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21L.472 Major European Novels
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Stendhal, *The Red and the Black*

1. Compare Julien Sorel's sense of himself at the outset of the book with Eugène's sense of himself at the outset of *Père Goriot*. What does "success" mean to each of them? What sense does each have of a vocation or a sense of purpose in life? Is it possible to imagine them meeting? Who would be more adept at describing this meeting, Balzac or Stendhal?
2. The uncertain nature of Julien's goal leads him to entertain a sense of duty that does not derive its content from the requirements of the goal; and so he often tests his capacity to follow the dictates of duty abstractly, that is, in circumstances where a sense of duty may not exist. Examine three cases from the early parts of the book and comment on how they reveal Julien's character.
3. Julien stands in contrast to people like Count Norbert in the book. They know their duty; it is tied to honor, which comes with birth and station. The book makes Julien more interesting than they (by having the admirable or interesting people in the book interested in him), but there is something a bit silly about him. Compare him in this respect with the figure of Don Quixote.
4. Julien acts at moments to propel what he thinks of as his career by saying to himself that he has a "duty to himself"? How does one acquire a *duty*? Is it possible to have "duties to oneself" as well as duties to others? What does Julien mean by the phrase "duty to himself"? If there is such a thing as duties to oneself, does Julien embody a valid idea of it?
5. Stendhal writes of Julien at the point when Julien is about to seduce the daughter of his friend and benefactor: "He was the unhappy man at war with all society." What is meant by this phrase? Can it possibly justify what Julien is doing? At the end of *Père Goriot*, Eugene would seem to declare war on society--the high society in Paris. Compare the two in respect of this notion.
6. Minor characters in *The Red and the Black* (Julien's father, M. Valenod, the Abbe de Frilair) know what they want and how to get it. Does Julien know what he wants? If not, does this make him superior or inferior to other characters in respect of the capacity to succeed? Does this make him ethically superior or inferior? Does it make him more or less interesting than they?
7. Knowing what you want can be a source of weakness, simply because it opens the possibility of others discovering what you want and using their knowledge to manipulate you. At the outset of the story's action, old Sorel gets a good deal out of M. de Renal in bargaining for Julien's salary. What does M. de Renal want from Julien's employment and how does old Sorel learn what that it and use the knowledge to advantage?
8. Julien imagines that the world is governed by vast conspiracies. Throughout the book, he imagines that people are secretly mocking him, judging him, conspiring against him. Is he correct in this? If so, does he understand the nature of the conspiracies appropriately?
9. Does the narrative voice of this text share Julien's sense that conspiracy is everywhere? Does it share Julien's understanding of the nature of these conspiracies? Consider, in this connection, the ceremonies surrounding the visit of the young Bishop of Agde to the town of Verrières.
10. Consider Julien's changing responses to the offer made by his friend, Fouqué, to put him in the way of riches. He seems to condemn himself for thinking to accept the offer and to condemn himself for thinking to refuse it. What does this say about his character?
11. Why does Julien decide to seduce Mme de Renal? Why does he decide to seduce Matthilde? Compare his love for these two women and their love for him. What is the source of his attractiveness to Mme de Renal? What is the source of his attractiveness to Matthilde? Compare the responses of

each woman to Julien's death. Does the contrast imply anything about the love that each bears for him?

12. Early in his residence at the Hotel de la Mole, Julien fights a duel. What is the occasion for it? Does dueling in response to this occasion make sense? Why does Julien accrue some benefit as a result of this duel?
13. The Count Altimira is under sentence of death in his own country. Why? Julien regards Altimira's failure to commit a certain act as the expression of weakness. What factors are at issue in this judgment?
14. Explain the ruse employed by the Marquis de la Mole in giving Julien two suits of clothing. Why does he so admire Julien for his adeptness in falling in with this stratagem?
15. The fix is in—the jury has been bribed to acquit Julien at his trial, yet Julien seems to throw his life away in his final address to the jury: he says things that will ensure his conviction of a capital crime. Why does he do this?
16. At the end of *The Red and the Black*, Julien is happy in prison (where ambition has no place), disregards Mathilde (who has sacrificed everything for him and is soon to bear his child), and occupies himself by making love with Mme de Renal and preparing himself to meet the day of his execution. Is this an appropriate end to the book?
17. The characteristics of the narrative voice in each of these texts implies something about the nature of the reader of them, who is occasionally addressed directly by the narrative voice. How would you describe the attitude of the narrative voice to Julien and to the other characters? How would you describe the implied reader of *The Red and the Black*?