'native' environment or to fulfill their parents' ambitions, all three desperately search for a different role. Indeed, Horace, Frédéric, and Lazare (albeit to a far lesser extent) all exhibit an astounding social plasticity. Horace variously joins intellectual, student, revolutionary, haut bourgeois, and noble cliques; Frédéric moves freely between much the same, and his personal society runs the gamut from noblemen to manual workers; Lazare is briefly accepted into student, haut bourgeois, business, and political circles. However, their various attempts at integration are, ultimately, no more successful than Rudin's - they are acting, playing at fitting in rather than really fitting in - and their social identities - like Rudin's - remain unresolved to the end.[257] As Horace rages:

> A quoi bon vivre dans ces temps-ci? [...] N'est-ce pas une vie d'avortement et d'agonie? N'est-ce pas un leurre infâme que cette société nous fait, lorsqu'elle nous dit: Travaillez, instruisez-vous, soyez intelligents, soyez ambitieux, et vous parviendrez à tout ! et il n'y aura pas de place si haute à laquelle vous ne puissiez vous asseoir! Que fait-elle, cette société menteuse et lâche, pour tenir ses promesses? Quels moyens nous donne-t-elle de développer les facultés qu'elle nous demande et d'utiliser les talents que nous acquérons pour elle? Rien! Elle nous repousse, elle nous méconnaît, elle nous abandonne, quand elle ne nous étouffe pas. Si nous nous agitons pour parvenir, elle nous enferme ou nous tue; si nous restons tranquilles, elle nous méprise ou nous oublie.[258]

There are two substantial differences between the Russian and the French visionary which must be acknowledged here: Firstly, Rudin - despite his birthright - is profoundly spiritually alienated from the nobility and seems unconcerned with social class. Horace, Frédéric, and (to a far lesser extent) Lazare, in contrast, all aspire to a higher social class in general and to the nobility in particular. All three thus display a social ambition which is completely alien to Rudin - and which is wholly attributable to their bourgeois origins.

Secondly, Rudin, like almost all superfluous men, dies childless. Horace, Frédéric, and Lazare all have not only children, but sons. This becomes significant because, out of all our superfluous men, only five ever succeed in having children - and out of these five, our three French visionaries would seem to represent a striking statistical blip. However, this is a great deal less problematic than it seems at first glance. Horace rejects and refuses to acknowledge his son as his own both before and after the birth; he (semi-seriously) tries to

---

[256] *Horace*, p. 273.

[257] With the possible, although extremely unlikely, exception of Horace; see section C.

[258] *Horace*, p. 233.

murder him; and the boy, in fact, is both emotionally accepted and legally adopted by Paul Arsène. Frédéric also semi-rejects his son, although he does (privately) acknowledge his paternity. Despite a later softening of his attitude, the boy - unnamed - dies in infancy. Lazare's son Paul is - alone among all superfluous mens' progeny - legitimate. However, he too is semi-rejected by his father (and, incidentally, by his mother). Paul is brought back to life - for he is stillborn - and raised by Pauline alone, and his future is left as uncertain as Horace's Théophile; for although Pauline promises 'J'en fais un homme', Lazare insists that 'Il aura la goutte comme papa et ses nerfs seront plus détraqués que les miens. [...] Regarde comme il est faible! C'est la loi des dégénérescences.'[259] The progeny of our three French visionaries are as thus as ambiguous in status as their fathers.

The visionary thus marks a significant turning point in the social status of the superfluous man. Whereas the dandy and the rebel, however much they transgressed against social norms, were still recognizably a part of noble society, the visionary, no longer a part of it, presages the classless intelligentsia - for with no clear-cut role within the social structure, the visionary *must* distinguish himself by means of ideas.

[259] *La Joie de vivre*, p. 1296. Indeed, Paul is so ambiguous in status that, as Jean Borie notes, he is even absent from Zola's genealogy; he wrote in his notes that: 'L'enfant est en dehors de la série'. (Jean Borie, *Le Tyran timide: Le naturalisme de la femme au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Editions Klincksieck,1973), p. 55.)

B. Contempt of 'bourgeois' ideals

In the two preceding chapters, we demonstrated that if the superfluous man could not identify with the traditional values of the nobility, he had even less respect for the mercenary, mediocre, and vulgar bourgeois ideal. However, we also saw that, as there was a marked change in the social and familial status of the dandy and the rebel, there was a consequent subtle shift in their attitudes towards the bourgeoisie; whereas the bourgeoisie was portrayed wholly negatively in our five 'dandy' texts, there was a noticeable softening of this stance in the 'rebel' texts. This movement continues - and indeed, reaches a sort of equilibrium - with the visionary, although the portrayal of the bourgeoisie *as a class* continues to be thoroughly negative (as it will consistently remain throughout the four generations). The visionary's attitude towards the bourgeois ideal - reflecting the decline in his own social status - is contradictory in the extreme.

As we saw above, Rudin's social status has been reduced to the point where he is *financially* middle-class; we are told that he was supported throughout his education by first a wealthy uncle and then by 'a certain rich prince', and at least some of his motivation for his various 'projects' comes from financial necessity (unimaginable to either the dandy or the rebel).

Rudin's position in the Lasunskaya household - that of social hanger-on and financial parasite - places him, despite his noble origins, on a more or less equal footing with the self-made man Pigasov, the toady Pandalevsky and the childrens' tutor Basistov. However, there is a world of difference between these three social 'equals' and Rudin's treatment of them which reveals both the changed attitude of the visionary towards the bourgeoisie - and the reasons behind it. Rudin evinces only contempt for the lisping sycophant Pandalevsky (who closely resembles Chatsky's nemesis Molchalin) and the embittered drawing-room fixture Pigasov. However, the situation with Basistov is very different: Rudin, seeming to disregard his social status entirely, views him as a disciple to be won over in the same way as Natalya.

The key to this is, of course, the visionary's own diminished social status. The visionary cannot - literally - afford to disregard money as did the dandy and the rebel. However, even while having to occupy himself with it, he still evinces the same sensibility towards it; he would *like to be able to disregard it* - hence his contradictory attitude. Thus, even as Rudin accepts loans from Darya Mikhaylovna and Volyntsev which it is uncertain that he will be able to repay, even as he accepts the position of social and financial parasite in the Lasunskaya household, he maintains a precarious grip on his autonomy by effectively ignoring his financial status and insisting on his *intellectual* independence. Pandalevsky and Pigasov merit his contempt not only because of their inferior intelligence and sensibility, but because they understand their subordinate status within the household and play their roles to

perfection;[260] Basistov merits his company because Rudin considers that he has retained a vestige of intellectual freedom.

The attitude of the Russian visionary towards the bourgeois ideal is thus contradictory and inconsistent. Although he retains the disdain of earlier superfluous men for monetary affairs, he is unable to practice this in reality due to his own severely reduced circumstances. Treated by the traditional nobility as a second-class citizen - but unable to accept this role - he is more or less *forced* to widen his net and distinguish between the great majority of the bourgeoisie, who still merit his contempt, and individuals who are, in all respects, his equals. This reflects not only the declining fortunes of the landowning nobility, but also the rapid breakdown of traditional social barriers.

Although one would perhaps expect the French visionary to differ from this model because he himself is of bourgeois origin, all three of our heroes exhibit a striking similarity to Rudin in their contradictory attitude - rejecting the bourgeois 'ideal' wholeheartedly, while being forced to compromise with it due to sheer necessity. As Giraud notes:

> The bourgeois hero is [...] a hero of ironies - one whose ideals, desires and feelings are in disharmony with his adult conception of reality. Nourished by romantic literature, inspired by conflicting eighteenth-century ideals, he is uncomfortable in the society in which, alas, he must make his living. But he lacks the raw courage to dissociate himself from it. [...] He consigns himself to a life of weak protest, of pseudo-disengagement and momentary feelings of shame, regret, guilt and complicity.[261]

Thus, Horace is a perpetual monetary parasite who wholly disdains money. He bleeds his parents dry and spends his sister's dowry while expressing total contempt for their restricted and prudent way of life; he borrows money from Théophile and 'forgets' to pay him back (in fact, he brags about his gambling winnings to Théophile, who is so nonplussed that he is unable to demand repayment); he borrows money from Louis de Méran, knowing that he is totally unable to cover the debt, rather than lose face with his aristocratic acquaintances; he allows Marthe to pawn or sell all of her belongings to support him, while forbidding her to take on 'demeaning' employment. What these incidents show, however, is not that Horace is avaricious (indeed, he is anything but; when he has money, Théophile tells us, he is the first to loan it to others) but that he is desperate to separate himself from the despised bourgeois ideal:

> Sachez que je me trouve meilleur et moins ridicule que tous ces hypocrites qui, se croyant *in petto* des demi-dieux, baissent sournoisement la tête et affectent une pruderie prétendue de bon goût. Ceux-là sont des égoïstes, des

[260] And, it must be said, because they recognize Rudin's status for what it is and refuse to accept him as superior, as does Basistov.

[261] Giraud, pp. 189-90.

> ambitieux dans le sens haïssable du mot et de la chose. Loin de laisser étaler cet enthousiasme qui est sympathique et autour duquel viennent se grouper toutes les idées fortes, toutes les âmes généreuses, ils caressent en secret leur étroite supériorité, et, de peur qu'on ne s'en effraie, ils la dérobent aux regards jaloux, pour s'en servir adroitement le jour où leur fortune sera faite. Je vous dis que ces hommes-là ne sont bons qu'à gagner de l'argent et à occuper des places sous un gouvernement corrompu.[262]

Like Rudin, he is able to more or less ignore his financial status by insisting upon his intellectual superiority.

Horace's disdain for his parents, Eugénie, Marthe herself, and especially Paul Arsène thus stems, not from misplaced snobbishness (as many commentators believe) but from their unquestioning acceptance of this prudent and mediocre ideal. To Horace, it is wholly inconceivable that Arsène - a talented painter - should give up his art studies with Delacroix to work as a waiter in order to support his sisters; this action merely confirms his longstanding prejudice. Although personally ambitious, his dreams revolve around power and glory, not money. Horace's ideal is wholly incompatible with the bourgeois lifestyle that he is in practice forced to adopt. As Théophile notes, Horace is an 'aristocrate dans l'âme'; but his ideal of 'une vie de luxe, mêlée de travail intellectuel' is much closer to 'l'aristocratie de la pensée' than 'l'aristocratie de l'argent'.

Frédéric, too, despises the bourgeois ideal; but that he is both obliged and willing to compromise with it is apparent from the very start of the novel. Although both Frédéric and his mother are deeply ashamed of his capitalist uncle, we first meet Frédéric while he is returning from a visit which is very explicitly meant to ensure that he inherits the commercially tainted wealth. Both are able to justify to themselves this relatively sordid maneuvering: Mme Moreau because the inheritance is to facilitate Frédéric's later, socially acceptable career; Frédéric himself because, like Horace, the money would enable him to separate himself from the unfortunate bourgeois necessity of actually earning his living. Throughout, Frédéric makes a conscious effort to separate himself from the bourgeoisie: he conquers his feelings of intimidation when first visiting the Dambreuse house by insisting to himself that M. Dambreuse 'n'était qu'un bourgeois'[263]; he dismisses Martinon's happiness (fifteen hundred francs and the love of a factory girl) out-of-hand as wholly unworthy of himself; he justifies his passion for Mme Arnoux on the basis of her superiority to her surroundings (but when rebuffed by her, rejects her with the words 'quelle bourgeoise'). Frédéric - like Rudin and Horace - maintains his self-esteem by insisting on his intellectual superiority and independence; and thus, even when ruined, is able to retain his sense of separation, of superior difference:

---

[262] *Horace*, p. 18.

[263] Apparently ignorant of the fact that M. Dambreuse, of course, is actually the comte d'Ambreuse.

> Beaucoup vivaient bien qui n'avaient pas de fortune [...], et il se trouva lâche d'attacher une pareille importance à des choses médiocres. La misère, peut-être, centuplerait ses facultés. Il s'exalta, en pensant aux grands hommes qui travaillent dans les mansardes.[264]

Lazare is able not only to dissociate himself from his mediocre surroundings by insisting on his intellectual superiority, but to effectively justify the draining of Pauline's wealth because it is going in the service of ideas and dreams. Although, as Borie notes, Mme Chanteau and Lazare form 'une alliance incestueuse tacite'[265] against Pauline, Lazare displays none of his mother's avarice or jealousy. (Indeed, he is greatly displeased - when he deigns to notice - that Pauline has taken on the responsibility for the household expenses.) Far from wishing to ruin her, Lazare alone feels genuine remorse and gratitude; and (unlike Mme Chanteau) he does not blame her when she considers refusing him money. Significantly, he calls her a 'sale bourgeoise' only when she ridicules his dreams of becoming a great musician or composer and recommends, instead, that he accede to his mother's wish by becoming a prefect or judge - thus revealing her essentially 'bourgeois' nature.[266] Lazare, like our other three visionaries, maintains a precarious grip on his autonomy and self-respect only by effectively ignoring his total financial dependence and emphasizing his intellectual independence.

Thus, although the visionary exhibits few qualms about his financial parasitism, he is unable to accept any demeaning infringement of his spiritual or intellectual independence - and it is this refusal to compromise his vision, as much as the grandiose nature of his vision, which condemns him to sterility and failure. Where a Pandelevsky would have (and, indeed, does) stay, Rudin moves on; where Théophile happily plans to subdue his sensibility in order to be a merciful doctor, Horace gives up the law in disgust at its injustice; while Martinon plots successfully to make an advantageous marriage, Frédéric forsakes one for a hopeless ideal; Lazare prefers to die in poverty and obscurity rather than live without inspiration.

---

[264] *L'Education sentimentale*, p. 111.

[265] Borie (1973), p. 92.

[266] Incidentally, he also finally loses romantic interest in her around the time that she steps into Mme Chateau's shoes and occupies herself with wholly prosaic, 'bourgeois' tasks, thus relinquishing her only advantage over Louise - her intellectual and spiritual superiority.

C. Intellectualism and Sensibility

The visionary, like all superfluous men, is distinguished by his extraordinary intelligence and sensibility. However, unlike either the dandy or the rebel, the visionary is *dependent* upon his intelligence and sensibility to distinguish himself from the crowd; for whereas the dandy and the rebel were still recognizably a part of noble society, the visionary - reflecting the breakdown of traditional class barriers in both nations - is no longer an integral part of it. He must, therefore, distinguish himself *by means of ideas*. 'Intellectualism' - 'cerebralism' - thus dominates the visionary; and it is in this that the visionary most strongly heralds the emergence of the intellectual hero in literature and of the intelligentsia in society. However, the visionary is a superfluous man; and as such, he is unable to harness his clearly superior abilities and talents to any real purpose. The intellectualism of the visionary is doomed to remain sterile; neither an original nor a committed thinker, he is also wholly incapable of translating his ideas and ideals into meaningful action. His intellectualism - although it dominates him - is thus both uncreative and unfruitful.

That Rudin is to be defined by his intelligence and sensibility is apparent from his very first appearance in the novel, when he dazzles the entire company gathered in the Lasunskaya drawing-room with his eloquence and is himself moved to tears by Pandalevsky's piano playing. As Freeborn notes, in a society 'in which ideas are either modish plagiarisms or the objects of cynical banter', Rudin 'stands for culture and learning, for cultivation of the finer human emotions and a love of the beautiful in nature. '*Vous êtes un poète*' is Darya Lasunskaya's verdict, and one must agree with it, for it is the absence of the humdrum, the mundane, the petty and conventional that distinguishes him.'[267]

Rudin - unlike Darya Lasunskaya or Pigasov - believes implicitly in the ability of ideas to change society and in the eventual victory of idealism over cynicism:

> All these attacks on systems, on generalizations and so on are particularly distressing because, together with systems, people are denying knowledge in general, science, and faith in science - and, at the same time, faith in themselves and in their own powers. But people need this faith: they cannot live on impressions alone, and it is wrong for them to fear ideas and not trust them. Scepticism has always distinguished itself by barrenness and impotence.[268]

Already in this first appearance, however, clues are given to the particular nature of Rudin's 'intellectualism'; an unsuccessful storyteller, Rudin only comes into his own when

---

[267] Richard Freeborn, *Turgenev: the Novelist's Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 75, 78-9.

[268] *Rudin*, p. 57.

he begins to speak in generalities - and his eloquence serves as camouflage for a lack of clarity and specifics:

> With bold and sweeping flourishes he painted a panoramic picture. Everyone listened to him with profound attention. He spoke masterfully, and entertainingly, but not entirely lucidly [...], yet this very vagueness lent particular charm to his speech. A profusion of ideas prevented Rudin from expressing himself cogently and precisely. Image after image poured out; analogies, now unexpectedly bold, now devastatingly apt, rose one after another. It was not with the complacent expertise of an experienced chatterbox, but with inspiration that his rushing impromptu speech was filled. He did not seek after words: they came obediently and freely to his lips and each word, it seemed, literally flowed straight from his soul and burned with all the heat of conviction.[269]

For, although Rudin's thought may be unconventional (at least in the limited society in which we see him), it is not innovative; despite being 'excellent at developing an idea and [...] masterly in argument', his ideas are 'not produced in his head: he took them from others'.[270] This first weakness of Rudin's 'intellectualism' - that, as Freeborn terms it, of the poet *manqué*, 'who can utter poetry but who cannot make it'[271] - is not, however, enough on its own to condemn Rudin to superfluity. The second weakness of his intellectualism - his inability to translate his ideals into meaningful action - does that.

Throughout the text, Rudin is presented as a fiery and inspirational speaker, one whose expressive ability is unparalleled and justly admired:

> Rudin possessed what is almost the highest secret - the music of eloquence. By striking certain heart strings he could set all the others obscurely quivering and ringing. A listener might not understand precisely what was being talked about; but he would catch his breath, curtains would open wide before his eyes, something resplendent would burn dazzlingly ahead of him.[272]

However, lacking the willpower to translate his 'high-flown phrases' into workable projects in the real world, Rudin has come to rely on his eloquence to the point where it actually excuses him (and perhaps even prevents him) from taking action: told by Natalya that 'others can take a rest, but you...you should work, you should try to be useful', his response is yet another flight of unstoppable eloquence:

---

[269] *Rudin*, p. 63.

[270] *Rudin*, p. 95.

[271] Freeborn (1960), p. 79.

[272] *Rudin*, p. 63.

> What you've just said has reminded me of my duty and shown me the way I ought to go...Yes, I must act. I mustn't hide my talent, if I have any; I mustn't waste my powers on talk, empty, useless talk, on mere words...And his words poured out like a river. He spoke beautifully, heatedly, convincingly.[273]

But, as Natalya observes: 'the truth is that words and deeds are far apart'.[274] Rudin is never able to successfully bridge the distance between 'mere words' and action; his extended article is never finished, and all his later attempts to find a practical application for his ideas also falter and fail.

Despite the sterility of Rudin's own intellectualism, however, he is still the recognizable precursor of the intellectual. His importance, as Lezhnev comes to realize, lies not in what he has accomplished, but in what he represents: idealism, optimism, ambition, enthusiasm, and above all an unshakable faith in the power of ideas and ideals to change the world:

> I want to talk about what is good and rare in him. He has enthusiasm; and that, believe me - for I speak as a phlegmatic man - is a most precious quality in our time. We have all become intolerably rational, indifferent, and effete; we have gone to sleep, we have grown cold, and we should be grateful to anyone who rouses us and warms us, if only for a moment! [...] He will not achieve anything himself [...], but who has the right to say that he will not contribute, has not already contributed, something useful? That his words have not sown many good seeds in young hearts, to whom nature has not denied, as it has to him, the strength to act, the ability to implement their own ideas?[275]

Rudin's significance is precisely that he relies on thought and on the expression of thought almost to the exclusion of anything else; his superfluity, of course, stems from the same source. As Freeborn notes:

> The vindication of Rudin offered by Lezhnev is the vindication not of a genius, not of any romantic figure such as Lermontov's Pechorin, but of a man of talent who believed in ideas in a society to which ideas were either contemptible or matters of little consequence, who propagated these ideas and yet was not strong enough to implement them.[276]

---

[273] *Rudin*, p. 78.

[274] *Rudin*, p. 129.

[275] *Rudin*, pp. 156-7.

[276] Freeborn (1960), p. 81.

Horace - believing, like his parents, that 'l'éducation nivelle les hommes'[277] - shares both Rudin's faith in the power of ideas and his almost unshakable belief in his own intellectual superiority:

> Vous voulez dire des idées?..j'en ai déjà, des idées, et si vous voulez que je vous le dise, je crois que je n'en aurai jamais de meilleures; car nos idées viennent de nos sentiments, et tous mes sentiments, à moi, sont grands! Oui, Monsieur, le ciel m'a fait grand et bon. J'ignore quelles épreuves il me réserve; mais, je le dis avec un orgueil qui ne pourrait faire rire que des sots, je me sens généreux, je me sens fort, je me sens magnanime...Les grandes choses m'enivrent jusqu'au délire. Je n'en tire et n'en peux tirer aucune vanité, ce me semble; mais, je le dis avec assurance, je me sens de la race des héros![278]

Like Rudin, too, he is an inspired and inspirational speaker, overwhelming not only Théophile and his student compatriots, but also Paul Arsène, Marthe, the vicomtesse Léonie, the marquis de Vernes - indeed, almost without exception, everyone with whom he comes into contact - with his eloquence and enthusiasm:

> Horace avait cela de particulier, qu'en le voyant et en l'écoutant, on était sous le charme de sa parole et de son geste. Quand on le quittait, on s'étonnait de ne pas lui avoir démontré son erreur; mais quand on le retrouvait, on subissait de nouveau le magnétisme de son paradoxe. Je me séparai de lui ce jour-là, très-frappé de son originalité, et me demandant si c'était un fou ou un grand homme. Je penchais pour la dernière opinion.[279]

> Sur toutes choses il était le plus compétent, quoiqu'il fût le plus jeune; en toutes choses il était le plus hardi, le plus passionné, le plus *avancé*...Ceux même qui ne l'aimaient pas, parmi les auditeurs, étaient forcés de l'écouter avec intérêt, et ses contradicteurs montraient en général plus de méfiance et de dépit que de justice et de bonne foi. C'est que là Horace reprenait tous ses avantages: la discussion était sur son terrain; et chacun s'avouait intérieurement que s'il n'était pas logicien infaillible, du moins il était orateur fécond, ingénieux et chaud. Ceux qui ne le connaissaient pas croyaient le renverser, en disant que c'était un homme sans fond, sans idées, qui avait travaillé immensément, et dont toute l'inspiration n'était que le résultat d'une culture minutieuse. Pour moi, qui savait si bien le contraire, j'admirais cette puissance d'intuition, à laquelle il suffisait d'effleurer chaque chose en passant pour se l'assimiler et pour lui donner aussitôt toutes sortes de développements au hasard de l'improvisation. C'était à coup sûr une organisation privilégiée.[280]

---

[277] *Horace,* p. 9.

[278] *Horace*, pp. 17-18.

[279] *Horace*, pp. 18-19.

[280] *Horace*, p. 51.

However, Horace also shares Rudin's weaknesses: his thought is not original (note his desperate attempts to write something, anything, that does not copy the style of, variously, Lamartine, Hugo, Courier, Nodier, Balzac, or Béranger) nor are his convictions solid:

> Il parlait avec une véhémence qui me plaisait, et qui cependant n'était pas tout à fait exempte d'un certain parti pris d'avance. On ne pouvait douter de sa sincérité en l'écoutant; mais on voyait qu'il ne fulminait pas ses imprécations pour la première fois. Elles lui venaient trop naturellement pour n'être pas étudiées.[281]

> Horace n'avait d'opinion affermie sur quoi que ce soit. Il improvisait ses convictions en causant, à mesure qu'il les développait, et il le faisait d'une façon assez brillante.[282]

Most significantly, he shares Rudin's total inability to transform his ideas into realities:

> Quand je ferme les yeux, je vois une armée, un monde de créations se peindre et s'agiter dans mon cerveau. Quand je rouvre les yeux, tout cela disparaît. J'avale des pintes de café, je fume des pipes par douzaines, je me grise dans mon propre enthousiasme; il me semble que je vais éclater comme un volcan. Et quand je m'approche de cette table maudite, la lave se fige et l'inspiration se refroidit. Pendant le temps d'apprêter une feuille de papier et de tailler ma plume, l'ennui me gagne; l'odeur de l'encre me donne des nausées. Et puis cette horrible nécessité de traduire par des mots et d'aligner en pattes de mouches des pensées ardentes, vives, mobiles comme les rayons du soleil teignant les nuages de l'air![283]

Early on in the novel, Théophile demands: 'Comment concilier, en effet, cette ardeur de gloire, ces rêves d'activité [...], avec la profonde inertie et la voluptueuse nonchalance d'un tel tempérament?'[284] Much later, he answers his own question:

> L'esprit d'Horace n'était certes pas stérile; il avait raison de se plaindre de trop d'activité de ses pensées et de la multitude de ses visions; mais il manquait absolument de cette force d'élaboration qui doit présider à l'emploi de la forme. Il ne savait pas travailler.[285]

---

[281] *Horace*, p. 11.

[282] *Horace*, p. 101.

[283] *Horace*, p. 100.

[284] *Horace*, p. 50.

[285] *Horace*, p. 101.

Throughout the novel, as Harriet Stow notes, 'Horace is judged by the narrator on the basis of what he is and does in the present, but forgiven on the basis of what he may become in the future.'[286] Théophile, like Lezhnev, offers a final vindication of Horace; however, it is given not at all in the same spirit. Lezhnev sincerely excuses Rudin's weaknesses, while acknowledging his real strengths and his possible contributions; Théophile awards lukewarm praise because Horace has apparently become 'un excellent jeune homme, rangé, studieux, inoffensif, encore un peu déclamatoire dans sa conversation et ampoulé dans son style, mais prudent et réservé dans sa conduite' who is industriously building a practice as a provincial solicitor.[287] Thus, Lezhnev belatedly admires Rudin for the very qualities which, while they condemned him to superfluity in contemporary society, marked him out as different and superior to that society; while Théophile admires Horace for *losing* (or subduing) the very same qualities. It would seem, then, that Horace has suddenly and with no preparation (of himself, or the reader) made the leap out of the realms of superfluousness and into those of practicality. There is, however, another interpretation which does not require such a leap of faith on the behalf of the reader: that Horace is following the advice of (and fulfilling his promise to) Louis de Méran - to allow time to efface his disgrace in society before attempting to return as equal or superior to 'ces personnages brillants dont l'air dégagé vous a séduit, et que vous regarderez peut-être en pitié':

> Quittez Paris, éloignez vous, faites-vous oublier; et si vous voulez reparaître absolument dans ce qu'on appelle, très-arbitrairement sans doute, la bonne compagnie, ne revenez qu'avec une existence assurée et un nom honorable dans les lettres.[288]

Whether or not the reader chooses to take Théophile at his word at this point,[289] however, hardly matters; for four hundred and nine pages less one paragraph, Horace's character has remained (like Rudin's) remarkably consistent. Like Rudin, he represents idealistic ambition, faith in ideas and intelligence, and reliance upon their successful expression to the exclusion of anything else.

Frédéric, distinguished rather more by his sensibility than by his intellectualism, is no orator on the scale of Rudin or Horace. He shares with them, however, the ability to not only sincerely impress others with his qualities, but to draw others to him. That Frédéric

---

[286] Harriet K. Stow, *Narrative and Thematic Structure in George Sand's Horace* (Diss.), University of Wisconsin, 1979, p.

[287] *Horace*, pp. 408-9.

[288] *Horace*, pp. 371-2.

[289] Stow, indeed, makes a good case for his unreliability as narrator; however, as we have not questioned his judgement up to this point - and mainly question it now due to its total incongruity with what has gone before (as well as the apparently second-hand nature of his information) - this question must remain open.

considers himself superior on the basis of his intelligence and sensibility is apparent from the very first pages of *L'Education sentimentale*:

> Un jeune homme de dix-huit ans, à longs cheveux et qui tenait un album sous son bras, restait auprès du gouvernail, immobile. A travers le brouillard, il contemplait des clochers, des édifices dont il ne savait pas les noms; puis il embrassa, dans un dernier coup d'oeil, l'île Saint-Louis, la Cité, Notre-Dame; et bientôt, Paris disparaissant, il poussa un grand soupir. [...] Frédéric pensait à la chambre qu'il occupait là-bas, au plan d'un drame, à des sujets de tableaux, à des passions futures. Il trouvait que le bonheur mérité par l'excellence de son âme tardait à venir.[290]

The fact that his 'intellectualism' is riddled with the same weaknesses as that of Rudin and Horace is equally anticipated, as the young Frédéric's thoughts - like his eyes - jump from one subject to another, never resting long in one place; this early promise of inconstancy is, of course, fully borne out by Frédéric's many failed attempts to find a productive outlet for his talents. Frédéric is perhaps the least committed or original thinker among our four visionaries; his ideas are borrowed from whomever happens to be uppermost in his life at the time, and are thus constantly in a state of flux between opposing influences.

The second and more significant weakness of Frédéric's intellectualism - his passive faith in the power of merit alone - is also signaled in this early paragraph. Frédéric, like Rudin and Horace, believes utterly in the power of ideas. Thus, sure of his personal superiority, he relies on his intrinsic abilities alone to carry him; and throughout, Frédéric finds that the happiness merited by his excellence is late in arriving. As Borie notes:

> C'est la raison de son incurie, de son apathie, de sa passivité: son mérite est évident, la grandeur de ses rêves témoigne de l'exceptionnelité de sa nature, les récompenses doivent venir d'elles-mêmes. Son attente n'est qu'une douce sommation adressée aux puissances nécessairement favorables du destin, comme si la réponse était en somme déjà comprise dans l'attente, dans le mérite, dans le désir.[291]

Frédéric's intrinsic qualities, do, in fact, carry him a surprising distance. When, however, actual effort is required to reach a goal, he inevitably falters. Like Rudin and Horace, Frédéric is wholly unable to translate his optimistic dreams into practical plans; when supplied (as he is, several times) with practical plans by others, he is unable to summon the wherewithal to successfully conclude them.

---

[290] *L'Education sentimentale*, pp. 19-20.

[291] Jean Borie, *Frédéric et les amis des hommes* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1995), p. 130.

Again, however, despite Frédéric's weaknesses, his fanciful impracticality is not presented in a wholly unfavorable light. He is not only, as Giraud notes, 'capable of an enthusiasm, of a fresh and naïve hunger for beauty and passion'[292] which is wholly absent in most of his contemporaries, but he retains that enthusiasm and hunger throughout. If Rudin represents 'a man of talent who believed in ideas in a society to which ideas were either contemptible or matters of little consequence',[293] then Frédéric represents a man of sensibility who believes in idealistic enthusiasm in a society where 'the only kind of passion that is possible is inactive passion.'[294]

Lazare, like Rudin, Horace, and Frédéric, is utterly certain of his own extraordinary potential; whether he is to be a composer, a doctor, a poet, a businessman, or a deputy, he has absolutely no doubt about his own superior ability and talent. He is, however, neither original, nor committed enough in his inspiration to translate his 'visions' into workable projects in the real world. As each new idea takes hold of him, Lazare is, like Rudin, Horace, and Frédéric, able both to summon vast reserves of enthusiasm:

> Une nouvelle fièvre l'emportait, il s'était donné entier, fougueusement, à l'idée d'être un médecin de génie, dont l'apparition bouleverserait les mondes.[295]

> Lazare s'emportait. Il voyait immense, il aurait volontiers donné aux hangars une façade monumentale dominant la mer, développant devant l'horizon sans borne la grandeur de son idée.[296]

Of course, each attempt fails when his grandiose visions fail to materialize immediately. Once again, when real effort is required, Lazare falters:

> Lazare se désespérait, car il prévoyait des retards de toutes sortes, et le moindre délai à la réalisation d'un de ses désirs devenait pour lui une véritable torture.[297]

As Borie notes, Lazare is 'quelqu'un dont les désirs et les idéaux sont tellement éloignés, tellement irréconciliables qu'il se voit condamné à une perpétuelle défaite, vaincu dans ses principes ou dans des désirs, ou simultanément dans les uns et les autres.'[298] Lazare, like

---

[292] Giraud, p. 148.

[293] Freeborn (1960), p. 81.

[294] Flaubert, *Correspondance*, V, 32; quoted by Giraud, p. 146.

[295] *La Joie de vivre*, p. 1073.

[296] *La Joie de vivre*, pp. 1088-89.

[297] *La Joie de vivre*, p. 1119.

[298] Borie (1973), p. 135.

Rudin, Horace, and Frédéric, relies totally on his intrinsic ability and on faith in ideas as a force in themselves, and is thus wholly unable to translate his visions. Once more, however, this is not totally negative; Pauline, who might well be termed the more 'intellectual', is wholly lacking in Lazare's enthusiasm and vision - and therefore in his magnetism. Laudable - and practical - as are her motivations (she immerses herself in the study of Lazare's medical texts, not out of any abstract desire for knowledge, but out of concrete needs; firstly, to educate herself sexually, then to find treatments for her cousin's nervous disorder and her uncle's gout), Pauline (like Lezhnev, Théophile, and Deslauriers) has none of Lazare's fervor or faith, none of the visionary's 'hunger for beauty and passion'.

Lazare - unlike our other three visionaries - eventually loses faith both in himself and in the power of ideas. By the end of the novel, the enthusiastic and idealistic Lazare 'n'est plus un homme, c'est un mort vivant'.[299] The visionary cannot live without his visions.

The sheer potential of the visionary's intellectualism is his downfall. Dependent upon his extraordinary intelligence and sensibility - his *vision* - to distinguish himself from his mediocre surroundings, he is nevertheless incapable of translating his vision from grandiose dreams into mundane reality. His intellectualism - although it dominates him - is thus doomed to bear no fruit. Edward Garnett calls Rudin 'a fresh variety of idealist, the orator sapped by the love of his own words'[300] and this applies, more or less, to all of our visionaries. Intent upon their lofty visions, they are inevitably tripped up by the first obstacle.

Despite his superfluity, however, the visionary is not a wholly negative figure; his intellectualism is, recognizably, the direct precursor of the intellectual hero. Garnett notes that:

> The Rudins, the idealists [...], were the yeast in the dough of the nation's stagnation. For one idealist there were a thousand lethargic, acquiescent minds, clinging to the rock of personal interest, staking nothing, but all subservient to the forces of official despotism or worldly power. In Rudin burned clear the light of humane, generous ideals, of the fire of the love of truth.[301]

Although our French visionaries can never properly be termed independent of personal interest - all three are significantly more personally ambitious than Rudin - and although none manages to actually live up to his 'humane, generous ideals', each stands out like a beacon from (or to) his contemporaries' 'lethargic, acquiescent minds'.

---

[299] Nils-Olaf Franzen, *Zola et La Joie de vivre* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1958), p. 124.

[300] Edward Garnett, *Turgenev: A Study* (London: W. Collins, 1917), p. 61.

[301] *Ibid*, p. 71.

D. Civic Sense

If the dandy can be summarized as possessing a social conscience without sufficient will to act upon it, and the rebel the will to act without a social conscience, the visionary is the recognizable beginning of a synthesis between the two.

The visionary is, more than any other type of superfluous man, an idealist. He can see his ideal; he can even take one or two steps towards it; but he is, like all superfluous men, wholly unable to reach it or even to live up to it. The sheer grandeur of his 'vision' sabotages him; as with all superfluous men, his reach exceeds his grasp. The visionary is unaware of - and wholly incapable of - the degree of commitment which successful completion of any one of his projects would require. His grandiose visions are thus fated to stay just that - visions, rather than realities. Victor Ripp notes that *Rudin* 'repeats one of the most vexing questions of Russian intellectual life: what is the connection between abstract ideals and purposeful activity?'[302] This - the connection between abstract ideals and purposeful activity - is the question at the crux of the struggle of not just Rudin, but also Horace, Frédéric, and Lazare.

Rudin, whose values are those of German Idealist philosophy, of intellectual independence and faith in ideals, is both the most political figure among our four visionaries and the most altruistic. Freeborn notes that:

> All Turgenev's heroes embody ideas and aspire to emulate ideals. The degree of success or failure which they experience in their lives is gauged by the extent to which they are able to put their ideas to the service of their chosen ideals.[303]

Rudin indeed attempts 'to put his ideas to the service of his chosen ideals'; among other projects, he attempts to introduce new principles of social agronomy (which, of course, implies modernizing the system of serfdom) while serving as manager of a large estate; he attempts to open up a provincial river to navigation; and, finally, he takes up a post teaching literature at a provincial *gymnazium.* His efforts, of course, prove futile; all of Rudin's ambitious and idealistic plans - barely realizable in the first place - fail on worldly obstacles which Rudin could not or would not foresee. However, although Rudin continually falls short of his own ideals, he does succeed in justifying by his personal example the *worth of those ideals.* As Ripp notes:

> Although by the end of the book Rudin stands condemned, his guilt is not absolute. He is no simple poseur; he has at least groped towards an ideal. Those who condemn him, on the other hand, only sit smugly by. Much of the

[302] Ripp, p. 128.

[303] Freeborn (1960), p. 75.

> time, *Rudin* breathes a santimonious air. In a world of fools and idlers, the man who most energetically tried to integrate value and action is most harshly judged.[304]

And nowhere is this more evident than in the comparison between Rudin and Lezhnev, as Seeley notes:

> Lezhnev is no superfluous man. Though he has shared in the experience of the *kruzhok*, though he has been exposed not only to Rudin in his heyday but to the radiant personality and serene visions of Pokorsky, he has come to terms with life. [...] He has ceased to write poetry or to break his head over the 'accursed questions' - the eternal problems of human destiny. Instead, he concentrates on doing the jobs that lie to hand - running his estate, raising a family - and these he does very competently. Beyond them he does not look. One might even say that by the time the novel opens he has lost all awareness of a beyond.[305]

Although Lezhnev certainly accomplishes more in concrete terms than Rudin ever will (for example, he allows his serfs to pay quitrent rather than labor in his fields, while Rudin's remaining 'two and a half' serfs are probably starving), he has lost the ability to strive towards an abstract ideal. As Leonard Schapiro notes, the main moral of *Rudin* is that 'what matters in life is not what you achieve, but how you live':

> That Rudin was elevated to the rank of the Don Quixotes for the purity of his intentions, not for his achievements, is proved by the Second Epilogue to the novel which Turgenev added when it was republished in a collected edition of his fiction in 1860. In this Second Epilogue, Rudin, red flag in hand, and armed with a crooked and blunt sword, is killed on the barricades in Paris in 1848, but at a time when the rising had already been almost crushed. In Turgenev's eyes, the very futility of his death ennobles him.[306]

Lazare is closest to Rudin in this aspect, embarking on a succession of curiously similar projects, including spells as a research chemist, an attempt to establish a factory, and construction of a breakwater to prevent flooding. Like Rudin, Lazare is unable to persist in any one of his undertakings; they fail because he has failed to finance them, because they do not bear fruit quickly enough, because they were never realizable in the first place - because he is unwilling to compromise the grandeur of his visions by considering practical obstacles. As with Rudin, the value of Lazare's civic sense is *symbolic,* rather than practical. Thus

---

[304] Ripp, p. 128.

[305] Frank F.Seeley, *Turgenev: A Reading of his Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1991), pp. 170-71.

[306] Leonard Schapiro, *Turgenev: His Life and Times* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 121, p. 150n.

Lazare fights the sea itself in a doomed effort to save Bonneville from annihilation, while Pauline dispenses practical charity - food, medicine - to its children; Lazare faces death dashing into a burning house to save a peasant's child, while Pauline finances rebuilding. As Borie notes:

> Son intelligence, sa supériorité doivent éclater dans la certitude intemporelle de leur essence, non pas s'user dans un accomplissement. Le sauvetage de l'enfant arraché à la maison en flammes a pareille valeur de geste: Lazare [...] se plaît pourtant à affirmer sa générosité virile dans un acte d'héroïsme instantané, un éclair de valeur qui s'épuise dans sa propre beauté et se transforme en renommée, non en responsabilité.[307]

While Pauline certainly accomplishes more in a practical sense, she - like Lezhnev - has 'lost all awareness of a beyond'; Lazare, with his eyes firmly fixed on the ideal, is unable to see the 'real'. Like Rudin's fatal stand, however, the very futility of his efforts ennobles him. He has, at least, 'groped towards an ideal'.

Horace and Frédéric, too, are extremely socially and politically idealistic; both have a clear conception of social justice and dream of revolutionizing the social order. Neither, however, is able to go as far as Rudin or Lazare in making the connection between their abstract ideals and purposeful, meaningful action. Like Rudin and Lazare, both Horace and Frédéric *are* able to act - but only in grand, meaningless gestures: the young Horace patrolling his provincial village 'le fusil sur l'épaule', waiting to join a revolutionary battle which he knows will never come; Frédéric's impassioned speech to the largely indifferent Dambreuse salon. Borie notes of Frédéric that:

> Il *vibre*. Il vibre lycéen au spectacle de rébellion physique de son condisciple Deslauriers injurié par un domestique, il vibre étudiant lorsque Dussardier fait le coup de poing contre la répression policière, il est même capable - lui qui déteste Sénécal - de défendre passionnément la réputation de celui-ci dans le salon Dambreuse, devant un public conservateur interloqué, il vibre encore en février 1848 au spectacle du soulèvement du peuple 'sublime'.[308]

and Horace, too, '*vibre*': 'Je me sens généreux, je me sens fort, je me sens magnanime; mon âme frémit et mon sang bouillonne à l'idée d'une injustice. Les grandes choses m'enivrent jusqu'au délire. [...] Je me sens de la race des héros!'[309]:

> J'ai le droit en horreur; ce n'est qu'un tissu de mensonges contre l'équité divine et la vérité éternelle. Encore si c'étaient des mensonges liés par un système logique! Mais ce sont, au contraire, des mensonges qui se

[307] Borie (1973), p. 150.

[308] Borie (1995), pp. 138-9.

[309] *Horace*, pp. 17-18.

> contredisent impudemment les uns les autres, afin que chacun puisse faire le mal par les moyens de perversité qui lui sont propres! Je déclare infâme ou absurde tout jeune homme qui pourra prendre au sérieux l'étude de la chicane; je le méprise, je le hais![310]

Neither Horace nor Frédéric, however, is ever able to marry their grand - and sincere - sentiments to action *when it matters*, as Borie continues:

> On peut lui faire confiance pour vibrer toujours pour la bonne cause: mais les choses se gâtent lorsque les amis du peuple, émus de le voir dans de si bons sentiments, s'approchent de lui avec à la main les bulletins d'adhésion. On ne parviendra jamais à changer ce spectateur en militant. Rien en lui n'est agissant.[311]

The civic sense of both Horace and Frédéric is thus, paradoxically, more apparent in what they *do not do* than in what they do; and what they do not do is betray their ideal. Their perpetual indecision is a sign of weakness, undoubtedly; but it also shows an absolute refusal to devote themselves to a cause which they do not wholly believe in. Rudin dies nobly for a highly unworthy cause; Horace and Frédéric avoid this precisely because they are afraid that the cause is unworthy. Frédéric, of course, escapes Paris for Fontainebleau to avoid commitment to a cause which is murky at best (ironically, he then escapes Fontainebleau for Paris to avoid a commitment to Rosanette); Horace backs out of Laravinière's plans, not because he is physically afraid, but because he no longer believes in Laravinière's cause:

> La guerre civile. [...] Voilà ce qu'on me propose, voilà où l'on veut m'entraîner. Et moi je répugne à de tels moyens, et j'attends mieux de la Providence. [...] Ma conscience me fait d'amers reproches de m'être laissé entraîner à ces projets incendiaires; je lui obéis.[312]

Théophile tells Horace that: 'Vous êtes philosophe comme moi, ou révolutionnaire comme l'ami Jean. Il n'y a pas de terme moyen.'[313] It is precisely because Horace is neither pure philosopher nor pure revolutionary, but persists in seeking the elusive middle ground that he rejects both Laravinière and Théophile; he avoids committing himself to one or the other by inventing a family illness which explains his absence from Paris at the critical moment. Frédéric is eventually reduced by his idealism to a state where the only course of action open

---

[310] *Horace*, p. 11.

[311] Borie (1995), pp. 138-9.

[312] *Horace*, p. 265-6.

[313] *Horace*, p. 269.

to him is *inaction*. Unable to act to realize his idealistic ambitions, he at least remains true to them by remaining passive - and the same can be said of Horace. As Borie notes:

> Agir, ce serait entrer dans la ronde, comprendre la règle du jeu. Frédéric, tout au long, reste dans un brouillard. Agir, il ne le peut qu'en cédant aux autres, et il ne leur cède jamais que partiellement, car il reste entêté dans sa fidelité au désir et au rêve. Chaque fois qu'il croit agir, *il cède* et sa 'victoire' est un soumission: la 'séduction' de Madame Dambreuse le prouve assez. Pas étonnant qu'il se sente progressivement compromis, pris dans un réseau d'embrouilles, dégradé. La seule action qui lui soit ouverte est une action négative, c'est le privilège des vierges, c'est le *refus*. Son parcours est jalonné de toute une série de petits refus (ces fameux 'échecs', examinés d'un peu près, se révéleraient être le plus souvent des refus) que culminent dans une sorte d'Himalaya de refus, abrupt, colossal, définitif: le refus opposé à Madame Dambreuse, le chapeau levé froidement le congé pris, pour toujours. Enfin voilà un acte, et un acte qui a un aspect de soudaineté, de surprise, qui a l'air d'un coup de tête, mais qui est au fond l'unique acte *longuement mûri* accompli par Frédéric. Et bien sûr il ne faut pas dire que Frédéric refuse Madame Dambreuse, il faut dire qu'il *se refuse* à Madame Dambreuse et à tous les autres, à toute la clique des deux sexes, qu'il se conquiert, au nom du rêve, dans son intégrité - imaginaire, mais qu'importe - qu'en face du monde il se voue éternellement à la *virginité*, qu'il se constitue célibataire.[314]

Thus, although both Horace and Frédéric are wholly unable to live up to their ideals, they do manage not to compromise them. If they have not groped towards their ideal as energetically as Rudin or Lazare, they have at least retained their faith in it - and this is nowhere more evident than in comparison to Théophile and Deslauriers. Horace's agonized soul-searching over his decision to back out on Laravinière contrasts very favorably indeed with the smug and hypocritical Théophile's justification: 'fils de gentilhomme, ami et parent de légitimistes, j'ai une sorte de dignité extérieure assez délicate à garder. [...] Il y a là une question de convenances',[315] as does, for example, Frédéric's refusal to stay with Madame Dambreuse for the sake of her income with Deslaurier's cynical and unfeeling seduction of Louise. Borie notes of Frédéric that:

> Il est [...], malgré tout, intelligent et lucide. Il émerge de cette histoire assez sordide relativement non compromis - ni magouilleur, ni fanatique - non abruti [...], non sali, à peu près intègre et disponible. Car aussi passif qu'on le juge, il y a tout de même un mot qu'il sait dire - le mot *non* - et une chose qu'il sait faire: prendre congé.[316]

---

[314] Borie (1995), pp. 155-6.

[315] *Horace*, p. 264.

[316] Borie (1995), pp. 157-8.

and the same could be said of Horace - who is, after all, 'un homme plus faible que mauvais, et plus malheureux que coupable'.[317]

Thus, despite his strong ethical and civic sense, the idealistic cerebralism of the visionary fatally hampers him from taking meaningful action. None of our visionaries are lacking in physical courage - indeed, all four face danger calmly and bravely (Rudin, of course, on the barricades; Horace facing down several would-be attackers; Frédéric in his duel; Lazare in the burning house); but except for Rudin's last stand, this heroic action is either wholly unavoidable or it is the impulse of a moment. It is when the visionary is faced with a decision, with action which would demonstrate, once and for all, his commitment to a cause, that he falters. As Horace cries despairingly: 'Je voudrais, moi aussi, avoir une espérance, une conviction assez forte pour me faire hacher à coups de sabre derrière une barricade.'[318]

[317] *Horace*, p. 339.

[318] *Horace*, p. 233.

E. Seeking of Soulmates

As we have seen, the superfluous man is profoundly isolated on both the societal and the personal levels; just as he is unable to find a role in society, he is inevitably unsuccessful in seeking out and keeping soulmates. Indeed, his search is doomed to failure, for any successful break from his isolation would signify reintegration into society and an end to his superfluity. Although the visionary is a better and more successful communicator than any other generation of superfluous man - and therefore the least isolated - he is still unable to overcome the essential barrier which separates him from society.

The visionary's search is both more honest and less destructive than that of either the dandy or the rebel. Where the dandy was primarily concerned with making an impression and the rebel with domination, the visionary seeks disciples to share his 'visions'. Thus, although he still attempts to establish an ascendancy over others, it is a relatively benign *intellectual* ascendancy. However, the cerebral idealism of the visionary sabotages his search for soulmates as it does his intellectual endeavors. The visionary's preference for abstract concepts and imaginative ideals results in, as Seeley notes, 'a striking emotional poverty coupled with a no less striking perceptual obtuseness'.[319]

Rudin constantly misjudges both situations and individuals, displaying an astonishing amount of social naïveté as well as a total lack of judgment. He takes the second-rate society hostess Darya Mikhailovna at her own estimate as 'a remarkable woman'; he does not understand Volyntsev and thus thoroughly humiliates him; he fails to notice either the quality of Natalya's understanding or the strength of Basistov's devotion. Despite this, however, his abundant eloquence and charisma attracts others; this lack of understanding is not enough, by itself, to destroy his appeal. It is, instead, the visionary's overreliance on cerebralism - his preference for an imaginary ideal over a tangible but unideal reality - which dooms his relationships to failure (as it does his experiments). As James Woodward notes:

> The recurrent expression of his 'controlled self-esteem' is his curious inability to sustain his successes, to complete any action on which he embarks. Hence the contrast that recurs in his personal relationships. First he attracts, then he repels. 'Domination' is followed by embitterment and rupture, and like 'the Wandering Jew' he is obliged to move on. His fate is conveyed by the 'Scandinavian legend' which he related to his audience in chapter 3: 'A king is sitting with his warriors round a fire in a long, dark hall. The episode occurs on a winter's night. Suddenly a small bird flies in through one open door and out through another. The king remarks that this little bird is like man in the world: it flew in from the darkness and back into the darkness and did not stay long in the warmth and light.' The 'legend' is a metaphor of the main action of the novel, of Rudin's arrival from the

[319] Seeley (1991), p. 172.

> 'darkness' at Lasunskaya's court and abrupt departure two months later. More generally, it alludes to the detachment from reality that explains the brevity of all his relationships.[320]

Seeley notes of Rudin that love 'is something that fires his thought or his imagination, not his blood: his love finds expression not in feeling, not in action, but in ideas and images - in words'.[321] Rudin cannot even decide if he is in love with Natalya or not; as Woodward comments, he is 'seduced by the belief that he is capable of love. He is portrayed, like Natalya, as a victim of his eloquence. He literally talks himself into believing that his emotions are alive.'[322] (Later, having learned nothing, Rudin repeats the 'experiment', as Pigasov recounts: 'Rudin came to the conclusion with the aid of philosophy that he ought to fall in love. He began to look for a subject worthy of such a startling conclusion.'[323]) At no time is Rudin able to stop *thinking* long enough to *feel*; although 'there was much warmheartedness in him', it is 'that particular warmheartedness with which people are filled who are accustomed to feeling themselves superior to others'.[324] Thus, while Rudin easily attracts others, he is unable to relate to them - except intellectually, and more explicitly as a superior intelligence. This explains both his total failure to appreciate Basistov:

> Basistov continued to worship Rudin and catch every winged word he spoke. Rudin paid little attention to him. On one occasion he spent a whole morning with him, discussed with him the most important world problems and aims and aroused in him the most lively enthusiasm, only to drop him afterwards...Evidently it was only so much talk on his part that he was seeking pure and devoted fellow spirits.[325]

and his confusion when Natalya suddenly attempts to move their relationship from the intellectual plane - where 'he was her mentor, her guide' and 'was not unduly worried whether she understood so long as she listened to him'[326] - to the emotional.

Horace displays very similar weaknesses in both his personal and social relationships. Like Rudin, he is a hopeless judge of character, taking Léonie and the marquis

---

[320] James B. Woodward, *Metaphysical Conflict: A Study of the Major Novels of Ivan Turgenev* (Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1990), p. 21.

[321] Seeley (1991), p 175.

[322] Woodward, p. 25.

[323] *Rudin*, p. 155.

[324] *Rudin*, p. 67.

[325] *Rudin*, p. 86.

[326] *Rudin*, p. 87.

de Vernes at face value and grossly underestimating both Marthe and Paul Arsène. He also shares Rudin's 'emotional poverty'; he *thinks* himself into love with all three of his 'passions'. Most striking, however, is not only Horace's initial naïve insistence upon his *intellectual conception* of what ideal love should be:

> Je n'ai pas encore rencontré la vierge idéale pour laquelle mon coeur doit se donner la peine de battre. [...] Moi, si je me livre à l'amour, je veux qu'il me blesse profondément, qu'il m'électrise, qu'il me navre, ou qu'il m'exalte au troisième ciel et m'enivre de voluptés.[327]

but his absolute refusal to compromise; when he finally realizes that despite his best efforts Marthe will never fit his ideal ('J'aspire à un amour sublime, je n'en éprouve qu'un misérable. Je voudrais embrasser l'idéal, et je n'étreins que la réalité'[328]) he simply reinvents both her and their relationship through intellectual means; he rewrites their love to *his* specification in his one successful novel.

Thus, although Horace is relatively sincere in his need for love and friendship ('Il avait horreur de la solitude, et il avait besoin du dévouement d'autrui'[329]), he is fatally hampered both by his insistence upon his own superiority - his preference for disciples, rather than equals - and by the fact that reality will never live up to his ideal:

> Horace n'était point né passionné. Sa personnalité avait pris de telles dimensions dans son cerveau, qu'aucune tentation n'était digne de lui. Il lui eût fallu des êtres sublimes pour éveiller son enthousiasme.[330]

> Oh! mon cher Horace, tu n'es pas, tu ne peux être le don Juan que décrit Hoffmann, encore moins celui de Byron. Ces créations occupent trop ton cerveau, et tu te manières pour les faire passer dans la réalité de ta vie. Mais tu es plus jeune et plus puissant que ces fantômes-là.[331]

Frédéric, exhibiting a stunning incomprehension of relationships both personal and social, spectacularly misjudges and misunderstands everyone with whom he comes into contact. As Borie notes, he displays the same pattern of attraction/ repulsion as our other visionaries:

> Frédéric a généralement d'assez mauvais rapports avec les autres, soit qu'il n'arrive pas à dépasser le stade des relations superficielles, soit, s'il y

---

[327] *Horace*, pp. 22-3.

[328] *Horace,* p. 242.

[329] *Horace*, p. 220.

[330] *Horace*, p. 104.

[331] *Horace*, pp. 320-21.

> parvient, que l'intimité établie tourne mal assez vite. Ce n'est pas qu'il soit insociable, on pourrait même dire, au contraire, qu'il est de sociabilité ouverte et facile. [...] Alors d'où vient cette impression qu'il n'est pas bien avec les autres, qu'il n'est pas de plain-pied, immergé dans la sociabilité commes les autres le sont? La réponse est évidente: le plus souvent, il ne comprend pas exactement ce qui se passe autour de lui.[332]

More than any of our other visionaries, Frédéric is so absorbed in his vision of an 'ideal' world drawn from literature that he wholly fails to understand the real; this is, of course, most obvious in his relationship with Mme Arnoux (not only is he attracted to her because 'elle ressemblait aux femmes des livres romantiques'[333], but he clings to this view of her throughout his increasing intimacy with her very prosaic life - he simply refuses to accept her reality) but it is evident in all of his other relationships. As Borie notes: 'Ce n'est pas qu'il soit *bête*, c'est qu'il ne pénètre pas les desseins des autres. Lui vit les yeux fixés sur les mirages du désir, les autres s'activent dans un réseau permanent de transactions et d'échanges.'[334] Frédéric, despite his sincere wish for love and friendship, is unable either to understand or to relate to the real world, and all of his efforts end as did his 'celebratory' supper:

> Frédéric était resté seul. Il pensait à ses amis, et sentait entre eux et lui comme un grand fossé plein d'ombre qui les séparait. Il leur avait tendu la main cependant, et ils n'avaient répondu à la franchise de son coeur.[335]

Lazare is alone among our visionaries in that we do not see him in any social setting other than the family home. Even here, however, the visionary's flawed understanding is evident; Lazare totally fails to comprehend his mother's machinations or to appreciate Pauline's devotion. Believing Louise to represent an ideal of sexual and romantic love, he severely misjudges her character. Lazare, too, although sincere in his need for love and friendship, is fatally hampered by his reliance on cerebral ideals.

Thus, the visionary is, in general, no more successful in finding and keeping soulmates than the dandy or rebel. However, there is one major difference between the visionary and our other three generations; intriguingly, each of our visionaries is shadowed by the continual presence of a non-superfluous character - Rudin/Lezhnev, Horace/Théophile, Frédéric/Deslauriers, Lazare/Pauline - who does not follow the pattern of the visionary's other relationships. In each text, this character takes on the role of

---

[332] Borie (1995), pp. 150-51.

[333] *L'Education sentimentale*, p. 27.

[334] Borie (1995), pp. 154-5.

[335] *L'Education sentimentale*, p. 163.

conscience or judge of the superfluous man - unimpaired by the visionary's precarious grasp of reality. These characters do not follow the attraction/ repulsion pattern of the visionary's other relationships; rather, they form lasting relationships with their superfluous counterpart. However, this does not represent either integration into society or the breaking of the visionary's isolation, but rather a microcosm of the relationship between the visionary and society and a personification of the theme of collective judgment which runs through all four texts. Each of our 'judges' - although initially attracted to the visionary because of his quality of difference, his 'apartness' - comes to see him as a threat to be competed with and, eventually, vanquished; and this pattern is strikingly similar in all four novels.

Thus, Lezhnev is, during their shared university years, an admiring disciple and loyal friend of Rudin's; later, this sours into competition and mistrust until the point that, when Rudin suddenly arrives at the Lasunskaya's, '[Lezhnev's] instinctive reaction is to recoil, to bristle, to growl'.[336] Lezhnev, unlike Rudin, has 'grown up' and integrated with society - and Rudin, with his fruitless but enticing visions, threatens the stability and happiness of that society. Although his toast to Rudin at the end of the novel is genuine, it is not until Rudin has wholly ceased to threaten that stability that Lezhnev softens his judgment, as Eidelman notes:

> Lezhnev does extend a measure of sympathy to Rudin eventually. But even though Lezhnev voluntarily reverses his original verdict of Rudin, the result is of dubious value. Only when Rudin has sought refuge in distant parts does Lezhnev appreciate him. Drinking to his health, he praises those qualities that distinguish Rudin as a unique individual, qualities which he had formerly decried as vices and affectations. No longer an intruder on Lezhnev's turf, Rudin eventually wins Lezhnev's forgiveness. Significantly, his change of heart occurs immediately following Lezhnev's dismissal of all of Rudin's practical efforts during the interval since his break with Natalya.[...] Lezhnev's change of opinion derives from a surge of sympathy and the security that Rudin can no longer wield influence over anyone with whom Lezhnev is acquainted.[337]

Théophile's relations with Horace follow a similar, if slightly different, progression; he, too, is initially attracted to, and then unrelentingly judgmental of Horace because of his 'superfluous' qualities. Théophile never rejects Horace, as did Lezhnev; instead, he initiates a power struggle, attempting to make a protege of Horace and thus to wield the same influence and power over him as he does over Eugénie, Marthe, and Paul Arsène and his sisters. Théophile, a sanctimonious and hypocritical petty dictator, cannot stand Horace's increasing influence over Marthe and does everything in his power to keep them apart - until

---

[336] Seeley (1991), p. 171.

[337] Dawn D. Eidelman, *George Sand and the Nineteenth-Century Russian Love-Triangle Novels* (London: Associated University Press, 1994), p. 127.

he decides that Marthe may be, after all, a 'civilizing' influence on Horace (a plan which, of course, fails dismally). Horace threatens Théophile's tiny and orderly world with his unwieldy emotions; and it is not until he apparently submits to Théophile's judgment that he is unconditionally praised.

Deslauriers, too, displays anything but unconditional friendship; instead, his initial admiration of Frédéric soon turns to jealousy and his pleasure at Frédéric's successes to open competition. Not only does Deslauriers attempt to seduce Mme Arnoux in the mistaken belief that she is, in fact, Frédéric's mistress; he also establishes a relationship of influence with Mme Dambreuse in Frédéric's absence and, of course, he preempts Louise's love entirely, marrying her behind Frédéric's back. Like Lezhnev and Théophile, Deslauriers is eventually reconciled with Frédéric; and like them, this reconciliation is only effected once Frédéric, his 'superior' qualities muted, is no longer a threat:

> Deslauriers [...] aimait mieux Frédéric dans la médiocrité. De cette manière, il restait son égal, et en communion plus intime avec lui.[338]

The case of Lazare and Pauline is, on the surface, slightly different; she is a rejected lover, rather than a male friend. However, Pauline does, in fact, fulfill the same role as conscience/judge as Lezhnev, Théophile, and Deslauriers. She is, to begin with, a loyal and admiring disciple of Lazare; but unlike him, she matures, is reconciled with society, and no longer admires Lazare's difference. In fact, she becomes the guardian of Lazare's restricted society. Pauline is able to 'forgive' Lazare for his betrayal because she has assumed a position of total power over him - and she works constantly to ensure that he is no threat to the stability of her tiny fiefdom.

The constant presence of 'conscience' character in these texts is intriguing. Lezhnev, Théophile, Deslauriers, and Pauline are, to many critics, the more attractive characters; in this view, they represent the marriage of ideas and practical action which the visionary is wholly incapable of accomplishing. This is, however, untrue. What these characters actually represent is submission: a loss, rather than a marriage. Victor Ripp comments: 'Lezhnev makes clear that he had fully accepted Romanticism, having gone so far as to write a play modeled on Byron's *Manfred*. He has now recanted, but can he blame Rudin merely for believing in what he himself once did?'[339] Théophile, Deslauriers, and Pauline have also 'recanted' - and the same question can be asked.

---

[338] *L'Education sentimentale*, p. 293.

[339] Ripp, p. 131.

F. Foreign Influence

As we have seen, the idea of the 'foreign' held a dual significance to both the dandy and the rebel; it represented, firstly, an openness to new ideas and philosophies, a break from the superficial cosmopolitanism of the traditional nobility, and, secondly, a means of escape - the conviction that the 'foreign' had something to offer which they could not find in their native environment. This fundamental attraction to the 'foreign' continues with the visionary. There was a dark side, however, to the cosmopolitanism of the dandy and the rebel; in rejecting their own milieu for the belief that a place existed where they would be a 'stranger' only in the literal sense of the word, they became perpetual strangers, no more able to fit back into their own society than they were able to adopt another - and this, too, continues with the visionary.

Rudin - 'steeped in German poetry, in the world of German Romanticism and German philosophy'[340] - is very explicitly drawn as a representative of the 'profound' foreign, as opposed to Darya Mikhaylovna, who represents the superficial. As Henri Granjard notes:

> Deux mondes se heurtent dans l'oeuvre. D'un côté, Darya Mikhaylovna et la noblesse provinciale qui n'ont emprunté à l'Occident que le décor élégant de la vie et la culture européenne superficielle qui les distingue de la plèbe commerçante et rurale. [...] De l'autre, Roudine, et, derrière lui, l'élite intellectuelle des années 'quarante' qui ont accepté l'idéalisme philosophique et humanitaire comme une foi nouvelle, armé de laquelle on pourrait réformer radicalement la réalité russe.[341]

Having digested this 'new faith' more thoroughly than the dandy or rebel, Rudin sincerely attempts to pass it on: reading to Natalya from Goethe, Hoffmann, and Novalis, he 'drew her with him into those lands of fairytale promise' and her reaction is entirely that which he expects:

> From the pages of the book which Rudin held in his hands wonderful pictures and new, mint-bright ideas literally poured in resonant torrents into her soul, and in her heart, shaken by the noble joy of great feelings, a sacred spark of exultation was gently kindled and caught alight.[342]

---

[340] *Rudin*, p. 87.

[341] Henri Granjard, *Ivan Tourguénev et les courants politiques et sociaux de son temps* (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Slaves de l'Université de Paris, 1954), p. 237.

[342] *Rudin*, p. 87.

Yet, as Granjard continues: 'L'apôtre de l'idéal, le propogandiste des rêves [...] est d'ailleurs trop indécis, trop faible pour avoir quelques chances de vaincre'.[343] Having kindled the spark, Rudin is unable to sustain it.

Lezhnev comments at one point that: 'There's no disputing that he's eloquent; only his eloquence isn't Russian'.[344] Rudin, in gaining his understanding of the 'foreign', has lost understanding of the 'native' - and is, therefore, unable to bring about a synthesis of the two. Although Rudin has managed to absorb the 'profound' foreign in a way alien to Darya Lasunskaya and her ilk, he is still totally unable to find a practical way to integrate his new ideas and ideals into his native environment.

Our three French visionaries, like Rudin, have been fundamentally influenced by the 'profound' foreign of literature and philosophy, of ideals and ideas. Like him, too, they share the vague conviction that the 'foreign' offers them something which is missing in their native environment. This is, of course, most obvious in Frédéric - who is, as Giraud notes, a 'maniac of exoticism - that tendency of the imagination to emigrate in space or in time, because one feels uncomfortable in one's country or in one's age'[345] - but it is not lacking in either Horace (who, like Frédéric, attempts to escape to the foreign (Italy) after his disillusioning experiences) or Lazare - who, indeed, shares both Frédéric's idealistic conception of the 'foreign' and the mistaken belief that this 'ideal' world exists:

> Je songe souvent que nous aurions dû nous expatrier [...], nous enfuir bien loin, en Océanie par example, dans une de ces îles où la vie est si douce. [...] Tu te souviens de ce livre de voyages que nous lisions ensemble, il y a douze ans? On vit là-bas comme dans un paradis. Jamais d'hiver, un ciel éternellement bleu, une existence au soleil et aux étoiles. [...] Nous aurions eu une cabane, nous aurions mangé des fruits délicieux, et rien à faire, et pas un chagrin![346]

Each is presented as an ambassador of the 'foreign' and as a symbol of the conflict between cosmopolitanism and provincialism, openness and parochialism. Like Rudin, however, they are wholly unable to integrate their 'foreign' paradigm with their 'native' environment; in basing their expectations and ambitions so thoroughly upon their idealized version of the foreign, they have lost their ability to live within the strictures of the native. Richard Freeborn notes that:

---

[343] Granjard, p. 237.

[344] *Rudin*, p. 91.

[345] Giraud, p. 151.

[346] *La Joie de vivre*, p. 1250. Revealingly, Pauline's response to Lazare's beautiful vision is both dismissive ('Es-tu fou, mon pauvre ami!') and pathetically practical: she asks what would be done with the crippled Chanteau and raises the necessity of hunting, fishing, and cultivating crops.

> All of Turgenev's heroes are strangers to the situations of their respective novels [...], while his heroines are integral parts of their novels' 'place'. [...] It is in the relationship between the hero who enters from outside and the heroine who embodies the most characteristic or typical features of the 'place' of the novel that the contrast becomes apparent. [...] The contrast afforded by the presence of the stranger-hero in the 'place' of the fiction is usually, firstly, that between the new and the old, between the modern and the traditional, between the younger and older generation, between experience and innocence, because the hero usually personifies a new ideological attitude which is strange and alluring to the heroine of the 'place'.[347]

Not only Rudin, but also Horace, Frédéric, and Lazare can be seen as 'stranger-heroes', perpetually attempting to fit into the 'places' of Natalya, of Marthe or of Léoni, of Mme Arnoux, Rosanette, or Mme Dambreuse, of Pauline or Louise - and always failing. To the end, the visionary is unable to find a place.

> Il voyagea.
> Il connut la mélancolie des paquebots, les froids réveils sous la tente, l'étourdissement des paysages et des ruines, l'amertume des sympathies interrompues.
> Il revint.[348]

[347] Freeborn (1960), p. 54.

[348] *L'Education sentimentale*, p. 450.

G. Femininity

As we have seen already with the dandy and the rebel, the superfluous man is almost always 'feminized' to some degree; the sexual ambivalence of these heroes serves to graphically represent their social and political impotence as well as their ambiguous position in society. The visionary, of course, is no exception - all four of our heroes are variously portrayed as feminine and/or childlike, but very rarely as overtly 'masculine', and all four are explicitly set in opposition to a female character who is revealed to be stronger and/or wiser than they. Unlike our other three types of superfluous man, however, the visionary is more often seen as childlike than feminine; his passivity and ineffectualness are portrayed more as an marker of his naïve enthusiasm then a symbol of his weakness. His 'femininity' is, therefore, less overtly negative than in any of our other three generations.

The problematic nature of Rudin's masculinity is signaled from his very first appearance, when we are told that 'The high-pitched sound of Rudin's voice was out of keeping with his stature and broad chest'.[349] More than this, however: throughout the novel, he plays a passive (and therefore 'feminine'), rather than an active (and therefore 'masculine') role. This is, of course, evident in his relationship with Natalya - it is she, rather than Rudin, who begins, advances, and ends their relationship - and even with Darya Mikhaylovna, whose edict he meekly accepts, as a child would. It is Lezhnev, however, who throws the most light upon Rudin's nature. At first, he portrays him as feminine:

> Natalya's no child; believe me, she thinks more deeply and more often than you and I. And now this honest, passionate, ardent girl's got to come across this actor of a fellow, coquette of a man! [...] What role has he got at Darya Mikhaylovna's? Being an idol, an oracle in the household, getting involved in the domestic arrangements, in family gossip and squabbles - is that worthy of a real man?[350]

But later, he revises his earlier judgment; Rudin is not feminine, but childlike:

> He is not an actor, as I called him previously, not a swindler, not a scoundrel; he lives at someone else's expense not like a sponger, but like a child.[351]

The inescapable conclusion is that Rudin, unlike Lezhnev himself, has arrested at an adolescent state, unable to shake off his juvenile illusions:

> I cried like a child when I saw him off for abroad. However, truth to tell, a seed of doubt had already been sown in my heart even then. And when I met

[349] *Rudin,* p. 52.

[350] *Rudin,* p. 93.

[351] *Rudin*, p. 157.

him later, abroad...well, I'd already matured...I then saw Rudin in his real light.[352]

While Natalya is 'no child, though unfortunately she's as inexperienced as a child'[353] Rudin - despite his experiences - remains childlike. Nevertheless, this is not wholly negative; for Lezhnev, precisely in maturing, has lost some quality which Rudin retains - and it is a lack of which he is conscious. As Woodward notes:

> In his farewell letter to Natalya, which is reproduced in chapter 11, Rudin quotes the line from Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*: 'Blessed is he who was young in his youth'. It is as a 'youth' or 'child' that Lezhnev now depicts him, disclosing once more his own nostalgia for 'youth' despite the contentment that he has discovered with Lipina. [...] And his toast to Rudin at the end of his speech is appropriately combined with a toast to youth - to 'its hopes, its aspirations, its trustfulness, its honesty, to everything that made our hearts beat at the age of twenty and which was better than anything else that we've known and are likely to know in our lives...I drink to you, the golden time of our lives. I drink Rudin's health.' Thus, as confirmed by the contrast in Lezhnev's own portrait, the motif of 'youth' alludes not only to the helplessness of the innocent child adrift in a world of self-interested adults, to his inability to maintain himself in the 'war of wills', but to the ability to be enthused by altruistic ideals which offer the vision of a better, more 'harmonious' world. [...] But Rudin's quotation from Pushkin's 'novel in verse' significantly omits the following line: 'But blessed is he who has matured at the proper time'. The omission demotes the hero's ignorance of the 'antithesis' represented by Lezhnev's 'second phase', and the Epilogue reiterates the familiar results. With his accounts to Lezhnev of his most recent adventures, which appropriately culminated in lecturing to children, he confirms that despite the experience of hardship [...], he remains to the end essentially unchanged.[354]

Horace, too, exhibits both feminine and childlike qualities. He is set in opposition to an older and 'wiser' female character - Marthe - who, 'in an ironic twist [...], makes her living doing successfully what Horace attempted to do. Whereas Horace is less than he seems, Marthe accomplishes much more.'[355] Like Rudin, too, he is judged by his 'mentor' - Théophile - to be feminine not only in his appearance ('Il avait la main blanche comme celle d'une femme, les ongles taillés en biseau'[356]) but in his very nature:

---

[352] *Rudin*, p 102.

[353] *Rudin*, p. 102.

[354] Woodward, pp. 37-8. 'Youth' also has *positive*, not negative, connotations in connection with Pokorsky, Basistov, Lipina, and to some extent, Natalya.

[355] Robert Godwin-Jones, *Romantic Vision: The Novels of George Sand* (Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, 1995), p. 119.

[356] *Horace*, p. 351.

> [Horace] est ce que nous appellons *douillet.* Je l'ai vu une fois tenir tête, dans la rue, à des gens de mauvaise mine qui voulaient l'attaquer, et que sa bonne contenance a fait reculer; mais je l'ai vu aussi tomber en défaillance pour une petite coupure qu'il s'était faite au bout du doigt en taillant sa plume. C'est une nature de femme, malgré sa barbe de Jupiter Olympien.[357]

Despite this, however, Horace is portrayed as significantly more childlike than feminine. Not only is he is regarded (and often referred to as) by almost every other character - Théophile, Eugénie, Jean Laravinière, Paul Arsène, Marthe herself - as a child; but his own behavior is rarely that of a responsible adult, and he himself retreats to a childlike role when it is necessary to avoid conflict or responsibility, as Dawn Eidelman notes:

> Horace argues that because he lacks financial security, he is in no position to serve as protector to a woman. He asks Théophile how he can be expected to marry when he hasn't been able to take care of his own life properly. 'Cela n'a pas de sens commun! Je suis mineur, et mes parents ne me permettront jamais'. Ironically, although Horace challenges his parents' authority in every aspect of his life otherwise, he retreats to the security they offer when challenged with adult responsibilities. Moreover, when Horace believes the insurrection is imminent, he seeks refuge from Théophile, asking his advice. The narrator offers Horace an honorable excuse to break his commitment. Horace, unable to face the inevitable ridicule such a change in attitude would elicit from Laravinière, leaves Paris claiming that his mother has fallen ill. Once again he retreats to the parental security so cherished by a child (if only as an excuse).[358]

Again, however, Horace's childishness is not portrayed as entirely negative; he inspires not just scorn, but also trust, friendship, admiration, and protectiveness on the part of others. The pragmatic, sanctimonious, and old-before-his-time Théophile is dull, lifeless, and uninspiring in comparison - and he himself knows and admits this.

Frédéric, too, is explicitly portrayed as both feminine and childlike. Frédéric's femininity is highlighted by Deslauriers: Frédéric 'se mit à trembler comme une femme adultère sous le regard de son époux'[359] when he is afraid of his friend's censure; later, in response to Frédéric's plea to stop tormenting him with the name of Arnoux, Deslauriers mocks 'les nerfs de Mademoiselle'[360] and, famously, he terms Frédéric's library 'une

---

[357] *Horace,* p. 240.

[358] Eidelman, p. 128.

[359] *L'Education sentimentale*, p. 62.

[360] *L'Education sentimentale*, p. 79.

bibliothèque de petite fille'.[361] Frédéric is the passive partner in relationships with not just one, but three women who are variously represented as stronger and more worldly - Mme. Dambreuse, Rosanette, and Mme. Arnoux - allowing them (whether they do so consciously or not) to dictate his every action. Frédéric is also regarded as childlike and/or feminine by the two older male characters who, along with Deslauriers, act as mentors: Arnoux and M. Dambreuse. Even la Vatnaz patronizes him. Like Horace, Frédéric tends to seek refuge by returning to his childhood home when adult decisions are about to be forced upon him.[362]

Frédéric is never able to rid himself of his immature and unrealizable aspirations; he is introduced as a romantic adolescent, and - despite his successive disillusionments - he exits fundamentally unchanged. As Borie notes: 'Frédéric fera toujours petit garçon gâté, petit jeune homme.'[363] Once more, however, this is not by any means presented in a completely negative light, as Raymond Giraud comments: 'He cannot settle down to any steady productive work or get rid of many of his silly juvenile illusions. He is, however, potentially more noble than many of his friends'.[364] It is precisely that naive and stubborn enthusiasm that sets Frédéric apart from others - and what attracts and holds others to him despite everything.

Lazare is the most explicitly feminine and childlike of all of our visionaries; the eventual extent of the masculine/feminine inversion between him and his female counterpart, Pauline, is foreshadowed from the very first pages of the novel, where he is introduced to her as 'un grand galopin qui est moins sage que toi'.[365] It is Pauline who, from the beginning, takes the lead in their relationship:

> Cette gamine continuait à le surprendre. Il éprouvait, depuis qu'elle était là, une timidité de grand garçon gauche. [...] Il allait la tutoyer, il se reprit. [...] Et ce fut elle qui tutoya la première le jeune homme, en lui prenant les mains, comme pour jouer.[366]

Although Pauline is presented as nearly a decade younger than Lazare at this point, she - unlike Lazare - will evolve and mature. In contrast, this passivity of Lazare - as opposed to the purposeful activity of Pauline and Mme Chanteau - increases to the point where he

---

[361] *L'Education sentimentale*, p. 162.

[362] It is perhaps worthy of mention in this context that he is greatly attracted to both Mme. Arnoux and Rosanette in their role of mother.

[363] Borie (1995,) p. 146.

[364] Giraud, p. 148.

[365] *La Joie de vivre*, p. 1043.

[366] *La Joie de vivre,* p. 1046.

becomes nothing more than an object, completely controlled by the desires of others, as Borie notes:

> Lazare est le trésor privé de sa mère. De cet objet qu'elle possède, elle vante les charmes, les avantages physiques à la future bru, qu'il faut convaincre, dont il faut éveiller l'envie. Le désir propre de Lazare est à peine un des éléments de la transaction, il va sans dire, et son exercice sera soigneusement dirigé. [...] La virilité de Lazare est devenue monnaie d'échange entre ces femmes, banquières d'amour qui contrôlent souverainement le marché.[367]

This objectification culminates in Pauline's 'gift' of Lazare to Louise. Lazare and Louise are diminished to the status of squabbling children - as Chanteau himself has been throughout the text - and completing the gender/age reversal, Pauline eventually assumes all the roles occupied by Mme Chanteau before her death: matriarch, not only mother-figure but head of a household where all males (including the dogs) are - actually or metaphorically, physically or emotionally - infants.[368]

Like Rudin, Horace, and Frédéric, Lazare's childishness is portrayed in a semi-positive light during his 'experimental' period; his enthusiasm and ardor (however temporary, however futile) are both attractive to and communicable to others. However, Lazare neither matures past the point at which he started - as do Lezhnev, Théophile, Deslauriers, and Pauline - nor does he remain there - as do Rudin, Horace, and Frédéric. Instead, he *regresses* - unlike them, he returns to the parental home seeking *permanent*, rather than temporary refuge from adult status - and it is at this point that his 'youth' loses any positive connotations and becomes wholly negative.

Thus, all four of our visionaries are presented to a significant degree as feminine and especially as childlike. All have, seemingly, reached the peak of their spiritual, emotional, and intellectual development at adolescence - and are then unable to progress past this point, to harness their abilities to any practical end. Lezhnev remarks of Rudin that: 'We've got a bit wiser since then, of course. It can all seem childish to us now. [...] However, unfortunately he's not changed'[369] - and this comment could easily refer to Horace, Frédéric, or Lazare.

---

[367] Borie (1973), p. 107. Significantly, even in bartering, Mme Chanteau speaks not of Lazare's virility, but of his tenderness, his steadfastness, and his soft skin - all attributes more easily imagined in a young girl.

[368] Borie notes that an earlier conception of the novel included a virile, strong, and healthy male rival (Charles) for Pauline, not a female rival for Lazare. Pauline would bear Lazare's son, after which Lazare would commit suicide, and Charles and Pauline would marry. 'Son absence indique simplement que les valeurs de la virilité, du courage, de la force et de la santé, partagées un moment entre Pauline et Charles, sont maintenant regroupées en Pauline.' (1973, p. 64.)

[369] *Rudin*, p. 97.

3. The Visionary's Legacy

From the dandy, the visionary inherited social and political progressiveness; from the rebel, the ideas and ideals of romantic heroism. He is endowed, too - like all superfluous men - with superior intelligence and sensibility. Despite this potent mix, however, the visionary is wholly unable to bridge the gap between abstract ideals and meaningful action. His vision, although inspired, is fatally unrealistic; he 'sees' the ideal rather than the real - and his efforts are thus misdirected and, ultimately, futile. Forced, unlike his predecessors, to rely on his intrinsic abilities to distinguish himself from the crowd, the visionary has come to rely too much on the power of ideas alone. He is a prophet, rather than a missionary - able to cry in the wilderness but not to conquer it. The visionary is thus fundamentally passive; he is caught up by events and moved by forces outside his control - and often outside his understanding, for his naïve concentration on a future ideal leaves little room for the present reality. The potential of the visionary thus remains - like that of all superfluous men - unfulfilled.

Despite his superfluity, however, the visionary is nevertheless the direct and recognizable predecessor of the intellectual in literature and in life. Emerging at a time of unprecedented social change - the emergence in Russia of the raznochintsy as a societal force and the triumph in France of the bourgeoisie - the visionary represents the embryonic form of a non-class based 'intelligentsia' in both Russia and France. His faith in ideas and ideals and his social and political progressiveness - even his naïve refusal to recognize the sheer inertial power of conventional society - are the recognizable precursors of the socially active and politically radical modern intellectual.

The visionary stands, as Seeley notes, at a 'parting of the ways'. On the one hand, he is superseded by the intellectual hero, who, inheriting his idealism and social conscience, is radical and progressive - and *capable of translating ideals into actions*: the visionary 'could not take that road, but he looked along it and urged others to follow it.'[370] On the other hand, however, he is succeeded by the final generation of nineteenth-century superfluous man - the 'dreamer' - who inherits not only his dreamy idealism, but his inability to act upon it.

[370] Seeley (1994), p. 19.

CHAPTER 4: THE 'DREAMER'

1. The Dreamer's Inheritance

> 'Why has it all been ruined?' she asked suddenly, raising her head. 'Who laid a curse on you, Ilya? What have you done? You are kind, intelligent, tender, honorable, and - you are going to wrack and ruin! What has ruined you? There is no name for that evil...'
> 'There is,' he said in a hardly audible whisper.
> She looked at him questioningly with her eyes full of tears.
> 'Oblomovism!' he whispered.[371]

As we have seen, the visionary marked a parting of ways; although superfluous himself, he would lead directly to the intellectual hero in both Russian and French literature. However, he did not mark the end of the superfluous man in either literature. As Seeley notes: 'On the one hand the road leads (upwards) out of the domain of the "superfluous". [...] On the other hand the road led downwards past the "defeated", from the heyday of the "superfluous man" through his twilight and evening.'[372] It is with the 'twilight and evening' of the nineteenth-century superfluous man that we shall be concerned in this chapter.

The model for the 'dreamer' type of superfluous man is supplied by Ivan Goncharov's Oblomov (*Oblomov*, 1859), while J.-K. Huysmans' des Esseintes (*A rebours*, 1884) best illustrates this type in French literature. Although the publications of *Oblomov* and *A rebours* are separated by more than twenty years and the tones of the novels differ wildly, there are extraordinary similarities both in the heroes' internal psychology and in their external relations to society. More than this, both Oblomov and des Esseintes are recognizable 'sons' of earlier generations of superfluous men - all the way back to René. Perhaps most importantly, both *Oblomov* and *A rebours* present 'a portrait of the hero or ideal man in stress, the social projection of the nineteenth-century age of uneasiness, as he reacts to his often unconscious but sometimes fully realized knowledge that his role on the stage of history [...] will soon come to an abrupt and most inglorious end.'[373]

The 'dreamer' is thus the fourth and final generation of nineteenth-century superfluous men. Unlike his predecessors, however, he does not exist in the relatively straight progression towards the intellectual hero, but rather in a sort of shadowy backwater. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, an identifiable intellectual elite had formed in

---

[371] *Oblomov,* p. 365.

[372] Seeley (1994), p. 19.

[373] George Ross Ridge, *The Hero in French Decadent Literature* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1961), p. 177.

both Russia and France; and although superfluous characters continued to appear,[374] the 'golden age' of the superfluous man as precursor of a new elite had passed. The dreamer can be considered, in fact, almost the opposite of our earlier superfluous men; Ellen Chances, indeed, goes so far as to call Oblomov 'almost a parody' of his literary ancestors.[375] Despite this, however, the dreamer is indeed the visionary's 'son'. He shares that most important quality - that of being 'both a social and a metaphysical outcast'[376] - with his superfluous predecessors. Furthermore, he is as at least as direct a development of the visionary's emphasis on cerebralism as is the intellectual hero.

We have noted before that the common thread linking all types of the superfluous man was their rebellion against society and their refusal to conform to social norms due to an innate superiority of intellect and sensibility. The dreamer, too, consciously rejects contemporary society. However, he is unlike his predecessors in that his 'rebellion' involves not overt struggle, but a withdrawal from society - and indeed, from reality itself - for, rather than allowing himself to be 'defeated', the dreamer beats a strategic retreat from the battleground of society straight into the realms of fantasy. Nevertheless, this very retreat is in itself rebellion, as Ridge notes:

> [Any] hero-type acts in response to his society. In this case it is an ugly, decadent society. He withdraws from it in disgust, but the very withdrawal, let it be stressed, is assuredly a form of response.[377]

Whereas the intellectual hero can be regarded as a potent visionary who has gained the ability to act upon his grand words, the dreamer is the opposite - an impotent visionary whose 'visions' no longer have the force to inspire others. The dreamer's 'visions' have lost the social significance, sense of urgency, and sincerity which redeemed the visionary even in the eyes of those who sensed his essential superfluity.[378] This reflects the most fundamental aspect of the dreamer and the major difference between him and his superfluous predecessors. Seeley notes that the dandy appears to live chiefly in the present with little thought of either yesterday or tomorrow, the rebel in memories of his past, and the visionary in hopes for the future. The dreamer's sphere, however, is none of these, but is instead the

---

[374] Consider, for example, the characters of Chekhov, Bunin, and A.N. Tolstoy in Russia, or those of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and Barbey d'Aurevilly in France. Some commentators have even extended the concept of the 'superfluous man' into the twentieth century.

[375] Ellen B. Chances, *Conformity's Children: An Approach to the Superfluous Man in Russian Literature* (Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1978), p.

[376] *Ibid.*

[377] Ridge (1961), p. 105.

[378] i.e. Lezhnev's belated recognition of and praise for Rudin.

timeless world of fantasy. Both Oblomov and des Esseintes prefer to inhabit the realm of imagination; both use their considerable intelligence and abilities to escape as best they can the demands of the real world. It is significant in this context that both novels include a 'dream' episode; both Oblomov and des Esseintes find it difficult, if not impossible, to separate their private fantasies from the world around them (and in any case, they prefer their fantasies). Ridge notes that:

> The world is too heavy for the decadent. It does not meet his expectations, it disgusts him, it overwhelms him. Nature has a negative not positive value, and reality never meets his wish. Thus the decadent rejects actuality, he retreats into himself, and he creates a more satisfactory world of his own. Hence he becomes a cerebral hero, the ideal man of inaction. For what is the purpose of engaging in idealistic quests in a most imperfect world? To do so is not only useless but even naïve.[379]

and this judgment applies equally well to Oblomov. Both Oblomov and des Esseintes are fully aware that the world is passing them by; the dreamer is, perhaps more than any other superfluous man, conscious of his status as outsider. However, he is also aware that he is wholly incapable either of adapting or of openly fighting - so he chooses to dream. The superfluous man has come full circle, back to the hopelessness and conflicted passivity of the dandy. As Oblomov explains to Stolz:

> 'Yes, I am an old, shabby, worn-out coat. [...] For twelve years the light has been shut up within me and, unable to find an outlet, it merely consumed itself inside the prison house and was extinguished without breaking out into the open. And so twelve years have passed, my dear Andrey: I did not want to wake up any more.'
> 'But why didn't you break out? Why didn't you run away somewhere, but preferred to perish in silence?' Stolz asked impatiently.
> 'Where to?'[380]

[379] Ridge (1961), p. 83.

[380] *Oblomov*, p. 184.

2. Identifying Characteristics

A. Ambiguity of familial and social status

As we have seen, the familial and social status of the superfluous man has declined sharply through the three types examined so far, reflecting the decline of the hereditary nobility - and, by extension, the rise of a non-class 'intelligentsia'. This process is continued with the dreamer - even though he is better off financially than the visionary - with the final descent of the traditional nobility into societal irrelevance and the triumph of the 'bourgeoisie' and the 'raznochintsy' in their respective spheres of finance and culture. The dreamer's identity - familial, social, and personal - is profoundly precarious, symbolizing his position as the most superfluous of all superfluous men.

Oblomov is a *barin* - a landowner - with a substantial 300 serfs. However, from the very first pages of the novel it is apparent that this traditional status is shaky and crumbling - and, indeed, has been for some time:

> The room in which Oblomov was lying seemed at first glance to be splendidly furnished. It had a mahogany bureau, two sofas, upholstered in a silk material, and a beautiful screen embroidered with birds and fruits never to be found in nature. It had silk curtains, rugs, a number of pictures, bronze, porcelain, and all sorts of pretty knick-knacks. But an experienced person of good taste casting a cursory glance round the room would at once detect a desire to keep up appearances somehow or other, since appearances had to be kept up. Oblomov, of course, had nothing else in mind when he furnished his study. A man of refined taste would never have been satisfied with those clumsy and heavy mahogany chairs and those rickety book-stands. The back of one of the sofas had dropped and the mahogany veneer had come unstuck in some places. The pictures, vases, and knick-knacks were equally shoddy. [...] Dust-covered cobwebs were festooned round the pictures on the walls; instead of reflecting the objects in the room, the mirrors were more like tablets which might be used for writing memoranda on in the dust. The rugs were covered in stains. A towel had been left on the sofa; almost every morning a dirty plate, with a salt-cellar and a bare bone from the previous night's supper, could be seen on the table, which was strewn with crumbs. If it had not been for this plate and a freshly smoked pipe by the bed, or the owner of the flat himself lying in it, one might have thought that no one lived there - everything was so dusty and faded and void of all living traces of human habitation.[381]

The description of Oblomovka - the family estate - is equally revealing: the gates 'lean to one side'; the wooden roof 'had settled in the middle and was overgrown with tender green

[381] *Oblomov*, pp. 14-15.

moss'; the front steps are 'rickety'; the garden is 'neglected'; the gallery is 'very old and unsafe'.[382] Indeed, decay and neglect are everywhere.

Oblomov is an orphan, and, like all of our superfluous men, the last of a fading line. However, for the first time, this is linked to hereditary decay as well as to social and political factors. Although Dobrolyubov declares that 'Nature has endowed [Oblomov] with the same gifts as she has endowed all men'[383] , there is at least as much indication of hereditary causes of 'Oblomovism'.[384] The gradual decline of the Oblomov family is never explained:

> The Oblomov family had once been rich and famous in its part of the country, but afterwards, goodness only knows why, it had grown poorer, lost all its influence, and, at last, was imperceptibly lost among the newer families of the landed gentry.[385]

Oblomov himself never undergoes a shattering experience of disillusionment like our earlier superfluous men - rather than being reduced to a state of superfluousness by external factors, it is his *natural state*. His propensity to illness (real and imaginary) and, indeed, his very name - derived from *oblomok*, a broken-off or ruined fragment - can be seen as indications of hereditary decay. Although Oblomov does marry and has a son, his marriage represents in no way a regeneration of the Oblomov line. His common-law wife and the mother of his son - Agafya Matveyevna - is lower middle-class; and the boy (named after no Oblomov, but instead, Stolz) is raised by Stolz and Olga. Although this should represent the advent of the classless 'new man', the boy is very specifically described as 'a little gentleman', and the 'spit and image of his father'.[386] We learn nothing of Andrey's future; whether he grows up to be a 'new man' or a strange hybrid like Stolz himself (the product of a Russian noblewoman and a 'middle-class German parvenu', who 'looked with his childish green eyes at three or four different social sets'[387]) is left to the reader's conjecture. However, he will certainly not be a traditional Oblomov.

Des Esseintes' status, too, is crumbling. Orphaned from an early age, he never marries, and is wholly unable to carry on his family line: he is sexually impotent. Although

---

[382] *Oblomov*, p. 111.

[383] Dobrolyubov, p. 185.

[384] Alexandra and Sverre Lyngstad, especially, note the importance of heredity in Goncharov's world-view: 'There is evidence of extensive psychopathology in Goncharov's family, affecting his father, his brother, and one of his sisters. [...] Goncharov himself speaks of his suspiciousness as an "inborn and heredity malady" transmitted from his mother.' (*Ivan Goncharov* (New York: Twayne Publishers,1971), p. 409.)

[385] *Oblomov*, p. 17. It must be remembered that this is still pre-Emancipation.

[386] *Oblomov*, p. 478.

[387] *Oblomov*, p. 156-7.

he, like Oblomov, is significantly wealthier than his immediate predecessors, this cannot hide the underlying rot. The château des Lourps, des Esseintes' ancestral seat, is even more racked with decay than Oblomovka:

> Des boiseries entières tombaient en poudre; des éclats de parquets gisaient par terre dans de la sciure de vieux bois semblable à de la cassonade; des pans de cloisons [...] descendaient en sable fin. Des fentes lézardaient les panneaux, craquelaient les frises, zigzaguaient du haut en bas des portes, traversaient la cheminée. [...] Par endroits, le plafond crevé décelait ses barreaux pourris et ses lattes. [...] Par instants, tout cela craquait.[388]

With *A rebours*, of course, the emphasis on hereditary degeneracy becomes extremely explicit; des Esseintes is 'the prototype of the tired aristocrat, the last son of a dying family in an exhausted race'.[389] As Christopher Lloyd notes, the 'hereditary monsters in the dungeon' are established from the very beginning: 'In the prologue, they are content to look out from the ancestral portraits of the declining generations of Floressas des Esseintes, but from the second half of the book, des Esseintes is dominated by the inherited sickness which Huysmans calls 'la névrose'',[390] and later, this judgment is extended to the whole of the nobility:

> La noblesse décomposée était morte; l'aristocratie avait versé dans l'imbécilité ou dans l'ordure! Elle s'éteignait dans le gâtisme de ses descendants dont les facultés baissaient à chaque génération et aboutissaient à des instincts de gorilles fermentés dans des crânes de palefreniers et de jockeys. [...] Les hôtels mêmes, les écussons séculaires, la tenue héraldique, le maintien pompeux de cette antique caste avaient disparu. Les terres ne rapportant plus, elles avaient été avec les châteaux mises à l'encan, car l'or manquait pour acheter les maléfices vénériens aux descendants hébétés des vieilles races![391]

Despite this, however, neither novel concludes absolutely that heredity is the sole cause of their heroes' decline and 'oblomovism'. Both Oblomov and des Esseintes - despite their intrinsically weak and damaged natures - are also explicitly portrayed as being in *ideological* conflict with society.

We have seen that each generation of superfluous man was inevitably brought into conflict with the older generation of nobility, representatives of 'traditional' social and

---

[388] As described in *En Rade* (1887). See *A rebours*, note pp. 387-8.

[389] Ridge (1961), p. 50.

[390] Christopher Lloyd, *J.-K. Huysmans and the Fin-du-siècle Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. 86-7.

[391] *A rebours*, pp. 341-2.

political values to which he did not - could not - subscribe; and the dreamer is no exception to this. The dreamer, however, is the first superfluous man to come into conflict with both the older *and the younger* generations; more than any of his predecessors, he finds himself 'sandwiched' between two generational ideologies into which he cannot fit.[392] Although both Oblomov and des Esseintes have been seen by some commentators as simple throwbacks - anachronisms - this is far too facile an approach. They are *not* simply old-style aristocrats born a century too late.[393]

Both Oblomov and des Esseintes, in fact, are explicitly shown in conflict with the traditional ethos of the hereditary nobility. We are told, with heavy irony, that Oblomov is 'certainly not like his father and grandfather. He had studied and lived in the world: all that suggested all sorts of ideas that were new to him.'[394] The tragedy, of course, is that he *is* too much like them to survive in the 'new' world - but too *unlike* them to return to the 'old' (which, in any case, is nearing extinction). Although he is unable to act upon these ideas, his mind has been 'quickened'; he can no more revert than adapt - and the same can be seen to apply to des Esseintes. Des Esseintes, too, is unable to fit into the 'old' world:

> Il subit, plusieurs fois [...] d'écrasantes soirées où des parentes, antiques comme le monde, s'entretenaient de quartiers de noblesse, de lunes héraldiques, de cérémoniaux surannés. Plus que ces douairières, les hommes rassemblés autour d'un whist, se révélaient ainsi que des êtres immuables et nuls; là, les descendants des anciens preux, les dernières branches des races féodales, apparurent à des Esseintes sous les traits de vieillards catarrheux et maniaques, rabâchant d'insipides discours, de centenaires phrases. De même que dans la tige coupée d'une fougère, une fleur de lis semblait seule empreinte dans la pulpe ramollie de ces vieux crânes. Une indicible pitié vint au jeune homme pour ces momies ensevelies dans leurs hypogées pompadour à boiseries et à rocailles, pour ces maussades lendores qui vivaient, l'oeil constamment fixe sur un vague Chanaan, sur une imaginaire Palestine.[395]

but is equally unable to find a place for himself in the 'new'.

The dreamer thus lacks either a familial or a social identity; and this ambiguity extends even to his personal identity - which is also fundamentally uncertain. Both Oblomov and des Esseintes are unsure of their own identity; they feel the need to actively differentiate themselves from others to stabilize their shaky status in society. Indeed,

---

[392] This conflict is, of course, not wholly dependant on age; for clarity's sake, however, we will generalize.

[393] Although their dream worlds do, in part, reflect a yearning for an earlier time, this is not based upon reality or even memory, but rather on a strange mixture of childhood and adult fantasies about 'une autre époque avec laquelle, par une dernière illusion, il lui semble qu'il eût été mieux en accord'. (*A rebours*, p. 298)

[394] *Oblomov*, p. 71.

[395] *A rebours*, pp. 81-2.

Oblomov's identity is so fragile that it emerges only in the negative - in who he is *not* and in what he does *not* do - as in this tirade directed at Zakhar:

> I'm quite different, am I? Wait, think carefully what you're saying. Just consider how the 'others' live. The 'others' work hard, they rush about, they're always busy. If they don't work, they don't eat. The 'others' bow and scrape, beg, grovel. And I? Well tell me, what do you think: am I like 'other people'? I am like the 'others', am I? Do I rush about? Do I work? Have I not enough to eat? Do I look thin and wretched? Do I go short of things? It seems to me I have someone to wait on me and do things for me! Never in my life, thank God, have I had to pull a sock on my foot myself! Why should I worry? Whatever for? And who am I saying this to? Haven't you looked after me since I was a child? You know all this; you've seen how tenderly I've been brought up; you know that I've never suffered from hunger or cold, that I've never lacked anything, that I haven't had to earn my living and never done any heavy work. So how did you have the heart to compare me to 'others'? Do you think I am as strong as those 'others'? Can I do and endure what they can?[396]

or in this response to Stolz:

> 'But who are you?'
> Oblomov made no answer.
> 'To what category of people do you think you belong?'
> 'Ask Zakhar,' said Oblomov.[397]

Oblomov's lack of identity extends even to his appearance; where Pechorin's make-up of opposites pointed to contradiction, Oblomov's results in negation: 'Oblomov's complexion was not ruddy, nor dark, nor particularly pale, but rather nondescript.'[398]

Des Esseintes, too, is desperate to establish his difference from others; revealingly, told by his doctor that 'il fallait quitter cette solitude, revenir à Paris, rentrer dans la vie commune, tâcher enfin de se distraire comme les autres', des Esseintes' response - 'Mais, ça ne me distrait pas, moi, les plaisirs des autres' - is strikingly similar to Oblomov's.[399] His quest for refinement is, above all, a search for a personal identity which would cement his uniqueness - and of course, this eventually finds him reduced to the point of absurdity.

Thus, Oblomov is reduced to defining himself in the negative, and des Esseintes to an increasingly ridiculous search for the unusual and bizarre. Like the dandy, the dreamer is unable to shake off the influence of the past enough to fit into the future - and equally unable

---

[396] *Oblomov*, pp. 96-7.

[397] *Oblomov*, pp. 176-7.

[398] *Oblomov*, p. 13.

[399] *A rebours*, p. 336.

to discard his ideals in order to live in the past. This is, of course, why he chooses to retreat into fantasy, where he *can* define his own identity.

B. Contempt of bourgeois ideals

The dreamer, like all superfluous men, feels a deep contempt for the ideals and way of life of the bourgeoisie - the hated 'others', who Oblomov defines as 'people who do not mind cleaning their boots and dressing themselves, [...] stirring the fire in the stove or dusting the furniture', who 'sometimes look like gentlemen, [but] it's all a put-up show':[400]

> This constant rushing about, this eternal interplay of petty passions, greed especially, the eagerness with which they try to get the better of one another, the scandalmongering, the gossip, the way they look you up and down; listening to their talk makes your head swim and you go silly. They look so dignified and intelligent, but all you hear them say is, 'This one has been given something and that one has got a big Government contract...' 'Heavens above, what for?' someone cries. 'So-and-so lost all his money at cards at the club last night; so-and-so takes three hundred thousand for his dowry!' The whole thing is boring, boring, boring! Where is the real man here? Where is his integrity? Where has he disappeared? How has he managed to squander his great gifts on trifles? [...] A fine life! What is one to look for there? Intellectual interests? True feeling? Just see whether you can find the centre round which all this revolves; there is no such centre, there is nothing deep, nothing vital. All these society people are dead, they are all asleep, they are worse than I![401]

> Après l'aristocratie de la naissance, c'était maintenant l'aristocratie de l'argent; c'était le califat des comptoirs, le despotisme de la rue du Sentier, la tyrannie du commerce aux idées vénales et étroites, aux instincts vaniteux et fourbes. Plus scélérate, plus vile que la noblesse dépouillée et que le clergé déchu, la bourgeoisie leur empruntait leur ostentation frivole, leur jactance caduque, qu'elle dégradait par son manque de savoir-vivre, leur volait leurs défauts qu'elle convertissait en d'hypocrites vices; et, autoritaire et sournoise, basse et couarde, elle mitraillait sans pitié son éternelle et nécessaire dupe, la populace, qu'elle avait elle-même démuselée et apostée pour sauter à la gorge des vieilles castes! [...] Le résultat de son avènement avait été l'écrasement de toute intelligence, la négation de toute probité, la mort de tout art.[402]

Nevertheless, the dreamer's relations with the bourgeoisie are radically different than his predecessors'. The dreamer is no longer on the offensive towards the bourgeoisie, as were the dandy, rebel, and visionary - but *on the defensive against them.* Despite his wealth, the dreamer represents the superfluous man's final loss of control over his external environment - he is running to stand still.

---

[400] *Oblomov*, p. 96. By this point, a recognizable 'bourgeoisie' was finally beginning to coalesce in Russia.

[401] *Oblomov*, pp. 172-3.

[402] *A rebours*, pp. 346-7.

Like earlier superfluous men, the dreamer's lifestyle is a conscious attempt to draw a line of difference: Oblomov evinces a total disregard for financial affairs of any kind, ignoring his bailiff's and Stolz' repeated warnings about the state of his affairs; des Esseintes seeks anything which is 'non-utilitarian, unknown, unpolluted and unsanctioned by public choice'.[403] For the first time, however, this position is wholly untenable. Indeed, the dreamer is ceaselessly hounded by the spectre of dispossession by the middle classes. Oblomov is evicted from his Gorkhovaya street apartment; he is blackmailed by, and nearly loses Oblomovka to Ivan Matveyevich and Tarantyev, and then abdicates it to Stolz; his Vyborg retreat is threatened by both Ivan Matveyevich and Stolz. Des Esseintes is forced to sell the château de Lourps to clear debts; he flees Paris because he can no longer endure 'l'aristocratie de l'argent'; and, of course, he is driven out of his dream world of Fontenay by the edict of the doctors whom he has to consult despite himself.

Both Oblomov and des Esseintes are overwhelmed, intimidated - even frightened - by the new world of this thrusting new class:

> He was not used to movement, to life, to crowds, and to bustle. He felt stifled in a crowd; he got into a boat fearing that he would not reach the other bank in safety; he drove in a carriage expecting the horse to bolt and smash it.[404]

> Enfin, il haïssait, de toutes ses forces, les générations nouvelles, ces couches d'affreux rustres qui éprouvent le besoin de parler et de rire haut dans les restaurants et dans les cafés, qui vous bousculent, sans demander pardon, sur les trottoirs, qui vous jettent, sans même s'excuser, sans même saluer, les roues d'une voiture d'enfant, entre les jambes.[405]

The attitude of the dreamer towards the bourgeoisie thus retains the contempt of his predecessors - but for the first time, it is heavily tinged with fear.

---

[403] Lloyd, p. 88.

[404] *Oblomov*, p. 66.

[405] *A rebours*, p. 107.

C. Intellectualism and sensibility

Whereas the visionary's intellectualism was outwardly and socially focused - in other words, his 'dreams' were of a better, future, society - the dreamer has turned inward. The dandy, rebel, and visionary all used their superior imagination and intelligence to conduct an offensive campaign against society - futile as their efforts were. The dreamer, however, uses his to construct an unreal environment for himself as a defense against society. Lloyd notes that des Esseintes 'practices a personal alchemy, using the imagination to overcome 'la vulgaire réalité des faits'[406] - and Oblomov is reduced to the same expedient.

For Oblomov, 'there was a gulf between life and learning which he never attempted to cross'.[407] The sole intellectual project to which he has been able to devote any considerable length of time is his 'plan' for Oblomovka, which, of course, has no chance of fruition. Oblomov's entire existence revolves around the imaginary role that he has created for himself in the absence of any material outlet for his intelligence and talents. In his dream world, he will be a *barin*, yes - but a modern, enlightened one - thus building a bridge between the 'old' and the 'new'. Had he not been superfluous, he may have succeeded in this ideological compromise in reality, cultivating Oblomovka 'after the fashion of Lavretsky, if not Stolz'.[408] However, he is wholly incapable of any action; and therefore Oblomovka's significance to him lies not in its real-world possibilities, but in its endless scope for escape; whenever the real world crowds in upon Oblomov, he lies back and flees to his imaginary world. Had his plans ever been materially realized, this escape would have been denied him. (Thus, when Stolz actually carries out Oblomov's imaginary reforms, he refuses to return.) Later, he romanticizes the unbearable Vyborg flat into another Oblomovka. As Zakhar suspects, Oblomov really 'doesn't care a fig for the dust and the cobwebs'[409]; the visionary's inability to translate dreams into reality has become a preference for dreams over reality. Unlike Stolz, who 'wants to study, to see everything, to know!',[410] Oblomov wishes only to dream.

Des Esseintes, too, has had to create an imaginary role for himself, his early attempts at integration having been no more successful than Oblomov's. Every detail of his isolated retreat betrays his desperation; crammed with every conceivable refinement, Fontenay is his Ark, poised to salvage civilization (as he imagines it) from the threat of the Deluge. Des Esseintes, too, uses his intelligence primarily to flee reality. His 'Oblomovka', Fontenay,

---

[406] Lloyd, p. 88.

[407] *Oblomov,* p. 69.

[408] Seeley (1994), note p. 37.

[409] *Oblomov,* p. 20.

[410] *Oblomov,* p. 60.

differs from the original only in that he controls its physical - as well as its theoretical - creation. However, it is, if anything, a more profound lapse into unreality than Oblomovka. The house at Fontenay is as built of fantasy as it is of wood and stone; des Esseintes strips the very rooms of their functions - the dining room becomes a ship's cabin, the bedroom a monk's cell - in his attempt to live his dream. Fontenay's importance - like Oblomovka's - lies not in its physical being, but in its ability to facilitate a dream.

Most of our earlier superfluous men - from René onwards - relished the natural world as a refuge from society and a link to their unspoilt youth, and one would expect the dreamer to follow in their footsteps. The sensibility of the dreamer, however, is diametrically opposed to this. Nature is to him as much of a threat as is society. Instead of appreciating the wildness of nature, he attempts to integrate it into his fantasy world - to try to tame its unpredictability, much as he tries to tame the unpredictable elements of contemporary society. Oblomov cannot even bear the breath of fresh air from his callers who come in 'from the cold'. More revealingly, in his 'Dream', he humanizes nature to such an extent that it resembles to the modern reader nothing so much as Disneyworld:

> The sky there seems to hug the earth, not in order to fling its thunderbolts at it, but to embrace it more tightly and lovingly. [...] The mountains there seem to be only small-scale models of the terrifying mountains far away that frighten the imagination. They form a chain of gently sloping hillocks, down which it is pleasant to slide on one's back in play, or to sit on watching the sunset dreamily. The river runs gaily, sporting and playing; sometimes it spreads into a wide pond, and sometimes it rushes along in a swift stream, or grows quiet, as though lost in meditation, and creeps slowly along the pebbles, breaking up into lively streams on all sides, whose rippling lulls you pleasantly to sleep. The whole place, for ten or fifteen miles around, consists of a series of picturesque, smiling, gay landscapes. The sandy, sloping banks of the clear stream, the small bushes that steal down to the water from the hills, the twisting ravine with a brook running at the bottom, and the birch copse - all seem to have been carefully chosen and composed with the hand of a master.[411]

Des Esseintes, of course, also attempts to circumvent nature: he shuts out all traces of the outside world; he reverses day and night; and, famously, he is enormously pleased with the idea of taking all nourishment by enema: 'Quelle décisive insulte jetée à la face de cette vieille nature dont les uniformes exigences seraient pour jamais éteintes!'[412] His quest for the bizarre is a conscious attempt to separate himself not only from the mundane and bourgeois, but also from the world of nature. Like Oblomov, he can only appreciate nature when it is humanized and brought into his fantasy world:

---

[411] *Oblomov*, p. 104. The entire description is too long to quote here. See pp. 103-6.

[412] *A Rebours*, p. 333.

> Par sa fenêtre, une nuit, il avait contemplé le silencieux paysage qui se développe, en descendant, jusqu'au pied d'un coteau, sur le sommet duquel se dressent les batteries du bois de Verrières. Dans l'obscurité, à gauche, à droite, des masses confuses s'étageaient, dominées, au loin, par d'autres batteries et d'autres forts dont les hauts semblaient, au clair de la lune, gouachés avec de l'argent, sur un ciel sombre. Rétrécie par l'ombre tombée des collines, la plaine paraissait, à son milieu, poudrée de farine d'amidon et enduite de blanc cold-cream; dans l'air tiède, éventant les herbes décolorées et distillant de bas parfums d'épices, les arbres frottés de craie par la lune, ébouriffaient de pâles feuillages et dédoublaient leurs troncs dont les ombres barraient de raies noires le sol en plâtre sur lequel des caillasses scintillaient ainsi que les éclats d'assiettes. En raison de son maquillage et de son air factice, ce paysage ne déplaisait pas à des Esseintes.[413]

Both Oblomov and des Esseintes, like all our earlier superfluous men, are endowed with above-average intelligence and sensibility and like them, they are unable to harness these talents to any useful purpose. However, unlike their predecessors, there is little indication that they have ever tried. Instead of attempting to find a place for themselves in the world, to rebel against the world as it is, or to change the world so that it accepts them, they simply use their considerable abilities to create a fantasy world which suits them in every way - thus relieving themselves of any responsibility whatsoever.

[413] *A Rebours*, p.105.

D. Civic sense

All of our superfluous men possessed some kind of civic awareness; at the very least, they shared the conviction that their society was rotten at its core. Feeble or futile as this was, it did foreshadow the politically radical and socially reformist intellectual hero. The dreamer's civic sense is, like that of the very first superfluous man, the dandy, wavering and unsteady - but it does exist. While the dandy's loudly proclaimed convictions were muted by the first sign of opposition, however, the dreamer's fall by the wayside *before* the first hurdle, victims of the dreamer's preference for fantasy over reality. Like the dandy, the dreamer indulges in tirades against society's shallowness, hypocrisy, and avarice:

> Well, and what about the best representatives of our younger generation? What do they do? Aren't they asleep even while walking or driving along the Nevsky, or dancing? What a continual, futile shuffling and reshuffling of days! But observe the pride and wonderful dignity, the supercilious look with which they regard everyone who is not dressed or of the same rank and social position as they. And the poor wretches imagine that they are above the common people! 'We' they say, 'occupy the best posts in the Civil Service, we sit in the front row of the stalls, we go to Prince N.'s balls where no other people are invited.' And when they come together, they get drunk and fight like savages. Why, are these alive, wide-awake people? What kind of life is that? I don't want it. What can I get out of it? What will I learn there?[414]

> [Des Esseintes] se prit alors à frayer avec les jeunes gens de son âge et de son monde. Les uns, élevés avec lui dans les pensions religieuses [...] étaient, pour la plupart, des bellâtres inintelligents et asservis. [...] Les autres, élevés dans les collèges de l'Etat ou dans les lycées, étaient moins hypocrites et plus libres, mais ils n'étaient ni plus intéressants ni moins étroits. [...] Il approcha les hommes de lettres avec lesquels sa pensée devait rencontrer plus d'affinités et se sentir mieux à l'aise. Ce fut un nouveau leurre; il demeura révolté par leurs jugements rancuniers et mesquins, par leur conversation aussi banale qu'une porte d'église, par leurs dégoûtantes discussions. [...] En même temps il aperçut les libres penseurs, les doctrinaires de la bourgeoisie, des gens qui réclamaient toutes les libertés pour étrangler les opinions des autres, d'avides et d'éhontés puritains, qu'il estima, comme éducation, inférieurs au cordonnier du coin.[415]

However, the dreamer's self-righteous anger may be seen to stem at least partially from a sense of shame at his own failure to combat this mediocrity, as Seeley notes:

> Oblomov's diatribes against society [...] are taken by some critics at face value, by others dismissed as rationalizations. Each party has recognized half of the truth. Oblomov's revulsion from society is quite genuine: but he

[414] *Oblomov*, pp. 173-4.

[415] *A rebours*, pp. 82-3.

> also uses it as a smoke-screen to mask his failure to attempt - let alone achieve - anything in alternative fields of action.[416]

Despite this, both Oblomov and des Esseintes do stand up for their convictions as best they can. Oblomov displays rare strength and energy when defending his ideals,[417] and several of des Esseintes' 'experiments' have socio-political overtones. His attempt to 'create a murderer' out of the young Auguste Langlois, especially (he hopes that by accustoming him to luxury, and then withdrawing support, to force him into a life of crime) is an overt attempt at subversion:

> La vérité c'est que je tâche simplement de préparer un assassin. [...] Alors, mon but sera atteint, j'aurai contribué, dans la mesure de mes ressources, à créer un gredin, un ennemi de plus pour cette hideuse société qui nous rançonne.[418]

Of course, the dreamer's civic sense is, like everything else about him, largely confined to fantasy. Oblomov's plans to ease the burdens on his serfs by reorganizing his estate, for example, are admirable - but never intended to succeed. Similarly, des Esseintes' cannot understand why his plan - so simple in fantasy - does not succeed in reality. Unlike the visionary, whose intent was sincere, the dreamer's civic sense is bounded by the limitations of fantasy and contains not a little self-justification.

---

[416] Seeley (1994), note pp. 36-37.

[417] See, for example, his conversation with Penkin on pp. 34-6.

[418] *A rebours*, pp. 165-6. Richard Shryock interprets *A rebours* as an anarchist novel, with this episode 'the most striking example'. ('Ce Cri rompit le cauchemar qui l'opprimait: Huysmans and the Politics of *A rebours*', *The French Review,* Vol. 66, No. 2, December 1992, pp. 243-54)

E. Seeking of soulmates

We have seen that all superfluous men are extremely isolated - indeed, they are defined by their 'apartness' - and the dreamer is no exception to this. Both Oblomov and des Esseintes are profoundly alone. Like their predecessors, neither has found true friendship or love in society:

> His soul was still pure and virginal; it was perhaps waiting for real love, for support, for overpowering passion, and then, as the years passed, seemed to have despaired of waiting. [...] He lazily dismissed all the youthful hopes that had betrayed him or been betrayed by him, all the bitter-sweet, bright memories that sometimes make even an old man's heart beat faster.[419]

> Est-ce qu'il connaissait un homme dont l'existence essayerait, telle que la sienne, de se reléguer dans la contemplation, de se détenir dans le rêve? est-ce qu'il connaissait un homme capable d'apprécier la délicatesse d'une phrase, le subtil d'une peinture, la quintessence d'une idée, un homme dont l'âme fût assez chantournée, pour comprendre Mallarmé et aimer Verlaine? Où, quand, dans quel monde devait-il sonder pour découvrir un esprit jumeau, un esprit détaché des lieux communs, bénissant le silence comme un bienfait, l'ingratitude comme un soulagement, la défiance comme un garage, comme un port?[420]

However, while all of our earlier superfluous men sought some contact with others in an attempt to find *something* - the dreamer *actively* seeks nothing and no one. He relates to other people, not through charisma, will, or intellect, but through fantasy; indeed, the dreamer simply *cannot* relate to real people. Instead, he creates a fantasy relationship in his mind and then attempts to fit others into it. Other superfluous men suffered when their 'soulmates' failed to live up to their ideals; the dreamer only suffers when they fail to live up to his imagination.

All of Oblomov's 'relationships' are, in fact, figments of his imagination. Stolz - a moderately successful bourgeois businessman - assumes in Oblomov's mind the proportions of a demi-god, 'with the power to answer all questions, solve all problems, conjure away all threats - but embarrassing with his uncomfortable expectations and demands and, above all, so rarely within reach when required'.[421] Oblomov's attitude towards him - by turns supplicating and placating - is always that of an inferior towards a remote and scarcely understood higher being. Their relationship only survives because Stolz willingly assumes - even enjoys - the role assigned to him.

---

[419] *Oblomov*, pp. 66-7.

[420] *A rebours*, pp. 340-1.

[421] Seeley (1994), p. 34.

Oblomov's relationship with Olga, on the other hand, cannot survive the great gulf between fantasy and reality; despite his best efforts, Olga simply will not fit into Oblomov's fantasy of her as dream wife - 'the embodiment of a life full of enchantment and grave repose...the personification of rest itself'.[422] Ironically, Olga, too, has based her relationship upon fantasy, upon what she believes Oblomov should be. Concerning Oblomov, Olga has, in her mind, assumed Stolz' divine mantle:

> And she - the silent, shy Olga - would perform this miracle, she, who had not yet begun to live and whom no one had even obeyed so far! She would be the cause of this transformation!...He would live, work, and bless life and her. To restore a man to life - why, think of the glory a doctor won when he restored a hopeless invalid to health! And what about saving a man whose mind and soul were facing moral ruin?[423]

Of course, Oblomov can no more fulfill Olga's fantasies than she his. The woman who eventually becomes his wife - Agafya Matveyevna - does allow herself to be slotted into Oblomov's fantasy world. Her own motivations and thoughts are unimportant (as, indeed, are Stolz' and Olga's).[424] What is crucial to Oblomov is that she never clashes his fantasy image of her as his ideal wife/mother figure. Oblomov's need to 'control' his immediate environment by fitting it into his dream word means that he relates to even Zakhar primarily through fantasy:

> And in my plan I had assigned you a house of your own, a kitchen garden, a quantity of corn, and a regular wage! I had appointed you my steward, my butler, and my business manager! The peasants would bow low to you, they would all call you Zakhar Trofimych, Zakhar Trofimych![425]

Des Esseintes, too, relates to others through fantasy alone. This is abundantly clear in his relationships with both the circus acrobat and with the ventriloquist; he is, of course, initially attracted to each woman because she seems to be 'that which she is not' - fertile ground for improvisation - and drops each because she fails to convince in her fantasy role. The first of these, miss Urania, he imagines in a masculine role; unfortunately, she is all too female:

> Fatalement, des Esseintes rentra dans son rôle d'homme momentanément oublié; ses impressions de féminínité, de faiblesse, de quasi-protection

---

[422] *Oblomov*, p. 202.

[423] *Oblomov*, p. 204.

[424] It does seem, however, that Agafya Matveyevna relates to Oblomov primarily through fantasy as well; for her, he fulfills a fantasy role of the *barin*.

[425] *Oblomov*, p. 98.

> achetée, de peur même, disparurent; l'illusion n'était plus possible; miss Urania était une maîtresse ordinaire.[426]

The second of these is even more intriguing; des Esseintes wants the ventriloquist, not as an *element* of his fantasy - like miss Urania - but as a *facilitator* of it. When her skills lose their power to convince, she too is rejected. Des Esseintes' attempt to 'create a murderer' also reveals his inability to separate reality from fantasy; he is angered when the young Auguste Langlois fails to fulfill the role that he has assigned to him. Like Oblomov, des Esseintes must bring every element of his life into line with his 'dream'. Thus, even his servants, who might infect the dream world with the prosaic, are forced into fantasy roles. (As far as possible, des Esseintes pretends that they do not exist; when they must appear, they are ordered to do so in period costume.)

All of our superfluous men were narcissistic; although part of their motivation for seeking soulmates was certainly a sincere search for understanding, their relationships with others always betrayed a need to impress, to dominate, to influence. The dreamer, however, does not function in the real world; all that he requires is compliance.

[426] *A rebours*, p. 208.

F. Foreign influence

Like all superfluous men, the dreamer's intellect has been stimulated by outside influences, foreign concepts and ideas - what we haved termed the 'profound foreign'. Like his predecessors, too, he shares the conviction that the foreign has something to offer which he cannot find in his own society - the belief that a place exists where he will be a 'stranger' only in the literal sense of the word. However, because the dreamer is unable to fully engage with society, his concept of the 'foreign' has gradually expanded to cover everything but his own fantasy world.

As we have noted above, the dreamer is caught between two opposing ideological systems, not wholly of the old, nor of the new. This applies equally well to his attitude here; he is trapped between provincialism and cosmopolitanism - between fear of the 'foreign' and attraction to it. This struggle is obvious in Oblomov's case, as Seeley notes:

> Oblomov [...] is split, in the sense that his being has two rival 'centres', is suspended between two incompatible systems of value...The 'peasant' in him demands peace and ease and shrinks from change and struggle, from effort and passion; but his schooling has implanted different images and aspirations in his mind and heart.[427]

However, des Esseintes also suffers from this split between provincialism and cosmopolitanism - although in his case, its cause is hereditary, and not educational. As Rodolphe Gasché notes:

> The 'gap in the pictorial pedigree' of the Château's portrait gallery suggests that there are two founders of the family lineage, that the family's root is irretrievably divided, double. On the one hand there are the 'sturdy campaigners with forbidding faces', brimming with physical health and vigor [...], on the other, the pale-faced ancestor with whom the family's decline presumably began. Between both founders all direct links are missing (as well as between them and their descendants). Both ancestors are unmistakably established as the poles of a divided origin.[428]

Both Oblomov and des Esseintes attempt to resolve this conflict, both physically and through fantasy. Richard Peace notes that Oblomov 'is not happy in St Petersburg, and only appears to come into his own in a rural setting, be it the countryside outside the capital where he hires a *dacha*, or the re-creation of the Oblomovka in the house of Agafya Matveyevna on the Vyborg side of the river.'[429] However, neither the hired villa nor the Vyborg house are

---

[427] Seeley (1994), p. 36.

[428] Rodolphe Gasché, 'The Falls of History: Huysmans' "A Rebours"', *Yale French Studies*, No. 74, 1988, pp. 183-204 (p. 191).

[429] Richard Peace, *Oblomov: A Critical Examination of Goncharov's Novel* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press,1993), p. 13.

rural, but rather *suburban*. Oblomov never returns either to St Petersburg or to Oblomovka, but remains in the shadowy area in between, and this is mirrored by des Esseintes' flight out of Paris to Fontenay:

> Il éprouvait une allégresse d'autant plus vive qu'il se voyait retiré assez loin déjà, sur la berge, pour que le flot de Paris ne l'atteignît plus et assez près cependant pour que cette proximité de la capitale le confirmât dans sa solitude. Et, en effet, puisqu'il suffit qu'on soit dans l'impossibilité de se rendre à un endroit pour qu'aussitôt le désir d'y aller vous prenne, il avait des chances, en ne se barrant pas complètement la route, de n'être assailli par aucun regain de société, par aucun regret.[430]

Oblomov's conflicted attitudes are neatly illustrated by two incidents from his youth: in the first, the 'foreign' is threatening, while in the second, it is not only attractive but intellectually exciting:

> A man had been found lying in a ditch by the bridge outside the village. [...] The boys were the first to discover him, and they ran back terrified to the village with the news that some terrible serpent or werewolf was lying in a ditch. [...] The stranger tried to raise his head but could not; evidently he was either ill or very tired. One peasant nearly brought himself to touch him with his pitchfork. 'Don't touch him! Don't touch him!' many of the others cried. 'How do we know what sort of a man he is? He hasn't said a word. He may be one of them - don't touch him, lads!' 'Let's go,' some said. 'Come on now: he isn't one of ours, is he? He'll only bring us trouble!' And they all went back to the village, telling the old men that a stranger was lying there who would not speak and goodness only knows what he was up to. 'Don't have anything to do with him if he is a stranger,' the old men said.[431]

> 'Wasn't it you [Oblomov] who said with tears in your eyes, as you looked at the prints of Raphael's Madonnas, Correggio's Night, Apollo Belvedere: 'Good Lord, shall I never be able to see the originals and be struck dumb with awe at the thought that I am standing before the works of Michelangelo and Titian, and treading the soil of Rome? Shall I never in all my life see those myrtles, cypresses, and citrons in their native land instead of in hot-houses? Shall I never breathe the air of Italy and feast my eyes on her azure skies?' [...] And when I drew up a plan for a journey abroad and asked you to take a course at the German universities with me, you jumped to your feet, embraced me, and solemnly held out your hand to me.[432]

---

[430] *A rebours*, p. 86.

[431] *Oblomov*, pp. 108-9. As part of 'Oblomov's Dream', this passage may be considered memory or fantasy. In either case, however, the attitude expressed is Oblomov's.

[432] *Oblomov*, pp. 181-2.

Many critics have interpreted the friction between Oblomov and Stolz as a symbol of the contemporary Slavophile/Westernizer debate; however, as Peace notes, this conflict is also an internal one, within Oblomov himself:

> In the relationship between Stolz and Oblomov we appear to have a confrontation between the values of the West and the values of the East; the pull between a conservative nostalgia for the life of old semi-Asiatic Russia and the attractions of progress as represented in the entrepreneurial values of the West. [...]The pull between East and West is going on within Oblomov himself. The anomaly of his position is that this denizen of the Russian Asiatic hinterland is actually, throughout the whole course of the novel, living in the most westward-looking city in Russia - the capital, St Petersburg. Despite the fact that there is both economic and emotional pressure on him to return to his roots, to revisit the Oblomovka which so enthralls him in his dream, he successfully resists it.[433]

Of course, Oblomov does not 'successfully resist' anything; both of these attitudes exist for him only as memories expressed - and unified - through fantasy. By the time narration begins, his world has shrunk to encompass only the small sphere under the direct control of his imagination. Anything outwith this sphere - and therefore outwith his control - is 'foreign', and no longer attractive, but threatening. Thus, even the street outside has become 'foreign' - and therefore dangerous. In his dream world, however, Oblomov does succeed in harmonizing these two attitudes towards the 'foreign': he returns to 'Eastern' Oblomovka as the bearer of 'Western' improvements.

Des Esseintes displays a similar ambivalent attitude towards the 'foreign'. The 'foreign' can be intellectually and artistically attractive; des Esseintes is drawn to Holland ('une Hollande, d'après les oeuvres de Teniers et de Steen, de Rembrandt et d'Ostade'[434]) and to Britain for just this reason. However, the 'foreign' can also be threatening and repulsive:

> C'était le grand bagne de l'Amérique transporté sur notre continent; c'était enfin, l'immense, la profonde, l'incommensurable goujaterie du financier et du parvenu, rayonnant, tel qu'un abject soleil, sur la ville idolâtre qui éjaculait, à plat ventre, d'impurs cantiques devant le tabernacle impie des banques![435]

---

[433] Peace, pp. 13-14.

[434] *A rebours*, p 245.

[435] *A rebours*, pp. 347-8. Interestingly, this hatred of the *bourgeois* 'foreign' is also found in *Oblomov*: Stolz is the bearer of 'good' Western values, while the hapless German piano-tuner and his family who live opposite Oblomov's Gorokhovaya street flat represent the 'bad'.

Des Esseintes, like Oblomov, has been able to reconcile these two opposing attitudes through fantasy. After his disastrous voyage to Holland (where he discovers that, after all, 'la Hollande était un pays tel que les autres'[436]) his 'journey' to London is a revelation: no inconvenient reality has been allowed to intrude, and a pint of stout in an 'English' pub and the purchase of a Baedeker guide have been enough to reproduce in his fertile imagination the London of his dreams. Concluding that 'il faudrait être fou pour aller perdre, par un maladroit déplacement, d'impérissables sensations'[437] , he returns to Fontenay, where he can travel to his heart's content in his ship's cabin dining-room with even less trouble:

> Le mouvement lui paraissait d'ailleurs inutile et l'imagination lui semblait aisément suppléer à la vulgaire réalité des faits.[438]

Thus, the dreamer's attitude towards the 'foreign' reflects the fundamental split in his character between provincialism - with its rejection of change - and cosmopolitanism - with its acceptance of it. He is unable to fully embrace either of these viewpoints, and so withdraws into fantasy, where he can succeed in integrating them.

---

[436] *A rebours*, p. 246.

[437] *A rebours*, p. 248.

[438] *A rebours*, p. 101.

G. Femininity

All of our superfluous men have displayed markedly feminine traits; the sexual ambiguity of these heroes graphically demonstrates their fundamental social and political impotence as well as their 'outsider' status. The dreamer, as the last - and most irrelevant - of the superfluous men, is the most androgynous of all. Reflecting the increasing empowerment of women as well as his own personal powerlessness, the dreamer is not just effeminate, but thoroughly femininized.

That Oblomov is intrinsically feminine - and not just in appearance - is suggested from the very outset of the novel:

> Generally speaking, his body, if one were to judge by the dull and excessively white color of his neck, his small, chubby hands, and his soft shoulders, seemed too effeminate for a man. His movements, too, even when he was excited, were kept in check by a certain kind of mildness and laziness which was not without its own touch of gracefulness. If his mind was troubled, his eyes were clouded over, lines appeared on his forehead, and he was plunged into doubt, sadness, and fear; but his anxiety seldom took the form of any definite idea and still more seldom was it transformed into a decision. All his anxiety resolved itself into a sigh and dissolved into apathy or drowsiness.[439]

The language used here to describe Oblomov (which continues throughout the novel: 'dove-like tenderness', 'pure and childlike soul', for example) emphasizes his 'feminine' passivity and gentleness.[440] More than this, Oblomov throughout assumes a passive role which is both 'feminine' and child-like. His relationship with Olga, especially, betray this outright gender reversal. It is she who sets the conditions for their betrothal, dictates when and where they shall meet, and unconventionally calls upon him at Vyborg. Revealingly, she comments that she once read Oblomov's words in a novel by Sue - but that they were spoken by a women; later, she accuses him of looking at her with eyes, not of passion, but of her old nurse. And ironically, when their relationship ends, it is Oblomov - not Olga, as both he and tradition expects - who pines and falls dangerously ill.[441] Indeed, Olga is fully aware that she is the dominant partner:

---

[439] *Oblomov*, p. 13.

[440] Indeed, Richard Peace argues that the narrative technique itself 'echoes the central theme of passivity in as much as Goncharov, in telling his tale, frequently presents his reader with states resulting from the character's actions rather than the actions themselves, and that such congruity of form and content extends to the language itself.' (p. 79.)

[441] That Olga is intended to represent the 'new woman' hoped for by the Russian intelligentsia is explicit in the text: '[Olga] was [...] not oppressed by the authority of numerous nurses, grandmothers, and aunts, with the traditions of their family and caste, of outworn manners, customs, and rules...not being led against her will along a beaten track, but walked along a new path which she had to open up by her own intelligence, ideas, and feeling.' (p. 444) Oblomov's femininity only emphasises her 'masculine' strength. It is suggested, intriguingly, that Stolz is no more suitable for the 'new woman' than Oblomov: '[Stolz] could scarcely manage to keep pace with the agonising rapidity of her thought and will.' (p. 446)

> In an instant the power she wielded over him became clear to her and she liked her role of a guiding star, the ray of light she would shed over the stagnant pool and that would be reflected in it.[442]

With Agafya Matveyevna, too, Oblomov assumes a passive role. However, with this 'ideal mother', Oblomov is child-like, rather than feminine (giving the relationship a quasi-incestuous quality).[443] What links these two relationships and marks a significant departure from the 'femininity' of earlier superfluous men is his abandonment of responsibility to an active and capable woman - his *voluntary* abdication of the traditional dominant male role.

Des Esseintes is even more overtly feminized than Oblomov; frail and androgynous in appearance, he is the last of a family in which 'l'effémination des mâles s'était allée en s'accentuant' and bears a strong resemblance to one ancestor in particular - a 'mignon' of Henri III:

> Un grêle jeune homme de trente ans, anémique et nerveux, aux joues caves, aux yeux d'un bleu froid d'acier, au nez éventé et pourtant droit, aux main sèches et fluettes. Par un singulier phénomène d'atavisme, le dernier descendant ressemblait à l'antique aïeul, au mignon, dont il avait la barbe en point d'un blond extraordinairement pâle et l'expression ambiguë, tout à la fois lasse et habile.[444]

Des Esseintes' femininity, like that of Oblomov, is not limited to his appearance. However, the dreamer's willingness to surrender his masculinity (as Oblomov did) is now garishly exaggerated. Des Esseintes - like Oblomov - seeks out strong and capable women - but with a decadent twist. He is attracted to miss Urania because she seems to offer the ultimate opportunity for gender reversal:

> A mesure qu'il admirait sa souplesse et sa force, il voyait un artificiel changement de sexe se produire en elle; ses singeries gracieuses, ses mièvreries de femelle s'effaçaient de plus en plus, tandis que se développaient, à leur place, les charmes agiles et puissants d'un mâle; en un mot, après avoir avoisiné l'androgyne, elle semblait se résoudre, se préciser, devenir complètement un homme. Alors, de même qu'un robuste gaillard s'éprend d'une fille grêle, cette clownessse doit aimer, par tendance, une créature faible, ployée, pareille à moi, sans souffle, se dit des Esseintes; à se regarder, à laisser agir l'esprit de comparaison, il en vint à éprouver, de son

---

[442] *Oblomov*, p. 229.

[443] Oblomov's relationships with Stolz and even with Zakhar also betray this childishness.

[444] *A rebours*, p. 78.

> côté, l'impression que lui-même se féminisait...Cet échange de sexe entre miss Urania et lui l'avait exalté.[445]

He is fascinated by Salome, with her life-or-death power over John; he delights in the sheer power of two 'female' locomotives ('quelle écrasante puissance lorsque, faisant trembler la terre, elle remorque pesamment, lentement, la lourde queue de ses marchandises!'[446]) Des Esseintes' denial of his own masculinity is both more profound and more planned than Oblomov's; he is bisexual (or, at least, has experimented with homosexuality) and, eventually, he celebrates his sexual impotence with the infamous 'repas de deuil'.

The dreamer's extreme androgyny thus reflects the impotence of the outdated and exhausted nobility as well as the 'twilight and evening' of the superfluous man type.[447]

[445] *A rebours,* pp. 206-7. Peace uses intriguingly similar language to describe Oblomov's relationship with Olga: 'This reversal of socially accepted sexual roles exhilarates him'. (p. 75.)

[446] *A rebours,* p. 104.

[447] And foreshadows the increasing masculinisation of women and corresponding feminization of men which permeates both literatures at the turn of the century.

3. The Dreamer's Legacy

> 'He's dead. He wasted his life! And he was as intelligent as anybody, his soul was pure and clear as crystal, noble, affectionate, and - he perished!'
> 'But why? What was the reason?'
> 'The reason - what a reason! Oblomovism!'[448]

The dreamer thus marks the end of the nineteenth-century superfluous man - with a whimper, rather than a bang. The dreamer is, more or less, an evolutionary dead end. His importance lies in his significance as the descendant of the dandy, rebel, and visionary, and his rejection of contemporary society is both as valid and as revealing.

Henry Gifford describes the essential difference between the dreamer and his predecessors with the following words:

> When Onegin fled from Tatyana, and drove sadly down the avenue, where did his pilgrimage end? When Pechorin vanished from Pyatigorsk [...], and Rudin said goodbye at the post-station to his one earnest disciple, what lay before them? We know what happened to each one individually. Onegin may have perished in the Caucasus; Pechorin, it seems, dies on his return from Persia; Rudin fell on a revolutionary barricade. But, supposing they had escaped these perils, what lay ahead? What was their goal, what was the last stage on that unhappy journey? A haven of unpaved streets, wooden sidewalks, meager gardens, and ditches overgrown with nettles. The long afternoons and sleepy dinners, the tranquility and dead routine of the Vyborg side. [...] But these earlier heroes had revolted against that end. Each in his own way sought death, rather than death-in-life.[449]

Gifford is accurate in that 'death-in-life' is precisely what the dreamer achieves. However, he is wrong in portraying the dreamer as a coward or a failure - for the dreamer, precisely by choosing to retreat into a fantasy world, is 'revolting against that end' no less than the dandy, rebel, or visionary. Oblomov does not live and die in Vyborg, *but in Oblomovka*. Ridge notes that:

> Perhaps decadence is even noble. [...] Perhaps the decadent, like a true hero, is even willing to die for the benefit of his race: he will commit suicide. [...] The decadent, in short, welcomes destruction at the hands of the barbarians. He knows, ironically, that he has no further purpose and that nature must replace him. He runs to accept nature's verdict. Is it masochism that impels him to seek death under the barbarian sword? Or is it rather nobility - the reasoned thinking that it is best for him to die?[450]

---

[448] *Oblomov*, p. 484.

[449] Henry Gifford, *The Hero of His Time - A Theme in Russian Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1950), p. 152.

[450] Ridge (1961), p. 23.

Both Oblomov and des Esseintes understand their superfluity; this is why they choose to dream, rather than to live. Both also understand that their fantasy life will destroy them - and it does. Oblomov perishes of and for his ideal of repose and plenty - he dies of a stroke brought on by overeating and inactivity - and Des Esseintes comes very close indeed to perishing of and for his - he nearly dies of a nervous condition brought on by solitude and experimentation. Oblomov lives and dies his dream; des Esseintes chooses to commit hari-kiri on the 'barbarian sword'. This is not, after all, so different from falling on a barricade after the battle had already been lost.

> Slowly there arose in his mind the painful realization that many sides of his nature had never been awakened, that others were barely touched, that none had developed fully. And yet he was painfully aware that something good and fine lay buried in him as in a grave, that it was perhaps already dead or lay hidden like gold in the heart of a mountain, and that it was high time that gold was put into circulation. But the treasure was deeply buried under a heap of rubbish and silt. It was as though he himself had stolen and buried in his own soul the treasures bestowed on him as a gift by the world and life. Something prevented him from launching out into the ocean of life and devoting all the powers of his mind and will to flying across it under full sail. Some secret enemy seemed to have laid a heavy hand upon him at the very start of his journey and cast him a long way off from the direct purpose of human existence. And it seemed that he would never find his way to the straight path from the wild and impenetrable jungle. The forest grew thicker and darker in his soul and around him; the path was getting more and more overgrown; clear consciousness awakened more and more seldom, and roused the slumbering powers only for a moment. His mind and will had long been paralyzed and, it seemed, irretrievably...'Why am I like this?' Oblomov asked himself almost with tears, hiding his head under the blanket again. 'Why?'[451]

[451] *Oblomov*, pp. 101-2.

CONCLUSION

It is clear, then, that the concept of a French 'superfluous man' is one which has a great deal of utility in formulating a coherent overview of the transition from the traditional noble hero to the modern intellectual hero in nineteenth-century French literature and of the emergence of the modern intellectual in French society.

Building upon the considerable body of criticism which exists concerning the Russian superfluous man, I have established a schematic method of analysis which not only helps to clarify the sometimes rather hazy image of the 'superfluous man', but also allows this concept to be taken out of an exclusively Russian context.[452] This 'blueprint' allows both an overview of the transition of the type and a detailed analysis of individual characters within this overall pattern.

I have thus been able to establish that a significant number of representative French literary heroes share the fundamental characteristics of the Russian superfluous man - and can, therefore, be legitimately considered as French 'superfluous men'. More importantly, however, I have shown that a literary *type* analogous to the Russian 'superfluous man' does indeed exist in nineteenth-century French literature - and that this type not only arises from comparable historical circumstances, but also follows a strikingly parallel path of transition and holds similar literary and social significance. We have seen that not only do our Russian and French 'dandies', 'rebels', 'visionaries', and 'dreamers' resemble each other in a spectrum of fundamental characteristics, but also that they reflect the evolving aspirations, the doubts, the fears, and the frustrations of successive generations of young men during a period of immense social and political transition. The nineteenth century in France is often described as 'le siècle bourgeois'; and it would be foolish to deny the importance of the rising bourgeoisie in literature or society. The analytical framework of the 'superfluous man', however, allows us to look at the figure of the 'noble' as a figure not just in decline, but also in transition, and helps to illuminate the changing nature of the elite in society, rather than the masses.

This study has, for reasons of both space and clarity, examined only a limited number of literary heroes. There are, of course, many, many more who could be profitably examined using the criteria laid down above: Stendhal's Octave de Malivert and Lucien Leuwen; Hugo's Hernani; Balzac's Raphaël de Valentin and Louis Lambert; Vigny's Stello and Chatterton; Sand's Sténio and Jacques; the young men of Musset and Du Camp - to name but the most promising - as well as a multitude of other, minor characters.

---

[452] Indeed, it would be interesting to extend the analysis to examine the literature of, for example, Britain or Germany.

The term 'intelligentsia' only came into common usage in Russia in the 1860's; the noun 'intellectuel' was not used in France until the very end of the nineteenth century.[453] However, as Brombert notes: 'The intellectual type could not possibly have penetrated so fast and so deeply into literature had he not first slowly emerged and become aware of himself as a social reality. The entire nineteenth century felt the need for the word'.[454] Similarly, the term 'superfluous man' only appeared in Russian literature in 1850, when it was invented by Turgenev for the title of his *Diary of a Superfluous Man*; the fact that it was immediately seized upon to describe not only other literary characters stretching back to the beginning of the century, but also contemporary people, testifies to its significance. The superfluous man - in his self-image based on intelligence and sensibility rather than on rank, in his impotent idealism, in his rampant individualism, in his political and social progressiveness, and in his futile transgression of contemporary societal norms - personifies the struggle of a nascent intellectual elite to gain social and political significance in both Russia and France.

The theme of the alienated and frustrated outsider, oppressed by a society with which he shares little in terms of values or ethics, is, of course, a theme which neither originated nor ended with the nineteenth-century superfluous man. However, the superfluous man of the nineteenth century is a very specific incarnation which is inextricably linked with his social and political milieu, and as such, he has a very specific role in the formation and consolidation of the intellectual elite in each nation. Brombert sums up the traits of the modern French intellectual as follows:

> Sensibility modeled on thought; faith in the efficiency of ideas as an organizational force in the tangible world; the utilization of culture as an instrument for criticizing tradition; the unselfish, gratuitous pursuit of truth, but simultaneously the pursuit of a humanitarian ideal; the transmission or preaching of moral values; the sensation, now proud, now humiliating, of existing outside the social framework, and yet, on the whole, an obvious sympathy for the laboring groups of the country and a consequent attraction to Leftist political parties; a feeling of 'not belonging' and of impotence; jealously of the man of action; the cult of revolt, sometimes even of anarchy; the nearly obsessive fear of being caught on the side of injustice; nostalgia for the masses coupled with the complexes of a *fils de bourgeois* ashamed of belonging to the privileged classes.[455]

---

[453] Louis Bodin, in his *Les intellectuels* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962) notes that 'intellectuel' is not found in the *Littré* of 1876, the *Grand Dictionnaire universel de Pierre Larousse* of 1866-78, or the *Grande Encyclopédie* of 1885-1902.

[454] Brombert (1961), p. 35.

[455] Brombert (1961), p. 34.

And the reader will, of course, recognize these traits as having had their genesis in the superfluous man.

The enduring significance of the superfluous man is thus not to be found in what he achieved, but in what he attempted; the tradition of the socially and politically active intellectual which he established became one of the most important forces in both Russian and French society. Brombert concludes that: 'Our intellectuals and those of 1898 are of one and the same family. Yet it is also evident that they existed *avant la lettre*'.[456] Of course they did - and their origin is revealed in the existence of the superfluous man.

[456] Brombert (1961), p. 35.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Primary Texts

Chateaubriand, François-Auguste de. *Atala - René.* Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1992.

Constant, Benjamin. *Adolphe suivi de Cécile.* Paris: Editions Gallimard (livre de poche), 1958.

Flaubert, Gustave. *L'Education Sentimentale.* Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1965.

Goncharov, Ivan. *Oblomov.* Trans. by David Magarshack. London: Penguin, 1954.

Griboyedev, A.S. 'The Trouble With Reason' ('Woe from Wit') in *Nineteenth-Century Russian Plays - an anthology.* Ed. and trans. by F.D. Reeve. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973.

Huysmans, J.-K. *A rebours.* Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1977.

Lermontov, Mikhail. *A Hero of Our Time.* Trans. by Paul Foote. London: Penguin Books, 1966.

Musset, Alfred de. *Lorenzaccio.* Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1971.

Pushkin, A.S. *Eugene Onegin.* Revised edition in four volumes. Trans. and commentated by Vladimir Nabokov. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.

Sand, George. *Horace.* Paris: Michel Lévy, 1875.

Senancour, Etienne de. *Obermann.* Paris: Charpentier, 1874. Preface by George Sand.

Turgenev, Ivan. *Rudin.* Trans. by Richard Freeborn. London: Penguin, 1975.

Zola, Emie. *La Joie de vivre,* in *Les Rougon-Macquart. Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le second Empire.* (Vol. 3) Paris: Editions Robert Laffont, 1992.

2. Secondary Texts

Andrew, Joe. *Russian Writers and Society in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century.* London: Macmillan Press, 1982.

Barbéris, Pierre. *René de Chateaubriand - un nouveau roman.* Paris: Larousse, 1973.

--- *Lorenzaccio - Alfred de Musset.* Paris: Editions Nathan, 1994.

Barratt, Andrew and Briggs, A.D.P. *A Wicked Irony: The Rhetoric of Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time.* Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989.

Bénichou, Paul. *L'école du désenchantement.* Paris: Gallimard, 1992.

Bodin, Louis. *Les intellectuels.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962.

Borie, Jean. *Le Tyran timide: le naturalisme de la femme au XIXe siècle.* Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1973.

--- *Un Siècle démodé: Prophètes et réfractaires au XIX siècle.* Paris: Editions Payot, 1989.

--- *Frédéric et les amis des hommes.* Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1995.

Boyd, Alexander F. *Aspects of the Russian Novel.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1972.

Bowra, C.M. 'The Hero', in *The Hero in Literature.* Ed. by Victor Brombert. Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1969, pp. 22-52.

Brogan, D.W. *The French Nation from Napoleon to Pétain (1814-1940).* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957.

Brombert, Victor. *The Intellectual Hero: Studies in the French Novel 1880-1950.* London: Faber & Faber, 1961.

--- Ed. *The Hero in Literature.* Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1969.

Carter, A.E. *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature 1830-1900.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958.

Chances, Ellen B. *Conformity's Children: An Approach to the Superfluous Man in Russian Literature.* Columbus, Ohio: Slavica Publishers, 1978.

Chaussinand-Nogaret, G. *La noblesse au XVIIIe siècle: De la féodalité aux Lumières.* Paris: Hachette, 1976.

Clement, N.H. *Romanticism in France.* New York: MLA, 1939.

Cockrell, Roger and Richards, David. *The Voice of a Giant: Essays on Seven Russian Prose Classics*. Exeter: University of Exeter, 1985.

Confino, Michael. 'A propos de la notion de service dans la noblesse russe aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles', *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, XXXIV (1-2), janvier-juin 1993, pp. 47-58.

Crossley, Ceri. *Musset - Lorenzaccio.* London: Grant & Cutler, 1983.

Delbouille, Paul. *Genèse, structure et destin d'Adolphe.* Paris: Société d'Edition 'Les Belles Lettres', 1971.

Dobrolyubov, A.N. 'What is Oblomovshchina?' in *Selected Philosophical Essays*. Trans. by J. Fineberg. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1949.

Ehre, Milton. *Oblomov and his Creator: The Life and Art of Ivan Goncharov.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

Eidelman, Dawn D. *George Sand and the Nineteenth-Century Russian Love-Triangle Novels.* London: Associated University Presses, 1994.

Fischer, George. *Russian Liberalism: From Gentry to Intelligentsia.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Fontana, Biancamaria. *Benjamin Constant and the Post-revolutionary Mind.* London: Yale University Press, 1991.

Fornasiero, F.J. and West-Sooby, J. 'Espace historique, espace amoureux: Fabrice del Dongo et Frédéric Moreau, faiseurs de mythe', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 1991, Vol. 28, no.2, pp. 110-118.

Franzén, Nils-Olaf. *Zola et La Joie de vivre.* Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1958.

Freeborn, Richard. *Turgenev: The Novelist's Novelist.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960.

--- *The Rise of the Russian Novel: Studies in the Russian Novel from Eugene Onegin to War and Peace.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Garber, Frederick. 'Self, Society, Value, and the Romantic Hero', in *The Hero in Literature.* Ed. by Victor Brombert. Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1969, pp. 213-227.

Garnett, Edward. *Turgenev: A Study.* London: W. Collins Sons & Co., 1917.

Gasché, Rodolphe. 'The Falls of History: Huysmans' "A Rebours"', *Yale French Studies*, No. 74, 1988, pp. 183-204.

Gifford, Henry. *The Hero of his Time - A Theme in Russian Literature.* London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1950.

Giraud, Raymond. *The Unheroic Hero in the Novels of Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1957.

Godwin-Jones, Robert. *Romantic Vision: The Novels of George Sand.* Birmingham, Alabama: Summa Publications, 1995.

Graña, César. *Bohemian versus Bourgeois: French Society and the Man of Letters in the Nineteenth Century.* New York: Basic Books, 1964.

Granjard, Henri. *Ivan Tourguénev et les courants politiques et sociaux de son temps.* Paris: Institut d'Etudes Slaves de L'Université de Paris, 1954.

Grimsley, Ronald. "The Character of Lorenzaccio", *French Studies*, Vol. XI (1957), pp. 16-27.

Harkins, William E. *Dictionary of Russian Literature.* London: Allen & Unwin, 1957.

Hemmings, F.W.J. *Culture and Society in France 1848-1898: Dissidents and Philistines.* London: B.T. Batsford, 1971.

--- Ed. *The Age of Realism.* Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978.

Hingley, Ronald. *Russian Writers and Society in the Nineteenth Century.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1977.

Holmes, Glyn. *The 'Adolphe Type' in French Fiction in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century.* Quebec: Editions Naaman, 1977.

Horville, Robert. *Lorenzaccio.* Paris: Hatier, 1994.

Karp, Carole. 'George Sand in the Estimate of the Russian "Men of the Forties"' in *George Sand Papers: Conference Proceedings, 1978* (Vol. 2/2). New York: AMS Press, 1982, pp. 180-88.

Knapp, Bettina. 'Huysmans' "Against the Grain": The Willful Exile of the Introverted Decadent'. *Nineteenth-century French Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1-2, 1992, pp. 203-221.

Lavrin, Janko. *An Introduction to the Russian Novel.* London: Methuen, 1945.

Lloyd, Christopher. *J.-K. Huysmans and the Fin-du-siècle Novel.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990.

Lyngstad, Alexandra & Sverre. *Ivan Goncharov.* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971.

Magarshack, David. *Turgenev: A Life.* London: Faber & Faber, 1954.

Magraw, Roger. *France 1814-1915: The Bourgeois Century.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

Mathewson, Rufus W. *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1958.

Mersereau, John Jr. *Mikhail Lermontov.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1962.

Peace, Richard. *Oblomov: A Critical Examination of Goncharov's Novel.* Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 1993.

Raeff, Marc. *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: the Eighteenth-Century Nobility.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966.

Raimond, Michel. *La Crise du roman.* Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1966.

Reeve, F.D. *The Russian Novel.* London: Frederick Muller, 1967.

Ridge, George Ross. *The Hero in French Romantic Literature.* Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1959.

--- *The Hero in French Decadent Literature.* Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1961.

Ripp, Victor. *Turgenev's Russia. From Notes of a Hunter to Fathers and Sons.* London: Cornell University Press, 1980.

Schapiro, Leonard. *Turgenev: His Life and Times.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Seeley, Frank F. *Turgenev: A Reading of his Fiction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

--- *From the Heyday of the Superfluous Man to Chekhov - Essays on 19th-Century Russian Literature.* Nottingham: Astra Press, 1994.

Seton-Watson, Hugh. *The Russian Empire 1801-1917.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.

Shryock, Richard. 'Ce Cri rompit le cauchemar qui l'opprimait: Huysmans and the Politics of *A rebours*'. *The French Review*, Vol. 66, No. 2, December 1992, pp. 243-254.

Smethurst, Colin. *Chateaubriand: Atala and René.* London: Grant & Cutler Ltd., 1995.

Stow, Harriet K. *Narrative and Thematic Structure in George Sand's Horace* (Diss.), University of Wisconsin, 1979.

Szabó, Anna. *Le Personnage Sandien: constantes et variations.* Debrecen: Kossuth Lajos Tudományegyetem, 1991.

Tabart, Claude-André. *Atala, René, Mémoires d'outre-tombe.* Paris: Hatier, 1993.

Thomasseau, Jean-Marie. *Alfred de Musset - Lorenzaccio.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986.

Thorslev, Peter L. *The Byronic Hero, Types and Prototypes.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962.

Turner, C.J.G. *Pechorin: An Essay on Lermontov's A Hero of Our Time.* Birmingham: Department of Russian Language and Literature, University of Birmingham, 1988.

Waddington, Patrick. *Turgenev and George Sand: an improbable entente.* London: Macmillan Press, 1981.

Westwood, J.N. *Endurance and Endeavor: Russian History 1812-1971.* London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Wood, Dennis. *Benjamin Constant - Adolphe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Woodward, James B. *Metaphysical Conflict: A Study of the Major Novels of Ivan Turgenev.* Munich: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1990.

Zeldin, Theodore. *France 1848-1945.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973.