

## Scott on Hamm (2018)

Hamm, Jean-Jacques. *Approches de Stendhal*. Classiques Garnier, 2018, pp. 361, ISBN 978-2-406-06501-2

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Jean-Jacques Hamm has devoted a large part of his research lifetime to Stendhal, producing several books on the author, a critical edition of *Lamiel*, as well as numerous *Concordances* of Stendhal's works. However, because so much of his work on Stendhal has taken the form of short essays, many of which have been published in specialist journals or in edited collections, the extent and importance of his published work on the author could be underestimated. *Approches de Stendhal*, the eighth title in Classiques Garnier's "Série Stendhal," edited by Xavier Bourdenet, leaves no room for any doubt as to the quality and breadth of the contribution Hamm has made to the field of Stendhal studies. The book presents twenty-five essays, the majority of which are versions of pieces published between 1985 and 2013, representing only a selection of Hamm's publications on the author. Grounded in a deep and wide-ranging knowledge of the author's work, they subject Stendhal's writing to a forensic kind of scrutiny, combining psychoanalytic perspectives with formalist analysis.

The essays, written in a candid and engaging style, explore big general questions, such as Stendhal's relationship to religion and his tendency to be out of step with his time, but also more niche themes, such as the author's use of epigraphs, his reflections on economic theory, or the specificity of his treatment of truth in *De l'Amour*. Similarly, while *La Chartreuse de Parme* is afforded three essays in this collection, Hamm dwells on minor texts, too, such as *Selmours*, Stendhal's earliest attempt to write for the theatre, and *Les Privilèges*. As might be expected of an author of concordances, recurring words, patterns, and motifs are of particular interest in these essays, where the significance of such repetitions is either posed as an open-ended question (as in the case of *o/a* and *a/o* phonemic structures), or woven into an interesting interpretation or argument. An example of the latter is the chapter "Nominalisme et nature," where an analysis of occurrences of "bois" and "forêts" in the novels leads the critic to the conclusion that physical objects have little if any universal symbolic import in Stendhal's work, tending rather to play specific situational roles, so that the corpus resists certain established psychoanalytic approaches. Stendhal's psychology is nevertheless an enduring source of interest for a critic intent on uncovering the laws at the heart of the author's textual production. The latter's inner world is at the center for example of essays such as "Stendhal et l'effet Méduse," "Texte et auteur," and "La Chasse dans l'univers stendhalien."

Among Hamm's privileged themes are the relationship between Stendhal and Henri Beyle, including possible reasons for the latter's adoption of pseudonyms, the novelist's tendency to leave projects unfinished, and his taste for plagiarism, antithesis, and restraint. While such themes will be familiar to specialists (at least partly thanks to the critic's own prior work, including *Le Texte stendhalien: Achèvement et inachèvement*), Hamm approaches them with an unflagging curiosity that regularly produces thought-provoking insights. "Texte et auteur," for example, begins with Hamm's reflection upon his own reluctance to resort to the biographical experience of Marie-Henri Beyle in his study of Stendhal's œuvre, but goes on to propose—tentatively though persuasively—that the unfinished qualities of Stendhal's writing, along with his obsession with pseudonyms and doubles of various sorts, might be linked to the early death of the novelist's older brother, the first Henri Beyle, almost exactly one year before his own birth. In the course of this argument, which touches upon the novelist's early attempt to produce a version of *Hamlet*, Hamm shares some intriguing observations: he reminds us for example how surprising it is that Beyle, who seemed otherwise careful to cultivate his own originality, should have begun his career as a published author by plagiarizing the work of others; and he notes how odd it is that the novelist never appears to reflect on his own habit of *inachèvement*, and how interesting it is that he never signed his private writing with his own full initials, preferring instead to use the initials of his older brother.

The collection is divided into three sections, the titles of which ("Œuvres," "Thèmes," and "Écriture") place the emphasis on Stendhal's texts rather than on their reception, but it is the work and the pleasure of reading that play the leading role in these essays. In the final lines of a fascinating concluding essay about his personal experience of computer-mediated approaches to literary analysis, on the subject of which he details both his reservations and his hopes, Hamm reflects that "[r]approcher lecture et science, c'est allier le plaisir et la rigueur" (330). This phrase would serve as a fitting and Stendhalian epigraph to this richly rewarding volume of essays.

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