

READING GUIDE

“*The Stolen Room*”

Novel by Robert Casanovas — Second revised and corrected edition (2025)

Historical fiction — spoliation, restitution and family memory

1. Fact sheet

Title: The Stolen Room (La Chambre volée)

Author: Robert Casanovas

Genre: Historical novel / documentary chronicle, spanning multiple time periods

Structure: Prologue + 11 chapters + Epilogue

Edition: Second revised and corrected edition, legal deposit September 2025

ISBN: 979-10-979984-4-8

Period(s) covered: 1920-1958 (spoliation, then partial restitution) and 1975-2034 (rediscovery, contemporary struggle)

Main settings: Paris (Rodin Museum, the Louvre, Musée d'Orsay), London, Tokyo/Kamakura, San Francisco, Geneva, Céret

Related resource: The fictional NGO “Retour et Restitutions” (“Return and Restitutions”), founded by the character Pierre Bertier, echoes the real-world NGO International Restitutions, of which the author is president

Associated publisher: International Restitutions (NGO chaired by the author)

2. General presentation

“The Stolen Room” traces, over more than a century, the fate of a collection of Western art assembled in Paris in the 1910s-1920s by the Japanese collector Kōjirō Matsukata, then seized by the French State in 1944 in the name of the law on “enemy property”, partially returned to Japan in 1958, and finally challenged before international bodies from 2024 onward by a campaigning NGO. The novel thus interweaves three temporal strata: the building and loss of the collection (1920-1958), its silent rediscovery by the Matsukata heirs (1975-2000), and then the legal and media battle waged before the United Nations Human Rights Council (2024-2034).

As the opening disclaimer states, the novel is a fiction inspired by real events: the names of deceased characters have been kept, those of living characters changed, some fictional characters added for narrative coherence, and the workings of international bodies simplified. The Matsukata collection affair itself — seized in 1944, subject to Article 14 of the 1951 San Francisco Treaty, partially restituted by ordinance in 1958 — constitutes a documented historical precedent that the novel fictionalises and extends to a fictitious resolution set in the 2030s.

3. Chapter-by-chapter summary

Prologue — Paris, autumn 1920

Kōjirō Matsukata, a Japanese industrialist passionate about Western art, acquires Van Gogh's “The Bedroom in Arles” from the dealer Paul Rosenberg. The chapter establishes the character — torn between Japanese tradition and fascination with the West — and closes on an ominous flash-forward: this acquisition sets in motion a saga that will span the century.

Chapter 1 — Clouds are Gathering (London, 1939)

Kōsaburō Hiōki, Matsukata's loyal adviser, learns from James Morrison, director of the Pantechnicon storage warehouse, of the threat that the coming war poses to the collection stored in London and Paris. A Foreign Office

official, Campbell, presents him with an ultimatum. The warehouse burns down overnight; only the Paris portion survives, entrusted to Marcel Aubert, deputy curator at the Rodin Museum.

Chapter 2 — The 1944 Scheme (Paris)

At the Liberation, de Gaulle, Pleven, Torrès and Jaujard secretly organise the seizure of the collection in the name of a war debt owed by Japan, despite Torrès's legal doubts as to whether a genuine state of war existed between France and Japan. The ordinance of 5 October 1944 places “enemy” property under sequestration; the operation is carried out without publicity at the Rodin Museum, where Aubert and Hiōki are pushed aside.

Chapter 3 — The Net Tightens (Paris, November 1944)

Bernard Dorival and Pierre Jacomet inventory the works with a mixture of aesthetic wonder and guilty conscience; the diplomat Mathey sets out the strategy of presenting the collection as war reparations. In Japan, an ailing Matsukata and his daughter Hana take the measure of the loss.

Chapter 4 — The Secret Negotiations (San Francisco, 1951)

At the peace conference, Maurice Schuman for France, John Foster Dulles for the United States, Sir Oliver Franks for the United Kingdom and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida negotiate Article 14 of the treaty, which authorises each Allied power to keep Japanese property present on its territory. The Matsukata collection becomes a textbook case of “cultural reparations”.

Chapter 5 — The Restitution Charade (1958)

De Gaulle, back in power, signs a partial-restitution ordinance negotiated by Debré, Malraux, Pompidou and Couve de Murville: France keeps eighteen major works and “offers” Japan around three hundred minor pieces, presented as an act of generosity. Two officials, Bougival and Moinot, privately worry about the constitutional fragility of the arrangement. Matsukata's son-in-law, Matsumoto, discovers that France may never have been formally at war with Japan.

Chapter 6 — The Years of Forgetting (1975-2000)

A succession of scenes spans several decades: the building of the Musée d'Orsay and the administrative erasure of the “Matsukata” provenance under Françoise Cachin and Michel Laclotte; the painful transmission of the family secret from Saburō to his grandson Kenji in Japan; the silencing of a Japanese journalist, Yukio Tanaka; the stifled research of a doctoral student, Sophie Martinet; Kenji's legal training at Harvard and his alliance with the lawyer Sarah Fieldman; and finally, in 2000, his direct confrontation with Françoise Cachin in front of “The Bedroom in Arles” at the Musée d'Orsay, before his struggle runs out of steam for lack of anyone to carry it forward.

Chapter 7 — A Struggle Reborn (2024)

Pierre Bertier, a retired professor and founder of the NGO “Retour et Restitutions”, takes up the case with the Japanese historian Taro Hagiuda and the lawyer Béatrice Klein. Faced with the systematic inadmissibility rulings of the French Conseil d'État (2022 and 2024 judgments, accompanied by a fine), he chooses to bring the matter before the UN Human Rights Council, invoking “negotiorum gestio” (management of another's affairs) to act on behalf of scattered, unidentified heirs.

Chapter 8 — The International Battle (Geneva, June 2025)

The Human Rights Council working group (Vásquez, Weber, Pereira, Harrison, Morales) examines communication 421/2025 and declares it admissible unanimously, opening adversarial proceedings against France.

Chapter 9 — The French Response (2025)

French diplomacy (Mérieux, Laignel, Blanchard, Roussel, Fontaine) discovers that its own archives and curators (Vatrin, Bonini) confirm the weakness of its position and the existence, as early as the post-war period, of official doubt over the legitimacy of the appropriation. The Élysée nonetheless rules out any restitution and imposes a maximum-defence strategy, despite attempts at European coordination in London.

Chapter 10 — The Legislative Deadlock (2025-2026)

In parallel, the administration prepares a law on cultural restitutions to States (stemming from the 2017 Ouagadougou speech), deliberately limited to State claims so as to exclude private individuals — which, according to Bertier, exposes a discrimination that paradoxically serves his case before the UN. The law is promulgated on 9 March 2026.

Chapter 11 — The Long Battle (2027-2032)

France resorts to delaying tactics for years before the Human Rights Council, but this widely reported obstruction turns the Matsukata affair into an international symbol of cultural spoliation, inspiring dozens of similar organisations around the world. Pierre Bertier dies in 2032 without knowing the final outcome.

Epilogue

An authorial afterword: the novel claims its role as a tribute to campaigners for cultural restitution and its ambition to nourish, through fiction, a real societal debate.

4. Main characters

Kōjirō Matsukata (1866-1950)

Japanese industrialist and collector, founder of the collection; he dies without ever seeing his works again, embodying a dream of cultural rapprochement shattered by History.

Kōsaburō Hiōki (20th c.)

Matsukata's loyal adviser, a powerless witness to the dispersal of the collection in London and then Paris.

Marcel Aubert (20th c.)

Deputy curator at the Rodin Museum, a friend of Matsukata's, stripped of his guardianship role during the 1944 seizure.

Charles de Gaulle (1944, 1958)

Signatory of the two ordinances that seal the collection's fate; a figure of *raison d'État* draped in national grandeur.

Saburō Matsukata, then Kenji Matsukata (descendants)

Grandson, then great-grandson of Kōjirō, successive custodians of family memory and documentation; Kenji, a Harvard-trained lawyer, embodies the first attempt at legal reconquest, before the torch passes to Pierre Bertier.

Françoise Cachin / Michel Laclotte (1975-2000)

Curators of the future Musée d'Orsay, tasked with administratively erasing the Matsukata provenance; they embody the tension between a passion for art and institutional loyalty.

Pierre Bertier (2019-2032)

A retired professor, founder of the NGO “Retour et Restitutions”; protagonist of the contemporary strand, an openly acknowledged fictional double for the author's own activism.

Carmen Vásquez / Klaus Weber (*UN, Geneva*)

Chair and rapporteur of the Human Rights Council working group, who conduct the proceedings and secure admissibility of the communication against France.

Claire Fontaine / Laurent Mérieux (*French diplomacy*)

Senior officials tasked with defending the French position, torn between loyalty to the State and clear-eyed awareness of how weak the case is.

5. Main themes

State cultural spoliation and its rhetorical disguises

The novel meticulously documents the semantic shift by which a confiscation becomes, over the decades, a “protective sequestration”, then “war reparations”, then a “generous gift” — each euphemism further masking the original act.

Time as a political weapon

From the delaying tactics of 1944-1958 to the six successive requests for extension before the UN (chapter 11), the attrition of time is presented as the State's principal strategy against inconvenient claims — until that same slowness turns against it and feeds the opposing cause.

Transmission and family memory

The burden of truth passes from generation to generation within the Matsukata family (Saburō, Kenji), echoing the transmission of secrets found in the author's other novels: to speak or to stay silent, to resist or to make one's peace.

Civil society versus *raison d'État*

The intrusion of the NGO “Retour et Restitutions” and its founder Pierre Bertier shifts the struggle away from the locked national courts and into the international and media arena — a dimension clearly inspired by the author's own personal involvement with International Restitutions.

Art as a diplomatic and identity stake

Van Gogh's “The Bedroom in Arles”, the novel's visual through-line, crystallises the tension between the universality of art and the national ownership each side claims over it.

Western solidarity and its limits

The attempts at a joint Franco-British-German front (chapter 9) and comparisons with the British Museum, the Parthenon Marbles or African restitutions broaden the Matsukata case into a wider critique of Western cultural policy.

6. Established historical fact / fictional elements

In line with the author's opening disclaimer, the list below distinguishes, as far as possible, the documentary framework from the novelistic invention.

Kōjirō Matsukata's acquisition of the collection and its seizure by France in 1944 — *Historical fact*

The Matsukata collection, its seizure under the ordinance of 5 October 1944, and the application of Article 14 of the 1951 San Francisco Treaty constitute a real and documented episode in the history of post-war cultural spoliation.

The partial-restitution ordinance of 18 December 1958 — *Historical fact*

The partial restitution to Japan, with France retaining the major works including “The Bedroom in Arles”, corresponds to a real episode in Franco-Japanese cultural diplomacy.

The historical figures (de Gaulle, Malraux, Pompidou, Dulles, Yoshida, Jaujard, Aubert, etc.) and their reported words — *Fiction*

The dialogue, private motivations and staging details attributed to historical figures are novelistic invention, the disclaimer specifying that the names of deceased characters have been retained.

The NGO “Retour et Restitutions”, Pierre Bertier, and the proceedings before the Human Rights Council (2024-2034) — *Fiction*

This contemporary strand, including its resolution (France's condemnation in 2034, the return of six works), is a fictional projection extending the real historical precedent into a future timeframe.

The contemporary Matsukata lineage (Saburō, Kenji) — *Fiction*

These characters and their trajectories (Harvard, an alliance with an American lawyer) are inventions designed to embody family memory across several generations.

7. Narrative construction and style

- A chronological fresco spanning more than a century (1920-2034), organised into dated, localised sequences (“Paris, October 1944”, “Geneva, June 2025”) that function as self-contained chapters linked by the motif of the collection.
- An alternation between dramatised scenes (confrontational dialogue, negotiations) and passages of historical synthesis that at times bring the text close to a documented essay.
- Systematic use of psychological asides: every character, even a minor one, is given a brief inner portrait explaining their motives and contradictions.
- A progressive telescoping of time: the early chapters cover a few months, while chapters 6 and 11 cover several decades through successive ellipses.
- A closing echo: the authorial epilogue ends the novel with a direct address to the reader, explicitly linking the fiction to the author's real-world activism.

8. Notable quotations

The irony of History — Prologue

« History, for its part, cares nothing for good intentions. »

Legalising theft — Chapter 1

« No, it's politics. Theft implies illegality. What I'm talking about will be legal, governed by exceptional laws passed in wartime. »

The semantic shift of spoliation — Chapter 3

« The art of diplomacy... lies in dressing our national interests in the appearance of international law. We don't take, we recover. We don't confiscate, we make reparation. »

De Gaulle's clear-sightedness about the 1958 “generosity” — Chapter 5

« We're not “giving” anything at all. We are merely returning what we can no longer, in good conscience, keep, while holding on to what interests us most. »

Pierre Bertier's motto — Chapter 11

« *Truth is slow, but it is sure.* »

9. Critical analysis

Strengths

- A well-documented fresco that spans a century without losing the connecting thread of a single object, Van Gogh's "The Bedroom in Arles", a powerful and unifying visual motif.
- A meticulous indictment of the State's rhetorical machinery — the lexical slide from "confiscation" to "generosity" is finely analysed scene after scene.
- A direct, openly acknowledged resonance with the author's own activism, which gives the novel the character of a sincere plea rather than mere historical reconstruction.
- A broad gallery of secondary characters (diplomats, curators, journalists) that gives flesh to the administrative machine and avoids easy moralising.

Limitations and points of caution

- The sheer number of characters, often introduced in a single scene and then dropped, can dilute the reader's attachment and makes the novel harder to follow over its full length.
- The long chapters of diplomatic negotiation (4, 8, 9, 10) slow the novel's pace in favour of an almost documentary account of international law.
- The character of Pierre Bertier, the author's acknowledged alter ego, is treated more indulgently than the other protagonists, which occasionally undermines the narrative's critical distance.
- The resolution (2034), deliberately projected into the near future, leaves the novel hovering between historical reconstruction and activist speculation, a hybridisation that is not always clearly signalled in the text.

10. Conclusion

"The Stolen Room" succeeds in the ambitious task of a century-spanning fictional fresco that turns a real legal precedent — the spoliation of the Matsukata collection — into a plea against the rhetorical mechanisms by which States legitimise their cultural appropriations. By extending History into a fictional resolution carried by a campaigning NGO, Robert Casanovas makes the novel a direct extension of his own activist commitment, offering both a lesson in diplomatic history and a manifesto for international cultural justice.

FULL STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

THE STOLEN ROOM

Novel by Robert Casanovas

A study of language, narrative construction and rhetorical effects

Prepared by Pierre Collonges

Registers of language — Narrative structure — The character system — Motifs and symbols — Rhythm and syntax

Methodological introduction

This study examines “The Stolen Room” by Robert Casanovas in its entirety (prologue, eleven chapters, epilogue). The analysis proceeds from the text itself: quotations, lexical and syntactic surveys, and observation of its construction as a fresco spanning more than a century. It aims to identify the author's major stylistic choices and to assess their coherence with the book's project — a novelistic chronicle that claims, from its opening disclaimer onward, a hybrid status between fiction and historical documentation, and which extends the author's own real-world activism into a near-future speculative fiction.

1. Narrative architecture and chronological span

1.1 A fresco in three movements

The novel unfolds three clearly distinct temporal movements: the building and then the loss of the collection (1920-1951); its trompe-l'œil restitution and administrative erasure (1958-2000); and finally its activist reconquest before international bodies (2024-2034). The 1920 prologue and the authorial epilogue frame this arc, the latter explicitly bridging the fiction and the author's own real-world associative commitment.

This span of more than a century sets “The Stolen Room” apart from a classic dual-timeline novel: the text multiplies its strata (1920, 1939-1944, 1951, 1958, 1975-2000, 2024-2034), each with its own cast and its own vocabulary, which brings the construction closer to a chronicle told through successive tableaux than to a narrative alternating between two voices.

1.2 The generational-relay device

The transmission of the family case, from Kōjirō to Hana, then Saburō, then Kenji, before symbolically passing to Pierre Bertier — a man with no blood tie to the Matsukatas but who becomes the custodian of their cause — organises the novel as a relay race. This device allows the author to renew points of view without breaking the thread of the plot, but it also creates sometimes abrupt ellipses whenever the narrative changes the bearer of the torch without a carefully prepared transition.

« Promise me you will never give up. Promise me you will do justice to Kōjirō's memory. »

Chapter 6 — Saburō to his grandson Kenji, a testamentary formula that seals the generational relay.

2. Registers of language and vocabulary

The author works across several levels of language, correlated with the different temporal strata and the different social milieux represented.

Diplomatic and administrative vocabulary

A dense but rarely explained technical vocabulary of international law and cultural administration: “protective sequestration”, “enemy property”, “negotiorum gestio”, “prima facie admissibility”, “exhaustion of domestic remedies”. This vocabulary, omnipresent in chapters 4, 8, 9 and 10, grounds the novel in a documentary realism close to a legal essay.

The vocabulary of State euphemism

A close reading reveals a genuine nomenclature of official concealment: “wartime protection”, “acquisition”, “anonymous gift”, “national collection”, “progressive erasure”. The author himself, through the voice of his characters (Cachin, Bougival), underlines the artificiality of this vocabulary — a rhetorical device that turns the text into a genuine case study of the performative power of administrative language.

« *We don't take, we recover. We don't confiscate, we make reparation. We don't plunder, we return Western art to its native soil.* »

Chapter 3 — the “semantic pirouette” explicitly named as such by the text.

The vocabulary of Japanese intimacy

Against this administrative vocabulary, the author intermittently introduces touches of Japanese local colour (“ojii-san”, allusions to tea, to the Zen garden, to calligraphy) that counterbalance the technical dryness with a more elegiac vein, centred on the Matsukata family.

3. The systematic psychological portrait

The novel's most characteristic stylistic feature is the presence, for every character — even one mentioned only once — of a brief psychological aside inserted into the third-person narration. This device, repeated several hundred times across the whole text, functions as an authorial signature: every actor in the story, however minor, is given an inner, often contradictory motivation that explains their behaviour without ever fully excusing it.

« *Torrès had built his reputation on his ability to navigate the grey areas of the law.* »

Chapter 2 — an example of the formula: professional identity + the character trait that follows from it.

This economical technique allows a sprawling fresco-novel to be populated with dozens of figures without resorting to lengthy narrative introductions, but it also exposes the text to a certain systematism: the syntactic construction of the psychological aside (name, function, then a gloss on the character's inner ambivalence) recurs with a regularity that, over time, becomes noticeable as a writing tic rather than an occasional effect.

4. Confrontational dialogue and argumentative jousting

The novel very largely favours confrontational dialogue — cabinet meetings, diplomatic negotiations, UN hearings, round tables of curators — over purely descriptive scenes. Every chapter in the institutional strand (2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10) is built as a sequence of successive speeches, in which each speaker develops a complete line of reasoning before yielding the floor — a device that brings the text closer to courtroom drama or Socratic dialogue than to an adventure novel with short exchanges.

This dramaturgy of adversarial reasoning matches the book's very subject: the legitimacy of an appropriation is never decided through physical action, but through each side's verbal skill in giving the facts a legal qualification.

5. Syntax and sentence rhythm

5.1 The historical-synthesis sentence

Many transitional paragraphs employ a factual, dated syntax close to a report, punctuating the dialogued scenes with precise chronological markers: dates, figures, administrative decisions. This writing of documentary precision, interspersed with dramatised scenes, creates an alternating rhythm between the tempo of History (fast, elliptical) and that of the scenes themselves (slow, dialogue-driven).

5.2 The sentence-maxim and the closing aphorism

The author favours the short, almost proverbial formula at the end of a chapter or paragraph, condensing the moral meaning of the preceding scene.

« History, for its part, cares nothing for good intentions. »

Prologue.

« The fait accompli created its own legitimacy. »

Chapter 4.

« Truth is slow, but it is sure. »

Chapter 11 — Bertier's final epitaph.

This aphoristic scansion, recurring throughout the novel, gives the text the character of a political fable as much as a historical reconstruction.

5.3 Nominal fragments and elliptical acceleration

In the synthesis passages covering several decades (notably chapters 6 and 11), the author resorts to very short nominal sentences, sometimes reduced to a single word, to speed up the tempo and suggest the passage of time.

« A brutal awakening. »

Chapter 2 — an isolated fragment punctuating a seizure scene.

6. Rhetorical devices and recurring figures

The unmasked euphemism

The novel's most central device: a character utters a watered-down official formula, immediately followed, within the same scene or by the narrative voice, by a reformulation that reveals its real meaning.

« A justice built on an injustice remains an injustice, madam. »

Chapter 6 — Kenji Matsukata to Françoise Cachin.

Narrative prolepsis

Sudden leaps forward, often at the end of a chapter, short-circuit the immediate tension in favour of an overarching view spanning several decades — a device inherited from the historical roman-fleuve.

« He could not know that these few scribbled words marked the beginning of a story that would outlast his own life. »

Prologue.

The moral antithesis as closing clause

As in the author's other novels, antithesis structures the ethical debate and recurs as an end-of-chapter formula: “thief or saviour”, “burden or honour”, here declined as “spoliation” versus “generosity”, “confiscation” versus “restitution”.

Administrative litotes

The novel's senior officials systematically practise understatement — “a few reservations”, “a minor difficulty”, “trifles” — which the text takes care to have immediately decoded by a more clear-sighted interlocutor, producing a recurring effect of dramatic irony.

7. Focalisation and narrative voice

The narrative adopts a classic third-person omniscient narrator, but practises a variable focalisation that follows, chapter by chapter, the point of view of whichever institutional protagonist is central at that moment (Hiōki, then Aubert, then Jaujard, then Cachin, then Bertier, then Weber on the UN side). This constant rotation of focalisation, more fragmented than a construction alternating between two voices, serves the novel's documentary project: it allows several legitimate points of view on the same fact to be multiplied, without ever granting the reader a single overarching truth before the resolution.

Kōjirō Matsukata himself, like Melzi in “The Testament Was a Forgery”, is never given to us from the inside beyond the prologue: his point of view recedes as soon as he becomes a stake rather than an actor, which preserves the symbolic dimension of the collection over that of the man.

8. Recurring motifs and symbols

Van Gogh's “The Bedroom in Arles”

The painting that gives the novel its title runs through the whole text as a stable visual reference point: from its acquisition in 1920 to its silent presence in the storerooms of the Louvre and then the Musée d'Orsay, it functions as a mute witness to History, its intact beauty contrasting with the legal vicissitudes surrounding it.

« Somewhere in the climate-controlled rooms of the Musée d'Orsay, Van Gogh's “The Bedroom in Arles” continued its silent testimony. »

Chapter 11.

The notebook and the archive

Matsukata's small red notebook (prologue), Saburō's black lacquer box (chapter 6), and the files accumulated by Pierre Bertier (chapters 7 and 11) form a chain of memory-objects that materialise the transmission of truth across generations, echoing the motif of the sealed casket found elsewhere in the author's work.

The map and the territory

The map of Europe unfolded by Morrison in chapter 1, with its red, orange and green zones, visually prefigures the logic of geopolitical zoning that will structure the entire novel — the collection tossed from a “safe” territory to a “hostile” one according to the vagaries of diplomacy.

9. The treatment of History: between reconstruction and advocacy

Chapters 2, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10 form the documentary core of the novel: they reconstruct, through dialogued scenes, real deliberations of State (the 1944 ordinance, the San Francisco Treaty, the 1958 ordinance) and a fictional UN proceeding that extends their logic. This choice brings the novel at times close to historical essay or political docu-fiction, at the risk of slowing the narrative tempo compared with the more intimate chapters centred on the Matsukata family.

The author is clearly aware of this: the character of Pierre Bertier, a retired professor turned campaigner, functions as an explicit relay between the historical material and the author's own contemporary activism — a dimension the epilogue openly embraces by calling on the reader to support “real-world action for justice”.

10. Dialogue: dramaturgical and didactic function

As in the negotiation scenes of the author's other novels, the dialogue here fulfils a dual function that is rarely separated: advancing the plot (confessions, dealings, ultimatums) and conveying precise legal or historical information (the mechanisms of international law, how the Human Rights Council operates, the admissibility procedure). This fusion avoids blocks of exposition detached from the action, but it also exposes certain secondary characters — Ravanel, Weber, Vasseur — to lines that read as lectures disguised as conversation, serving the reader's education more than the character's plausibility.

11. Dramatic irony and mirror effects

The novel multiplies effects of dramatic irony built on structural repetition: the 1944 and 1958 ordinances are sealed under similarly rhetorical conditions (patriotic packaging, minimisation of legal scruples); the administration's delaying tactics of 2025-2032 repeat, eighty years on, the constitutional evasions of the 1958 officials. The reader, already informed of the outcome of the first spoliation, perceives in advance the weaknesses of the official argument in the second strand — an effect of historical *mise en abyme* that is one of the text's most effective devices.

« Each of these three options has its advantages and its drawbacks [...] Five years? Ten? Who can say? »

Chapter 2 — the strategy of temporisation set out as early as 1944, whose echo is found almost word for word in the manoeuvres of chapter 11.

12. Stylistic strengths and limitations

Strengths

- A remarkable coherence between substance (the slow sedimentation of a State lie) and form (a generational-relay fresco that stretches the narrative over more than a century).
- A genuine command of legal and diplomatic vocabulary, always placed at the service of political argument rather than gratuitous erudition.
- A unifying visual motif — “The Bedroom in Arles” — that gives a connecting thread to a novel otherwise very scattered across characters and eras.
- A genuine feel for confrontational dialogue, particularly successful in the institutional negotiation scenes (chapters 2, 4, 5, 9).

Limitations and points of caution

- The proliferation of secondary characters, each fitted with a brief psychological aside following a repetitive formula, eventually produces an effect of systematism that can wear on the reader over the length of the novel.
- The institutional chapters (4, 8, 9, 10), heavily dialogued and didactic, noticeably slow the narrative tempo compared with the chapters centred on the Matsukata family.
- The generational relay, though consistent with the book's project, produces sometimes abrupt ellipses and a diluted emotional attachment, for want of a single protagonist carried through the whole of the novel.
- The acknowledged closeness between Pierre Bertier and the author's own activism, while it gives the novel its activist sincerity, also exposes the character to more indulgent treatment than the story's other figures, which occasionally blunts the narrative's critical distance.

Conclusion

The style of “The Stolen Room” is defined above all by its ambition as a fresco: every stylistic choice — the generational relay, the systematic psychological portraits, the alternation of dialogued scenes and documentary syntheses, the running motif of “The Bedroom in Arles” — serves a hybrid project between historical reconstruction and contemporary advocacy, announced from the opening disclaimer and embraced right through to the authorial epilogue. The language, dense with diplomatic and legal vocabulary, favours argumentative jousting for the institutional scenes and a more intimate, almost elegiac vein for the Matsukata family memory — an ambitious device in its chronological scope, whose main cost is an uneven narrative rhythm, at times vivid and scenic, at times close to political exposition.

« Truth is slow, but it is sure. »

Chapter 11 — the key phrase that sums up, in one final formula, the aesthetic and the ethic of the novel as a whole.