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**Jean Giono: Latent Political Strategist
or Simple French Ruralist?**

**An examination of the life and works
of Jean Giono during the Vichy Era in France**

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I. Introduction and General Overview

Born March 30, 1895, Jean Giono was a part of the land from the moment he came into the world. He was born in the Provençal town of Manosque, a town that even today carries with it images of a pastoral paradise. He left Manosque very rarely throughout his life, and the times when he did, it seems that his departure was obligated. In fact, when Giono left Manosque for the first time, it was to go to fight at Verdun in 1916. Perhaps it was this responsibility, or perhaps it was simply his ties to the land, but somehow this left quite an unsavory taste for war in Giono's mouth.

He was to be a pacifist for the rest of his life, and was to be twice imprisoned for these anti-war sentiments. On the eve of World War II, he wrote, « *Encore une fois vous allez vous battre pour rien. Vous allez tuer pour rien. Vous allez vous faire tuer pour rien. Pour moi, mon compte est fait, je ne me salirai pas dans cette lâcheté* » (Guiraud 1998, p. 67). However, tendencies such as these aligned him with more than simply the pacifist crowd. His traditionalist leanings were most prevalent at a time when the most conspicuous traditionalists were those in Vichy. Furthermore, his most prolific period was immediately preceding and following the Vichy era. As a result, his writings were often seen as Vichy doctrine. However, I shall show that Jean Giono was essentially guilty by association. He was a ruralist, one who subscribed to the theory that a return to the soil was a return to the golden period of France. However, he was not a collaborationist. Instead, the traditionalists of Vichy simply latched on to the ideas that he presented throughout his novels. Jean Giono was not a collaborationist; he was simply a man from the country, trying to lead others to the land he so adored.

I shall present a brief history of the period surrounding World War II in France. I will examine such themes as changing times in pre-war, occupation, collaboration, and

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regaining of cultural identity. The main text I consulted for this section is Robert O. Paxton's *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*. Using it as a reference, I will trace these themes through Vichy in order to demonstrate the views that were dominating the political landscape during this time.

Next I shall examine two works of Giono in order to provide a more explicit sense of his philosophy. I will analyze *Un de Baumugnes* (1929) and *Jean le Bleu* (1932), both of which were written in the years preceding World War II. In analyzing them, I hope to provide clearer examples of the ruralism Giono advocated.

Finally, using texts from this period, I will show that Giono was guilty by association. I will demonstrate that he made little if any political effort ever, and instead, merely hoped to lead by example. Despite this, he was accused of being a collaborationist. Through these examples, I shall prove that he was not a collaborationist; he was simply an author with a view on life that he knew he needed to share.

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The period from 1939 to 1944 in France was a time of uncertain change, with no one really sure of what was to come. This time was marked by several themes, however, that serve to characterize the period. The themes of pre- and early war, occupation and liberation, collaboration, and emerging cultural identity all had a tremendous impact on these five years.

France had been contemplating war for several years before it actually engaged in battle. "Since the German menace had first taken clear form, with the denunciation in March 1935 of the arms limitations provisions of the Versailles Treaty and the remilitarization of the Rhineland in March 1936, the possibility of war against Hitler aroused mixed emotions" (Paxton 1972, p. 11). France did not actually declare war on Germany until after the British on September 3, 1939. To say the least, they had gone into the fight with "anything but enthusiasm" (Paxton 1972, p. 11).

Pre-War and Early War: The Vichy Régime

There were two main reasons that the French delayed fighting Germany, hence the "mixed emotions" that Paxton noted. The first reason was that, to many of the French, "war against Germany could only serve Stalin, by destroying his main enemy in the West and by undermining the European social structure" (Paxton 1972, p. 11). These thoughts had been preceded by an electoral victory by the Popular Front in France in 1936, which had "raised fear of a Communist revolution in France to hysteria" (Paxton 1972, p. 11). The fear of Communism eventually resulted in the overwhelming mentality that a war against the Germans would in truth be "a war where the interests of France are not at stake but only those of International Communism" (Paxton 1972, p. 11). The

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second reason that France resisted fighting Germany was that memories of the period 1914-18 were only too present in the minds of the French. Aggravating the daily trauma that many were forced to relive daily with the sight of mutilated veterans was the fact that the “wastage of young men...had made France a nation of old people and cripples” (Paxton 1972, pp. 11-12). The war had taken a marked toll on France. This toll “took on a particular urgency in the middle 1930’s with the advent of the ‘hollow years,’ the moment when, as a demographer had predicted, the annual draft contingent dropped in half because so few boys had been born in 1915-19. One more bloodbath, and would there be a France at all?” (Paxton 1972, p. 12). The author Louis-Ferdinand Céline, one of the most prolific collaborationist authors, predicted twenty-five million casualties and the “end of the breed.” “We’ll disappear body and soul from this place like the Gauls.... They left us hardly twenty words of their own language. We’ll be lucky if anything more than the word ‘merde’ survives us” (Paxton 1972, p. 12). Thus, France declared war hours after the British on September 3, 1939, and much to the chagrin of several parties involved. “There were two negative votes on the *Conseil supérieur de guerre* and massive gloom among civilians...The nagging suspicion remained that the war was not necessary” (Paxton 1972, p. 12).

As soon as the war began, the gloom the French had felt in entering the war was confirmed. After several crucial defeats by Hitler and the Germans, “French society began to come apart at the seams” (Paxton 1972, p. 12). Entire villages and towns began to pick up and move. Paul Valéry, who himself left Paris for Dinard before the Germans arrived, wrote that “All Belgium and Artois are on the road...The impression of living,

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poignant disorder...carts stuffed with blond children in the straw. They don't know, nobody knows, where they are going" (Paxton 1972, p. 13). This disorder preceded the occupation of Paris and eventually of France.

As a result of the German attack and eventual occupation of Paris on June 14, 1940, it was no surprise that the French government was itself looking for a new home. This was a representation of what the entire country feared: chaos. It was Marshal Pétain who was regaled as 'the leader who saved [France] from the abyss [of chaos]' (Paxton 1972, p. 14). His method of saving France was to reach an armistice with Germany. Pétain and his cabinet were "quite explicit about the dangers of disorder if the war went on...The danger of moving the government overseas, Pétain told the cabinet, was that an émigré government 'might not be recognized as such,'" (Paxton 1972, p. 16).

To deprive France of her natural defenders [e.g. federal administrations] in a period of general disorder is to deliver her to the enemy, it is to kill the soul of France—is it, consequently, to make her revival impossible.... We must expect French revival much more from the soul of our country, which we will preserve by staying in place, than by the reconquest of our territory by allied cannon, under conditions and after a delay impossible to foresee. (Paxton 1972, p. 16)

Therefore, facing rising unemployment, a rapidly inflating economy, and an occupied capital city, France began to work with the Germans. French "businessmen turned to German Army contracts" (Paxton 1972, p. 18). The government itself looked for someplace to relocate within France. The town of Vichy turned out to be the best of a bad lot; Marseille and Perpignan were too close to the temptations of emigration, other towns were in occupied zones, or were governed by radical leaders. As a result, Pétain and his team moved to the hotel-rich town of Vichy, and set up the new government there

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after the armistice took effect on June 25, 1940. They did not expect to remain in Vichy very long. American representatives following the government [of Vichy] were told on July 14 that the government would move to Paris around the 20th (Paxton 1972, p. 19). After watching the entire country be uprooted, “the government, no less than its citizens, itched to get back into some settled routine” (Paxton 1972, p. 19). “Around the Marshal, in the veneration of which his name inspires in us all, our nation has rallied in its distress. Let us be careful not to trouble the accord which has been established under his authority” (Paxton 1972, p. 31). Vichy was taking advantage of the situation presented to it. It looked to alter the representation the citizens had enjoyed under the Third Republic. As a result, there was a continuance of the efforts to rewrite the constitution. This time, the effort was centered on public representation. In July of 1941, plans were laid “for a Chamber of 200, entirely named by the head of state, and a Chamber of 300, half named by the head of state and half elected by the provincial assemblies” (Paxton 1972, p. 193). In fact, from the time Vichy took over, there was a distinct increase in the number of bureaucrats. One member of the Vichy cabinet noted that “Vichy was the primacy of public administration over politics” (Paxton 1972, p. 193). This is reflected in the very government run by Pétain: a government that was surprisingly accountable to the public. Thus, the move to Vichy, and the armistice, provided “a kind of tacit accord between Hitler’s hopes for an economical armistice and French longing for a quick return to orderly life” (Paxton 1972, p. 19). This French longing appears to have been Pétain’s motivation for Vichy during the pre-war and early war period.

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Occupation and Liberation

The end of the summer in 1940 found France an occupied state, with an administration relegated to a hotel with an eighty-four year old general as its chief. France, however, seemed content to stay under Pétain's direction. According to French and German police records, 1940 revealed "no serious problems of dissent for the [Vichy] regime..." (Paxton 1972, p. 38). Nevertheless, the end of 1940 showed France completely at the mercy of Germany, as a German general asserted when he wrote that "the German High Command has the right to call upon French industry [in the Occupied Zone] in the form and to the extent that the continued war against Britain makes necessary" (Paxton 1972, p. 54).

France (ostensibly) begrudgingly helping out Germany in industry because the Allies were not giving France much of a reason to come to their side. March 3, 1942 saw the advent of the British bombings of French cities, beginning with a raid on the Renault factory. However, Germany was not making the French enamored of them either. They reduced French food rations in July in order to make sure that the citizens of occupied countries had it worse than Germans. Large Jewish deportations began later on in July. The Vichy cabinet decided at this point that, in case of an Allied invasion, Marshal Pétain would "appeal to French citizens to remain loyal to their armistice obligations" (Paxton 1972, p. 303). November saw total occupation of France. November 7-8 the Allied forces landed on the south shore of the Mediterranean. As a result, the Germans moved into the south of France, resulting in the complete occupation of France, either by the Allies, or by the Axis. Vichy now had nothing. Their ships had all been sunk on November 28, and the Allies were holding much of that which had previously been part

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of the empire. German representatives were in Vichy carefully ensuring the inactivity of the French military, as well as Pétain's compliance with all of the German manifests. As Pétain continued to admonish the French to persist in resisting the Allies, his cabinet assured the nation that "The Marshal [was] no longer free" (Paxton 1972, p. 282).

It was apparent to everyone that the end was at hand. Paxton notes that Vichy had become a "shadow regime" (Paxton 1972, p. 326). While he was still quite popular throughout France (enough to receive cheers upon his return to Paris), his approval in France was as meaningless as his role there. Early 1944 saw the first increase in the production of consumer goods in France since the occupation. Much of credit for the increase was due to constant petitions to Hitler by Pétain's cabinet for a decrease in the number of French drafted by the Germans. However, while Pétain was still attempting to exert some of his power, that power was dwindling. The end of his time was near, and the same could be said for the Germans.

The time for liberation had arrived, and the occupation was ending. Chaos, however, could come from freedom as well. Even as the Allies were landing on the Normandy beaches on June 6, 1944, Pétain was admonishing the French citizens to remain neutral. He suggested that French blood was "too precious to waste" (Paxton 1972, p. 326). August brought the Allied liberation of France. While ostensibly this was a cause for celebration, there were still many who feared the inevitable civil war that they were sure was to follow an Allied victory. Nonetheless, it must be noted that never did France fight side-by-side with Germany against the Allies, certainly a testament to Pétain's neutralism. Even as the end was drawing near, Pétain was doing as much as possible to ensure an orderly transition. On August 11, Pétain even sent an emissary to

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try and contact DeGaulle to “negotiate whatever ‘political solution’ would ‘prevent civil war’ and safeguard ‘the principle of legitimacy which I embody,’” (Paxton 1972, p. 328). DeGaulle refused to see anyone who was trying to get him to follow in Pétain’s footsteps. Thus, the 17th of August brought the flight of Pétain and his cabinet under German watch. As the Resistance pushed forward, Pétain refused to try and rule a government in exile. With the Liberation advancing, chaos erupted. Over 4500 deaths occurred during this time. The bloodshed so many had feared would result from the Liberation was in full effect.

Collaboration

There has been much discussion by historians about Pétain’s actions in Vichy. He was accused several times of being a “defeatist” by Winston Churchill, and never seemed to believe, up until the Liberation of France, that anyone but Germany could possibly win the war. The question that arises is: did Pétain want Germany to win the war, or was he simply trying to ally France with the side that he saw as the certain victor? Entire books have been written on this subject, including Herbert R. Lottman’s *Pétain: Hero or Traitor*. Much of the debate in this book results from the ambivalent evidence from the Vichy period. Pétain sought an armistice with Germany because he saw that France was going to be beaten. As a result, Pétain, and France by association, was allied with Germany. This does not necessarily mean that Pétain was a supporter of the Germans. However, even through the Liberation, Pétain was cautioning the French citizens to remain true to that armistice. He knew that the Germans were being beaten out of

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France, and he still supported them, even in the face of liberation. This evidence supports the claim that he sympathized with the Germans.

However, Pétain also took pains to point out that he was being forced to act in certain ways. As Pétain admonished the French to continue resisting the Allies, his cabinet assured the country that “The Marshal [was] no longer free” (Paxton 1972, p. 282). He knew that he was being scrutinized, and often tried to remove the blame for his actions from himself. Ostensibly, Pétain was simply trying to ally France with a winner so that it could take advantage after the war. It is unclear, however, whether or not he truly wanted Germany to win the war, or whether he simply wanted France to be at the helm of whatever the world was going to become. Pétain’s true feelings about the Allies and the German Axis will unfortunately never be known. All we can discern is that Pétain lobbied until the end for France to be a mediator. Nonetheless, no matter what his motivation or his feelings toward Germany were, Pétain was accused of collaborating with Germany. With this said, let us examine more closely Pétain’s actions during the war.

During the war, the Germans and French each had their own reasons to be working with the other. Each country had desires that coincided with those of the other. As a result of the German desire for an economical armistice and the French desire for a return to orderly life, collaboration between the two countries was sure to occur. Indeed, collaboration is even mentioned by name in Article 3 of the armistice when it orders French officials to “conform to the decisions of the German authorities and collaborate faithfully with them” (Paxton 1972, p. 19).

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Pétain saw France as able to profit from allying itself (as it was beginning to) with Germany, who he saw as the eventual victor of the war. “Although France was prepared for good relations with all her neighbors, Franco-German relations dominated her future” (Paxton 1972, p. 72). Moreover, since these relations were with Germany, the victor in Pétain’s mind, then France could choose “a new peace of collaboration” [or a] “traditional peace of oppression.” Either way, if Germany could “rise above her victory, [France would] know how to rise above [its] defeat” (Paxton 1972, p. 72). In order for France to truly ally itself with Germany, however, Pétain and his cabinet felt that the first step would be to renegotiate the settlement between itself and Germany. This renegotiated “new policy” (Paxton 1972, p. 73) would replace the current armistice and would hopefully give France more power to use with Germany. Thus, the “new policy” was essentially achieved through several discussions between high-ranking French officials and German dignitaries, but it did not quite accomplish what the French had hoped. They were allowed more freedom with their military, but much of the freedom prevented the French military from getting into skirmishes with the British. Thus, the “new policy” really only put the French at more of a disadvantage with the Germans. However, as Paul Baudouin, one of the members of the 1940 cabinet, noted, “This possibility of doing something new thrills men of every walk of life” (Paxton 1972, p. 136).

As a result of Pétain’s movement within the government, and the government’s movement around the country, Pétain found himself doing something new. He was in a new position with full executive power. He was faced with guiding the nation through a rewriting of the Constitution at a time when nothing was concrete, not even the seat of

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the government. Faced with these challenges, one can see the dominating traits of Pétain brought into the spotlight. Sir Winston Churchill later explained why he thought Pétain was so quick to concede to the Germans: “[Pétain] had always been a defeatist, even in the last war” (Lottman 1985, p. 168). Pétain thought that he was looking out for the good of France by agreeing to the armistice. He said, “The French renaissance will be the fruit of this suffering” (Lottman 1985, p. 169). This, however, was one of the few times Pétain showed optimism in his decisions. Instead, he was famous for remaining “Silent, cold, calm, hostile to hasty judgments and always working methodically” (Lottman 1985, p. 31). It was these traits that allowed Pétain to govern as an eighty-four year old head of state; however, it was also these traits that would eventually lead to his arrest for collaboration.

In 1942, the Germans were assuring the inactivity of the French military. Many generals and other public figures began quietly to switch sides. There were several instances of officers fleeing aboard British submarines or moving to the mountains. However, cabinet members in general were quite imperturbable and remained at Vichy. As Paxton notes, “secessions were the exception rather than the rule” (Paxton 1972, p. 285). Pétain and his cabinet had at this point agreed to link all active resistance to communism, an attempt to stigmatize the growing popularity of the Resistance. Pétain, meanwhile, continued to try and prevent France from becoming a battleground. There are myriad quotations from Pétain that underscore his motivation to retain as much of France as possible. He continued to seek the compromise peace that would result in a New Europe with Germany at the helm. Pétain, always looking out for the good of

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France, continued to believe that Germany would win the war and France would be there to reap the benefits. These are the actions of a collaborationist.

Beginning in February 1943, German factories began drafting French workmen, thereby decreasing an already dwindling workforce. Pétain had begun to realize that perhaps there was a chance that Germany might not win the war. However, the risks of continuing the collaboration were lesser than the risks of the revolution that liberation seemed to portend. Pétain also knew the risks he and the other collaborationists were facing. He knew they had to win, or they would die. Meanwhile, the rest of France had begun to take a slightly different view. Beginning in late 1943, most of the French wanted to be out from under Germany. However, few wanted to engage in the consequent revolution. As a result, just as many people participated in police forces to put down resistant acts as participated in the Resistance itself.

We can see that over time, many of the collaborationists grew fearful, both of their fate, and of the fate of their country, because it was during this time that so much was changing within the country, both politically and culturally.

Cultural Identity

After the Third Republic had come to an end, the Vichy reign took its place. Germany was considered a sure thing to win the war, and Pétain and many others were sure that France would benefit from the Franco-German partnership, however one-sided it was. As a result, France swung into action. A purification of France would begin. Vichy was attempting to help France to regain its cultural identity. Essentially, Vichy “had already set up its own concentration camp system” (Paxton 1972, p. 170). As

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Paxton notes, the defeat that France had suffered at the hand of Germany “called for scapegoats, and scapegoats were ready to hand” (Paxton 1972, p. 171). The three main groups who were victimized were the Jews, Masons, and Protestants. France’s purification motivations differed slightly than those of Nazi Germany. While the Nazis were effecting a “purge” for racial reasons, France’s reasons were more national and cultural/religious. Unlike the Germans, the French did not see themselves as a race. Instead, they were exhibiting the same xenophobia that many accuse them of today. They were not treating blacks any differently than the Third Republic had, and Pétain demanded that Jews who had served in the military be treated differently than foreign Jews.

The purification of France, however, was not concerned solely with creating a new country. Instead, it also hearkened back to its past. It was during the Vichy reign that **practicality** seems to have become a watchword. In such a time of need, few were comfortable pushing for measures that were extreme to others. From the Vichy government’s location in a sparse hotel, to the nationwide rationing of food, to the thousands shipped to labor and concentration camps, no one was able to live a life of prosperity. French social conservatives, meanwhile, were reinforcing this notion of practicality with their ideas of **ruralism**. They suggested that “self-supporting peasants made countries strong while city populations made them insecure” and that “peasant battalions had snuffed out every revolution since June 1848” (Paxton 1972, pp. 200-01).

The idea of ruralism was by no means a new one; instead, it seemed almost to refer to feudal times. In fact, among the traditionalists of Vichy (of which Pétain was a member) there was much talk during 1940 and 1941 of restoring the provinces of 1789.

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This was a policy known as regionalism. While the regionalist movement eventually died out, in France there remained a force championing agriculture and those associated with it. This force—peasantism—had begun even during the Third Republic, and many different societies were born out of it. These societies grew into political syndicates during the 1930's, as the depression spread through France. One such syndicate was the *Union Nationale des Syndicats Agricoles*, which was associated with the corporatist movement within agriculture. Other such organizations went even farther in their effort to get France to “return to the soil.” *Les Chantiers de la Jeunesse* assigned every French man into a rural work camp outside of the city for the first eight months after he turned 21. Fascism, today an insult, was then less an epithet and more a concept. Its influence, especially in terms of being a proponent of the “common man” helped also to bring peasantism to the forefront.

Peasants were credited with being the force behind winning the battle at Verdun, thereby strengthening the connection between the peasantry and Pétain. In an address on October 11, 1940, Pétain underscored that connection when he said that “family agriculture” would be the “principal economic and social base of France” (Paxton 1972, p. 270). It was these social traditionalist leanings that rallied so much of the nation behind Pétain. The traditionalists were, as Paxton notes, the “public face” of Vichy. While they (the traditionalists) did not decide policy, they were responsible for the image cultivated throughout the Vichy period. Despite their arguable unimportance in terms of political matters of the regime, it was many of these traditionalists who were most “thoroughly purged” at the time of the Liberation.

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Nonetheless, the Vichy period was certainly marked by attempts to return to more traditional times. It was efforts by these traditionalists that characterize the essays to regain the cultural identity of France. Whether these were attempts to purge France of its less-nationalistic members or efforts to regain its rural history, the cultural identity of France was on the minds of many during the Vichy period.

As we have seen, the themes of pre-and early war, occupation and liberation, collaboration, and emerging cultural identity each played a tremendous role during the years from 1939 to 1944 in France. It was during this period that, along with the works of Karl Marx, Honoré de Balzac, and Emile Zola, Jean Giono's characterization of the "ennobled" rural life "came to seem the fragile and precious fountainhead of a dwindling national vigor," (Paxton 1972, p. 201). This ruralist movement claimed Giono as one of its greatest allies, and it was this association that would result in his arrest for collaboration.

III. Analysis of Giono's Philosophy

Coming from the tiny provençal town of Manosque, Jean Giono had quite an appreciation for the land and what it could provide. As a result, he was not an advocate of the industrialization and emigration to the city that the early 20th century held. Simply put, Giono embraced a philosophy of a "return to the land." In every novel Giono wrote, the land was the most prominent and most important character. He treats it with an awe-inspiring level of deference and respect. Even when the novel was not necessarily about the land (Jean le Bleu, for example) the characters within the novels and their relationships with the land are testimony to Giono's affinity for the land. It was this affinity for the land that resulted in Giono's being willing to twice accept imprisonment for not backing down from his pacifistic beliefs. In his mind, World War II was going to destroy the land, and therefore would effectively destroy humanity. As a result, Giono continued to write novels advocating a return to the goodness of the land.

Two novels, Un de Baumugnes (1929) and Jean le Bleu (1932), were written in the years immediately preceding World War II. The narrative in each novel serves, to a great extent, to outline Giono's philosophy. Within each, Giono strengthens the tie between the people and their land. Essentially, these two novels are testaments to the power of nature in everyday life, and also to the effect on man that nature can have.

Un de Baumugnes is a story of pastoral love: love for the land, and love for its possessions. One of the main characters, Albin, is from the town of Baumugnes--famous for its purity. He meets and falls in love with a virginally pure girl, Angèle, from a small farm called La Douloire. Her purity lasts until she meets Louis, a man from the nearby city of Marseille. Louis represents every Gionesque stereotype of the city: selfishness and dishonesty. In a memorable scene, Louis seduces Angèle and deprives her of her

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purity. To Albin's horror, Angèle goes to Marseille with Louis, where she is forced to live as a prostitute. When she becomes pregnant, she flees to her home, and eventually gives birth to a child, Pancrace. Meanwhile, Amédée, a farmhand, has met all three characters and has become friends with Albin. Seeing that Albin is in love, he decides to help him get Angèle and her purity back. Amédée seeks to work at La Douloire in an effort to find out exactly what has happened to Angèle. He discovers that she has a child, and reports this to Albin. Albin, realizing that he carries with him the ability to pardon Angèle, plays his harmonica for her and gradually wins her and her family over. As a result, she becomes pure again and she and Albin and Pancrace embrace the land of which they are a part.

In Un de Baumugnes, Angèle, Albin, Amédée and Louis are much more than simple characters in a novel. Each represents something; in this case, each stands for or against the land. Angèle, for example, originally serves as the quintessential girl from Giono's beloved Provence. She is pure and virtuous: he describes her as « *une fille: deux sauts de pigeon, et là voilà dans la boutique...* » (Giono 1929, p. 13). Yet his real characterization of Angèle is much more significant. He realizes in fact that she is « *La Vierge!* » (Giono 1929, p. 14). Her innocence is certainly representative of the land; she is qualified as a girl from the land, and to be characterized as « *La Vierge* » certainly indicates that Giono associates her with something preternatural: in this case, the land. In addition, as « *La Vierge* », she has a child: Pancrace. When Amédée finally sees her with the child, he sees her emerge from her cloister « *dans la raie d'or...[avec] un enfantelet, tête ballante: le Jesus!* » (Giono 1929, p. 65). Angèle and Pancrace represent virginity

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(both before and after her pardon) and the divine respectively, and their goodness can be linked only to the land. Later on, in fact, Giono expounds on their "cloistering" while remarking how unfair it was. He writes, « *...si c'était pas un péché, de clôturer une chrétienne quasiment sous terre quand il faisait si beau dehors* » (Giono 1929, p. 104). Essentially, Giono is condemning Clarius (Angèle's father) for shutting Angèle and Pancrace up when they are part of the beauty of the land that reigns outside their "cloister."

Angèle and Pancrace are by no means the only characters who are representative of the land Giono so adores. Albin also seems to epitomize the land in the eyes of Giono. Albin comes from Baumugnes, which is, as noted earlier, a bastion of bucolic purity. Given the amount of detail that Giono uses to describe what it means to come from Baumugnes, it is certain that Albin is a part of the land. However, the fact that Albin is from Baumugnes is not the only factor linking him to the land. Instead, he carries with him an innocence that is indicative of the land as well. Giono makes several references to Albin's laugh which was « *comme de la neige* » (Giono 1929, p. 10). Snow here obviously is a symbol of purity, so Albin is pure and innocent, just like the land. In addition, Albin carries with him the pardon that will forgive Angèle. After she was "dirtied" by Louis, she returned to her home in the country. There, the process of her pardoning began in that pastoral refuge. Yet the process was not complete until Albin had pardoned her. At that point, she regained her virginal status. Albin completed the purging process for Angèle with the simple words « *Ça ne fait rien* » (Giono 1929, p. 98). This pardon reflects a simplicity of Albin which is itself a reflection of the simplicity of the land he represents.

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In addition to Albin, Amédée maintained a simplicity that connected him to the land. His simplicity, however, was based more on the way he lived his life. Amédée was a farm hand; he lived his life helping to tend the land he and Giono loved. He tended more than just the land, however. Amédée also helped to tend the lives of the land's denizens. As a result, he was somewhat larger than life, almost to the point of seeming immortal. In fact, Giono makes several religious references with respect to Amédée, creating an image of a savior. Twice, Amédée makes an effort to stop someone with « *[ses] bras en croix* » (Giono 1929, p. 96). He looks after what Giono cherishes the most: the land and its simple folk.

In clear contrast to Angèle, Albin and Amédée, Giono presents « un type de Marseille, un jeune tout creux comme un mauvais radis, la peau sur l'os et un tatouage à la paume de la main où il y avait écrit « *Merde* » » (Giono 1929, p. 11). Louis, the antithesis of everything that represents the land, is a man of the city. He is responsible for stealing the innocence of Angèle, and therefore, for destroying the purity of the land. Clearly, Louis does not represent the land but rather everything Giono detests in the world. Giono writes « *Derrière, le Louis; rien que sa bouche avec les dents gâtées et le mégot, et le jet de salive qui saute, mais lui tout entier, bien plus qu'entier avec toute sa méchanceté et sa pourriture* » (Giono 1929, p. 24). Louis is a pimp, a rapist, and is Giono's representative of city life. Culturally, Louis is « *un type de Marseille* » ; as a person, he is like his tattoo: un type de « *merde* ».


Aside from Louis, each of these characters is representative of the land that Giono idealizes. They serve to represent it and to take care of it. It is clear that the land itself is the main character in Un de Baumugnes -- it is a haven for agriculture and for man.

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Jean le Bleu is much like Un de Baumugnes in that the story it tells has much to do with the land. Jean le Bleu, however, is a semi-autobiographical account of Giono's childhood in which he fictionalized many of his experiences. He wrote:

C'est ma vie intérieure que j'ai voulu décrire dans Jean le Bleu. Cette vie qui était essentiellement magique. Je ne pouvais pas la raconter autrement qu'en créant autour de moi les personnages qui n'existaient pas dans la réalité, mais qui étaient les personnages magiques de mon enfance.
(Giono, 1990, p.81)

Jean le Bleu is a more forward expression of Giono's vision of France than of Un de Baumugnes. His philosophy remains the same as it was in Un de Baumugnes, however, he is four years more hardened (Jean le Bleu was written in 1932). In Jean le Bleu, Giono gives us more insight into how he might define perfection, and, conversely, more insight into what city life might do to France.

Jean le Bleu is a fictional biography.  Based on Giono's childhood growing up in the town of Manosque. However, as he noted in Entretiens (1990), Giono created characters that did not exist, and changed those who did exist. In Giono's modified town, there seem to have been extremes, with very little room in the middle. Giono apparently really admired people, or he detested them. Giono's father served as the character that Giono most admired and much of the novel details Giono's relationship with his father. In a sense, that is the entire novel.

The novel follows Giono's life growing up in a city which we can assume is larger than Manosque (given the description). He goes to school, meets interesting caricatures of city people, and then, finally, his father sends him to live in the country. It is at this point that Giono realizes that the land is where he belongs, and that his father

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was right to send him there. After his return, Giono notices that he has a different view of the city, and it pales in comparison to the countryside he just experienced. He realizes that his father and the land are the two most important things to him, and he decides to live a life guided by both of these.

Père Jean, Giono's father in Jean le Bleu, represents three things for Giono. First, he represents what Giono hoped to grow up to be at the age at which he is narrating the novel. The novel certainly has basis in fact, and in 1932, Giono was not too far removed from his childhood. He is able to look back and see his aspirations in the actions of his father. He wrote « *Si j'ai tant d'amour pour la mémoire de mon père, si je ne peux me séparer de son image, si le temps ne peut pas trancher, c' est qu'aux expériences de chaque jour je comprends tout ce qu'il a fait pour moi* » (Giono 1932, p. 174). Giono aspired to be like his father, and therefore attempted to mold himself into the same image.

However, the molding of characters was done for more than just Giono himself. The way Giono portrays his father is indicative as well of how Giono wanted his father to be. Since the novel is fictional, however, Giono takes the opportunity to portray his father as he wants. When his father tells Giono to go to the land, the reader encounters one of the best examples of this character. Although his mother told him that he needed the land for physical reasons, his father « *était un peu différent [mais] il était très ému et tout éclairé d'une sorte de bonheur inquiet* » (Giono 1932, p. 127) and explained that Giono was to go to the land « *Comme j'ai fait. Comme on doit faire. C'est l'école pour plus tard* » (Giono 1932, p. 128). In this example, Giono's father planted the seed that would bloom into Giono's feelings about life. Giono wanted to experience the land, and he wanted his father to condone it. Thus, Père Jean acts as Giono doubtlessly wanted his

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father to. In another instance, Giono's father speaks to him about having hope and faith, again advocating what Giono would have certainly wanted his father to condone. His father says,

Tu vois, fils, la terre et tout, et tu verras notre rue. Il t'a poussé des yeux neufs. Ne t'inquiète pas si c'est tout autour de toi comme sous de la poussière de charbon... Car, si on se fie à ce qu'on voit, à ce qu'on entend, on n'a pas beaucoup de raison d'espérer. (Giono 1932, p. 229)

This attitude toward the land makes even more sense when evaluating Giono's feelings towards the land after living there, but nonetheless, it shows that Giono wanted his father again to see things the way he did, in this case, the effect that living life in the land can have. The way Giono portrays his father also displays how Giono saw himself after the war.

While it is possible that Giono describes his father realistically in Jean le Bleu, it is far more likely that he uses his father to show how he viewed himself. Given Giono's social philosophy of the return to the land, we see him as someone who tried to heal France. In a sense, he used his novels to try and convince others of this philosophy and it is clear that he was frustrated by the lack of response to his philosophy he felt from his compatriots. Thus, we see Giono's father as a man who was pushing for socialism in France. Père Jean explains « *J'aime mieux être infirmier...tu me mettras à l'infirmerie* » (Giono 1932, p. 59). Giono thought he could heal France with his social view, and we can surmise here that he was frustrated because he knew that he could help if he were put in the right place. In addition, given that Giono went to jail at one point, we know that he was willing to sacrifice everything for his beliefs in helping to heal France. In Giono's mind, France was a patient desperate for treatment, and Giono's philosophy was going to

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save it. Thus, Père Jean receives a letter thanking him for treating a little girl. He served as a priest and as a doctor. Giono wanted to as well. The father of the little girl wrote, « *Vous avez donné, et au-delà, tout ce qu'un être vivant peut donner à un autre être vivant. Vous lui avez apporté la tranquillité et la paix* » (Giono 1932, p. 153). Giono knew that if he were to give up everything for his land, he would have to sacrifice himself.

Similarly, his father began to suffer after giving up so much for other people:

Il était de plus en plus seul. Son coeur ne l'aidait plus. Il pouvait encore aider les autres mais il n'avait plus hospitalité pour lui-même, et voilà que mon père aussi voyait dans sa vieillesse sa ville détruite, ses champs brûlés, et qu'il devait partir seul sur les routes comme les autres. (Giono 1932, p. 290)

Giono saw himself dying but as a sacrifice for his land. To Giono, the land of France was worth dying for, and in Jean le Bleu, effectively both he and his father do just that.

Giono also uses Jean le Bleu to provide the reader with a comparison between the land and the city, and show what each truly means to him. For Giono, the land was everything that was right, innocent and pure; a return to the land was a return to goodness. Louisa the first (there was a Louisa the second who was not as virtuous) was one of the “girls” at the washroom his mother operated. This Louisa embodies Giono's notions of childhood and purity, and also of the land. Therefore, Giono's love for Louisa was representative of his love for the land. He wrote of Louisa, « *[Elle] avait des yeux clairs et ronds qui regardaient toujours en face avec l'innocence d'une enfance qui s'était continuée à travers sa beauté et par sa beauté* » (Giono 1932, p. 23).

It was not only people who transported Giono to the land. Music also served the purpose of connecting Giono to the land. Just like the land, music provided peace for Giono, and a sensualism that he felt allowed him to understand both. Giono wrote, « *Il*

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n'y avait plus rien [que la musique] » (Giono 1932, p. 77). He later explains in Jean le Bleu that he did not want to learn to play music; instead, he wanted to experience it, just as he experienced the land. Essentially, Giono uses his father, Louisa the first and music to symbolize his love for the land.

More than an idealized paradise, however, the land was an antidote for suffering for Giono. Because he thought that France was suffering, he felt that the way to ease that pain was for all French people to return to the land. This repeated theme makes it clear that, in Giono's mind, the land was the answer to the problems France suffered. Thus, as his mother reasoned, « *Tu [la France] as besoin de la campagne. Ca te fera revenir la santé* » (Giono 1932, p. 127). Through the character of his nurturing mother, Giono is again arguing that France should return to the land so that its problems might be effaced. In fact, Giono thinks that happiness can only be found in nature -- the origin of the human race. Just as with the happiness Giono experienced being around Louisa the first and her childlike innocence, the French will be happy living in an unaltered natural state. Giono writes that, « *Tout le bonheur de l'homme est dans de petites vallées...Depuis qu'on a commencé à bâtir des maisons et des villes...on n'a pas avancé d'un pas vers le bonheur* » (Giono 1932, pp. 315-16). For Giono, it is a return to the beginning, for only at the beginning, when things were simple and innocent, was the human race happy.

City life, on the other hand, represented everything that Giono believed was wrong with the world. The city, always cast in a negative light, represents unnecessary technological advancement, uncleanness, and death. Père Jean says that, after coming back from the pure land, Giono would see the city for what it was in reality: « *sous de la poussière de charbon* » (Giono 1932, p. 229). For Giono, cities were the bastards of a

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formerly pure world. He wrote of the men preparing for World War I that « *trop nourris, [ils] avaient oublié leurs génitoires ; ils faisaient l'amour avec du pétrole et des phosphates, des choses sans hanches ; ça leur donnait envie du sang* » (Giono 1932, p. 333). Living in the city had made man to consume himself; it was capable of more than corruption of humankind; it could make him thirsty for blood.

While Giono was living in the country, the corruption of life by the city had begun to take a more serious effect on his hometown. Cities were destroying everything around them, including themselves. He characterizes this destruction when he writes that,

La ville était toute brûlée et sèche...Les maisons pourrissaient sous elles et des sanies dorées suintaient des évier. Dans les quartiers du côté du dépôt aux ordures, la typhoïde avait mis des graines et presque toutes les maisons avaient un malade dans son cocon de draps et de couvertures, ratatiné et grelottant. (Giono 1932, p. 306)

The city and the people within were disintegrating into sickness and death. They had done it to themselves, they were accelerating towards death, and it is death that Giono considers to be the final effect of life in the city.

In Jean le Bleu as well as in Un de Baumugnes, we see Giono's philosophy of returning to the land exemplified repeatedly. The city, for Giono, can destroy even those like his father whom he admired above all. Thus, Giono advocates, both through the words of his father and the examples of the consequences of city life, a return to the land. That life on the land is a life of innocence and purity -- the essential elements for the salvation of France. In Un de Baumugnes and in Jean le Bleu, we see that a return to the land is more than a suggestion for the people; it is a mandate for an entire country.

IV. Conclusion: An Unfair Association

Throughout this period in France, we have seen that there was persecution, often of the innocent. While it was not necessarily to the degree that existed in Nazi Germany at the time, it still did exist. Moreover, persecution in France was not based solely on heritage. Instead, ideology was also a motive for punishment. As a result, Giono was persecuted during this time. He was sent to jail after being accused of collaboration. The question that arises, however, was whether or not Giono was a collaborationist. Giono's works certainly seem somewhat in keeping with the ideologies of Vichy France, and he is often listed among those who supported the Vichy Régime. However, Giono's most outspoken political efforts were only based on the pacifism that he advocated. However, this pacifism was based on his endorsement of living, not under German rule, but under the rule of Nature.

The youth of France (who were his biggest proponents) "were mainly interested in camaraderie, the outdoor life, and becoming acquainted with French rural ways. Giono represented these ideals to them. Although he was not active in fascist movements and attempted in the main to eschew politics, his critiques of urban life, the bourgeoisie, and materialism, and his emphasis on intuition as opposed to rationalism were seen even before the war as potential fascism" (Gordon p. 256). In addition, Giono was not completely ignorant of politics. At one point, he had toyed with National Socialism, although he was not the only "apostle of Nature" to be attracted to it. As a result, many of his disciples found their way into National Socialism, and the more militant ones often found their way into the French unit of the Waffen-SS (Gordon p. 232). Nonetheless, Giono's flirtation with National Socialism seems to have been more in passing: a sampling of ideologies that endorsed his ruralist philosophy.

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Giono's leanings seem to have been much more deeply rooted in pacifism than in collaborationism. In fact, on the eve of World War II, Giono wrote to France, « *Encore une fois vous allez vous battre pour rien. Vous allez tuer pour rien. Vous allez fous faire tuer pour rien. Pour moi, mon compte est fait, je ne me salirai pas dans cette lachete* » (Guiraud p. 67). In addition, he published a work entitled « *Réfus d'obéissance* » in which he expressed a profound dislike for the war. However, this was the extent of Giono's political actions concerning the war.

Giono was never an active political figure by any definition, and though his writings are often associated with collaborationism, one can make the same argument for scores of authors who wrote during this period. The fact that he and his writing were accused reflects not on Giono, but on the political environment of the post-Vichy era. Much like the McCarthy era of the U.S., the Gaullists went on a witchhunt throughout France and came upon Giono. He had not supported Vichy; they had supported him. Although he had not accepted this support, he was punished with jail time.

At heart, Giono advocated not a political theory, but a social one. He was not trying to change the world with a political agenda; instead, he simply attempted to lead by example. Giono had so much love for his country that he would have done anything for it, including going to jail. He was the victim of a country trying to purge itself of those who it viewed as traitors. An innocent victim of a land where self-righteousness was running rampant, Giono stood by his beliefs despite the fact that he knew imprisonment was inevitable. He remained proud of his philosophy, and he exemplified it by peacefully accepting a jail sentence.

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In essence, Jean Giono espoused a move back to the country, to all things pastoral. To him, this meant simplicity and happiness. To post-Vichy France, this meant collaboration. To his readers, this meant that he is one of the best French authors of his time.

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