

Scott on Stendhal (2013)

Stendhal. *Journaux et Papiers. Volume 1, 1797–1804*. Ed. Marie-Rose Corredor, H el ene de Jacqu elot, and C ecile Meynard. Grenoble: ELLUG, 2013. Pp. 696. ISBN: 978-2-84310-240-0

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Anglophone interest in Stendhal has been somewhat muted over the last two decades, with the other founding father of Realism appearing to hog most of the limelight at academic conferences and on university curricula in the English-speaking world. By contrast, the author has attracted an unprecedented level of scholarly interest in France over the same period, with two academic journals now devoted to his work and the appearance of a plethora of new editions and studies, rising to a peak with the inclusion of *Le Rouge et le Noir* on the program for the 2014 Agr egation de Lettres Modernes. The fact that Stendhal left behind so much unpublished work is no doubt a key factor in this surge of interest in France, where allegiance to genetic modes of criticism is strong. This new edition of Stendhal’s private writings was produced by a large team of scholars, working alongside a digital technologist, Thomas Lebarb e, under the stewardship of C ecile Meynard. It has its roots in a collaborative manuscript transcription project, initiated by G erald Rannaud in the 1990s, which led to an even larger editorial endeavour that has been informed since 2006 by regular seminars held under the auspices of the Grenoble-based “Manuscrits de Stendhal” group. This ambitious project has, to date, seen almost 2,600 pages of Stendhal’s manuscripts, held at the Biblioth eque municipale de Grenoble, transferred to an innovative open-access digital archive (<http://manuscrits-de-stendhal.org/>), where they are legible in three modes: facsimile, pseudo-diplomatic, and linear.

The new print edition of Stendhal’s private papers, conceived as a complement to the overarching manuscripts project, is presented with a helpful scholarly apparatus (an introduction to the overall project, a preface designed to contextualize each section, as well as explanatory endnotes), along with a number of black and white photographs of selected manuscript pages and drawings appearing in those pages. The completed edition will consist of four volumes and will cover the period between 1797 and 1821 (the date when the author left his private papers with a friend, never to return to them). Unusually, the author’s various documents—including autobiographical notes, intellectual reflections, and literary experiments—are published together and in chronological order, however generically heterogeneous this presentation appears. While there are, by necessity, limits to the scope of this edition—deliberately excluded are marginalia as well as some particularly well-developed literary projects—this is a far more comprehensive edition of Stendhal’s private papers than any yet attempted. It includes translations and transcriptions, as well as texts by others, all on the basis that Stendhal felt that these pieces were worth keeping among his private documents.

The first volume begins in 1797, when the author was fourteen years old, a good twenty years before he adopted “Stendhal” as his signature. It starts with a narrative “Anecdote” (1797) and a plan for a play, and goes on to include many of those diary entries which have traditionally been collected as part of the author’s *Journal*, as well as occasional poems, various theatrical projects, and a collection of “Pens ees,” which have not. Because these latter writings are often not easy to locate in published form, they can appear new and revelatory even to the specialist.

The first volume shows very clearly, particularly in its concluding annex, how the author was an exemplary product of the Revolution. Collected in the “Dossier de formation” are the previously unpublished notes that the author retained from a number of his classes at the  cole centrale, an institution that owed its very existence to the Revolution; the fact that Stendhal kept these notes with his private papers, and the clear continuities between their content and his own later thinking, suggest the decisive importance of his classes with Dubois Fontanelle, despite the fact that the latter are treated somewhat disdainfully in *Vie de Henry Brulard*. It is known that Stendhal had, from an early age, a great interest in sensualist philosophy and ideology, but what these notes demonstrate very forcefully is the extent to which he was steeped in these currents of thought as early even as his school days.

The disjointed presentation of Stendhal’s notes may alarm readers accustomed to more readable texts, but the chaos is contained by the editorial organisation of the volume into periods, and by internal titles and running heads that constantly remind us which notebook we are currently perusing. In conclusion, this first volume of Stendhal’s private papers makes a very real and commendable contribution to our understanding of the author’s early intellectual influences and artistic leanings.

Volume: 43.3-4

Year:

- 2015