"Esquisse d'une mort d'Helene" as the outline of Giono's "Pagan symbology"

Myrna Lutes Kintz

The University of Montana
ESQUISSE D'UNE MORT D'HELENE AS THE OUTLINE OF GIONO'S PAGAN SYMBOLOGY

By

Myrna Lutes Kintz

B.A., Montana State University 1963

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1977

Approved by:

[Signatures]

Chairman, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

Date 10/21/77
An examination of all available critical works shows that *Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène*, one of Jean Giono's earliest writings, has been virtually ignored by his critics and biographers. Since it is part of the total works of a contemporary author of stature, it is worthy of investigation. The study is limited to this play, thus excluding his other dramas, but referring to his pre-World War II short stories and major novels and essays when they give supporting evidence. A thorough study of mythology and traditional symbolism was also essential.

The first chapter contains a plot résumé, discusses the major theme, examines the cosmogony upon which the play is based, and discusses Giono's probable motivation in supplying an account of the death of Helen of Troy. The second chapter is a study of the symbolic importance of the setting, while the third and fourth chapters explore the symbolic meaning of the female characters. The final chapter is a discussion of the actual death scene of Hélène.

A study of *Esquisse* demonstrated that it contains most of Giono's pre-World War II concepts in germinal form expressed through a complex set of symbols. Indeed, the meaning of the play is obscure until it is interpreted on the symbolic level, and the imagery and symbols which appear in *Esquisse* prove to be constants throughout Giono's Panic cycle as is evidenced by tracing their appearance in his more fully developed works. The play was doubtless meant to be read, rather than produced on the stage; for much of the essence of the play resides in the symbols found in Giono's detailed descriptions of the decor and the characters. Since there is no account of the death of Helen of Troy in classical literature, Giono was free to supply his own and posit his view of death as the natural sacrifice necessary to rebirth, the cyclical continuation of life, and restoration of order. It is the overriding theme of the play. Hélène is semi-divine and embodies the same fundamental duality inherent in her brothers, the Gemini; therefore, she is the perfect foil for Giono's penchant for resolving dualities and uniting apparent opposites. Her basic duality is complemented by other antitheses and dualities throughout the play.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I. PLOT AND MAJOR THEMES</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. SYMBOLS IN THE SETTING</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE TRANSFORMED</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE TRANSFORMER</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE DEATH OF HÉLÈNE</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jean Giono never ventured far from his native Provence which he glorified through his lyrical descriptions of nature as well as the area's peasants, artisans, and shepherds. During a literary career of more than forty years, his voyages were those of the imagination—voyages shared with the world across the pages of a prodigious number of novels, short stories, essays, plays, film scenarios, radio dramas, and a collection of poems in prose.

Although Giono was enraciné in Manosque, appreciation for his work is increasingly widespread. Neglected until recently, Jean Giono has been heralded by some as one of the most important French writers of this generation. André Malraux, along with other noted men of letters felt that he was one of the three best.¹ Formal acclaim includes the following: the Prix Monégasque of one million francs, given by Prince Rainier of Monaco for the best ensemble of works in the French language (1953); election to the Goncourt Academy (1954); and the Prix Brentano (1931).

The latter award is especially significant, for Giono was the first recipient, and it brought him world-wide attention. The translator of this English version of Colline, Jacques le Clercq, states that the Prix Brentano is important, because it is the first American Foundation to recognize a French work and to guarantee its publication in America. Moreover, the possibility of clique manoeuvres—which sometimes accompanies prizes—is reduced since the jury is composed of foreigners.\(^2\)

Although Giono is now generally acclaimed as a writer of stature, the man himself is elusive; he is an enigma. Apparent simplicity belies the complexity of the inner man, and his critics and biographers cram their works with labels (often contradictory) in an effort to characterize him. Are we to believe that he is the pure pantheist and sensualist of Chonez; the solitary visionary, the anachronism, the demiurge of Boisdeffre; the modern of Robert; the poet in prose of Miller; or the great tale-teller of Pugnet?\(^3\) In short, there probably is no mot-clef for Jean Giono; but as he said, in an interview with Boisdeffre,

\(^2\)Miller, *The Books in My Life*, p. 110.

"s'il existe un homme heureux, c'est bien moi. J'adore écrire." Nonetheless, a brief biography of the man aids in understanding his work.

Giono was born March 30, 1895, in Manosque, a small village in Provence, and he made it his home until his death in October, 1970. He was extraordinarily proud of his humble origins; and profound attachment to his shoemaker-guérisseur father, his laundress mother, and his carbonaro paternal grandfather is affirmed by Giono's modeling some of his characters after them. From his French mother, he claimed to have inherited his sensitivity while he attributed his independent and humanitarian spirit to his father, who was of Italian lineage. Jean-Antoine Giono, an agnostic, most certainly influenced his son's religious views; yet he often read the Bible to him for its poetic content. This early Biblical influence manifested itself in Giono's frequent use of Christian imagery and symbolism in his works even though the author disavowed any interest in Christianity. It is the elder Giono who is credited with being...

---

the one to impart to young Jean a sensuous enjoyment of nature, an abhorrence of social injustice, a distrust of the increasingly mechanized modern society, a reverence for the value of love and solitude. Literarily speaking, Giono owes much to both parents.

Although he attended the local schools in Manosque, Giono's formal education was halted at the age of sixteen when it became necessary for him to support his family by clerking in a local bank. The tedious work was not without rewards, however, for Giono had to make small pilgrimages into the surrounding countryside on bank business; these jaunts served to deepen his acquaintance with the peasants of the region. His small salary afforded him the means to buy the inexpensive Garnier classics which allowed him to continue his education; and Giono developed a love of the Greeks, especially Homer, who inspired much of his early writings.

The First World War interrupted this period of Giono's life; his war experiences profoundly disturbed the sensitive young Jean and gave rise to his lifelong pacifism. Upon his demobilization in 1919, he returned to his bank job, and the following year he married Elise Maurin. (The couple had two daughters: Aline, in 1926; and Sylvie, in 1934.)

---

Giono fairly burst upon the literary scene in 1928 after André Gide enthusiastically endorsed his novel *Colline* which was first published in a literary magazine *Commerce*. The subsequent novels, *Un de Baumugnes* and *Regain*, which with *Colline* make up the Pan trilogy, were well-received by the public, thus enabling Giono to quit his job at the bank and devote himself completely to his writing. At this time he purchased his home, Le Paraïs, situated on the slopes of the Mont d'Or, near Manosque.

By 1935 many young people, writers, and others had begun to visit Giono at his home, calling upon their 'prophet' to help them realize their dreams of lasting joy and peace. When their numbers swelled, it became necessary to find a larger place, and the plateau of Contadour was chosen. The first Contadour was followed by others during the next six years. The bugle of the experiment was a quarterly called *Les Cahiers du Contadour*, comprised of contributions from the residents of the commune. The experience ended in disillusionment as Giono realized he could not play the prophet; he could not lead the followers of *gionisme* to joy, for the latter is a very personal matter. Each must find his own joy.9

Literary success was Giono's until the outbreak of World War II initiated a black period in his life; he was

9Smith, *Jean Giono*, pp. 88-93.
imprisoned before the war for his pacifist views and was again incarcerated after the Liberation on the suspicion that he was a Nazi sympathizer. In 1944 the Comité National des Ecrivains blacklisted Giono and all other writers accused of collaborating with the Nazis. The charges were unsubstantiated, and in 1947 Giono was free to publish again. The fact that his comeback was successful is, in itself, a proof of the merit of his writing. From that time until his death in 1970, Giono's life was singularly uneventful; it was a period of serenity dedicated to the essence of his existence—writing.\(^\text{10}\)

An examination of the importance of the myths to Giono will be helpful to the reader. As stated before, Giono continued his education by reading the inexpensive Garnier translations of the Greek classics when his formal education was halted. Although his critics agree that the myths were a vital literary influence upon Giono, their precise appeal for him is a moot point. Whether the poverty of his family precluded his buying works by modern authors,\(^\text{11}\) or whether "he felt the classics spontaneously and

\(^{11}\text{Smith, "Giono's Use of the Ulysses Concept," p. 41.}\)
lived them in his body,"12 is debatable. Since Redfern says that one of Giono's most salient characteristics is démesure, it follows that myths with their gross exaggerations and confusion of proportions appealed to Giono's untrammelled imagination; or, as Pugnet states, perhaps they were important to him because the Greek countryside so much resembled the region around Manosque that they taught him to "read" his own terroir.13

The retelling of Greek legends has been extremely popular in this century, particularly with important French writers such as Gide, Camus, Cocteau, Giraudoux, and Anouilh. Although Giono can hardly be classed with this group, perhaps he shares with them the reason they found Greek legends so compelling.

The central answer is that the myths are permanent. They deal with love; with war; with sin; with tyranny; with courage; with fate; and all in some way or other deal with the relation of man to those divine powers which are sometimes felt to be irrational, sometimes to be cruel, and sometimes, alas, to be just.14

While the renewal of the myths is an important trend in the theater in recent years, the influence of Greek mythology...

and literature has been less evident on the contemporary French novelist; however, Jean Giono is among the few contemporary French writers of note to bring the Greeks to the novel. Undoubtedly Giono appreciated the timelessness that makes myths relevant for us today; he stressed the fundamental elements of human existence, both concrete details of everyday life and common emotional experience. What Giono did is to show that attitudes toward life and death, which are formalized in ritual and tale, compose a body of myth that is the same in all places without limit of time. In short, the myths are universal.

Whether the mythological references are direct, as in *Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène* and *Naissance de l'Odyssée*, or whether there is simply a mythic atmosphere, as in his later works, the influence of the Greeks is unmistakable. Because of them, Giono was lifted from being simply a regionalist writer and made a seeker and purveyor of universal truths.

Mythic imagery and symbolism play an important part in Giono's early writings, and he uses them to express the life of the earth, the eternity of nature. Therefore,

---

15 Smith, "Giono's Use of the Ulysses Concept," p. 41.
a clear definition of the term symbol as well as an exami-
nation of a few of Giono's favorite symbols will aid the
reader of this paper.

What we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even a pic-
ture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that pos-
sesses specific connotations in addition to its conven-
tional meaning. It implies something vague, unknown,
or hidden from us.

Thus a word or an image is symbolic when it implies
something more than its obvious and immediate meaning.
It has a wider 'unconscious' aspect . . . \(^\text{18}\)

A symbol always stands for something more than its obvious
meaning; it must also be interpreted in the light of its
context.

Giono's symbolic use of pagan deities expresses his
own awe of nature; and in this regard, the mythological
demiurge Pan is of prime importance. Traditionally, Pan is
the Greek god of woodlands, pastures, flocks, and herdsmen;
and in time, he came to be a personification of Nature.
He is represented as part man and part goat which makes him
like the satyrs and sileni associated with Dionysus. He is
playful, lascivious, and unpredictable, sometimes inspiring
men with a sudden "panic" fear.\(^\text{19}\) In the broadest sense,

\(^\text{18}\)Carl G. Jung et al., Man and His Symbols (Garden

\(^\text{19}\)Frank C. Bray, Bray's University Dictionary of
Mythology (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, Apollo
Classical Mythology (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston,
1959), pp. 73-74; Thomas Bullfinch, Mythology (New York:
Pan is Giono's metaphor for nature or, to use his word, *la terre*. (According to his biographer Chonez, if there is a leitmotif in the work of Giono, it is "la terre âpre et nue.")

Pan's voice echoes across the pages of Giono's early works; he appears in many forms, but even when he is not expressly personified, a pantheist point of view remains. Redfern says, "Pan, for Giono, stands for both nature itself and for the intermediary between it and men. He is the ubiquitous spirit commingling all living matter under the same laws of physical attraction." Pan incites men to use their natural instincts; and this is fundamental to the individual moral system of Giono in which ethical conduct is based upon what is natural. Giono's characters sin when they fail to recognize their oneness with *la terre* or try to interfere with natural forces. Telluric knowledge, knowledge of the earth and the oneness of all things, is often gained after an expression of Panic will.

The reconciliation of opposites and fundamental dualities is important to Giono, and Pan is useful to the author in this respect, also. As a personification of Nature, Pan embodies characteristics which are juxtaposed to those of Pan, the musician.

---

**Chonez, Giono par lui-même**, p. 80.


**Lutes, "Moral Outlook,"** p. 58.
The fact that Pan is credited with having invented the syrinx, or shepherd's pipes, and that, in Greek thought, music represents order, adds to the suitability of Giono's choice. As a nature god, Pan represents spontaneity and chaos, and embodies the concomitant notions of creativity and the unconscious. As a musician, he is order, stability and the conscious. In his role as a demiurge, then, Pan is not only creation, or the feminine principle, but restoration of order, or the masculine principle. As such, he becomes a metaphor for the reconciliation of opposites and the resolution of conflict.23

As a symbol, the mythical serpent, the Ouroboros, is almost as prevalent in Giono's writings as Pan. The Ouroboros appeared among the Gnostics—early Christians who also embraced Greek and Oriental philosophies and believed in individual morality. The serpent is depicted as biting his own tail, thus forming a circle. Interpreted in the broadest sense, it signifies: (1) that life is cyclical; (2) that opposing principles are counterbalanced; and (3) that sacrifice is necessary for the continuation of life.24 Giono's use of the Ouroboros will be explained further in the body of the paper.

As with many creative writers, imagery is an important stylistic characteristic of early Giono; the vivid visual impressions evoked by the "poet in prose" are an important component of the beautiful lyric descriptions that are unique to Giono. Moreover, his use of recurring images

23 Ibid., p. 37

prove that they have definite values for him. Redfern says that Giono uses imagery to help develop his plots—that it is functional as well as ornamental. Therefore, it is generally agreed by Giono's critics that his forte as a writer—the narrative—is more appropriate to the novel than to the theater. The latter depends upon sharp visual and auditory delineation of characters, and dramatic dialogue is clearly not his forte. Hence, Giono's place in literature depends more upon his novels, short stories, and essays than his efforts in the legitimate theater. In fact, Giono's first attempt at drama, _Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène_, was undoubtedly written to be read rather than produced. Since Giono's particular talent was primarily that of a novelist (even early in his career), he gave excessive attention to detail of décor and physical description of characters. Therefore, attention must be paid to such in analyzing _Esquisse_. Few critical studies have been done on any of his plays; but this one, written when Giono was only twenty-five years old, has been literally ignored.

---


27 The play was written in 1919 but published in Jean Giono, _Théâtre de Jean Giono_ (Paris: Gallimard, 1943). (hereafter cited as Giono, _Théâtre_). For ease of reading, _Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène_ will often be referred to in the text as _Esquisse_.

Yet Esquisse, which has to be one of the very earliest works of a writer of great stature, is worthy of study because of the general neglect by his critics.28

The word esquisse is indeed appropriate, for it suggests that the play contains the nascent concepts of Giono expressed in symbols; therefore, a detailed analysis of the symbols in the play is absolutely necessary to its comprehension; moreover, they all appear in later works. After careful study, this short play can be understood as an extremely ambitious effort, containing the germ of his major pre-World War II themes.

In interpreting the symbols, the Dictionary of Symbols by J. E. Cirlot and the works of Carl G. Jung, especially Man and His Symbols,29 have been most useful. The traditional interpretation of symbols will be supported by reference to other, more fully-developed, works of Jean Giono. The latter will all be from Giono's pre-World War II period; for the novel, Que ma joie demeure (1935), marks the beginning of a definite decline in his use of pagan

28 This writer could only find two mentions of the play in all the secondary source material. Chonez, in Giono par lui-même (p. 114), simply mentions that the theme is too pesant; Smith merely says that Giono's interest in the theater goes back to Esquisse and continues through his writing of radio dramas and movies in Maxwell Smith, "Giono's Rustic Dramas," Romance Notes 2 (Spring 1961): 119.

29 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols; Jung, Man and His Symbols.
symbols. The constancy of favorite images will be similarly traced; however, many mythological references appearing in the play will be omitted, because most readers will find their meaning traditional and obvious.

The body of the thesis is simply organized. Since the internal structure of *Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène* does not lend itself readily to the kind of study which is the subject of this paper, the grouping of like and complementary symbols will aid the readers' comprehension. Therefore, Chapter I will present a résumé of the plot, explain the major theme of the play, and examine the cosmogony upon which the play is based. A theory will also be posited as to why Giono chose to supply an account of the death of Helen of Troy, rather than someone else. Chapter II is a study of the symbolic importance of the setting. Chapter III will explore the meaning of: Hélène, Les Jeunes Filles, and La Veilleuse. The discussion will depend upon their appearance as much as or more than it will upon their lines in *Esquisse*. These characters are all three undergoing a process of transformation and are juxtaposed to La Captive Troyenne, who is the subject of Chapter IV. The discussion of her, as a transformer,

---


31For ease of reading, Les Jeunes Filles will be referred to throughout the rest of the paper as the girls or the maidens.
will proceed in a manner similar to that of the other characters. Chapter V discusses the actual death scene of Hélène and its two vital components: the funeral chant and Les Jeunes Hommes\textsuperscript{32} who participate only in the on-stage action at this time. The final chapter will summarize the conclusions drawn from the study of \textit{Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène}.

\textsuperscript{32}Les Jeunes Hommes will henceforth be referred to as the young men or the young athletes.
CHAPTER I

PLOT AND MAJOR THEMES

Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène is an outline of a possible death of Helen of Troy. The plot of the one act play is remarkably simple. The dying Hélène is mourned only by La Veilleuse, a faithful servant, who, as her name implies, watches over her. La Veilleuse's pleas to the gods and her own human efforts to prolong the life of her queen are all in vain; she is also regretting King Ménélaus' apparent indifference to his wife's suffering. At the end of the servant's long monologue, a group of girls enters the palace, dazzled by the royal abode and the coiffure and make-up of Hélène. La Veilleuse beseeches them time and again to sing the funeral chant, but La Captive Troyenne enters and announces that she will sing the chant. Up until this point in the play, the reader has been aware of the presence of La Captive Troyenne as a black shadow who roams in the gardens, howling at the moon; but only at this time, does she join the action. Throughout the play, the shouts of the struggling young athletes in the background form a contrast to the grief of La Veilleuse. After the funeral chant is sung by La Captive Troyenne and the
girls, the young men speak for the first time. Now that they have succeeded in their efforts to set a new discus record, they are willing to struggle to the death for something indefinable. La Captive Troyenne repeats, "O graine!"1 But Mme Hélène is already dead.

Although Giono borrowed characters from the Greeks and observed some practices of the early Greek theater—the three unities, choruses, monologues, dialogues, three principal characters—Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène is not a renewal of a Greek legend. It is the completion of the story of Helen of Troy for which there is no precedent in classical literature; therefore, it is no pastiche of ancient material, but Giono's own literary invention. Most likely one of the reasons he chose the character of Hélène is precisely because there is no mythological account of her death; thus he was free to create his own and posit his view of death, which is the overriding theme of the play. While the death of Hélène is the apparent subject of the play, it is generalized through the other characters; therefore, the play is about death itself rather than a particular death.

Understanding Giono's view of death is essential to the comprehension of the play. Since Man is an integral part of Nature, he is on the same biological level as the

1Giono, Théâtre, p. 361.
animals and subject to the same natural laws; death is but a part of the cycle inherent in all of Nature.\textsuperscript{2} We can assume that Hélène's death is from natural causes since it is not otherwise specified; therefore, it may be understood as the natural sacrifice necessary to rebirth, the cyclical continuation of life, and restoration of order. In the play, Giono expresses that death is inexorable and to struggle against it is useless; moreover, resisting natural death is a sin which will upset the order implicit in Nature.\textsuperscript{3}

In this respect, the play is clearly a forerunner of the novel \textit{Colline} (1928) in which the old Janet stubbornly clings to life and, by doing so, brings misfortune to the inhabitants of Les Bastides. In the preface to his essay, \textit{Les Vraies richesses}, Giono succinctly explains that death is "une justice, une sorte de connaissance totale."\textsuperscript{4}

In order to accept death as an inevitable part of cyclic Nature, one must gain or possess telluric awareness. \textit{Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène} may be interpreted on one level as a story of initiation into this realization of Man's oneness with Nature. The medium of awareness and transformation in the play is a person as it is in Giono's later


\textsuperscript{3}Lutes, "Moral Outlook," p. 310; p. 54.

transition novels, *Que ma joie demeure* (1935) and *Batailles dans la montagne* (1937); however, Giono is fond of using a violent manifestation of Nature, an expression of Panic will, as the forerunner of this knowledge as he did in *Colline*.

Most theories of death include some notion of what happens afterward. Although a lot of Giono's ideas are similar to those of Christianity, he did not profess to be a Christian; therefore, death was not, for him, a passage to Heaven or to Hell. Redfern affirms that Giono had read widely in Hindu literature which undoubtedly influenced his view of the hereafter. "Though he conceives of no afterlife in any physical or spiritual form, Giono often invokes the Oriental belief in the body's absorption after death into the cycle of nature." Giono himself gives graphic testimony that death leads to cosmic integration. In the following passage from his autobiographical novel, *Jean le bleu*, he is describing the death of a family friend, Franchesc Odripano:

> Dans toi il n'y a déjà plus d'homme, il n'y a plus que la matière de cent sauterelles neuves, de dix lézards, de trois serpents, d'un beau rectangle d'herbe drue et peut-être le coeur d'un arbre.  

---


By saying that there is no more left of the man but the substance for new grasshoppers, lizards, serpents, grass, or a tree, Giono affirms that death is the sacrifice necessary to rebirth and continuation of life.

This cyclical view of life and death is one means of expressing Giono's fundamental tendency toward the resolution of duality—a tendency of major import in interpreting the symbols in *Esquisse*. His choice of Hélène as his heroine is, therefore, complementary and suitable; her characteristics as a figure in classical mythology doubtless influenced Giono's selection. In Greek literature, Helen of Troy is the beautiful daughter of Zeus, the god, and Leda, the mortal; hence from the moment of inception, she was semi-divine and, as such, embodied a basic duality. It is the same duality implicit in her brothers, the Gemini; Castor is mortal and Pollux is immortal. Giono's probable motivation in supplying an account of a possible death of Helen of Troy is now more certain. The lack of such in mythology gives him the opportunity to supply his own and, thereby, posit his view of death in general; and Hélène's innate duality provides a vehicle for Giono's penchant for resolving such dualities.

---


Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène is based upon a dualistic cosmogony, a theory of the origin of the universe which embodies a feminine and a masculine principle. One is safe in assuming a dualistic cosmogony on the basis of Giono's later works, particularly Le Serpent d'étoiles. In this novel, he described the birth of a different cosmogony in which the sea is feminine and the earth masculine. However, the cosmogony in the play is similar to the Orphic in which the duality of the world is expressed in terms of Gaea, Mother Earth, and Ouranos, Father Heaven.\(^1^0\) (Whether the cosmogony is Orphic, Roman, or Gnostic, the differences are only superficial; the basic duality is the same.) In traditional symbolism the sky, the heavens, or the sun represents the masculine principle, the active, the rational, and the spirit as opposed to earth which connotes the feminine, the passive, the irrational, and matter.\(^1^1\) This manifestation of duality is complemented by other antitheses and dualities throughout the play.

Secondary themes appearing in Esquisse, which are implicit in the later works of Giono, will be treated as they arise in the following discussion.

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 64.

\(^{11}\) Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 303.
CHAPTER II

SYMBOLS IN THE SETTING

The setting is usually very important in the works of Giono; Pugnet sees a more or less secret correspondence between the characters and the decor. An examination of the symbols in the description of the setting, as well as any references to it during the course of the play, will demonstrate the importance of Giono's choice of time and place. A few elements of decor are complementary to certain characters; hence the discussion of these is more appropriate later.

Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène takes place one afternoon in late spring in the palace of Menelaus, King of Sparta. All the action is centered within a twenty step-high marble portico which is dedicated to Venus. The portico affords a view of the sky, the king's orchards, and a small square where young men are throwing the discus. Not described as being visible from the portico, a clump of cypress trees on a nearby plain afford shade for a shepherd. The latter is molding votive figurines, called santons,

1Pugnet, Jean Giono, p. 52.

22
from terra-cotta, alone except for the company of warblers and titmice singing in the foliage of the trees.

The choice of an afternoon was not arbitrary; Giono chose this time of day to emphasize that Hélène is dying. An examination of the cycle of day and night, vividly expressed in "Présentation de Pan," will help clarify the author's intent: "Voilà le jour; il est exactement soude à la nuit. Il recommence éternellement, comme un serpent qui se mord la queue." Days are irrevocably welded to the nights, rebeginning eternally like a serpent who bites its tail. This illustrates that Giono regards day and night as being united like the Ouroboros, the meaning of which was detailed in the Introduction. Since the circular serpent is a symbol of the life cycle, he is clearly saying that the cycle of night and day is complementary to that of death and rebirth.

Giono's penchant for seeking the perfect circle, the union of opposites, is applied to day and night and fully developed in a short story entitled, "Rondeur des jours."

Les jours commencent et finissent dans une heure trouble de la nuit. Ils n'ont pas la forme longue, cette forme des choses qui vont vers des buts: la flèche, la route, la course de l'homme. Ils ont la forme ronde, cette

---

forme des choses éternelles et statiques: le soleil, le monde, Dieu.  

By saying that days begin and end at the same point, Giono makes it clear that he finds the cycle of day and night a perfect circle, representative of life itself.

The ancient Greeks believed that the sun was swallowed by a monster at evening only to be regorged at sunrise; each evening the sun died only to be reborn again each morning. Afternoon can now be understood as the time of day preceding the death of the sun—that time of day at which the sun could be termed to be "dying"; therefore, Giono chose to set the play at this point in the cycle to emphasize the approaching death of Hélène.

The symbolic meaning of afternoon is enriched by La Veilleuse's description when she says: "Cette après-midi est rousse et amère comme un abricot des collines. . . . Toutes les après-midi sont amères mais celle-là, . . . qui sera la dernière de Mme Hélène est la plus amère de toutes." The imagery of a russet, bitter afternoon adds

3Giono, L'Eau vive, p. 114.


5Giono, Théâtre, p. 351.
definite overtones to this time of day. She says all afternoons are bitter, but this one, which will be Hélène's last, is the bitterest of all. The russet color--a synthesis of the colors red and brown which symbolize respectively sacrifice and earth--suggests natural sacrifice or sacrifice to the earth which is All. In Giono's pre-World War II Panic cycle, natural sacrifice is an important concept, because it is prerequisite to telluric knowledge.

The inherent suffering of self-sacrifice is expressed in the above passage by the word bitter. The usage of the word in this context corresponds to the dictionary definition, "causing or showing sorrow, discomfort, or pain." Giono formulated and established the idea of suffering and sacrifice occurring in the afternoon in Esquisse, but he clearly stated this notion in a subsequent short story, "Champs," in which he says: "La souffrance vint durant l'après-midi." In a later-published story, "Rondeur des jours," he has substituted the word cruel for bitter; if we understand the word cruel to mean disposed to inflict

---

6 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 51.
8 Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, coll. ed. (1959), s.v. "bitter."
pain and suffering, the connotation is practically the same as bitter, and the constancy of Giono's views is assured. He states, "... les longues heures un peu cruelles qui penchent vers la nuit... elles marchaient posément vers les fontaines dans l'ombre profonde du vallon. Ainsi les heures de l'après-midi."\(^\text{10}\) It was established earlier that night has the same significance as death. Once again, Giono affirms his symbolic usage of afternoons preceding death. In the play, La Veilleuse compares the afternoon when Hélène is dying to an apricot. An examination of traditional symbolism reveals that the author's intent was more profound than to create an unusual simile. Cirlot equates all fruit with the symbolic meaning of the egg which is, of course, the origin or seed of all life.\(^\text{11}\) The apricot thus signifies rebirth. The linking of afternoons and apricots is an image which appears at least once more in the works of Giono who compares afternoons to savage, bitter, reddish apricots in the short story, "Philémon."\(^\text{12}\) The entire quotation from Esquisse can now be understood as an expression of the basic theme of the play; Hélène's suffering is a condition of the natural sacrifice which leads to death and rebirth.

\(^{10}\)Giono, L'Eau vive, p. 117.

\(^{11}\)Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 109

\(^{12}\)Giono, Solitude de la pitié, p. 145.
It is significant that the play is set in the spring as the cycle of life and death in Giono's works is often complemented by the seasonal cycle in nature.\textsuperscript{13} Since spring is customarily a time of new beginning, Hélène's death in the spring unites death with the season of rebirth. As Redfern has indicated, spring is an ambivalent season for Giono.\textsuperscript{14}

The action of Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène takes place within the confines of a portico dedicated to Venus. A reader who is knowledgeable in mythology might wonder why Giono chose Venus. She is a Roman goddess and his only Latin mythological reference among the many Greek ones during the course of the play. The writer of this paper believes that choosing Venus, rather than her Greek counterpart Aphrodite, was deliberate on Giono's part. Venus was originally a Latin goddess of spring who later came to be identified with Aphrodite, particularly in personifying sensual love.\textsuperscript{15} By choosing Venus, Giono reinforces the springtime setting and makes a statement about love, for it is through this portico that Hélène ran away to join Paris, thereby causing the Trojan War.

\textsuperscript{13}Lutes, "Moral Outlook," p. 62.
\textsuperscript{14}Redfern, The Private World of Jean Giono, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{15}Bray, Bray's University Dictionary of Mythology, p. 118.
Any portico or doorway has significant symbolic implications; it is used to denote the passage from spatial to non-spatial, or from a temporal to a non-temporal existence on the spiritual level. In other words, the portico symbolizes the passage from an earthly existence to the hereafter, or cosmic integration in the Gionian scheme. It is also an important symbol on the biological level, representing the female principle with its concomitant fertility. Spiritually, it signifies a rite of passage or death; biologically, it signifies fertility—the seed of new beginning—or rebirth. On both levels, it is significant that the dying Hélène wishes to be placed in the portico. La Veilleuse describes the death of Hélène as crossing "le seuil farouche" and later as "la porte farouche". Thia affirms that the portico symbolizes her passage from this life to another form of existence; it is a symbol of transformation, a focal point of Inversion—the point at which death becomes life. In Esquisse "le seuil" represents the passage to death; yet in Triomphe de la vie, "le seuil" refers to the moment of birth. The moment of death is, therefore, rebirth. This view of the portico

16 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 81, 142. Such an interpretation is derived from the association of the portico with the symbolism of the door and, subsequently, the hole.

and the threshold is consonant with Carl Jung's interpretation of archways; for he says, "An arched gateway is also a symbol for a threshold, a place where dangers lurk, a place that at the same time separates and unites."\textsuperscript{18}

The portico is atop twenty marble steps. Stairs, or steps, are traditional symbols of passage from one mode of being to another, and climbing them constitutes this rite of passage or moving from life to death.\textsuperscript{19}

Twenty steps give the portico sufficient height to emphasize the symbolic meaning of the stairs, but twenty has numerological significance in itself. It is probable that Giono had a good reason for specifying the exact number of steps, because the ancient Greeks were very preoccupied with the symbolic meaning of numbers, and the Greek influence on Giono has been well-established. Cirlot explains the symbolic interpretation of higher numbers below.

...sometimes the meaning is derived from the fusion of the symbols of the units composing it. There are two ways in which this fusion may occur: either by mystic addition (for example, $374=3+7+4=14=1+4=5$) or by succession, in which case the right-hand digit expresses the outcome of a situation denoted by the left-hand number (so 21 expresses the reduction of a conflict--two--to its solution--unity).\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18}Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 293.


\textsuperscript{20}Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 224.
The method of succession is probably the one which applies to the interpretation of the twenty steps. The number twenty is a fusion of the number two and the number zero. The two represents the duality implicit in the myth of the Gemini which is embodied in Hélène. The zero means death as the state in which life forces are transformed. The method of succession says that zero is the outcome of a situation expressed by two; therefore, death is the means of resolving Hélène's duality. Numbers have special symbolic importance in other panic works by Giono. Lutes found the number of inhabitants significant in the novel Colline, and Redfern discusses Giono's "sept pin-lyres" as a symbolic representation of the seven planets in Le Serpent d'étoiles.

The twenty steps are made of marble. Perhaps Giono chose marble, because he intended the steps to incorporate the symbolism of rocks in general, as well as the characteristics of marble in particular. One aspect of rock symbolism is that the rock is the source of human life as opposed to the soil—which is more disintegrated—and is the source of animal and vegetable life. The fact that

21Ibid., p. 221.


23Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 262.
Hélène is atop the rock steps underlines her separation from the rest of the earth which has already been noted as sinful in the Gionian system. It is common knowledge that the peculiar characteristics of marble as a stone are that it is hard, cold, smooth, and light-colored. These attributes are complementary to the description of the dying body of Hélène in which the profile of her face is likened to the silhouette of an icy mountain. Although marble is also used for building, it is the stone commonly used for monuments and tombstones; possibly Giono intended it to suggest impending death. In at least one other work, Giono does associate marble with death. In "Mort du blé," he says that "la terre est étincelante et morte comme du marbre." While the connotations of rock and marble may appear antithetical, marble may now be understood to embody symbolic representations of death and the source of life. It is one more of Giono's symbols which unites death with birth, expressing that death leads to rebirth.

Giono describes the portico as "plein de ciel, seulement de ciel dur et d'un bleu de gentiane et pareil à une grande pierre lisse." The portico is hereby depicted as "full of sky." It was established earlier that the sky embodies the masculine principle and the portico,

24 Giono, L'Eau vive, p. 179.
25 Giono, Théâtre, p. 349.
the feminine. Hence, the description unites two opposing principles and resolves another basic duality; it may also be an expression of Hélène's desire for a male since Menelaus is apparently indifferent to her impending death. This must be difficult to accept for one so accustomed to adulation. The sky is represented as hard, blue, and similar to a large smooth rock. By associating this earthy substance—which symbolically constitutes the source of life—with the sky, Giono is uniting all the duality implicit in Gaea and Ouranos as well as the spirituality inherent in the color blue with the sensuality he associates with la terre. This quotation from the play illustrates what Redfern has noted as fundamental tendencies in Giono's imagery: he had a capacity for drawing together things which are normally regarded as separate, his purpose being to show that all of Nature is interrelated, even the sky and a rock. Giono also had a penchant for investing virtually everything with weight, and Pugnet believes that the author's purpose was to increase the sense of power in telluric forces, to intensify "le climat panique." Likening the sky to a large smooth rock gives one the sense of the sky pressing down upon the earth.

26 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 52.
The portico opens upon a little square where young men are training for the discus throw. Giono enlarges upon this facet of the setting in a paragraph entitled "Sparta." The athletes are struggling breathlessly to reach a goal which is more and more difficult to attain as the line is pushed back. Their effort to throw the discus past this line is expressed as being with "bras en croix dans la douleur et le triomphe." The arms crossed in pain, suffering and triumph certainly evoke the Christian symbol of the cross with its concomitant sacrifice leading to the ultimate victory—rebirth. (It has been noted before that the nature of rebirth is one of Giono's points of departure from the Christian tradition.) The passage may now be understood as stressing sacrifice as a condition of rebirth; and athletic activity per se suggests the rhythm and struggle inherent in life itself. Since the scene is visible from the portico where Hélène is dying it readily suggests that life goes on, even in the presence of death. Moreover, life appears to lie beyond the wall; but the separation is only apparent, for there is no wall where there is an opening. Life and death are, therefore, one phenomenon. This is confirmed by the fact that these young men, who suggest life, enter the portico and are near Hélène at the moment of her death. The discus itself is

28 Giono, Théâtre, p. 350.
likely to incorporate the symbolism of disks in general; therefore, it signifies "matter in a state of sublimation and transfiguration." This interpretation enriches the symbolic interpretation of the discus throwers as young men in a state of transformation, an idea which will be fully developed in the chapter entitled, "The Death of Hélène."

The portico also overlooks the king's orchards which are generally understood to be groves of fruit trees; therefore, they embrace the symbolism of both fruit and trees. It has been stated earlier in this chapter that fruit is a symbol of the origin of life, fertility, and birth. In traditional symbolism, any tree denotes the inexhaustible life of the cosmos; and the three main parts of a tree: roots, trunk, and foliage are related to the three worlds: the underground, the surface of the earth, and the sky. Standing for the general relationship between the three worlds, the tree is a symbol of ascension and transformation, for the movement is generally from the lower to the higher. In its broadest sense, any tree stands for the eternal life of the cosmos and indicates a change from one form of existence to another. Redfern has also noted that trees unite three worlds for Giono; they

---

29Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 79.
are frequent images in his writings and seem to hold a special place in his mystique. In *Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène*, Giono linked the orchards with the square of the discus throwers. If one synthesizes the symbolism pertaining to both components of the image, what emerges is yet another expression of death as the sacrifice leading to rebirth.

Tree symbolism is given an added dimension in the following description of cypress trees, which are a major component of the setting:

*Ils sont en touffes dans la plaine. . . . Des mésanges et des fauvettes, dans le feuillage à forme de flammes, chantent. Aux pieds d'Hélène fusé un sanglot musical comme un chant de jet d'eau.*

The special significance of the cypress tree is derived from its importance to the ancients, from the symbolism of trees in general, and from Giono's own unique view of them. The cypress was dedicated by the Greeks to their infernal deity, while the Romans actually added the name 'funeral' to it; the attendant connotation persists to this day. Of the many varieties of cypress trees, one is actually referred to as the 'mourning' cypress, and it is commonly planted around temples and cemeteries. From association

---

with funerals and cemeteries, it is clearly a death symbol. Any tree denotes ascension and transformation as has already been established. The upward movement from the lower to the upper world associated with the tree is complemented by the birds in the foliage, as birds symbolize the release from any confining pattern of existence. Therefore, the birds represent transcendence, liberation, and they also represent the spiritual side of Man.34 In the Gionian system, spirituality might be defined as the awareness of the oneness of all things in Nature. Since the birds are in the foliage, the highest part of the tree, the author is expressing that this telluric awareness is complete at the moment of death.

It is significant that the foliage is in the form of flames, for the four elements are vital expressions of Panic will in Giono's pre-World War II works. Fire is yet another symbol of transformation, for it is the element that brings about change in matter. However, fire is also symbolic of love, desire, and animal passion,35 which often bring about transformation. Although both birds and fire denote change to another form of existence, they are antithetical in expressing Man's inherent duality—spirit and body. By describing the birds as being in the foliage

34 Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 149.
"à forme de flammes," Giono fuses the two symbols and indulges his penchant for unification of opposites. Moreover, in his pantheism, this animal passion, which is a form of instinctual behavior is right and moral; suppressing it is wrong. As Lutes has observed, "The morality that emerges is essentially a question of what is biologically normal." 36 Man is not biologically superior to animals, but on the same level; acceptance of this precept is vital to live in harmony with la terre. Although Giono had not read the theories of Carl Jung at this point in his career, 37 the notion has great consonance with Jung's theory of individuation which states that instinctual behavior is largely repressed in the subconscious. In his terms, to become a whole person, one must recognize and accept this part of himself; and this process usually begins with suffering. 38

Giono describes the cypress trees as being in a clump, and any bunch or cluster is a Christian symbol of Christ and sacrifice. 39 Therefore, Giono is saying that

37 Ibid., p. 328.
38 Jung, Man and His Symbols, pp. 162-166.
39 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 116. This symbolism is due to the association of any clump or bunch with grapes. The latter are, in turn, linked with wine which is usually symbolic of blood and sacrifice.
the transformation process is accomplished only through sacrifice. The "sanglot musical comme un chant de jet d'eau" probably comes as much from the cypress trees themselves as from the singing birds, for they are described as groaning throughout the play. Undoubtedly they were set on the plain, because they are more accessible to the wind, which plays the trees like a musical instrument. Wind generating music from trees proves to be a favorite Gionian image in later works. In Colline he describes the phenomenon as: "L'arbre ébouriffe son épais plumage vert et chante. Le tronc s'est plié dans le lit habituel du vent. . . . Il chante tout mystérieusement à voix basse." In Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène, the music is undoubtedly funeral music because of the relationship between the cypress and funerals; moreover, the music is described as a sob and a groan throughout the play. Not only do the trees sing; but they sound like a fountain—an image more explicitly expressed in the following passage from, "Au Pays des coupeurs d'arbres":

C'est un arbre beau chanteur. . . . On aimait cette musique de cyprès. C'est profond, c'est un peu comme une fontaine, tenez. Vous savez, l'eau des fontaines,

40 Jean Giono, Colline (Paris: Grasset, 1929), p. 149. For further examples of trees as musical instruments played by the wind see Jean Giono, Le Serpent d'étoiles (Paris: Grasset, 1933), pp. 42, 142.
près des fermes, ça coule, ... ça vit. ... Ici, on ne pouvait pas se payer le luxe de faire couler l'eau tant.  

Giono is describing his Provence, but the similarity of the terrain of that region to that of Greece has already been noted. Since water is scarce, it would be a luxury to let it run for its music alone, and he has come to appreciate the music of the cypress trees. Although the fountain exists only as part of a simile, Giono enriches the meaning by comparing the music to a fountain and thereby evoking the connotation of water. In traditional symbolism, water denotes the life force of all things,  

this is clearly how Giono views it; for in Le Serpent d'étoiles—which describes the birth of a cosmogony—the Sea embodies the feminine principle. His intent is clear in the description of a female, after she has been with her mate: "Elle est comme une source, voilà qu'elle est comme une fontaine d'enfants."  

Water would seem to be simply a birth symbol for Giono unless we consider the views of Pugnet. The latter has found evidence of water being linked to dreams of death, and he says that water is not simply the element of rebirth but the invitation to,

43Giono, Le Serpent d'étoiles, p. 203.
and the first step of, the last voyage. If one accepts his findings, the fountain becomes the perfect metaphor for the union of opposites—death and birth. When all components of the description of the cypress on the plain are considered, the image emerges as one more expression, through symbols, of death as the sacrifice necessary to rebirth.

Seated in the shade of the trees is a lone shepherd molding santons, presumably from terra-cotta. In one image, Giono combines two of his favored groups of people—shepherds and artisans. The latter are special people for the author, because his father was a shoemaker. His admiration for all artisans is expressed in the essay, Triomphe de la vie, in the following passage:

C'est la grande importance du métier, et combien l'homme devient étrangement lumineux et attachant dès qu'avec ses mains et la science que lui ont transmise des générations mortes il transforme la matière en quelque chose d'utile pour tous.

Artisans possess knowledge that is handed down from generation to generation; they are in touch with all of Nature, because they use their sense organs, especially hands, in their work. Hands are an important part of the body for Giono; he sees them as organs of special knowledge, much

44 Pugnet, Jean Giono, p. 51.
45 Giono, Triomphe de la vie, pp. 27-28.
like the poet's "commingled senses." All sensory experience is important to Giono, and the sense of touch seems particularly so.

The shepherd is making santons, little figures of clay; most often, the figures are religious representations, but the shepherd is probably forming votive offerings to pagan gods. The important thing is that, through his hands, he is touching and in touch with la terre. Shepherds are equally revered by Giono, and their role in his pantheism is delineated in Le Serpent d'étoiles. As primitives, they are the "hommes premiers," the "chefs de bêtes"; they see the duality of the world and recognize their bond with the Earth. Perhaps they come to possess this special understanding, because their occupation necessitates solitude which facilitates awareness and a sense of oneness with the animals they tend. Solitude is also important to Giono. Clarke sees le héros solitaire as a fundamental unity in all of his work. She discussed the matter in a personal interview with him, and he replied, "Il me semble que je retourne et que je remâche toujours le même personnage solitaire et le même drame de la solitude et le même antagonisme contre les dieux." It seems that one

47 Giono, Le Serpent d'étoiles, p. 212.
prerequisite to telluric awareness is solitude. It can now be understood that the lone figure under the cypress trees is an important component of the setting.

The whole image of singing cypress trees on the plain, the birds, the flame-like foliage, the suggestion of water, and the solitary shepherd-artisan intimate the presence of Pan. From the standpoint of Giono's writing, Pan was present from the start.
CHAPTER III

THE TRANSFORMED

An analysis of the symbolic meaning of the characters will complete the discussion of *Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène*. It will be further demonstrated that the essence of the play resides in interpretation of the symbols. Giono's method of characterization depends heavily on bodily descriptions. Indeed, his characters are defined as much by what they look like and do as by what they say.

Giono's early characters tend to fall into one of two main groups: the transformed and the transformers,¹ and this division was already evident in *Esquisse*. Moreover, a comprehensive study of the play reveals that the transformed characters are initiates into telluric awareness. The author arranged the characters into an ascending order of awareness with the ideal epitomized by the transformer, *La Captive Troyenne*. Next, by virtue of her impending death is *Hélène*, since such preternatural

¹Lutes, "Moral Outlook," p. 175. Examples of the two groups in the Pan trilogy are as follows: transformers include Janet in *Colline*, Albin in *Un de Baumugnes* (Paris: Grasset, 1929), and Mameche in *Regain* (Paris: Grasset, 1930). The transformed are Jaume in *Colline*, Clarius in *Un de Baumugnes*, and Panturle in *Regain*. 43
knowledge often comes to the dying in the works of Giono. She is followed by: the young athletes, the girls, and La Veilleuse. Since segregation by sex was an important element in ancient pagan initiatory rites, the young men are separated from the other characters until the very close of the play. In the discussion of the female transformed characters, it will be demonstrated that each of them represents one of the three stages of the initiation process as elucidated by Jung who says, "Initiation is, essentially, a process that begins with a rite of submission, followed by a period of containment, and then by a further rite of liberation."\(^3\)

Since Hélène represents the final stage in the initiatory rite, liberation, the analysis of the characters will begin with her. It should be recalled at this point that one's complete comprehension of Hélène's role in this play is dependent upon knowledge of her as a mythological character which is not expressed fully in the play. Her beauty, the fact that there is no classical account of her death, and her semi-divine nature were all discussed in Chapter I. It was noted that she embodies the same sort


of duality implicit in her brothers, the Gemini, which is readily understood as denoting any two opposing principles. 4

Hélène is one of the main characters in the play, although she speaks no lines. Her already shrouded body rests immobile, at the edge of a shadow, upon the marble slabs of the portico. The hardness of the marble is made soft by the skins of she-wolves. The essence of her beauty remains in the profile of her face, etched against the background of the blue sky like an icy mountain. But in her half-open mouth, one can detect a drop of shadow. She is the only person visible; peach blossoms are floating on the wind, and two pigeons have built their nest in the lotus carved in a portico column. But other personnages live hidden over the portico; and their voices, which are directed toward the dying queen, convey lamentations or the joyous clamor of life. An analysis of the symbols in the foregoing description will reveal the essence of Giono's Hélène.

By shrouding Hélène, though she is still alive, Giono expresses that death is imminent and inescapable. Shrouds are usually white and complement the description of her face like an "icy mountain" as well as the girls'  

4Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 85-86.
reference to her as "cette blanche figure." By preceding the noun, the adjective white tends to assume a figurative, as well as a literal, meaning and thereby suggests "whiteness" with all its connotations. Giono's persistent use of white to describe Hélène is symbolically important. Traditionally, white is conceived of as being diametrically opposed to black with the former connoting "good" and the latter connoting "bad." White is, therefore, one part of a duality; and like all dualities, it is related to the number two and the great myth of the Gemini. However, it is the juxtaposition of white to black that is of interest here, as the symbolism of two and the Gemini has already been discussed. In the play, the white Hélène is antithetical to the black Captive Troyenne and to the negress whom Menelaus prefers to her; but Giono inverts the usual correspondence of good and evil associated with these colors. This inversion of traditional color symbolism

5Giono, Théâtre, p. 355.
6Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 54.
7Redfern has also noted inversion in Giono's Le Poids du ciel (The Private World of Jean Giono, p. 100.) In this work, Giono inverted usual class positions and made peasants a superior race. It should be noted, however, that the inversion of traditional black-white symbolism, which appears in Esquisse, is not an absolute constant for Giono. For example, the name of the character Albin in Un de Baumugnes definitely suggests whiteness; and he does exemplify morality and purity, as might be expected. Yet, just as he does in this play, Giono associates white, rather than black, with death in "Mort du blé," L'Eau vive, p. 183.
signifies a different system of morality which will be clear when the discussion of all the characters is complete. The essential here is that Hélène is sinful and white, and La Captive Troyenne and the negress are moral and black.

The immorality of Hélène should be examined at this point. Although they may be enumerated, her sins can be summed up by the word orgueil, a fundamental concept throughout the works of Giono. He condemns pride that is not based upon the reality of Nature; it is a false pride which leads Man to live according to man-made rules rather than as an integral part of la terre. Undoubtedly, Hélène is guilty of this false pride with her make-up and elaborately coiffed hair. Her whole life revolved around this artificial beauty, the false value of which is expressed by the girls saying, "Il faut si peu pour être belle!" Moreover, in mythology, her beauty was the cause of the Trojan War; and Giono's distaste for war, as a result of his own experiences, is well documented. Hélène's immorality is suggested, although not overtly expressed, because she is Queen of Sparta. It is common historical knowledge that Sparta was a highly civilized Greek city-state; and it may be assumed that, as its Queen, Hélène believed in its values. One of Giono's later major


9Giono, Théâtre, p. 357.
themes is the condemnation of highly developed technological societies and their values; perhaps his most succinct expression of this viewpoint is found in the following lines from Les Vraies richesses: "La société construite sur l'argent détruit les récoltes, détruit les bêtes, détruit les hommes, détruit la joie, détruit le monde véritable, détruit la paix, détruit les vraies richesses."

Such societies destroy all that Giono holds dear: harvests, animals, men, joy, the true world, and peace—the true riches. Moreover, it is orgueil that causes Man to create these money-based societies with their wars and illusory values. By erecting a barrier with her pride, Hélène failed to recognize her oneness with Nature, and a sacrifice is the only cure for pride that has overreached itself. It is understood by now that her sacrifice is death.

Hélène is alone as the play opens. The preference of the natural to her artificiality is exhibited in Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène by Menelaus' neglect of his dying wife. He is either hunting or with the negress who runs nude through the hills at night, knows new rites of

---

10 Giono, Les Vraies richesses, p. 25.
11 Pugnet, Jean Giono, p. 30.
12 Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 114.
love, and whose bed is always open.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, Hélène dies without loved ones at her side, and this sense of solitude and concomitant suffering is an important part of her sacrifice. The relationship between suffering and solitude in the works of Giono seems to result from a very personal experience. Shortly before his death, his father said, "Ça n'est pas difficile de vivre seul, fiston. Le difficile, c'est de souffrir seul."\textsuperscript{14} However, Giono sees suffering as leading to hope, for he says, "La souffrance est une inventeuse de remèdes; une inventeuse d'espérance. C'est quand on souffre le plus sans espoir qu'on a le plus d'espoir."\textsuperscript{15} The hope for Hélène is that her suffering is a condition of her sacrifice which will lead to rebirth.

The solitary white body rests at the edge of a shadow formed by a column of the portico. Shadows are more prominent in the late afternoon—the time of day which the ancients believed preceded the "death of the sun." In the discussion of symbols in the setting, it was established that afternoon is the time of day which is a precursor of

\textsuperscript{13}Even in this early work, Giono borrowed some of his images from the Bible though the theme is pagan. The imagery connected with the negress was probably borrowed from Song 1:4-16.

\textsuperscript{14}Giono, Jean le bleu, p. 305. His father died in April, 1920, after a long period of suffering; During this time, Giono was writing \textit{Esquisse}.

\textsuperscript{15}Giono, \textit{Les Vraies richesses}, p. 91.
death in many of Giono's writings; and it is clear that he regards a shadow as a herald of death in the short story, "Peur de la terre." However, the symbolism of the shadow is augmented if one takes into account the Jungian notion that it represents the primitive, instinctual side of man's nature. With her artificial beauty, her highly civilized kingdom, and her semi-divine nature, it is plausible that Hélène has denied the mortal, earthly, and natural side of her nature. By placing her body at the edge of the shadow, Giono is saying that as she nears death, she is nearer to accepting this biological instinctual side of herself. She is approaching individuation in Jungian terms. This element of la mise en scène is reinforced by the description: "... dans la bouche entr'ouverte, pèse une goutte d'ombre." This image is strongly suggestive of the dying Janet in "Présentation de Pan." His mouth is forced open forever by his attempt to say PAN, a word that is explosive and hard as a rock when pronounced aloud in French. It is described as a word that weighs equally on all. This word, which is the beginning of his death, is impossible for him to say, so Giono does it for him.

---

16 Giono, Solitude de la pitié, p. 207.
17 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 277.
18 Giono, Théâtre, p. 349.
Pour que je dise: PAN, et pour qu'on comprenne comme je l'ai à côté de toi, cette nuit, toute la sauvagerie, toute la grandeur, tout l'humain de ce mot, il faudra que j'ajoute des mots à des mots et que j'en fasse des tas bien séparés: ... parce qu'un homme vivant n'a pas cette lucidité précise et ce grand souffle qu'ont les morts. ...

Ce sera comme si je disais d'abord le P, puis le A, puis le N et qu'enfin on entende le mot entier.  

To understand all the savagery, the grandeur, and the humanness of Pan, one must be dying. As Hélène lies there close to death, she at last has the clarity, the lucidity of spirit necessary for supernatural knowledge of Nature. The instinctual, suggested by the shadow, is reinforced by the wolfskins which have been placed upon the marble to make it soft. The skins are from "she-wolves," so they obviously relate to Hélène, but they come from animals which generally represent the primitive in human beings. 

Giono uses the shadow and the wolves to complement the dedication of the portico to Venus, the goddess of sensual love. The suggestion is that love is based upon following one's instinctual nature—a part of Hélène that she has previously denied but which she is closer to accepting as she nears death. The wolves may also be interpreted as another symbol of death leading to rebirth; for in the Gnostic cosmogony, the wolf was the beast who devoured the ________________

19 Giono, "Présentation de Pan," Les Amis des cahiers verts, pp. 82-83.

20 Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 237.
sun at sundown only to regorge it at sunrise. Therefore, Giono is saying, in yet another way, that only in death leading to rebirth will Hélène's fundamental duality be resolved.

It is significant that Giono uses the image of an icy mountain to describe the silhouette of her face. By setting her face—the uppermost part of her body—against the sky, he utilizes the mountain as a symbol of ascension to the realm of the spirit or to cosmic integration. A mountain is also a point of contact between heaven and earth and, consequently, between that which is divine and that which is mortal; therefore, it is a focal point of Inversion where all dualities are resolved for a moment, where "all opposites are for an instant fused together and then inverted." Since Hélène is not yet dead, the image suggests the transformation to come. Being icy, the mountain conveys her coolness, aloofness, impending death, and complements the "whiteness" discussed earlier.

Hélène is described as the only person visible, yet there are peach blossoms which "courent sur le ciel bleu suivant les caprices du vent," and "deux pigeons: ils ont leur nid dans le lotus d'une colonne." Just as the

21 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 355.
22 Ibid., pp. 150, 208-210.
23 Giono, Théâtre, p. 349.
play opens, a whiff of perfume—a mixture of iris and peach blossoms—"crushes" itself on the impassible face of the dying Hélène. As this occurs, the pigeons coo. Peach blossoms embody the symbolic meaning of flowers in general; and, as such, they signify spring, beauty, and the transitory. It was established earlier that in the cosmogony upon which Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène is based, the earth represents the passive and the feminine principle; by extension, the flowers might be understood as embracing the same connotations, because they are products of the earth and grow very closely connected to it. Moreover, flowers are more commonly associated with females than with males. In traditional symbolism, the wind—as the creative breath of life—represents the active or the masculine principle. All the elements play an important role in Giono's later works, and he was fond of using them as manifestations of Pan. However, in this play, it is more likely that the wind serves as a metaphor for Menelaus just as the flowers are a metaphor for Hélène. The peach blossoms are described as following the caprices of the wind; the union of the wind and the blossoms is transitory like the union of the two people. The perfume of the blossoms is ground

24 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 104.
25 Ibid., p. 91.
in Hélène's face. All perfume signifies memories and reminiscences;²⁷ and as she lies dying, Hélène is filled with nostalgia. It is significant that the wind lets one flower drop upon her shroud; the male wind drops the female flower, thereby corresponding to Menelaus' rejection of Hélène. In addition, just as surely as the plucked blossoms will die, so will she.

Hélène is looking for the sun, a symbol of the male principle, through the portico, a symbol of the female principle. As she is dying, Hélène desires her husband; but it is at this moment of the play that the peach blossom is dropped on her shroud by the wind. At the same time, the wind brings the soft sound of a flute. The instrument reinforces the interpretation of her longing; for the flute symbolically unites the male and female principles and, by extension, any two opposites: "The flute is phallic and masculine in shape and feminine in its shrill pitch and light, silvery (and therefore lunar) tone."²⁸ Giono probably intended the flute to convey, also, that Hélène's awareness of the meaning of life and her tel­ luric knowledge are heightened as she approaches death. For in the autobiographical Jean le bleu, Giono describes his own music lessons on the flute, saying that it is the

²⁷Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 240.
²⁸Ibid., p. 213.
instrument of hidden forces. "... j'étais comme un qui parle non pas par sa voix et par sa tête mais qui n'est plus que l'instrument de toutes les forces cachées."²⁹ Giono affirms that he regards the flute as a bearer of special knowledge in Le Serpent d'étoiles as follows: "... le chant de flûte devient une parole de la vie, un verbe vivant comme le jour, fait à la fois de joie et de tristesse."³⁰

Giono links the description of the flowers on the wind with the description of two birds, and it proves to be an elaborate vehicle for expressing his recurrent themes. Jung sees any bird as a rather common symbol of transcendence; and Cirlot states that they are images of the human soul or bearers of celestial messages.³¹ By linking the flowers and birds, Giono suggests Hélène's inherent duality; for just as the blossoms from the earth represent her physical side, the birds are symbolic of her spiritual side. However, the birds, in themselves, are symbolic of this duality; there are two of them, and the Gemini often take the guise of birds.³² It should be recalled from

²⁹Giono, Jean le bleu, p. 78. See also p. 115.
³⁰Giono, Le Serpent d'étoiles,p. 149. See also pp. 76, 86.
³¹Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 149; Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 21.
³²Ibid., p. 336.
previous discussion that the Gemini are the brothers of Hélène, and they embody the same mortal-immortal duality implicit in her. By building their nest in "the lotus of a column," the birds convey their desire to resolve the duality; for the lotus, as an artistic creation is related to the mandala--the Hindu magic circle--which denotes completeness and unity.33 It is more evident that the birds are a metaphor for Hélène when they are later described as white, and her whiteness has already been noted. As a symbol of transcendence and liberation, the birds represent Man's release from a confining pattern of existence and moving toward a superior state of development which, for Giono, would be increased awareness of oneness with la terre. Therefore, the pigeons help establish that Hélène represents the final stage in the initiation process. In a subsequent description, the birds fall from the portico column to the ground. This high to low movement of birds is typical of Giono as Pugnet observes in the following:

Le mouvement général du spectacle est de haut en bas. Giono décrit rarement des oiseaux en vol, des oiseaux en train de prendre leur essor, au contraire leur vol est bas et se dirige vers la terre; . . .34

33 Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 212.

34 Pugnet, Jean Giono, p. 58. Cirlot takes notice of this type of movement in A Dictionary of Symbols (p. 27) saying that the downward movement of birds is indicative of an earth-bound attitude. This is certainly true of Giono.
The role of the pigeons is completed in the ensuing passage from Esquisse: "(Les deux pigeons se becquêtent et, à pas menus, entrent dans l'ombre du pilier.)" If one understands becqueter to mean caresser avec le bec, as it usually does in the case of pigeons, these lines convey the impression that Hélène's inherent duality is being resolved as the birds enter the shadow. Since the shadow is a herald of death and representative of the biological and instinctive, as discussed earlier, the quotation means that only in death will her duality be resolved, only in death will she truly be part of the earth.

Birds and flowers may be Hélène's only visible companions as the play opens, "Mais d'autres personnages invisibles vivent cachés au delà du portique et, vers la mourante impassible, déferlent leurs lamentations, ou la clameur joyeuse de la vie. C'est:" By ending the quote with "it is" and a colon, Giono indicates that the voices belong to La Veilleuse and La Captive Troyenne, as these are the next characters that he describes. Moreover, these two characters have different views of death, and the voices express lamentations or the joyful clamor of life. If the voices seem to be contradictory, they are at least consonant with mythological tradition. Frazer states that

35 Giono, Théâtre, p. 352.
36 Ibid., p. 349.
myths often depicted annual growth and decay of vegetation as episodes in the lives of gods. They died and were re-born and this was celebrated with rites of alternate lamentation and rejoicing.\textsuperscript{37} Once again, Giono is emphasizing the cyclic nature of life. The lamentations are for death itself; the joy is for the new beginning, the rebirth which follows death, the continuation of life itself. As Eliade says, "Modality can be changed only as a consequence of rupture--and this releases ambivalent feelings of fear and of joy."\textsuperscript{38} These feelings, as pertaining to death, will be discussed further in the analysis of La Veilleuse and La Captive Troyenne.

In summary, Giono uses the character Hélène to embody the artificial (as opposed to the natural); the sin of false pride; a fundamental duality which is resolved in death; the acquisition of telluric knowledge as a result of suffering and sacrifice; and his own view of death as the sacrifice leading to rebirth.

The chorus of maidens represents containment, the intermediate stage of the female initiatory process. The discussion of the girls will begin with their description and proceed to their role in the action on stage. They


\textsuperscript{38}Eliade, Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries, p. 116.
are obviously young and lovely. Giono uses the metaphor—apples and lilies. They are life in flower, abloom of cheek and with bluish "snow" under the eyes because of the dances and the kisses in the shadow and the embraces which promise but don't come like the rumbling of a thunder storm when it is hot in the summer. They are wearing peplums of silk, amulets for love, and combs depicting the beautiful legends of Adonis and of Hero and Leander.

It is very Gionian to link two usually antithetical images as he does in the metaphor, "des pommes et des lys." Connecting apples and lilies, rather than opposing them, is another example of his tendency to resolve dualities and to interlock separate images in order to invoke a new one. The symbolic interpretation of apples and lilies in this particular context depends upon the traditional and specific Christian connotations as well as upon the colors usually associated with them. It is unlikely that the general symbolism of fruit and flowers is intended here, for the significance of each is complementary rather than antithetical. Jung says that the apple is connected with Eve, who represents purely instinctual and biological relations; and Cirlot states that, in traditional Christian symbology, the apple signifies earthly desires or indulging in such desires. Moreover, since it

is nearly spherical, it symbolizes totality.\textsuperscript{40} The lily, on the other hand, denotes purity; for it is a symbol of the Virgin Mary.\textsuperscript{41} By linking earthly desires with purity, Giono is expressing the idea that in his moral system, the two are not mutually exclusive. The significance of the colors simply underlines the meaning of the apples and lilies. Color symbolism is richly complex; but in the broadest sense, red stands for strong, basic emotions. Through its association with blood, it is also indicative of the body and of sacrifice. White represents purity, the spirit, and ascension,\textsuperscript{42} and Giono unites red and white to illustrate that body and spirit are not opposed but welded together. It is obvious that the girls are not totally representative of the purely biological and instinctive Gionian ideal, but they are closer to it than the totally "white" Hélène.

"La neige bleutée sous les yeux car les bals et les baisers dans l'ombre et les étreintes qui promettent et ne viennent pas, . . ."\textsuperscript{43} suggests circles under the eyes as a result of denying the sexual side of their

\textsuperscript{40}Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 185; Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., p. 180.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., pp. 50-57.

\textsuperscript{43}Giono, Théâtre, p. 350.
nature. In this respect, these maidens seem to be precur-
sors of girls in Giono's later works. According to Pugnet:

Les jeunes filles, . . . sont des images de la pureté. Riches d'une science non apprise, elles vivent elles aussi dans l'ordre . . . ; elles peuvent tout à coup devenir passionnées, bien souvent toutefois, leur volonté de vivre se dissipe en rêves de vierges.  

Such denial of sexual fulfillment is unnatural and, therefore, immoral in the Gionian system. Moreover, the quotation from Esquisse indicates that the girls are repre-
sentative of the intermediate step of containment and wholeness in ancient initiation rites.

The girls are obviously dressed to attract men with their peplums of silk—a sensuous fabric—and their amulets for "le bon amour." They are also wearing make-up, for La Captive Troyenne refers to them as "femmes peintes." The combs in their hair depict the legends of Hero and Leander as well as Adonis; and perhaps Giono chose these particular mythological tales, because the characters were related to Venus in some fashion. Adonis was her lover, tragically killed by a boar; Hero, one of her priestesses, was in love with Leander, but he drowned while swimming the Hellespont to meet her. Hero, discovering his body,


45Giono's attitude toward sexual experiences is expressed in his autobiographical novel, Jean le bleu, pp. 292-293.

46Giono, Théâtre, p. 357.
plunged to death in the waves. Furthermore, both legends depict romanticized, tragic love which is typically appealing to young girls.

The maidens have no characteristics which distinguish one from the other; and when they speak, it is in unison. (This is probably Giono's deference to the importance of choruses in the early Greek theater.) As the girls enter the palace, they are singing a popular song. Their voices are "mêlées sans ordre comme les clochettes d'un troupeau de chèvres, ..." This certainly suggests a lack of individuality. One of their primary functions in the play is to provide dialogue with La Veilleuse so that all can expound upon the inconstancy of men. They contrast Menelaus' current preference for the negress and indifference to his dying wife with his fury when he discovered her abduction by Paris. When the girls discover that the palace of the king is not always a joyful place and that royalty and beauty do not exempt one from death, they are truly surprised. Obviously interested in the coiffure and make-up of Hélène, for the purpose of imitating and replacing her, they manifest little concern for the fact that she is dying. The maidens are not being callous; they are simply young and innocent and do not

find death upsetting. This is as it should be since it is but a part of the life cycle. It is they whom La Veilleuse beseeches time and again to sing the funeral chant for Hélène. However, they do not sing it until the end of the play when they are "rangées comme les tuyaux de deux syringes." They help to form the pipes of Pan.

In *Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène*, the girls express the inevitability of death and acceptance of it as a natural part of life. Giono uses them to convey that the natural is preferable to the artificial and that love based on responding to and following one's own nature is infinitely preferable to romanticized love. They are the resolution of the apparent duality of earthly desires and spirituality, and these girls represent the intermediate step of containment in female initiatory rites.

La Veilleuse is one of the most important characters in the play; for after a careful study of her role, she emerges as the embodiment of wrong-doing in the Gionian scheme. Just as Hélène represents the ultimate degree in the initiation process and the girls are the intermediate step, La Veilleuse signifies the initial phase, submission. It will be apparent throughout the ensuing discussion that

---

49 *Ibid.*, p. 360. It is interesting to note that Giono uses almost the same image in, "Ivan Ivanovitch Kossiakoff," *Solitude de la pitié*, p. 98. He states, "... et une rangée d'enfants classés par ordre de grandeur décroissante comme les tuyaux d'une syringe."
she is the least aware of her oneness with la terre. The examination of this character will proceed in a different manner, as the initial description of her is less important than that of the others; everything in it is expressed through her lines in the play. She has the largest speaking part, beginning with long monologues and finishing with dialogues with both La Captive Troyenne and the girls. La Veilleuse is the only character for whom Giono uses no similes or metaphors to compare her to something else in Nature. This is a clear signal that she is not integrated with la terre; because Giono usually uses nature images for his favored people. She is probably a servant or a lady in waiting, because her opening position is at the feet of Hélène which indicates an attitude of subservience. She is crying which implies that the lamentations from invisible voices belong to her; for throughout the play, she alone grieves because the queen is dying.

La Veilleuse's vigil at the bed of Hélène has lasted one hundred days and one hundred nights. Indeed, her name is the traditional term used to describe a woman whose function is to sit up and watch over the dead and dying. It was demonstrated earlier that numbers are usually significant in the works of Giono; therefore, his choice of one hundred was probably not arbitrary. If one were to assume that a numerological interpretation is in order
here, it seems probable that the method of fusion of higher numbers that pertains is mystic addition. Therefore, one hundred is reduced to one. Zero has already been established as symbolizing death as the state in which life forces are transformed. One denotes being and the revelation of the spiritual essence and "also stands for spiritual unity—the common basis between all beings." In other words, death as a state of transformation (expressed by the zeros) will ultimately result in being and the revelation of the oneness of all things (symbolized by one). Only in death which leads to rebirth, will complete awareness be achieved; but La Veilleuse's vigil of one hundred days and one hundred nights is in itself indicative that she is growing in telluric knowledge. The close tie of nothing (zero) with all (one) is poetically expressed in "Rondeur des jours."

Nous n'allons vers rien, justement parce que nous allons vers tout, et tout est atteint du moment que nous avons tous nos sens prêts à sentir. Les jours sont des fruits et notre rôle est de les manger, de les goûter doucement ou voracement selon notre nature propre, de profiter de tout ce qu'ils contiennent, d'en faire notre chair spirituelle et notre âme de vivre. Vivre n'a pas d'autre sens que ça.52

Giono clearly believes that sensory appreciation of each day is essential if one is to truly live; and in contrast,

50 For discussion of this matter see p. 29.
51 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 221.
52 Giono, L'Eau vive, p. 114.
La Veilleuse has committed a grave error by spending so many days and nights at the bed of Hélène. She has wasted precious days by not experiencing them to the fullest. Moreover, she is caught up in ritual and is ignorant of life itself.

In her opening monologue, La Veilleuse says, "Je dois cacher mes yeux sous un pan de ma robe. . . . Je ne peux plus voir le soleil."\(^5^{3}\) Choosing not to see the sun by hiding her eyes with a corner of her dress is indicative of her attitude and the change taking place within her. The above lines are reinforced when, later in the speech, she reiterates saying, "Oh! le soleil, je ne veux plus voir le soleil" and "ce soleil je ne peux plus regarder le soleil."\(^5^{4}\) These lines invite close examination on more than one level. Generally, the sun is not visible at night, and night as a death symbol has been well documented. Not seeing the sun might mean that the late afternoon of the setting is leading toward sunset, that time of day when the ancients believed that the sun "died." She realizes that Hélène's death is ever closer. Moreover, this interpretation of the lines is complemented by the initial description of La Veilleuse as one who "entend le pas inexorable de la messagère d'Hadès molle comme un linge tombé

\(^{53}\)Giono, \textit{Théâtre}, p. 351.

\(^{54}\)Ibid., p. 352.
du séchoir . . ." A messenger from Hades, the underworld, would most likely be Persephone, though there is not a definite statement in Esquisse. At any rate, she is tantamount to a messenger of death. Not seeing the sun and the messenger from Hades are both evocative of Hélène's impending death. Not seeing the sun is significant on another level; this is an important way of establishing that she and, of course, Hélène are going through an initiation rite. Such trials for women prescribe isolating them in a dark corner and, among many peoples, they are forbidden to see the sun. Female initiatory rites are less dramatic than those for men, and segregation is an important element. This taboo may be based upon the mystical and mythical connection between women and the moon and between men and the sun.\textsuperscript{56} In earlier discussion, it was established that the sun represents the masculine principle, the active, the rational, and the spirit. Therefore, in Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène, not being able to see the sun may also be interpreted to mean the absence of Menelaus, for the crown is a solar symbol.\textsuperscript{57} The king is clearly linked with the

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., p. 349.

\textsuperscript{56}Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation, p. 42. There is no doubt that Giono regards the sun as masculine. He describes the sun's sexual excitation of mares, which he compares to women, in Jean le bleu, pp. 243-244.

\textsuperscript{57}Olcott, Sun Lore of All Ages, p. 290.
sun. At first, La Veilleuse says that he is hunting; then in a lower voice, she admits that she thinks he went to the lodging in the woods where one sings and the bed is always open. She adds:

J'ai cherché le roi. Oh! je n'ai pas décidé de ma propre initiative. Je ne suis rien ici. . . . les yeux de madame Hélène, à travers les murs, cherchaient le ciel enclos dans le portique. . . . Le roi ne pourra pas me chercher querelle je pense? Oh! le soleil, je ne veux plus voir le soleil!

At first La Veilleuse was upset, because she couldn't find Menelaus; now she no longer wants to see him. She fears the king will be angry, because she has been looking for him, and because she carried Hélène to the portico.

During her long vigil, La Veilleuse has administered all the known herb-teas and Egyptian ointments in an effort to keep Hélène alive; the ancients of all cultures believed that certain herbs were capable of conferring immortality. She is proud of her knowledge of these concoctions and of her efforts to prolong Hélène's life, even though she is increasingly aware of their futility. She says, "J'ai suivi du doigt l'écrit des mages et pour chaque mot j'ai pesé en mon esprit dix sens divers avant d'appliquer le remède." However, her endeavors are wrong from

---

58 Giono, Théâtre, p. 352.
59 Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 298.
60 Giono, Théâtre, p. 351.
Giono's point of view; she has erred by upsetting the natural order—the balance of life and death—by trying to keep Hélène alive. La Veilleuse committed another grave error by relying upon the writings of the magi and her own reason in applying the prescribed remedies, for Giono distrusts knowledge based solely on intellect or reason. Knowledge should also be intuitive and sensory. As Pugnet has observed: "L'homme péche aussi par l'esprit; l'orgueil a pour arme l'instrument le plus précis, l'intelligence, maintes fois opposée par Giono à la connaissance intuitive de tout l'être." In this respect, La Veilleuse has committed the sin of orgueil, false pride. Not only did she "sin by the spirit," but she thought that her hands, through the application of remedies, could keep Hélène from going toward "la porte farouche." La Veilleuse is, then, a would-be guérisseur, but a pale precursor of Giono's later healers. The hands are a very important part of the body to Giono, for it is through the hands that men have the most physical contact with objects and other people;

---

61 The consequences of interference with the natural cycle of life and death is expressed dramatically in the novel Colline. When Janet refuses to die, the town spring dries up.

62 Pugnet, Jean Giono, p. 30. For the importance of the senses, see the quote from "Rondeur des jours," p. 65 of this paper.

63 Giono, Théâtre, p. 355.
hence, they can be instruments for acquiring knowledge or for communicating feeling. In *Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène*, Giono uses the hands of La Veilleuse to suggest her suffering; and it has already been established that a prerequisite of telluric knowledge is suffering. Her hands are described as frayed from the rubbing of terrible ointments; the skin is even hanging from the nails. Moreover, she is exhausted from one hundred days and nights without sleep and is beginning to realize that her efforts are in vain.

Her suffering and sense of hopelessness lead La Veilleuse to make a plea to the gods, but they are "sourds, ou trop loin." Perhaps the gods are deaf or too far away to help her, but Giono regards her "prayers" as useless, as well as wrong. The futility of praying to prevent death is clearly stated in one of his later short stories, "La Ville des hirondelles," as he says, "Celui qui prie pour empêcher la mort est aussi fou que celui qui prierait pour faire lever le soleil par l'ouest, sous prétexte qu'il n'aime pas la lumière matinale." La Veilleuse's growing impatience with the gods leads her to implore, "0 cygne!

---

Oiseau-dieu, ... elle ne peut plus parler, celle que tu mis au ventre de Léda. ... Permettras-tu à des ongles d'Asie de déchirer sa chair?" 67 It is well documented in mythology that Leda and Zeus were the parents of Hélène, Zeus having come to Leda under the guise of a swan. It is to the "oiseau-dieu" or Zeus, as Hélène's father, that La Veilleuse now makes a plea to protect her queen. The swan image of Zeus is doubly appropriate in the play, because it is a symbol of a journey to the other world. 68 Therefore, it is also a symbol of death. Nevertheless, La Veilleuse's supplication to Zeus is in vain, and she is disillusioned. (Her disenchantment with the gods suggests Giono's own disavowal of Christianity which "held little meaning for the peasants of Haute-Provence in their struggle with the land; the Panic cycle of novels is essentially the creation of a religion that would doubtless be less distant and more meaningful to the common peasant.") 69 Finally, she is driven by despair to invoke a new god saying, "Oh! qui inventera un dieu qui pleure comme nous, un dieu-source pour laver nos plaies, un dieu-pain pour nous qui mâchons de la rue sur la terre? Viens! J'irai

67Giono, Théâtre, pp. 353-354.
m'étendre comme une agnelle sur ton autel!" This speech is a turning point in Esquisse; for from this time on, La Veilleuse seems more resigned to Hélène's impending death. Only after her own solitary suffering could she realize the need for a new god and invest him with the sympathetic characteristics required to meet the needs of Man. She wants to know who will invent a god who cries like us, who would wash our wounds and give us bread. Similar conditions of solitary suffering linked to a quest for a deity are clearly amplified in Jean le bleu when Giono's dying father says:

Ça n'est pas difficile de vivre seul, fiston. Le difficile c'est de souffrir seul. C'est pourquoi il y en a tant qui cherchent dieu. Quand on l'a trouvé, on n'est plus seul, plus jamais seul. Seulement, écoute bien, on ne le trouve pas, on l'invente.

Once again Giono speaks of inventing a god; this is precisely what La Veilleuse expressed by invoking a new god and specifying the characteristics which he should possess. This invention implies that religion is an individual matter having little to do with ritual or prescriptive belief of formal religion. La Veilleuse would willingly be an agnelle for the god she wishes to invent—the female revers de la médaille of the Christian Lamb of God. As he

70 Giono, Théâtre, p. 354.
71 Giono, Jean le bleu, p. 305.
did elsewhere in the play, Giono once again borrows imagery from the Bible even though the god invented is pagan.

Just as solitude and suffering are a basis for knowing the deity, so is fear. "Inspiring fear and awe in Man is the first step in producing religious awareness and invests Man with the desire to know the will of the deity in order to seek ways of avoiding future violence." Though Panic will is often manifested in natural violence in Giono's early works, La Veilleuse's fear is based more upon the unknown in Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène. She states her fear of La Captive Troyenne in the following lines: "On ne devrait pas laisser cette femme libre dans les jardins. Je l'ai surprise une nuit, hurlant à la lune comme une chienne. Elle mâche des mots de malheur. . . . J'ai peur, si elle voit madame Hélène . . ." Her fear of the deity causes La Veilleuse to long for the more benevolent side of Pan, that part of him which restores

72 Other biblical imagery in Esquisse should be recalled at this point. It was established that: the clump of cypress trees is evocative of Christ (see p. 37); the imagery connected with the negress whom Menelaus prefers to Hélène was probably borrowed from the Song of Songs (see pp. 48-49); the metaphor for the girls, des pommes et des lys, represents Eve and Mary (see pp. 59-60).


74 Giono, Théâtre, p. 353.
order and harmony with his pipes. That is why she beseeches the girls to sing the funeral chant.

La Veilleuse emerges as a very important vehicle for many of Giono's ideas. Her vigil of one hundred days and nights expresses through the symbology of numbers that one can possess telluric awareness only if one recognizes that the ultimate sacrifice is death leading to rebirth. Her solitude and suffering are an important part of her initiation into telluric knowledge, and she represents the first stage in the initiatory process, submission. La Veilleuse is ignorant of life and how to live it, in the Gionian sense. Not being able to see the sun signified her increasing awareness of the inevitability of death; moreover women and girls are often forbidden to see the sun, as part of their initiation; and lastly, not seeing the sun conveyed La Veilleuse's distress at the absence of Menelaus. She "sinned" by administering the herb-tea and ointments in an effort to prolong Hélène's life, thereby interfering with the natural cycle of life and death; in addition, she erred in relying solely upon her reason and intellect in deciding how to administer her potions when knowledge should also be intuitive and sensory. In that respect, La Veilleuse represents the futility of praying to prevent death. She establishes the need for a new god who will be sympathetic to the needs of Man; moreover,
experiencing solitude, suffering, and fear is prerequisite to knowledge of the deity. Though the new god may make his will known by inspiring fear, Man also has a desire to know his benevolent side; and the latter is often represented by music in Giono's pantheism.
CHAPTER IV

THE TRANSFORMER

La Captive Troyenne is one of the most symbolically important characters in the play. In many ways, she is antithetical to each of the other females, because she is the embodiment of Gionian virtue as opposed to their errors. She emerges as the prototype of Giono's later visionnaires—persons who have knowledge of "les pays de derrière l'air"—such as Janet in Colline and Albin in Un de Baumugnes. The study of this character will begin with a brief synopsis of her role in the play and then proceed to a detailed analysis of the symbolic meaning of components of her physical description. Much of the knowledge of what she looks like is based upon the perceptions of La Veilleuse and the girls. The discussion of La Captive Troyenne will conclude with a summary of Giono's views expressed in her on-stage lines.

It seems likely that Giono based this character on Hecuba, one of the traditional mythological survivors of the Trojan War, who went mad as a result of her suffering.

\(^1\)Giono, Le Serpent d'étoiles, p. 49.
and was transformed into a hell-hound. Giono describes La Captive Troyenne as "hurlant à la lune comme une chienne" which, besides comparing her to a dog, certainly suggests irrational behavior. La Troyenne is part of the Spartan booty from the Trojan War and serves as amusement for the older soldiers who are no longer up to the more sportive conquests of the fields and streets. As a prisoner, she is in chains although she is apparently free to roam the palace grounds. Her ugliness is suggested by the description of her startling gray hair and the violet-colored, snake-like scar which splits one of her breasts and descends to the genital region. As the play evolves, it is apparent that she and the primitive negress who runs nude on the hill at night, participates in Panic revels, and knows new rites of love have much in common. They are both dark, and both recognize their oneness with la terre. La Veilleuse fears that this wild, natural Trojan woman, who is given to making animal-like noises, will seize an opportunity to avenge her misfortunes on the dying Hélène.

Since the latter's abduction by Paris is the traditional, mythological cause of the Trojan War, La Troyenne might well see her as being responsible for the loss of her city.

---


and her lover, as well as for the abuse of her own body. The fear of La Veilleuse proves groundless, however; for La Captive Troyenne says that she loves, not hates, Hélène. It is she who will sing the funeral chant.

It is significant that Giono associates more than one type of tree with La Captive Troyenne on more than one occasion. The importance of trees to him as well as their traditional interpretation as symbols of transformation and the eternal life of the cosmos has already been noted.\(^4\) In his initial description of La Captive Troyenne, Giono describes her hair as "grise comme le feuillage d'un olivier."\(^5\) Olive trees are generally understood to be symbols of peace, and Redfern has noted Giono's usage in this sense.\(^6\) When one takes into account that the olive tree was sacred to Pallas Athena, goddess of wisdom, it takes on that special significance as well.\(^7\) Gray is usually considered to be the intermediary between white and black, two antithetical colors; and Giono's description of her hair as gray may have been to suggest the resolution of an apparent duality. However, Cirlot says: "The complex symbolism of mixed colours is derived from the primary

\(^4\)For a detailed discussion of trees see pp. 34-35.

\(^5\)Giono, Théâtre, p. 350.

\(^6\)Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 231; Redfern, The Private World of Jean Giono, p. 63.

\(^7\)Hamilton, Mythology, p. 30.
colours of which they are composed. . . . greys and ochres are related to the earth and vegetation."^ The latter meaning of gray is probably the one Giono intended here. Gray hair is also suggestive of age, which is complementary to wisdom. When all components and associations of the olive tree are considered, it emerges as an image of peace, the earth, wisdom, and establishes La Captive Troyenne's age. The wisdom is doubtless synonymous with telluric knowledge in this case, while peace may have a two-fold significance. It should be recalled at this point that Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène was written in 1919, shortly after Giono returned from his devastating experiences in World War I; and he had a profound desire for external peace—peace among Men. It may also suggest an inner tranquility that comes when one realizes the oneness of all things of la terre.

The second tree with which La Captive Troyenne is associated is the laurel. Although the reader has been aware of her presence, she joins the action on stage as she "vient de surgir d'une touffe de laurier . . ."^9 Laurel trees were sacred to Apollo, the sun god; and their leaves were made into wreaths to crown poets, heroes, and

---

^8 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 54.
^9 Giono, Théâtre, p. 357.
victors in games. The clump as a symbol of sacrifice has already been established. It should be recalled that any bunch or clump is a Christian symbol of Christ and sacrifice due to the association of any clump with grapes; the latter are, in turn, linked with wine which is traditionally symbolic of blood and sacrifice. Giono carries the Christian imagery further by describing La Captive Troyenne as "rising" from the clump of laurel trees. The image, therefore, becomes evocative of Christ's rising from the dead. What Christ and La Captive Troyenne have in common is that, through their suffering and sacrifice, each has come to know his deity. If one synthesizes the symbolic meaning of rising from the clump, which is sacrifice leading to death and rebirth, with that of the laurel tree, victory, it is suggested that only through such a sacrifice can victory be achieved. For Giono, the ultimate victory is death which leads to rebirth.

The tree most definitely associated with the Trojan is the cypress; the girls actually use the metaphor, "un cyprès qui marche," and La Troyenne replies:

... je suis pareille au cyprès, maigre et noire, mais, n'est-ce pas au seuil des bastides hérisées de herbes, le cyprès qui est seul âde et donne la pi­tance de musique apaisante. ... je serai votre cyprès lourde de mille oiseaux, ouverte au vent propice, je chanterai le chant funèbre.11

---

10 Hamilton, Mythology, p. 31.
11 Giono, Théâtre, p. 358.
The passage states that since she is like the cypress, heavy with birds and open to the wind, she will sing the funeral chant. This speech reinforces the interpretation of the cypress tree as a death symbol, as well as underscoring its musical qualities if open to the wind, which was discussed in Chapter II. It was also established earlier that birds are common symbols of transcendence and liberation, while the wind is symbolic of the creative breath and has powers of fecundation and regeneration.12 Although Giono does belabor the point, the birds in the cypress tree, open to the wind, seem to be one more expression of death leading to rebirth.

In addition to the observation made above, the passage establishes that the cypress is "the only poet," and Giono views the poet's senses as organs of knowledge as are the artisans hands. La Captive Troyenne is enlightened, for "Pan also initiates men into poetry, which arises from the digestion of sense impressions."13 As a poet, she possesses special sensory knowledge, for Pan incites one to use his natural instincts. She is not the messenger from Hades as La Veilleuse feared; she is a messenger of Pan. She will teach them all the lesson of sacrifice as a prerequisite to telluric comprehension. The will of Pan

12Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 353-354.
will be expressed through her, not through natural violence as it is in many of Giono's early writings.\(^{14}\)

The imagery establishes that she is thin and black like the cypress tree, although Giono does not make it clear whether she is "black" from the sun or if she is naturally dark-skinned. However, the comparison of cypress trees to thin dark people proves to be an image that Giono repeats at least once in later works. In "Au Pays des coupeurs d'arbres," he says: ". . . un bosquet de cyprès; Ça me fait penser à des nègres. Vous voyez: des petits nègres pas gras, des nègres de la campagne."\(^{15}\)

In addition to her association with the trees, La Captive Troyenne is symbolized in Esquisse by another Nature image, a swallow. Against the background of cooing pigeons, there is the "ciel impassible où passe l'éclair noir d'une hirondelle."\(^{16}\) The black flash of lightning of the swallow can be understood as a death symbol, because of the association with the color black. However, as a

\(^{14}\)Lutes in "Moral Outlook" (p. 317) has noted the expression of Panic will through a superior individual in his discussion of Saint-Jean in Batailles dans la montagne, Giono's last pre-war novel.

\(^{15}\)Giono, Solitude de la pitié, p. 177.

\(^{16}\)Giono, Théâtre, p. 354. The author's fondness for swallows is detailed in the short story, "La Ville des hirondelles," L'Eau vive, pp. 205-210. The town of the swallows is Manosque, and he sees the birds as "un jaillissement spontané de joie," p. 205.
bird, the swallow is an allegory of spring. Lightning is also associated with spring and represents the supreme creative power, because it symbolizes the initial stage of every cycle. As a composite, the swallow stands for death leading to rebirth; since the cooing of the pigeons forms a counterpoint to the flight of the swallow, the image underlines the juxtaposing of Hélène and La Troyenne.

The blackness of La Captive Troyenne also emphasizes that she is antithetical to Hélène who is white. Giono inverts the correspondence of good and evil usually associated with these colors, as noted before; hence, La Troyenne is the embodiment of Gionian morality. It is not surprising that she is Giono's preferred character in the play; her skin is the color of the earth. Black is also the color of darkness and death; but it is symbolic, too, of nature and instincts. It is for this reason that many white people fear blacks; they project on to them the primitive drives and uncontrolled instincts that they do not want to admit are a part of themselves. Perhaps this is the unconscious basis of La Veilleuse's fear of La Troyenne.

18Ibid., p. 324.
19For more on Giono's inversion of white and black see p. 36.
The former character certainly regards the latter as primitive, instinctual, and animal-like as evidenced by lines in the play where La Veilleuse describes La Captive as "hurlant à la lune comme une chienne," and saying "elle mâche des mots de malheur." In addition, she fears La Captive Troyenne will tear at Hélène's flesh. Likening her to a dog was not an arbitrary choice of animal since she is probably based on Hecuba, as stated earlier. Moreover the comparison suggests that she is one with the animals and thereby represents the Gionian ideal of instinctive behavior; for as Redfern says, "In this purely terrestrial world, the only sin lies in rejecting, not in coveting, the riches of instinctual living." The Trojan woman has broken through the barriers and recognizes her oneness with la terre. Moreover, she rejoices in it. It is now clear that just as La Veilleuse's voice was the lamentations directed toward the dying Hélène, the voice of La Captive Troyenne was the joyous clamor of life. Linking the two is typical of the balance Giono seeks to portray.

The above discussion certainly implies that La Captive Troyenne is free; yet her freedom is not total. The very adjective "captive" denies it; and when she approaches

21 Giono, Théâtre, pp. 353, 354.
the other characters on stage, "un fer tinte sur les marches." The wording suggests that the irons are on her; therefore, she becomes an allegory for naturalness enchained. This one line can be taken as germinal to Giono's criticism of modern society in his essay, Les Vraies richesses. In Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène, he is criticizing the highly advanced Greek society in a similar manner; it, too, has enchained naturalness and tried to enslave it.

La Captive Troyenne is described as having startling gray hair, being thin and black, with a rather long serpentine scar on her chest and stomach. The composite suggests ugliness which is another way in which she is antithetical to Hélène, a beauty. The importance to the comprehension of the play is that it underlines the fact that Giono's sympathies lie with her. "Like Hugo, Giono reserves much of his tenderness for grotesque creatures." This is confirmed in Jean le bleu in the description of Mme Massot whom Giono describes as being incredibly ugly but incredibly good. "C'était une laideur faite de tout ce sacrifice, de tout ce martyr qui est la vraie bonté."

He continues with a description of a photograph of her as

23 Giono, Théâtre, p. 357.
25 Giono, Jean le bleu, p. 128.
a beautiful young woman; therefore, sacrifice—the true goodness—has changed her from a beauty to an ugly woman. This is doubtless the case with La Captive Troyenne.

The suffering and sacrifice of this character is established throughout Esquisse; specifically, she has lost her city, her beloved, and her own body was violated. "La douleur de ma propre chair"26 that she speaks of refers to the fact that the old Spartan soldiers use her for their pleasure at will. The most graphic evidence of her suffering at their hands is "la cicatrice violette qui fend un de ses seins et descend en queue de serpent jusqu'à son ventre."27 The violet scar is one of the most symbolically important images in the play. To understand fully the significance of the scar, it must be examined in detail. Any scar is a distinguishing mark and, like a brand or a tattoo, sets one person apart from others; therefore, it is a mark of individuality—a quality which Giono greatly admires. A scar is also indicative of a healed wound, and wounds have the same symbolic function as blood which denotes sacrifice.28 The location of the scar suggests that the wound was of a sexual nature; and the whole description of it has great rapport with the tattoo of the prostitute,

26Giono, Théâtre, p. 359.
27Ibid., p. 350.
Marie-Louise in Jean le bleu. "... Marie-Louise avait un serpent tatoué sur la jambe, ... il s'enroulait à sa cuisse et ... il plongeait sa tête plus haut, au bon endroit." 29 The assault on La Troyenne and the death of her bien-aimé at the hands of the Greeks are detailed in the following passage:

J'ai dit: 'Laissez-moi baiser mon bien-aimé,' et ils m'ont saisie par les hanches pour la chose d'amour. Et, de mes yeux renversés, j'ai vu le bronze fendre sa poitrine comme un soc de charrue. Quand ils m'ont lâchée, un fleuve de sang ruisselait entre mes jambes. Les cheveux de mon bien-aimé étaient dans la boue et ses yeux étaient dans la boue, et il y avait de la boue dans sa bouche! ... J'ai baisé cette bouche et il est venu de la boue dans la mienne. 30

It is very probable that the above account of her rape is an explanation of the origin of the wound which resulted in her scar. Enduring an assault of this nature represents the highest degree of suffering; for her very essence, her very naturalness was violated.

The mud transmitted from her lover's mouth to La Troyenne's is significant also. According to Cirlot, "Mud signifies the union of the purely receptive principle

29 Giono, Jean le bleu, pp. 151-152. Marie-Louise was another of Giono's people for whom he had a great deal of sympathy. She was denied treatment in a Catholic hospital because of the nature and location of this tattoo. The implication is that Giono is condemning Christianity for its indictment of sexual pleasure as well as society with its man-made values.

30 Giono, Théâtre, p. 353.
(earth) with the power of transition and transformation (water)."31 If that is the case, then the union of earth and water may signify that at the moment of his death, his transformation, her lover was aware of the Earth; since she kissed him and mud came into her mouth, the awareness was transmitted to her. La Troyenne's own wound, of course, was a vital part of the total suffering and sacrifice described in the quoted passage. Her superior knowledge, her telluric awareness would then be due to this period of anguish.32

It is important that the scar is violet; for in traditional symbolism, "violet represents nostalgia and memories, because it is made up from blue (signifying devotion) and red (passion)."33 The devotion and passion of La Captive Troyenne are both exemplified in her account of the death of her beloved; the violet scar suggests that she will always remember that occasion, for a scar is a permanent reminder of a wound.34 Although conventional

31Cirilo, A Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 211-212.
32Giono's father expressed the idea that wounds lead to enlightenment in Jean le bleu (p. 286) saying, "les plaies éclairent."
33Cirilo, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 52.
34Giono established early a penchant for linking violet and mud and violet with ventre. For other examples, see Jean le bleu, pp. 21, 109, 161, 210, 249.
color symbolism is appropriate here, the meaning of the serpent-like violet scar is enlarged if one considers the images of red and blue snakes in Giono's novel, *Le Serpent d'étoiles*, which details the creation of the world. Although *Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène* was written first, the violet snake does appear to be a synthesis of the two. In describing the birth of the Earth, Giono says:

Une veine bleue entre comme un serpent dans sa tête. C'est par là qu'elle se remplit de sa charité.
Une artère rouge entre comme un serpent dans sa poitrine. C'est par là qu'elle se remplit de sa méchanceté.35

The stated colors are antithetical in meaning as blue symbolizes charity, and red stands for wickedness; this implies that Earth itself has an implicit duality. However, the violet scar in *Esquisse* would appear to resolve this duality, as violet is a fusion of red and blue. The symbolic meaning of the snake is complementary to this interpretation of violet; for although snake symbolism is multifaceted, any snake stands for the union of opposites such as active and passive, affirmative and negative, masculine and feminine.36 The entire interpretation of the serpentine scar is reinforced by the following passage


36Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 235. Giono's predilection for the Gnostic Ouroboros has been noted in the Introduction. For specific examples, see p. 23 which contains quotations from "Présentation de Pan" and "Rondeur des jours."
from Jean le bleu in which Giono's father says:

Je sentais que le vent s'enracinait en moi. Quand il m'arrive maintenant d'essayer de soigner sur moi des éclats de chair saignants et tout aiguës de douleur, je pense à ces graines dont j'ai été ensemencé devant la grande fenêtre et je trouve toujours au fond de la plaie le petit serpent violet.37

With regard to La Captive Troyenne, the snake-shaped violet scar denotes that with her superior knowledge, gained through her suffering, she knows that death leads to rebirth.

It has been noted before that La Veilleuse fears La Troyenne will seek revenge upon Hélène for the destruction of Troy, the death of her lover, and the abuse of her body. Instead, she tells Hélène that it is hopeless to struggle against death. After forcing Hélène to recall events of the Trojan War, La Captive Troyenne says that she has no malice toward her.

N'avions-nous pas des mages en Troade aussi puissants que les vôtres et dont l'ouïe fine entendait la parole des dieux dans le pépiement des pigeons?

Tout se paie dans la boutique des Immortels: nous achetons des pans de joie et de beauté et notre monnaie est la douleur. Nous connaissions les calamités attachées à chaque cheveu de votre reine. . . .

Pourquoi de la haine? . . . Je l'aime, ta reine, autant que toi.38

In spite of all the misery which Hélène caused, La Captive Troyenne accepts her losses; the Trojans had to pay with their sorrow for the joy and beauty which Hélène brought

37Giono, Jean le bleu, p. 68.
38Giono, Théâtre, pp. 359-360.
them. Moreover, she doesn't hate Hélène; she loves her as much as La Veilleuse does. This is a splendid example of a Gionian virtue, pitié, which is almost synonymous with the Christian concept of charity. Pitié is a human virtue which seems to be attainable only by those who possess telluric awareness.39

La Captive Troyenne can now be understood as the embodiment of Gionian goodness. Most of the symbols pertaining to her convey that she is natural, primitive, and instinctual which makes her close to la terre. Therefore, she possesses telluric knowledge which is a result of all her suffering and sacrifice; and she is the medium of transformation through which the will of Pan is conveyed. By her lesson in pitié, she transforms La Veilleuse, the girls, and Hélène. Their initiation is finished; they are now aware that death is an inevitable, natural part of the life cycle. La Veilleuse is overjoyed that her pleas were not in vain, thereby implying that a new, sympathetic god has been invented. They are ready for the funeral chant.

CHAPTER V

THE DEATH OF HÉLÈNE

In the moments preceding the death of Héléne at the conclusion of the play, two things are of importance: the funeral chant and the young men. As in the preceding discussion, an analysis of the attendant symbols is vital to their comprehension. Symbolic analysis will be preceded by a short description of the events prior to Héléne's death.

The funeral chant is sung by La Captive Troyenne, as well as the girls, who are aligned on either side of her like "les tuyaux de deux syringes."\(^1\) They are obviously evocative of the Pipes of Pan; and it should be recalled that the music of Pan is representative of his gentle side, the restoration of order, and the reconciliation of opposites.\(^2\) Since the music in *Esquisse d'une mort d'Héléne* is funeral music, her death is also understood to be the restoration of order and is united with birth. The young maidens chorus enthusiastically their

\(^1\)Giono, *Théâtre*, p. 360.
\(^2\)For more information see p. 11.
part of the funeral chant as follows: "O Hélène, de fleurs chargée, ô sagette, ô vent portant l'odeur des tilleuls, ô nue venue du fond ouranien pour la joie du monde!" La Captive Troyenne simply says, "O graine!" The symbolic meanings of the flowers, the wind, and the trees have already been established; but the cloud is a new metaphor for Hélène and is appropriate because of its twofold meaning. A cloud is symbolic of matter in a constant state of metamorphosis; and through its association with water, it is a fertility symbol. Hence death, as a state of transformation, will lead to rebirth. "O graine" is symbolically complementary to the cloud. Any seed is commonly regarded as indicative of new life, but the meaning is extended by symbolism. The seed is "symbolic of latent, non-manifest forces, or of the mysterious potentialities the presence of which, sometimes unsuspected, is the justification for hope. These potentialities also symbolize the mystic Centre ...." For all symbols expressive of the mystic Centre, the intention is to teach Man to identify himself with the supreme principle of the universe. Thus "O graine" means that Hélène's death is the seed of a new

---

3 Giono, Théâtre, p. 360.
4 For complete discussion see pp. 34, 53.
5 Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 48.
6 Ibid., pp. 39, 269.
beginning; moreover, it is union with the cosmos and through this she will gain superior knowledge of the laws of Nature. Implied, but not stated, is the concept of espérance, which is a panic virtue. It is similar, but not exactly equivalent, to the Christian idea of hope; and Giono's own connotation of espérance is nearly that of the verb attendre which implies waiting and expectation. In the play, Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène, La Captive Troyenne says "O graine!" one more time. It is intoned in the middle of the silence that follows the acclamations from the stadium and just as the groaning of the cypress trees becomes louder, "mais déjà madame Hélène est morte." The implication is that death is the ultimate end of espérance; it is the end of waiting and the end of Hélène's one hundred day struggle. When she finally submits willingly to death, it becomes the natural sacrifice necessary for rebirth. Her death also represents restoration of order.

The young men struggle to succeed in the discus throw all the while that Hélène lies dying, but they cease their efforts and join the other characters moments before she dies. Throughout the play, their shouts and the roar of the crowd form a counterpoint to the grief of the

8Giono, Théâtre, p. 361.
faithful Veilleuse; the connotation is that life goes on, even in the presence of death.

The precise metaphor for the young men is "le blé de Sparte." Wheat is a phallic symbol and denotes the regenerative power of grain as the "inseminator of the earth." The metaphor, the wheat of Sparta, clearly signifies that these young men are hope for the continuation of life itself. Wheat and bread, which Giono sometimes uses almost interchangeably, are among his favorite images in later works; the growing of wheat and the making of bread is glorified in Les Vraies richesses, and it is clear that it has sexual connotations. It is also Giono's vehicle for a critique of modern society as he contrasts home-baking to the mass production methods which he deems to be dehumanizing. Wheat and bread are natural nourishment from the Earth and almost synonymous with life: "C'est la nourriture de la vie et d'une vie qui est la joie, et si nous n'en mangeons pas nous mourons." The metaphor of wheat is complemented by the description of the young men as "bruns comme des ailes d'aigles mais plus légers et plus

---

9 Ibid., p. 350.

10 Jung, Symbols of Transformation, p. 436.

11 Giono, Les Vraies richesses, p. 106. For more complete information, see pp. 102-120. The significance of bread and wheat to Giono is also emphasized in the short story, "Mort du blé," L'Eau vive, pp. 169-185.
vains que la nue." Brown implies that they are tan and healthy, and it is also an earth color. Although the suggestion is that the young men are somewhat natural, they are probably not so attuned to la terre as the black Captive Troyenne; for black is a deeper earth color than brown. The eagle signifies spirituality and is identified with the sun since the thrust of its activity occurs during the daytime. The association with the sun denotes "male activity which fertilizes female nature," so the eagle symbolizes the father. As a bird, it is uniquely characterized by its daring flight, its speed, and rhythm. Wings encompass these same notions, adding the concept of mobility. The intention behind the comparison to eagle wings is to complement the embodiment of the male principle by the wheat while adding the connotations of bravery, speed, agility, and rhythm—qualities important for their athletic endeavors. This may seem to belabor the point, but Giono does not choose his images by chance.

The cloud is another fertility symbol, but it is also indicative of metamorphosis or transformation. Therefore, it suggests that the young athletes are going

---

12 Giono, Théâtre, p. 350.
14 For more information see p. 93.
through an initiation of their own. Jung says that the most common initiation pattern for young men is the ordeal or trial of strength.

... the novice for initiation is called upon to give up willful ambition and all desire and to submit to the ordeal. He must be willing to experience this trial without hope of success. In fact, he must be prepared to die; ... the purpose always remains the same: to create the symbolic mood of death from which may spring the symbolic mood of rebirth.¹⁵

The athletic struggle of the discus throw was the young men's trial of strength; evidently they were all successful in finally winning their crowns of laurel. However, the worthiness of such efforts is doubtful from Giono's point of view; games of athletes are very like formal rituals which he condemns, for they are established by society and not Nature.¹⁶ The athletes, who are being transformed, realize this as they speak for the first time, saying:

Nous avons toutes les couronnes de laurier. Ah! maintenant, je voudrais lutter à mort comme un vieux cerf du bois pour une indéfinissable chose. J'ai l'âme douloureuse et joyeuse à la fois. N'y a-t-il pas, de par le monde, une inutile quête pour laquelle on pourrait mourir?¹⁷

The statement conforms to the initiation pattern which decrees that male initiates must be prepared to die and

---

¹⁵Jung, Man and His Symbols, p. 131.


¹⁷Giono, Théâtre, pp. 360-361.
to be willing to experience their trial without hope of success. In order to better understand what Giono meant by "une indéfinissable chose," the examination of a quotation from "Rondeur des jours," will prove helpful.

La civilisation a voulu nous persuader que nous allions vers quelque chose, un but lointain. Nous avons oublié que notre seul but, c'est vivre et que vivre nous le faisons chaque jour et tous les jours et qu'à toutes les heures de la journée nous atteignons notre but véritable si nous vivons.  

We have forgotten that our only aim, the only worthwhile quest is to live. This aim is most likely what Giono is expressing in *Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène* by "une indéfinissable chose." Pugnet sees the struggle to live as one of Giono's most frequently recurring themes. It is appropriate that Giono links the image of an old stag to the struggle for life, because the stag is a symbol of the cycles of regeneration and growth and is correlated in meaning to the Tree of Life because of the resemblance of its antlers to branches. In the broadest sense, the stag is a life symbol.

In *Esquisse* the function of the young men is to represent the male initiatory experience, to embody the

---


19Pugnet, *Jean Giono*, p. 64.

regenerative powers and cyclical nature of la terre, and to express the view that the only meaningful struggle is the struggle for Life itself with all its joy and sadness. It is not a single life, not a particular life, but Life.
Esquisse d'une mort d'Helène is indeed an important play, for it contains most of Giono's pre-World War II concepts in germinal form, expressed through a complex set of symbols. Moreover, the images and symbols which appear in Esquisse, one of his earliest writings, prove to be constants throughout his Panic cycle. Since Jean Giono was a contemporary author of note and no definitive study has been published on this play, it is worthy of serious examination. Even though it shows little of Giono's skill as a writer, it emerges as an extremely ambitious effort. It is quite obviously the product of a young, undeveloped author, and it should be recalled that Giono was primarily a novelist. Therefore, Esquisse was undoubtedly meant to be read, rather than produced on the stage; for the dialogue is not as important as the detailed descriptions of the decor and the characters; moreover, the meaning of the play is obscure until it is interpreted on the symbolic level.

Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène is the completion of the story of Helen of Troy; she was an appropriate choice as a character; because, as the daughter of Zeus and Leda,
she is semi-divine and embodies the same fundamental duality inherent in her brothers, the Gemini; therefore, Hélène is the perfect foil for Giono's penchant for resolving dualities and uniting apparent opposites. Her duality is complemented by the dualistic cosmogony upon which the play is based; it is similar in nature to the Orphic cosmogony in which the sky and the sun represent the masculine principle while the earth connotes the feminine. Giono links many apparently antithetical nature images, forming a synthesis of apparent opposites and demonstrating the interrelatedness of all things in Nature.

Because there is no account of Hélène's death in classical literature, Giono was free to supply his own and to posit his personal view of death. Therefore, the subject is death in general, rather than a particular death. It is the overriding theme of the play; and as his critic and biographer Chonez said, the theme is too pesant. In fact, the majority of symbols in the play affirms that death is the natural sacrifice necessary to rebirth, the cyclical continuation of life, and restoration of order. The cycle of life and death, or death leading to rebirth, is complemented by the cyclical nature of the seasons as well as night and day. Giono's favorite symbol for the unification of opposites embodied in the cyclical is the Gnostic Ouroboros. In Esquisse he expresses that death is
inexorable and that to struggle against it is not only useless but wrong, for that upsets the natural order implicit in Nature. From his point of view, death does not lead to heaven or to hell but to cosmic integration; it is a focal point of Inversion, the point at which death becomes new life. Moreover, Giono regards death as justice and as a sort of total knowledge. This knowledge is telluric, an awareness that Man is an integral part of Nature and not superior to it. Concomitant with telluric knowledge is a moral system, a code of ethical conduct which decrees correct behavior. If it is biologically natural, it tends to preserve the balance and order of la terre. This is the basis of Giono's preference for natural love, which he opposes to flirtation and romanticized love. Giono also prefers the natural to the artificial and the primitive to the civilized. He criticizes modern society with its man-made values, because it destroys the natural and limits individual freedom. Modern society was created by Man out of his sin of orgueil, false pride; and this pride and all its far-reaching implications are the barrier that prevents Man from recognizing his oneness with la terre. Orgueil also leads Man to rely solely on his reason and intellect when true knowledge is also sensory and intuitive. Juxtaposed to the sin of orgueil are the virtues of pitié and espérance. Pitié is roughly
equivalent to the Christian concept of charity, while espérance implies a sense of waiting or expectation that is allied with hope.

*Esquisse d'une mort d'Hélène* may also be understood as an initiation into telluric awareness. For some, this knowledge is possible only in death (represented by Hélène) while for others, it comes as a result of extreme personal suffering and sacrifice. The latter is exemplified in the play by La Captive Troyenne. She, as an exceptional individual, is able to impart a modicum of awareness to the maidens, La Veilleuse, and the young athletes.

Pan, Giono's metaphor for Nature, is present even in this early work. La Veilleuse pleads for a new god who will be understanding and sympathetic to the needs of Man. Although Panic will is often manifested in natural violence in Giono's pre-World War II writings, sometimes it is conveyed through an exceptional individual as it is in this play. La Captive Troyenne, through her suffering and sacrifice, has come to know the deity. His benevolent side is expressed through the pipes of Pan, as the girls and La Troyenne sing the funeral chant.

Other Gionian favored people are suggested, but not developed in the play; there is the shepherd-artisan, a poet, and prototypes of later visionaries and guérisseurs. The elements--wind, fire, water, and earth--are
all present; however, their roles are not as notable as in later works. Christian symbols are present in Esquisse although Giono professed not to be a Christian; and there is a certain consonance with Jung's concept of individuation, even though he had not read Jung's theories at the time he wrote the play.

Important themes, images, and symbols which are the very essence of Giono's pre-World War II writings are present in Esquisse d'une mort d'Helène. They appear in the play in abbreviated, germinal form; but they attest to the constancy of Giono's views. The voice of Pan was present from the start.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES—WORKS OF JEAN GIONO


SECONDARY SOURCES

A. Critical Works


B. General References
Kirkwood, G. M. *A Short Guide to Classical Mythology.*