

# **The Red Lily**

Anatole France

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## **The Red Lily** Anatole France

The Red Lily tells of the affair between a woman of the world, married to a politician, with an artist. A trip to Florence (which symbolizes the title) crowns this carnal and mystical union. Soon, jealousy insinuates itself into the lover's heart, who ends the affair.

This novel by Anatole France, unique in its genre, now rehabilitated and returned to fashion, is partially autobiographical, since it is based on the, at first passionate affair, between the author and Mrs. de Caillavet.

## **The Red Lily Details**

Date : Published 1894 by IndyPublish.com

ISBN : 9781404328228

Author : Anatole France

Format : Hardcover 276 pages

Genre : European Literature, French Literature, Fiction, Classics, Cultural, France, Novels

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# From Reader Review The Red Lily for online ebook

**Jareed says**

*"I need love"*

*"I need love"*

says the title of the first chapter. So basic a need that will define this book's essence.

*"I need love"*

says Mdm. Therese, and inevitably a love that cannot be found in the arms of his husband leads to adultery and fornication, not just in an isolated occurrence. This is a recurring aspect of France's in his novels, characters which seemed to be designed with the canonical belief to engage in adultery. France's own life inevitably trickles in these instances as he too was known for these kind of passionate indecencies.

*"I need love"*

says the art. For France's talks about the myriad facets of arts, of passion, of styles, of inspiration for passion for art, of the differences in style, of art itself.

*"I need love"*

says France's impeccable prose, to that, love need not be asked twice!

Other works by Anatole France:

The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard(4 Stars)

Revolt of the Angels(4 Stars)

Penguin Island (3 Stars)

This book forms part of my remarkably extensive reading list on Nobel Prize for Literature Awardees

This review, along with my other reviews, has been cross-posted at [imbookedindefinitely](#)

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**Altan Suphandag says**

It was way too boring. Certainly not for this century readers, I knever know authors like this remain, while much much better ones dissappear in history.

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**Kelly says**

It reminded me of Anna Karenina.

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## Kalliope says

I will start with an avowal and with apologies. The main reason I decided to read this novel now was not so much because of an interest in the book and in its writer, but in another work and in another author. As part of the full year project of reading Proust's *La recherche*, I want to read a selection of some of his contemporary writers.

Ruskin would have questioned the morality of such a purpose.

Anatole France himself was an important figure in Proust's world. Older than Proust by almost thirty years, he was sort of his literary protector, writing the Preface to his first published work, *Les plaisirs et les jours* (1896). The character of *Bergotte* in the famous roman à clef is a key to Anatole France.

AF's real name was François-Anatole Thibault and he lived from 1844 until 1924. As the son of a book seller, he was very well read and developed a very polished, sensitive and witty writing style. He occupied a very public place in the Parisian literary circles, as both a member of the prestigious *Académie Française* and as the Librarian of the Senate. May be it was his weighty role in the cultural circles of Paris, and his general excellent writing abilities, rather than the greatness of any particular work, that earned him the Nobel Prize in 1921 and that keep his name alive today.

The first draft of this novel had the very different title of *La terre des morts*. The final version was published in a serialized manner in *La Revue de Paris* in 1894 under its more beautiful name of *Le lys rouge*. This red flower crops up repeatedly in different guises along the book. As a natural flower, as a piece of jewelry, as a decoration in a silver teaspoon or most importantly, as the heraldic symbol of the city of Florence, it becomes a sort of *idée fixe* very much favored by the Symbolists.

The novel is considered as an exemplary *Roman d'amour* in French literature. For a more cynical reader from the twenty first century the story can easily seem one of silly jealousies. For the whole drama consists of a woman committing adultery with one man, and then with another one, and of the consequent jealousy felt by the latter two (no, not the husband). At the time it was easily realized that Anatole France knew what he was talking about. The not so hidden story between himself and Mme Arman-Caillavet (Léontine Lippman) could be easily read into the book. Mme Arman de Caillavet was well known for the Salon she held in Paris. AF eventually divorced his wife for her.

The main appeal of the book, if not in the plot, resides in the scenes, incidents, settings, and all the cultural *vignettes* that it describes. Art is the pervasive air that everyone breathes. The red lily could represent love as the embodiment of artistic passion, or a passionate love of art, or the art of passionate love, or as a passion for the love of art. But the best of all is that this is explored by AF's exquisite prose.

But to return to our interest on the book's relevance for Proust: the novel starts with a scene in a Parisian Salon. It then follows the British art and literary circles by traveling to the place in Europe where these circles could best be found, Florence. There it visits a Vivienne Bell (sic), who darlings everyone and

collects “cloches” or bells (AF could be very lyrical but also very funny), and an opportunity is created to mention one of the Pre-Raphaelites, Burne Jones. Upon returning to Paris, there is an inevitable visit to the Opera house in which the looking around to society and to who is with whom, switches on the Degas mode. And in case anyone had missed this, Degas seems to be walking in himself with a lovely but somewhat disconnected description of his dancers doing their bar exercises next to men dressed in black.

In addition to the above elements, which make this a suitable parallel read to *La recherche*, there is an additional incident that links both writers and friends even closer. AF includes, again in a somewhat disconnected fashion to the rest of the story, and in the mouth of one of the secondary characters, Joseph Schmoll, an angry diatribe against the *Arch of Titus* standing in Rome. He denounces its high reliefs that show and celebrate the spoils from the Temple in Jerusalem. It is also this character who declares what has become the most famous quote from this novel: "*L'antisémitisme, c'est la mort, entendez-vous, de la civilization européenne*"

This, at the time very controversial statement, certainly takes us to one of the most memorable episodes of the friendship between Proust and AF.

When the Affair Dreyfus exploded, Proust, who later would represent himself as the first Dreyfusard, persuaded AF to stamp the first signature in a public statement in support of Alfred Dreyfus. A group of writers and artists declared their belief in the innocence of Alfred Dreyfus. When Zola later vociferously and much more controversially championed the case also in support of Dreyfus, Anatole France then lent his support to both Dreyfus and Zola.

Le lys rouge has then been a perfect foyer for approaching *La recherche*.

But to do AF justice, I plan to read, later on, two more of his books, *Thaïs*, in honor of someone, and the evocatively titled *L'île des Pingouins*.

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I am adding a postscript on Dec 11th, 2012 :

I have just learnt from Marcel Proust: A Life, that Proust was buried wearing the ring that Anatole France had given to the actress Gabriele Réjane, when *Le lys rouge* was later adapted for the theatre. She had acted the main role and the ring was brought to Proust's deathbed by Jacques Porel, her son.

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**Tina says**

Es un privilegio leer a Anatole France, ganador de Premio Nobel, a principios del siglo pasado.

Esta obra trata de amores apasionados, intensos que al final, después de tramas de celos y malos entendidos, cobran justicia. La prosa es exquisita, muy característica de los autores del siglo XIX, algunos bellísimos poemas adornan la obra. Además en la misma, hay un toque de política y de arte. Vale la pena leerla.

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## **knig says**

Is it possible all French women in French literature up to the 20c are actually one person, whose ennui-ridden prototype is being etched-by-numbers in all the great classics? Madame Martin being the final straw that finally shook me out of my lazy reverie, I'm going to have to go with with yes.

Who is it, then, that presents the French vision of womanhood, embossed starkly in the collective literary consciousness of the West, exemplified by say Madame Bovary, Therese Raquine, Mme du Maupin, Manon Lescaut, others & cie, ad nauseum? A bunch of men, that's who.

Now, I'm not saying a male author can't write from a woman's perspective authentically and vice versa, except, I am (I have no problem with sfumato thinking, btw. Love it, in fact. The intellectual's take on sitting on the fence, heh).

My point is, these women are not 'real women'. They are what their male counterparts imagine them or desire them to be. Madam Martin so much so, that it becomes impossible to not acknowledge this point. France dispenses with all pretence to explain, justify or contextualise her as a flesh and blood personage. She presides like an automaton during discussions of state affairs, beautiful but silent and futile, and 'switches on' only during love scenes, with the express purpose of promulgating, nay, perpetuating France's well ensconced psychological and philosophical terminology for defining the female psyche.

And for the avoidance of any doubt, just in case any reader out there might become a little confused about the overall message, France brings it all nicely home with an impassioned diatribe which tells us whats what. Decharte, Martin's lover, informs her: 'you are the thing and I am the mind. You are the clay and I am the artisan.'

Now, OK. But. Heres the problem with that type of thinking. There you are, molding away, artisaning and whatnot, all pleased as punch, and before you know it: you got yourself, instead of a real woman, a man with breasts:

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## **Luiza Lang says**

Alguns aspectos do livro são muito bons. Adorei os discursos de Paul Vence e, principalmente, de Choulette, inclusive seus ideais para uma reforma do clero. Com relação à Condessa Martin, todavia, sinto que não há o

menor laço de empatia. Muito me lembra de Constance Chatterley, personagem título do livro "O Amante de Lady Chatterley", com um espírito esmaecido, que não consegue se guiar ou guiar suas ações, à revelia dos atos e ideias dos homens a quem ela alega entregar seu afeto. Como alguém à deriva aguardando seu herói e salvador.

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## Asma says

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## Fionnuala says

Like the Adriana character in Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, many of us must wonder what it would have been like to live at the height of the Belle Epoque in France during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Reading *Le Lys Rouge* is like stepping back in time just as Adriana did; we get to walk about the streets of Paris with the beautiful Thérèse Martin-Bellème who is always impeccably dressed and usually in the company of writers, sculptors or poets. Thérèse's world is not only fashionably literary, it is also very political and we understand quite early on how fascinated Anatole France must have been with French history and politics. Since he was a journalist as well as a writer, the novel is sprinkled with both political and artistic digressions ranging from an assessment of Napoleon Bonaparte to a critique of the 1879 Grèvy government, touching on the miseries of military conscription, the reconstructions of national monuments, the inadequacies of the Catholic church and the wonders of the Renaissance in between. Sometimes these digressions work beautifully, at other times they disrupt the smooth flow of the novel and seem more like an afterthought. But perhaps it is the novel which is the afterthought and it is the political and artistic discussions which are the most important elements in *Le Lys Rouge* since there isn't really much in the way of plot. There might have been a more sensational ending but France chooses a more realistic one instead. This is essentially a snapshot of a period and as such, it succeeds perfectly. For any Proustians reading this, there are interesting links. The novel is set in much the same period as *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. Anatole France is said to have been the model for the character Bergotte in Proust's work. Anatole France's mistress had a literary salon which Proust attended and the character of the

young writer Paul Vence in *Le Lys Rouge* resembles Proust himself. France's mistress was famous for refusing to have any boring people attend her salon so she may be the model for Proust's Mme Verdurin who had a similar rule for her salon. Like *A la Recherche* itself, this makes for a very interesting roman à clef.

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## Elizabeth says

A few months ago, I found this book in the back of a dusty old bookstore in my hometown. I was looking through several unknown titles in the high shelves containing antique novels, and this one, upon quick research on my phone, caught my eye. Since this is my year of reading classics, I decided to include this obscure French title, especially since it seemed to be a good old-fashioned romance. And, I must admit, this book was indeed a pleasant surprise. I fell in love first with the language, sensual, gorgeous, and intricate, then I fell for the heroine: Countess/Madame Therese Martin-Belleme. Her story is one of a married-off-for-political-reasons woman pursuing love through another man, and how jealousy is often the monster that drives even the closest lovers apart. This premise is incredibly well-known throughout human history; from fairytales to mythology, to television and movies of today, it shows the ups and downs of a passionate romance, and how just one slip-up, one silly miscommunication, can bring the whole foundation down to its knees.

I must confess, I enjoyed indulging myself in the sweeping romance of this philosophically-inclined, unhappily married countess, and how an Italian sculptor brought colors into her "boring life," despite already having a long-term lover. Perhaps it was the beautiful language, or my own personal romantic tendencies, that drew me deeper into the heart of late 19th century aristocratic France, and the "first world problems" of dear Therese. She's emotional, intelligent, thoughtful, and witty, and a lover of the arts and the beauty of life. Her original lover is a good man who's unfortunately simply too boring for her needs; her passionate new lover brings her joy and intimacy that she never imagined experiencing before. It's a typical love story, just with a bittersweet moral: Jealousy does not bode well in a healthy relationship. That moral, at the very least, remained consistent and was certainly not romanticized the way it is in Hollywood ~~and anime~~. Honestly, my only issue with the ending, despite the implications that it was never meant to last, was Jacques' - the sculptor - overblown jealousy. If he had just grown the fuck up and swallowed his pride, he could have forgiven her, but noooo.... Ugh, stupid masculine possessive bullshit...

The only truly dull moments in the story were the occasional (and sometimes frequent, in the same chapter) monologues of political/philosophical discussion, but they were fitting for the scenes in which they took place. I actually found myself enjoying some of the philosophical tangents, that were expressed by both the narrative and characters, because it showed that more often than not universal and ancient ideas still take root in our modern culture. The passion, the sorrows, the angst, the anger, the joys; every emotion and idea was felt and conveyed beautifully -- if not melodramatically, though that's probably the point. It's a very human story: of love, sex, philosophy, politics, desires, grudges, and sorrows.

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## John says

A more serious and humorless work than *Penguin Island* or *At the Sign of the Reine Pedauque*.



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**Brad says**

With the exception of a few digressions on politics, the subject matter was entirely beyond my experience. The characters seemed like spoiled little ingrates, and I found it near impossible to have any sympathy with them. Not my cup of tea.

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**Montse de Paz says**

So elegant, so romantic, son cynical... and well written! Anatole France is one of those classics one should read at least once a year, to learn what is beautiful writing.

The red lily is a kind of Madame Bovary with the glamour of Paris and romantic Tuscany, and without the merciless tragic aura that Flaubert gave to his heroine.

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**Eadweard says**

He did not wish to go in. He declared that the door was closed.

She pushed it, and slipped into the immense nave, where the inanimate trees of the columns ascended in darkness. In the rear, candles were moving in front of spectre-like priests, under the last reverberations of the organs.

She trembled in the silence, and said: "The sadness of churches at night moves me; I feel in them the grandeur of nothingness."

He replied: "We must believe in something. If there were no God, if our souls were not immortal, it would be

too sad."

She remained for a while immovable under the curtains of shadow hanging from the arches. Then she said: "My poor friend, we do not know what to do with this life, which is so short, and yet you desire another life which shall never finish."

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The shame of emperors and of republics is to have made it an obligation for men to kill. In the ages called barbarous, cities and princes entrusted their defence to mercenaries, who fought prudently. In a great battle only five or six men were killed. And when knights went to the wars, at least they were not forced to do it; they died for their pleasure. They were good for nothing else. Nobody in the time of Saint Louis would have thought of sending to battle a man of learning. And the laborer was not torn from the soil to be killed. Nowadays it is a duty for a poor peasant to be a soldier. He is exiled from his house, the roof of which smokes in the silence of night; from the fat prairies where the oxen graze; from the fields and the paternal woods. He is taught how to kill men; he is threatened, insulted, put in prison and told that it is an honor; and, if he does not care for that sort of honor, he is fusilladed. He obeys because he is terrorized, and is of all domestic animals the gentlest and most docile.

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She murmured carelessly: "We long to be loved, and when we are loved we are tormented or worried."

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Ah! The things that live are only too mysterious; and you remain for me, my beloved, an enigma, the unknown sense of which contains the light of life. Do not fear to give yourself to me. I shall desire you always, but I never shall know you. Does one ever possess what one loves? Are kisses, caresses, anything else than the effort of a delightful despair? When I embrace you, I am still searching for you, and I never have you; since I want you always, since in you I expect the impossible and the infinite.

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There is nothing like suffering to enlarge the mind.

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## Ellen says

This is the first book by Anatole France that I've read; I'm not familiar with French literature in general and would like to improve that by reading more novels and such by French authors.

France's style is brilliant, his descriptions elegant and beautiful. You can see in your mind quite vividly the places and people he describes, and can comprehend the characters and their actions with the exception of those of the main character, Therese. As I read, she continued to baffle me with her actions and her thinking; there came a point toward the end of the novel at which I wanted to slap her face and say, "Wake up! Can you not see how your flirting and dishonesty are driving the men in your life absolutely insane?" Although a married woman, Therese involves herself emotionally and physically with several men, and each time she gets into a relationship with men she ends up hurting them terribly. She has no self-awareness, no understanding of her own motives, and just barges through these men's lives like some kind of tornado. And yet she's astonished when they boot her out of their lives!

Again, being unfamiliar both with French writing and the period during which the novel was written, I don't know if this is the usual plot of a novel of its time. However, I hope to read more of France's novels and some novels by other French writers of the same period to find out.

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### **Mustafa ?ahin says**

Çok fazla isim var. Kafa kar??t??r??yor. Sebebi de kimsenin do?ru düzgün tan?t?lmamas?. Herhangi bir karakterle ba? kuramad???m gibi sayfalar da geçmek bilmedi. Uzun zamand?r ilk kez bu kadar s?k?ld?m bir kitab? okurken. Neden böyle oldu, ben de anlamad?m aç?kças?.

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### **Elif says**

<http://kitaplikkedisi.com/kitaplar/ki...>

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### **Sketchbook says**

"She was young, she was loved, and she was discontented."  
She is Therese, married 6 yrs to a politico who goes about his business and expects her to do the same. She naturally takes a lover. In France, marriage is a strategy to further careers or status. It's expected that you find your "hots" elsewhere. Perfection: I approve.

When her lover explains that he'll be away on a hunt, she's insulted. Therese must be the Center of Attention. In Italy she caresses the red lily, symbol of love, and submits to a passionate Frenchy who wants to control her ideas and emotions. He erupts with a smothering unlovely sense of possession, jealousy and a tangy love-hate that only a French writer could produce. Anatole France, winner of the Nobel Prize 1921, consumes our attention with this exercise in a man's obsession and a woman who realizes "the terrible immensity" of life.

"Whatever one does one is always alone in the world."

"Love is a brief intoxication. We want to be loved, and when we are loved we are either tormented or bored."

"Having attained to years of discretion, how can one commit the folly of marriage."

"Hope keeps us alive. We live in the expectation of tomorrow."

The French take the complexities of "Love" seriously. Americans take monogamy seriously and End Up Fuked Up.

An elegant, ironic novel that you underline. The most shattering liner: "It is only ourselves that we find in books."

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