Lamiel has the potential to be Stendhal's most engaging heroine. Her enthusiasm, curiosity, and intelligence sweep the reader up in her adventures as she seeks an answer to the question “Qu'est-ce que l'amour?” Unfortunately, she never really finds out: the novel remains unfinished, and the reader is left with the uncomfortable feeling that somewhere between Normandy and Paris Lamiel herself has become rather less intriguing.

We now know why this is so, thanks to Victor Del Litto's edition of Lamiel, which is the only complete one and the only one to present everything Stendhal wrote of this novel in chronological order. Exactly what Del Litto's Lamiel contains has been summarized very neatly by F. W. J. Hemmings, who has demonstrated that the novel is actually two rather different versions of one story. The first, which he terms Lamiel I, is an outline of the complete plot. The second, or Lamiel II, is a completed manuscript of the first six chapters of the novel, ending before Lamiel's walk in the woods with Jean Berville. Hemmings has discussed the stylistic changes and descriptive additions that Stendhal brought to the second version of his story and has quite rightly concentrated on the principal difference between the two accounts; that is, the increased importance of Dr. Sansfin in Lamiel II over his minor role in the outline. Both Del Litto and Hemmings conclude that the novel is unfinished because the independent actions of the first Lamiel cannot coexist with Sansfin's psychological domination of the second Lamiel.

Yet, further questions remain to tantalize us: Why does Stendhal seem to lose interest in Lamiel? Why does Sansfin become the dominant character in the novel, and what is the importance of this change? Perhaps some possible answers can come from a study of the educational aspects of the novel.

Certain similarities between the education of Lamiel and that of Beyle himself have been perceived by G. D. Chaitin. In early childhood both were repressed by the religious and aristocratic pretensions of their parents: they were under constant surveillance; they were forbidden to play with the other, supposedly lower-class, neighborhood children; and they were not allowed any amusements. At the moment of their sexual initiation both Beyle and Lamiel
were about sixteen years of age and both were paying customers. Chaitin feels that "[Beyle] endows Lamiel and her parents with the same characteristics that he felt he and his relatives possessed. This picture corresponds to Beyle's psychological situation, even if it is not a completely faithful reproduction of the historical situation."6

One could also point out other similarities in their development. In general, the direction of their education is the same: they both began with private lessons, then took advantage of the educational opportunities available in the home town, and finally arrived in Paris, where they chose their own instructors. Both youngsters overheard a phrase that seemed to trigger in them the analytical process and turn them away from religion.7 Their dreary childhood was brightened by their love of adventure stories; and in Paris when they were independent, they both took an enormous number of lessons, some of which were very much alike. For example, a young actress taught Lamiel to avoid using her "patois normand" (p. 139); and two retired actors, La Rive and Dugazon, trained Beyle to eliminate "les derniers restes du parler trainard de [son] pays."8 One can also find a similarity of vocation and character between Lamiel's English teacher, Abbé Clément, and Beyle's English teacher, Père Jéki.

In fact, their educations have so much in common that, by telling Lamiel's story, Stendhal is, in many respects, retelling his own. If we compare the Vie de Henry Brulard to Lamiel it becomes clear that, in addition to the similarity of details, there is also a decided similarity of intention on the part of the author. Certainly, in embarking on Lamiel, Stendhal knew that he was writing a novel; but also by relating the Vie de Henry Brulard, says Victor Brombert, "he knew that he had undertaken not a simple recounting but an act of creation and that what he was creating was precisely the boy Henry Brulard, if not Beyle-Stendhal himself."9 Because Stendhal ceased work on Brulard only three years before writing Lamiel, it is possible that he did not want to persevere with virtually the same story so soon again. This repetition might account in part for Stendhal's abandonment of his alter-ego heroine of Lamiel and his subsequent interest in Sansfin. Lamiel I can be seen, then, as a novel of education that Stendhal did not want to rewrite.

Another possible explanation of Stendhal's increased interest in Sansfin arises from an examination of the teacher-student relationships in the novel. Lamiel's part in these relationships is always the same. She is a willing student who profits from her lessons; but, with regard to her instructors, she displays all the indifference of a statue. On the other hand, Lamiel's educators usually exhibit a much warmer attitude toward their pupil. Except for the Hautemares, who consider their instruction simply the dutiful dispatch of an obligation; for Jean Berville, who calmly but greedily accepts payment for services rendered; and for the Sansfin of Lamiel I, who plays too minor a role to be considered a
significant teacher figure, all of the educators show great good will toward their pupil.

In fact, they are so anxious to mould Lamiel that their zeal seems unbelievable to the reader. Mme Le Grand, the hotelkeeper who guides the young woman through her first days in Paris, is typical in this respect. Stendhal explains: "L'unique passion de Lamiel était alors la curiosité; jamais il ne fut d'être plus questionneur; c'était peut-être là ce qui avait fait la source de l'amitié de Mme Le Grand qui avait le plaisir de répondre et d'expliquer toutes choses" (p. 107). It is evident here that the pedagogical function itself constitutes the source of the instructor's affection for her pupil. Mme de Miossens is no different: she instructs Lamiel, first, because she enjoys her task, and second, to relieve the boredom of long evenings in her dismal château. Ultimately, she forgets her boredom as all her feelings are made to revolve around Lamiel. At this point the teacher's affection for her pupil is developed to such an extent that a paradoxical situation arises. Instead of the teacher's sanctioning the student's excellence, it is the student who becomes the judge of her teacher's merit, as we see in the episode where Mme de Miossens shows Lamiel a portrait of her son, Fédor: "Elle voulait montrer ce beau portrait à l'aimable Lamiel, et elle n'osait en quelque sorte se livrer à son ravissement avant d'avoir l'opinion de l'être aimable qui disposait de son cœur. Arrivée dans la chambre de Lamiel, la duchesse se livra aux éloges les plus exagérés, mais son œil interrogeait sa favorite qui ne répondait guère" (p. 258).

The same pattern is evident in Lamiel's relationship to her male teachers; but here, if anything, the teachers develop an even deeper affection for their pupil, again precisely because they are educating her. For example, like those of Mme de Miossens, Abbé Clément's feelings arise first from boredom and a desire to instruct; however, the young priest actually falls in love with Lamiel. Similarly, when Comte d'Aubigné Nerwinde eyes Lamiel through his drunken stupor, he boasts to all and sundry: "il y a quelque chose de singulier, d'original chez cette jeune fille. Et moi je veux la former. Avec ses grandes enjambees, elle me fera rougir quand je lui donnerai le bras; elle ne sait pas porter un châle; mais je lui plairai ou je mourrai à la peine" (p. 111).

The entire situation is reflected clearly in the relationship of Lamiel and Fédor de Miossens. The young man is enamored of explaining everything to his mistress, and his passion knows no bounds when she asks him to expound the principles of geometry to her. She, however, feels no love for her teacher: "Quant au duc, elle le regardait par curiosité et pour son instruction" (p. 78).

This situation seems unusual. The teachers, motivated by the ignorance and need for guidance they perceive in their pupil, give so generously of their time and effort to form her character that they develop great affection and even love for her. Furthermore, although they receive virtually nothing in return from Lamiel, they persist in their helpful, affectionate attitude. Is such behavior
altruistic to the point of foolishness? Not according to Pierre Fauchery, who observed the same phenomenon in many eighteenth-century novels and termed it pygmalionism.\(^{11}\) He believed that pygmalionism expresses the teacher’s dream of modeling and possessing another human being, perhaps without having to confront the uncertainties that a physical possession implies.\(^{12}\)

Stendhal was no stranger to the experience of pygmalionism. In his letters to his sister Pauline, he tried to form all facets of her taste and character.\(^{13}\) When in Marseille he wished to turn Mélanie Guilbert into one of the outstanding actresses of her time and felt confident that he could do so,\(^{14}\) especially after his success at training Adèle Rebuffel for amateur theatrics when he himself was only a part-time drama student.\(^{15}\)

Obviously, pygmalionism interested Stendhal very much. Perhaps it interested him so much that he wished to explore it further than he could in *Lamiel I*. Certainly, in this preliminary version of the novel we have many examples of the phenomenon; however, the emphasis is always on the student. We constantly see Lamiel acting and reflecting, while we learn of the teacher’s attitude rather as background information and only insofar as it affects Lamiel’s life. By changing the emphasis of the narrative, by putting the accent on the teacher, Stendhal could explore the other half of the relationship in greater depth. This is what he does in *Lamiel II*.

Here he concentrates on Dr. Sansfin, who was simply a background figure in the first version of the novel, and on Sansfin’s relationship with Lamiel, an association that was merely suggested in the earlier draft. A rather sinister portrait of the Pygmalion figure thus emerges. Unlike Ovid’s Pygmalion, who was basically a nice, if overly perfectionistic, young man, Sansfin is driven above all by vanity and fear of ridicule. The hilarious “scène du lavoir” (pp. 196–206) establishes the hunchback as humorless and ill-tempered. Instead of love, Sansfin’s motives are lust and power, which will enable him to compensate for his deformity.

At the outset the plot of *Lamiel II* revolves not around Sansfin and Lamiel only but around Sansfin, Lamiel, and Mme de Miossens. The good doctor initially plans to garner for himself the delights of Lamiel’s sexual awakening and to savor the more mature pleasure of Mme de Miossens’s company somewhat later. This is quite a change from *Lamiel I*, where Stendhal simply toyed with the idea of having Sansfin mastermind a liaison between Lamiel and Féodor. The modifications in the second version are obviously due to the author’s deepening interest in Sansfin’s character. This new outlook has in turn changed the roles of Lamiel and Mme de Miossens. Instead of Mme de Miossens’s being simply a teacher for Lamiel, in the second version we see her, as well as Lamiel, linked to Sansfin. Because of the similar purpose he has in mind for the two women, their roles tend to converge.
To begin with, both women are bored: Lamiel because she is compelled to behave decorously in a musty old château, and the duchess because she has imposed the decorous behavior and can find no one to dispel it. Because of their boredom both Lamiel and Mme de Miossens require medical care. Lamiel falls quite seriously ill from her cheerless confinement in the château. The duchess is not really ill at all, but in her boredom she has plenty of time to dally in front of her mirror. Upon noticing crow’s-feet around her eyes, she hastens to summon a specialist who confirms the possibility of disease. Just as Sansfin, who attends Lamiel, decides that he will be her tonic by amusing her and cheering her up, so Mme de Miossens’s Parisian specialist in a sense does the same thing. By substituting an illness for the natural process of aging and by changing her life with the suggestion that she engage a reader, he too provides a tonic. Furthermore, both women have newspapers read aloud to them: Sansfin reads the *Gazette des Tribunaux* to Lamiel, and Lamiel reads the *Quotidienne* to the duchess.

During Lamiel’s illness Mme de Miossens actually does become indisposed herself out of worry for the girl. At this point Sansfin attends the duchess as well, and the roles of the two women become increasingly similar. The doctor’s first action is to make Lamiel and the duchess even more ill, the better to manipulate them, of course. In their worsened state Sansfin controls them by the “magnétisme de son éloquence infernale” (p. 237). Finally, he arranges for them to live side by side in peasants’ cabins for the duration of Lamiel’s illness. After a final paroxysm of vanity in which Sansfin envisions marrying the duchess, he decides instead to concentrate on Lamiel and to settle for “les prémices de cœur de cette jeune fille” (p. 244). From this point on, because of Sansfin’s conscious decision, the teacher-student relationship develops between himself and Lamiel only. Stendhal is still concentrating on the Pygmalion figure.

Sansfin spares no effort in his attempt to control Lamiel. He ensures her complicity through the use of terror and systematically destroys the power of others over her, concentrating his efforts on the formative influence of the Hautemares. This sinister aspect of Sansfin’s undertaking is emphasized by his fear of losing his pupil to another male teacher figure, either Abbé Clément or Féдор. Whereas in *Lamiel I* Sansfin was to have promoted a romance between the heroine and Féдор, in *Lamiel II* he cannot bear the thought of a liaison between them; and it is he, not the prudish Mlle Anselme, who suggests that Lamiel leave the château before Féдор’s arrival.

We can see, then, that the two versions of the novel constitute, in effect, an inquiry into the nature of pygmalionism, by exploring the possibility of liberty for the pupil in *Lamiel I* and the possibility of control for the teacher in *Lamiel II*. Stendhal carries his meditation on freedom and constraint one step further: it
becomes the subject matter of Sansfin's lessons to Lamiel. In this way Stendhal is able to examine pygmalionism not only through the structure of the novel but also through its ideological content.

The doctor calls his first lesson the "règle du lierre" (p. 247), by which he intends to rid Lamiel of her preconceptions much as one would cut an overgrowth of ivy from an oak tree. In his desire to cleanse Lamiel's mind of all false ideas, Sansfin is employing a sort of "anticrystallization" technique: instead of allowing Lamiel's thoughts to build one upon the other like crystals on a branch, he wishes to strip the trunk of its growth and to start it afresh. Although his intention here may seem honorable—he wants Lamiel to learn to think for herself in complete intellectual freedom—his method is perhaps questionable. His anticrystallization actually puts Lamiel totally at the mercy of his suggestions and does not permit her to think for herself. In this sense the "règle du lierre" becomes a meditation on pygmalionism. It demonstrates the paradoxical nature of the situation: the overbearing mentor cannot create an independent human being from a statue by chiseling away all of its ideas, even though they may be false.

Sansfin's second lesson concerns his "doctrine du plaisir," in which he urges Lamiel to find her pleasure where she will, but to preserve her reputation at all costs (pp. 261-62). This course of action seemed to work quite well in Lamiel I, where the heroine worked out these ideas for herself. However, in Lamiel II, although the principle is stated much more categorically by Sansfin, Lamiel's acceptance of it is actually more problematical. There are two explanations for this. The first arises from the relationship between Sansfin and Lamiel. While she is totally dominated by him she cannot possibly practice his ideas on pleasure and hypocrisy: he will always be able to guess at her motives, and thus she will never be able to achieve perfect, unfathomable hypocrisy. Once again Stendhal has demonstrated the overwhelming control that the mentor can assume in the Pygmalion-type situation.

The second explanation for Lamiel's inability to practice the "doctrine du plaisir" comes from a polarization of teacher-student relationships in Lamiel II. Sansfin's reasoning is echoed by Abbé Clément, who also speaks to Lamiel of the horrors of a reputation forever lost. However, as one would expect, Clément advises Lamiel to mistrust any man who does not follow his protestations of affection with an offer of marriage. Basically, the young priest gave the same advice in Lamiel I; however, in Lamiel II his words take on a new emphasis because they are contrasted in the heroine's mind with Sansfin's advice. The contrast between the two suggestions confuses the impressionable Lamiel and makes her unable to choose a course of action. Once again, the inevitable impasse of pygmalionism is posited.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that Lamiel's question "Qu'est-ce que l'amour?" is never answered. For an answer to be forthcoming
there would have to be an intervention from on high, like that of Venus bringing to life the statue Galatea in Ovid’s tale of Pygmalion. Stendhal was not prepared to play that part here; instead, it seems that he was more interested in a role he had often chosen for himself: he wished to be the observer and investigator of relationships, the “connaisseur du cœur humain.”


3. Ibid., pp. 307–12.

4. Del Litto, preface to Lamiel, p. iv; and see Hemmings, pp. 312–16.


6. Ibid., p. 175.

7. In Lamiel, p. 30, La Merlin characterizes Lamiel’s adoptive parents with the exclamation: “C’est bon comme du bon pain les Hautemare, mais c’est bête”; cf. ibid., p. 216. Here, as in subsequent quotations from Stendhal, the italics are Stendhal’s. In the Vie de Henry Brulard (Paris: Le Divan, 1949), 1: 49, Beyle recounts that when his mother died he overheard Abbé Rey say to his father: “Mon ami, ceci vient de Dieu.”


10. Georges Blin, Stendhal et les problèmes de la personnalité (Paris: José Corti, 1958), 1: 76, explains this type of reversal in existential terms, as a kind of “‘toi qui devant moi me saisis moi devant toi,’ si bien que là où je semblais, comme candidat à un examen, tenir, des deux, le rôle faible, c’est moi qui, au contraire, contraignant mon expert à prendre acte de ma contingence, le requérant, au nom de la vérité ‘objective,’ de me compter pour tout ce que je suis et ne le comptant, lui, que pour bon à ce faire, c’est moi qui, de l’opération, dirige le procès, et en l’alignant tout sur ma loi.”


12. Ibid., pp. 528–29.


