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The Novel Map

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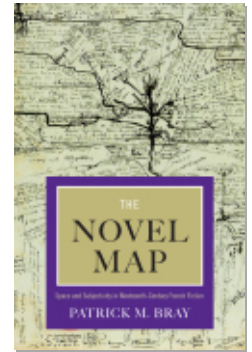
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PART I

Stendhal's Privilege

Il est, dans l'histoire littéraire, des personnages qui déroutent les procédés ordinaires de la critique et qu'on se sent envie de traiter comme des personnages de roman.*

—Léon Blum, *Stendhal et le beylisme*

Stendhal, Dominique, Henry Brulard, M.B.A.A. (Monsieur Beyle, Ancien Auditeur), and Mr. Myself are some of the many names and pseudonyms that testify to the multiplicity of the subject Henri Beyle. In his writings, Beyle contradicts the mystification of identity, the will to hide behind an encoded pseudonym, by a nearly constant impulse toward self-exposure in the form of autobiography. Henri Beyle felt the need to write, and in particular, to write about himself, from a relatively early age. What is perhaps more remarkable is that he was able to do so almost continuously from the age of eighteen until his death. There exist texts of autobiographical content that cover nearly every period of his life forming a more or less uniform autobiographical project.¹

The *Vie de Henry Brulard* in its structure, unity, and scope is unlike Stendhal's other autobiographical writings.² By way of an analysis of the progression of Stendhal's autobiographical works, the *Vie de Henry Brulard* can be differentiated from the oeuvre and made autonomous (made to have its own name, the difference between Henri/y Beyle/rulard). The *Vie de Henry Brulard* transcends the earlier autobiographical writing with the creation of a novel subject, Henry Brulard.

*There are in literary history personages that throw off the ordinary processes of criticism and which one wants to treat like characters in a novel.

The earliest autobiographical writings were a collection of various personal diaries published posthumously as the *Journal*, and begin with the young Beyle's arrival in Milan with Napoleon's army in 1800, tapering off only in 1823. From 1800 to 1814, he regularly made an entry every night, after which time the publication of other works (*Histoire de la peinture en Italie*, *Vies de Haydn, de Mozart, et de Métastase*, and *Rome, Naples, et Florence* where the pseudonym Stendhal makes its first appearance) seems to have satisfied some of the writing impulse (Martineau, "Avertissement," in Stendhal's *Oeuvres intimes*, 7). Indeed, the subject matter of the journals is often closer to that of his nonfiction publications than to a sentimental diary. At various moments, Beyle makes it clear that the journals are intended only for him, or at best for the Henri Beyle of the future. These are private literary journals, where every play seen and book read is carefully recorded, dated, and picked apart. Especially in the early journals (1800–1805), Beyle's main interest is in his future as a playwright; details concerning his travels, his life as a sous-lieutenant, the women he loves, are secondary and seem to be presented only for their possible connection to future literary endeavors. Gradually, however, the journal itself becomes the site of stylistic experimentation, the entries become longer, descriptions are more detailed.

The object of study eventually returns to Beyle himself: "Faire incessamment (le 13 octobre, jour anniversaire de mon départ de Paris) l'examen de ma conscience" (*Oeuvres intimes*, 895) ("Incessantly examine (October 13th, anniversary of my departure from Paris) my consciousness"). By studying himself, he can arrive at a perfection of his character and profession (as writer). The creation of an aesthetic leads to the creation of an identity. The methods of self-examination vary widely and anticipate one of Stendhal's principal literary inventions, what Georges Blin calls the "restrictions de champ," where the narrative field is restricted to the perceptions of one character (*Stendhal et les problèmes du roman*). Moreover Beyle rereads the journal from earlier years to discern what his thought process had been; he often describes himself in the third person with the help of an ironic narrator.

The end of the *Journal* coincides with the appearance of short (1–4 page) autobiographical essays, "notices autobiographiques," that Yves Ansel has called "fiches d'état civil," or an administrative curriculum vitae (Ansel, 2). Often in the third person, they summarize the life and anticipate the death of Henri Beyle, in the form more of a fictionalized auto-eulogy than an autobiography. Yet they represent a necessary step toward autobiography (and beyond), by separating it from an "exercice de style," and preparing the story of his life as a public and no longer private matter.

In 1832 Beyle began a more ambitious project, the *Souvenirs d'égotisme*, in which he envisioned recounting the "space of nine years" (1821–30) that he spent in "exile" in Paris, banished by the Austrian government from Milan. For the first time he recounts a part of the past, and not the immediate present. It is a much more personal text than the "auto-eulogies" which precede it. Writing has become a way to know himself, and to be known by others in the future: "J'avoue que le courage d'écrire me manquerait si je n'avais pas l'idée qu'un jour ces feuilles paraîtront imprimées et seront lues par quelque âme que j'aime . . . Quel homme suis-je? Ai-je du bon sens, ai-je du bon sens avec profondeur?" (*Oeuvres intimes*, 1427) ("I admit that I would lack the courage to write if I didn't have the idea that one day these pages would be printed and would be read by some soul whom I love . . . What type of man am I? Do I have good sense, good sense with depth?"). He continually expresses reluctance to write and doubts as to the possibility of drafting a memoir which is not "boring" or vain; the only remedy to this doubt is absolute sincerity and a minute study of the individual, a quality he terms "l'égotisme": "[Si ce livre] n'ennuie pas, on verra que l'égotisme, *mais sincère*, est une façon de peindre ce coeur humain" (*Oeuvres intimes*, 1482) ("[If this book] doesn't bore, the reader will see that egotism, *the sincere kind*, is a way to paint this human heart"). And yet Stendhal's *Souvenirs d'égotisme* is left unfinished, barely twelve days after it was begun; instead of the space of nine and a half years, he only finished three. The failure of the *Souvenirs d'égotisme* lies, perhaps, in its very sincerity. Stendhal only writes what he already knows is true about himself, and therefore is unable to discover the motives for his actions. By recounting the recent past, the author cannot take sufficient distance from himself or the events in his life.

Three years later, in November 1835, he took up the same themes again in the *Vie de Henry Brulard*, but instead of writing about a relatively recent period of his life, he began with the beginning. In the *Souvenirs d'égotisme* he states only half in jest that he was (morally and intellectually) twenty years old in 1821 (*Oeuvres intimes*, 1487), placing his "birth" at the beginning of the *Journal*, with his arrival in Italy and his first steps to becoming a writer. By placing this new "Life" (the usual page heading he gives to the manuscript) anterior to his "birth" as a writer, by changing the character's name to Brulard (he had first written Beyle), the text has made a shift from autobiography toward the novel. The frequent protests that he does not wish to "fall into the novel" only help to accentuate the precariousness of the text. The desire to find the truth about himself, to be sincere, is even more present in the *Vie de Henry Brulard* than in the *Souvenirs*; the concern that "on peut connaître tout, excepté soi-même" ("one can know everything, except one's self") which ap-

peared in *Souvenirs d'égotisme* (*Oeuvres intimes*, 1482), becomes “quel oeil peut se voir soi-même?” (“what I can see itself?”), in the manuscript, “soi-même” (*Oeuvres intimes*, 41). By looking into the past, by changing the subject into an object of study, Beyle (or perhaps from now on the writer Stendhal) can successfully become other to himself. He can become romanticized.³ It is commonly recognized by Stendhal experts that the *Vie de Henry Brulard* is an unfinished work, a draft of something left to be published after his death; Gérard Rannaud, editor of the “Edition diplomatique,” the first to include reproductions of all manuscript pages, claims that there is no “established text,” but rather an unfinished “editorial manuscript” (Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard écrite par lui-même*, I). I would argue that the *Vie de Henry Brulard* forms a coherent whole (much more so than his other unfinished works, such as *Lucien Leuwen*) that describes the entire childhood of Brulard, from Grenoble to his “escape” to Paris and then to Milan.

The *Vie de Henry Brulard* is then a unique text in Stendhal's oeuvre, suspended between novel and autobiography, deceptive truth and truthful lie, past and present. *Brulard's* instability, the becoming of the novel subject Brulard, relies on the instability of the text itself. Chapter 1, “The Life and Death of Henry Brulard,” analyzes the construction of an autonomous textual subject. The subject of autobiography is converted into narrative and the novel subject is born with the declaration “je vais naître” (“I am going to be born”). This new subject is at once a true representation of Beyle and an abstract, fictional invention, Brulard. The text creates and conceals this dual nature through the autobiographical simulacrum which collapses the differences between narrator, author, and character. The tension between word and image introduced by the presence of countless maps, diagrams, drawings, and engravings in the narrative maintains the distance between autobiographical and novel subject. Maps inscribe another Brulard into textual space that cannot be perfectly assimilated into either the written Brulard of the narrative or the author Beyle.

The second chapter of this section, “The Ghost in the Map,” reveals how *Brulard* questions from the outset the very possibility of autobiographical truth and the eventual results of the autobiographical project. The cartographic inscription of the subject occurs through the reduction of the self to language, the transformation of the personal to the universal, the repression of memory through the affirmation of chronological time. The only recourse is to textuality, the control of meaning through the play of signifiers. Another model of cartography, what I call the novel map, is proposed which counters chronological time, layers Brulard's past and present, and embraces the ambiguity of the novel subject.