

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:           SPACE OF PASSION: THE LOVE LETTERS OF JEAN GIONO TO BLANCHE MEYER

**Patricia A. Le Page, Doctor of Philosophy, 2004**

Dissertation Directed By:   Professor Joseph Brama, Department of French and Italian

This dissertation offers a first analysis of a collection containing more than one thousand letters that Jean Giono wrote to Blanche Meyer over a thirty year period from 1939-1969. The correspondence, which was first opened to the public in January 2000, is housed at Yale University's Beinecke Library. It has never been mentioned by Giono's biographer or critics in spite of the light it sheds on his creative process. The liaison revealed by the letters leads to a discovery of the extraordinary role that Blanche played in Giono's creative life. She was the only person to be so profoundly involved in his writing as the idealized image with whom he shared his internal dialogue. As the beloved "other" who inspired Giono's lover's discourse, she allowed him to express and examine his ideas and thus to clarify his thinking and move forward with his work.

What strikes the reader upon reading the letters in conjunction with Giono's novels, is the extent to which Giono's life and his fiction were inspired by the myth of courtly love and how deeply his life and work were intertwined. Identifying and explicating the myth is significant because it provides an essential key to a renewed

understanding and appreciation of Giono as a writer, a reinterpretation of the conception of love and sexuality he expresses in his novels, and a resolution of several important contradictions in his life and work. All of this leads to a reassessment of the legend invented by the writer himself and disseminated by his critics, that Giono was a self-taught provincial writer whose work was outside the intellectual mainstream. The letters reveal that Giono was a complex man of letters whose life was informed by the reading of literature and centered around writing and reflection. Moreover, the correspondence read as a meta-discourse along with his novels, provides a unique portrait of the artist engaged in the experience of passionate love which was for him the penultimate human experience and the apotheosis of the myth.

SPACE OF PASSION:  
THE LOVE LETTERS OF JEAN GIONO TO BLANCHE MEYER

By

Patricia A. Le Page

Thesis or Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy]  
2004

Advisory Committee:  
Professor Joseph Brami  
Professor Sandra Cypess  
Professor Hervé Campagne  
Professor Madeleine Hage  
Professor Pierre Verdaguer

© Copyright by  
Patricia A. Le Page  
2004

## Dedication

For my son, William Le Page who discovered the collection of letters  
and for Didier Bertaud who taught me to use and appreciate the French language.

## Acknowledgements

I would especially like to express my gratitude and appreciation to my advisor and the chair of my dissertation committee, Joseph Brami, who gave generously of his time, never failed to encourage me but even more importantly, showed me that a task worth doing is worth doing well. I also thank Madeleine Hage who was my original advisor and who, even after her retirement, read everything I wrote and shared her ideas and insights with me. And I thank Pierre Verdaguer who was always ready to help me with administrative details and who gently encouraged me to finish the project when it seemed that the end was a long way off. I am also grateful to Hervé Campagne who agreed to serve on very short notice and still managed to find the time to read the material, and to Sandra Cypess for her support both during the process and during the defense.

I am grateful to my family for their enthusiasm and never-wavering support even when my own courage flagged. I especially thank my mother, Paule Allard, for encouraging me every step of the way and for teaching me from childhood to believe in my dreams and to work to make them come true. I thank my daughter, Lise Le Page, who read portions of the manuscript and whose background in English literature made her comments especially meaningful; my son, Bill, whose careful and intelligent search led him to the collection of letters from Jean Giono to Blanche Meyer and who was always ready to send me materials from the Columbia University Library where he was employed; my son, Leo for listening to me, sharing his own ideas and encouraging me; my sisters, Jacqueline Morgan and Cynthia Mendez who

accompanied me through this project and were always willing to share their intelligent and helpful insights with me; my brother, Jeffrey Allard, who was the first Ph.D. in the family, for all of his encouragement and for generously taking his time to discuss literature with me; my brother John Allard for believing in me even though my choice of a career path is very different from his.

For everything he taught me about the French language, for generously giving his time to read and edit papers I wrote during my tenure as a graduate student and for his untiring support and friendship, I am eternally grateful to Didier Bertaud.

I also thank all of my friends who patiently and kindly accepted my absence from social events and from life in general and yet kept encouraging me to go on with my work . I especially thank Sandra Waters who called often and never ceased to encourage me while I was out of state and away from the familiar circle, and Jane Tabb and Friedrun Sullivan who were equally supportive.

And finally, I thank my husband, Leo Le Page, for his patience and encouragement during the past ten years and for generously giving not only moral but also financial support. He was willing to allow me the space I needed to write and research and yet he was always there for me at the end of the day.

## Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter I: The love letters as examples of the epistolary genre .....	15
Chapter II: The love letters as the self-expression of a writer .....	36
Chapter III: The creation of the Muse: Blanche, Adelina White and <i>Pour saluer Melville</i> .....	60
Chapter IV: A portrait of the artist: Giono, Angelo and <i>Le Hussard sur le toit</i> as a novel of chivalry .....	92
Chapter V: The metamorphosis of the myth: <i>Le moulin de Pologne</i> and <i>L'iris de Suse</i> .....	126
Conclusion .....	177
Works Consulted.....	187



## Introduction

This dissertation consists of two parts: a first edition of the unpublished love letters that Jean Giono wrote to Blanche Meyer over a 30-year period between 1939 and 1969,<sup>1</sup> and an interpretation of the letters read in conjunction with the novels. The collection of over 1200 letters is housed in the General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.<sup>2</sup> I began my work on the letters on January 6, 2000, as soon as the collection was opened to the public. The letters have never been studied nor even mentioned by Giono's critics up to this date nor has Giono's relationship with Blanche Meyer ever been made public. The only mention of Blanche or the correspondence occurs in an article written by Jolaine Meyer, Blanche's daughter.<sup>3</sup> The Yale collection of letters, as large as it is, is not exhaustive however. There is a smaller collection housed at Laval University, Province of Québec, Canada, which I have not yet read. In addition, according to the curator of the collection at the Beinecke Library, Blanche had begun selling the letters to various collectors before her friend Jean Gaudon, former member of the Yale University French Department, persuaded her to allow Yale to acquire the collection. Therefore it is likely that in addition to the Laval collection, there are

---

<sup>1</sup> The letters are not included with this manuscript. They will be filed with the dissertation when permission is obtained from the copyright owner.

<sup>2</sup> In her notes that accompany the letters Blanche made a slight error in stating that there are 1307 letters totaling 3300 pages. See Giono Gen. MSS 457, box 2.

<sup>3</sup> "Sur un personnage de Giono: Adelina White ou Blanche?" *Pratiques d'écriture* 1994. 375-386.

letters still in the hands of individual collectors. This reading offers a new interpretation of Giono's work and illustrates the way in which both his life and his whole creative opus were inspired by the myth of courtly love. Paradoxically, the letters also reveal the importance of sexual love for Giono, as a catalyst for his work but also as a source of joy and comfort in his personal life. The ecstasy Giono derived from his physical relationship with Blanche is in direct contrast to the chaste, transcendent relationships that he portrayed in his fiction. Identifying and explicating the myth is significant because it provides an essential key to a renewed understanding and appreciation of Giono's work and his conception of love and sexuality. An exegesis of pertinent texts according to this hypothesis, read in the light of the letters, leads to a resolution of several important paradoxes in the writer's life and work and to a reinterpretation of the Giono legend. This is of considerable importance in the case of Giono because his critics have attempted to preserve a certain image of him at the expense of revealing the more complex aspects of his life and thus preventing his work from being fully understood.

It is significant in the context of the myth of *amour courtois* that Giono entered into his relationship with Blanche not by chance but by choice, although he always insisted in the letters that their love was predestined. Both Jean and Blanche were married and living in Manosque where Blanche's husband, Louis Meyer, had just bought the local notary practice. Louis was older than Blanche and Jean too was thirteen years her senior.<sup>4</sup> Jean first saw Blanche as she sat in the window of a local

---

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Jolaine Meyer and the article previously cited for the details concerning Blanche and her initial meetings with Jean Giono. The letters also contain

bus, talking to her husband. As he relates in an early letter, he was immediately impressed by her way of focusing her gaze only on what she wanted to see, by her simplicity and by her voice: “J’aimais la façon que vous aviez de regarder ce que vous vouliez regarder. Et cet air de grande simplicité qui est le vôtre. [...] J’aimais votre voix.”<sup>5</sup> According to Blanche’s daughter, this first encounter took place around 1928-30, which would be right after the couple arrived in Manosque. Giono remarks in his letter that it was before Jolaine was born in an era when busses were still horse-drawn.

At the time that Giono met Blanche he was involved with another woman, Simone Téry, a Paris journalist with whom he had a stormy affair.<sup>6</sup> It would appear that he sought out Blanche, whom he already knew by sight, when the earlier love affair came to an end. Blanche’s daughter, quoting from her mother’s unpublished memoirs, relates that her mother and Giono saw one another around town for several years and exchanged greetings. Blanche mentions that she enjoyed the attention Giono paid her and his obvious appreciation of her youthful charms.<sup>7</sup> Finally, around 1934 (there is no record of the exact date), Giono called Blanche and asked her to

---

references to the couple’s first encounters, which serve to verify the facts presented in the article.

<sup>5</sup> 3 January 1939.

<sup>6</sup> See *Correspondance 1928-1963, Jean Giono et Jean Paulhan*. Edition établie et annotée par Pierre Citron, (Paris: Gallimard, 1995) 53-54 and 56-58. These letters date from 1934 when Giono tells Jean Paulhan that he is still in love with Simone Téry. Citron’s notes state that the romance had ended in the autumn of 1933.

<sup>7</sup> Blanche Meyer, *Souvenirs inédits*. Cited by Jolaine Meyer, “Sur un personnage de Giono”<sup>377</sup>.

spend an evening with him at the home of mutual friends, a couple named Kardas who were German/ Jewish refugees. During the year 1934-35, the couples often went for walks together in the hills outside of Manosque. When the Kardas fled the country, Blanche and Jean kept up their friendship but did not meet often. In 1938, they resumed the relationship and began to see each other nearly every day. In November 1938, when Jean was 43 and Blanche was 30 years of age, Jean declared his love for her. The first letter was written in January of 1939 and in June of 1939, in Vence, they became lovers. The letter of 3 July 1939 memorializes that unforgettable night.

I prepared the edition of the letters according to the methodological guidelines and ideas developed in Marie-Claire Grassi's text on epistolarity, *Lire l'épistolaire* and Claudine Gothot-Mersch's essay, "Sur le renouvellement des études de correspondances littéraires: l'exemple de Flaubert". Among the guidelines offered by Claudine Gothot-Mersch,<sup>8</sup> were those concerning the selection of the letters and the ordering of the text in regard to issues of grammar and structure, choices concerning annotation, and tools the editor might wish to provide to the reader, such as a chronology of the writer's life, an index of persons, places and works mentioned in the letters, and an appendix containing pertinent documents. Concerning methodology, the sources that I consulted propose that a writer's correspondence can be read as a document providing information on the writer, his work and/or his era, or as a text analyzing the writer's use of language.<sup>9</sup> Amélie Schweiger suggests that

---

<sup>8</sup>pp. 5-9.

<sup>9</sup>See Claudine Gothot-Mersch, 9-13; Amélie Schweiger, 41-45.

reading a writer's letters as a text is especially fruitful because, in the case of a writer, the medium of the epistolary document is the same as that of the work of literature.<sup>10</sup>

My essay combines a thematic analysis of the letters in an effort to interpret the significance of the myth of courtly love in Giono's life and work, with a textual analysis of Giono's use of language and metaphor in this context.

Although, according to Claudine Gothot-Mersch,<sup>11</sup> the preferred practice is to include the whole collection rather than a selection, the volume of letters in this collection made that choice prohibitive. Therefore, I decided to make a selection of approximately 250 letters from entire corpus of the collection, using the following criteria: 1. Letters containing Giono's reflections on his novels or on writing in general; 2. Letters important to an understanding of the unfolding of the love affair; 3. Letters illustrating the inspiration of the myth in Giono's life and work; 4) Letters which shed light on Giono's personal evolution.

Concerning the texts of the letters, the current trend is to be as faithful as possible to the original and to change as little as possible. Giono's letters present a particular editorial challenge because of the orthographic and grammatical errors, the lack of punctuation and accent marks, and the syntactical idiosyncrasies of Giono's epistolary style. My decision, in keeping with contemporary practice, was to leave the letters as Giono wrote them except for punctuation and accent marks which I supplied as a service to the reader, and the noting of spelling and grammatical errors by the insertion of *sic* in the text.

---

<sup>10</sup> Schweiger, 45.

<sup>11</sup> Gothot-Mersch, 5.

The annotation of editions of letters has also been a subject of discussion, with some critics preferring to limit themselves to giving only the most indispensable information in the notes and others, like Colette Becker who edited Zola's letters, opting for a fully annotated edition. My editorial preference, like Colette Becker's, is to provide explanatory notes as a service to future scholars, and therefore, I have identified as many as possible of the various persons, places and works mentioned in the letters. In order to do this I consulted the biographical material listed in the attached bibliography, as well as Giono's *Journal de l'Occupation* and his correspondence with persons other than Blanche. I also used library sources such as dictionaries, literary encyclopedias, *Who's Who in France*, and histories of the French Press. For dates, I used the various chronologies listed in the bibliography as well as the biographical sources. In the case of personal acquaintances of Blanche and Jean who were not identified by Giono's biographers or in other primary or library sources, I relied on the bound volume of Blanche Meyer's explanatory notes which is included in the Beinecke Library collection.

In addition to the index of proper names, this edition also contains an appendix in which I have placed such items as letters to Giono from various other persons, that were included in the collection, as well as Giono's letters to Louis Meyer, Blanche's husband; dedications of Giono's work to Blanche, and the rights to certain works which Giono gave to Blanche; various other documents which might be of interest to future scholars; as well as maps of the regions mentioned in the letters in order not to have to provide explanatory notes of all the little villages that Blanche and Jean visited together.

Although it is appropriate to publish what Claudine Gothot-Mersch calls an "édition pure et simple" which would contain just the letters and notes, the fact that this edition was prepared in part to fulfill the requirements of a dissertation, required that it be prefaced with an interpretive essay. My essay undertakes a thematic analysis of the letters in order to reveal the myth that led Giono to construct his poetic identity and more importantly, to understand how this mythopoeic tendency inspired and influenced Giono as a writer. The introductory essay is organized into five chapters, which look at the letters themselves as examples of the epistolary genre and then at the thematic material that unifies the letters and forms an important link with Giono's literary work.

Chapter I of the essay discusses the letters as examples of Giono's particular epistolary style and as representatives of the literary genre of the love letter. In this context I have looked at the various idiosyncrasies in the letters, such as misspellings, underlined words, capital letters, the use of pen or pencil, and the variations in Giono's writing manner depending on his mood; the length, register and tone of the letters; the question, in relation to Giono's letters, as to what makes a letter "literary"; the forms of address (and in some cases, the lack thereof), including the various uses of "tu" and "vous" and especially the masculine terms of endearment Giono used when writing to Blanche. On the subject of form, I look at the letters as a sort of personal rhapsody without organizing structures such as paragraphs, and where subjects change from sentence to sentence with no attempt at development.

I also discuss certain subjects and terms that occur frequently in the letters, such the use of food imagery as a metaphor for love and the masculine forms of

endearment as symbols of the androgynous ideal inherent in the myth. In discussing the purposes of the love letter in general and those specific functions that the lover's discourse served for Giono, I have looked especially at the fundamental theme of absence and at the paradoxical nature of love letters both to create bridges and to create distances between the lovers. Finally, in an attempt to answer the question as to why a writer would devote so many hours to the writing of love letters, I have analyzed the hypothesis offered by Jacques Brengues in his essay "La correspondance amoureuse et le sacré," that the love letter by its very nature partakes of the sacred, and that for Giono, the ritual of writing love letters was part of the process that elevated his relationship with Blanche to the level of myth.<sup>12</sup>

Chapter II looks at the letters as important vehicles of self-expression for the writer and reveals that in fact, their primary purpose for Giono was as a space in which to work out his problems and to express his reflections on life, art and his own work, in the guise of communicating with the idealized Blanche. She was his preferred audience and the mere act of writing to her seemed to inspire Giono with the courage and enthusiasm to create. The letters provide an invaluable look at Giono's creative process and the means by which he constructed his books and invented his fictional characters. They also shed light on the inspiration he derived from literature and from music and the way in which he used that inspiration and made it his own. It is clear that after the initial letters written in the heat of passion, Giono is no longer speaking to Blanche but through her to his own inner self and that the letters are a portrait of the artist interrogating his art. Finally, the letters show that

---

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Brengues, "La correspondance amoureuse et le sacré" *Actes du colloque international: les correspondances* (Nov. 1993) 56.



Blanche's primary purpose for Giono was to serve as a muse for his creativity and to turn him into an artist. Once she had fulfilled this purpose, although he still loved her, her presence was no longer essential to him. As I argue in the chapter and elsewhere in the dissertation, this is why Giono did not feel compelled to marry her and perhaps why he did not feel that he was being unfaithful to Elise.

Chapter III examines the myth of courtly love as expressed in the medieval legends and compares the classical tenets of the myth to Giono's more personal expression in his letters. The chapter discusses the way in which Giono fashioned his relationship with Blanche according to the tenets of the myth and the way in which the novel, *Pour saluer Melville* forms a part of this process of the fictional creation of Giono's muse through the inspiration of his relationship with Blanche. I have argued that the myth of chivalric love provides both a framework and a subtext for the letters. The letters recount the story of Giono's passion for Blanche and the idealized love that she embodied for him. They reveal the tension between the world as it is and the ideal that Giono valued and that he constantly affirmed in the letters and in his books. The parallelism between the letters and the novels show the fictive nature of the letters themselves and of the portrait they present of Blanche as the idealized woman. A number of Giono scholars whose work is included in the bibliography, have noted the influence of the myth in one or another of Giono's novels but no one has seen it as the leitmotif that unifies his whole opus and his life with his work.

I maintain that Blanche was essential to Giono not primarily as a partner in a love affair but as a muse to inspire his creativity and to serve as a model for his novelistic heroines. In this context I argue that Giono needed to draw from life in

order to invent his fictional characters, a fact which contradicts his repeated assertions that everything in his novels was invented and that he disliked basing his work on real people or events. The letters show the process by which he sculpted a Tristanian heroine and muse figure from the real Blanche and that this fictional Blanche was a reflection of Giono's notion of the ideal feminine and even, Giono's own feminine side. I also show that the creation of the muse was carried out in the space of writing, the privileged space in which Giono essentially lived out his relationship with Blanche. *Pour saluer Melville* is important for the light it sheds on the tripartite process by which Giono fashioned the real Blanche into a literary muse and under her inspiration, created Adelina White his novelistic heroine, who then existed within the pages of his book as an inspiration to Blanche to remain faithful to the Tristanian ideal that she had inspired Giono to create.

Chapter IV looks at Angelo as an idealized portrait of the artist,<sup>13</sup> at the Angelo series, especially *Le hussard sur le toit*, as an expression of the myth of *amour courtois* and at Pauline and Angelo as models of the chivalric ideal. Regarding Angelo as a novelistic representation of the knight errant rather than as a soldier will shed light on the paradox of Giono the pacifist who was inspired to write so many military novels.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Giono's pre-occupation with violence can be understood

---

<sup>13</sup> In a letter dated 3/6/45, the moment when Giono first began composing *Le hussard sur le toit*, he wrote to Blanche: "je fais bouillir mes sucres les plus secrets dans ma marmite de sorcière pour une fois de plus faire mon propre portrait, comme il se doit, mille fois plus beau que ce que je suis. Tel que je voudrais être."

<sup>14</sup> Robert Ricatte raises this issue in his *Notice to Le Bonheur fou* without arriving at a satisfactory resolution.

in part as belonging to the phenomenon of errantry<sup>15</sup> which required knights to wander about searching for wrongs to right and foes to vanquish, often engaging in bloody combat during these adventures. The chivalric myth transforms these wanderings into an aspect of the quest for the Grail, a quest that Giono carried on by means of his writing.

The letters of this period reveal the importance of the myth for Giono and of the influence of Stendhal, as a means of inspiring his creativity during the dark period after the war. The letters, read in conjunction with the novels of the Angelo cycle, help explain the complex character of Pauline who is based both on Blanche and on Giono's mother whose name was Pauline. In addition, as Jean-François Clément points out, there is an incestuous aspect to the myth.<sup>16</sup> I maintain that this is evident in Giono's myth-based novels, and that a reading of *Le hussard* in the light of the letters and in the context of Clément's essay, leads to new interpretation of Giono's ideas on love and sexuality. Giono insists in the letters that death in its luminous aspect is the theme of *Le hussard sur le toit* and it is there that he reveals his understanding of the myth, with its inherently fatal intermingling of love and death, as a means of self-transcendence.

Chapter V discusses the fatality of the myth of courtly love as Giono interprets it in his novel, *Le moulin de Pologne*. The letters are essential to an

---

<sup>15</sup> On the subject of errantry see John Matthews, *The Arthurian Tradition* op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> "Pourquoi Tristan et Iseut n'est pas un roman d'amour" *Analyses et réflexions sur Tristan et Iseut (adaptation de Joseph Bédier): la passion amoureuse*. Ellipses (Paris: Edition Marketing, 1991.) 59-65.

understanding of this novel because they show the fictional process by which Giono worked out his disillusionment through his writing after his discovery in 1949 of Blanche's long-term liaison with a French *pied-noir* from Algeria named François Bravay. The importance of writing for Giono as a means of catharsis and of transforming his vision of reality is especially evident in the letters of this period.

Giono's intent in the novel, as the letters clearly reveal, is to destroy the mythic ideal and especially the Tristanian ideal of woman he had created in *Pour saluer Melville*. It is significant that the process of creating *Le moulin de Pologne* according to Giono's life experience, mirrors that of the earlier novel. Without the letters it would be difficult to see the parallels between *Le moulin de Pologne* and *Pour saluer Melville* and impossible to understand the roots of the disillusionment expressed in the later book. This is especially true given the fact that Giono never finished the projected Part II of the novel which was to recount the fall of the hero, Léonce, because of his relationship with the female protagonist called "le démon" in Giono's cahiers. The letters, along with the notes in Giono's cahiers, prove that this "démon", named "Adeline" in one of the early drafts published in *La Revue de Paris*, is a "femme fatale" who represents the degradation of the heroine/muse figure of Adelina White in *Pour saluer Melville*.

Giono's cahiers of the period indicate that he was reading and reflecting on the Arthurian legend while writing *Le moulin de Pologne*. The influence of the myth is especially evident in the figure of Léonce, a character based on Lancelot, the tragic knight of the Grail. Both Léonce and Lancelot are destroyed because they allow themselves to be seduced by passion, not only carnal passion but the passionate

clinging to the things of this world such as money and position, and the violence that ensues when human passions are frustrated. This recognition on the part of Giono of the destructive side of passion is noteworthy because it represents a fundamental change in his thought and provides the thematic link between *Le moulin de Pologne* and Giono's last novel, which is called significantly, *L'iris de Suse*, the name he had originally chosen for *Le moulin de Pologne*.

This chapter demonstrates that it is possible to read *L'iris de Suse* as a sequel to *Le moulin de Pologne*, in which Giono once again confronts the problem of woman and finally arrives at a solution, albeit a highly idiosyncratic one. The letters read in the light of the myth, provide a key to an understanding of *L'iris de Suse*, Giono's enigmatic last opus, because it is the letters that reveal the existence of the mythic vision that guided Giono's creative life. The fact that Giono returned to the title he had once chosen for *Le moulin* is another important indication that there is a link between the two novels. The theme of courtly love provides the unifying element between the two books, and *L'iris de Suse* reconstructs and transforms the myth that *Le moulin de Pologne* had destroyed.

The relationship between the two novels is most apparent in the treatment of the female element, which, in the later book, Giono divides between two protagonists, the innocent "Absente" and the worldly, passionate baroness. The details in the letters suggest that it is Blanche once again who provided the model for this binary figure and that Giono's destruction of the figure of the baroness symbolizes his renunciation of passion as the destructive side of love. It is also significant in establishing a tie between the two novels, that Giono was reading T.S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday" poem

while composing the earlier novel and that the poem provided the imagery for the later one. *Liris de Suse* represents a continuation of the exploration of love and passion that he undertook in *Le moulin de Pologne* and suggests that there is a way to transcend the fatality of the myth through the accomplishment of the quest.

The hero's picaresque journey in this last novel parallels Giono's own experiences as recounted in the letters. His suffering and disillusionment led him to see passion as a rite of purification and therefore as a stage in the quest for the mythic vision of the Grail, which in Giono's case, was the accomplishment of his artistic vocation. Interpreted in this light, it is clear that L'Absente, the female character inspired by T.S. Eliot's "Lady of silences," is not meant to be a real woman at all but rather an incarnation of the mythic ideal, the empty vessel by means of which the seeker achieves self-actualization. As an iconic figure, empty of everything, she can be viewed as a vision of the Grail. Giono's literary representation of "emptiness" as the goal of the journey is significant and reveals his understanding of the mystical nature of the Quest.

## Chapter I: The love letters as examples of the epistolary genre

Unlike such novelists as Flaubert and George Sand, Giono was not a letter-writer. His letters to friends and acquaintances, even to close friends like Lucien Jacques, provide very little insight on the writer or his work. Most are short, less than a page, and were written primarily for practical or business reasons. Therefore it is noteworthy that Giono wrote over 1200 letters to Blanche Meyer comprising not only a testament to his love for her but also reflections on many of the important themes of his fiction as well as the expression of the animating myth of his life and work. These letters are the instruments into which Giono poured his thoughts and ideas over a period of 30 years in an effort to share his inmost self with Blanche. As he said to her in 1947: "Si plus tard quelqu'un a la curiosité de me connaître tel que je suis, c'est dans les lettres que je t'écris qu'il me trouvera---"<sup>17</sup> This chapter will look at the letters as specific examples of the gionien love letter by examining the details of the letters including Giono's problems with grammar and spelling, their style and form, and finally, the subjects and themes of the letters.

Stylistically, one could describe Giono's letters as letters "à la Portugaise" because of their passionate immediacy. As Linda Kauffman explains in her essay on the letters of the Portuguese nun, this became a code for a certain style of writing "at the height of passion in a moment of disorder and distress."<sup>18</sup> Giono's love letters to Blanche Meyer are spontaneous, rhapsodic and passionate expressions of his feelings of the moment. It is as though his emotions overflowed onto the page so quickly that he did not have time to attend to the normal exigencies of written expression such as accent marks, punctuation, paragraphing and such. The letters are laments, elegies,

---

<sup>17</sup> 7 October 1947.

<sup>18</sup> *Discourses of Desire* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986) 95.

exhortations, supplications and finally outbursts of rage against Blanche for the anguish she has caused him. They explore the entire range of emotion from the most lyrical outpourings of joy at the experience of loving to the abysses of jealous rage and loss. Certain literary figures including Stendhal have seen this ability to channel the outpouring of powerful feelings into written expression as a mark of genius. Others have seen writing inspired by powerful emotion as a mark of feminine expression.<sup>19</sup> What is important in the case of Giono and his development as an artist, is that the experience of being in love brings about a blurring of distinctions between masculine and feminine and even, as we will see in Chapter III, an exchange of roles between the letter writers.

Given their striking, vivid imagery, and the insights they provide on Giono's work, the letters contain a surprising number of orthographic, syntactical and grammatical errors, errors as basic as incorrect verb endings and lack of past participle agreement. This is especially perplexing in that by 1939, when the correspondence began, Giono was a successful writer with ten novels to his credit, he was being published by Gallimard, and among his friends and correspondents were such major literary figures as André Gide and Jean Paulhan. It is not possible to know why Giono did not or could not overcome these technical deficiencies but it is curious that neither his biographer, Pierre Citron, nor any of his critics, friendly or otherwise, have ever alluded to the problem. Citron merely mentions in passing that Giono's spelling of proper names was unreliable. One wonders who read and corrected Giono's hand-written manuscripts before they were sent to the publisher. Giono's wife, Elise, who had been a teacher prior to their marriage and was his typist until 1935, was too busy with the household, according to Pierre Citron, to do any typing or editorial work after that time. Giono himself makes only one comment in the

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 93-94.



letters to his spelling difficulties, in a letter where he acknowledges that he misspelled "salicylate".<sup>20</sup> It is possible that Blanche, who typed some of his manuscripts, had chided him for his orthographic problems and thus had made him more aware of them.

And yet, leaving aside the technical errors, the letters are models of epistolary style: they are vivid, clear and concise,<sup>21</sup> like a conversation or a face-to-face meeting between friends or lovers,<sup>22</sup> the tone is appropriate to the subject,<sup>23</sup> and as the American essayist and stylist, E.B. White, proposed, there is no unnecessary verbiage and "every word tells".<sup>24</sup> Giono insisted on the importance of words and on his ability as a poet to chose the right word for the occasion: " Seuls les poètes savent construire.[---] Mon amour, je sais la valeur exacte des mots. Il n'est pas un mot que je t'ai dit, il n'est pas un mot que je t'ai écrit qui n'ai [sic] été écrit ou dit en dehors de sa propre valeur d'exactitude."<sup>25</sup> Although it was not Giono's habit to write preliminary drafts of his letters as Stendhal often did,<sup>26</sup> it is evident that he worked on the letters, especially in regard to the clarity and precision of his thought: "Je mets dix minutes

---

<sup>20</sup> 14 September 1946.

<sup>21</sup> See Marie-Claire Grassi, *Lire l'épistolaire* (Paris: Dunod, 1992) citing Cicero on epistolary style, 67.

<sup>22</sup> See Grassi on the "lettre familière", 66.

<sup>23</sup> See Grassi citing Furetière on epistolary style in the encyclopédie, 64-65.

<sup>24</sup> William Strunk jr., *The Elements of Style*, (New York: Macmillan, 1979) 67.

<sup>25</sup> 18 July 1939. See also the letters of 13 July 1942, and 31 January 1944, where Giono insists on the importance of words.

<sup>26</sup> V. Del Litto, préface, *Stendhal: lettres d'amour* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 1993) 9.

entre chaque phrase. Je n'arrive pas à leur [sic] faire dire ce que je voudrais qu'elles disent."<sup>27</sup>

The truth is that Giono often succeeded in putting his thoughts into words with such power that the words come alive on the page: "A mesure que je t'écris, d'insidieux ruisseaux de feu courent le long de mes bras et de mes jambes et des places que tu as caressées s'embrasent."<sup>28</sup> In a more lyrical mode, Giono captured the eroticism of his first night with Blanche by invoking memory: a summer night made sensual by the moonlight shining through the foliage moving and undulating in the wind. Animated by passion and desire, the memories become ever more acute until the images are so physically violent that his body literally cries out after hers:

"Ce souvenir de 'cette nuit-là' est maintenant vivant devant moi comme si c'était vraiment en cet instant la nuit de lune et le feuillage des arbres remués par le vent de la nuit. Il est toujours présent, que ce soit le jour ou la nuit, que je sois près de toi ou loin de toi, mais pendant que je t'écris cette lettre avec la tristesse d'être séparé de toi, il est encore plus vif et ses images sont si violentes dans mon coeur que tout mon corps crie après le tien."<sup>29</sup>

Finally by using the metaphor of music, Giono succeeds in infusing his violent emotions with a musical sonority which reminds him of the harmony he is seeking in their relationship: "Toutes mes possibilités de jouissance étaient là toutes prêtes, jouant déjà en notes sonores à mesure que la musique naissait. [---] Je sens avec joie que peu à peu commence à naître entre ton corps et le mien une harmonie qui sera toute ta vie comme déjà elle est toute la mienne."<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> 26 June 1945.

<sup>28</sup> 29 December 1940.

<sup>29</sup> 3 July 1939.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

It is evident that Giono's grammatical and spelling deficiencies did not affect his command of the language. And yet, the man who could write such powerful prose still made mistakes with past participles and occasionally misconjugated the verb "parler". E.B. White addressed this paradox when he wrote: "Style is an increment of writing. When we speak of (F. Scott) Fitzgerald's style, we don't mean his command of the relative pronoun, we mean the sound his words make on paper."<sup>31</sup> Somehow, Giono managed to develop a style without having mastered the rules of spelling and grammar. Although this is unusual in a writer, Giono was able to make up in creativity, individuality and sheer hard work for what he lacked in technical prowess. That he would undertake a career as a writer handicapped as he was by lack of education, a provincial background and his own orthographic deficiencies, illustrates both his need to express himself and his unwavering belief that he had something valuable to say.

The majority of the letters are written in black ink on white or off-white paper of good quality with very few crossed-out words. When crossed-out words and phrases do occur, they are generally in Giono's most angry letters and it is evident that he leaves them there as a form of emphasis. In the letter of 10 January 1942, a masterpiece of jealousy and cold fury, the last half of the second line and the first half of the first line on page one are crossed out. However, the seven remaining pages are remarkably evenly-written in the concise, dense hand that is characteristic of Giono's letters. Giono fills the entire page and often spills over into the margins to add a suddenly remembered detail. Occasionally the later letters appear to have been dashed off quickly in pencil, indicating a cooling of Giono's ardor and of Blanche's diminishing importance in his life.

---

<sup>31</sup> *Elements of Style*, 67.

The most striking visual feature of the letters, aside from the spelling errors, is the number of underlined words and phrases including the signature which is always underlined. In the 1939 letters, which are free from the misunderstandings and jealousies of the later letters, the underlinings serve primarily for emphasis: "---- écrivez Poste Restante en très grosses lettres";<sup>32</sup> "---- la terreur d'être privé de toi----",<sup>33</sup> "la mieux aimée".<sup>34</sup> However Giono also uses underlinings to emphasize the key words in a theme, like the word "magic" to characterize the nature of his love for Blanche: "Il y a longtemps que je cherchais le lieu magique que j'ai trouvé. Il semble que tu ais [sic] apporté une magie supérieure."<sup>35</sup> It is illustrative of Giono's insistent style, that even in this lyrical love letter, there are ten underlinings in four pages.

When he is jealous and angry, the insistence is even more marked. The letters illustrate Giono's temperament, which at its best was solid, firm, and steadfast in his loyalties, but at its worst was stubborn, unreasonable, inflexible and finally domineering and controlling. In the letter of 10 January 1942, mentioned above, Giono takes Blanche to task for her infidelity and her lack of confidence in him, underlining the word "confiance" three times on one page: "ai [sic] confiance en moi"; "Si tu as confiance en moi--"; "----soutenu par la seule confiance en moi" and finally emphasizing his own faithfulness by repeating the word "fidèle" twice and using ever stronger qualifying adjectives and double underlinings: "Vous avez mon amour, mon amour visible, évident, constant, fidèle, absolument fidèle, exclusif, toute ma vie mise à vos pieds, tout mon talent tourné vers vous, toute ma force tendue à

---

<sup>32</sup> 2 January 1939.

<sup>33</sup> 10 July 1939.

<sup>34</sup> 18 July 1939.

<sup>35</sup> 10 July 1939.

chaque instant vers votre bonheur." "Amour" is repeated twice, "tout" three times and there is a crescendo of emotion in the phrases, "toute ma vie", "tout mon talent", and "toute ma force". On this page alone there are 11 underlinings, six of which are double. This is just one example among many, of Giono in his didactic mode, taking on the role of Blanche's conscience: "---prenez, Blanche, intelligente, cultivée, riche d'amis, la leçon que vous donne le petit garçon coiffeur----."<sup>36</sup>

It is not surprising that Blanche went through a period where she left Giono's letters unread and sometimes unclaimed at the post office, pretending they were lost in the mail. Giono's poignant response to the loss of some of the letters reveals the essential purpose of the letters for him:

"Je suis peut-être idiot de tant attacher d'importance aux lettres que je t'écris mais elles sont tellement l'expression de ma vie, [--] que je tremble d'en imaginer la moindre miette perdue. [--] Pourquoi les lettres des autres ne se perdent-elles pas? Ils écrivent en se jouant et leurs lettres arrivent. J'écris en faisant vengeance de mon coeur et mes lettres se perdent."<sup>37</sup>

Giono's letters are essentially a means of self-expression - "[la] vengeance de mon coeur" - not a means toward a dialogue with Blanche. And yet, because of his ability to write at the height of emotion, these letters written in moments of jealous rage are among Giono's best. This letter of January 10, 1939, for example, skillfully uses the metaphor of putrefying meat to qualify the world of Parisian society, ("un milieu légèrement faisandé"); to describe Blanche's friends who are "plus 'faites' que vous (dans le sens gibier)"; and to vilify Blanche herself: " ---vous êtes couvertes d'hommes comme les viandes mal protégées sont couvertes de mouches."

---

<sup>36</sup> Giono used the example of Joseph Berenger, a young man who had been in prison with him. He had trusted Giono to finally obtain his release rather than attempting to escape as he had planned to do. After his release he wrote to thank Giono for his help and good counsel.

<sup>37</sup> September 1947, no. 10.

As the letter quoted above illustrates, Giono goes back to using the formal *vous* every time he sees Blanche drifting away from him whether through anger or jealousy or some other type of misunderstanding. As early as 1941, in a fit of jealousy, he proclaims, "Je n'ai absolument aucune confiance en vous. [---] Je vous ai détestée aussi féroce­ment que ce que je vous aime."<sup>38</sup> Occasionally he begins a letter with *vous* and progresses to *tu* after he has resolved the misunderstanding in his own mind, by means of the letter.<sup>39</sup> For him the use of *tu* implies both presence and closeness as when he tells Blanche, "Mais, tu me donnes encore cette joie qui est la plus rare du monde: avoir cette confiance en quelqu'un; et le fait que tu ne sois pas 'quelqu'un d'autre' puisque tu es moi-même".<sup>40</sup>

Giono did not use *tu* easily and the term he chooses to denote the *you* who is the recipient of the letters, is carefully chosen and in keeping with the protocol of his time. It is noteworthy in this regard that Giono uses *vous* as a courtesy in his first letter to Blanche when the two lovers are still in what Giono refers to as a primary state of *éblouissement* and have not become physically intimate: "J'ai à peine touché votre bras, à peine touché votre main, à peine écouté un mot qui soit pour moi."<sup>41</sup> Likewise, in *Pour saluer Melville*, Giono has the two lovers, Adelina and Herman, whose story is based on the early days of his own love affair with Blanche,<sup>42</sup> use *vous* to denote a spiritual love that has never been consummated. After the late 1950's, by

---

<sup>38</sup> 25 August 1941.

<sup>39</sup> 28 July 1940.

<sup>40</sup> 29 December 1940.

<sup>41</sup> 2 January 1939.

<sup>42</sup> See letters of 30 January 1940, 17 February 1940 and dedication to Blanche's copy of *Pour saluer Melville*, included in the Appendix.

which time he and Blanche have ceased to be lovers, he never again addresses her as *tu*, even though their friendship continues until Giono's death in 1970.

"Coeur chéri" or simply "coeur" are Giono's most usual forms of salutation in the letters. It is significant that the word "coeur" is masculine in French because the gender of the word is in keeping with Giono's preference for masculine terms of endearment when addressing Blanche, terms such as "cher fils", "fiston", "mon beau", or even "mon corps de garçon" and the androgynous "fille / fils". In his first letter to her, he conceives of her as a "petit enfant", the "fils chéri" that he, taking on a protective maternal role, feels the need to advise and protect: "Soyez prudente [---], couvrez-vous bien, ne prenez pas froid, ne soyez pas malade, prenez du plaisir."<sup>43</sup> In a letter dated November, 1939, Giono addresses Blanche as "mon fils chéri", "mon grand doux fils", "mon fils" (twice), "mon fils chérie" (twice), using the feminine form of the adjective, and finally "mon corps de garçon" and "mon admirable fils", all in less than two pages!

As Julie Sabiani points out, Giono's conception of love is platonic in that he believed that a perfect love makes the lovers like two parts of one whole.<sup>44</sup> This is also an expression of Giono's conception of the tristanian ideal of the mystical unity of lovers as is evident from the preface he wrote for an edition of *Tristan et Yseut*: "Il me semble, dit Iseut, que je ne pourrai jamais me séparer de vous. - C'est merveille, dit Tristan, je suis tel pour vous que vous êtes pour moi."<sup>45</sup> The letters express this same ideal of an indissoluble unity: "--et je connais maintenant la valeur véritable de cette terrible soudure qui complète en un seul être vivant deux corps et deux âmes qui

---

<sup>43</sup> 2 January 1939.

<sup>44</sup> "A propos de l'amour," *Revue des Lettres modernes, Jean Giono No.1* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974) 192-197.

<sup>45</sup> *De Homère à Machiavel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986)16.

vivaient séparément."<sup>46</sup> The feeling of union is so profound that Giono can proclaim further on in the same letter the joy that Blanche's love brings him especially given their perfect union: "--- le fait que tu ne sois pas 'quelqu'un d'autre' *puisque tu es moi-même*." [emphasis mine] There is no doubt that the source of Giono's ideal comes from his interpretation of the myth of *amor courtois* when he asserts at the end of the letter that his love for Blanche is " l'aventure avec un grand A et au singulier, l'Aventure pour laquelle l'homme et la femme naissent, la seule Aventure valable; la vie; la vie de Tristan et d'Yseult,<sup>47</sup> de Roméo et Juliette, la vie des héros-----".

Giono's conception of love as a mystical union that transcends gender by co-mingling the masculine and feminine elements of each partner in an androgynous ideal would seem to preclude a sexual relationship as it does in his fiction.<sup>48</sup> And yet, it is clear that Giono's love for Blanche included the carnal aspect and was in fact, based on physical attraction: "C'est la joie de ta chair, c'est ton visage renversé sous moi, c'est ton oreille, c'est ta douce cuisse, c'est ton corps si beau---."<sup>49</sup> His desire for her is physical and is often expressed in the most corporeal, sensory way, using terms that derive from the vocabulary of nourishment with its components of appetite, taste, hunger and satisfaction through eating and drinking.

In the first paragraph of the first letter he writes to her, during their first separation, Giono sets up the paradigm of desire as appetite and love as nourishment

---

<sup>46</sup> 29 December 1940.

<sup>47</sup> Giono spells Yseult with an "I" in his letter but the title of the edition of the myth for which he wrote a preface is *Tristan et Iseut* without the "I". Both spellings are correct and the name may also be written Iseut as in the title of the Bordas edition of the various renditions of the myth.

<sup>48</sup> The discrepancy between Giono's life and his fiction as regards the chivalric ideal is discussed further in Chapters IV and V.

<sup>49</sup> 26 February 1940.



when he describes himself as "plein d'appétit [--] plein de faim" and he insists that her absence deprives him of essential nourishment: "--je savais que je souffrirai [sic] de votre départ; [---] pour toute la grande tendresse qui brusquement ne vous a plus pour s'appuyer sur vous, pour *se nourrir de vous*, pour que vous deveniez ma vie[emphasis mine]."<sup>50</sup> Later that same year he tells her that she is not only the sun, the wind and the rain, but she is the nourishment on which he lives: "tout ce que je mange, tout ce que je bois, tout ce que je respire. Tu es ma vie."<sup>51</sup> Giono idealized Blanche to the extent that he insisted that she was the only one who could assuage his craving and that she alone was keeping him alive: "Les délices, c'est toi seule qui les a maintenant et il est inutile que je continue à demander aux couleurs et aux formes l'apaisement d'un appétit dont *tu es la seule nourriture* [emphasis mine]."<sup>52</sup>

For Giono, this craving for replenishment comes about as a result of the outpouring of energy that creative work requires: "Il faut donner de la vie aux images et c'est chaque fois avec un don de son propre sang que cela se fait."<sup>53</sup> As Part II, Chapter 1 explains, it was Blanche who engendered Giono as an artist. Now, in a symbolic birth process, he must shed his own blood to give life to the work of art. Even the receipt of a letter from Blanche nourishes Giono: "---tes lettres sont une sorte de nourriture sur laquelle je me rue et chaque mot compte."<sup>54</sup> Michèle Ramond

---

<sup>50</sup> 2 January 1939.

<sup>51</sup> 14 July 1939.

<sup>52</sup> 29 January 1940.

<sup>53</sup> 20 January 1940. See also the letter of 18 July 1939 where Giono tells Blanche that the writer is one who "ne cesse d'être occupé d'une idée tant qu'il ne l'aura pas faite avec son propre sang." and the letter of 29 décembre 1940 where he declares that the writing of his play *La femme du boulanger* would only be achieved with the shedding of his blood; "Encore une fois, ce sera avec mon sang."

<sup>54</sup> 31 January 1944.

has noted that Madame de Sévigné, in a letter she wrote to her daughter, used the same metaphor of letters as nourishment: "Enfin, ma fille, voilà trois de vos lettres. J'admire comme cela devient, quand on n'a plus d'autre consolation: c'est la vie, c'est une agitation, une occupation, c'est une nourriture---"<sup>55</sup> Ramond suggests that in Madame de Sévigné's case also, "nourishment" consists in the letter's ability to reinvigorate the letter writer psychologically and to replenish the emotional energy that (s)he has expended in writing. Giono too evokes this notion of letter writing as an expenditure of emotional energy, using once again the symbolism of blood: "C'est la fin de la crise. [---] peut-être même cette sorte d'hémorragie qui m'a fait écrire dix pages de stupidité m'a dans un certain sens aidé à guérir." However in Giono's case, the act of writing was both the emotional hemorrhage itself and the means to a cure.

Giono's imagery, which is so emphatically physical, would seem to contradict the ideals of purity and chastity inherent in the myth of chivalric love: e.g. "gavé de désirs"; "tes lettres sont une sorte de nourriture sur laquelle je me *rue*"; "c'est la joie de *ta chair*"; "Et je t'ai, belle que tu es, [---] *dans ma bouche où je te mange* à la longueur de journée--" [emphasis mine].<sup>56</sup> The implication of the adjective "gavé" is that the lover is "stuffed" or "crammed" so full of desire that there is no room for anything else; he is the incarnation of desire calling to the body of the beloved for satisfaction. And yet Giono calls to Blanche using the androgynous language which is one of the characteristics of *amor courtois* : "Mon doux fils, mon beau Blanchet, ma fille chérie [---]."<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> "La lettre ou le lien délirant" *Ecrire, publier, lire les correspondances* Actes de colloque international: "Les correspondances" U. of Nantes, novembre (1983): 359.

<sup>56</sup> 13 August 1943.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

For Giono, there is no inherent contradiction in his paradigm of desire as hunger and love as nourishment. Unlike Denis De Rougemont,<sup>58</sup> who identifies hunger with sexual instinct and sexual satisfaction with nourishment, Giono does not separate the sexual component of love from its spiritual aspect. The sacrilege in the gionien system is not the consummation of love in the sexual union - in fact, the physical enhances the spiritual for Giono - the sacrilege is infidelity which soils the purity of the all consuming passion of the lovers for one another: "Blanche, mon coeur, ma satisfaction personnelle ne compte pas; ce qui compte c'est être pur. Aux purs tout est pur. Aux autres, la nourriture de leur âme est toujours souillée. [---] J'aime mieux que mon âme meure plutôt que de la nourrir avec de la nourriture souillée."<sup>59</sup> Sexual passion made pure by absolute fidelity is a form of communion so profound, that rather than being a sacrilege against the precepts of chivalric love, it elevates love to the level of the sacred.

The major theme of the love letter is, of course, love. Love experienced as desire or memory by the solitary lover makes *Absence* one of the leitmotifs of the love letter. The letter can be perceived either as a bridge to the absent beloved or as a metonymic incarnation of the distance between them.<sup>60</sup> An analysis of the ways in which Giono treats the theme of absence leads to an understanding of his evolution as an artist. It is especially significant in this regard that Giono chose the more feminine role of the letter writer who languishes in place, while Blanche played the masculine part of the voyager, setting out in search of adventure.

---

<sup>58</sup> *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion, revised and augmented ed. including postscript by the author. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983).

<sup>59</sup> 12 August 1939.

<sup>60</sup> Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: approaches to a form* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1982) 13.

In the earliest letters, when Giono was in thrall to his passion, he treats the letter as a bridge toward Blanche and as a means to bring her closer. In one of his earliest letters Giono implores Blanche to write so that in holding the letter he can feel and touch her: "Ne manques [sic] pas de m'écrire, une lettre un peu longue, coeur chérie, que je te sentes [sic] et que je te touche."<sup>61</sup> He writes to reassure himself that she exists because she is as essential to him as water.<sup>62</sup> Even when circumstances separate them, the act of writing functions as means of filling the void between them and creates an illusion of presence: "Je ne cesserai plus maintenant de t'écrire, même dans ce vide où tu n'es pas. Je n'écris plus pour que tu lises, j'écris pour être avec toi."<sup>63</sup> Ironically, love is not nourished by plenitude but by absence, which fuels passion and inspires the imagination. Absence can bring the lovers closer because of the sharing and the idealization process that goes on within the pages of the letters. During these periods of absence the space of passion is transferred to the letter, which becomes a sort of magic carpet spanning the distance between the two lovers. The letter can be used to create and prolong desire because as Philippe Brenot emphasizes in his essay, the love letter is above all a carnal, sensuous, physical instrument with the power to excite, stimulate and arouse feelings, especially sexual ones<sup>64</sup>

And yet, Giono is always more conscious of distance as an obstacle than of the possibility of bridging the distance by means of the letter: "Je suis plus près de toi; il me semble que je vais toucher ta joue ou tes cheveux mais je ne les touche pas et il

---

<sup>61</sup> 3 July 1939.

<sup>62</sup> 30-31, end of February, 1940.

<sup>63</sup> 4 January 1941. See also the letter of November, 1942, p. 8, where Giono asserts that he can find joy in writing to Blanche even when he is angry and feels alienated from her, because writing is in itself a way of being with her.

<sup>64</sup> *De la lettre d'amour* (Cadeilhan: Zulma, 2000) 11 and 55-73.

y a des kilomètres entre la paume de ma main et ta joue."<sup>65</sup> When Blanche leaves, the magical world she has inspired collapses and their separation is a "déchirement insupportable"; not to be able to hold her in his arms, to look at her, to touch her is "désespérant."<sup>66</sup> Their partings are a "souffrance physique d'arrachement" where her absence creates a void which totally transforms his reality.<sup>67</sup> When Blanche and her husband leave Manosque permanently for Marseilles, Giono pens a litany to her parting:

" elle part, elle part, elle s'en va, elle n'habitera plus à côté de toi, tu ne la verras plus ni tout à l'heure, ni demain, ni après demain, elle ne va pas te téléphoner pour te fixer un rendez-vous, tu n'iras plus guetter l'arrivée de sa tête blanche au dessus du mur du chemin, c'est fait, elle part, elle part, elle part."<sup>68</sup>

And yet, in spite of his suffering when he is away from Blanche, Giono often used his work and his health problems as an excuse to preserve the distance between them. The great paradox in these love letters is that as much anguish as Blanche's absences cause him, Giono never seriously tried to end the separations by marrying her, even when he realized he was losing her. In fact, when she turned to François Bravay because she had given up all hope of marriage to Giono, he used her unfaithfulness as the final obstacle to their union.

Why did Giono behave in such a seemingly contradictory way and what purpose did Blanche's absence serve for him? To answer this question it is useful to look at one of the less obvious aspects of the phenomenon of absence. Roland Barthes

---

<sup>65</sup> 3 July 1939.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> 21 December 1941.

<sup>68</sup> 21 April 1943.

has emphasized the feminizing effect of absence on any man who *chooses* to remain behind and suffer, thus playing the traditionally feminine role.”<sup>69</sup> This choice is especially significant in the case of a writer because the absent partner leaves an empty space that can be transformed from a simple void to a space of creativity. Although the themes of absence and presence, closeness and distance are interwoven in the letters, the particular significance of distance for Giono is that it opens up a space of writing where he creates both letters and fiction. Barthes suggests that every lover who waits is in some sense creative because the very phenomenon of waiting creates a "scenography" which becomes a sort of play in which the lover creates an idealized absent beloved.<sup>70</sup> In this context too, Blanche was essential to Giono, not as a real woman to be lived with day-to-day (as Rougemont has said, can anyone imagine a "Madame Isolde"?) but as the heroine of his life drama, a drama which was essential to him in his evolution as an writer.

Giono played out the feminine role with its emphasis on fidelity and rootedness because he had a fervent desire to be grounded in an ideal, the ideal of chivalric love which ennobled his passion for Blanche: "Mon désir le plus violent et ce à quoi je m'attache de toutes mes forces dans tout ce que je fais, c'est m'enraciner. Je suis enraciné en toi, et si tu te refusais à mes racines, l'arbre ne donnerait plus ni feuilles ni fruit mais mourrait".<sup>71</sup> The violence of Giono's desire and of its expression in the letter could be characterized merely as the lover's delirium, a psychological aberration that affects writers of love letters according to Michèle Ramond.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979) 14.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 37-38.

<sup>71</sup> 3 July 1939.

<sup>72</sup> See "La lettre ou le lien délirant", and especially p. 361, citing Abélard à Héloïse.

However, in Giono's case, the end of the second sentence reveals the basis for his seemingly irrational and even perverse need: Using the metaphor of a tree that needs strong roots to flower and bear fruit, Giono tells Blanche that he has to feel grounded in this idealized relationship in order to grow as an artist. As the letters and Giono's fiction demonstrate, he could not find inspiration in the ordinary world. He had to transform it by first transforming himself into the creative persona of the poet. Through the act of writing, a creative act traditionally viewed as masculine, Giono transcends the role of the passive, thus feminine, victim of his passion. As will be evident from a reading of Part II, Chapter 1, it is Blanche who was thrust into the position of the wanderer while Giono's sedentary role was freely chosen. It was the need to create that led him to seek the solitude provided by Blanche's absence and it was the creative possibilities inherent in absence itself that caused him to choose the seemingly feminine role of the lover who waits and writes.

The letters provide a key to the process by which Giono transformed his love for Blanche and raised it to the level of myth. As I show in the chapter that follows, the Arthurian legend, and especially the legend of Tristan and Isolde, is the major underlying theme of the letters. Giono recognized the power of myth to elevate life experience. By drawing on the fundamental myth of courtly love, he sanctified his love for Blanche and placed the relationship outside the bounds of ordinary society. Myth sacralizes experience by describing the manifestations of the sacred in the world and it is clear that for Giono, passion is sacred.

According to Mircea Eliade, participation in rites and rituals is a way to acknowledge the presence of the sacred and to sanctify the activities of the every day.<sup>73</sup> The letters that Giono wrote to Blanche became a sacred ritual between them,

---

<sup>73</sup> *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. William R. Trask (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961) 98.

and as ritual objects, the letters themselves became sanctified. The love letter substitutes for the body of the beloved as a sensory object that can be touched and felt, read and re-read. Giono asks Blanche to write to him "--que je te sentes [sic] et que je te touche."<sup>74</sup> As Jacques Brengues suggests in his essay on the love letter and the sacred, the very paper on which the letter is written is sacred because it represents the skin of the beloved.<sup>75</sup> Giono tells Blanche: "J'ai pleuré sur ta lettre. Pleuré de joie. [--] Lu et relu ta lettre. Comme j'aimerais les garder."<sup>76</sup> According to Philippe Brenot: "La lettre d'amour a l'encre pour sang et du papier en guise d'apparence corporelle, mais nul doute qu'elle est vivante, qu'elle respire, qu'elle aime."<sup>77</sup> The length of the letter becomes irrelevant as a means of making the beloved physically present: "La lettre est seulement le papier sur lequel tu as écrit. Ta présence qu'elle apporte me suffit."<sup>78</sup>

It is especially apparent, in a letter that Giono wrote to Blanche in July of 1945 after burning one of her letters and burying the ashes, that the letter is a sacred object which not only *symbolizes* Blanche's body, it *is* her body: "Ce petit tas de

---

<sup>74</sup> 3 July 1939.

<sup>75</sup> Jacques Brengues, "La correspondance amoureuse et le sacré" *Actes du colloque international: les correspondances* (nov. 1993) 56.

<sup>76</sup> 30 February 1940.

<sup>77</sup> Brenot 9.

<sup>78</sup> 19 July 45.

<sup>79</sup> 10 July 1939.

<sup>80</sup> Brengues, 65.



papier noirci qui est toi et cet amour magnifique---."79 As an incarnation of the beloved, the letter is a sacred object and as such it cannot be merely tossed away; it must be immolated in the purity of the flame.<sup>80</sup> The importance of the love letter transcends the symbolic as Philippe Brenot remarks in his essay on the love letter: "La lettre d'amour est un acte d'amour, elle est l'amour lui-même. En ce sens, elle impose le respect."

When Giono burns the sheets of paper and buries the ashes, he is enacting a funeral ritual. It is as though he is performing a ritual sacrifice in which the corporal aspect of love is burned away in order to purge the relationship of the destructive element of physical desire and to purify and elevate the spiritual nature of love. Even in the pile of ashes the beloved is still there and she still represents love in all its magnificence.

In a sense, Giono's action in burning the letter also represents a sort of *liebestod*, an acknowledgment of the fatality of passion which inevitably burns itself out. Giono was always aware of the terrible dichotomy between the intensity of passion and its ephemeral nature. In the letter he writes to Blanche after the first night they spend together, he tries to reassure her that in giving herself to him she has not extinguished his desire nor his love for her. And yet, further on in the same letter, he admits the paradoxical nature of love whose satisfaction leads not to fulfillment but to death: "Quand tous les au-delà du désir sont satisfaits, cette plénitude est terrifiante. Il me semble qu'il n'y avait plus qu'à mourir."<sup>81</sup>

The sacrality of the love letter is also evident, according to Jacques Brengues, because of its ability to abolish time and space and thus to create a new, sanctified

---

<sup>81</sup> 3 July 1939.

space, that of the letter itself.<sup>82</sup> The correspondence thus creates a "hierophany", an experience of a totally different order and thereby leads to an experience of the sacred.<sup>83</sup> This new sacred space created by the letter is utopic and a temporal.<sup>84</sup> Giono creates this idea of an epistolary utopia in his evocations of the "Jardins d'Armide", the "derrière l'air", and even the "Forêt de Brocéliande", all mythical other worlds apart from the ordinary world which is too sordid to offer a refuge for the lovers. In fact the experience of love as ritualized in the love letter represents a complete rupture with the ordinary world and a withdrawing into the self.

It is this inner self and the magical world in which he dwells that Giono tries to share with Blanche: "Pour moi, mon travail et ma solitude me forcent à composer ce monde étrange où je te faisais entrer chaque jour, et, où je m'efforce encore de te faire entrer avec les lettres que je t'écrivais chaque jour."<sup>85</sup> What he worries is that she will lose the key in time because she has chosen to inhabit a totally different world that even the letters may no longer be able to bridge: " Mais, sans que je cesse de t'aimer, tu me deviendras étrangère et à ce moment-là, l'amour ne signifiera grande chose."

Giono's philosophy of love is both unique and potentially dangerous because, like the myth of *amour courtois* on which it was based, there is no provision in his

---

<sup>82</sup> Brengues, 58-59.

<sup>83</sup> See *The Sacred and the profane*, p.11.

<sup>83</sup> The terms Brengues uses for this space outside of time and space are *uchronique* and *utopique*.

<sup>85</sup> January 1944.

schema for closure. As opposed to Jacques Brengues, Roland Barthes and even Stendhal, for all of whom love is part of a process which, albeit sadly, comes to an end, Giono believed that in order for love to be real it had to be eternal. Jacques Brengues, in his essay, outlines a process of “destruction,” which ends the passionate stage of love and allows the lovers to progress toward a restructuring of their relationship in a more permanent union like marriage. Barthes envisions a sort of evolution from passion with its obsessions to a stage where the lover abandons his will to possess the other and is thus able to break through the constraints of desire, to freedom. Stendhal's stages of crystallization are obviously envisioned as stages and not permanent states of being. The unfortunate lover who, like Werther, insists on remaining in a state of passionate intoxication, most often ends up as a suicide. And yet, Giono did not end his affair with Blanche by committing suicide nor did he ever even seriously contemplate it. The letters show that as Blanche drifted away from him, Giono's work became central to his life and it was in his books that he was able to evolve a theory of love whereby passion is transcended and life, including the ability to create, is rediscovered.

## Chapter II: The love letters as the self-expression of a writer

The letters are important for what they reveal about Giono the writer, his creative process, his manner of writing, and especially, the importance for Giono of his work as a novelist. This aspect of the letters is less evident on first reading because of Giono's tendency to write under the inspiration of the moment, never pausing to organize his letters into paragraphs according to subject matter. His thoughts tumble onto the page unedited, much in the same way as they must have appeared in his own consciousness. Subject matters overlap and disappear without any logical conclusion and sometimes ideas are merely tossed in without comment. However a careful reading of the letters shows that while love was the impetus for the letters, they are primarily vehicles of self-expression where Giono confided his ideas on subjects as diverse as nature, music, reading, politics, health, aging and death in addition to his work which was always his central concern.

The "Blanche" to whom he poured out his soul was a real woman but she was also an incarnation of his anima, the idealized female image that he saw as the other half of himself. This is one of the primary reasons Giono wrote so many letters to Blanche: they were actually a means of sorting out his thoughts and of expressing himself as he could not do to anyone else. In one of the letters of disillusionment, Giono asks for the return of his letters, saying that the letters were not intended for Blanche Meyer but for someone else whom he was addressing through her: "D'autant que ces lettres ne s'adressaient pas à vous mais à travers vous à quelqu'un que vous ne connaissez pas."<sup>86</sup> Thus despite his passionate assertions that Blanche is the vital

---

<sup>86</sup> 21 January 1943.

center out of which he lives his life, the stream of consciousness he employs is more an interior monologue than an attempted dialogue with the her. Giono himself admits as much when he tells Blanche that he writes: "seulement pour te raconter ce que minute par minute je raconte à moi-même."<sup>87</sup> Much later, in 1947, Giono tells her that his letters are so important as the expression of his life that he can't bear to imagine that any of them should be lost.<sup>88</sup>

Giono's ego-centeredness provides an important clue as to how he was able to achieve his success as a writer. He wrote nearly every day and his often-achieved goal was to write "trois belles pages." His ego kept him from doubting his abilities as a writer as is evident in a letter he wrote to Blanche early in their relationship: " Non, je n'étais pas humble, ni modeste. *Je me disais que j'étais le plus grand poète vivant de langue française.* (Je sais que je suis sans doute le plus grand poète) et j'en avais la certitude et je me disais que pour ce poète-là, tu étais tout. [emphasis mine]"<sup>89</sup> Later the same year he reiterates: "Ma chérie, malheureusement, je suis un homme exceptionnel."<sup>90</sup> Giono always believed in the quality of his work and this certainty gave him the inspiration to keep writing. He describes *Pour saluer Melville* as a "grand quatuor";<sup>91</sup> he calls *Virgile* his best work yet and although in this case he was wrong, his enthusiasm was an impetus to finish the novel; several letters attest to Giono's belief that the Angelo cycle was to be his greatest work;<sup>92</sup> in 1946 Giono

---

<sup>87</sup> 29 December 1940.

<sup>88</sup> September 1947 (10).

<sup>89</sup> 3 July 1939.

<sup>90</sup> 12 August 1939.

<sup>91</sup> 26 December 1939.

<sup>92</sup> See letters of 21 March 1945, Vendredi Saint 1945 and 13 June 1945.

asserts that in *Un roi sans divertissement*, the public will discover "des ressources insoupçonnées";<sup>93</sup> as late as 1965, at seventy years of age, Giono could declare: "J'ai en chantier un grand roman très différent de tout ce que j'ai écrit jusqu'ici"<sup>94</sup> and in his last letter written in 1969, Giono tells Blanche that he has just finished *L'iris de Suse* and that he is working "magnificently".

There is no doubt that Giono took himself seriously as a writer and believed that he had a message for the world. In 1942 during his first serious rupture with Blanche when he appears to be considering either suicide or at least abandoning his career and leaving Manosque, he wrote: "Je crois que je vaudrais la peine de me sauver. Je représente pour beaucoup [---] un espoir qui laisserait le monde un peu moins lumineux s'il disparaissait prématurément. Je ne laissais derrière moi qu'une illusion massacrée."<sup>95</sup>

Giono's innate stubbornness also helped him to persevere despite his rare doubts that his writing was important: "Inventer dans une chambre close, vivre avec des personnages qui ne sont jamais que moi-même---"<sup>96</sup> This passage is revelatory both as regards Giono's creative process as we will see further on, and his struggles with the solitude demanded of a writer. As early as 1940 Giono tells Blanche: "Je ne sors presque pas."<sup>97</sup> Shortly afterwards he says: "Je me referme de plus en plus ici."<sup>98</sup> These phrases occur over and over again until they become one of the major themes

---

<sup>93</sup> 14 September 1946.

<sup>94</sup> Early October, 1965.

<sup>95</sup> November 1942.

<sup>96</sup> 14 October 1943.

<sup>97</sup> 29 January 1940.

<sup>98</sup> 21 May 1940.

of the letters. At first Giono laments that he cannot go back into the hills around Manosque where he and Blanche had walked during the early days of their relationship, because she is no longer there to walk with him. But interwoven with this theme of absence is that of creativity. The truth is that Giono needs this solitude to protect his ego from the assaults of a corrupt world so that he can continue to write. For him solitude is: "--l'armure qui m'y garderait à l'abri des bêtes."<sup>99</sup> The world, especially that of Paris, stands in the way of his ability to create: "La moindre boue empêche mon luisant."<sup>100</sup> In one of his darkest moments Giono says that his darkened study is "comme le doux mur d'une prison ou d'un cloître qui protège et apaise."<sup>101</sup> He even yearns at one point for the hermit's life and wishes he could close himself up in a medieval convent.<sup>102</sup>

Despite moments when Giono struggles with his solitude - "Ici la réclusion n'est pas gai non plus et devient même forte harassante. Je suis blanc comme le blanc de poulet."<sup>103</sup> - his writing sustains him as in this case, when he is working on Angelo, and exclaims at the end of the letter that what he has written that day is "très beau". In fact the series of letters written during this period are an important expression of Giono's efforts to accept the solitary life of the writer. His enthusiasm for his creative activity<sup>104</sup> gives way occasionally to nostalgia for moments when he

---

<sup>99</sup> 10 January 1942.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> 23 January 1950.

<sup>102</sup> 28 August 1942.

<sup>103</sup> 19 July 1942. See also the letter of 10 July 1945 where Giono complains about his solitude.

<sup>104</sup> Letter of 1945, "Je suis ici avec mes pieds de plomb"-----\*; also 21 May 1946.

and Blanche were together and to jealousy over her imagined infidelities in Paris. However, Giono was at heart a solitary and as much as he laments Blanche's absence, he refuses to share the life she has chosen: "Je crois que j'aimerais assez cette solitude."<sup>105</sup> At one point he brags to Blanche that he hasn't been out in fifteen days except to mail his letters to her.<sup>106</sup> This finally becomes their pattern as Blanche travels more and more and Giono sequesters himself as the faithful hermit who writes books and daily letters to her.

From 1945 onwards it is evident that Giono largely inhabits an internal world from which he draws the material he needs for his books. The letters too are literary spaces, created by separation, in which Giono lives his passion for Blanche. By this time, Giono is writing the Angelo cycle and he has reached a high level of skill as a novelist. He no longer needs outside inspiration, neither that of love nor of nature to carry on his work. His walks in the countryside merely activate his desire to work and lead him back to his study.<sup>107</sup> His work which he once described as a benediction<sup>108</sup> has become the vital center of his life: "mon balancier et ma base d'âme, c'est mon ciment et ma solidité."<sup>109</sup>

Giono's perseverance is best illustrated by the "life is war" metaphor he reiterated over and over again both in regard to his life and to his work. His life is a "grand combat"<sup>110</sup> especially against himself<sup>111</sup> and love too is a sort of war against the

---

<sup>105</sup> 2 August 1945.

<sup>106</sup> 21 May 1945.

<sup>107</sup> 21 April 1956.

<sup>108</sup> 30 February 1940.

<sup>109</sup> Pâques 1945.

<sup>110</sup> See letters of 29 January 1940, 29 December 1940, 113 July 1942, November 1940, 21 January 1943, 12 October 1943, and many others.



forces which strive to separate the lovers and from which they must emerge "vainqueurs".<sup>112</sup> Even cities are seen as enemies whom Giono must conquer.<sup>113</sup> Giono's favorite verbs in the face of all his struggles are "gagner" and "vaincre", verbs which served him in good stead in the struggles he waged in his creative life if not in his personal life.

The letter he wrote just before he finished *Un roi sans divertissement* is a good example of Giono's tenacity and the seriousness with which he regarded his work. He tells Blanche: "Je ne peux pas, je ne dois pas ni pour toi ni pour moi interrompre l'effort avant d'avoir gagné [Giono's underlining]".<sup>114</sup> He feels he must finish the book within a month in order to regain his place in the literary world after being black listed by the CNE<sup>115</sup> after the war: "--je veux 'remonter sur la scène' si on peut dire et je veux remonter pour vaincre et vaincre d'une façon totale."<sup>116</sup> The underlinings emphasize Giono's desire to win the artistic struggle to write a great book ("Je ne peux pas ----interrompre l'effort avant d'avoir gagné") and his determination to vanquish his enemies after having suffered what he considered an unfairly inflicted punishment ("Je veux remonter pour vaincre"). Giono's language demonstrates his total faith in his ability to write a work capable of vanquishing his enemies in the literary world and of his absolute dedication to his task.

---

<sup>111</sup> January 1951 (4).

<sup>112</sup> 21 March 1945.

<sup>113</sup> 21 March 1945.

<sup>114</sup> 2 October 1946.

<sup>115</sup> Comité Nationale des Ecrivains

<sup>116</sup> 2 October 1946.

Giono's letters contain many references to his creative process. These references in typical gionian fashion, are not developed but they give us an idea as to how his novels came about. First of all, Giono saw himself as a poet who, by the power of language, could bring a work into being.<sup>117</sup> The poet is a "réalisateur" and like a film producer, accomplishes his creative task through hard physical work as well as artistic inspiration. As several of the letters attest, the process shuttles the writer back and forth from the heights of joy to the depths of despair.<sup>118</sup> This is one of the reasons Giono needs Blanche - not to validate him as an artist but rather to comfort him when everything falls apart:

"D'ordinaire, au moment où la construction s'écroule dans vos mains, il n'y a plus d'issue; on ne sais même plus s'il y aura jamais, un jour encore, de l'espérance. Pour moi, maintenant, tu es là et dans le plus profond de l'écroulement il reste toujours assez de lumière pour voir à travers des décombres le chemin de la reconstruction."<sup>119</sup>

This alters the commonly held belief, mentioned by Pierre Citron<sup>120</sup> and others that Giono was a self-motivated writer who didn't need anyone with whom to share the creative process.

Three key terms define the creative process as Giono perceived it. These three seemingly unrelated terms are *image*, *blood* and *birth*. Giono didn't launch a novel with an idea for a plot for instance, or a character; instead he allowed himself to be

---

<sup>117</sup> See letter of 18 July 1939 cited in Chapter 1, p. 3.

<sup>118</sup> See for instance the letter of 3 January 1940.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> See Citron, *Giono* 439 where Citron quotes Elise Giono as having also having believed that her husband was self-sufficient and really needed no one.

taken over by images. He likened his psychological state when he was in the throes of creation to that of a "trance": "les images les personnages, le rythme, les éléments dramatiques, les ciels, les bêtes, les arbres, les eaux, les mers, les étoiles, tout ça arrive, se mélange, s'organise, joue, flambe, tonne, coule, rugit et vit. [---] Tu auras le temps de me voir en transes."<sup>121</sup> Giono's books were inspired not by his intellect but by his artistic imagination which he allowed free reign as he began work on his novels. In fact the more carefully thought-out grand designs that he occasionally confided to his notebooks rarely came to fruition. Describing his work on *La chute de Constantinople*, Giono describes the process:

"Tout de suite c'est l'ample départ d'une très grande symphonie. Mais à mesure que j'écrivais et plus j'écrivais, d'admirables images naissaient en moi, s'organisaient, sonnaient, retentissaient, se pressaient de venir et, quand je me suis arrêté vers les 9 heures 1/2 [---] j'avais ainsi établi l'ordre et la beauté de presque la moitié du premier volume!"<sup>122</sup>

Speaking of *Le poète de la famille*, Giono again says that the writing itself precedes and inspires the gush of creativity: "Création sans cesse spontanée et sans cesse jaillissante à l'instant où la création se forme en moi elle est déjà écrite sur le papier."<sup>123</sup> It is as though when his work was going well, the writing and the creative imagination functioned at the same time.

Often however, Giono had to struggle with his writing, like a mother who sheds her own blood to bring a child into the world: "---je suis arrivé au coeur du travail que je fais. Ce point toujours très délicat - car il faut y être entièrement sincère

---

<sup>121</sup> 30 February 1940.

<sup>122</sup> 26 February 1940.

<sup>123</sup> 28 August 1942.

- où il faut donner de la vie aux images et c'est chaque fois avec un don de son propre sang que cela se fait."<sup>124</sup> Thus, for Giono writing was like the process of maternity; carrying a child with all the dreams, joys and fears that process entails, and finally after the child has developed of his own accord, shedding his own blood in order to bring the child into the world. This is an example of the feminine imagery that is woven throughout the letters. The import of this imagery will become clearer after a reading of the first chapter of Part II. However it is worth noting in passing that Giono chose the designation of poet while Flaubert preferred to think of himself as an artist because he found the idea of the poet as too feminine.

The maternal image of the writer incubating his novels is even more apt as concerns his characters. He found the models for these characters in the real world: Blanche is the model for nearly every female heroine of the postwar novels; his mother served as the basis for the aging Pauline in *Mort d'un personnage*. Both women embodied aspects of the feminine in Giono such as generosity, tenderness and the need to protect; his father inspired the idea of the healers in Giono's works which also includes aspects of the feminine; Lucien Jacques seems to have inspired the portrait of *Le déserteur*, a protagonist who illustrates the desire for solitude and withdrawal from the world which is emblematic of all creative people including Giono; Gaston Pelous almost certainly served as the model for Langlois in *Un roi sans divertissement*. Both Giono and Gaston, with whom Giono was closely associated during the post war years, shared a need for the spectacle, which excites the passions and speaks to the core of being, and both knew the despair and monotony of the postwar years. Giono searched the depths of his inner self to find traits that resonated with those of the character he was "inventing":

---

<sup>124</sup>20 January 1940.

"J'examine mes propres mystères, je parcours les propres profondeurs de mon coeur. Je fais bouillir mes sucres les plus secrets dans ma marmite de sorcière pour une fois de plus faire mon propre portrait, comme il se doit mille fois plus beau que ce que je suis. Tel que je voudrais être."<sup>125</sup>

Once Giono had brought his characters to life, he lived them, often speaking of them in the first person. Speaking through the narrator in *Le moulin de Pologne*, Giono says: "Moi [---] je suis au bal. Au bal 1893 avec valse et quadrilles des lanciers."<sup>126</sup> Continuing in the same voice Giono reveals to Blanche one of the more unpleasant aspects of his character: "Mais comme je suis aigre dans mes observations! Je me faufile à travers les couples, avec mon petit gibus à la main et j'observe et je cancanne, et je dis du mal."<sup>127</sup> This observation on Giono's part, realized through a fictional persona, reveals the complexity of the author (and indeed of the human psyche). This was the period when Giono was in the process, through his book, of destroying his idealized relationship with Blanche as an experience of *amour courtois*. And yet, in the same letter, Giono speaking as himself, could assert: "Rien ne peut plus me toucher que de chercher à te faire une vie douillette et sûre. Je voudrais t'entendre ronronner comme un chat."

Giono saw himself both as the creator and animator of his fiction - "Moi - tel Zeus sur l'Olympe"<sup>128</sup> - and, as the above-quoted passages show, as inhabiting his own fictional world. In the same 1946 letter, during the composition of *Angelo*, Giono describes himself as: "Galopant sur place en croupe avec mon Angelo qui est bien

---

<sup>125</sup> 3 June 1945.

<sup>126</sup> 4 May 1950.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> 6 April 1946.

beau et bien brave à *t'attendre* [emphasis mine] au milieu du choléra et de l'amour." It is Giono/Angelo who is waiting for Blanche as Giono proves by continuing after the quoted sentence with a lighthearted discussion of some physical problem of Blanche's requiring surgery, which he interpolates so skillfully into his discussion of Angelo and his role as creator that it is difficult to see where fiction ends and reality begins. And while seeing himself as Angelo, and Angelo in turn as a sort of knight errant in search of adventure, Giono sees Blanche as a winged demon who is flying to Paris, her "ville lumière", to seduce the beau monde. This latter point is important as an adumbration of the letters of 1949-50 and of Giono's novel *Le moulin de Pologne* where he envisioned the female figure as a sort of demon and an embodiment of the fatality that brings about the destruction of the hero and his lineage.

Giono becomes attached not only to his male characters but also to his female ones like Adelina White, the Blanche-inspired heroine of *Pour saluer Melville*, and Pauline, heroine of the Angelo cycle. Much later, after writing the death of Pauline in *Mort d'un personnage*, having used his mother's own recent death as the basis for the death of the aging heroine, Giono explains to Blanche that he hasn't made much further progress on the work "Car j'étais emporté par la mort de Pauline."<sup>129</sup> Giono recognizes the paradoxical relationship between life and art where art serves both as a means of catharsis and as a powerful way to revive memory: "On peut dire par une sorte de Paradoxe terrible (qui est tout le mystère de l'Art) que cette mort est bien vivante."<sup>130</sup>

Giono's advice to Blanche in the later letters, advice that is perspicacious and sound on one level, shows that even the writer himself did not fully understand the

---

<sup>129</sup> 2 March 1946.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

creative process that took place in him. These letters are a sort of compendium of astute suggestions as to how to improve her writing that demonstrate that Giono had mastered his craft. He tells her to eliminate unnecessary words and to say only what will advance her story;<sup>131</sup> he gives her advice on construction and on character portrayal;<sup>132</sup> he advises her on the art of writing dialogue, and reminds her not to weigh her sentences down with unnecessary adjectives and adverbs.<sup>133</sup> He devotes a whole letter in 1966, to carefully analyzing a short story she had sent to him for comments.<sup>134</sup> What is most evident in these letters is not only Giono's expertise but his obvious enthusiasm for the art of writing and his whole-hearted involvement in helping Blanche to learn a craft which is obviously very important to him. This is true even though by the time of the 1966 letter, Giono was so crippled with gout that he couldn't walk into the next room to find books in his library.

The most revealing of this series of letters, touches on Giono's own writing process. In this letter he suggests that Blanche use James Frazier's work *The Golden Bough* as a source of themes for her short stories.<sup>135</sup> He suggests that Frazier is a valuable compendium of customs, strange folklore and legends, leading us to surmise that Giono himself may have used Frazier, especially during the 1930's when he was using Aztec legend in such works as *Les vraies richesses*.<sup>136</sup> His advice to Blanche to

---

<sup>131</sup> 14 March 1944.

<sup>132</sup> 5 November 1957.

<sup>133</sup> 22 May 1957.

<sup>134</sup> January 1966.

<sup>135</sup> 16 August 1956.

<sup>136</sup> Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged edition (New York: Mentor Books, 1964) 203, 531, 645-46. See especially pp. 531-32 where Frazer speaks of the

invent by using themes like those of fire or birds or fish and even better to mix the themes: "on peut les mélanger: mains qui sont des fleurs ou des oiseaux, étangs qui sont des domaines, navires qui sont des montagnes (ou inversement)", brings us closer to Giono's own method of creating. However he forgets to tell Blanche that in order to transform a simple meditation on a theme into art, the writer must appropriate it, get inside of it and make it her own. The artist, like Giono, creates from the inside out, not, as Giono counsels Blanche, from the outside in.

Giono's process of describing the light in *La chute de Constantinople* illustrates his creative process. It is evident that he is giving voice to an inner vision of light: "Cette lumière sera *ma* lumière [underlined by Giono]".<sup>137</sup> As he writes, he is being inspired and impelled a creative force that he likens to music: "J'entends se créer une symphonie à laquelle on ne résistera pas." Once again evoking the idea of the gestation and birth, Giono says that the work is coming to fruition in him and he is compelled to bring it to life. As he writes his description of the light, the light becomes symbolic of the seductive power of death. Giono applies his description of death to the "vieux père" who is a character in his book and who has a sort of black spot in his line of vision that Giono calls a "mouche noire". The black spot becomes like an immense bird, another symbol of death, that the old man must resist in order to go on living. Giono ends the letter by expressing the joy of carrying out the creative process, an experience that is as revitalizing to him as sleep and a way of confronting and confounding death.

---

Aztec god Huitzilopochtli. Giono referred to this Aztec deity in his first letter to Blanche written on 2 January 1939.

<sup>137</sup> 17 May 1940.



By 1945, love had served its purpose for Giono by making him into a writer. His work was not only taking all his time and energy but it had become his greatest source of joy, providing him with the physical pleasure he had once found only in his relationship with Blanche:

"Quand les choses vont bien elles attachent à la table et à la plume. Il semble que s'éloigner de la feuille de papier, ne serait-ce que de trois pas est un crime contre la conscience (et contre une sorte de jouissance physique assez forte et continue). Je ne résiste pas dans ces cas-là (toujours ma sensualité mais bien comprise) à rester attaché à ce qui me donne du plaisir."<sup>138</sup>

Although Giono never mentions Montaigne, there is something of the spirit of Montaigne in Giono, especially as regards the self-sufficiency of both writers in their later years. Giono cloistered in his thébaïde achieving a certain wisdom and self-understanding through his writing, resembles Montaigne in his tower study, reflecting and perfecting his essays.<sup>139</sup> For both the essayist and the fiction writer, the subject of the work was the author himself and for both, their work was the essential center of their lives. It was his work that gave Giono solace in the darkest periods of his life and in 1951, he declares that he has decided to put his work first, implicitly telling Blanche that from now on, his work will not only come before love but it will receive his exclusive attention: "J'ai complètement abandonné l'idée de vivre ne serait-ce qu'une heure sans travail. J'y consacre tous mes jours et toutes mes pensées."

Giono's later letters are among the most interesting because they provide a look into the psyche of the mature writer who manages to transcend the storms of

---

<sup>138</sup> 24 November 1955.

<sup>139</sup> We know that Giono was a reader of Montaigne because in the journal he kept during his imprisonment in St. Vincent-les-forts at the end of the war, he asks for only two books; his copy of Montaigne and his Pléiade edition of Baudelaire. See "Portrait de l'artiste par lui-même," *Bulletin* no. 44, automne/hiver, 1995, pp. 8-87.

passion and in so doing, recovers the world. Nature had inspired Giono's work of the 1930's but this was nature as transformed by myth and then by love into a mythical other world, that of the *Jardins d'Armide*, capable of sheltering the lovers and of supporting Giono's fiction. This transmogrified vision of nature could not sustain itself unfortunately, when disillusionment set in at the end of the love affair. Giono chose to stay inside rather than face nature unadorned by his imagination.

The letters of 1949-1950 reveal the anguish that Giono went through during this period of disillusionment at the end of his love affair with Blanche. Although he insists he never considered suicide, he apparently found death seductive because it brought release from pain. Pierre Citron cites pages that Giono wrote in 1949 as an introductory piece on the *Hussard* but never published: "Giono en son nom propre exalte le rêve, seule source possible du bonheur, et la mort dont l'idée est si apaisante puisqu'elle donne la certitude que les souffrances de la vie prendront fin."<sup>140</sup>

Aside from his work, Giono looked to literature to transcend this period of crisis. However in his typical way, he identified with those writers and passages that most moved him, appropriating what he found in the classical works to his own life and use. In September of 1949 he is probing childhood memories in which he sees Manosque as resembling classical Greece and he is reading Sophocles in order to find there "des thèmes d'espoir et de dimanche."<sup>141</sup> He is especially impressed by Créon's lines from *Antigone* referring to Antigone's infatuation with death: "Si ta nature est d'aimer, va chez les morts et aimes [sic] -les."<sup>142</sup> This is one of many allusions to love and death in this series of letters. When Blanche asks him to borrow Oscar Wilde's

---

<sup>140</sup> *Giono 1895-1970*, ( Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1990) 434-34.

<sup>141</sup> 12 September 1949.

<sup>142</sup> 12 September 1949.

poetry, Giono pens a long homage to Wilde that includes a reflection on Wilde's poem, the "Ballad of Reading Gaol". Giono comments: "C'est un poëme que je ne peux jamais relire sans larmes,"<sup>143</sup> remembering perhaps, his own experience of prison or his purported actions in hastening the death of his father in order to end his suffering. Bernard Viard mentions this experience of euthanathisia as a possible explanation for Giono's obsession with Wilde's lines from "Reading Gaol": "The man had killed the thing he loved / And so he had to die."<sup>144</sup> However, like Oscar Wilde during the period of his "De Profundis", Giono is reaching out from the depths of personal despair and this series of letters constitutes his own *de profundis* and Wilde's lines, as we will see further on, had a profound effect on Giono's work.

In a whole series of letters, and in much the same way as he had appropriated the characters of his fiction, Giono tries on various literary personae as a means to free himself from himself and to put an end to his suffering. One of the most significant letters, written in January of 1950, can be read as a self-portrait of Giono as he saw himself during this dark period. Like Descartes meditating beside his stove, Giono reflects on his life and on his art. Writing has become his life and he acknowledges that although by now the letters have ceased to interest Blanche, both letters and fiction are essential to him as means of self expression:

" Si je ne veux pas perdre toute envie de vivre il me faut aimer ces moments de grand dénouement où il ne me reste rien que moi-même pour affronter mon

---

<sup>143</sup> September 1949 (6).

<sup>144</sup> See "Un long déreglement des termes de l'échange," *Giono romancier* (Colloque du centenaire. Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1999.) 475. Viard cites The Notice to *Deux Cavaliers de l'orage*, t. VI, p. 893, where curiously, in his discussion of the relationship between love and domination and finally, murder, Robert Ricatte quotes almost verbatim Giono's words from his hitherto unpublished letter of September, 1949 to Blanche concerning Oscar Wilde, without however disclosing his source.

combat, mon métier. C'est beau un métier [underlined by Giono]. De plus en plus je lui demande de me ravir, de m'emporter comme un beau cavalier noir, un roi des aulnes. Le poêle commence à ronfler. --"<sup>145</sup>

Giono is no longer speaking to Blanche but rather through her to his own inner self. He is the artist standing alone before the abyss, interrogating his art. Whereas before this time Giono had looked to love to ennoble his life and to provide the enchantment he needed to create, now he looks to the work itself to enthrall him. Although he writes ironically in his notebooks of the period: "C'est beau l'amour,"<sup>146</sup> Giono acknowledges in the letters that it is his work that sustains him: "C'est beau un métier [underlined by Giono]."

And yet in invoking the power of art Giono uses images of death: "un beau cavalier noir, un roi des aulnes". There are several references to death in the letters of this period but the letter of May 6, 1950 is especially instructive because of what it says about Giono's reflections in the book he is writing,<sup>147</sup> on the relationship between love and death:

"Cela touche à la fois à l'amour et à la mort, dans ce que l'un et l'autre ont de plus tragique, de plus glorieux et de plus horrible. Il faut qu'on ne sache plus lequel on préfère et qu'on finisse par accepter l'un en fonction de l'autre sans préférence ni choix."

In the May 6th letter Giono uses the verb "s'engloutir" which means literally to be engulfed, to describe both the experience of succumbing to love and that of sinking

---

<sup>145</sup> 23 January 1950.

<sup>146</sup> ORC V 1204.

<sup>147</sup> *Le moulin de Pologne*

into death. It is significant that Roland Barthes uses the same idea<sup>148</sup> in writing on love and death when he speaks of the "craving to be engulfed" as a desire for annihilation which affects lovers both in their moments of plenitude, as a desire for complete fusion,<sup>149</sup> as well as in their moments of separation and suffering, as a desire to dissolve into death. For Giono too the experience of passionate love implies a unity so perfect that the ego self ceases to exist.

However, Barthes suggests that the disintegration of the personality in the fusion of passion is so complete that the self has no place anywhere, not even in death - because in reality, there is no self. Therefore when the love affair ends and the androgynous being created by passion no longer exists, the abandoned lover has nowhere to hide and no way to assuage his anguish. The references in this letter and others of the period to Giono's preference for rain and dark skies recall Baudelaire and the "spleen" poems, written out of Baudelaire's own moments of anguish. However Giono says that he is not simply being romantic. Rather, in his nakedness and vulnerability, he is seeking the darkness to hide him like the protective walls of a prison or a cloister. It is at this time that Giono's thoughts turned to both art and death: "Je pense avec une infinie tendresse à ce qui inéluctablement arrive, la vieillesse, puis la mort----"<sup>150</sup> That death, other than suicide, does not come when we choose, forced Giono to look for another means of solace, that of art: "Je me calfeutre de plus en plus dans mon travail."<sup>151</sup>

---

<sup>148</sup> Barthes uses the verb "s'abîmer" which the translator rendered as "to be engulfed." See *A Lover's Discourse*, 10-11.

<sup>149</sup> Barthes is referencing the legend of Tristan and Isolde here with its ideal of perfect unity

<sup>150</sup> 21 November 1950.

<sup>151</sup> 21 October 1950.

By the spring of 1951 he is working on *Le hussard sur le toit* and the crisis has passed. Both *Le moulin de Pologne* and *Le hussard* have helped him work out his situation and to extricate himself from it. As he finishes *Le Hussard* he writes a revealing letter to Blanche in which he asserts that not only are love and death related but that death engenders both love and life: " La mort y marche en cortège triomphal et on la voit non pas décharnée et hideuse mais, radieuse et belle, comme elle est, puisque elle [sic] est en réalité amour et vie."<sup>152</sup> Death can be seen as beautiful because it is not only the ultimate solace but also the means to new life and new creation. The fires of passion have burned out, the couple Blanche/Jean no longer exists, and it is as though Giono has been re-born out of the ashes. Barthes suggests that passion is a sort of state of "hypnosis", and that the idea of the abyss is a means of escape, less extreme than death, from the anguish of loss.<sup>153</sup> The fall into the abyss can be interpreted as a symbolic death, which allows the lover to die to the couple of which he was a part and to emerge with his ego intact.

As both Giono<sup>154</sup> and Barthes<sup>155</sup> realize, love is a drama, in which the lover gives himself a part to play. This notion of love as a scenario helps explain the seemingly enigmatic letter Giono wrote to Blanche in the Spring of 1950. In this letter, Giono as the romantic hero, dresses in a special costume: "avec mon gilet à carreaux vert [--] chemise blanche comme du lait, foulard d'or pourpre" in order to prepare himself to vanquish his adversary and win back his lady love, or perhaps even to replace her with another. Barthes explains the import of clothing to the lover, who

---

<sup>152</sup> 17 April 1951.

<sup>153</sup> Barthes, 12.

<sup>154</sup> 15 March 1950.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid. 94.

as the actor in his own drama, dresses either to impress or to seduce. He cites the example of Werther who wore a certain blue coat and yellow vest when he met Lotte and therefore always associated that outfit with his amorous encounter. Barthes adds that readers of Werther copied this costume all over the continent and that it became known as a "costume à la Werther."<sup>156</sup> Giono seems to have drawn on a similar repertoire of behavior in choosing his unusual costume and in describing his actions to Blanche. The letter, coming as it does after a series of dark, almost despairing letters, illustrates Giono's intuitive understanding that comedy is the other side of tragedy and can even transcend it. Using his favorite metaphor, "life is war", Giono ends the letter in an outpouring of romantic hyperbole: "Les armées sont prêtes, sur pied de guerre. Le printemps sera terrible cette année. [---] la loi de talion est prête à être exécutée."<sup>157</sup>

Later that Spring, borrowing the metaphor that Marcel Proust used in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Giono tells Blanche that he is shedding his lantern on the dark corners of life in order to write his novel of disillusionment, *Le moulin de Pologne*.<sup>158</sup> In the earlier March letter, Giono also mentions that he is knotting his tie like Baudelaire who exposed the underside of love in *Les fleurs du mal* as Giono is doing in *Le moulin de Pologne*.

In a letter written shortly afterward, Giono makes reference to Baudelaire's "L'invitation au voyage": "Comme toi j'aspire de tout mon coeur à la paix: ordre, calme et volupté comme dirait l'autre."<sup>159</sup> There is a parallel between Baudelaire's

---

<sup>156</sup> Ibid. 128.

<sup>157</sup> 15 March 1950.

<sup>158</sup> 9 May 1950.

<sup>159</sup> June 1950 (4).

idealization of his lady in the poem and Giono's idealization of Blanche in the letters. As the critic Barbara Johnson points out, in "L'invitation au voyage", the lady of the poem does not really resemble the land where all is beauty, calm, order and sensual pleasure. Instead, the poem is "a description of what the speaker wishes the lady were like."<sup>160</sup> This is Giono's case too when he tells Blanche that the Spring landscape is only beautiful because it is a reflection of her beauty: "Tu es partout ici bien plus énorme que le pays, bien plus belle que le pays qui n'est beau que de ta beauté et j'insiste: beauté d'âme, beauté de coeur, un parterre de qualités, une prairie de narcisses et de sureaux du Prince Olaf."<sup>161</sup> However, as in Baudelaire's poem, Giono is engaging in wishful thinking. The letters of 1945 were written at a time when Blanche had moved from Manosque to Marseilles and had no further interest in sharing the bucolic life that Giono so loved.

By the autumn of 1950, Giono is coming out of his depression and nature has begun to reassume her comforting reality: "J'ai eu hier une douce journée de pluie. [--] --- la pluie était très douce à écouter et j'ai fini la journée d'hier avec un coeur attendri et convalescent qui trouvait tout beau."<sup>162</sup> Nature in Giono's later years does not lift him to transports of joy as it did in his young manhood when he and Blanche walked together in the hills outside Manosque, or during the composition of *Angelo* when Giono saw visions of horsemen and mythical animals in the cloud formations outside his windows. And yet, Giono still finds comfort in the quiet beauty of the natural world:

---

<sup>160</sup> Barbara Johnson, "Two *Invitations au voyage*" in *The Critical Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) 26-27.

<sup>161</sup> See letter of 3 October 1940, n.3.

<sup>162</sup> 9 October 1950.



"Hier après-midi pour me dégourdir les jambes, je suis rentré par les bois de la Margotte à Manosque. Seul, à travers les bois d'automne, par le Mont d'Imbert, ramassant des champignons et écoutant les oiseaux, il m'arrive maintenant, parfois dans ces occasions d'atteindre à une sorte de paix qui sans être le bonheur, y ressemble; comme le reflet d'un arbre dans l'eau ressemble à l'arbre."<sup>163</sup>

Although Giono had fallen to the depths of despair where he meditated on suicide, he tells Blanche that suicide was never really a temptation for him as it might have been had he not had his resources. The letter memorializes an epiphany moment where Giono realizes that tragedy is only the other side of comedy: "Passé ce moment-là, il faut peut-être penser au rire, ce qui est la même formule mais, en rose."<sup>164</sup> He knows that he has accorded love far too much importance and feels that if he could look at his anguished moments from his present vantage point, he would probably end up laughing at himself. Now he is re-building his world: "Je refais le monde où j'ai longtemps vécu seul, replanté collines, montagnes à leur place". This is a world without Blanche where his work will take priority. Giono takes up his pen again to work on *Le moulin de Pologne*: "en espérant que tout cela finira par m'exprimer tel que je suis."

This was to be Giono's last spiritual crisis and his later years, despite his health problems, were peaceful ones:

" Quand je ne souffre pas de rhumatisme, je passe des jours paisibles dans mon bureau, à travailler à mon aise, à lire, à fumer ma pipe. [---] Je me suis repris à trouver de la joie dans les plus humbles des choses et tout à fait certain que le

---

<sup>163</sup> 21 October 1950.

<sup>164</sup> 17 November 1950.

plus beau moment de la vie est la vieillesse: on y sait tout faire et on a tout."<sup>165</sup>  
Giono recognizes the value both aesthetically and intellectually, of this period of maturity before old age sets in: "cette époque magnifique de demi-vieillesse où tout retentit majestueusement ou plus exactement on a (paradoxalement) le temps d'écouter retentir majestueusement ce qui ne paraissait être qu'un petit fil de flûte."<sup>166</sup>  
Such comments reveal a wisdom born of solitude and reflection that once again call to mind the wisdom of Montaigne in his later essays.

And yet, Giono was not blind to the negative side of aging nor did he try to belay its disadvantages. At one point he suspects that he looks too old to be seen in public with Blanche: "Je me sens un peu ridicule à côté de toi. C'est le moment où la différence d'âge se voit."<sup>167</sup> Many of the letters mention Giono's increasing disability because of his arthritic ailments and his cardiac problems and he realizes that life's sorrows are pulling him down. In 1965, in his 70th year, he writes to Blanche: "Bien d'eau en effet, a passé sous les ponts depuis notre dernière rencontre: La mort de Lucien,<sup>168</sup> les années qui passent, la vieillesse, la maladie. Tout cela marque."<sup>169</sup> In 1967 he exclaims "Je suis vieux"<sup>170</sup> but he maintains that he still has his usual curiosity about life. His last letter to Blanche was written in a moment of peaceful stoicism: "Pour moi je vais maintenant (cahin-caha) mais j'ai passé par des tunnels très noirs [--] Et voilà. La vie se termine lentement, sagement avec l'acceptation de mes

---

<sup>165</sup> 25 February 1952.

<sup>166</sup> 18 January 1956.

<sup>167</sup> 21 November 1958.

<sup>168</sup> Lucien Jacques, Giono's close friend who died in 1961.

<sup>169</sup> Mid-October 1965.

<sup>170</sup> 25 January 1967.

faiblesses et mon enroulement de colimaçon"<sup>171</sup> As the circle of his life closes, Giono applies the same image to himself as he had applied to his elderly mother years before. The letter serves as a final example of Giono's perspicacity and his skillful use of imagery. His last self-portrait is of the aging writer with his accumulated spiritual wisdom but whose crippled body is gradually curling up like that of a snail.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>171</sup> 5 avril 1969.

<sup>172</sup> Speaking to Blanche about her own mother Giono had said: "La mienne toute recroquevillée sur elle-même n'est qu'un petit escargot noir et pétrifié." (Pâques 1945.)

### Chapter III: The creation of the Muse: Blanche, Adelina White and *Pour saluer Melville*

One of the most intriguing aspects of Giono's relationship with Blanche Meyer is that it illustrates the way in which the myth of *amour courtois* inspired his life as well as his work. Their love affair as it unfolds in the letters reveals Giono's conception of the myth and the way in which he consciously wove it into his relationship with Blanche. Unlike Dante's Beatrice or Petrarch's Laura, women who inspired the poets but whom they scarcely knew, Giono sought to *live* an idealized relationship with Blanche based on the myth of courtly love. He searched for a woman made of flesh and blood to serve as his model of idealized womanhood. However, because no human being can completely incarnate an ideal, Giono found it necessary to create Blanche herself as well as her fictional avatars. In his attempt to impose his mythic vision of reality on Blanche, he failed or refused to see the real woman whom he pretended was at the center of his life. Although he insisted that she was the muse who inspired his creativity, she was more like a fantasy object who had no life of her own outside the enclosed space of his writing. This chapter examines Giono's use of the myth as he expressed it in his letters to Blanche and in the novel *Pour saluer Melville*, in order to arrive at a better understanding of his seemingly enigmatic conception of love.

To attempt to define exactly which version of the myth informed and influenced Giono's fiction is difficult because as a novelist, he appropriated and transformed his literary inspirations in the context of his fiction. To add to the problem, scholars themselves are in disagreement as to how to define the myth of *amour courtois* and which literary works best express the tenets of the myth. However, most critics have agreed on certain aspects of the twelfth-thirteenth century phenomenon known variously as courtly love, *amour courtois*, *fin'amors* or in its

Italian version, *cortesia*.<sup>173</sup> It is generally accepted, for instance, that with the lyrics of the Troubadours, the expression of love as a deep personal relationship between two individuals, attained a primacy in poetry that it had not had before. Joseph Campbell calls this personal sentiment *Amor* as opposed to *Eros*, the purely sexual attraction of male and female.<sup>174</sup> Jacques Roubaud explains that although the great discovery of the Troubadours was not love itself but the essential link between love and poetry,<sup>175</sup> an experience of human love was necessary as the catalyst for the poetry: "---l'amour a une existence, une évidence extérieure au chant, sans laquelle le chant ne peut pas être."<sup>176</sup>

Secondly, courtly love centers around the woman whose beauty is the inspiration both for love itself and for the literary creation it engenders.<sup>177</sup> The *fin'amors* sung by the troubadours had a beautiful woman as its subject and its object was to praise her beauty. René Nelli insists on the importance of woman to the phenomenon of *Courtoisie* : "Pour la plupart des poètes du Moyen Age la femme est amour de la tête aux pieds [---]. Elle représente la source naturelle du désir et celle - un peu surnaturelle - de *Fin Amors* et, partant, de toutes les valeurs morales. C'est

---

<sup>173</sup> Although some scholars like René Nelli, make a distinction between the various kinds of courtly love, others like Denis de Rougemont use the terms interchangeably.

<sup>174</sup> *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) 186.

<sup>175</sup> *La fleur inverse: l'art des Troubadours*. 2e édition révisé et augmentée d'une postface. Collection Architecture du verbe, dirigée par Francis Lalanne ( Paris: Belles lettres, 1994) 10.

<sup>176</sup> *Les troubadours: anthologie bilangue*. Introduction, choix et version française de Jacques Roubaud (Paris: Seghers Collection "P.S.", 1980) 11.

<sup>177</sup> Nelli, "De l'amour provençal" 44-45; *L'érotique des Troubadours*. Tome II. ( Paris: Union Générale d'éditions, 1974) 7-18; Jacques Roubaud, *Les Troubadours*. Introduction, choix et version française de Jacques Roubaud. Collection P.S. (Paris: Seghers, 1980) 8-9.

pourquoi *Amors* est une entité féminine."<sup>178</sup> Jacques Roubaud describes, by citing the troubadours themselves, the very special attributes of the lady capable of inspiring such poetry:

"La dame est belle. Elle a la *belatz*, la beauté totale qui est à la fois corps et esprit, morale. [---] Elle est lumière. [--] (car sa beauté illumine un beau jour et rend clair une nuit noire.) [---] Sa présence même transporte la lumière----. [---] Elle est lumière en la chair. [---] Elle est plus blanche qu'ivoire. [---] [Son corps est] beau et blanc, il est frais et gai et lisse."<sup>179</sup>

For Giono, Blanche was the incarnation of this literary ideal, the tristanian heroine, blond and innocent like "Isolde -the-fair". Giono often plays with the idea of "whiteness" in his letters: "Tu étais blanche comme la lumière de la neige."<sup>180</sup> "----tu es bonne. Tu es toute blanche. [---] Toute blanche, toute pure, toute neuve, intouchée, qui s'est gardée, qui est restée toute fraîche."<sup>181</sup> For Giono, the whiteness evoked by her name is a sign of her intrinsic purity, the essential quality of ideal love in his eyes. "Je suis blanc comme tu es blanche"<sup>182</sup> he tells her later in a long letter in which he stresses the importance of absolute purity in their relationship. "Blanche, mon coeur, ma satisfaction personnelle ne compte pas; ce qui compte c'est être pur. Aux purs tout est pur."<sup>183</sup> Giono tells Blanche that she resembles the painting over his desk of the

---

<sup>178</sup> *L'érotique des troubadours*, Tome II, 7.

<sup>179</sup> *Les troubadours*, 8-9.

<sup>180</sup> 3 July 1939

<sup>181</sup> 18 July 1939

<sup>182</sup> 12 August 1939

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

Vierge d'Amiens.<sup>184</sup> Later he dreams of her in the guise of a Madonna rocking her child.<sup>185</sup> He often expresses a desire to protect her: "Je voudrais te protéger dans mes mains jointes comme un petit oiseau."<sup>186</sup>

Inspired by this ideal of beauty with its emphasis on beauty of mind and spirit, luminosity and whiteness, it is no wonder that Giono was intrigued by Blanche's very name, a name which resembles *Blanchefleur* the name of Tristan's mother and Perceval's love in the Celtic legends, and by her pale skin and blond hair that he describes in the letters as *cheveux couleur de paille* and *cheveux épi d'or*. His fascination with her name and the ideal of whiteness it represents for him, even extends to the countryside beyond his study window, "Par un invraisemblable amalgame d'esprit, de chair et de terre, ce pays maintenant s'appelle de ton nom. C'est Blancheville, c'est Whitehills [...]".<sup>187</sup> He became obsessed with the ideal of whiteness and blondness to the extent that he dyed his own hair blond between 1939 and 1945 which according to Pierre Citron, shocks his family and friends.<sup>188</sup> However in the context of his infatuation with Blanche (and with the ideal of purity that had permeated certain strains of European thinking during the 1930's),<sup>189</sup> one can guess

---

<sup>184</sup> 28 July 1940

<sup>185</sup> 11 May 1943

<sup>186</sup> 30/31 February 1940

<sup>187</sup> 3 June 1945 : It is significant that even after a relationship of nearly 10 years, Giono's idealized vision of Blanche is still as vibrant as ever.

<sup>188</sup> P. Citron, *Giono* (Seuil, 1990) p. 337.

<sup>189</sup> Bernard-Henri Lévy referred to this trend toward purity and absolutism in the Europe of the 1930's in *L'idéologie française* and in an interview on the CNN Book Channel in October, 2003, regarding his recent book *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?*

that he was attempting to transform himself into the ideal tristanian lover, a blonde descendant of the Celts.

Joseph Campbell insists on the mystical element of medieval *Amors* and makes the quest for the woman, who is the guide to the sublime, the first part of the quest for the Grail.<sup>190</sup> In the Middle Ages, according to Campbell: "Love was a divine visitation, quelling mere animal lust whereas feudal marriage was a physical affair. The lover, whose heart was rendered gentle by the discipline of his lady, was initiate to a sphere of exalted realizations that no one who had experienced such could possibly identify (as the Church identified them) with sin."<sup>191</sup> Denis De Rougemont goes so far as to describe *cortesia* as: "a literary 'religion' of chaste Love, of idealized woman and her particular 'piety', joy d'amor, its detailed rites, the rhetoric of the troubadours, its morals of homage and service---."<sup>192</sup> It is evident that Giono saw the experience of love as an experience of the absolute when he wrote in 1941, at the height of his romance with Blanche: "Nous n'arrivons plus à l'amour sur la fin d'un formidable élan vers Dieu. Au contraire, nous sommes dieu tout le reste du temps et l'amour est une fonction comme les autres."<sup>193</sup>

This highly idealized aspect of courtly love led Rougemont to see in it a mystical element and to search for a link between the Troubadours and the Cathars. He hypothesized that since some of the Troubadours and many of their female

---

<sup>190</sup> *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Bollingen Series XVII (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 109-110.

<sup>191</sup> *The Masks of God*, Arkana Series (New York: Penguin, 1964) 509.

<sup>192</sup> *Love in the Western World*, Trans. Montgomery Belgion (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983) Trans. of *L'amour et l'Occident*, 1940. 35-37 and generally. 113.

<sup>193</sup> *Triomphe de la vie*, (Paris: Grasset, 1942) 113.



patrons were Cathars, and that the Cathars used the language of human love to express the mystical union between the human and the divine, it may have been Catharism that inspired the Troubadour ideal of love. As in the tradition of Courtly Love, women enjoyed an elevated position among the Cathars and were even permitted to serve as teachers.<sup>194</sup> Rougemont warns however, against assuming that passion is merely the transposition of mysticism into human experience or that, conversely, mystical experience somehow explains human passion.<sup>195</sup>

Nevertheless, it is useful to look at the double paradox of mysticism, on the one hand, as a spiritual experience that uses the language of sexual love and of human passion on the other, as an ideal that transcends the sexual and rises to the level of the mystical. The experience of mysticism described by such mystics as St. Theresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, is an experience of a totally different order and occurs outside of time and space as Mircea Eliade explains in *The Sacred and the Profane*.<sup>196</sup> Likewise, the experience of passionate love as a perfect fusion with the beloved also occurs outside ordinary time / experience and can be interpreted as an experience of the sacred akin to the mystical experience. Jacques Brengues makes this connection in his essay on the love letter<sup>197</sup> as does Roland Barthes when he describes the fusion of lovers as a form of engulfment, which he compares to the mystic's dissolution into the godhead.<sup>198</sup>

---

<sup>194</sup> *Love in the Western World*, 153-159 and 340-348.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* 141-142 and especially 152.

<sup>196</sup> p. 11.

<sup>197</sup> See "La correspondance amoureuse et le sacré." 58-59.

<sup>198</sup> *A Lover's Discourse*, 10-11.

Giono often expresses this quasi-mystical experience of fusion in his letters to Blanche. She has been created out of his very flesh: "ce coeur et ce corps saignant d'où tu as été arrachée."<sup>199</sup> And yet, she is the maternal figure who has engendered him: "Je suis ton premier enfant."<sup>200</sup> She resembles him like a beloved son but she is also, evoking the courtly tradition, his sister and his lover: "mon admirable fils, ma soeur, mon amante, la joie de ma vie. Ma joie."<sup>201</sup> As lovers they have achieved a unique closeness that Giono describes as: "notre totalité de corps et de coeur."<sup>202</sup> The transcendent love that they share can only be experienced outside ordinary time and space in the *jardins d'Armide*,<sup>203</sup> the *derrière l'air*<sup>204</sup> or the Arthurian *Forêt de Brocéliande*.<sup>205</sup>

However, the experience of love in the tradition of *cortesia* depended on the existence of an obstacle, which served to maintain desire and thus prolong and intensify the amorous experience.<sup>206</sup> In its purest form courtly love is chaste and

---

<sup>199</sup> 14 July 1939.

<sup>200</sup> 26 December 1939.

<sup>201</sup> November 1939.

<sup>202</sup> 26 February 1940.

<sup>203</sup> See the letter of 26 August 1942 among many others.

<sup>204</sup> 13 August 1943.

<sup>205</sup> 5 May 1944. See also the letter of 11 November 1959 where Giono says that he finds the terrace of a Paris café where he met Blanche to be as magical because of her presence as: "les taillis de la forêt de Brocéliande. Aussi magique que les jardins d'Armide de nos anciennes collines."

<sup>206</sup> Roubaud, *Les Troubadours*, pp. 15-16; Anthony Bonner, *Songs of the Troubadours*, Ed. and trans. by Anthony Bonner (New York: Schocken Books, 1972) 23-25.

requires that the lady who was the object of desire be married to someone other than the aspiring lover. As Denis De Rougemont has argued, it is not the happiness or fulfillment of the lovers that is at the heart of the myth but rather the necessity of the obstacle that is essential: "in order that this love may be intensified and transfigured."

<sup>207</sup> It was the woman who was responsible for guiding the relationship and for maintaining both her virtue (as paradoxical as that sounds) and that of her lover. In fact, René Nelli suggests that the lover in the chivalric tradition was actually the creation of his lady: "Mais cet amant en qui elle avait confiance, capable de la respecter, de lui laisser toujours l'initiative du jeu érotique, celui-là à qui elle révélait - et qui lui révélait - le Pur Amour, ce "fin amador" était, en définitive, son oeuvre."<sup>208</sup> He in turn served as her protector and in that role, tried to shield her from temptation, a desire Giono himself expressed in a previously quoted letter: "Je voudrais te protéger dans mes mains jointes comme un petit oiseau."<sup>209</sup>

The moral overtones inherent in the emphasis on purity in *amour courtois* echoes the purification process of religion where the aspirant is purified through prayer, charitable works and grace. Nelli calls *cortesia*: "ce grand mythe de purification par l'amour" and insists that moral perfection was an element of chivalric love and that the mutual elevation of the one by the other led them toward other worlds.<sup>210</sup> Thus Giono's desire to protect Blanche formed a part of the quest for moral perfection. In the words of the troubadour A. de Mareuil: "Je vous protège contre un

---

<sup>207</sup> Rougemont, 35-37.

<sup>208</sup> *L'érotique des Troubadours*, 18.

<sup>209</sup> 30/31 February 1940.

<sup>210</sup> "De l'amour provençal" 52-53.

dommage mieux que je ne me protège moi-même parfaitement."<sup>211</sup> Whether Nelli's interpretation of chivalric love comes from his own affinity with Catharism is irrelevant here. What is important is that Giono shares a similar conception of love as is apparent from his own emphasis on purity and fidelity as essential to a meaningful relationship and from his insistence that love is supremely important: "La grande beauté, la grande pureté de l'amour vient de sa gravité et de son immense importance."<sup>212</sup> Furthermore, he leaves no doubt that his concept of love comes from his understanding of the myth: "-----l'Aventure avec un grand A et au singulier, l'Aventure pour laquelle l'homme et la femme naissent, la seule Aventure valable: la vie: la vie de Tristan et d'Yseult, de Roméo et Juliette, la vie des héros dont il est ridicule de désirer le bonheur si on ne s'occupe à chaque instant d'avoir la pureté et la grandeur."<sup>213</sup>

It is important to note, especially as regards Giono's love for Blanche, that the tradition of courtly love was played out on two very different stages. The form illustrated by the myth of Tristan and Isolde, was a literary form of the ideal which emphasized the importance of the obstacle and the paradox between the erotic nature of passion and the requirement of chastity, as well as the essential relationship between love and death. It is the literary form of *amour courtois* that has exerted such an influence on Western literature and culture and that inspired not only the lyrics of the Troubadours but also literary classics such as *Tristan and Isolde*, the Arthurian

---

<sup>211</sup> A. de Mareuil, XX, 15-16. Cited by René Nelli in *L'érotique des Troubadours*, p. 9.

<sup>212</sup> 3 July 1939.

<sup>213</sup> 29 December 1940.

Legend and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* among many others.<sup>214</sup> What I will call the chivalric tradition, that is, the version of courtly love that so many nobles of the 12th and 13th centuries actually tried to live and which affected the basic Western concept of the male/female relationship, highlights the joyful aspects of love and includes a solution to the constraints of chastity. According to the courtly tradition, once the aspirant had proved his merits as a lover, the lady could grant her "merci" which covered the gamut of physical intimacy from the right to a simple chaste kiss, all the way to the possibility of full sexual favors depending on the situation and the parties involved.<sup>215</sup> The notion of the "merci", provides a way to understand how Giono could exhort Blanche to purity on the one hand while telling her in the most erotic terms that he desired her body: "C'est la joie de ta chair-----c'est ton corps si beau."<sup>216</sup> It was not chastity that Giono was seeking in his relationship with Blanche, but the symbolic purity of romantic love, the exclusive love between two individuals that Pierre Bourdieu calls "the art for art's sake of love" and that seeks nothing except "the happiness of giving happiness."<sup>217</sup>

As Bourdieu himself notes, the ideal is fragile and rarely attained because of the dulling effect of routine if the lovers marry, and even if they do not, of the threat

---

<sup>214</sup> See Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, 190, where Rougemont explains that Verona was a center of Catharism in Italy. He calls *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare's one courtly tragedy and "the most magnificent resuscitation of the myth that the world was to be given till Wagner wrote and composed his *Tristan*."

<sup>215</sup> Nelli, *L'érotique de troubadours* 13-15; Roubaud, *Les troubadours*, 22; *Songs of the Troubadours*, ed. and trans. by Anthony Bonner (New York: Schocken Books, 1972) 23-25.

<sup>216</sup> 26 February 1940.

<sup>217</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*. Trans. Richard Nice. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001) 110-111. Trans. of *La domination masculine*. Paris: Editions du seuil, 1998.

of the return of the ego and the ensuing disequilibrium the crisis of ego intervention causes in the relationship. Bourdieu sees this ego threat as being exemplified by the masculine desire to dominate but I would argue that both sexes contribute to the disequilibrium in their efforts to realize their personal desires in a relationship with the other. This effort to live "happily ever after" requires not only constant work and vigilance but as both Bourdieu and Jessica Benjamin<sup>218</sup> suggest, the ability to accept the other as a separate, distinct person and to love him or her as such.

René Nelli argues that the enduring value of *amour courtois* is that it provided a means to an authentic male / female relationship by extending the platonic ideal to the woman, making her as capable of virtue as the man and therefore, as worthy of being loved. Chivalry reversed the model of male dominance by giving the lady the role of seigneur with her lover as vassal. This construct granted masculine qualities such as fidelity and integrity, to the woman, and allowed the man to cultivate the gentler virtues of humility, tenderness and patience. The effect of the reversal was to bring male and female closer together by making the partners more alike. The experience of ideal love according to René Nelli, liberated the man from fear of women and from his instinctive misogyny as well as from what Nelli calls the "complexe maternel" which had led him to appropriate the woman as an object rather than entering into a relationship with her as a person.<sup>219</sup> By allowing each of the partners to partake of the full gamut of human characteristics, the practice of *fin' amors* could lead to an experience of androgynous oneness that heretofore was only possible in the homosexual unions of Platonism.<sup>220</sup>

---

<sup>218</sup> See *Like Subjects, Love Objects: essays on recognition and sexual difference*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995).

<sup>219</sup> René Nelli, *L'érotique des Troubadours*, 355.

<sup>220</sup> *ibid.* 355-365.

However, the ideal of union should not be carried too far or the problem of objectification arises once again. Jessica Benjamin describes the problem as the failure to accept distinction and difference and she argues that this failure to establish a genuine relationship of equilibrium between the partners leads to a return to the desire for dominance on the part of the male, and even, in extreme cases, to sadism.<sup>221</sup> She sees the roots of this problem in the male's failure to accept his mother as both separate and imperfect. Giono's idolization of his father, his ambiguous relationship with his mother who lived with him throughout her life, his tendency to mix the maternal with the erotic (e.g. idealizing Blanche as the Virgin or as a Madonna; giving the heroine of the Angelo cycle his mother's name, Pauline, while modeling her after Blanche; basing the death of the elderly heroine on his own mother's death in *Mort d'un personnage*) would suggest that this theory might be appropriate in his case.

The question arises as to whether Giono ever really loved Blanche or whether he was infatuated with his own literary creation. In trying to understand their complex relationship, I am reminded of Robert Haas's essay on the poet Rilke which preceded the Stephen Mitchell translation of Rilke's poems.<sup>222</sup> Haas raises the same question in regard to the German poet and suggests that Rilke (like Giono) did not trust relationships and did not have much capacity for them. One of Rilke's lovers interprets his failure to understand his partner as she was, as a result of his tendency to usurp both roles and to fulfill himself not in a relationship with another, but with his own inner being. Haas sees this tendency not as narcissism but rather as an

---

<sup>221</sup> *Like Subject, Love objects*, 113 and generally.

<sup>222</sup> *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, Ed. and Trans. by Stephen Mitchell with an Introduction by Robert Haas. Bilingual edition. (New York: Vintage International, 1989) Orig. pub. New York: Random House, 1982.

indication of androgyny: "the pull inward, the erotic pull of the other we sense buried in the self." For Rilke, as for Giono, the mystery was within himself and it was the exploration of this inner mystery of existence that compelled him and made him blind to those around him except as extensions of himself.<sup>223</sup>

Yet this search for understanding, to which Giono was as dedicated as Rilke, condemned the writer to a painful solitude which he tried to fill with his writing and with his obsession with the idealized Blanche. It is interesting in this regard, that Rilke's intense but self-imposed solitude led him to write the *Duino Elegies* in which he cries out to the infinite in the form of the elusive angel. For Rilke,<sup>224</sup> the figure of the angel incarnates both absence and desire and represents the dangers of annihilation inherent in the ideal of fusion.<sup>225</sup> The poet wants desperately to embrace the absolute as symbolized by the angel but if he does, he fears that he will be consumed in a power greater than his own. Like Rilke, Giono was infatuated by the figure of the angel<sup>226</sup> with whom he wrestled until he met Blanche. One of the last appearance of the angel in Giono's work is in *Pour saluer Melville* where he appears as a benign figure, a familiar with whom Giono can speak and even joke. The angel no longer represents the terror of destruction of the self in relationship because fear of the other has been replaced by the ecstasy of love. It is Blanche who has tamed the awful power of the angel but in some mysterious way, she is also responsible for

---

<sup>223</sup> Robert Haas, Introduction, xxxii-xxxiii.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid. xxxv.

<sup>225</sup> *Like Subjects, Love Objects*, 143-146.

<sup>226</sup> For an analysis of the figure of the angel in Giono's work, see Agnès Castiglione, *Une démonologie magnifique: la figure de l'ange dans l'oeuvre de Jean Giono*. (Aix-Provence: Publication de l'Université de Provence, 2000.)



summoning him in the first place: "Sans ange pas de poète mais sans Adelina,<sup>227</sup> pas d'ange. L'ange ne peut être suscité que par elle---"<sup>228</sup> In the case of Blanche and Jean, the angel so necessary to the poet, represents the supreme obstacle to their union as two human beings. As Giono insists, she is the muse who inspires his writing, and as such, she is responsible for maintaining the tension that allows him to create. Like the lady of chivalry, her role is to maintain the passionate relationship that ironically, cannot endure without the obstacle.

It is clear that Blanche's role is a tragic one which allows no possibility that her own dreams and hopes of marriage and a life with Giono in the real world will be fulfilled - or in fact, that she will have any independent life at all. Not only does Giono reject her dream of a life together in the literary world of Paris,<sup>229</sup> he does not really want to share his own real life with her either. He envisions her as a sort of fairy tale princess, *la Belle au bois dormant*, whom he has awakened with his love and who waits for him eternally in a mythic other world: "[une] domaine interdit à quiconque, où sont nos monstres personnels, nos forêts de Brocéliandes, nos châteaux enchantés, nos magiciens et nos archanges: tout notre avenir: *ton château* [underlined by Giono], car ce sera vraiment le château de la belle au bois éveillée---"<sup>230</sup>

---

<sup>227</sup> Adelina Whilte, the heroine of *Pour saluer Melville*.

<sup>228</sup> Dédicace, non-datée, par l'auteur à Blanche de son roman, *Pour saluer Melville*. (Fonds Giono à Yale, Gen MSS 457, box 2, folder 5. )

<sup>229</sup> See for instance the letter of Noël 1940 where Giono tells Blanche that he won't and can't go to Paris because of the effect that cities have on him and his letter of 26 December 1946 where he repudiates cities entirely. There are many letters of this type in the collection, which make it clear that this was a one-sided relationship where Giono would not or could not share Blanche's world.

<sup>230</sup> 5 May 1944.

Giono reveals the nature of his desire for her in one of his earliest letters, written after their first night together:

"Mon désir le plus violent et ce à quoi je m'attache de toutes mes forces dans tout ce que je fais, c'est *m'enraciner* [underlined by Giono]. Je suis enraciné en toi et si tu te refusais à mes racines, l'arbre ne donnerait plus ni feuilles ni fruit, mais mourrait."<sup>231</sup>

In Giono's metaphor, Blanche is to be the fertile soil that will nourish the artist while her fidelity and purity will support the roots he is sinking into her very flesh. It is these roots that will bind her to him forever and make her escape impossible because if she tries to get away, the poet (who has in the same letter declared himself to be the greatest poet in France) will not only be incapable of artistic creation, he will die! Thus the relationship is already unequal and coercive: the free choice required by *amour courtois* has been obliterated by Giono's overwhelming need. In fact, Giono does not see love as a choice at all but rather, as the letters amply show, as the acceptance of a shared destiny like that of the lovers in the tristanian version of the myth.<sup>232</sup> From the moment Giono first saw Blanche in the late 1920's, talking to her husband from the window of a bus, he believed that they were star-crossed lovers who were meant for one another regardless of the difficulties they would inevitably face.<sup>233</sup>

Blanche is as much an idealized literary creation as Adelina White and in fact, Giono created them both at the same time. It is not an accident that Blanche's

---

<sup>231</sup> 3 July 1939.

<sup>232</sup> See letters of 18 July 1939, 19 August, 1939, 20 January 1940, and 26 February 1940 among many others that illustrate this point.

<sup>233</sup> See Jolaine Meyer's account of the meeting between her mother and Giono in "Sur un personnage de Giono: Adelina ou Blanche" 377.

daughter entitled her essay on the relationship between Blanche and Jean "Sur un *personnage* de Giono [emphasis mine]: Adelina White ou Blanche?" nor is it surprising that she noted the fictive quality of Giono's idealized love for her mother. Although Blanche already possessed the "qualités extraordinaires" that Giono required in a lover,<sup>234</sup> she is not quite perfect enough. She is still in his eyes like an innocent young girl, malleable like clay, whom he is joyfully molding into a beautiful woman: "Je t'ai dit que je me sentais plein de joie parce que je te sentais - en réalité - toute neuve comme une petite fille. Pas faite. Encore argile où c'est un beau travail d'homme de modeler une belle et grande femme."<sup>235</sup> His creative effort has as its goal the bringing together of the masculine and feminine principle in a new Adam and Eve. It is noteworthy that Giono's joy in this passage comes from his rediscovery of the feminine as an essential part of humanity and thus evokes the chivalric tradition in which the quest for the feminine was an essential aspect. However a closer look at Giono's language reveals that his intent is to restore the lost feminine side to the male from whom she was torn after the fall of Adam: "---- pour que se rapprochent de toi, de leur raison de vivre, ce coeur et ce corps saignant d'où tu as été arrachée." And yet, the androgynous being whom Giono addresses at the end of the letter as "ma douce chérie, ma fille de joie, mon fils", is the result of the grafting of masculine qualities onto the woman rather than the reverse. It is because Blanche resembles her lover so closely that he is able to interiorize her as food, drink, warmth, light and in fact, the animating force of his life.

And yet, as much as he takes pleasure in the relationship, it has a more noble purpose for him and that purpose is to inspire his work. The joy that Giono feels in re-

---

<sup>234</sup> January 29 1939. See also the article by Jolaine Meyer, previously cited.

<sup>235</sup> 14 July 1940.

creating Blanche is the joy of the artist creating his muse: "Mon oeuvre véritable commence pour toi. Elle n'est faite que pour que je te l'apporte et pour que je te la donne [sic] et pour que tu t'en serves pour ton bonheur et pour ta paix et pour ton repos et pour ta joie. [---] je l'attends et elle est pour moi aussi importante que toutes les magies admirable [underlined by Giono] que tu m'as découvertes."<sup>236</sup> There is an emphasis on the joyful aspect of love in this letter, the joy of creating for Blanche and through her inspiration and the mutual joy of sharing the creative process.

A later letter, in which Giono expresses his rapture at having someone to share his creative life with, reveals the supreme importance for him of the role he is giving to Blanche.<sup>237</sup> The tone of the letter is rhapsodic, Giono is "tout ébloui," certain both of Blanche's love and of the profundity of their union. The most remarkable aspect of the letter however, is that Giono feels that he has experienced a rebirth:

"Je viens de naître. Je sens que je viens de naître, qu'avant je n'étais pas: c'est maintenant que je suis; depuis que tu m'a fait." It is Blanche who has brought into being the artist Giono: "Je suis parti de Marseille à midi [---] en plein bouillonnement créateur.[---] Tu avais déclenché en moi toutes les forces du miracle. Elles n'ont pas cessé de croître et de se déchaîner. C'était une grande tempête d'expression qui n'a pas cessé de me bouleverser."

The force of her love has engendered his creativity and the process is a corporal one in which she has physically infused him with the creative spirit:

"Maintenant, voilà, le livre est parti! Il est commencé. Tu l'a commencé toi-même dans mon corps et mon corps est en train de l'écrire avec tes forces, ta joie, ta douceur, ta beauté, ta solidité, ta bonne fidélité mon fils---."

---

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> November 1939.

It is noteworthy that this enterprise is an androgynous one where both partners partake of both the masculine and the feminine. Blanche is the "fils" who is still able to play the maternal role of engendering the artist. Giono, endowed with male creative powers, participates in the maternal role by giving birth to a book. The significant point here is that Giono feels so much a part of Blanche that he is inspired to share the creative process with her. He gives her the masculine, creative role of *générateur*, the one who engenders the writer, and he fuses this role with the feminine role of the mother who gives birth to the artist. The remarkable letter closes with an expression of the perfect love that transcends gender and lifts the lovers to a quasi-mystical union of male and female: "J'embrasse mon beau doux ventre et mon corps de garçon et tes seins qui sont comme des petits pigeons, je t'embrasse de toute ma tendresse mon admirable fils, ma soeur, mon amante, la joie de ma vie. Ma joie."<sup>238</sup> The process is a magical one where Blanche as the "magicienne de magicien"<sup>239</sup> plays the role of Morgane la fée, the magician of Arthurian legend who derived her powers from Merlin. Giono's language, *magicienne de magicien*, reveals that in his eyes too, Blanche's magical powers come from him even though it is she who plays the principal role: "tu m'apprends le miracle."

The first novel that Giono wrote under Blanche's inspiration is the autobiographical *Pour saluer Melville*, written in 1939 as a homage to her and to their love. It is evident from the letters that the novel is based on Giono's own relationship with Blanche and that its heroine is modeled after her:

"Brusquement, je me suis rendu compte que ce que j'avais surtout envie d'écrire c'était une histoire d'amour, *de toi et pour toi* [underlined by Giono.] C'est ce

---

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

que je fais. C'est ce qu'est devenue la préface de *Moby Dick*. Miracle, merveille et mystère des choses. Sans toi c'eût été une sèche biographie. C'est devenu une miraculeuse histoire entièrement inventée. [---] "Et c'est toi. Toi tout à fait. Tu y es d'ailleurs. Tu t'appelles Adelina White (White veut dire en anglais Blanc, Blanche.) [---] Tu vas voir, tu vas nous y voir tel que nous étions à nos premières promenades dans les jardins d'Armide."<sup>240</sup>

However the book is more than a love story. It is the account of a poetic vocation whose goal is to express the tragedy of the human condition.<sup>241</sup> A part of that tragedy is the unattainability of love as a lived relationship between two human beings. What Giono attempts to put into words in the novel is his vision of life transfigured not by simple human love but by love as an experience of the sublime. The last sentence of the quote is telling in this regard: Giono's use of the past tense reveals that he is fully aware that his love affair with Blanche, as a reflection of the ideal, is over. And yet, he insists throughout his letters of the 1940's that Blanche *is* Adelina: "Miss Adelina c'est vous. Elle est totalement inventée. C'est vous seule. Et je vais en faire ce que je veux."<sup>242</sup> He has even incorporated Blanche's letters into the novel as those of Adelina.<sup>243</sup> His letters of the period belie his assertions, however, and appear more like wishful thinking or efforts to persuade Blanche to accept her idealized role as a model for the gionien heroine. He needs to continue to live the myth in order to finish his book.

---

<sup>240</sup> 26 December 1939.

<sup>241</sup> See also Henri Godard's Notice to *Pour saluer Melville*.

<sup>242</sup> 2 January 1940.

<sup>243</sup> 17 February 1940.

Giono's projected introduction to his translation of Moby Dick had become the novel *Pour saluer Melville*.<sup>244</sup> In the novel, set in the 19th century, Herman and Adelina meet as fellow passengers on a coach traveling through England. Herman had come to England for business reasons and decided to take a trip through the countryside to occupy himself while awaiting the sailing of his ship back to America. Adelina is Irish and she is engaged in smuggling food into Ireland out of sympathy with the Irish who are dying in the famine. Although Adelina resembles Blanche in her person, one can see the difference between the self-centered Blanche with her social aspirations and the gentle self-effacing Adelina who takes great risks to help the poor. Adelina is small like Blanche and has Blanche's shining blonde hair, the famous "cheveux, couleur de paille"<sup>245</sup> [Melv. 44] she has Blanche's voice which seems both to reveal her soul and to express "toutes les nuances d'un coeur bouleversé de passion;"<sup>246</sup> and she has the scent of "résine de sapin mais sucrée et avec un peu de vanille"<sup>247</sup> which resembles the seductive "odeur" that Giono often speaks of in his letters to Blanche. Giono sees both Blanche and Adelina as being vulnerable because of their beauty and in need of protection from a corrupt world.

It is significant that in the novel, as in Giono's letters, the protagonists share aspects of both the masculine and the feminine. As in the letters, Giono emphasizes the boyish qualities of the heroine, the feminine aspects of the hero, and the childlike qualities of both characters. Herman is described as having an inimitable childlike manner<sup>248</sup> and a somewhat feminine appearance: "un front lisse, satiné et bombé

---

<sup>244</sup> *Pour saluer Melville*, ORC III, Gallimard, 1941.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. 46.

<sup>248</sup> ORC III, 25.

comme un petit ventre de jeune fille,"<sup>249</sup> while Adelina White is "une sorte d'enfant précieux" who could pass for a "jeune garçon."<sup>250</sup> Julie Sabiani has recognized Giono's fascination with the childlike, boyish appearance of the heroine and she suggests that in this case, the ambiguity of the female body satisfies a deep-seated wish to return to the primordial and mythic indistinction of the sexes.<sup>251</sup>

Both Adelina and Herman are angel figures in the novel, winged creatures whose domaine is the *derrière l'air*, not the earth of ordinary mortals. Adelina, because of her meditative gaze that seems to see beyond the ordinary, reminds Herman of the *Vierge de Lima* just as the real life Blanche reminds Jean of the of the *Vierge d'Amiens* whose portrait he has hanging over his writing table. Both women combine the androgynous qualities of the child and the angel with the otherworldly qualities of the virgin. Moreover, they incorporate the maternal and the erotic, a combination that was essential to the gionian esthetic.<sup>252</sup> Adelina White is beauty incarnate, and thus the meeting between Herman and Adelina represents an encounter with the absolute:

" Il prit conscience de la beauté complète de ce visage ----Il éprouvait un sentiment de très grande tranquillité, un repos de l'esprit et du corps, un bien-être comme si enfin la vie était devenue confortable. [---] Cette extrême beauté si près de lui ne l'empêchait plus de vivre; au contraire, elle le faisait vivre comme il ne se souvenait pas d'avoir vécu." <sup>253</sup>

---

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>251</sup> Julie Sabiani, "A propos de l'amour." *RLM, Jean Giono no. I*, 1974. 193.

<sup>252</sup> See *Pour saluer Melville*, 28-38 for Giono's description of Adelina White.

<sup>253</sup> ORC III 47.



The effect of their brief encounter is enabling in that it calms Herman's self-doubts and unleashes his creative powers just as Blanche's love had done for the writer in the early days of their relationship.

There are several major distinctions, however, between the novel and the real-life relationship on which it was based. In the novel Herman is aware that the friendship is an extraordinary one and that Adelina is not his to possess. Before they even get to know one another she tells him she is leaving shortly. She is so beautiful and so transparent that Herman, like Giono himself, fears she will not be able to retain her unique qualities once she returns to the world. In the book the encounter is very brief as opposed to Giono's relationship with Blanche, which went on for over thirty years. Herman and Adelina are together for only four days during which they take a long walk - the *Ballade magique*, inspired by the long walks through the countryside that Jean and Blanche used to take when they first met. In the novel, it is Adelina who tells Herman the story of her life while his role is to reveal to her the magic world of nature and to share with her his conception of love. There is a communion between the two which gives rise to a unique relationship. Herman returns to America in a state of ecstasy and even his wife notices that he has a radiance that he describes as being "tout embaumé." He never sees Adelina again but he writes his masterwork under her inspiration. When she fails to answer his last letter, he is reduced to silence. His subsequent novel, written after he realizes that Adelina is dead, is a failure. He never speaks again and gives up writing to become a custom's officer.

The encounter between Herman and Adelina is in direct contrast to that of Blanche and Jean as expressed in the letters. Whereas the fictional couple experience a rare moment of communication so intimate that the effect is of a spiritual fusion of two beings into one, the letters give no indication of a shared vision or of any real intimacy between Blanche and Jean beyond the physical. Giono desperately wants the

experience he describes in the book but he is living out of an inner vision that seems to block his ability to see and appreciate the world as it is. While remaining oblivious of Blanche's inner reality, Giono insists that she serve as a vessel into which he can pour his vision of the world. The flaw in Giono's understanding of communication is that for him, it only flowed in one direction, from his consciousness into hers, as he himself makes clear. It is interesting that in the passage which follows, Giono does not use the verb "offrir" to connote the idea that he is offering Blanche a gift of himself that she is free to decline. Instead he uses "donner" placing the emphasis on his need to unburden himself and turning her acceptance into an obligation:

"Tu entends mon amour quant tu me permets ainsi de te donner plus que ce qu'on donne de la main à la main mais, ce qu'on donne de l'âme à l'âme, quand tu me permets de te donner ainsi le plus précieux de moi, le plus rare de mon coeur, ce que j'ai le plus envie de donner à ce que j'aime ce qui n'est que pour toi. A ces moments-là, mon amour c'est le plus grand des délices pour moi c'est vraiment mon amour chérie *quelque chose de moi qui entre en toi et qui y reste et qui t'habite.*[emphasis mine.]"<sup>254</sup>

Giono's critics up till now have seen the love story depicted in *Pour saluer Melville*, as the expression of a new conception of love, in which the goal or at least the normal end of love is not sexual union but rather, a pure love in the tradition of *amour courtois*. The quoted passage illustrates the idea that the sharing of the lover's interior vision resembles the sexual union in that something essential flows from the lover to the beloved and remains with her as the "word made flesh." This ideal represents the mystical union of the masculine and feminine principles, a union that transcends the merely physical. The analogy is apt and works in Giono's fiction. However the real-life Giono could not escape the dominant masculine role in his

---

<sup>254</sup> 18 July 1939.

desire to impregnate Blanche with his vision. He failed to see that the very act of spiritual sharing, which is part of the experience of unity that he sought, partakes of the feminine aspect and requires the commingling of two psyches. This is what *amour courtois* tried to teach: that the mere taking or overpowering of a woman by the man can never lead to the level of ecstasy that can be enjoyed in a relationship between two free beings, sharing both body and soul. Giono understood this in his novel but not in his life.

However even the novel expresses the fatality of the romantic myth. With Herman and Adelina, there was no "engulfment," no long process of crystallization, and in fact what they experienced was a magical moment outside of time that remained forever new and beautiful. Still, even this brief encounter had fatal consequences: Adelina dies and Herman writes only one book before her absence reduces him to silence. As in Giono's metaphor of Blanche as a new Eve torn from the side of Adam, the two can no longer live apart. Only in the fusion that takes place in the experience of perfect love, can the wound caused by the expulsion from Eden be temporarily healed.

At the end of the *ballade magique*, Herman calls Adelina's attention to the mountains in the distance. He explains that for him the distant mountains symbolize a paradise lost where mother and child are locked in an eternal blissful embrace that combines both the maternal and the erotic:

"--les mammy négresses toute nues qui jouent comme ça à enfermer lentement leurs petits dans leurs bras: oh, c'est pour eux le plus grand jeu du monde. Ils ont un nom qui veut dire "plus jamais" et c'est ainsi qu'ils l'appellent. Si on y réfléchit, c'est tellement savant, ça contient si bien la réalisation de tous les désirs humains en un seul que ce jeu doit venir du fond des temps. Ça a dû

être le premier grand jeu qu'Adam et Eve ont joué sur la première plage qu'ils ont rencontrée après le Paradis terrestre."<sup>255</sup>

There is no doubt that for Giono, the most pure and perfect love embodies the erotic and the maternal as well as the masculine and the feminine. Adelina as a symbol of the absolute reminds Herman of the *Vierge de Lima*<sup>256</sup> and Blanche in her luminous purity, reminds Giono of the *Vierge d'Amiens* depicted in the painting that hangs over his desk. He dreams of her as a Madonna figure, peacefully rocking her child.<sup>257</sup> That Blanche was not particularly maternal, nor at all boyish, doesn't matter. Giono was creating an iconic figure and he was not interested in the particulars of the real woman. He says as much when he tells her, while writing *Pour saluer Melville* that there is nothing she can tell him about herself. He already has some mysterious intuition of her very essence: "Mais tout de suite J'ai voulu te dire que tu ne pouvais rien m'apprendre ni de ce que tu es *ni de ce que parfois tu veux être* [underlined by Giono.] Tu le verras quand tu liras ce que je fais."<sup>258</sup> As Agnès Castiglione points out, the character Giono creates in Adelina White is his own double.<sup>259</sup> The reason Herman goes to such pains to share his inner vision with her is that she represents the feminine part of himself. However, she is not only his double, she is also the part of himself that is a stranger and has therefore not been assimilated. She is the elusive feminine symbolized in the book as the "baleine blanche", the great white whale "blanche

---

<sup>255</sup> ORC III 57.

<sup>256</sup> Saint Rose of Lima was the young Peruvian virgin martyred for her purity and canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church.

<sup>257</sup> 11 May 1943.

<sup>258</sup> 12 February 1940.

<sup>259</sup> Op. cit. 131.

comme la neige" who seduces Herman to his death. However as a symbol of woman, Adelina is as flawed as Eve and all other avatars of the feminine because she, like Eve, does not exist as an autonomous figure, but instead was created out of the masculine imagination. The flaw in Giono's relationship with Blanche is that he is incapable of appreciating her or any other woman as a particular incarnation of the universal feminine. Instead, he deforms her by trying to mold her in his image of the ideal woman and then he attempts to possess her.

Malcolm Godwin<sup>260</sup> echoes Joseph Campbell's idea that the goal of the Grail quest is the return of the son to the mother. This hypothesis might explain the tenacity of Giono's quest for union with the feminine even though, paradoxically, throughout his life he was surrounded by real women. In his second preface to his novel, *Angelo*, Giono responds to his American critics who had misunderstood his conception of love as an ideal rather than as a relationship which includes the sexual.<sup>261</sup> Giono misunderstood his critics also, imagining that what they wanted were graphic descriptions of or at least an emphasis on the sexual aspect of love. His response is revealing: he emphasizes that Pauline, the heroine of the Angelo series, first appears in the novel *Mort d'un personnage* as the aging figure whose death is depicted at the end. He says that he first got to know her by witnessing her final agony and death and that this is why he chose her to be the young heroine who encounters Angelo. He asks how, after knowing Pauline via such a profound experience, he could then imagine the young woman reveling in the purely physical: "Nous sommes dans une dimension

---

<sup>260</sup> Malcolm Godwin, *The Holy Grail* (New York: Viking / Penguin, 1994) 197.

<sup>261</sup> "Le critique littéraire du 'New York Times' et ceux de trois ou quatre journaux américains se sont demandé sérieusement pourquoi Angelo et Pauline ne faisaient pas l'amour. A la lecture de ces articles sans humour, j'ai senti la nécessité d'un peu de fausse indignation devant ces êtres naïfs. Dieu sait pourtant si je déteste m'occuper de ce qui ne me donne aucun plaisir." ORC, Tome IV, 1187-88.

romanesque pleine de richesses [---] nous sommes évidemment très loin des parties de jambes en l'air d'une certaine littérature dite moderne, ou portrait de l'époque."<sup>262</sup>

The book was Giono's homage to his own mother, Pauline, and we know from the letters that Giono was with her during her last hours.<sup>263</sup> The book was an attempt at catharsis for Giono and he confides to Blanche that once he finished the account, he couldn't go on at once with the Angelo cycle because he was so moved by the death of Pauline: "On peut dire par une sorte de Paradoxe terrible (qui est tout le mystère de l'Art) que cette mort est bien vivante."<sup>264</sup>

It may have been his experience of his mother's death as well as her extreme piety and the austere moral code she lived by that prevented Giono from totally accepting the pleasurable aspect of romantic love and forced him to justify love as an unattainable ideal. The fact that the eminently satisfying love of mother and child was the only form of perfect love he had ever known may have led Giono to give the maternal a dominant place in his subconscious life and caused him to see the maternal as an aspect of the erotic. Although his mother's death, which took place in 1946, certainly did not give rise to Giono's conception of love, his reaction to her death and the fact that it inspired a novel and indirectly the whole Angelo cycle, suggests that she influenced the way he thought about women. As an example of this influence, Pierre Citron mentions that Giono's mother forbade his wife to go to dances just as Giono himself forbade his daughter Aline, who never married and of whom he was

---

<sup>262</sup> ORC, Tome IV, 1187.

<sup>263</sup> See letter of 21 January 1946 where Giono describes his vigil at his mother's bedside the night she died. See also, Notice, ORC IV, 1241-1242, where Pierre Citron describes how Giono began his book before his mother's death and finished it in March, 1946.

<sup>264</sup> 2 March 1946.

inordinately protective to dance.<sup>265</sup> The letters reveal that he tried to persuade Blanche too to stay away from balls and in his fiction, especially *Le Moulin de Pologne*, balls and the women who frequent them, are depicted as occasions of evil.

Giono remarks in the same Preface we have been discussing that his readers need to understand that he is writing about fictional characters. Then he adds that as soon as the fictive touches ordinary people, they become exceptional.<sup>266</sup> Although he never understood them, Giono idealized both his mother and Blanche in his life and rendered them exceptional by his fiction. He created the figure who was to be his greatest heroine, Pauline, by grafting the maternal represented by his mother onto the erotic embodied by Blanche and thereby attempted to create an icon of the eternal feminine. Perhaps because Giono never really understood the women who served as his models, the experiment did not work. The projected novel in the Angelo cycle that was to be dedicated to the character of Pauline was never written. Giono's difficulty relating to women may explain why he was never able to create a believable heroine in his fiction.

Marcel Neveu suggests that Giono's ideal of love came out of his reaction against modernism and from his repudiation of the reductionism of Schopenhauer and Freud both of whom, according to Giono, saw love simply as an expression of physical drives.<sup>267</sup> While this is perhaps true, Giono's vision did not come about as a result of his reaction against Schopenhauer, Freud, or against modernity. He reacted against his era and its spokesmen because their vision was not compatible with his. His concept of love was basically a literary one, inspired by his reading of novels of

---

<sup>265</sup> Pierre Citron, *Giono 1895-1970*, (Paris: éditions du Seuil, 1990) 94.

<sup>266</sup> ORC, Tome IV, 1188.

<sup>267</sup> Marcel Neveu, "Pour saluer Melville: la passion blanche" (*RLM, Jean Giono 5*, 1991) 38-40.

chivalry, of *Don Quixote*, Ariosto, the Greek tragedies and those of Shakespeare. Like theirs, Giono's vision was tragic and as Henri Godard says in the *Notice to Pour saluer Melville*: "La volonté qu'a Herman - ou que son ange a pour lui - d'écrire un livre où il exprimerait enfin ce qu'est à ses yeux 'le sort de l'homme' reste le coeur de *Pour saluer Melville*."<sup>268</sup> More than a love story, the book expresses Giono's sense of the tragedy of the human condition and of his hero's effort to transcend this condition through an experience of the absolute. What the book reveals is not that "love conquers all" but rather man's powerlessness in the face of his own humanity or at least, the fragility of his power and its ephemeral nature, whether expressed in love or in art.

Without access to the letters, the reader has no way of knowing that the novel is profoundly autobiographical and that it represents both Giono's ideal of love and his realization that the ideal is unattainable. The book is Giono's *abschied*, his farewell to love as he had tried to realize it not only in Blanche but in Simone Téry, Blanche's predecessor.<sup>269</sup> Simone Téry is the Miss Valentine of the book, a Parisian journalist with whom Giono had had a stormy love affair in the early 1930's. Giono marks the end of their liaison in the novel:

"Mais vous êtes dans la tradition des filles de capitaine<sup>270</sup> et, bien que le garçon ait bonne allure avec ses grandes épaules et ses yeux de poète, c'est lui que vous marquez coupable. Tant pis pour vous, Miss Valentine, il était bon à prendre et, si vous l'aviez voulu, il aurait eu à peine sous votre main le

---

<sup>268</sup> ORC, Tome III, 1118.

<sup>269</sup> See *Jean Giono / Jean Paulhan Correspondance 1928-1963*, Edition établie et annotée par Pierre Citron. (Paris: Gallimard, 1995.) March, 1934, 53-57.

<sup>270</sup> Giono may have been referring to the fact that the Parisian, Simone Téry, was too urbane and sophisticated for him or even that she came from a different class.



blottissement du moineau. Quand les garçons vont au large comme il y va, c'est qu'il n'y a pas eu à côté d'eux de fille assez belle. Tant pis."<sup>271</sup>

However, as the book opens, the protagonist is looking back with the eyes of memory at another love that he has also lost, Adelina White, the Blanche-inspired heroine of the novel. His chagrin over her loss is all the more acute in that he is still deeply involved with the real Blanche whose ultimate loss the book adumbrates. The book like the letters is the site of passion, a fictive otherworld where Giono can realize his magnificent obsession with the ideal. It is significant that although Adelina is the muse who inspires Herman's great work, she can only serve that function through her absence as the ever-absent Blanche will do for Giono. The tragedy of Giono's love for Blanche was that her eternal unattainability was what kept his desire alive and spurred his creative activity - and yet, her absence was also at the very root of his anguish. Better than any other of his novels, this one expresses Giono's belief in the value of human struggle, which comes from an awareness and acceptance of the tragic nature of existence.<sup>272</sup> For Giono life was an epic battle with destiny and his novel illustrates his belief that art is a refuge when nothing else remains. He attributes these same sentiments to Herman Melville whom he perceived as a kindred spirit:

"Nul ne le sait mieux qu'Herman et quand les temps seront accomplis avec le souvenir, cette eau étendue sur des horizons illimités, il écrira ce livre-refuge où le monde entier peut abriter son désespoir et son envie de persister malgré les dieux."<sup>273</sup>

---

<sup>271</sup> ORC III 14.

<sup>272</sup> ORC, Tome III, 1119.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid. 15.

Unlike Simone Téry who apparently walked away intact from her love affair with Giono, Blanche allowed her life to be dominated by him: "J'ai toujours subi ce qu'il faut bien appeler la magie de sa présence. Toutes mes connaissances, mes rapports avec le monde, tout était balayé et mes émotions étaient mon sable mouvant."<sup>274</sup> That she was young and impressionable made her the very sort of woman Giono was looking for, "pas faite ... encore argile" whom he could mold according to his desire. Using Gerard de Nerval's Aurelia as an example, Claudine Hermann suggests that certain women actually cooperate in this enterprise by modeling themselves according to men's desires and that by so doing, they become "that desire itself, a serial object."<sup>275</sup> Like Blanche who merely replaced Simone Téry in Giono's iconography, these women, are not valued for their individuality but for the role they play in men's lives. In the same way that Aurelia was able to inspire Nerval, Blanche opened the doorway of a dream for Giono. As Marcel Neveu observed, love allowed Giono "des ouvertures sur un 'au-delà de l'air' une réalité transfigurée."<sup>276</sup>

It is significant that Jolaine, Blanche's daughter noticed the similarity between her mother and the gionian heroine, Adelina White and offers a portrait of her mother as the young woman who provoked such a profound sentiment in Giono:

"Blanche est jeune, belle, élégante. Sa démarche est fière et gracieuse. Elle a d'exquises qualités naturelles et un charme indéniable. Elle est profonde de sentiment. Elle n'aime le monde que selon les lois de son coeur. Tout excès de bêtise ou de vulgarité la blesse. Elle a un goût forcené de la liberté et de la

---

<sup>274</sup> *Souvenirs*, unpublished, p. 29. Quoted by Jolaine Meyer op. cit.

<sup>275</sup> Claudine Hermann, *The Tongue Snatchers*. Trans. and with intro. and notes by Nancy Kline (Lincoln, Nebraska: U of Nebraska P, 1989) 76. Trans. of *Les voleuses de langue*, 1976.

<sup>276</sup> "Les métamorphoses de Sylvie" (*Bulletin* no. 53, printemps-été 2000) 74.

paix. Le sens paysan qu'elle tient de ses origines lui donne un appétit des choses justes et simples, de la grandeur et de la pureté. Romanesque, elle reconnaît en Giono l'homme de ses aspirations. C'est la naissance de l'amour. Sa réalité absolue. Son irréversibilité."<sup>277</sup>

However Jolaine's portrait of Blanche is so close to the idealized literary description in Giono's novel, that one suspects that she too was persuaded by the writer's vision of her mother. It is likely that Blanche herself was taken in by the ideal that Giono created of her both in the letters and in his fiction and that part of the reason she put up with his unreasonable behavior was because she couldn't bear to be deprived of her starring role in his fiction. The transfigured vision of reality that Giono imposed on Blanche made it impossible for her to find a satisfying place in the real world and to realize her life as an individual. As René Nelli suggests in his definition of *amour courtois*:

"La plus haute de ces vertus pouvait être, à la limite, la Pureté ou *Castitatz*, qui faisait disparaître la femme réelle dans l'exaltation mystique qu'elle inspirait, et permettait à l'amant d'atteindre dans l'amour lui-même, le seul objet vrai de l'amour."<sup>278</sup>

Unfortunately, Giono not only tried to force Blanche to live his myth thus depriving her of the right to create her own reality, he also deprived her of any role in his reality. Without the letters, the reading public would never know that Blanche Meyer had ever existed, nor would they suspect that the love of a woman had played such a central role in Giono's creative life.

---

<sup>277</sup> See article by Jolaine Meyer, op. cit. 375-386.

<sup>278</sup> Nelli, *Les Troubadours II: le trésor poétique de l'Occitanie*. Texte et traduction par René Nelli et René Lavaud. (Belgique: Desclée de Brouwer, 1965) 338.

## Chapter IV: A portrait of the artist: Giono, Angelo and *Le Hussard sur le toit* as a novel of chivalry

Giono found his voice very early in his writing career and created his image of the hero as a knight errant in his first novel, *La naissance de l'Odyssée* (Grasset, 1938). In Giono's version of the myth, Ulysses is a very human hero whose faults are transformed into virtues. The author's habit of fabricating reality to suit his own purposes, a trait that exasperated his family and friends, gives a quality of reality to his writing and makes him a compelling storyteller. There is more than a little of Giono himself in his heroes as the letters attest. Apparently the whole literary world knew of Giono's propensity to mix reality and fiction as Blanche reminded him in 1945 when he was at work on the Angelo cycle: "Merci, même de m'avoir rappelé la phrase de Darius Milhaud."<sup>279</sup> What Milhaud had said was: "Et Giono, il est toujours aussi menteur?"<sup>280</sup> Milhaud had never forgiven Giono for having duped him (and others) into believing that the major episode in *Le serpent d'étoiles* (1933) was based on reality. What Milhaud failed to realize was that everything in Giono's writing came out of his own personal vision of reality:

"Le plus magique instrument de connaissance, c'est moi-même. Quand je veux connaître c'est de moi-même que je me sers. C'est moi-même que j'applique mètre par mètre, sur un pays, sur un morceau de monde, comme une grosse loupe. Je ne regarde pas le reflet de l'image, l'image est en moi."<sup>281</sup>

---

<sup>279</sup> 24 June 1945

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. n.2.

<sup>281</sup> ORC III, 206.

Not to understand this point is to misunderstand Giono's art and in a sense, to misunderstand art in general. As Giono told Jean Carrière in an interview: "J'ai besoin d'inventer absolument tout, en partant de choses existantes, car seul Dieu peut inventer à partir de rien. On est forcé d'inventer à partir de quelque chose qui existe déjà."<sup>282</sup> Giono insisted on his absolute right to transform reality according to his own vision just as Van Gogh had transformed the wheat fields of Provence in his paintings, by painting them as he saw them with his unique artist's perception.<sup>283</sup> That Giono's readers believed in his rendition of reality was for him not a form of duplicity but rather the evidence that he had succeeded in his goal as a writer.

By the end of World War II, Giono had written ten major novels and felt that he was ready to write a literary masterpiece, the work that would make his reputation. He was preoccupied with this effort to create a great work all through the spring of 1945, which he describes as a "période de combat" during which he prepares to write "le grand livre."<sup>284</sup> However in this endeavor he could not rely completely on love as a catalyst for his creativity as he had done during the writing of *Pour saluer Melville*. By this time Blanche had given up on Giono's promises of marriage and was spending most of her time in Paris. Giono laments that she is pulling away from him: "Tu refuses de tout me donner désormais; ma lettre d'hier te donnais ta liberté totale."<sup>285</sup> Blanche had fulfilled her purpose as muse by engendering the writer and although Giono still aches for her presence, he is able to continue his path without her:

---

<sup>282</sup> "Entretiens Jean Giono-Jean Carrière" in J. Carrière, Jean Giono, coll. *Qui êtes-vous*, (Lyon: La Manufacture, 1985) 144.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid. 145.

<sup>284</sup> 21 March 1945.

<sup>285</sup> 24 June 1945.

"Je suis maintenant maître de ma langue, bon ouvrier, travailleur, possédant un très bon outil. Je suis maître du romanesque de mon coeur. Je vais créer (ils sont créés) des 'monstres sublimes' qui hanteront les âmes sensibles même quand toi et moi nous serons morts."<sup>286</sup>

The letters are especially instructive in what they reveal about Giono during 1945-46 when he began work on the Angelo cycle. Up to this time very little has been written about this period of Giono's life and, except for the letters, Giono himself confined his reflections to his works of fiction. Pierre Citron devotes only four pages of his six-hundred-page biography of the writer, to this time period, most of which is concerned with Giono's monetary and publishing difficulties. He was blacklisted by the CNE<sup>287</sup> after the war because of suspected collaboration and therefore, none of the major publishers would publish his work.<sup>288</sup> According to the letters, this was a painful period for Giono, not only for monetary and professional reasons but also because of his political and personal disillusionment after the war. As he confessed to Blanche in a dark moment: "Pour dire la vérité, j'ai perdu confiance en février quand je suis rentré de St. Vincent. J'ai reçu là un bon coup que j'ai encaissé, mais qui a démolé quelque chose."<sup>289</sup> Moreover, Giono's relationship with Blanche was foundering, very likely because he did nothing to move closer to marriage after his release from prison at the end of the war. Blanche may well have regarded his hesitation as a sort of breach of promise and as an indication that he never had any

---

<sup>286</sup> 21 March 1945.

<sup>287</sup> Comité national des écrivains.

<sup>288</sup> See Citron, *Giono*, chs. 16 and 17, for a discussion of Giono's difficulties with publishers during this period. His first postwar work to be published by Gallimard was *Un roi sans divertissement* in 1947.

<sup>289</sup> 8 November 1945.

intention of creating a permanent liaison with her.<sup>290</sup> Giono was living in Marseilles at the home of his friend, Gaston Pelous, of the Marseilles Sureté, and writing at Blanche and her husband's home in the afternoon. We know that Blanche, however, was rarely in Marseilles during this postwar period and found excuses to be absent tending to her ailing mother or visiting her sister in Paris.

In spite of his efforts to find ways to make life in the city bearable without Blanche,<sup>291</sup> it is clear from the letters that Giono was miserable during his forced exile from his family and from the familiar countryside around Manosque. As André Not observed, the first two chapters of *Angelo*, which Giono began at this time, are organized around the theme of flight:<sup>292</sup> All he could think of was his eventual escape, not only from Marseilles itself but from the modern world which cities symbolized for him.

"Je vais bientôt partir d'ici, secouer la poussière de mes semelles sur cette ville dont la laideur désormais ne me blessera plus, mais me fera rire. Il n'est pas possible de la haïr plus que je la haïs. C'est mon ennemie. C'est l'ennemie des collines enchantées et des jardins d'Armide. Ce qui s'y fait est le contraire de ce que j'aime; l'âme qu'elle ordonne est la mort de l'âme enchantée. Je ne peux absolument rien pour ceux qui elle prend à ses pièges."<sup>293</sup>

---

<sup>290</sup> The letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter supports this idea that Blanche was exasperated with Giono's eternal prevarications. See Letter of 24 June 1945.

<sup>291</sup> The letters of this period reveal some of Giono's strategies such as reading, walking the streets and especially, music. The letter of March 24 1945 describes an optimistic moment when he was inspired to whistle all he knew of Mozart, Haendel and Haydn on his way home. However the letter ends with a denouncement of the city.

<sup>292</sup> See "Le jeu avec le lecteur dans *Angelo*," *Giono autrement: l'apocalyptique, le panique, le dionysiaque*. Anniversaire du centenaire mars 1995 (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1996) 97.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

And yet Giono demonstrated the will to combat his depression, which he attributed to his being forced to remain in Marseilles. In the spring of 1945, he wrote to Blanche: "Alors, me voilà enchaîné à Marseille. C'est le seul endroit où je puisse être. [...]"<sup>294</sup> Quoique, tu sais, cette ville ne gagnera pas: c'est moi qui gagnera j'en suis sûr."<sup>295</sup> Later that spring, writing in the same spirit of combat, he asserted: "*Marseille ne me fera jamais plus souffrir* [Underlined by Giono]. Je n'ai pas l'habitude de perdre les batailles avec les villes."<sup>296</sup> His primary weapon was his creative work: "Je ne suis plus désespéré de la laideur de cette ville, tu verras. J'ai mon travail; que peut la ville contre?"<sup>296</sup> He was writing the first book of the four-novel series that has come to be called the Angelo cycle. Angelo was born in a moment of self-doubt and discouragement, a point which is important to an understanding of the character and of Giono himself. Giono, imprisoned in Marseilles, the *héros-manqué* who could not live out his pacifism, who could not even drive a car let alone ride a horse, had just recreated himself in the dashing figure of Angelo *le cavalier - épi d'or*.

The so-called Angelo cycle<sup>297</sup> is only a cycle in the sense that some of the same characters appear in all four novels. However, there is no development of the characters from novel to novel nor is there any chronological continuity, except between *Le hussard* and *Le bonheur fou*. Even there, however, the last novel cannot be considered a sequel to the former because while *Le hussard* is a novel of chivalric

---

<sup>294</sup> 21 March 1945.

<sup>295</sup> 5 April 1945.

<sup>296</sup> 21 March 1945.

<sup>297</sup> *Angelo* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958); *Mort d'un personnage* (Paris: Grasset, 1949); *Le hussard sur le toit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951); *Le bonheur fou* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957). All four volumes of the Angelo cycle are contained in the Pléiade edition of Giono's work, ORC IV, 1977.



love, *Le bonheur fou* is a military novel which delineates the final disillusionment of the hero and in which Pauline does not appear at all. In fact, the novels are basically independent of one another and can be read separately. The publishing dates demonstrate the folly of looking at the books as a chronology in the traditional sense. *Angelo*, which was not published until 1958, was actually written between May and September, 1945, during Giono's period of despondency in Marseille. The book, which takes place in 1843, is a sort of preparation for the later *Angelo* books, and a means of introducing the main characters, Angelo and Pauline. *Mort d'un personnage*, which takes place in 1940, is an account of the aged Pauline's final moments. She is attended not by the Angelo of the first book, however, but by Angelo III, her grandson. The novel, which was written as a memorial to the author's mother, was begun a few months before she died, and finished shortly after her death. It was written between the late summer of 1945<sup>298</sup> and March 1946 but it was not published until 1949. *Le Hussard sur le toit* was begun in March 1946, right after Giono finished *Mort d'un personnage*, but Giono laid it aside in June of that year. The author worked on the novel again between October, 1947 and June, 1948. The work was finally finished between December 1950 and April, 1951. *Le Bonheur fou*, written between 1953 and 1957, is the last novel of the cycle and its title, borrowed from Stendhal<sup>299</sup>, is ironic. The novel is a chronicle of disillusionment and the uselessness of combat. In spite of the fact that Citron claims that there were no more cataclysms in Giono's life after the war<sup>300</sup>, it is clear from the letters and from his later

---

<sup>298</sup> The first reference is in the letter of 24 August 1945 where Giono mentions: "Je suis en train de faire le long portrait de Pauline par petites touches."

<sup>299</sup> See ORC IV 1476 for a discussion of the stendhalian origins of the title.

<sup>300</sup> See *Giono*, 388, where Citron writes: "Les périodes agitées ont pris fin pour lui: les guerres, les engagements politiques, les emprisonnements, les angoisses. Il se sent fort et il a des raisons d'espérer."

fiction that the war years haunted the writer's memory and that he regarded the death of his mother and the rupture with Blanche as irremediable losses.

Just as the first Angelo novel had lifted Giono out of his postwar depression, Angelo's appearance in *Le hussard sur le toit*, the second book of the series, carried Giono through the period of his mother's death and the loss of Blanche to François Bravay in 1949. There was an element of magic in Angelo's creation as the letters attest. He was Giono's favorite fictional character and his persona is a carefully constructed portrait of the artist:

"Je travaille. Je prépare le grand corps du roman. Je me sens prêt à écrire le grand livre qu'il faut que j'écrive et suis solidement assuré des avenir. Je combine des aventures du cavalier-épi d'or.<sup>301</sup> J'examine une fois de plus mes propres mystères, je parcours les propres profondeurs de mon coeur. Je fais bouillir mes sucs les plus secrets dans ma marmite de sorcière pour une fois de plus faire mon propre portrait, comme il se doit mille fois plus beau que ce que je suis. Tel que je voudrais être."<sup>302</sup>

And yet while Giono was consciously creating Angelo as his alter ego, the process was actually happening on the sub-conscious level. As he explains in the *Postface à Angelo* (1949),<sup>303</sup> the characters of a work of fiction are there in the writer's psyche before their creator actually becomes aware of them. All of the preparatory work that the author undertakes before actually writing the novel, his research, his notes and outlines etc., are merely part of a gestation period, which allows the character finally

---

<sup>301</sup> Giono never really discusses this phrase, which however is emblematic of Angelo, Giono's blonde hero. In the *Postface to Angelo*, Giono describes how he first discovered his hero, "le cavalier d'or sur son cheval noir," as a sort of sudden apparition on the sidewalk of the Boulevard Baille in Marseilles. ORC IV, 1166.

<sup>302</sup> 3 June 1945.

<sup>303</sup> ORC IV, 1163-1181.

to be born to the consciousness of his creator. The writer brings his character to life not only by consciously creating him with words but in some subconscious way, by finally becoming aware of his existence:

"D'autant que de ce temps-là, Angelo épi d'or sur le cheval noir était né; il était là, avec son casque emplumé de faisonnerie; il vivait, il ne demandait pas mieux que d'ébouriffer le douanier et d'entrer en France d'un saut. D'autant que Pauline de Théus avec son visage en fer de lance, elle était là, elle aussi, assise bien sagement à attendre la page 119 du manuscrit.<sup>304</sup> Tout le monde était là, il n'y avait que moi qui n'y étais pas."<sup>305</sup>

The cryptic phrase that Giono uses - *cavalier-épi d'or* - evokes rather than describes Angelo. It is as though he has always been there and when the writer finally turns his eyes from his papers and sees his character, his recognition brings Angelo to life. This process of recognition requires that the writer participate in his own fiction, that he must be in the story ("dans le conte") as Giono asserts during this same period.<sup>306</sup> He often exclaims during the writing of the novel, "Je suis en plein choléra,"<sup>307</sup> as though he himself were confronting the epidemic that ravaged Provence in the book.

And yet, in spite of the freedom of becoming that Giono gives to his characters, once they appear, he is the absolute arbiter of their fate. Even though he says that he engages in dialogues with Angelo and that he learns from him,<sup>308</sup> Giono

---

<sup>304</sup> Apparently the page reference is spurious and does not refer to the actual page number in the manuscript where Pauline first makes her appearance. See ORC IV, 1165, n. 1.

<sup>305</sup> ORC IV, 1165.

<sup>306</sup> 25 March 1945.

<sup>307</sup> See for instance the letter of 21 May 1946.

<sup>308</sup> ORC IV, 1170-1172.

retains the right to control all of his actions. As he said in the marginal notes he wrote in Georges Blin's study of Stendhal: " le romancier est bien la figure centrale de l'oeuvre et, même s'il conserve à ses personnages une part de liberté et de mystère, il a tous les droits, à commencer par le *droit d'expression* [underlined by Giono]."<sup>309</sup> In Giono's case, this need to dominate seems to be both artistic and personal: it is artistic in the sense that as a writer, Giono claimed absolute freedom of invention; it is personal because the pseudo-freedom he gave his fictional characters, especially Angelo, gave him paradoxically, the artistic freedom and inspiration he needed to create. On the one hand, Giono's assertions that the writer has total control of his creation, is an argument in favor of Stendhal and the novelist's right to create out of the imagination as opposed to realism (as personified, in Giono's eyes, by Zola whom he deplored) and the obligation to describe the real world. However, Giono's defense of the rights of the novelist to control his characters is excessive if one regards it as a purely literary idea.

The letters, in what they reveal about the creation of Angelo, illustrate the complex nature of Giono's relationship with his characters and his emotional investment in them. Giono creates his favorite character, whom he declares that he loves like a brother,<sup>310</sup> out of a complex web of identification, omnipotence and admiration amounting to hero worship. Unlike Flaubert, who struggled to keep his distance from his fictional characters<sup>311</sup> and even his idol, Stendhal, Giono both

---

<sup>309</sup> Cited by Jean-Yves Delaurichesse, "Création romanesque et réflexion sur le roman: Giono lecteur de Stendhal et les problèmes du roman de Georges Blin," *Giono romancier*. Colloque du centenaire. (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1999) 289-309.

<sup>310</sup> ORC IV 1174, n. 4.

<sup>311</sup> See Victor Brombert, "The author's presence," *The Novels of Flaubert: A Study of Themes and Techniques*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966) 161-173.

controlled and identified with Angelo. The letter of April 4, 1946 is especially instructive on this point. Giono is obviously in an emotional state over Blanche's departure for Paris as he begins the letter: "Ah coquine, te voilà avec tes sulfamides, te voilà partant pour Paris, te voilà avec tes ailes de soufre comme les démons, prête à voler vers la ville dite lumière." Blanche who had always been portrayed as an ideal, almost an angel figure, has become a demon with wings of sulfur implying her infernal origins. The reference to "sulfamides" appears to be partly a play on words with "soufre" (the tone of the letter is playful with an underlying current of rage) and partly an acknowledgment that Blanche is purportedly going to Paris to be treated for some sort of female trouble ("ces organes non pas objets [sic] mais bien aimés..."). The letter is also a commentary on flight: Blanche can fly away figuratively on her sulfurous wings or actually travel on the train, while Giono with his lead feet can only gallop in place behind his hero Angelo: "Et bien, moi je vais rester ici avec mes pieds de plomb, galopant sur place en croupe avec mon Angelo....." It seems to be this realization that Blanche is able exercise her freedom while he for some reason cannot do so except by means of his fiction that has triggered Giono's emotional outburst. His exclamation "que de désirs de fuite!" could be applied as well to its author as to Blanche.

However, contrary to what we might expect, Giono does not go on to depict a scene where Angelo wins a battle or evades his enemies or simply rides off toward a better future. Instead, he ends the letter with an emotional declaration of the almost tyrannical right of the author to dominate his character:

"Ah Angelo se débrouille. Il veut se payer une de ces méditations au pied d'un arbre qui n'est pas dans une musette. Et s'il savait ce qui l'attends [sic]. Moi - tel Zeus sur l'Olympe- - je brasse un pain de choléra, de douleur, de bouffeur, chaleur, de sueur, que je te [sic] vais lui engorger comme on nourrit un faucon. Et nous verrons bien, quand il aura été gavé de cette nourriture, ce

qu'il fera à et avec sa Pauline. Ah monsieur est romanesque et appelle la grandeur - dit Dieu - je vais te lui foutre dans les jambes quelques délicieux organes (on ne parlait pas encore des coagulations en ce temps-là) et nous verrons bien s'il n'en perdra pas le Nord. Ah, - dit Angelo - Dieu est bon! Je t'en foutrai du bon - dit Dieu. Et ainsi de suite."

The author is omnipotent ("tel Zeus sur l'Olympe") and takes a malicious pleasure it seems, in manipulating his character and in envisioning his future torments. It is as though Angelo, as the writer's double, has become the object of Giono's self-flagellation. Moreover, in this passage, by speaking of his relationship with Pauline in such a vulgar, uncharacteristic way, the author denigrates Angelo as a knight of chivalry who, in the novel, represents the purity of *amour courtois*. The vulgar tone of the letter, both in its references to Angelo's relationship with Pauline and in its references to Blanche's medical problems, is totally uncharacteristic of Giono and is explainable only if it is read as an outburst of the author's impotent fury.

Giono's identification with his fictional Angelo is apparent toward the end of the passage when the author suggests that after an encounter with Pauline (who is another fictional avatar of Blanche), Angelo will lose his way as Blanche has caused Giono to do. It is noteworthy that the two protagonists, Angelo and Pauline, never depart from the chivalric model and that their love is never debased in any way in the novel in which they appear. Giono's outburst is obviously directed at the real Blanche because she has failed to live up to his ideal. This powerlessness in regard to Blanche, and Giono's inability to control the relationship, is seemingly behind the rage that he expresses at the end of this letter: "C'est palpitant et voilà avec quoi je vais palpiter<sup>312</sup> (plus naturellement des rages, des jalousies, et des envies de t'étrangler) pendant que

---

<sup>312</sup> Giono is referring to *Le hussard sur le toit*, the novel he was writing at the time.

tu palpitera [sic] la danse de la séduction avec tes ailes de soufre<sup>313</sup> devant les royaux benêts de Paris." As Giono himself asserted in his writings on Machiavelli, it is not love that is the strongest of human passions but the urge to dominate: "La plus forte des passions humaines: le besoin de dominer."<sup>314</sup> If he could not dominate the real Blanche, he would at least dominate his fictional characters, a point that explains his insistence on the absolute omnipotence of the writer in regard to his creation.

Angelo is absolutely faithful: "comme la terre sous les pieds," a phrase Giono appropriates for himself in a letter to Blanche.<sup>315</sup> Angelo asserts in one of his dialogues with the author that this phrase expresses love's most beautiful sentiment, that of unwavering fidelity.<sup>316</sup> Nonetheless, like Giono who is forcing the idea of faithfulness on Blanche as she is tiring of him, Angelo says "Je veux être désormais comme la terre sous tes pieds" at a moment when love is past. In exploring the idea further, Giono emphasizes its negative side: " Il y a bien en lui cette solidité, cette certitude de la terre sous les pieds. (Et certes, aussi, cette brutalité matérielle de la terre, cette volonté inéluctable, cet enchainement de la terre, cette obligation d'être absolument collé à elle sans possibilité d'envol, pour tout dire, il y a bien en lui aussi cette laideur.)"<sup>317</sup> This is the intractable Giono with his "pieds de plomb," irrevocably

---

<sup>313</sup> It is significant that this is the first time that Giono refers to Blanche as a demon. This is the name he will use in his notebooks for his later novel, *Le moulin de Pologne*, to denote the femme fatale who brings about the ruin of the hero. As the following chapter will reveal, the unfaithful Blanche was the model for the demonic heroine of this later novel.

<sup>314</sup> *De Homère à Machiavel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986) 214.

<sup>315</sup> See letter of 15 November 1946 for example.

<sup>316</sup> See *Postface*, ORC IV 1172, where the author says of Angelo : "Ses plus beaux mots d'amour, c'étaient: Comme la terre sous les pieds."

<sup>317</sup> ORC IV 1173.

tied to his native Manosque, unable to follow Blanche and jealous of her freedom. The ideal of faithfulness pushed too far becomes merely an excuse for possessiveness: "Je suis enraciné en toi et si tu te refusais à mes racines, l'arbre ne donnerait plus ni feuilles ni fruit, mais mourrait."<sup>318</sup> Possessiveness debases chivalry because it is the opposite of generosity, which is inherent in the ideal.

The letters reveal that Giono was as involved with the idea of the cholera epidemic, the cataclysmic central event of *Le hussard sur le toit*, as he was with his character, Angelo. He never explains its significance in the letters, but every time he refers to the book, he speaks of cholera: "Tout à l'heure il [Angelo] remontera sur son cheval et s'en ira vers des Choléras." (30 mars 1946); "... Angelo qui est bien beau et bien brave à t'attendre au milieu du Choléra et de l'amour" (6 avril 1946); "Je suis en plein Choléra" (21 mai 1946). The word is always capitalized and sometimes, as in the letter of March 30, 1946, it is given in the plural. We know from the novel that Pauline is attacked by disease-carrying crows, a scene that is presented as an attempt at seduction to which she, to her horror, succumbs thereby contracting the disease. The description of Angelo in the letter,<sup>319</sup> waiting for Pauline in the midst of love and cholera, (note the use of "te" rather than "la" in the letter, implying that Giono was thinking of Blanche rather than her fictional counterpart in this scene) implies that the disease represents an obstacle to their love. That Pauline is infected with the cholera because she was seduced by birds carrying the disease, suggests that cholera is a metaphor for the seductiveness of the world and its mediocrity. For Giono, the modern world would always represent, like the Cholera in his novel: "Une maladie très contagieuse." After the war Giono rejected the world more and more and in fact suggested in his synopsis for the Pléiade edition of *Le hussard sur le toit* that Cholera

---

<sup>318</sup> 3 July 1939.

<sup>319</sup> 6 April 1946.



implies a turning away from life: "Le Choléra n'est pas une maladie, c'est une peur de vivre."<sup>320</sup> It is not surprising that Giono's meditations as he wrote the last section of *Le hussard*, were on death.<sup>321</sup>

One could argue that the Cholera – a word that so terrified its creator when he first inscribed it in capital letters on a separate sheet of paper “comme un personnage nouveau” - is the central figure of the book.<sup>322</sup> It is an omnipresent, amorphous, invisible villain who represents all that Giono considered to be evil. Using an anthropomorphic force like the plague to serve as the central character of his book is totally gionian, and gave the author the opportunity to move away from the influence of Stendhal and to make the *Hussard* his own. Giono had an anthropomorphic vision of the world and he saw characterization as going beyond the merely human to include the whole natural world. An early letter to Blanche expresses his conception of a world where all of nature is animate and participates with humans in the drama of life:

"Je veux créer un monde inoubliable. C'est de ça que je suis habité maintenant. [...] Il faut aussi que dans ce livre *tout* [underlined by Giono] soit animé. Jusqu'ici dans toutes les littératures il n'y a eu que des hommes ou des femmes pour personnages. Je veux que tout soit personnage: le cheval, le buisson, l'aubépine, la terre, le ciel, la nuit, le vent, la pluie, que tout soit vivant et inoubliable."<sup>323</sup>

---

<sup>320</sup> ORC IV, 1469.

<sup>321</sup> ORC IV 1181-1182.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid. 1166.

<sup>323</sup> 22 January 1940.

Pauline is the most enigmatic character in the cycle, especially when Giono's comments on her character in the *Postface à Angelo* (1949) and the second *Préface* (1969) are read as a subtext to the novels. However, once the reader realizes that Pauline and Angelo are modeled after Blanche and Jean, the writer's ambivalent attitude toward his heroine become comprehensible as a reflection of his attempts to understand Blanche and his changing relationship with her. Although Giono never insisted on Pauline's resemblance to Blanche in the way that he did when he was creating Adelina White<sup>324</sup>, he does make it clear that Blanche is the model for the young heroine. For instance, when Giono was writing the first novel, *Angelo*, he told Blanche that "...la rencontre Angelo Pauline [...] sera un peu comme les longues nôtres mais ils mettront moins longtemps que nous pour se reconnaître."<sup>325</sup> Just as he had attributed a virginal purity to Blanche and to the fictional Adelina White, in his preparatory notes for *Angelo*, Giono describes Pauline as: "tendre et belle comme une vierge."<sup>326</sup> Moreover, Pauline arrives on the scene "en chemise de nuit,"<sup>327</sup> a seemingly unremarkable detail unless one recalls that in Giono's recollection of their memorable first night together in the summer of 1939, he uses the same phrase in speaking of Blanche: "...je t'avais sentie bouleversée quand tu étais entrée dans ma chambre dans ta longue chemise de nuit."<sup>328</sup> This was the moment when she appeared to him as the incarnation of the ideal of the myth of *amour courtois*: "blanche comme la lumière de la neige" and when love seemed to open up a "monde magique" for

---

<sup>324</sup> In the *Notice*, however, Pierre Citron points out the resemblance between Pauline and Adelina, as characters. ORC IV, 1206.

<sup>325</sup> 19 July 1945.

<sup>326</sup> ORC IV 1198.

<sup>327</sup> 10 July 1939.

<sup>328</sup> 3 July 1939.

him.<sup>329</sup> Significantly, this is the only time in his letters that Giono comments on the clothes that Blanche is wearing.

Pauline is all the more puzzling in that she changes so dramatically from book to book that she is hardly the same character. She first appears in the last chapter of *Angelo* as a stendhalian heroine, noble, proud, beautiful and cold. Giono's admiration for Stendhal has been well documented<sup>330</sup> and allusions to Stendhal abound in the letters. As Giono begins *Angelo*, he remarks, "J'ai cinquante ans aujourd'hui, comme disait Stendhal."<sup>331</sup> When his friends Lucien Jacques and Maximilien Vox pointed out the similarities between Giono's *Angelo* and Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme* and *Lucien Leuwin*, Giono decided not to publish the first book and not to make the second book its sequel as he had previously planned.<sup>332</sup> Giono addresses his book to an exclusive public as he tells Blanche: "Je vais créer (ils sont créés) des "monstres sublimes" qui hanteront *les âmes sensibles* [emphasis mine] même quand toi et moi nous serons morts."<sup>333</sup> Shortly afterward he re-iterated the same idea: "Je vais enfin écrire un beau livre qui restera pour le bonheur *des âmes tendres*[ emphasis mine]."<sup>334</sup>

---

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> See especially the article by Jean-Yves Laurichesse. "Création romanesque et réflexion sur le roman: Giono lecteur de Stendhal et les problèmes du roman de Georges Blin," and his full-length study, *Giono et Stendhal: chemins de lecture et de création* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1994); See also "Voyage sentimental d'une citation: de Stendhal à Giono," *Bulletin* No. 45, Printemps - été 1996; and the various *Notices* for the novels of the cycle, contained in ORC IV, especially Pierre Citron's *Notice générale* for the *Cycle du Husard*, ORC IV 1113-1151, especially 1121-1123 where Citron addresses the influence of Stendhal on Giono.

<sup>331</sup> Vendredi saint, 1945.

<sup>332</sup> ORC IV 1139-40.

<sup>333</sup> 21 march 1945.

<sup>334</sup> 7 April 1945.

He tells Blanche on more than one occasion: "Tout est toujours très chartreuse"<sup>335</sup> and in choosing one of the provisional titles for *Le husard sur le toit*, Giono decided on *Le hussard piémontais* after Stendhal's *Lucien Leuwin*, "le chasseur vert".<sup>336</sup>

We know that Giono had read and re-read Stendhal and that he owned his complete works in numerous different editions.<sup>337</sup> He also possessed most of the major critical works on Stendhal and the proof that he had read them carefully and reflected on them is contained in the many marginal notes he made in the works during his reading.<sup>338</sup> Giono's ideas on the freedom of the writer to create out of his imagination rather than out of observed "reality" is apparent from his annotated reading of Stendhal. Although Giono never wrote anything on Stendhal, his erudition as regards Stendhal was acknowledged by the eminent stendhalian scholar, Victor del Litto, who dedicated his book, *La vie intellectuelle de Stendhal* to Giono.<sup>339</sup> And in fact, Giono's *Angelo* might be considered his "Hommage to Stendhal," just as *Pour saluer Melville* was conceived as a novelistic homage to the American writer.

Pauline's kinship with Stendhal's aristocratic heroines is evident in *Angelo*. Her superiority infuriates the hero, and when she humiliates him by pointing out the errors in his whistled rendition of the Brahms *Regrets*, Angelo conjures up the protective image of his mother playing the same piece on the piano, in a seemingly adolescent regression. His attempt to regard Pauline as a sister, albeit the *ami soeur* of *courtoisie*, and his fear of physical intimacy, are indicative of Angelo's youth and

---

<sup>335</sup> 24 August 1945.

<sup>336</sup> 16 march 1946.

<sup>337</sup> Laurichesse, "Création romanesque et réflexion sur le roman," 289.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid. 289-90.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid. 290.

inexperience with women (and perhaps the writer's as well), but they also suggest a sort of sexual confusion. His fraternal feelings for Pauline appear paradoxical because she is presented not as a sister/companion but as a seductress in her purple dress with its revealing neckline. As Pauline sits at the piano playing the correct version of the work, Angelo's confused feelings turn to violence. Looking at her alabaster skin against the purple of her dress, he evokes the image of the blood of a slaughtered goose dripping on the snow, from the Arthurian legend of Perceval.<sup>340</sup> Angelo's murderous rage is incomprehensible unless the reader understands that the fictional hero is actually expressing his author's jealous fury against Blanche and that this book mirrors the actual relationship between Giono and Blanche with all the misunderstandings inherent in that relationship.

As the letters make apparent, it is the couple's relational difficulties that are behind all the negative comments on women that Giono expressed in the seemingly enigmatic 1949 *Postface*. For one thing, Giono implies in the *Postface* that love does not last and that Pauline was unfaithful: "C'était l'époque où Pauline aimait, car il y a bien toujours un moment, une seconde, pour si courte qu'elle soit."<sup>341</sup> However it was Blanche who was unfaithful and not Pauline who, especially in *Le hussard sur le toit*, is a model of fidelity. In 1949, the year the *Postface* was written, Giono had learned of Blanche's affair with François Bravay whom she considered marrying. It was evidently Giono's chagrin over losing Blanche that led him to write in the *Postface*, all the while attributing the sentiments to Angelo: "C'était un optimiste qui devient écoeuré, puis enfin pessimiste." These comments adumbrate the Angelo of *Le*

---

<sup>340</sup> ORC IV 133. Giono used this same image in *Un roi sans divertissement*, but in a different context. However in both cases, the image is indicative of the underlying violence of the human psyche.

<sup>341</sup> ORC IV 1171.

*bonheur fou* but they are incomprehensible in 1949 when they are applied to the Angelo of *Le hussard*.

The peculiar passage in the *Postface* where the author has Angelo compare women to insects, also supports the idea that Giono's experience with Blanche influenced his thinking about Angelo and Pauline. The observation would have been totally uncharacteristic of the young, idealistic Angelo<sup>342</sup> but very much in the tradition of Giono in his angry letters. In the *Postface*, Giono has Angelo tell him in one of the imaginary dialogues between character and creator: "La femelle qui n'a pas d'ailes se traîne lourdement à terre en relevant son ventre de manière à mettre en évidence la lumière qui en emmène et qui est destinée à signaler aux mâles."<sup>343</sup> This is not very different from the metaphor used by a furious Giono in an earlier letter where he raged at Blanche for her worldliness. There he accused her of rejecting him and the noble role he had chosen for her and of choosing instead as her guides, women of easy virtue whom Giono describes as preying mantises: "quelques secs insectes broyants dans leurs mandibules de mante [sic] religieuses l'amertume de leur échec intérieur."<sup>344</sup>

What is most singular in Giono's treatment of Pauline in the *Postface to Angelo*, is his repeated disavowal of her character. While emphasizing his closeness to Angelo - they are brothers, he loves him "éperdument"<sup>345</sup> - he insists that he (and his alter ego, Angelo) do not understand Pauline at all. At first he emphasizes that "Il

---

<sup>342</sup> Giono says in the *Postface*: "C'était un chevalier qui survolait les hautes eaux... C'était un jeune homme. Il avait vingt ans." ORC IV 1171.

<sup>343</sup> ORC IV 1171.

<sup>344</sup> 10 January 1942.

<sup>345</sup> ORC IV 1171.

[Angelo] ne connaît pas encore Pauline"<sup>346</sup> apparently because the author wants to ensure that the reader understands that the young Pauline of this book is a totally different character from her elderly counterpart in *Mort d'un personnage*. However he goes on to emphasize that he had nothing to do with creating her as a fictional character: "Angelo ne sait pas qui est Pauline. Moi non plus. Je me suis refusé à la traiter comme un personnage de roman. Ce qu'elle est ne compte pas. Seul compte, ce qu'Angelo voit qu'elle est. Ce n'est pas moi qui l'invente, c'est lui."<sup>347</sup> The author seems to be inferring that whether in life or in fiction, women are incomprehensible and that what counts after all, is the male vision of woman. Actually, Giono is contradicting himself here because he has already acknowledged that "Pauline de Théus avec son visage en fer de lance, elle était là" just like Angelo, before the author / creator became aware of them.<sup>348</sup>

The last repudiation of Pauline in the *Postface* is the most bitter of all and as Pierre Citron remarked in his biography of Giono,<sup>349</sup> it has nothing at all to do with the fictional Pauline, who was an exemplary model of courtly love. Giono speaks in his own person this time insisting: "Je ne la connais pas, malgré une longue pratique où je l'ai vue autour de moi, en train de faire bouilloner ses longues robes."<sup>350</sup> He goes on to destroy the character of Pauline continuing in a tone of cold fury: "C'est une bourgeoise. Il n'est pas de moment où elle ne se garde. Pour qui ou pour quoi? On se le demande. Quand on le sait on s'étonne: elle se garde pour la médiocrité. La

---

<sup>346</sup> ORC IV 1175.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> ORC IV 1165.

<sup>349</sup> Citron, *Giono*, 434.

<sup>350</sup> ORC IV 1181.

médiocrité la rassure, la réchauffe, l'endort. C'est une chatte qui choisit pour dormir les genoux des paralytiques."<sup>351</sup>

This woman is obviously not Pauline but Blanche whose affair with François Bravay Giono had discovered this very year. Ironically, the triple denunciation is reminiscent of Peter's triple denunciation of Christ before the crucifixion, a betrayal that Giono could not have intended. Nevertheless, the author's denial is enough to suggest a repudiation of his idealized love for Blanche who was the inspiration for Pauline, and thus of Pauline herself and of the idealized love that her character represents. It signifies for Giono's readers, his disillusionment with love even though it was too late to re-write the novel. This may be why, contrary to Giono's assertions, *Le hussard sur le toit* ends with the parting of the lovers. The author could not continue to affirm an ideal of love in which he no longer believed.

There is another point worth mentioning here: while Giono denounces Pauline as a bourgeoisie in his *Postface*, his letters to Blanche during this period are remarkable for their restraint. The *Postface* was written in October, 1949 and in September Giono wrote to Blanche:

"Ma pauvre chérie, je traverse une période de découragement noir. Je la prévoyais. Elle est là. J'ai peur de ne pas pouvoir en sortir. Je n'ai plus de confiance en rien et d'espoir en rien. Bravay a fait beaucoup de mal dans ta chambre à Cannes. Il n'a fallu que quelques minutes à ce lourdaud pour changer l'or en plomb. Il me semble que rien ne vaut plus la peine. Depuis, je me trouve être un pauvre niais avec mes idées d'amour exceptionnel, mon goût du merveilleux qui vaut moins que quelques assiettes de gâteaux et une présence quotidienne, mon sens moral qui me fait donner de l'importance à ce que pour un peu de poudre aux yeux, on jette par-dessus les moulins, à ma

---

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.



fidélité [...] Je suis atterré par la séduction que la médiocrité exerce sur toi. J'ai la sensation épouvantable de t'avoir inventée jusqu'ici, de n'avoir plus rien à la place où je t'avais mise. [...] Je me dis aussi qu'il y a à peine un mois que j'ai perdu brusquement toutes mes illusions en trouvant la voiture de Bravay à ta porte et toi enfermée avec lui dans ta chambre..."<sup>352</sup>

This letter leaves no doubt that the passages Giono imputes to the character of Pauline in the *Postface*, were really provoked by the upheaval caused by his rupture with Blanche. However, throughout the period, Giono continued to send Blanche money and to try to see the situation in a way that would allow him to continue the relationship. It is noteworthy that Giono was writing *Les âmes fortes* at this time, a book in which he explores the idea of generosity pushed to its limits. The heroine of the book is the noble, generous character of Madame Numance, surrounded by a world of villains. Giono describes her as "L'ange blanc [...] en qui j'ai accumulé tout ce que j'ai pu inventer de générosité et de noblesse."<sup>353</sup> This was a bitter period of soul-searching for Giono in which he tried to come to terms with his anger and possessiveness and in which his disillusionment was so profound that he felt that the only possible release might be in death.

It is evident that Blanche inspired the emblematic phrases that appear in Giono's first descriptions of Pauline in his preparatory notes: "le petit visage en fer de lance" and "le coeur en arme."<sup>354</sup> The letters suggest that Giono is imputing Blanche's cold, determined personality to Pauline: "Vous avez dans votre caractère un côté froid calculateur, sceptique...."<sup>355</sup> In one of his letters Giono imagines her as an almost

---

<sup>352</sup> 1 September 1949.

<sup>353</sup> Début avril 1949.

<sup>354</sup> ORC IV 1200.

<sup>355</sup> 10 January 1942.

savage superwoman: "...et toi, montée sur ton léopard tu me bondirais dessus avec tes sabres et tes dents éclatantes."<sup>356</sup> It is perhaps this image that inspired Giono to create the character of Pauline as a superior horsewoman, the equal of Angelo. Giono also gave Pauline Blanche's green eyes. As he was creating Pauline, he wrote to Blanche: "J'ai vu tout à l'heure tes yeux verts dans un bourgeon de grande plantane"<sup>357</sup> and shortly afterwards he referred to her eyes as "mes beaux yeux d'herbes."<sup>358</sup> However in the novel the author emphasizes the coldness of Pauline's "grands yeux verts" so cold that like her marble skin, they inspire thoughts of violence. Speaking through his character, Angelo, Giono says in a letter: "Mais cette peau si blanche et ces cheveux si noirs rendent l'histoire très facile. Sans compter que ma mère aurait su tisonner des grands yeux verts si glacés."<sup>359</sup>

Looking at *Angelo* as a novel of chivalry and at Pauline as the *ami soeur* of the myth, offers a possible interpretation of this enigmatic sentence. Giono, like Angelo in the novel, was searching for a sister figure, one who would be so similar in character to him as to be the predestined ideal lover of the myth. This is the way he saw Blanche but the real woman, like Pauline in *Angelo*, did not fit the image. Understood in this light, one can infer that in the letter, Giono was chastising Blanche/Pauline for not living up to the ideal and suggesting that if Pauline were Angelo's sister, their mother would have known how to put her in her place. However these allusions to the mother in the novel, and the confusing of life with fiction, go

---

<sup>356</sup> 25 September 1943.

<sup>357</sup> 24 March 1945.

<sup>358</sup> Vendredi saint 45.

<sup>359</sup> 27 July 1945.

beyond the tradition of *amour courtois* and amount to a sort of incestuous subtext as we will see further on.

While *Angelo* owed a great debt to Stendhal, *Le hussard sur le toit*, as we have noted, is pure Giono. It is a novel of chivalry as Giono understood it, and Pauline and Angelo represent the author's ideal of *amour courtois*. Pauline is no longer the cold, superior, stendhalian heroine and Angelo is no longer the immature hero of the first book. However, while the hero of the *Hussard* is recognizable as the Angelo of the earlier novel, Pauline has been utterly transformed into the ideal lady of chivalry. The Pauline of *Le hussard* is Angelo's loyal, courageous friend and partner, and she appears without a trace of the seductive character of the earlier Pauline.

With her "visage en fer de lance" and her "coeur en arme," Pauline is Angelo's double, an androgynous figure who partakes of the masculine and the feminine. It is as though Giono has finally succeeded in creating a woman worthy of his favorite character by re-creating her in his image. Paradoxically however, it is Blanche, rather than the dark-haired Pauline whose golden hair evokes for Giono the beloved *cavalier épi d'or*. In a letter written just before the one in which Giono rebukes Blanche for flying off to Paris, he tells her: "Sois paisible. Fais-toi de belles tresses *en épi d'or* [emphasis mine] autour de la tête, sois belle comme tu le seras toujours. N'oublie pas d'être bonne."<sup>360</sup> It is as though by calling to mind Blanche's resemblance to Angelo, Giono is seeking to imbue her with his virtues.

Moreover, as the language of the letters attest, Blanche herself is in some ways, the androgynous *cher fils* whom some critics have seen in Angelo.<sup>361</sup> In a

---

<sup>360</sup> 30 March 1946.

<sup>361</sup> It is worth noting that Stendhal had a similar relationship with his character, Lucien Leuwen, whom he treated as a son. Jean Prévost suggests that the fictional father/son relationship serves the same purpose as the actual relationship in allowing the father to see in the son a fulfillment of his own life. "Lucien Leuwen" trans. Ann

subconscious way this may have been behind Giono's curious refusal to have a child by Blanche. Pierre Citron remarks for example that Giono wrote to Maximilien Vox in June 1944 expressing his wish that he might have a son like his friend's and later recounting a dream in which he actually had a son of his own: "étonnant de beauté, [...] doré de soleil, gracile et d'un visage de dieu réussi." Citron goes on to say that he began work on *Angelo* exactly nine months later.<sup>362</sup> This represents a sort of gestation period like that to which the author alludes in the *Postface*, during which time his character of Angelo was developing in his psyche. It is interesting on this point that Giono was fifty years old at this time, the age at which both his father and grandfather had a son.<sup>363</sup> Giono could have had a child with Blanche, perhaps the son he always wanted, and yet, curiously, he chose to engender a book with her instead.

Angelo, the knight of chivalry, rescues the fair Pauline whom he finds stranded alone in the midst of a cholera epidemic. He is selfless in his protection of Pauline and honorable in returning her to her husband as soon as he is able to do so. Pauline too is faithful to her husband although she falls in love with Angelo, a love she honors to the very end of her life. The protagonists undertake a journey beset with obstacles (as though the obstacle of Pauline's marriage were not enough), and they prove their worthiness with each obstacle they surmount. Their wanderings echo those of Tristan and Isolde in the forest. In the midst of the plague, they discover the estate of an unknown nobleman, which functions as a sort of Arthurian otherworld where the two chaste lovers enact a scene reminiscent of the myth. Pauline and

---

Bayless, *Stendhal: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Twentieth Century Views (Prentice Hall: Englewood, New Jersey, 1962) 50.

<sup>362</sup> Citron, *Giono* 392.

<sup>363</sup> Vendredi saint 45.

Angelo, seated in chairs placed in opposite corners of the room, recount their lives to one another, thus substituting a spiritual experience for a carnal one. The writer emphasizes their chastity: "les corps sont très loins," like the mythic lovers with the sword between them.<sup>364</sup> The wells are poisoned because of the cholera epidemic and thirst becomes the metaphor for desire. The wine they find in the home of the nobleman looses their tongues and like the magic philter in the myth, inspires them toward a new closeness symbolized by the sharing of their life stories. Like Giono and Blanche, whose love was expressed in letters, the love of the two fictional heroes, Angelo and Pauline, is embodied in the words of their stories.

According to the author, there is no cholera in this otherworld, no passion to tempt the lovers to transgress the purity of their sentiments for one another. In the *Postface*, Giono insists that for his heroes, passionate desire does not exist. Their only desire is the need to keep each other alive and to preserve each other's liberty: "Il y a cette passion pour la liberté, qui, tant qu'elle existe détruit toutes les autres. [...] Si l'on excepte le désir qu'ils ont, de vivre et de se faire vivre l'un l'autre, ils n'ont pas de désir."<sup>365</sup> To resolve this contradiction between passion and the restraint demanded of *amour courtois*, Giono makes his protagonists creatures of flight, insisting that the only remedy against cholera, whether as a metaphor for fatal passion or for the seductive mediocrity of the world, is flight: "Le seul remède sûr contre le choléra: contre la médiocrité [...] contre [la bourgeoisie, la vulgarité, la prudence]<sup>366</sup> la vie bourgeoise. Que tout cela est d'accord avec la mélancolie: fuite, fuite incessante, et solitude."<sup>367</sup>

---

<sup>364</sup> ORC IV 1175.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Brackets placed in the text by Giono.

<sup>367</sup> ORC IV, 1179.

The mysterious nature of passion and its incestuous aspect is especially evident in *Mort d'un personnage* (written in 1946 and published in 1949). The book was inspired by Giono's mother as the author argues in the second preface to *Angelo* (1969). Pauline, the name of the heroine, was Giono's mother's name and she is presented in this second novel as an old woman about to die. Her death at the end of the book is based on that of Giono's mother, which took place during the writing of the book. Angelo has disappeared but we learn that Pauline has had a son, Angelo II, and that there is also a grandson, Angelo III. The grandson attends Pauline until the end of her life and cares for her in the same generous, tender way as Angelo I had done when the young Pauline had cholera (in the third book of the cycle.) In fact there is the same underlying eroticism in Giono's descriptions of Angelo III bathing the elderly Pauline as in the scene in which Angelo I massages the young heroine to cure her of cholera. The parallel is all the stronger in that the author has the dying Pauline use the same phrase when her grandson bathes her as the young Pauline uses later with Angelo I in *Le hussard sur le toit*, when he massages her nude body during her illness: "Laissez-moi. J'aime mieux mourir."<sup>368</sup> In fact, it is the elderly Pauline who first utters the phrase and thus sets the stage for the appearance of her younger avatar.

The novel is both a memorial to Giono's mother in its portrayal of filial love and a tribute to the faithfulness that is emblematic both of filial love and of *amour courtois*. However, to see the love of mother and son as being not only equal to, but the same as romantic love, taints both forms of love with an incestuous quality. That Giono saw his mother as an erotic figure and Blanche and his novelistic heroines as virgin madonnas, emphasizes the peculiar nature of gionian eroticism. Strangely

---

<sup>368</sup> ORC IV, 217 and 628.

enough, Pauline is not presented as being particularly maternal: her major quality in the book is her absolute fidelity to her love for Angelo I. She is presented as a heroine of chivalry, an extraordinary figure, "l'absence d'être et l'emplacement de rapt," who represents the absolute faithfulness of the myth.<sup>369</sup> In this sense, the Pauline of the second book represents not so much a devoted mother-figure but the persona of the writer himself, who chose to absent himself from the world and to build an epistolary monument to Blanche's absence. The elderly Pauline mirrors the writer in his feminine aspect, faithfully waiting, like the Portuguese nun, for a love that was irretrievably lost. This is the closest that Giono ever came to an understanding of the feminine - not as the necessary other of a heterosexual relationship but rather as an integral part of his own nature.

In an effort to understand Giono's ideas on sexuality, it is worth looking at Jean-François Clément's interpretation of the Tristan myth as a myth of incest and family disequilibrium.<sup>370</sup> Clément hypothesizes that because Tristan was an orphan, he suffered from an identity crisis. The problem was caused by the lack of a mother image and the absence of King Marc, his uncle and father figure, who was often away at war. Tristan develops a passion for swordsmanship purportedly in order to impress his peers and to attract the attention of his uncle. However the passion is interchangeable, according to Clément, and merely serves as a metaphor for his quest for fulfillment. The magic filter is merely a means of transferring his passion to another object, Iseut. She is the object of passion par excellence because she is his uncle's fiancée and therefore represents the sacred taboo. The fatal couple, according

---

<sup>369</sup> Ibid. 160.

<sup>370</sup> "Pourquoi Tristan et Iseut n'est pas un roman d'amour" *Analyses et réflexions sur Tristan et Iseut (adaptation de Joseph Bédier): la passion amoureuse*. Ellipses (Paris: Edition Marketing, 1991.) 59-65.

to Clément's interpretation of the myth, are Tristan and King Marc and not Tristan and Isolde as Rougemont and most other critics (not to mention most members of the reading public) have believed. Tristan's yearning after the absent father, which is displaced in his passion for Isolde, reflects the desire for union with the Father God inherent in the religious experience. Clément insists that looking at the Tristan legend as an oedipal "roman familial" which goes back to an indefinite time and therefore belongs to all times, does not denigrate the myth but rather reveals its worth.

One might ask how this interpretation of the myth applies to Giono who was not an orphan but rather the only son of loving parents. And yet, there are indications in Giono's experience that suggest that his quest too was a search for the absent father. His father was fifty years old when the writer was born and died when his son was nineteen, just after his return from his shattering experience in World War I. Giono himself was fifty when he first spoke of his longing for a son and when he created Angelo whom some critics have seen as the fictional incarnation of the son he never had. As he relates in his autobiographical novel, *Jean le bleu*, he was his father's son and it was his father who inspired in him the desire to become a storyteller. His mother was devoted to him but she was a practical woman who never really understood her son's vocation. One can imagine Giono's disappointment at never having had the satisfaction of sharing his creative life and his successes with the father who had played such a formative role in his early life, especially since in his all female family, no one was ever able to fill his absent father's place.

In this sense, one could look at Giono's passion for Blanche as a stage in his search for the absent father figure. She is simply a substitute object, to borrow from Clément's construct, whose idealization occurs in order to cover the "corps manquant" of the father and to distract from his absence. According to Clément, without anguish there is no passion and therefore, passion presupposes a disequilibrium. The manifestations of passion are simply "symptômes trompeurs" of the lover's anguish.



Crystallization is a process of hiding the faults of the beloved by covering them with virtues he/she does not have. Clément insists that love is a desire for the forbidden and thus the beloved is ugly. Crystallization hides the ugliness of this object of forbidden desire and makes it seem beautiful. The awakening is bound to be painful because the beloved is revealed not simply as ordinary but as odious. This is apparent in Giono's inability to see Blanche as a normal woman and instead to portray her as either a virgin or a demon.

Moreover, the intermingling of the erotic with the maternal in the figure of Pauline, and the imputing of the mother's qualities to the seductive young heroine based on Blanche, leads to the premise that Giono's passion was incestuous and that the real object of that passion was his mother.<sup>371</sup> Giono insists in the second preface to *Angelo*, that the heroine of *Mort d'un personnage*, the aged mother figure, is the first avatar of Pauline and is the real basis for her character. That he actually drafted *Angelo* and the Blanche-inspired younger heroine first does not lessen the import of his insistence that his heroine is really his mother.

Circumstances ordained that Giono would not finish the saga of Pauline and Angelo until 1951 when he had suffered the disillusionment of seeing his real life romance with Blanche destroyed. Although he managed to retain the lyrical, stendhalian tone that makes *Le hussard sur le toit* a novel of chivalry, he no longer believed in the chivalric ideal of *amour courtois* that had inspired the book: "Je suis dans les dernières pages *du Hussard* et il faut y soulever un tel lyrisme que j'y

---

<sup>371</sup> None of this is meant to imply however, that Giono had an immoral relationship with his mother. The theme of incest is a literary one that dates back at least to the myth of Oedipus, whose purpose is to allow the author to explore the male/female relationship.

consacre tout mon temps."<sup>372</sup> The letter ends with a meditation on the intrinsic relationship of love and death and death's essentially luminous nature:

"Le livre, je te l'ai dit, sera *très beau* [underlined by Giono] plein de retentissements extraordinaires. La mort y marche en cortège triomphal et on la voit non pas décharnée et hideuse mais, radieuse et belle, comme elle est, puisque elle est en réalité amour et vie."<sup>373</sup>

Death is depicted as luminous because it is not seen the end of life but rather as a necessary stage on the path toward re-birth. Giono had always sought dissolution in the sense of release from the ego self. His conception of ideal love called for a union so intense as to be quasi -mystical and to lead to the formation of a new hermaphroditic entity, the Pauline / Angelo of his book or the androgynous perfection of a union with the idealized Blanche. For Giono, the release from the conflicting demands of the ego stimulated creative energy and therefore led to the production of works of art. Art too is a means of displacement if not dissolution of the ego self in the creation of fictional characters like Angelo.

And yet, the ideal of romantic love is a fatal myth from which the lover must finally escape. In this sense, cholera is a metaphor for the fatality of passion. The only way to avoid contagion is to keep fleeing from the epidemic. The repose that the lover seeks from his constant flight leads him to long for the solace of death. In a much earlier letter that Giono had devoted to a meditation on death, he expresses the idea of death as luminous because it represents both repose and consolation: "Cette lumière que je décris est en même temps la lumière de la mort. La consolation suprême, cette ardeur délicieuse que la mort apporte. Et son calme."<sup>374</sup>

---

<sup>372</sup> 17 April 1951.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> 7 May 1940.

Giono expressed the same thoughts at the end of the *Postface to Angelo* when he spoke of the release of death:

"Douceur infinie de songer à ne plus être pendant que je lutte avec ce qui est. C'est par les sens que j'aime les raisons de la mort. À force de succomber sans cesse sous la douleur et sous le plaisir, je désire qu'il me soit enfin promis avec certitude un état au-delà du plaisir et de la douleur. [...]  
...immanquablement le jour vient où j'ai fini d'être. C'est preuve de ma [...] noblesse et de la justice qui le reconnaît. [...] Dormir enfin, sans rêves à interpréter, au réveil amer; sans inquiétude, sans ennui, [...] sans inconstance... [...] Je n'ai pas peur de vivre, au contraire, je vis mieux que j'aime le repos qui suivra." <sup>375</sup>

Death is portrayed here as the final solace, the repose at the end of life, the reward, the peace and the rest that Giono sought and but had not yet found.<sup>376</sup> At this point he believed that life is ennobled, transfigured and justified only in death. There is no inconstancy or fear after death because death brings the perfect peace of dissolution. In his darkest moments, as in 1950 when he declared "le monde est aux médiocres,"<sup>377</sup> Giono saw death as the only desirable end for the knight of chivalry, seeking purity and ideal love in a sordid and inconstant world.

However at this time Giono had not yet understood the nature of passion nor the meaning of the symbolic death that leads to release. Clément suggests that passion if suffered to the bitter end, can serve as a way to wisdom. The death instinct that

---

<sup>375</sup> ORC IV 1182.

<sup>376</sup> See ORC IV 1181-82, where Giono asserts that art has only an ephemeral power to distract.

<sup>377</sup> 23 January 1950.

Giono expresses in his letters, and which Clément insists is the root of all passion, is a sign of his realization, perhaps subconscious, that his passion for Blanche is the violation of a taboo, against adultery or even against incest. Clément suggests that the impulse to murder, that is, to destroy substitute objects in passionate crimes, is a deflection of the death instinct. Giono carries out this instinct to murder again and again in his books:<sup>378</sup> Langlois' murder of the serial killer and his subsequent spectacular suicide in *Un roi sans divertissement* (1946); the murder of the brother of the protagonist in *Deux cavaliers de l'orage* (1965); the murder of the protagonist's husband in *Ennemonde* (1968); Angelo's murder of his brother, Giuseppe, in *Le bonheur fou* (1957); and finally the murder of the object of passion herself, "le petit Verdet" a later avatar of Pauline, in the *Récits de la demi-brigade* (1972). This supports Clément's theory that murder is a displacement of the death instinct and offers an explanation as to why Giono was never tempted by suicide.

The most important aspect of Clément's theory is that it is possible to transcend passion, which can be viewed as an adolescent stage, leading to a more mature experience of love. Giono was to live for another twenty years of intense artistic activity after his rupture with Blanche. During this time he explored in his fiction the virtue of generosity and its ability to loose the possessive bonds of passion. From 1950 onward he looked to art itself to inspire his creative life: "C'est beau un métier. De plus en plus je lui demande de me ravir, de m'emporter comme un beau cavalier noir, un roi des aulnes."<sup>379</sup> His writing allowed him to achieve the

---

<sup>378</sup> Even Giono's wife, Elise, commented on the amount of violence in Giono's post-war novels and surprised her husband by her reaction to the murders in his books. Her daughter, Sylvie, quotes her mother as having exclaimed: "Jean, je ne te reconnais pas parce que tu n'arrêtes pas de tuer les gens." According to Sylvie, Giono was furious at his wife's outburst. See "Lectures familiales: Entretiens avec Sylvie Durbet-Giono par Jacques Mény," *Giono dans sa culture*, Actes de colloques international de Perpignan et Montpellier, Sous la direction de Jean-François Durand et Jean-Yves Laurichesse (27, 28, 29 mars 2001).

<sup>379</sup> 23 January 1950

breakthrough to "un état au delà du plaisir et de la douleur," the state that the anguished Giono had sought in his Postface to *Angelo*, and that he found not in death but in the act of artistic creation. As the following chapter will show, Giono's work proved to be the means toward the liberation of the ego self and to the enjoyment of a measure of the freedom that he so valued.

## Chapter V: The metamorphosis of the myth: *Le moulin de Pologne* and *L'iris de Suse*

There have been few critical studies devoted to *Le moulin de Pologne*, very likely because the book presents so many difficulties to the reader. On one level it works because of its vivid, theatrical presentation of the workings of fate. For the critic, however, there is much that is enigmatic especially in the delineation of the female characters and even in the author's concept of destiny. Giono himself realized that the books of this period were going to present difficulties for future critics: "Problème pour les futures exégètes de l'oeuvre (s'il s'en présente) sur la *période noire* [underlined by Giono]. Comme il en est le cas pour la période noire de Shakespeare qui s'explique par ses sonnets."<sup>380</sup> Giono might have added that in order to understand *his* "période noire" one would have to have recourse to the letters. Certainly in the case of *Le moulin de Pologne*, it is the letters that reveal the circumstances underlying the creation of the novel and even more importantly, Giono's thoughts and reflections during its composition. As for the future critics of his work, Giono envisions them as being motivated more by scholarly arrogance than by a real desire to understand and appreciate his creative endeavors: "Heureux de pouvoir magnifiquement tenir le coup à tout ce travail de création sur lequel on dit<sup>381</sup> tant de bêtise et qui fait tant de fats orgueilleux." His remarks show that by this time he realized that although he had

---

<sup>380</sup> 9 November 1950.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

remained silent since the war on every subject but literature, he would be misunderstood even there, in his own realm.

When Giono began the novel in December of 1949 he was struggling to emerge from a profound spiritual crisis. The letters of 1949 chronicle Giono's disillusionment after learning of Blanche's affair with François Bravay, a French pied-noir from Algeria, living in Marseilles with his wife and family. This time it was not Giono's imagination that was causing his anguish<sup>382</sup> and he was forced to accept that the chivalric ideal he had seen reflected in Blanche, was only a fiction: "J'ai la sensation épouvantable de t'avoir inventée jusqu'ici, de n'avoir plus rien à la place où je t'avais mise."<sup>383</sup> It is this inner void brought about by the death of love that Giono strives to come to terms with during this dark period. It is important to note that he underwent a psychological evolution during the years of his liaison with Blanche, as the letters reveal.<sup>384</sup> While in the earlier letters he had expressed his jealousy in outbursts of murderous rage, these letters express Giono's efforts to understand Blanche and himself. He sought solace and wisdom both through his writing and through his reading of the classics, and his reflections on his reading informed and inspired his later novels.

The revelation that Giono's grief and disillusionment of this period came more from the failure of his relationship with Blanche than from the futility of his political

---

<sup>382</sup> See letter of June 1949 where Giono refers to Blanche's admission regarding her relationship with Bravay and the letter of 1 September 1949 where he speaks of having surprised Bravay in Blanche's room in Cannes.

<sup>383</sup> 1 September 1949.

<sup>384</sup> See letter of December, 1949, where even after learning about Blanche's infidelity, Giono could write: "Et oui, Blanchet, il y a ici un ami fidèle, un compagnon sûr, un homme qui *travaille* [underlined in the text] et pour toi. [...] Sache aussi que je pardonne *toujours* [underlined in the text]."

efforts during the 1930's and his two imprisonments during the war years, is significant for an understanding of his work. Without the letters to Blanche and the revelation of her infidelity, the reader might well ask what was inspiring Giono's malefic vision of the world in 1949. After all, this was a very fertile creative period for Giono who had recently reclaimed his place on the French literary scene and was once again publishing his novels through the prestigious Gallimard publishing house. Especially given the fact that he knew he was at the height of his creative and of his economic powers:

"La seule chose qui compte pour assurer le "*ravitaillement d'or*" [underlined by Giono] c'est ma tête, qui fournit tout et est de plus en plus claire lucide [underlined by Giono] et riche. Je vois clair en tout. Il me faut simplement travailler, essayer de donner des livres incontestables, s'atteler obstinément à cette tâche de chaque seconde, écrire, écrire, s'abstraire du monde pour l'exprimer."<sup>385</sup>

It is clear from the letters that it was not political disillusionment that was affecting Giono's creative life during this period, as was previously thought, but his struggles with Blanche and the final realization that he had to give up the central myth of his life and work, that of *amour courtois*. His chagrin had a marked effect on his writing as he confided to her toward the end of 1949: "J'ai dû abandonner *Trois et le vent* dont la création a subit trop d'attaques."<sup>386</sup> And in fact he claims at the end of 1950, although there is no supporting evidence in Pierre Citron's biography, that Gallimard had reduced his monthly advances at this time because his output was not

---

<sup>385</sup> 9 November 1949. At this time Giono was sending money not only to Blanche but to her sister and to her friend Anna Robin. This letter expresses both his faith in his ability and his exasperation at being taken advantage of financially.

<sup>386</sup> December 1949. This book was later used in part in the novel that became *Les grands chemins*. See ORC III, 1260-1265.



what he had promised.<sup>387</sup> The depth of Giono's investment in the relationship is evident from the fact that an ephemeral moment of reconciliation with Blanche had the power to inspire him to begin *Le moulin de Pologne*. Although he has had to put aside his previous novel, Giono launches the new one, as is his habit, in a state of creative enthusiasm:

" Mais je me suis jeté dans un autre roman qui alors, celui -là vient magnifiquement, *est riche* [underlined by Giono] et *divers* [underlined by Giono] et me comble [sic]. Il est intitulé *Sans titre* et porte en épigraphe la phrase: 'Maintenant, Seigneur, laisse [sic] aller ton esclave en paix.'<sup>388</sup> Ce drôle de titre lui-même donnera une dramatique nouvelle et très âpre [sic] quand on aura fermé le livre. (il y a déjà plus d'un chapitre d'écrit.)"

The book was to go through a succession of titles - *Sans aucun titre de gloire* (and variations including the first title, *Sans titre*) *La Mort Coste*, inspired by *La mort artus*<sup>389</sup> and *L'iris de Suse* - before settling on *Le moulin de Pologne*, a title that seems to have very little to do with the novel that bears its name. In fact, Giono did not change the title of the book from *L'iris de Suse*, its original title, to *Le moulin de Pologne* until just before submitting the book to the editor for publication. Giono explains the title by saying that it was the name of a deserted farm and mill near the commune of Montlaux in the Basses-Alpes that had appealed to his imagination when he noticed it from a train window during a trip he made during World War II.<sup>390</sup> As

---

<sup>387</sup> 21 December 1950.

<sup>388</sup> This is a reference to the New Testament, Luke 2: 29.

<sup>389</sup> ORC V 1215.1

<sup>390</sup> *Préface* de l'édition du Club du meilleur livre, 1958.

he learned shortly afterward from his friend Lucien Jacques who lived in the region, the name does not refer to the country in Central Europe but rather to the name of the proprietor, a woman named la Pauloune or Paulougne whose husband, Paul, had once owned the farm.<sup>391</sup> The name was finally deformed into Pologne but it is its origin as a woman's name that reveals its import for Giono. Pauloune or Paulougne is close enough to Pauline to have appealed to Giono's love for names and their mysterious associations. If he was in fact thinking of the relationship between Pauloune and Pauline, the title of the book suggests that there is an association between the Angelo cycle, especially *Le hussard sur le toit*, and the 1949 novel. This is especially likely given that Giono was working on *Le hussard* during the period in which he was writing *Le moulin de Pologne*. Viewed in that light, and in light of Giono's personal experience as delineated in the letters to Blanche during the period, *Le moulin de Pologne* becomes a novel of the destruction of the ideal of *amour courtois*, which *Le hussard sur le toit* (and *Pour saluer Melville*) had so carefully constructed.

The novel recounts the story of the Coste family and the strange fatality that haunted them, causing all of them to die early and violent deaths. The hero of *Le moulin* is Léonce, the last of the lineage and his parents, the mysterious M. Joseph who restores the country estate from which the book takes its title, and his equally enigmatic wife, Julie. Destiny, in its omnipresence and almost anthropomorphic nature, plays a role not unlike that of the cholera in the *Hussard*, creating yet another link between the two novels. However the cholera epidemic spares the two heroes in *Le hussard*, seemingly because they are stendhalian *êtres exceptionnels*, whereas the Coste family, also exceptional in their way, is the designated victim of a fate they are powerless to oppose. The virtues of purity, fidelity and courage have lost their power

---

<sup>391</sup> See ORC V 1224-25.

to protect their exponents and in the bourgeois, hobbesian world of *Le moulin*, chivalry has become useless.<sup>392</sup>

This is the first novel to be entirely set in Manosque, as Pierre Citron points out,<sup>393</sup> although Giono himself never actually admits this. The reader, however, is less likely to notice the resemblance of the setting to Manosque than to a mythological Hell replete with nocturnal scenes illumined by lighted torches and gardens of dark flowers. The setting is the antithesis of the gionian otherworlds, the *forêt de Broceliande* of chivalry or the *jardins d'Armide* and the *derrière l'air*, so often evoked in the letters. It is significant that in a letter written shortly before he began the novel, Giono speaks about his personal vision of hell, a vision that he asserts evolved out of his reading of Greek tragedy. The letter also suggests that Giono saw parallels between Manosque and his vision of hell as an *enfer grec*:

"Je me souviens ce matin d'une image que j'avais trouvé dans ma jeunesse pour symboliser l'Enfer. C'était l'époque où Homère et Eschyle emplissaient toujours mes poches et ma tête. J'allais dès que j'avais un moment de libre me promener dans ces vergers d'oliviers qui devinrent plus tard mes jardins d'Armide. Tu les connais, ils sont gris luisants et palpitants comme des poissons pris dans le filet. Manosque était alors une ville blanche comme un tas d'ossements. Il s'agissait évidemment pour moi de cet enfer grec à quoi étaient promises les âmes tumultueuses et naïves d'avant le Christ et non pas de cet enfer chrétien plein de massacres et d'horreur. J'avais dans l'idée des paysages très proches des paysages dans lesquels je vivais mais, a qui l'habitation des morts

---

<sup>392</sup> It is important to take into account that Giono was reading Hobbes and also Machiavelli during the time that he was writing *Le moulin de Pologne*, in an attempt to come to terms with the realities of the post war world.

<sup>393</sup> Citron, *Giono*, 438-439.

éternels donnaient une qualité nouvelle. Et j'avais trouvé l'image suivante: le silence aux dents serrées marche le long des chemins."<sup>394</sup>

Giono's image of death is a hermetic one, which suggests that for him, death implies absence and silence: the absence of sound and by extension of communication implied by the "silence aux dents serrées." In fact, silence is stalking the white hills around Manosque, the village itself becoming an image of death: "la ville blanche comme un tas d'ossements." However this is the vision of death that formed the decor of *Le hussard sur le toit*, that of a sky whitened by the searing heat of a provençal summer and a countryside littered with the bones of plague victims. It is evident that during the autumn when Giono was planning *Le moulin de Pologne*, he was occupied with the images of death and devastation that inspired *Le hussard*. It is a tribute to his inventiveness that when he finally began work on *Le Moulin* just two months later, he created a very different hell, more baroque and Christian where the souls of the mediocre play out their drama in a nightmare world under the flare of torches.

It is typical of Giono that the more personal the material of his novel, the more ardently he insists that his work is entirely fictitious. Just as he did when he was writing *Pour saluer Melville*, Giono maintained that *Le moulin de Pologne* had nothing to do with his real life: "Cette histoire de famille est totalement inventée. Je déteste de travailler sur du vrai."<sup>395</sup> And yet in this case, even Pierre Citron noted the similarities between the characters in the novel and certain members of Giono's own family.<sup>396</sup> According to Citron, M. Joseph has many traits in common with Giono's father, Jean-Antoine, including the fact that both were strangers in Manosque and that

---

<sup>394</sup> 12 September 1949.

<sup>395</sup> Citron, *Giono*, 440.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.* 438-439.

both were generous, protective and had a rare ability to heal the sick. The author even gave M. Joseph the name Coste, which he believed was an Italian name like that of his father.

The character of Léonce, the adored only son of Julie and M. Joseph, is obviously based on that of Giono himself: he lives in his dreams, prefers solitude, suffers from timidity which comes from his excessive pride, struggles with a violent temper,<sup>397</sup> invents his own world and has great trouble finding a place in the real world.<sup>398</sup> Like Giono, who was often considered a loner who didn't need other people, Léonce was a solitary who, as the author tells us: "pouvait vivre indéfiniment seul, mais il fallait être dépourvu de la plus modeste des intelligences pour méconnaître son extraordinaire appétit d'amour que son mépris apparent dissimulait par timidité."<sup>399</sup> However in Giono's own case, his emotional dependency was apparently very difficult to detect, so difficult that even his own wife was unaware of it. It is only in his letters to Blanche that Giono explains the nature of his needs. As he reiterated countless times, he didn't need people in general, but far from being self-sufficient, he was entirely dependant on Blanche's love not only for creative inspiration, but for the courage to go on living.

Léonce like Angelo was conceived by its author as a sort of knight of chivalry whose name and fate resembles that of Lancelot.<sup>400</sup> Like Lancelot who failed to win the Grail because of his love for Guinevere, Léonce comes to ruin because he gives in

---

<sup>397</sup> ORC V 1216.

<sup>398</sup> *Le moulin de Pologne*, ORC V 736-37.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.* 737.

<sup>400</sup> See ORC V 1223 for a discussion of the influence of the legend of Lancelot on that of Léonce.

to his passion. Léonce is a dark knight whom his mother calls her *beau ténébreux*<sup>401</sup> and who lives in the shadow of a destiny he cannot escape. The fate that pursues him is hereditary, the legacy of a romantic, overly generous mother and of a father, “l'irrésistible don Juan des ténèbres,”<sup>402</sup> whose flaw like that of his son, is his passion for life. It is difficult, however, to see M. Joseph as a don Juan figure, given that he is an avatar of the author's father and that Giono describes him as a *cavalier*. In a letter to Blanche, Giono clarifies the passage and makes reference to the enormous difficulties he encountered in writing it:

"Mon bel amour, je suis sorti victorieux de mes difficultés, lutte de six jours et six nuits.<sup>403</sup> Fais [sic] un très beau passage "intérieur" de la jalousie de Mr. Joseph. Jalousie non pas d'un homme mais de *la mort* [underlined by Giono] qui doit lui prendre Julie (destin des Costes). Jalousie abominable de ce don Juan des ténèbres avec lequel Julie s'est "compromise" au su et au vu de tout le monde. Je crois que c'est bien. [...] Fourbu [double underlined by Giono] mais je ne m'arrêtes [sic] pas et me *jette* [underlined by Giono] littéralement à la suite de l'idée."<sup>404</sup>

It is because Julie is menaced by the fatal curse of all the Coste family, that she is in thrall to death. Death's seductive power over her is expressed as a sort of betrayal of her love for M. Joseph and he becomes a "don Juan des ténèbres" because of his efforts to rescue her from death's grasp. He interprets Julie's affinity for death as a

---

<sup>401</sup> *Moulin*, 740. As further evidence that Léonce is a self-portrait of the author, it is interesting to note that Giono, entitled a sketch he wrote on his own adolescence, "Le soliloque du beau ténébreux." ORC V 1335.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.* 742.

<sup>403</sup> Note the biblical overtones here.

<sup>404</sup> 5 June 1950.

form of infidelity to his love for her, an obstacle that he must combat in order to hold her.

In an interesting stylistic variation the author intervenes not primarily in the character of Léonce, who does not speak for himself, but as the voice of the narrator. This is all the more intriguing given that the narrator is not a particularly agreeable personality. Pierre Citron describes him as an egotist, somewhat underhanded, who rejoices at the ill fortune of his fellow citizens, the only narrator in Giono's fiction to have a tendency to make the reader uncomfortable.<sup>405</sup> And yet it is impossible, after reading the letters, not to see the reflection of the author in this unpleasant little man whom Giono tells us toward the end of the story is a hunchback. The notion of using a hunchback as a central figure evokes the acrobat, Bobi, in Giono's earlier novel, *Que ma joie demeure*. However there is a great difference between the hero of the 1930's novel who tried to share his elevated, poetic vision of the world, and the ironic, narcissistic narrator of the later novel, who has an aversion for the people around him.

During this bitter period in the author's life, he seems to be venting his spleen through the person of the narrator whose unlikeness to Giono's public personality might allow his affinity with the author to go undetected. More importantly, the narrator, as a hunchback and thus an outsider to society, is in a position to observe and judge the behavior of the other characters. In this sense he is not unlike Marcel Proust's Marcel, the narrator who shares his author's name. The fact that Giono speaks in a letter to Blanche of "extinguishing his lantern" lends credence to the possibility that this book, in its attempt to study bourgeois society, owes a debt to the author's reading of Proust.<sup>406</sup>

---

<sup>405</sup> Citron, *Giono*, 437.

<sup>406</sup> See letter dated July 1950 (10).

The letters are particularly important because of the light they shed on the creation of the novel and especially, on the author's conception of the female characters. It is noteworthy that only other novel to receive as much comment in Giono's letters to Blanche as *Le moulin de Pologne* was *Pour saluer Melville* (1941), the novel Giono wrote as a tribute to his love for Blanche. Ironically, this was the novel that Madame Bravay, the wife of Blanche's lover, brought to Giono for his autograph on the day she met with him to discuss the liaison between Blanche and her husband.<sup>407</sup> Giono's mocking tone in the letter where he speaks of Madame Bravay's visit is not unlike the tone of the narrator in certain passages of *Le moulin*. Although he addresses Blanche as "mon bel amour" and even "mon bel amour adoré" this letter of disillusionment is worlds away from the euphoric lover letters he wrote to Blanche during the composition of *Pour saluer Melville* and he remarks to her that he inscribed Mme. Bravay's copy of the novel with the phrase: "la drame de l'envoûtée," implying that their love was a magic spell which has been broken.

The first letter of 1950, although it doesn't specifically mention *Le moulin de Pologne*, offers a probing self-portrait of the writer as he begins the novel.<sup>408</sup> Sitting before his stove early one morning, Giono's pensive tone evokes Descartes reexamining his life and beliefs. Giono's attempt to take control of his life is evident even in the evenly formed script of this letter, as compared to that of 1949 when he was going through the anguish of Blanche's affair with Bravay. The letters of this period show that Giono is struggling to accept his life as it is without Blanche: "Si je ne veux pas perdre toute envie de vivre il me faut aimer ces moments de grand dénuement où il ne me reste rien que moi-même pour affronter mon combat, mon métier. C'est beau un métier." In his *carnets de travail* Giono uses the same phrase

---

<sup>407</sup> See letter dated November 1949.

<sup>408</sup> 23 January 1950.



several times, except that in the notebooks he says, "C'est beau l'amour" and his tone is ironic.<sup>409</sup> One could infer that he is suggesting that a vocation is preferable to love because it is more certain. However, it is clear that for Giono, love and art both lead to the welcome dissolution of death: "De plus en plus je lui [le métier] demande de me ravir, de m'emporter comme un beau cavalier noir, un roi des aulnes." This remark is significant because death is the theme of *Le moulin de Pologne*, in the sense that the dissolution of the ego, which occurs in death, is regarded as a form of solace awarded to those who are marked by destiny as the happy few. The seduction of death lies in its promise of peace, a peace that Giono seeks so ardently that he is ready to give up everything else in order to obtain it: "J'ai un besoin de paix pour lequel il me semble que je vais finir par avoir envie de tout détruire sauf elle."<sup>410</sup>

The letter reveals Giono's romantic affinities not only in his comments on death but in his evocation of a baudelairian world of rain and dark skies:

" Le ciel à l'air couvert. Tant mieux. Trop de lumière maintenant m'irrite. J'ai toujours aimé la pluie et le ciel couvert mais maintenant c'est loin d'être par désir romantique que je les aime. Cette absence de lumière est comme le doux mur d'une prison ou d'un cloître qui protège et apaise."

In fact, Giono seems to have been preoccupied with Baudelaire during the entire composition of the novel. One letter finds him knotting his tie "Comme la cravate de Baudelaire sur ses portraits"<sup>411</sup> and dressing in the costume of a dandy, a gesture entirely uncharacteristic of Giono who hated any type of affectation. In a certain sense, his conduct mirrors that of the narrator in *Le moulin de Pologne*, a disgruntled

---

<sup>409</sup> See ORC V 1204 where Giono uses the phrase, "C'est beau l'amour" in speaking of the end of the Coste lineage.

<sup>410</sup> 23 January 1950.

<sup>411</sup> 15 March 1950.

intellectual who scorned the shallowness of society, and yet took great pains to dress as though he belonged in the bourgeois world. Giono's behavior also suggests that of Werther, another key figure of Romanticism, who always dressed in a certain blue coat and yellow vest when he went to visit his beloved. Werther's influence was such that during the Romantic era, dressing in a particular way before a liaison became known as dressing "à la Werther."<sup>412</sup> In another sense, Giono's costume with the green-checked vest, gives him the air of a tragic clown or fool like Shakespeare's Falstaff, an effect that, as we will show further on, was not unintentional. However, toward the end of the letter, Giono utters what could be construed as the battle cry of the knight of chivalry setting off to war: "Les armées sont prêtes, sur pied de guerre. Le printemps sera terrible cette année. Voilà pour les dames qui se font suivre, ou suivent, ou autres fantômes de haute-école. La loi du talion est prête à être exécutée."<sup>413</sup>

The effect of the letter is as theatrical as is that of the novel Giono is writing. The drama of the letters is being staged for future readers: "Et je crois qu'il faudrait, malgré tout quelquefois revenir sur ce chapitre pour que le lecteur ne croît [sic] pas que c'est fini de ce côté-là." At this point Giono shifts from real life to fiction and it is the intermingling of his experience with his art that suggests the meaning of the letter. It is Giono the poet who through his writing will have vengeance on the seductive Blanche:

"Il faut bien préciser qu'il y a toi, qui n'a pas encore commencé à aimer (et ne commencera probablement jamais, ni moi, ni personne) et moi qui ne peut pas finir d'aimer (et ne finira sûrement jamais). La situation ainsi exposée permet de garder tout l'intérêt dramatique aux événements qui se dérouleront pendant ce terrible

---

<sup>412</sup> See Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 127-28.

<sup>413</sup> 15 March 1950.

printemps entre l'homme au foulard d'or pourpre et la dame qui se fait suivre, ou suit, ou être... "*Fanfares, on emporte les morts*" [underlined by Giono], comme dit Shakespeare."<sup>414</sup>

That Giono is transforming his life situation into fiction is evident from the vocabulary he uses: "Il faut bien préciser qu'il y a toi [...] et moi" - the author has to carefully delineate his characters, based in this case on himself and Blanche. He has ample dramatic material in the plight of the poet striving to avenge the infidelity of his beloved: "La situation ainsi exposée permet de garder tout l'intérêt dramatique aux événements..." Furthermore even in its bantering, joking tone the letter contains a veiled threat that in the battle between the jilted lover and the woman who is playing with love, there will be casualties: "Fanfares, on emporte des morts."

It is significant that Giono quotes Baudelaire's "Invitation au voyage" in speaking to Blanche of the tumultuous state of their love: "Comme toi j'aspire de tout mon coeur à la paix: ordre, calme et volupté comme dirait l'autre." Giono's wistful tone implies that without Blanche's love, which he still yearns for, he can no longer conjure up imaginary otherworlds, like the *jardins d'Armide* of the earlier letters. Barbara Johnson's analysis of the poem suggests that this is the idea that the poet himself was trying to express: "And the land where 'all is but order and beauty, luxury, calm, and sensual pleasure' is not in reality a land that is just like the lady, but a description of what the speaker wishes the lady were like."<sup>415</sup> In reality, she is the mysterious other whom Baudelaire addresses as "Mon enfant, ma soeur," in an effort to create an intimacy that does not really exist, just as Giono had tried to do with

---

414 Ibid.

415 Barbara Johnson, "Poetry and Its Double: Two Invitations au voyage," *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) 23-52.

Blanche. In fact the poet's language is strikingly similar to that which Giono so often used with Blanche in addressing her as "cher fils" and "fille/fils."<sup>416</sup>

All of these influences in the letters strongly suggest that Giono derived a part of his aesthetic from his reading of Baudelaire. It is almost certain that it was in the poems of *Les fleurs du mal* that Giono found his images of women as virgins, Madonnas, angels and demons.<sup>417</sup> Giono's depiction of Léonce as a "beau ténébreux" was very likely inspired by Baudelaire's "Belle ténébreuse,"<sup>418</sup> both creatures destined to come to fatal ends. Baudelaire like Giono painted women as winged beings; like Blanche with her sulfurous wings, Baudelaire's "Etre aux ailes de gaz"<sup>419</sup> is a woman whose lightness makes her impossible to possess. Giono always feared losing Blanche to the *beau monde* of Paris, and Baudelaire pictured his mistress as a phantom dancing far above him where he could no longer reach her:

"Que ce soit dans la nuit et dans la solitude,  
Que ce soit dans la rue et dans la multitude,  
Son fantôme dans l'air danse comme un flambeau

---

<sup>416</sup> See also Alan Clayton's analysis of the influence of "Le Voyage" on Giono's *Fragments d'un Paradis* in "Giono lecteur de Baudelaire: *Fragments d'un Paradis* et 'Le Voyage'," *Pour une poétique de la parole chez Giono*, (Paris: Lettres modernes Minard, 1978) appendice 133-44. Giono's association with Baudelaire apparently goes back a long way because when he was imprisoned in St-Vincent-Les Forts at the end of World War II, the only two books he asked for were his copy of Montaigne and his Pléiade edition of Baudelaire. See *Bulletin* no. 44, p. 14. It is significant that in one of his first entries in his prison journal, Giono recalls that he managed to recite to himself Baudelaire's entire sonnet no. XIII, *Recueillement*, even though he insists that he could never memorize poems. p.11.

<sup>417</sup> See among many possible examples, LXXIII "Le tonneau de la haine," LVII "A une Madone," XLI "Tout entière," XLII "Que dirais-tu ce soir," and XLIV "Réversabilité" all poems from "Spleen et idéal".

<sup>418</sup> XXXIII "Remords posthume."

<sup>419</sup> LIV "L'irréparable."

Parfois il parle et dit: "Je suis belle, et j'ordonne  
Que pour l'amour de moi vous n'aimiez que le Beau  
Je suis l'Ange gardien, la Muse et la Madone." <sup>420</sup>

Like Baudelaire who created masterpieces out of his anguish by making it the object of his contemplation and his art, Giono made his experience of passion and loss the centerpiece of his fiction. And like the poet, he created an aesthetic of passion by elevating it to the level of a quasi-religion and making of the woman a sacred figure.

However without the letters, many of Giono's sources of inspiration would be difficult to identify. For instance, while chivalry provides the model for Giono's idealization of passion, Baudelaire's poetic exploration of the violence inherent in love very likely offered Giono support for his own experience of jealousy and the cruelty that jealous passion inspires. And yet, like Baudelaire, Giono was a post-romantic in thrall to the myth. *Le moulin de Pologne* was conceived as an effort to reveal the destructive nature of passion and thus to escape the destiny that vanquishes the fictional hero, Léonce. In this sense, Giono's allusions in the letters to Baudelaire and his novelistic construction of a baroque, decadent world like that of the sonnets, suggests that his goal was to paint a similar, late romantic world and then to depict its aftermath. That Léonce was "le dernier des Costes" and that his downfall occurs before the book begins, supports this idea. The narrator, who recounts his story, is an embittered intellectual who, like Baudelaire and Giono himself, seeks a way to make life bearable in a bourgeois, mediocre world. He no longer believes in love and he tells Léonce's story to prove to his listeners that passion destroys.

Using the figure of the acrobat, Giono, returns to the idea that inspired his pre-war novel *Que ma joie demeure*, that one way to rise above the world of mediocrity is

---

<sup>420</sup> XLII "Que dirais-tu ce soir."

to voluntarily sink below it: "Le monde est aux médiocres. [...] Il y aurait peut-être un grand feu à faire avec un "médiocre volontaire" une sorte d'acrobate qui raterait volontairement tous ses coups. Il me semble que j'ai vu ça dans un cirque. En tout cas voilà une drôle d'idée de pièce de théâtre: le médiocre par amour, (non, ce n'est pas totalement ou exactement par amour.)"<sup>421</sup> However in this letter, the acrobat / poet is not seeking to bring the world up to his level as Bobi did in the earlier novel, with tragic consequences. The acrobat who fails at everything is more like the albatross in Baudelaire's poem who as a symbol of the poet, has no place in the modern world. As Giono laments to Blanche: "Au fond je n'étais pas fait pour les règles de la société."<sup>422</sup> However, the narrator of *Le moulin de Pologne* who is a hunchback, makes accommodations and finds a place in bourgeois society, all the while mentally despising the people around him. This is reflective of Giono's own mental state in 1950 while writing the novel under the inspiration of Hobbes and Machiavelli:

"Je finirai sûrement aussi *L'iris* mais je n'étais plus en état de poursuivre la rédaction de ce livre cruel. Celui que j'ai commencé n'est pas plus gai mais il est d'une cruauté plus générale et moins particulier.<sup>423</sup> Dès que maintenant je touche aux manifestations du coeur humain, je ne trouve de vérité que dans les noirceurs et les mauvais sentiments."<sup>424</sup>

---

<sup>421</sup> 23 January 1950.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Giono had put aside *Le moulin de Pologne*, which he was still calling *L'iris de Suse*, in July 1950 before finishing the final chapter. He didn't take it up again until the end of 1951 when he went through seven versions of the last chapter. At the time of the writing of this letter, Giono was working on *Les grands chemins* (1951), a novel he worked on at various times over a period of twelve years and finally finished between October 18 and December 22, 1950. Pierre Citron suggested that Giono needed to get away from *Le moulin* in order to get some distance from his characters. (*Giono* 441).

<sup>424</sup> 20 October 1950.

In May 1949, Giono wrote in his notebooks that his reading of Hobbes and Machiavelli had led him to the study of human beings, a study that was more exciting than the study of nature. He adds that he is persuaded by Hobbes and by his own observations that: "l'homme est naturellement mauvais."<sup>425</sup>

*Le moulin de Pologne* is an exploration of humanity's dark side and a vision of the world of bourgeois mediocrity, no longer ennobled by the myth. In a revealing letter, Giono, who as we have noted had an aversion to dancing, describes the important ball scene in his novel by speaking through his narrator:

"Moi, (pour une fois c'est bien mon tour) je suis au bal. Au bal de 1893 avec valse et quadrilles des lanciers. Mais comme je suis aigre dans mes observations! Je me faufile à travers les couples, avec mon petit gibus à la main et j'observe et je cancanne, et je dis du mal. J'ai dansé avec Alphonsine M. la fille (laide) du quincaillier, mais simplement parce que, dans ma situation, il fallait que je danse au moins une contredanse. J'ai choisi la fille la moins compromettante, laide, et sans [mot illisible] et maintenant j'assiste et je décris le scandale provoqué par Julie de M. Le bal (à mon avis) est fort joli. Mais il me donne du mal."

During the long period of misery that preceded his writing of the novel, Giono probed his own psyche and made the observation that, like his narrator who felt only scorn for his fellow man,<sup>426</sup> he was not entirely the noble person he had tried to be. At one point, in a telling letter to Blanche, Giono confided:

"Je ne suis pas gentil, je le sais et mon comportement est même assez laid. Je me le reproches [sic]. Je me suis reproché très souvent puisque je savais que je ne pourrais ni oublier ni pardonner de n'avoir pas fait une situation nette dès le 22

---

<sup>425</sup> ORC V 1193.

<sup>426</sup> ORC V 1236.

juillet à Cannes.<sup>427</sup> Mais je ne peux pas ne pas t'aimer malgré tout ce que je sais et je reste jusqu'à maintenant pour te faire du mal. Non pas que je le désires [sic] mais je le fais. Toi tu as oublié, comme il est naturel, moi pas. Voilà toute la différence et ce qui fait mon malheur et notre actuelle incompréhension."<sup>428</sup>

And yet, Giono's behavior at this point is remarkable. He has discovered Blanche's affair with Bravay, she has admitted it, and furthermore, her sister has sued Giono for non-payment of a loan he had signed on Blanche's behalf.<sup>429</sup> Nevertheless, from this time on, rather than wasting time in blaming Blanche for failing to live up to his ideal, he pours out his anger and bitterness in his novels.

One suspects that this is the reason Giono makes the ball scene and Julie's disgrace, the central scene of his novel. As we have shown, Giono detested the idea of Blanche going to balls and yet Blanche loved to dance. Giono could not dance and he has his narrator admit on two occasions that he also could not dance: "Je suis mauvais danseur" ;"Je danse mal."<sup>430</sup> The narrator is jealous and disdainful of the anticipated pleasure of his fellow citizens. He is glad to see the rain on the evening of the ball because the good dancers will arrive with muddy boots and therefore, the narrator hopes, their dexterity will be impeded. However Giono's aversion to dancing goes beyond the fact that he himself was not a good dancer. The ball scene in the novel reveals that Giono's conception of dancing is that it is not simply a pass time but a form of implicit sexual behavior meant to allow participants to seduce members of

---

<sup>427</sup> This is the date on which Giono surprised François Bravay in Blanche's room in Cannes and thus was forced to accept their liaison as a fact.

<sup>428</sup> January 1951 no. 4.

<sup>429</sup> See letters of 1950-51.

<sup>430</sup> ORC V, 675 and 700.



the opposite sex. For this reason, when Blanche goes dancing, according to Giono's perspective, she is being unfaithful.

In his novel, Giono invokes his own sense of morality and presents the ball as an orgy. Julie, a member of the ill-fated Coste family, comes unescorted to the dance and fails to attract a partner. On the one hand Julie appears as a normal young woman who comes to the ball for the pleasure of dancing. And yet as she stands on the sidelines, she is portrayed as an Eve-like figure, "un oiseau attiré par un serpent,"<sup>431</sup> the undulating dancers resembling the mythical snake in the Garden of Eden. Her desire to join the dance is presented by the author as evidence of her sexual needs. As she joins the writhing dancers, the author speaks of her "atroce visage" which reflects the "extase des femmes accouplées." The author portrays Julie as offering her sexual wares freely, "en train de se donner au vide."<sup>432</sup> Her spectacular performance is evidence of her membership in the ill-fated group of *passionnés*, and as she dances, the townspeople look on in horror. After the dance, Julie goes to M. Joseph who has been looking for a wife. The reader is not privy to what transpires inside the house, but the next morning, M. Joseph forces the narrator and the other town leaders, to help him with the arrangements for his marriage, to Julie.

Giono mentions Julie only twice in the letters.<sup>433</sup> The first reference is in connection with her family, M. Joseph and her son Léonce. She is described as the quintessential unfulfilled romantic searching everywhere for the world of her dreams. She is the "reine éperdue" who is the victim of her "romantisme fou."<sup>434</sup> However, in

---

<sup>431</sup> Ibid. 703.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid. 704.

<sup>433</sup> June 1950 (4) and 5 June 1950.

<sup>434</sup> See letter of 5 July 1940, where Giono calls Blanche a "petite fille romanesque," and as though suggesting that her needs are childish, says that he is trying to love her as she wants to be loved. In this sense, Julie's naive romanticism appears to be patterned on that of Blanche.

the novel she is also portrayed as a woman of strong character who goes after and obtains what she wants, including the husband that half of the young women in the town have tried unsuccessfully to snare. Once married, she is faithful and carries out her role as wife and mother admirably. She recalls Rousseau's Julie who seems to have it all but like the earlier heroine, finds that the happiness of domestic life is boring. As Giono remarks in the second letter that speaks of Julie, her fate is that she is one of Giono's exceptional beings who lives for romantic passion and when that is lacking, gives herself away with a generosity that borders on the aberrant. Like the author himself who longed for total fusion in love, she is a victim of the seductive power of death, the only other means of dissolution.

Julie's experience, as well as that of Léonce, suggests that Giono rejected marriage as a solution to the fatality of passion. In the case of both Julie and Léonce the marriages were happy ones, and as Pierre Citron pointed out in his biography of Giono, Léonce and Louise's marriage resembled in many ways that of Giono and Elise.<sup>435</sup> Giono gives Louise many of Elise's characteristics including a similar name - a name which like that of Julie, evokes Rousseau's novel *La nouvelle Héloïse*. *Le Moulin de Pologne* is clearly meant as a rejection of *amour passion* as a goal to be sought, or as means of ennobling love, even for those superior people who are capable of passion. From henceforth, Giono envisions passion as destructive and as an experience to be avoided. As Giono began *Le moulin de Pologne*, he believed that the hero must reject passion and that those who, like Léonce, fall into passion's snares are destroyed, either physically or morally.

---

<sup>435</sup> All of Giono's critics who have mentioned Giono's domestic life have emphasized his happy marriage. However, the marriage was apparently lacking the passion that Giono found with Blanche.

The projected heroine of *Le moulin de Pologne* is a *femme fatale* whom Giono called "le démon" in his notebooks.<sup>436</sup> She was to be the subject of a second volume of the novel, which was to be an exploration of her character, but which Giono was never able to write. The letters read in conjunction with the writer's notebooks reveal with certainty that the model for the *démon* was Blanche once again, whose behavior since the *affaire Bravay*, Giono was trying to understand. Giono first used the term in a 1946 letter,<sup>437</sup> where pertinently, he was chiding Blanche for a projected trip to Paris which he was sure would include dancing: "Te voilà avec tes ailes de soufre comme les démons..."<sup>438</sup> The term denotes not only Blanche's seductive side but even more importantly, her lightness in every sense of the word. This *démon* is a baudelairian winged creature, a fallen angel, who flits from one man to another on sulfurous wings. Giono expresses his rage while picturing Blanche in Paris: "pendant que tu palpitera [sic] la danse de la séduction avec tes ailes de soufre devant les royaux benêts de Paris." Like Julie at the ball in his novel, Giono cannot imagine why Blanche would want to dance except to attract a lover.

Giono composed the novel under the title *L'iris de Suse*, a title that was meant to represent the heroine who was called, for a time, Adeline. This is the last appearance of Adelina, the heroine whom Giono created in *Pour saluer Melville*, and the later book was intended to delineate her destruction. Just as the earlier Adelina was the idealized Blanche, the virgin Madonna, whose mysterious attraction was her luminous purity, this Adeline, denigrated in Giono's notes to "Didi," represents the fallen Blanche, a simple seductress whose body is her only attraction. Giono's process in creating the *démon* mirrors that of the earlier novel in that he shares every step of

---

<sup>436</sup> ORC V 1232–34 and generally.

<sup>437</sup> 6 April 1946.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid..

her creation with Blanche. He even asks Blanche to give her a name. However, whereas he insisted in the earlier novel that Adelina was Blanche and incarnated all her wonderful qualities, he denies that the later Adeline, whom he calls at various times Marion and Irma, is modeled after Blanche. We can only speculate as to Giono's reasons for showing his drafts to Blanche, but it seems reasonable to infer that it was his way of forcing her to share in his suffering, which he insisted was so intense as to be physical. In fact, Giono asserted that his books were meant for Blanche and are only conceived as extensions of his letters. In that sense, Blanche-des-collines, as Giono called his idealized beloved, was a creation of words and Giono could prolong the relationship, as unsatisfactory as it was, by making Blanche live in the space of the letters or suffer dishonor in the pages of a book.

Although his intention is not evident from the published version of the novel, the notebooks prove that it was meant to center around the heroine symbolized by the *Iris de Suse*, and was meant to be a study of woman: "Garder le titre qui centre sur la femme."<sup>439</sup> The mythological Iris is the winged messenger of the gods, the link between Heaven and Earth. She is light-footed and swift and is depicted as wearing winged sandals and a rainbow-colored veil.<sup>440</sup> The winged goddess is the ideal symbol for Giono's heroine who is not only a later representation of Adelina, but also an avatar of Pauline. It is Blanche who inspired nearly all of Giono's heroines after 1940 and lightness is her most remarkable attribute.

All of Blanche's fictional personas are lighter than ordinary mortals, more like creatures of air. Even the later appearances of Pauline de Théus in the *Récits de la*

---

<sup>439</sup> ORC V 1208, citing the draft of the last chapter contained in *le carnet 51*.

<sup>440</sup> Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, trans. by John Buchanan-Brown, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

*demi-brigade*,<sup>441</sup> where she is portrayed unsympathetically, emphasize her lightness. In "Une histoire d'amour," the hero Martial describes the young woman who heads the band of royalist outlaws during the Restoration Period called the *Terreur blanche*<sup>442</sup>, as "un petit personnage léger," and even as the hero pursues her and finally kills her, he praises her lightness in the saddle and her superb horsemanship. Lightness, however, can connote not only exceptional virtue but also the "legerté" of the woman of easy virtue. In "Le bal"<sup>443</sup>, the heroine is *La petite marquise*, a young woman named Blandine (a name not so different from that of Blanche on whom her character is based) who later scorns the hero who is in love with her. When the narrator looks back on the moment when he danced with *La petite marquise* at the ball, he remarks: "son habilité la rendait semblable à du vent. Qui peut se flatter de tenir le vent dans ses bras?"<sup>444</sup> As in his letter where he imagined Blanche as a winged demon whose wings would carry her away from him, his fictional heroes never achieve a lasting union with the elusive heroines.

And yet, without the wings that make her so seductive, woman sinks to the level of an insect seeking its prey. In one of the imaginary dialogues between author and character in the *Postface to Angelo*, Angelo tells his creator: "La femelle qui n'a

---

<sup>441</sup> *Récits de la demi-brigade* ORC V (Paris: Gallimard, 1980). Most of the work was actually written in 1955 for the Rotary Club of Manosque and published in April of that year in *Le Rotarien français*. See the *Notice*, 890-901 and generally, for an explanation of the link between the *Récits* and the Angelo cycle. There is also a connection to *Un roi sans divertissement*, as the *Notice* affirms, in the personage of Martial who is another avatar of Langlois, the hero of *Un roi*.

<sup>442</sup> Just as in *Pour saluer Melville*, where the idea of the *baleine blanche* was used both literally and figuratively, it is likely that in "Une histoire d'amour," Giono consciously employed the idea of the *Terreur blanche* both in its historic and in its symbolic and more personal meaning.

<sup>443</sup> Written December 1962 - January 1963 and first published in *Elle*, 13 April 1963.

<sup>444</sup> ORC V, 42.

pas d'ailes se traîne lourdement à terre en relevant son ventre de manière à mettre en évidence la lumière qui en émane et qui est destinée à signaler aux mâles."<sup>445</sup> As Giono makes clear in a letter to Blanche, a refusal of his idealized conception of love reduces woman not only to the level of an insect but actually condemns her to the society of the damned.<sup>446</sup> Such predatory females are like preying mantises: "quelques secs insectes broyant dans leurs mandibules de mante [sic] religieuses l'amertume de leur échec intérieur."<sup>447</sup> Thus the writer poses an impossible dilemma for woman: either she retains the angelic lightness that makes her attractive because unattainable or she sinks to the level of a groveling insect resembling a prostitute searching for a victim and thus makes herself undesirable. As Giono said to Blanche in the same 1942 letter just quoted, once the woman allows herself to play the role of seductress, she loses her value: "...vous êtes réduite à si peu que, qui vous a, n'a rien."<sup>448</sup> This paradigm of impossible virtue or total vice suited Giono perfectly however, because it ensured the existence of the obstacle so essential to maintaining the ideal of chivalric love with its component of desire.

The letters show that Giono was suddenly obsessed with flowers during the composition of the book; poppies, roses, white tulips, lilacs and cyclamen to name a few. As his notebooks reveal, he wanted his heroine to resemble the flower that he had created as her literary symbol: "Description physique d'Adeline / ressemble à l'iris..."<sup>449</sup> Giono's notebooks depict the *Iris de Suse* as a black iris, although

---

<sup>445</sup> ORC IV, 1171.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> 10 January 1942.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

<sup>449</sup> ORC V 1208.

scientific treatises do not support this notion.<sup>450</sup> One can surmise that for Giono, the *Iris de Suse* was a symbol for the fallen Blanche, whose name signified whiteness and purity but whose behavior had revealed her darker side. In a sense, the black iris is the *fleur inverse* of chivalry, the lovely innocent flower of ideal womanhood, turned inside out.

Moreover, Giono makes his narrator a lover of flowers, a reflection perhaps of his own developing tastes. Until this time, nature for Giono was symbolized by the out of doors, in the form of trees, hills and mountains and he never spoke of domesticated plants. Suddenly, just as he began to write to Blanche about his projected novel *L'iris de Suse (Le moulin de Pologne)*, his letters are filled with references to cut flowers and flowering plants. Whether Giono actually became enamoured with flowers during this period is not the issue. The references in the letters are clearly symbolic and meant to be so. Flowers evoke Blanche, as the femme / fleur of the mythic ideal: in one letter of this period, the countryside reflects the color of her dress, as do the cyclamen and tulips in Giono's study. The lilacs outside his window recall her lips and hair.<sup>451</sup> Flowers denote light as with the golden poppies that create a "magnifique vitrail de gloire au travers duquel vient le chant d'amour des rossignols."<sup>452</sup> Although he doesn't say so, the gold of the poppies suggests Blanche's golden hair as well, perhaps, as her love of money. Giono devotes one letter entirely to flowers, in this case, a bunch of white tulips, *des tulipes blanches*, symbolizing Blanche by their whiteness and by the word play on her name, which always fascinated Giono. However he doesn't speak of the purity of the white flowers but

---

<sup>450</sup> ORC V 1216.

<sup>451</sup> 26 March 1950.

<sup>452</sup> 4 May 1950.

rather of their beauty and radiance, how they are illuminating even the approaching twilight: "sur ma fenêtre elles sont comme une explosion de phosphore."<sup>453</sup> Suddenly with the explosion of phosphorus, Giono evokes the fires of passion and of Hell, the subject of the book he is in the process of writing. And in the very next line, as though betraying his thoughts, he says to Blanche: "Je te voudrais là avec moi. Tu y sera [sic] car ce sera trop bête à la fin." He is soliciting Blanche's participation in the act of creation but also in his suffering, (which of course he believes she has caused). His words demand her presence in his book, the place to which the undefined "là" seems to refer. Right after alleging: "Les fleurs sont my dernière ressource," he ends the letter ironically, "Blanchet ma porteuse de joie" as though linking her *légèreté* with the ephemeral beauty of flowers.

Like the narrator in the novel, Giono expresses his fondness for roses and in a letter, and he tells Blanche that he is on his way out to buy roses for his studio. Although white flowers do not figure in the book, Giono emphasizes them in this letter: "Mes tulipes blanches font merveilles. De plus en plus belles, elles se sont épanouies comme des femmes pures et candides devant toutes les joies."<sup>454</sup> White flowers symbolize the ideal woman, whose purity and faithfulness allow her the experience of joy in love. Significantly, right after his discussion of flowers and without even changing paragraphs, Giono speaks of the novel he is writing and explains his conception of love and death:

"La matière de ce livre est inépuisable. [...] Cela touche à la fois à l'amour et à la mort, dans ce que l'un et l'autre ont de plus tragique, de plus glorieux et de plus horrible. Il faut qu'on ne sache plus lequel on préfère et qu'on finisse par accepter l'un en fonction de l'autre sans préférence ni choix. Le dernier des

---

<sup>453</sup> 5 May 1950.

<sup>454</sup> 6 May 1950.



Coste s'engloutira dans l'amour avec le même hurlement de détresse qu'ont poussé ses ancêtres engloutissant dans la mort et nous resterons (je le souhaite) haletant [sic] de comprendre enfin que le destin peut épanouir ses aurores boréales, les décors pourpres de son théâtre indifféremment et pour des buts similaires au profit de l'amour ou de la mort."<sup>455</sup>

This short passage is a succinct expression of the theme of the book that amorous passion destroys just as surely as physical death. However there is an ambivalence in Giono's presentation of the theme as his difficulties with the last chapter demonstrate. Giono labels ordinary people outside the ranks of the happy few as *avides*, mediocre creatures who are incapable of passion and are hanging on to life ("la vie à tout prix"); these are the don Juans of society in Giono's construct. On the other side of the spectrum are the rare and exceptional beings, who because they feel the call of the void, give of themselves without reserve.<sup>456</sup> These are the *passionnés* who are destined for dissolution and death. However, as Roland Barthes points out, the perfect fusion of lovers locked in a passionate relationship has the power to dissolve the ego in an imitation of the dissolution of death.<sup>457</sup> Léonce, who is destined for destruction at the end of the novel, as the last of his ill-fated lineage, flees instead with the mysterious *démon*, in the middle of the night. Like Romeo and Juliet, the two lovers come from opposite sides of the gionian spectrum, and as Giono perhaps subconsciously wished, she redeems him.

Giono struggled during his July 1950 letters to Blanche, to arrive at a satisfactory conception of the figure of the *démon*. As in *Pour saluer Melville*, he

---

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> See ORC V where Giono describes Léonce as: "L'homme qui se dépensait le plus (et en pure perte.) 1216.

<sup>457</sup> *A Lover's Discourse*, 10-11.

affects to seek Blanche's aid with the book and he creates his character in Blanche's image, but this time, rather than asserting that his heroine is Blanche, he denies that he is using her as his model:

"Non, je ne me sers pas de toi [...], oh non! Ce qui est inévitable c'est que forcément je suis obligé de me servir de mon expérience personnelle pour décrire. Mais, j'ajoute ou je retranche, je compose un personnage *nouveau* où peut-être toi et moi pouvons trouver des réminiscences. Mais en aucun endroit Marion n'est toi."<sup>458</sup>

However Blanche apparently protested at the resemblances, and Giono admitted that, although Blanche was not identical to his fictional character, he had given her certain of Blanche's traits: "Marion n'était pas toi mais je me servais de certaines choses de toi."<sup>459</sup> In his notebooks as in the letters, he was obsessed with her character:

"l'innocence du démon" who destroys not out of malice but because of her "amoralité totale."<sup>460</sup> Giono's relentless obsession with the *démon* supports the theory that Barthes among others has explored, that "we are our own demons"<sup>461</sup> and like all victims of amorous passion, Giono's demon was an interior one. Giono's cahiers prove however, that the inspiration for the *démon* whether called Adeline, Marion or Irma was Blanche herself and especially the worldly, unfaithful Blanche. In May 1950, at the very time Giono was writing Blanche the letters replete with allusions to

---

<sup>458</sup> See letters of July 1950 and ORC V, especially 1200-1203; 1208-1209; 1215 and 1217.

<sup>459</sup> July 1950, no. III.

<sup>460</sup> ORC V 1200; see also the letter of July 1950, no. 11, where Giono tries to express Marion's intrinsic innocence.

<sup>461</sup> *A Lover's discourse* 80-81 and 177.

flowers, he was preparing the second part of his book, which was to be the story of the unfaithful heroine, and he wrote in a notebook:

"2<sup>o</sup> partie / 1. Connaissance d'Adeline / 2. Récit de l'homme (désastre de Cannes!) / 3. Connaissance de l'intrigue avec le dernier / 4. la fin se précipite."<sup>462</sup>

The phrase, "le désastre de Cannes" is enough to prove that Giono was profoundly affected by the incident and that the novel is an effort to come to terms with his disillusionment. He recalls his *chagrin* in a letter he wrote to Blanche in the Fall of 1949:

"Je me dis qu'il y a à peine un mois que j'ai perdu brusquement toutes mes illusions en trouvant la voiture de Bravay à ta porte et toi enfermée avec lui dans ta chambre, qu'il n'est guère possible à personne d'oublier cette chose-là ou de passer légèrement par-dessus à moins de ne pas aimer, que peut-être le temps..."<sup>463</sup>

There is a more subtle clue to Giono's inspiration for the *démon* in an unpublished *variante* of the text where the author has the narrator exclaim, as he stands before a photograph of the *démon* as a young girl: "J'avais sous les yeux un spécimen parfait de cette race des dévorateurs, de ces constructeurs de ruines."<sup>464</sup> Giono makes a similar comment after seeing a photo of Blanche as a young girl, as he tells her in a letter: "Il me suffira de t'y regarder d'y voir ton visage 'd'enfant ébloui.' Le même que sur ta photo de la sixième année. Je ne m'étais jamais aperçu que tu regardais le monde ainsi: avec effarement et malice."<sup>465</sup> The similarity of these two incidents, one

---

<sup>462</sup> ORC V 1201.

<sup>463</sup> 1 September 1949.

<sup>464</sup> ORC V 1217.

<sup>465</sup> 24 November 1946.

fictional and the other real, once again support the idea that Blanche was the model for both Adelina, the heroine of *Pour saluer Melville*, and Adeline, who was called variously Irma, Marion and the demon, the *femme fatale* of *Le Moulin de Pologne*.

During this same period, Giono and Blanche were reading Oscar Wilde and Giono remarked at Blanche's perceptive reading of Wilde's "De Profundis." One cannot but be struck by the irony of the parallel between Blanche whose demonic portrait Giono is in the process of creating, and the "De Profundis" which recounts Wilde's tragic love affair with Sir Alfred Douglas, Wilde's "worthless beloved."<sup>466</sup> In describing Adelina, Giono attributes to her the same sort of infidelity he had discovered in Blanche when he learned of the afternoons she had spent with Bravay in hotels in Marseilles: "Pendant l'amour avec Léonce elle continue à aller à l'hôtel avec d'autres. Retour en arrière (il la voyait sortir de la porte cachée de l'hôtel. Ses efforts pour aller voir; il guette devant l'hôtel la voit entrer avec ses partenaires.)"<sup>467</sup> In a letter written during Blanche's affair with Bravay, Giono relates to her the results of his conversation with a detective he hired to follow her. The detective told him: « Je connais l'adresse à Marseille de l'appartement où ils vont passer quelques heures presque chaque soir [...] J'ai les fiches des hôtels. »<sup>468</sup> As in the previously recounted incidents, the similarity in this case between life and fiction are too close to ignore.

However, as we have noted, the projected sequel to *Le moulin de Pologne*, which was to focus on the character of the *démon*, was never written. It is possible

---

<sup>466</sup> This was Jacques Barzun's term for Lord Alfred Douglas in "The Permanence of Oscar Wilde" *A Jacques Barzun Reader: Selections from his Works*, edited and with an introduction by Michael Murray (New York: Harper Collins, 2002.) 276.

<sup>467</sup> ORC V 1208.

<sup>468</sup> 21 September 1949.

that Giono, who was still in love with Blanche, couldn't bring himself to write it over her objections, for fear of losing her. He wrote seven versions of the last chapter and finally published a version calling the heroine Adeline, in *La Revue de Paris* in 1951. However, the definitive version of the novel completely changed the projected ending. Instead of focusing on Léonce's tragic liaison with the *démon*, the last chapter centers on Julie and Léonce's wife, Louise, who are searching for the absent Léonce in an effort to prevent some intuited disaster. Leaving the devastated Louise at home, Julie goes to the train station and learns that Léonce has just departed with a woman of easy virtue, "une gourgardine." Julie dies at the end of the book and the narrator goes back to his flowers.

The few critics who have looked at this book in detail, have seen it either as a failure on Giono's part to come to terms with his material which, as Citron has suggested, was too personal to allow him the necessary artistic distance, or as an enigmatic novel with a sort of voltairian ending where Giono is suggesting that the reader can avoid destiny by staying home and tending his garden.<sup>469</sup> However if one regards the myth of chivalric love as a myth of incest, this novel represents a breakthrough in Giono's thinking and therefore, the ending can be read in a very positive sense. Given that the *démon* was never created, it is Julie who has the central female role and it is in her character that the key to the novel's meaning lies. In her lightness and her love of dancing, she is another avatar of Pauline, and she too is modeled on Blanche. However, the romantic dream world she has constructed is not only untenable, it is diseased. The decor of the novel with its nocturnal scenes filled with flaming torches and heavy with the scent of dark flowers<sup>470</sup> recalls the decadent world of Huysmanns. It is the stylized, artificial world of theater where the last of the

---

<sup>469</sup> See the *Notice* by Janine and Lucien Miallet in ORC V 1193-1243.

<sup>470</sup> See for example, ORC V 730.

romantic heroes as exemplified by Léonce and his parents, struggle to find a place among the mediocre members of the bourgeoisie.<sup>471</sup> That Giono saw the same romantic malady in himself is evident from his letters to Blanche, with all their romantic allusions to Werther, Wilde, Heinrich Heine and Baudelaire. Regarded in this light, the flowers so important to both the novel and the letters are Giono's *Fleurs du mal*, and they symbolize the negative side of the romantic myth.

Léonce, the fatal hero of the tale, was born with a romantic character, "extrêmement ferme pour les rêves,"<sup>472</sup> but he realizes that living in a dream world is taking the easy way out. His challenge is to find a place in the real world: "Il faut surmonter de plus grandes difficultés pour vivre dans le monde réel impur, infidèle et médiocre."<sup>473</sup> Neither parent is aware of his struggle and in fact, both of them are romantics and are trying to inculcate the same aesthetic in their son. M. Joseph adores Léonce and is constructing a dynasty over which his son can someday reign and which will be a bulwark against fate for both Léonce and Julie. Julie however, is a much more dangerous figure:

"Cette femme romantique avait donné à Léonce une sorte de procuration générale, pour vivre à sa place la vie héroïque qu'elle avait toujours désiré vivre. Cela n'était pas fait pour arranger les choses. Elle avait avec lui des tête-à-tête langoureux où elle était loin de lui parler en mère. S'il avait été possible d'en faire un fat, elle y serait arrivée. Il eut toutes ces intrigues de jeunes gens qui sont sans importance mais dans lesquelles il voyait toujours la fin de sa vie et où il payait

---

<sup>471</sup> It is also noteworthy that this is Blanche's world and the Parisian milieu that she had wanted Giono to share with her.

<sup>472</sup> Orc V 737.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

chaque fois en conséquence bon coeur bon argent. Julie exultait et l'appelait 'son beau ténébreux'."<sup>474</sup>

Julie is the embodiment of the gionian heroine who, like Pauline (and Blanche), incorporates the qualities of virgin, Madonna and whore. As a young girl she was the seductress who scandalized the whole town with her *danse macabre* at the ball. Julie is a complex figure who also represents the poet who reveals his innermost self by means of his art and is often misunderstood. Her dance is a metaphor for the artistic creation that allows the soul of the artist to become visible to the crowd but like Giono's acrobat and Baudelaire's albatross, Julie is mocked and jeered at by the uncomprehending masses. It is M. Joseph, also an exceptional being, who comes to love her and whose capacity for passion is equal to her own. And yet this is a fatal passion: she is the *putain des ténèbres*<sup>475</sup> whose charm is keeping her husband in thrall almost by magic. Her influence on her son, which the narrator insists is not purely maternal, keeps him a prisoner of his romantic fantasies. Giono had thought of calling the book *Perséphone*, a title that invokes Julie much more than the *démon*, in its mythical allusions to the seductive power of the kingdom of darkness. For it is the allure of death that is attracting Julie and not the temptation of love. Mother and son are locked in a quasi -incestuous relationship and both are cursed with a passion for dissolution.

Ironically, Giono never managed to write the book that was to recount the hero's destruction at the hands of the *démon*, a book that was to illustrate the fatal aspect of romantic passion. Instead, his truncated novel suggests that *amour passion* may be an antidote to death and a means toward life. In fleeing with the *démon* in the

---

<sup>474</sup> Ibid. 739-40.

<sup>475</sup> This is the phrase Robert Ricatte used in his essay, "Giono et la tentation de la perte," *Giono aujourd'hui*, Actes de colloque international Jean-Giono d'Aix-en-provence (10-13 juin 1981) 219.

end, Léonce succeeds in escaping the tenebrous romantic world of *Le moulin de Pologne*, and more importantly, from the unhealthy influence of his mother, even if only to find his place in the ordinary world. As Julie dies and Léonce rides away, one can almost see the Moulin de Pologne, like an imaginary Camelot, fading away in the distance. As Giono asserted in *Le hussard sur le toit*, flight is the only remedy against the contagion of cholera, whether represented as a physical or a psychological malady, or as in this novel, as the diseased world of romanticism. Léonce, the ill-fated romantic is not destroyed in the end after all. By opting to flee with the woman he loves, he is redeemed. Giono has the narrator observe at the end of the version of the novel that was published in the *Revue de Paris*: “Et c'était chose faite quand j'appris sa fuite avec Adeline, (n'était-ce pas en fin de compte son apothéose, sa gloire, son pardon?) avec la seule puissance qui pouvait anéantir ce qu'il était.”<sup>476</sup>

Giono wrote his final novel, *L'iris de Suse*, in 1969, the year before he died. The letters are silent on the composition of this last novel but what they tell us about *Le moulin de Pologne* which originally bore the title *L'iris de Suse*, and about Giono's life and work in general, permit certain valuable insights into this final literary testament. While *Le moulin de Pologne* had offered death as a solace and a reward for exceptional people condemned to live their lives in a mediocre, bourgeois world, *L'iris de Suse* affirms life. In this book Giono returns to his original literary milieu, the high hills of Provence, which he transforms into a mythological but adjacent otherworld. Tringlot, the hero of the book, undergoes a metamorphosis, which allows him to realize his quest for the feminine, a fundamental aspect of the grail quest. He is Giono's last knight errant and the quest is a typically gionian one accomplished with the aid of a shepherd guide in a high summer meadow, except that this time it takes the form of an interior journey back through the protagonist's past

---

<sup>476</sup> ORC V 1380. This was the third version of Chapter VI of the novel, written by Giono in July, 1951 and fittingly, it is the version in which the mysterious demon is called Adeline.



life as a brigand. And once again, Blanche figures in the story, this time as the model for the bifurcated female heroine whose passionate, romantic form is represented by the baroness, Jeanne de Quelte, and whose idealized, transcendent aspect is represented by the mysterious young woman called *l'Absente*.

Giono fell in love with Blanche as an ideal of purity and whiteness and for him she represented the flower of chivalry. He never lost touch with that ideal and never ceased to love the aspect of Blanche, which for him still reflected the ideal. However by 1942 if not before, Giono had seen the other side of Blanche, the worldly, self-centered woman who liked to be admired, and loved the Paris milieu with its social life, its balls and other festivities. Giono portrayed the worldly side of Pauline/Blanche in *Angelo*, and attempted to do so with the character of the *démon* in *Le moulin de Pologne*. On the other hand, *Pour saluer Melville*, *Le hussard sur le toit*, and *L'iris de Suse*, are expressions of chivalric love and the gionian ideal of woman. Although his work treats many other themes, it is clear that the novels from 1940 onward attempt to come to terms with Giono's experience of passion and to make some sense out of his love for Blanche. Unlike Oscar Wilde who finally regretted his expenditure of emotion on Alfred Douglas who had proved so unworthy, Giono was determined to the very end of his life, to redeem his love for Blanche. His attempt to excoriate her in *Le moulin de Pologne* and his attempt to kill her in *Les recits de la demi-brigade* do not bring him the release he is seeking. In *L'iris de Suse*, Giono divides the heroine into two separate characters, giving Jeanne de Quelte all the negative qualities of *amour passion* and imbuing the innocent *Absente* with a quasi-spiritual perfection. *L'iris de Suse*, the white flower with its dark underside, which was meant to symbolize the *démon* of the earlier book becomes the emblem of the *Absente*, the equally enigmatic heroine of the final book. As Luce Ricatte remarked in the *Notice* to the Pléiade edition, the iris has been transformed from the flower of perdition in *Le moulin*, to the flower of salvation in *L'iris*.

In a sense, Giono had been incubating his final novel since the era of the composition of *Le moulin de Pologne* with its failed attempt to understand the character of the seductress. When he could not realize her character, Giono was forced to abandon the title, *L'iris de Suse*, which was meant to represent her. His fascination with the original title is evident however, in that he retained it right up to the day on which he finally released the draft for publication. When he reluctantly changed the name of his earlier book to *Le moulin de Pologne*, a title that evokes Pauline, the focus shifts from the character of the *démon* to that of Julie. The enigmatic title, *L'iris de Suse*, evokes the *femme/fleur* of chivalry and the impossibility of realizing (and even of understanding) the ideal of chivalric love. Jacques Roubaud suggests that the very heart of troubadour poetry (and of chivalric love) is an enigma: the enigma of the desire for dissolution into nothingness, which is related to the enigma of the desire for a dissolution of the ego through loving. Both Barthes and Giono see love as a manifestation of the human desire for annihilation in the absolute, or at least an experience of annihilation through engulfment in the other. In *La fleur inverse*, Roubaud's study of the art of the troubadours, love is turned inside out, not to reveal what it *is*, or what it *is not*, but to illustrate through the poetry itself, that the experience of loving is a paradox which is inaccessible to human reason. In a sense, this is what Giono is expressing in his final novel. Like Roubaud, Giono suggests that love's dilemma rests on its tendency to dissolve into nothingness. The experience of loving is less one of the ecstasy of present experience than of desire, memory and finally, absence. Giono's heroine incarnates the paradoxical nature of *amour passion* in her very name, *l'Absente*.

In addition to having shared the title, *L'iris de Suse*, it is very likely that both books were inspired by Giono's reading of the same poem. We know that he was

reading T.S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday" poem<sup>477</sup> while he was working on *Le moulin de Pologne* and that he was impressed with the difficult second section of the poem, especially with the lines: "Prophecy to the wind, to the wind only for only the wind will listen." Given that the final novel is related to the earlier one and brings to a close Giono's exploration of romantic passion, it is plausible that he found the enigmatic images he used in *L'iris de Suse*, in Eliot's poem. Although the two writers are as different stylistically as two writers could possibly be, they shared a pessimistic view of modern society and a mystical bent that found expression in their writings. The similarities between certain aspects of Eliot's poem and Giono's novel are too intriguing to ignore.

Giono's final heroine, *l'Absente*, is not a heroine at all: she is not even a character in the usual sense of the word given that she never utters a word, never acts, and in fact never makes a single human gesture in the entire novel which is centered around her. Giono does not describe her except to say that she is young and lovely. Although she can see and hear, she is impervious to the world around her. Tringlot encounters her for the first time, standing in the center of his path, her face immobile, and her eyes gazing into the distance. She does not react in any way to his greeting nor does she seem to notice when he brushes against her on the narrow path as he passes by. She never even acknowledges his existence at any time in the book. And yet, Tringlot insists that every time he sees her, he is filled with happiness. Luce Ricatte attributes Tringlot's entire metamorphosis to this young woman who is absent from everything and yet in some mystical way, inspires Tringlot to find the right path and accomplish his life. Her appearance in the middle of Tringlot's path on two key occasions suggest that she is an angel figure whose presence serves to illumine the way for the hero. On the last occasion she is standing outside in a snowstorm and

---

<sup>477</sup> *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1964).

Tringlot recognizes her by her “regard lumineux.” As the snowflakes begin to cling to her hair and eyelashes, she becomes the personification of Stendhal’s crystallization process. Significantly, *l’Absente* incarnates presence by her immobility and in that sense, she is the opposite of the light-footed Blanche whose physical absence was a leitmotif of the letters. The unattainable *Absente* is an iconic figure who elevates the ideal of the feminine to the level of a goddess or of the Blessed Virgin whose likeness hung over Giono’s desk and whom he insisted that Blanche resembled. She is a grail figure, who contains all opposites and at the same time, she is the empty cup waiting to be filled. In this sense, her being includes the androgynous figure of the angel who, although winged, has finally reached perfection and become still.

As a fictional heroine, *L’absente* was certainly born out of Giono’s imagination, but T.S. Eliot provides a poetic model for her character in his “Lady of silences” who presides over Section II of the “Ash Wednesday” poem. She too is a mute figure who reconciles all opposites in her own being, where the parallel torments of love unsatisfied and love possessed are transcended. In this sense she is the apotheosis of ideal love, the end of the quest, “the garden where all love ends.” And like *l’Absente* whose symbol is the mythical iris, the emblem of Eliot’s “Lady of silences” is also a flower, the mystical rose:

“Lady of silences  
Calm and distressed  
Torn and most whole  
Rose of memory  
Rose of forgetting  
Exhausted and life-giving  
Worried reposeful  
The single Rose

Is now the Garden  
Where all loves end  
Terminate torment  
Of love unsatisfied  
The greater torment  
Of love satisfied  
End of the endless  
Journey to no end  
Conclusion of all that  
Is inconclusible  
Speech without word and  
Word of no speech  
Grace to the Mother  
For the garden  
Where all love ends.”

That the iris is emblematic of Blanche, the love of Giono's life and for him, regardless of the pain she caused him, the *femme/fleur* of chivalry, is evident if we examine what the author wrote about the flower at various times. Blanche is the model for Jeanne de Quelte (the baronness), as well as for *l'Absente* in *L'iris* and, as the letters attest, for Julie and the unrealized démon in *Le moulin de Pologne*. Janine and Lucien Miallet, the authors of the *Notice* for *Le moulin* insist that: "...*L'iris de Suse* est à coup sûr l'emblème de la magicienne qui ensorcelle le dernier Coste."<sup>478</sup> In one of his passionate early letters, which calls to mind Baudelaire's poem, "Le balcon," Giono refers to Blanche as the "magicienne de magicien," who has charmed him like Morganne-la-fée in the Arthurian legend.

---

<sup>478</sup> ORC V 1215.

Giono has mythologized not only the woman who inspired the symbol but also, the flower itself. In one of his preparatory notebooks, he wrote of the iris: "L'iris de Suse ou iris de Chalcédoine est une fleur somtueuse mais noire. D'aucuns ne la trouvent que grise."<sup>479</sup> The dictionary definition of the *iris de Suse* is that it is originally from Asia Minor and that the flower is white with violet markings. Luce Ricatte points out in the *Notice to L'iris de Suse*, that in current horticultural magazines, the flower is still included and is described as "pointillée de blanc sur fond de velours noir."<sup>480</sup> Giono himself possessed a picture of the *iris de Suse* that his daughter found in a drawer of his study shortly after his death. The 18th century horticultural catalogue from which the picture was taken referred to it as "une fleur somptueuse et sombre." And yet, the *prière d'insérer* that Giono wrote in 1970 insists that the flower is imaginary: "L'iris de Suse n'a jamais été une fleur. Il n'y pas d'iris de Suse."<sup>481</sup> As Luce Ricatte suggests, it is as though Giono had appropriated the flower for himself alone, and like a jealous lover who thinks that only he can appreciate its beauty, had locked it safely away in the recesses of his imagination. This is a plausible explanation when we recall how Giono tried to possess and dominate the woman behind the symbol. However it is more likely that the reason for Giono's ambivalence regarding the title is that he was appropriating the act of creation, as was his habit, and distancing his work from real life whether in the form of *femme* (Blanche) or *fleur* (the iris).

It is also true that by 1969 when *L'iris de Suse* was written, Blanche, the woman who had inspired Giono's fascination with the flower, was no longer at the center of his life as his primary source of happiness. She had passed from reality to

---

<sup>479</sup> ORC V 1216.

<sup>480</sup> ORC VI 1049.

<sup>481</sup> ORC VI 1049

symbol and perhaps that is what Giono was trying to express in making the symbol so elusive. It is interesting that Pierre Citron, who did not have access to the letters, failed to see the essential connection between the symbol and gionian heroine. Therefore he proposed yet another interpretation of the novel's title, which ironically, leads back to the heroine and resolves the riddle. Given that Giono, who did not have any knowledge of Greek, uses the word *telios* in the novel, to refer to a tiny bone in the wing of a bird, Citron proposes that the author must have had access to someone who knew the language. If so, according to Citron, it is possible that Giono knew that the words *ta soussa* are Greek for lilies. Using this hypothesis, the *iris de Suse* becomes the symbol par excellence for the woman who incarnates the feminine ideal of purity and chastity inherent in *amour courtois*, as well as the fatality of romantic passion with its components of sexuality and infidelity. The luminous purity of the lily as the flower of salvation is combined with the tenebrous hues of the black iris, the flower of perdition. In fact, the description of the *Iris de Suse* in current horticultural catalogues is compatible with this idea, given that it is a white flower with dark under petals.

In his *Prière d'insérer*, the author would have us believe that rather than being a flower, the iris de Suse is actually a tiny little bone in the skull of a bird. Elsewhere, he situates the tiny bone in the skull of a rodent called a *rat d'amérique*. However in two significant passages, Giono describes the bone as *un petit os mafflu*, a part of the wing of a small warbler which had no use except to impede the bird's flight. In the evolutionary process the bird has managed to get rid of the annoying little bone so that he can fly freely. Giono applied the bird analogy to the Baroness, calling her a *mésange* and later a *huppe* and describing her as "léger, vive, différente." She is the last avatar of Pauline, a light-footed, almost winged creature who finally shakes off the yoke of mortality and finds release in a flaming car-crash. However she is also a romantic as was Julie, and she represents the fatality of passion. It is significant that

Giono destroys her in a car crash with Murataure, the husband of the idealized Absente, because the event recalls Blanche's accident while driving the automobile that Giono had bought for her and which she enjoyed clandestinely with François Bravay when they were lovers.

In order to fully understand the symbolism of the *Iris de Suse* for Giono, one has to look at the symbol both as a flower and as the *os mafflu* that hinders a bird's flight until he can evolve into a freer, lighter being. As a flower, the symbol denotes the winged goddess of the rainbow as well as Blanche as a creature of flight (the démon with phosphorous wings) and all of Giono's Blanche-inspired, light-footed heroines. Significantly, the *iris de Suse* unites the symbolism of two related flowers: the lily, a metaphor for whiteness, chastity and virginal purity with the black iris, in Giono's conception, a symbol for the fatality of *amour passion*. However, the lily is considered to be a mythical flower of love and thus it too has ambivalent connotations. It is said that Persephone was gathering lilies when the King of the Underworld kidnapped her and thus, lilies too represent the passionate aspect of love. Moreover, the lily can represent love as unfulfilled, repressed or sublimated. When sublimated, the lily is a flower of glory and its cup-like shape might be seen as a symbol for the Grail.

Blanche herself as well as Julie in *Le moulin de Pologne* and Pauline in *Angelo*, embodied both the ideal of *amour courtois* and the fatality of romantic passion. However, as we have pointed out, in *L'iris de Suse*, Giono creates a binary heroine out of the baroness and l'Absente, the one a woman of desire and passion who leaves the scent of crushed violets in her wake, and the other, like the *rosa mystica*, an incarnation of virginal purity. In order for the ideal to triumph, Giono destroys its opposite in a fiery immolation where all that is left of the two lovers are two lumps of coal. Passion is reduced to its elemental form as carbon whose blackness signifies its true nature for Giono. This is what Giono could not do in *Le*



*Moulin de Pologne*, where the *femme/fatale* was the Blanche-inspired *démon*. By splitting her character in two in his final novel, he is able to destroy her fatal aspect while retaining the Blanche-inspired ideal.

There is no doubt that the *iris de Suse*, as a symbol, refers to the feminine. However, in order to fully understand Giono's complex symbolism, it is necessary to look at the notion that the *iris de Suse* also refers to a bone in the wing of a bird. In both cases the iris is a metaphor for flight, and flight is a means to freedom. Flight was the only way to escape the cholera that for Giono was a metaphor for human anguish. Many of Giono's heroes were wanderers, from Antonio and Bobi in the 1930's to Angelo in the post-war years, and culminating in Tringlot, Giono's final hero. Tringlot, the central character of *L'iris de Suse* is a brigand who first appears as a hunted man sleeping in barns or when he can't find shelter, outside under the stars. As we have shown, the gionian hero was a knight errant on a quest for meaning and until the last novel, the quest centered on a search for the feminine. However, freedom not union is the ultimate value in the gionian hierarchy. This is the goal that Angelo sought and that Léonce, the hero of *Le moulin de Pologne*, attained when he fled at the end of the novel with the mysterious unnamed *démon*. Léonce however, achieved his liberation at the expense of his family whom he abandoned. His flight led to the death of his mother and possibly to that of his wife. This puts him in the same lineage as *Ennemonde* who liberated herself by eliminating her elderly husband and taking a younger lover. The point is that both novels accent the importance of freedom to the extent that its attainment seems to be worth any price, including the sacrifice of other lives.

However Giono had envisioned a process of salvation for Léonce in the projected second volume of the novel. The author had planned an exploration of the stages of passion by depicting Léonce as the jealous lover who progresses through the desire for vengeance with its extension into cruelty and brutality and finally breaks

through into understanding. In Giono's construct, jealous passion pursued to its ultimate limits can lead to redemption via renewed sensitivity, awakened imagination and finally, the quasi-mystical realization that the secret of the Grail lies in the joy of emptiness and non-possession. In the author's own words, the goal of the Grail hero is to give of himself without limit: "L'homme qui se dépensait le plus (et en pure perte.)"<sup>482</sup> This is the path of Giono's own evolution as expressed in the post-1949 letters where he progresses from the wildly jealous lover of the earlier years to the serenely supportive friend of the later years when he finally accepts Blanche and arrives at a profound appreciation of their long friendship. As a study of his novels of the 1950's and '60's reveals, Giono carried out his own quest in his fiction

Jean-François Clément suggests this same process of evolution via passion in his study of the Tristan myth. In fact, he suggests that passion may be the only way to wisdom because, the experience of passion is so profound that it is capable of forcing the lover to transcend his old identity and be re-born into wisdom, the liberating *connaissance* that replaces passion. Clément points out that the woman who inspires the passion (or the man as the case may be) can finally be accepted by the lover because it is he/she who has precipitated the spiritual breakthrough - "le dépassement vers un au-delà spirituel" - which leads to a re-possession of the world, allowing the searcher to go beyond the ego toward a spiritual experience: "La passion peut alors être un élément d'un cheminement mystique, une forme d'auto initiation."

Roland Barthes' exploration of passion in *A Lover's Discourse* is surprisingly close to Giono's understanding of the stages of passion as he expressed it in his novels. Like Giono who allows his hero, Tringlot, to experience the transcendent state of a passion liberated from desire, Barthes suggests a final stage of passion beyond possession and even beyond the desire not to possess. As he points out, the romantic

---

<sup>482</sup> ORC V 1216.

solution to unrequited love is that of Werther who ended his life in suicide. Giono himself entertained the idea of suicide, as the letters reveal, but he found other resources that ultimately saved him: "A certains moments de l'an dernier, à peu près à la même époque que maintenant, j'ai quelquefois pensé au suicide [...] Pensé comme à une solution qu'on comprend, chez des êtres moins bien défendus."<sup>483</sup> It is clear that Giono, like the hero of *Le moulin de Pologne*, avoids the pitfalls of Romanticism, and opts for life. In this same November letter, he tells Blanche that he is re-creating the world that he knew before he met her, and even more importantly, that he is looking for a solution through his writing and his study of Machiavelli: "Je pousse tant que je peux le roman toujours à la même cadence et fais des pages de *l'iris* et de Machiavel en espérant que tout cela finira par m'exprimer tel que je suis."<sup>484</sup>

For a writer who had such a talent for invention, and who could spin such good stories, Giono's novels are amazingly introspective and personal. Both Léonce and Tringlot share much with the author and with their forbear, Angelo, and all of them are avatars of the gionian knight errant. It is Tringlot however, and not Léonce who achieves his own and his creator's apotheosis. Of all Giono's chivalric heroes, Tringlot is the least idealized, being neither an aristocrat like Angelo nor an aspiring saint like Léonce. He is more like the Bobi, the wandering acrobat in *Que ma joie demeure* or the narrator in *Le Moulin de Pologne*, whom Giono describes as a hunchback and in one version of the text, as a *raté*, a failure. Tringlot's final quest is not in the form of a flight this time, but rather it is an inward journey that leads him back to himself. Tringlot looks back over his life as a brigand and relives his adventures. His passion is not for women but for gold and by the end of his journey of introspection, he has emptied himself of desire and has decided to return the treasure

---

<sup>483</sup> 17 November 1950.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

he was hiding. The actual journey to return the treasure allows Tringlot to complete his transformation, both inward and outward. His other and abiding passion is for life; "ma passion est vivre" he asserts on several occasions, revealing the transformation in Giono's own thought. While during the composition of *Le moulin de Pologne*, Giono had maintained that the exceptional beings were those who were in love with death, Tringlot, his alter ego in his final novel affirms his passion for life.

That the two novels, at least at one point, bore the same title suggests not only their kinship but also the importance of the title for Giono. And yet *L'iris de Suse* is such an elusive title that its significance threatens to escape all but the most dedicated reader. How, after all, is the reader to make sense of the idea that the *iris de Suse* is at once a sumptuous flower, a mythological winged goddess and a tiny bone in the wing of a bird. It is almost as though the author wanted to lock the secret away from all but the most worthy readers, those who were willing to make the difficult interior journey toward understanding with him.

Once again T.S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday" poem offers a possible clue to Giono's choice of imagery in his novel. In fact the clue lies in the very portion of the poem that contains the lines that Giono quoted to Henri Fluchère: "Prophecy to the wind, to the wind only for only the wind will listen." The theme of Eliot's poem is very close to that of Giono's novel, the dissolution not into death exactly but into a mystical oneness with all that exists. Both authors rejected the carnal aspect of love in favor of its transcendent aspect. Tringlot, in giving everything away, pares his life down to its bare essence almost as though all that is left of his former self is a shining skeleton. It is no accident that one of his guides during the period of his inner quest is Casagrande, the collector of skeletons of birds and small animals. He finds beauty and purity in the white bones and it is he who tells Tringlot about the bone called the *Iris de Suse*: "Ah! C'est l'os qu'on appelle l'Iris de Suse, en grec: *Teleios*, ce qui veut dire: 'celui qui met la dernière main à tout ce qui s'accomplit'." Casagrande's

definition of the bone suggests an association with mysticism and in turn, suggests that the mystical experience is not transcendence itself but a bridge to the state of transcendence, which only comes after death. Bones evoke death and forgetting, and both the poet and the novelist were concerned with the profound forgetting that leads from transformation to a quasi-mystical state of contemplation:

“Let the whiteness of the bones atone to forgetfulness.  
There is no life in them. As I am forgotten  
And would be forgotten, so I would forget  
Thus devoted, concentrated in purpose.”

Giono had remarked to Blanche that in a mediocre world it was perhaps best to voluntarily fade into anonymity: “...il vaudrait mieux sans doute, que je me mette aux fadeurs [...] (Il y aurait peut-être un grand feu à faire avec un médiocre volontaire, une sorte d’acrobate qui raterait volontairement tous ses coups.)” There is little doubt that Tringlot is Giono’s “médiocre volontaire” who by ending his struggle accomplishes his quest. Like the speaker in the poem, Tringlot is seeking to lose himself in obscurity: “J’ai envie d’une fin obscure, la plus obscure du monde. Je n’ai pas tellement besoin d’une fin lumineuse.” Like the small bird who cannot fly because a tiny useless bone is keeping him earth-bound, Tringlot’s metamorphosis requires that he continue his quest until he empties himself of everything that is keeping him from being free. This struggle toward transcendence is also a central theme of T.S. Eliot’s poem:

"Because these wings are no longer wings to fly  
But merely vans to beat the air  
The air which is now thoroughly small and dry

Smaller and dryer than the will  
Teach us to care and not to care  
Teach us to sit still."

In Giono's own quest for liberation, air and space were his most essential elements. Robert Ricatte emphasizes this affinity for space in his preface to the Pléiade edition of Giono's works and Giono expresses his need for the renewing properties of air in a letter to Blanche: " Je suis un nageur d'air, un plongeur d'air, un homme qui doit fréquenter les plages de l'air. C'est l'air qui me lave, me modèle et me rafraîchit."<sup>485</sup> Giono sought the inspiration of the hills and mountains of Provence in his own life and often situated his novels in high places, surrounded only by the airy reaches of the sky. Tringlot is in the high pastureland where the shepherds are grazing their sheep during the summer months when his transformation occurs. However, the work of transformation takes place during the night in the *maison en dur*, the stone house that the hero shares for a time with the shepherds. The setting the author chooses reflects the fact that this is a profound interior change, a rebirth that requires the darkness of the enclosed womb-like stone house as a place of gestation. Tringlot's inward journey is still a quest but this time the hero, like Orpheus in the Underworld, must conduct his search in the darkest recesses of himself.

One can see the prototypical gionian hero in Tringlot, the man who is no longer in harmony with nature, in this case because he is in thrall to his passion for gold. As in T.S. Eliot's poem, the air, "which is now thoroughly small and dry," has lost its power to cleanse the hero because he no longer seeks solace in nature. For the brigand fleeing the law, nature is elemental and cruel and he yearns for a human habitation. Like the little bird, who has not completed his process of evolution and

---

<sup>485</sup> 18 September 1945.

can only flutter a few feet above the ground, Tringlot is earthbound. He has lost his liberty symbolized by the loss of the power of flight: "...these wings are no longer wings to fly, but merely vans to beat the air..." In Giono's hierarchy, all exceptional beings are light-footed, winged creatures whose liberated spirits allow them to escape the fetters which bind ordinary folk to the earth. Tringlot finds freedom, however, not by means of a flight to a new life, but rather in the wholehearted acceptance of mortal limitations and the responsibilities that accompany the mortal condition. By renouncing his passion for gold and his life as a wandering adventurer, Tringlot finds the answer to his quest in the life of the everyday in a small Provençal village and in loving contemplation of the mute, autistic *absente*.

Tringlot is Giono's ultimate acrobat who turns himself inside out and thus goes from being a thief possessed by his passion for gold, to a saintly ascetic or even a knight of chivalry whose chief attribute is his absolute generosity. As Giono's emblematic *homme de pure perte*, he has also achieved the barthian ideal and transcended not only the will-to-possess but also the more elusive, will-not-to-possess. He is willing to devote the rest of his life to the care of a woman who is incapable of reciprocating his love for her: "Désormais elle serait protégée contre vents et marées et elle ne savait même pas qu'il était tout pour elle."<sup>486</sup> As he reaches the end of his interior journey and prepares to take up the unchanging life of a village blacksmith, he personifies Eliot's incantatory words in the "Ash Wednesday" poem: "Teach us to care and not to care, teach us to sit still." By giving everything away, including himself, Tringlot has achieved a quasi-mystical beatitude and he has fulfilled the chivalric quest: "Je suis comblé. Maintenant, j'ai tout."<sup>487</sup> The peaceful tone of Giono's last letter to Blanche suggests that in the completion of the novel, its

---

<sup>486</sup> ORC VI 527.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

author too has accomplished his quest: “Je suis en train de terminer un roman: *L’iris de Suse*, un vieux titre. [...] Et voilà! La vie se termine, lentement, sagement avec l’acceptation de mes faiblesses et mon enroulement de colimaçon.”<sup>488</sup>

---

<sup>488</sup> 5 April 1969.



## Conclusion

Although Jean Giono's correspondence with Blanche Meyer was closed to the public until January 1, 2000, it is surprising that his critics have never made reference to the existence of the letters or even to the woman who was the recipient of the thirty-year correspondence. As the preceding chapters amply demonstrate, the letters are essential to a proper understanding of Giono's work from 1939 onward and in fact, much of his work is unnecessarily obscure without the letters. Without knowing about Giono's liaison with Blanche one cannot understand Pauline (nor any of Giono's other Blanche-inspired heroines), and without understanding his personal experience of passion one cannot pretend to understand the conception of love that he expressed in his novels. Blanche was the woman through which Giono attempted to understand the feminine in the world and more importantly, in himself.

In his essay on the love letter, Philippe Brenot suggests that love letters are published only if they are written by great men (or women) and if the addressee admires the letter-writer.<sup>489</sup> I would argue that the love letters of the great are invaluable primary sources and as such, should be published regardless of the relationship between the letter-writer and the addressee. In Giono's case, the friendship endured despite Giono's decision not to marry Blanche and her subsequent infidelity. However, rather than being viewed as unflattering documents because of Blanche's behavior toward Giono and his consequent suffering, the letters are of

---

<sup>489</sup> *De la lettre d'amour* (Cadeillhan: Zulma, 2000).

primary importance as a means of revealing his painful evolution from a selfish, jealous and violent lover into a generous, accepting, magnanimous friend. These concepts, after all, are important themes of Giono's fiction and their genesis can only be surmised without the letters. Moreover, the letters are essential as a means of correcting the erroneous impression that Giono was a provincial writer who lived a simple life inspired by nature and was therefore not as vital a member of the literary world as the Parisian writers of his day. The material contained in the correspondence reveals that Giono was a complex man of letters for whom literature and writing were paramount. In fact, Giono's superlative fictional output gives the lie to the idea, embedded in the French psyche, that only Paris can produce great writers.

It is clear from his own words that Giono wanted and expected the letters to be published. At a moment when his love affair with Blanche seemed to be over, he wrote: "Et je crois qu'il faudrait, malgré tout quelquefois revenir sur ce chapitre pour que *le lecteur* [emphasis mine] ne croit pas que c'est fini de ce côté-là."<sup>490</sup> Many references in the letters illustrate their importance for Giono as instruments of self-expression:

"Je suis peut-être idiot de tant attacher d'importance aux lettres que je t'écris mais elles sont tellement l'expression de ma vie, j'ai tant appétit à te donner chaque expression de ma vie, j'ai tant espoir que cette expression peut te montrer la passion vraie de mon coeur que je tremble d'en imaginer la moindre miette

---

<sup>490</sup> 15 March 1950.

perdue. [...] Pourquoi les lettres des autres ne se perdent-elles pas? [...]

J'écris en faisant vendange de mon Coeur et mes lettres se perdent.”<sup>491</sup>

At one stormy moment in their relationship, Giono asked Blanche to return his letters and insisting on their value, suggested that if she wanted to sell them, she should contact the Bibliothèque de France: “En toute bonne foi et dégagé de toutes raisons sentimentales, je vais vous dire que le prix offert est très intéressant même pour le moment.”<sup>492</sup> This gesture on Giono's part shows that he knew the value of the letters and realized that one day critics and scholars would want to read them.

For one thing, as Giono himself recognized, the letters constitute an essential portrait of the artist: “Si plus tard, quelqu'un a la curiosité de me connaître tel que je suis, c'est dans les lettres que je t'écris qu'il me trouvera. Il me verra jaloux et passionné parce que je suis jaloux et passionné et que je te le dis toujours avec franchise sans rien dissimuler.”<sup>493</sup> In addition, Giono revealed the workings of his inner life more fully in his letters to Blanche than anywhere else: “Chérie, c'est seulement pour te raconter ce que minute par minute je me raconte à moi-même.”<sup>494</sup> This is the real purpose of the letters as Giono admits in one of his angry, disillusioned moments: “Petite lettre idiote. Il vaudrait mieux ne pas l'envoyer. Et pourtant, autant que les autres elle dépeint l'état dans lequel je suis aujourd'hui par

---

<sup>491</sup> September 1947 no. 10.

<sup>492</sup> 21 January 1943.

<sup>493</sup> 7 October 1947.

<sup>494</sup> 29 December 1940.

rapport à toi.”<sup>495</sup> This process of introspection and self-revelation was essential to Giono as he tells Blanche in the earlier letter; “T’écriture m’était plus nécessaire que tout.”<sup>496</sup> The 30-year correspondence was an integral and necessary component of his creative life and inspiration: “J’écrivais maintenant un admirable livre avec votre aide. Il faut pour que je continue que je me persuade qu’il est une longue lettre d’amour que je continue à vous écrire.”<sup>497</sup> Conversely, as if to further mingle letters and fiction, Giono actually incorporates Blanche’s letters into his novel, *Pour saluer Melville*.<sup>498</sup>

However, it is not only because of what they reveal about Giono as a man and an artist that the letters are important. They also disclose Giono’s liaison with Blanche Meyer and the essential role she played in Giono’s life. Blanche’s identity deserves to be made public because she was the only woman to be so profoundly involved in Giono’s work and especially in his creative process as his muse, his model and his confidante. As the letters show, Blanche was Giono’s facilitator and his genitrix as a writer. They were the couple that gave birth to his books. I believe, therefore, that Giono would have wanted the world to know about her and to appreciate the part she played in his life and work:

“Au moment où peut-être le monde nouveau se construit un étrange homme nouveau se construit en moi. Mes amis mêmes sont émerveillés. Merci et

---

<sup>495</sup> 27 August 1942.

<sup>496</sup> 29 December 1940.

<sup>497</sup> 5 July 1940.

<sup>498</sup> 17 February 1940.

merci ma fillette de me permettre de reflurir à l'époque où j'allais peut-être ne plus produire que des épines. C'est maintenant que je peux peut-être créer ma 9ème Symphonie, orchestrer les chœurs de la douleur, de la joie et de la vie. Merci et merci, je ne serai que ce que tu auras voulu que je sois et je veux dire *librement* (underlined by Giono) à tout le monde que c'est toi qui m'as fait. Oh Blanche, ma joie et ma vie!"<sup>499</sup>

Blanche inspired Giono's conception of love and incarnated it for him. Giono saw her as the lovely, innocent lady of chivalry and their love as the embodiment of *amour courtois*. This idealization of love redeemed it for him and elevated it far above a mere experience of adultery. What is more, by relying on the construct of *amour courtois* with its inherent tension between the purity demanded by the ideal and the constant state of carnal desire necessary to keep the love alive, Giono not only ennobled his love for Blanche but imbued the relationship with the enigmatic quality that is the essence of chivalric love and thus made it a fitting subject for literary contemplation. Finally Giono interiorized Blanche to the extent that he no longer needed an on-going day-to-day relationship with her in order to write. And yet, the memory of her presence never ceased to echo in his heart and in his work, right to the very end of his life. As unworthy as she may have been as a real woman, no one ever replaced her in Giono's psyche and his last novel is a testament to her supreme importance for him.

None of this is meant to disparage or deny the value of the part played in Giono's life by his wife, Elise. She typed his manuscripts for many years and as a

---

<sup>499</sup> 18 January 1940.

former teacher, may even have corrected his spelling and grammatical errors.<sup>500</sup> She created the tranquility in his household that was necessary to him as a writer. And she created a home not only for his children but for his difficult mother and his alcoholic uncle as well as for her own mother, not to mention entertaining his many visitors. All of Giono's critics agree that Elise was a model wife and mother and that the couple got on well. She remained faithful and supportive, even after she learned about his liaison with Blanche by inadvertently opening one of Blanche's letters.<sup>501</sup> She even accepted the relationship as essential to Giono's life (although one suspects, from Giono's words in the following letter to Blanche, that she was not privy to the sexual nature of their friendship):

“C'est-à-dire que j'ai expliqué et soutenu la solidité de la tendresse de qualité extrêmement pure qui me lie à toi et Elise a parfaitement compris. [...] Elle sait que j'ai une extrême 'affection' pour toi et elle admet que c'est logique et que naturellement je te voie comme par le passé.”<sup>502</sup>

Giono adds that Elise accepted the affair in that same way that Blanche's husband Louis did after he learned of it in 1942.<sup>503</sup> The letters shed no light on the effect of Elise's discovery of the affair on their marriage. However, Elise appears in Giono's

---

<sup>500</sup> Giono's daughter, Sylvie, related in an interview with Jacques Mény that her mother often tried to critique her husband's writing when he would read them portions of novels he was working on, a gesture Giono did not always appreciate. See “Lectures familiales,” Entretien avec Sylvie Durbet-Giono par Jacques Mény, *Giono dans sa culture Actes du colloque international de Perpignan et Montpellier* (27, 29 et 30 mars 2001).

<sup>501</sup> 7 January 1946.

<sup>502</sup> 8 January 1946.

<sup>503</sup> See letter of 5 July 1942.

novel, *Le moulin de Pologne*, as the model for Louise, the innocent victim, not of her husband's infidelity, but of the seductive powers of the woman called the *démon*. She is depicted in the novel as a cripple, which makes her doubly pitiable, suggesting that Giono felt remorse even if he could express it only in his fiction. Louise's portrayal in the book as handicapped also intimates perhaps that Louise/Elise had some flaw for which she was not responsible but which made Léonce/Giono more vulnerable to the charms of the Blanche-inspired *démon*.

One of the most important revelations of the letters is that Giono derived his inspiration, his ideas and his view of the world from literature and not in the world of nature as had been previously supposed. While it is true that the hills above Manosque provided solace, and that he always returned stimulated and refreshed after his walks in the countryside, what Giono perceived in nature was inspired by what he read in books. He saw ancient Greece reflected in the limestone hills outside his native village because he had read Homer and the Greeks; the elder tree that he called "le sureau de Prince Olaf" was interpreted as a romantic symbol because he had read the poems of Heinrich Heine; he was comforted by rain and dark skies during his period of anguish after Blanche's romance with François Bravay because he knew Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* and identified with its author's interior state.

Giono's use of literary stimuli is a complex process of assimilation leading to creativity. His reading and translation of Herman Melville led him to write *Pour saluer Melville*, a book that is not only a homage to the American author but also a memorial to his love for Blanche. The book read in conjunction with the letters illustrates the way in which Giono used his various sources of inspiration; it was

Blanche who gave him the enthusiasm to write the book while it was Melville who informed its composition as a literary work. And as with all great writers, the book finally is more about Giono than about Melville or Blanche. Under the dual inspiration of Melville's artistry and Blanche's love, Giono succeeded in writing a novel that ultimately became an expression of his vocation as a writer. Moreover, the conception of love that Giono portrayed in the book was inspired not only by Blanche herself, but also by the ideal that Giono had constructed under the inspiration of his reading of Arthurian legend, the myth of Tristan and Isolde and Stendhal; in fact, the evolution of Giono's love for Blanche is an illustration of the crystallization process.

Giono's literary influences were many and varied, as the preceding chapters have revealed, running the gamut from Stendhal to T.S. Eliot. His aesthetic derived from the tales of chivalry but also from Baudelaire. His tragic world-view came from the Greek tragedies and from Shakespeare. His heroic ideal came from chivalry and also from the novels of Stendhal. His image of the poet as an outsider came from Stendhal and his ideal of the "happy few." However, in the case of his ill-fated outsiders like Bobi, the protagonist of *le déserteur* and even Tringlot, Giono seem to have been inspired more by Baudelaire's figure of the albatross or his *jongleur* in "A la madone" than by Stendhal. In this sense, Giono wrote in the great tradition of French literature, which holds that a writer must look to the literary tradition of the past, create based on what has come before, and thus contribute to and become a part of that literary tradition. Giono acknowledged his debt to literature in his letters to Blanche, and yet, in his fiction he was always eminently himself. As I pointed out in my discussion of *L'iris de Suse*, he was able to draw for inspiration on the imagery



from a hermetic T.S. Eliot poem to create a novel set in the high hills of Provence, in which the protagonists are peasant/poets who speak a gionian version of the local patois.

Finally, as I have shown, the letters reveal the myth that guided Giono's life as well as his work. As in all autobiographical writing, the letters, which are purportedly "true," contain elements of fiction. The appropriation of the myth of *amour courtois* as an important life myth creates a link between Giono's life and his fiction. By using the construct of myth in his novels, Giono freed himself from the constraints of reality and historical accuracy and allowed him to invent a fictional world carried along on the wings of his imagination. For Giono, myth was an alternative to psychology, which he disliked and mistrusted, and offered a way to frame experience and to examine life by presenting it metaphorically. Myth's purpose is not merely to divert but also to enlighten, which places it squarely within the tradition of French literature and made it appealing to Giono both as a story-teller and as a moralist. The mythic message partakes of commonly held beliefs and arises out of the collective memory of an entire people. This explains the appeal of Giono's 1930's novels whose bucolic message of a return to an earthly Paradise Lost drew from the deeply held myth of the Fall and eventual return to the Garden of Eden. When the author exhausted this myth toward the end of the 1930's (and when it became politically untenable), he substituted the equally embedded myth of life as a purifying quest in which romantic love serves as a means toward salvation. In spite of his bitter real-life experience of love, Giono was able to redeem his ideal in his work because myth allows the possibility of realizing absolutes. His last novel, *L'iris de Suse*, can be read

as his final literary testament because it successfully rehabilitates both of his central myths, that of life as a circular journey ending in the return to an existence lived in harmony with nature, and that of love as a means toward salvation and the realization of the quest.

## Works Consulted

### I. Primary Sources: Works by Jean Giono

- Giono, Jean. *Oeuvres romanesques complètes*, t. I - VI. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971-1983.
- Giono, Jean. *Récits et essais*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, t.VII, 1988.
- Giono, Jean. "Journal de l'Occupation" in *Journal, poèmes, essais*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, t.VIII, 1995.
- Giono, Jean. *De Homère à Machiavel*. Paris: Gallimard, 1986.
- Giono, Jean. "Portrait de l'artiste par lui-même" *Bulletin* no. 44, (automne-hiver 1995) 9-88.
- Giono, Jean / Blanche Meyer, unpublished letters 1939-1970.  
Gen. MSS 457, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
- / Jean Paulhan, *Correspondance 1928-1963*. Ed. établie et annotée par Pierre Citron. Paris: Gallimard, *Cahiers Giono* no. 6, 2000.
- / Charles Vildrac, *Correspondance*. présentée par Pierre Citron. *Bulletin de l'Association des amis de Jean Giono*, No. 49 (printemps - été) 1998.
- / Gaston Pelous, *Correspondance*. présentée par Pierre Citron. *Bulletin de l'Association des amis de Jean Giono*, No. 48 (automne - hiver) 1997.
- / Jean Guéhenno, *Correspondance 1928-1969*. Ed. établie et annotée par Pierre Citron. Collection "Missives". Paris: Seghers, 1991.

----- / Lucien Jacques *Correspondance 1922-1961*. présentée et annotée  
par Pierre Citron. *Cahiers Giono* no.1. Paris: Gallimard, 1981.

**Primary Sources: Blanche Meyer**

Meyer, Blanche. Unpublished notes. General Collections Jean Giono / Blanche Meyer. Gen. MSS 457. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

**Primary Sources : Interviews**

Giono, Jean. « Du côté de Manosque » Entretien avec Jean Carrière. France Culture, septembre 1965. Collection *Les grandes heures*. 2 CD, 1994.

Giono, Jean. « Propos et récits de Jean Giono » 25 entretiens avec Marguerite Taos, Du 9 janvier au 6 juin 1955. Collection *Les grandes heures*. 5 CD, 1994.

Sylvie, Giono. “Lectures familiales” Entretien avec Jacques Mény. Documentaire spécialement réalisé pour le colloque *Giono dans sa culture*. Actes du colloque international de Perpignan et Montpellier (27,28,29 et 30 mars, 2001).

**Other Primary Sources:**

Beauvoir, Simone de. *A Transatlantic Love Affair: Simone de Beauvoir, Letters to Nelson Algren*. New York: The New Press, 1998.

Bousquet, Joë. *Un amour couleur de thé*. Lettres de Joë Bousquet à Fany. Paris: Gallimard, 1984.

- Giono, Elise. "Manosque au début du siècle". *L'Arc.100 Jean Giono*. Marseille: Ed. LE JAS, 1986.
- Jacob, Max. "Max Jacob's Letters to Gertrude Stein". *Max Jacob Centennial, 1876-1976*. Brockport: SUNY, 1976.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Lettres à Méry Laurent*. Ed. établie et présentée par Bertrand Marchal. Paris: Gallimard, 1996.
- Miller, Henry. *Dear Dear Brenda: The Love Letters of Henry Miller to Brenda Venus*. Ed. Gerald Sindell. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986.
- Sévigné, Madame de. *Lettres*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. 3 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1953-1963.
- Yourcenar, Marguerite. *Lettres à ses amis et quelques autres*. Ed. établie, présentée et annotée par Michèle Sarde et Joseph Brami avec la collaboration d' Elyane Dezon-Jones. Paris: Gallimard, 1995.

## **II. Secondary Sources:**

- Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1983.
- Ames, Sanford S. "Cinderella's Slipper: Mallarmé's Letters in Duras." *Visible Language*, XII 3 (Summer 1978). 245-254.
- Arnaud, Philippe. *Pour une érotique gionienne: La guêpe et le narcisse*. Paris: l'Harmattan, 2000.
- Arnaud-Toulouse, Marie-Anne. "Dans les jardins d' Armide." *Giono l'enchanteur*. Colloque international de Paris, sous la direction de Mireille Sacotte. (2,3 et 4 octobre, 1995) 111-121.
- Arrouye, Jean. *D'un seul tenant : manières et matière gioniennes*. Aix-en-Provence : Pub. de l'Université de Provence, 2003.

- Assouline, Pierre. *L'épuration des intellectuels*. Paris: Editions Complexe, 1995.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon , 1969. Trans. of *La poétique de l'espace*. PUF, 1985.
- *La psychanalyse du feu*. Paris: Gallimard, 1938.
- Badr, Ibrahim H. *Jean Giono: L'esthétique de la violence*. New York: Peter Lang, 1998.
- Bantel-Cnyrim, Andrea B. "Regain ou un mal entendu sur Giono." *Giono l'enchanteur*. Actes du colloque de Paris, 1995. 55-65.
- Barber, Richard. *The Arthurian Legends*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1993.
- Barstad, Guri. "L'iris de Suse ou l'appel de l'autre." *Giono romancier*. Colloque du centenaire. Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1999. 51-57.
- Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse : Fragments*, Trans. Richard Howard. New York : Hill and Wang. 1979. Trans. of *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*. 1957.
- Mythologies*. Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1957.
- Baudry, Robert. "Giono et la table ronde" *Bulletin de l'Association des amis de Jean Giono* No. 42 (automne-hiver 1991) 26-52.
- Benjamin, Jessica. *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference*. New Haven : Yale UP, 1995.
- .....*The Bonds of Love*. New York: Pantheon , 1988.
- Bergin, Thomas G. Introduction. *Anthology of the Provençal Troubadours*. Second edition, revised and enlarged by Thomas Bergin with the collaboration of Susan Olson, William D. Paden, Jr. and Nathaniel Smith. New Haven: Yale UP, 1973.

- Berlier, Jean-Marc. *Les policiers français sous l'Occupation: d'après les archives inédites de l'épuration*. Paris: Perrin, 2001.
- Biehl, Janet and Peter Staudenmaier. *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience*. Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995.
- Blum, Léon. "A theoretical Outline of *Beylism*". Trans. Richard L. Greeman. *Stendhal*. Ed. Victor Brombert. Collection, *Twentieth Century Views*. Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962. 101-113. (From *Stendhal et le Beylisme*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1947.)
- Bogin, Meg. *Women Troubadours*. London: Paddington, 1982.
- Bonner, Anthony. Introduction. *Songs of the Troubadours*. Ed. and trans. by Anthony Bonner. New York: Schocken Books, 1972.
- Bosco, Henri. *Le Mas Théotime*. Paris: Gallimard, 1952.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Masculine Domination*. Trans. Richard Nice. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001. Trans. of *La domination masculine*, 1998.
- Bray, Bernard. *L'art de la lettre amoureuse: des manuels aux romans (1550-1700)*. Paris: Mouton, 1967.
- Bregues, Jacques. "La correspondance amoureuse et le sacré". *Ecrire, publier, lire les correspondances*. Actes du colloque international: "Les Correspondances". U. de Nantes, novembre, 1983. 55-77.
- Brenot, Philippe. *De la lettre d'amour*. Cadeilhan: Zulma, 2000.
- Briffault, Robert S. *The Troubadours*. Trans. by the author. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1965.
- Bromberg, Victor. "Stendhal, Analyst or Amorist?" 1953. *Stendhal*. Ed. Victor Brombert. 157-166.
- Brunel, Dominique. "Le langage dans la trilogie de Pan." *Bulletin des amis de Jean Giono*. no. 33. (printemps-été, 1990) 81-99.

Burrin, Philippe. *France Under the Germans*. Trans. Janet Lloyd. New York: The New Press, 1996. Trans. of *La France à l'heure allemande*. 1995.



- Buisine, Alain. "Ici Sartre (dans les *Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres*)."  
*Revue des Sciences humaines* no. 195, juillet - septembre, 1984.
- Caillois, Roger. *Le mythe et l'homme*. Paris: Gallimard-folio, 1938.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.
- ..... *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, Bollingen  
 XVII, 1973.
- *The Masks of God: Occidental Mythology*. vol. III. Penguin USA,  
 1964.
- Carrabino, Victor. "The Poetics of Fire in Jean Giono's *Le Chant du monde*." *Poetics  
 of the Elements of the Human Condition*: part II. Vol. 23. "The Airy  
 Elements in Poetic Imagination." Ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. London:  
 Dordrecht, 1988.
- Carroll, David. "What it Meant to be 'a Jew' in Vichy France: Xavier Vallat, State  
 Anti-Semitism, and the Question of Assimilation". *Substance*. Special Issue:  
*Demythologizing the Occupation*. Guest Ed. Rosemarie Scullion. Vol.  
 XXVII, No.3. U of Wisconsin P, 1998.
- Carrière, Jean. *Jean Giono: Qui êtes-vous?* Lyon: La Manufacture, 1996.
- Castiglione, Agnès. *Une démonologie magnifique: la figure de l'ange dans l'oeuvre  
 de*  
*Jean Giono*. Aix-en-Provence: Pub. de l'Université de Provence, 2000.
- Chantal, Carta. "Les jardins d'Armide: entre *recréantise* et merveille". *Bulletin*  
 No. 53 (printemps - été 2000). 18-63.
- Chevaly, Maurice. *Giono vivant: notre ami Jean le bleu*. Ed. Autres Temps, 1995.
- Citron, Pierre. *Giono 1895-1970*. Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1990.
- "Relecture de *L'iris de Suse*" *Bulletin* no. 50, (automne-hiver, 1998)  
 12-45.

- "Légende et vérité". *L'Arc 100 Jean Giono*. Marseille: Ed. LE JAS, 1986.
- "Pacifisme, révolte paysanne, romanesque sur Giono de 1934 à 1939" *Jean Giono imaginaire et écriture*. Actes du Colloque de Talloires (4, 5 et 6 juin 1984). Edisud, 1985.
- Clayton, Alan. *Pour une poétique de la parole chez Giono*. Appendix. "Giono lecteur de Baudelaire: *Fragments d'un Paradis* et "Le Voyage." 133-144. Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1978.
- Clément, Jean-François. "Pourquoi Tristan et Iseut n'est pas un roman d'amour" *Analyses et réflexions sur Tristan et Iseut (adaptation de Joseph Bédier) : La passion amoureuse*. Ellipses. Paris : Marketing, 1991. 59-65.
- Dabezies, André. "Le Hussard et Tristan: Giono et Rougemont". *Giono aujourd'hui*. Actes du Colloque international Jean Giono d'Aix-en-Provence. (10-13 juin, 1981). 274-280.
- Dezon-Jones, Elyane. *Les écritures féminines*. Intro. par Germaine Brée. Paris: Magnard, 1973.
- Durand, Jean-François. *Les métamorphoses de l'artiste : l'esthétique de Jean Giono de*  
*Naissance de l'Odyssée à L'iris de Suse*. Aix-en-Provence : Pub. de l'Université de Provence, 2000.
- "Elégance bergère : vers une poétique de *L'iris de Suse*" *Bulletin* no. 50 (automne-hiver 1998) 45-76.
- "Le portrait de l'écrivain entre Virgile et Machiavel". *Giono autrement: l'apocalyptique, le panique, le dionysiaque*. Actes de Colloque du 31 mars 1995. Réunis par Béatrice Bonhomme et Jacques Chabot. Aix-en-Provence : Pub. De l'U. d'Aix-en-Provence, 1996.

- Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*. Trans. William R. Trask. New York: Harper Torch Books, 1961. Trans. of *Le sacré et le profane*. 1957.
- "Myth and Reality". *The Myth and Ritual Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.
- Ewert, A. *The Romances of Tristan by Béroutl*. 5th edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1963.
- Ferdinand, Joseph. *Gionisme et panthéisme: la recréation de l'homme par Jean Giono*. Sherbrooke, Can: Naaman, 1987.
- Fisher, David James. *Romain Rolland and the Politics of Intellectual Engagement*. Berkeley: U. of Cal. P, 1988.
- Fourcaut, Laurent. "L'été et le choléra dans *Le hussard sur le toit*." Le hussard sur le Toit de Jean Giono, Actes du colloque d'Arras (16 et 17 novembre, 1995.)
- ....."Les livres de Giono". *L'Arc*. 100 Jean Giono. Marseille: Ed. LE JAS, 1986.
- Frye, Northrop. "The Archetypes of Literature". *The Myth and Ritual Theory*. Ed. Robert A. Segal. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.
- Gaitet, Pascale. "Sleeping With the Enemy: Jean Genet's Erotic Reconfiguration of the Occupation." *Substance* Vol. XXVII. 1998, 73-83.
- George, Jocelyne. *Paris /Province: de la Révolution à la mondialisation*. Paris: Fayard, 1988.
- Girard, René. *Violence and the Sacred*. Trans. Patrick Gregory. 3rd printing, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981. Trans. of *La violence et le sacré*. 1972.
- "What is a Myth". *The Myth and Ritual Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.
- Glees, Anthony. *Reinventing Germany: German Political Development Since 1945*. Oxford: Berg, 1996.
- Godard, Henri. *D'un Giono l'autre*. Paris: Gallimard, 1995.
- Golson, Richard. "Myths of Apocalypse and Renewal: Jean Giono and *Literary Collaboration*". *Substance* XXVII. 1998, 17-35.
- Godwin, Malcolm. *The Holy Grail*. New York: Viking Penguin. 1994.

- Goetschel, Pascale et Emmanuelle Loyer. *Histoire culturelle et intellectuelle de la France au XXe siècle*. Armand Colin, 1994.
- Gothot-Mersch, Claudine. "Sur le renouvellement des études de correspondances littéraires: l'exemple de Flaubert". *Romantisme* no. 72 (1991 - 92).
- Gramain, Michel. "Jean Giono et son œuvre de 1934 à 1944 : une étude de Réception." *Bulletin* no. 55 (printemps-été 2001) 70-84.
- Grassi, Marie Claire. *Lire l'épistolaire*. Paris: Dunod, 1992.
- Guéhenno, Jean. *Journal des années noires (1940-44)*. Paris: Gallimard-folio, 1973.
- Heller-Goldenberg, Lucette. *Le Contadour: "Un foyer de poésie vivante" 1935-1939*. Les Belles lettres, 1972.
- Heller, Gerhard. *Un Allemand à Paris 1940-1944*. avec le concours de Jean Grand. Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1981.
- Hofstadter, Dan. *The Love Affair as a Work of Art*. New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1996.
- Howe, Irving. "Stendhal: The Politics of Survival." 1957. *Stendhal*. Ed. Victor Brombert. 76-95.
- Hüe, Denis. "Walter Scott et Jean Giono, une parenté." *Bulletin des amis de Jean Giono*. No. 55. (printemps - été) 2001.
- Jardine, Alice A. *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Jasmin, Claude-Guy. "L'invention du zéro." *Giono aujourd'hui*. Actes du colloque d'Aix-en Provence, 1981. 189-203.
- Johnson, Barbara. *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*. 3rd printing. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992.
- Judt, Tony. *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*. Berkeley : U. Of Cal. P, 1992.

- Julien, Hélène M. *"Ce paquet de littérature à deux": Passion, écriture, et recherche de soi dans le journal de Catherine Pozzi et les cahiers de Paul Valéry*. Diss. Princeton U, 1994.
- Kaplan, Alice Yaeger. *Reproductions of Banality*. Minneapolis, Minn: U. of Minn. Press, 1986.
- Kaufmann, Linda. *Special Delivery*. Chicago and London: U. of Chicago P, 1992.
- Discourses of Desire*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1986.
- Kaufman, Vincent. *L'équivoque épistolaire*. Paris: Minuit, 1990.
- Kedward, H.R. *Resistance in Vichy France*. Oxford U P, 1978.
- Labouret, Denis. "Contagion et abjection dans *Le hussard sur le toit*" *Le hussard sur le toit de Jean Giono*. Actes du colloque d'Arras, 1995.
- "L'écriture polémique de Giono". *Giono l'enchanteur*. Actes du colloque de Paris, 1995. 21-23.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. Trans. Jacqueline Rose. Ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose. New York: Pantheon-Norton, 1982.
- Lacassagne, Jean-Pierre. "Le discours épistolaire comme travail sur soi." *George Sand: Une correspondance*. Textes réunis par Nicole Moset. Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian Pirot, éditeurs, 1994.
- Landes, Agnès. "Coeurs, passions, caractères: l'homme problématique." *Giono romancier*. 265-277.
- Laurichesse, Jean-Yves. "Création romanesque et réflexion sur le roman: Giono lecteur de Stendhal et les problèmes du roman de Georges Blin." *Giono romancier*. Colloque de centenaire, Aix-en-Provence, 1999. 289-309.
- Leissing, Jean-Marie. *Découverte du monde chez C. F. Ramuz et Jean Giono*. Zurich: Juris Druck-Verlag, 1972.
- Lejeune, Philippe. *Le pacte autobiographique*. Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1975, 1996.

- Lévy, Bernard-Henri. *L'idéologie française*. Paris: Grasset et Fasquelle, 1981.
- Lindenberg, Daniel. "French Intellectuals and a German Europe: An Aspect of Collaboration". *Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century France: Mandarins and Samurais*. Ed. Jeremy Jennings. St. Martin's, 1993.
- Loomis, Roger Sherman. *The Development of Arthurian Romance*. New York: Harper TorchBooks, 1964.
- *The Grail*. New York: Columbia UP, 1963.
- Loubet del Bayle, Jean-Louis. *Les non-conformistes des années 30*. Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1969.
- Lydon, Mary. "Love Letters: Michel Butor and Visible Language." *Visible Language*, XII 3 (Summer 1978). pp. 255-268.
- Machu, Anne et Didier. "Un œil en trop : La dimension perdue et l'espace De la perte." *Giono aujourd'hui*. Actes du colloque, Aix-en-Provence, 1981. 280-288.
- Marris, Michael and Robert O. Paxton. *Vichy France and the Jews*. New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- Marty-Dufaut, Josy. *L'amour au Moyen Age: De l'amour courtois aux jeux licencieux*. Paris: Autres Temps, 2002.
- Matthews, John. *The Elements of the Arthurian Legend*. 4th printing. Shaftesbury, Eng: Element Books, 1993.
- Maugey, Axel. "Amour tristanien et imaginaire dans *Le Chant du monde*," *Giono aujourd'hui*. Actes du colloque, Aix-en-Provence, 1981. 262-274.
- Mehlman, Jeffrey. "On Literature and the Occupation of France: Blanchot vs. Drieu." *Substance* Vol. XXVII, 1998. 7-16.
- Monin, Emmanuel-Yves. *Le grand chant d'amour des Troubadours, Trouvères et autres fidèles*. Paris: Y. Monin, 1999.

- Morel, Jean. archivist. *Jean Giono: Bibliographie et médiagraphie. Association des amis de Jean Giono.* (printemps 2000). Publication hors série.
- Morzewski, Christian. " Pour en finir avec le 'régionalisme' de Giono" *Giono dans sa culture.* Actes du Colloque international de Perpignan et Montpellier (27, 28 et 30 mars 2001) 359-375.
- Nelli, René. *Les Troubadours.* Trad. de René Lavaud et René Nelli. Belgique: Desclée De Brouwer, 1965. Tome I *Jauffre, Flamenca, Barlaam et Josephat.* Tome II, *Le trésor poétique de l'Occitanie.*
- *L'érotique des Troubadours.* Tome II. 1963. Paris: Union Générale d'éditions, 1974.
- "De l'amour provençal." *Cahiers du Sud,* numéro spécial *Le génie d' Oc,* 1942. 44-68.
- *Textes pour les Cahiers Du Sud.* Choisis et présentés par Daniel Fabre et Jean-Pierre Piniès. Ouvrage publié avec le concours du Conseil Général de l'Aude. Garae / Hésiode. Marseille: A. Robert, 1987.
- Neveu, Marcel. "Le romanesque de Giono." *Giono romancier.* Colloque du centenaire, Aix-en-Provence, 1999. 393-401.
- "Pour saluer Melville, la passion blanche." *Revue des lettres modernes,* Giono no.5, 1991.
- "Sur Le Hussard: Angelo et l'amour." RLM, *Giono* no. 1. 1974.
- "Les métamorphoses de Sylvie" *Bulletin* no. 53, (printemps-été 2000) 63-78.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner.* Trans. with commentary by Walter Kauffman. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- Patterson, Linda. *The World of the Troubadours: Medieval Occitan Society, c. 1100-c. 1300.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.

Paxton, Robert O. *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940-1944*. New York:  
Columbia UP, 1972.



- Pierrot, Jean. "La cruauté dans l'oeuvre de Giono". *Giono aujourd'hui*. Actes du Colloque, Aix-en-Provence, 1981. 189-203.
- Pourrat, Henri. "La pensée magique de Jean Giono." *Les critiques de notre temps et Giono*. Paris: Garnier, 1977.
- Prévost, Jean. "Lucien Leuwen." Trans. Ann Bayless. *Stendhal*. 47-63 (From *La création chez Stendhal*. Paris: Mercure de France, 1951.)
- Ragon, Michel. "Giono anarchiste?" *Magazine Littéraire*. No. 329, 1995.
- Rajsfus, Maurice. *La police de Vichy: les forces de l'ordre françaises au service de la Gestapo 1940-1944*. Paris: le cherche-midi, 1995.
- Ramond, Michèle. "La lettre ou le lien délirant." *Ecrire, publier, lire les correspondances*. Nantes, 1983. 357-374.
- Rannaud, Christine. *Giono philosophe*. Pas de Calais : Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2002.
- Rasson, Luc. *Ecrire contre la guerre: littérature et pacifismes 1916-1938*. Paris: l'Harmattan, 1997. especially Ch. 5, "On fait la vie avec le sang: Jean Giono et *Le grand troupeau*." 109-122.
- Ricard, Georges. "Langue provençale, provençalismes et français régional dans l'oeuvre de Giono." *Bulletin de l'association des amis de Jean Giono* No. 33. (printemps-été, 1990) 36-79.
- Ricatte, Robert. "Giono et la tentation de la perte". *Giono aujourd'hui*. Actes du colloque, Aix-en Provence, 1981. 217-226.
- Roger, Alain. "La lettre d'amour et l'effémation épistolaire." *Ecrire, publier, lire les correspondances*. 93-107.
- Roubaud, Jacques. *La fleur inverse: Essai sur l'art formel des troubadours*. Paris: Editions Ramsay, 1986.

- Les Troubadours*. Anthologie bilingue. Introduction, choix et version française de Jacques Roubaud. Collection "P.S." Paris: Seghers, 1980.
- Rougemont, Denis De. *Love In the Western World*. Trans. Montgomery Belgion, revised and augmented ed. including postscript by the author. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1983. Trans. of *L'Amour et l'Occident*, 1940.
- Sabiani, Julie. "A Propos de Giono et de l'amour". RLM, *Jean Giono* no. 1. 1974.
- *Giono et la terre*. Paris: Ed. Sang de la Terre, 1988.
- Schweiger, Amélie. "La lettre d'Orient". RSH, No. 195, juillet-septembre, 1984.
- Simon, Sunka. *Mail Orders: The Fiction of Letters in Postmodern Culture*. New York: SUNY P, 2002.
- Soucy, Robert. *Fascism in France: The Case of Maurice Barrès*. Berkeley : U. Of Cal. P, 1972.
- Stendhal. *De L'Amour*. 1822. *Oeuvres de Stendhal*. Ed. Henri Martineau. Vol. 4. Nedeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1968.
- *Le Rouge et le noir*. 1830. Ed. Henri Martineau. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1960.
- Sternhell, Zeev. *Ni droite ni gauche, l'idéologie fasciste en France*. Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1983.
- Strunk, William jr. *The Elements of Style*. With revisions, an introduction and a chapter on writing by E.B. White. 3rd edition. New York: Macmillan, 1979.
- Thiesse, Anne-Marie. *Ecrire La France: le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de la langue française entre la belle époque et la libération française*. Paris: PUF, 1991.
- Toderov, Tzvetan. "La quête du récit: le Graal." *Poétique de la prose*. Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1971 and 1978.
- Verdaguer, Pierre. "Denis de Rougemont et la nouvelle censure." *The French Revue*, Vol. LIX no.2. Dec. 1985. pp. 258-266.

- Viard, Bruno. "Un long dérèglement des termes de l'échange." *Giono romancier*.  
Actes du colloque du centenaire, Aix-en-provence, 1999. 467- 478.
- Vignes, Sylvie. *Giono et le travail des sensations : un barrage contre le vide*. Paris :  
Librairie Nizet, 1998.
- Vitaglione, Daniel. *The Literature of Provence: An Introduction*. Jefferson, N.C:  
Mc Farland & Co, 2000.
- Weil, Simone. *L'enracinement: prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l'être  
humain*. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.
- *Simone Weil: An Anthology*. Ed. and intro. Siân Miles. New York: Grove,  
1986.
- White, George Abbott. Ed. *Interpretations of a Life*. (Essays on the life of Simone  
Weil.) Amherst: U of Mass. P, 1981.
- Wilhelm, James J. *Seven Troubadours: The Creators of Modern Verse*. U. Park:  
Pennsylvania State UP, 1970.