

Post-pastoral and the Nonmodern: Jean Giono's Engagement with Nature

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In Catharine Savage Brosman's article, "The Pastoral in Modern France: Forms and Reflections," she cites several authors as examples of the pastoral genre in twentieth-century literature: "The pastoral serves as an explicit model for texts which are, however, modern as well as imitative. André Gide, Paul Valéry, Marcel Pagnol and Jean Giono, who are among those who evoke the bucolic tradition, were all readers of Virgil" (212). While this grouping might create fascinating possibilities for connections between these authors and the innovations they bring to the mode, Giono is singled out instead for his fidelity to tradition:

Giono's bucolic is consistent with the classical suppositions about harmony among man, beast and nature, and happiness to be found in the bucolic life. It has, moreover, a social implication which goes beyond that of many idylls: any upheaval or disorder which threatens to destroy the natural order is to be condemned. (221)

This is a common reading of Giono and one held by many contemporaries of his work, particularly before the Second World War. This picture of harmony and condemnation of any discord is, however, much more complicated. Giono's work does not assert any uniform idea of what a natural order would be, but rather offers consistent experimentation regarding what and how exactly such a natural order might be organized, if indeed it can be said to exist at all. His attitude is articulated through his characters in an interrogative mode, asking what "nature" is, what it wants, and how we might fit into it. Two theorists recently have addressed this relationship. Terry Gifford's categorization of the post-pastoral is concerned with the portrayal of humans and nature. Bruno Latour, on the other hand, presents a model of epistemological categories and their relationship to politics, suggesting that in order to understand the relationship of the human and the natural world, we have to go beyond the idea of the "modern" as the ideal to which we aspire. In this article, I will argue that Giono, exemplary of the post-pastoral, highlights the role of the writer in the critical and political category of the "nonmodern."

Before addressing the pastoral as such, any writing on Jean Giono must acknowledge that he has often been critiqued for what can most charitably be termed a disingenuous indulgence for far-right politics, a relationship seen as intimately bound to his attitude towards nature. I argue, however, that Giono's writing presents a truly radical relationship between his embodied characters and the place in which they are to be found. Place for Giono is not locally ethnic or

evocative of blood origin as put forward by the “blood and soil” call of the Nazis or the particularly Vichy interpretation of a *retour à la terre* ‘back to the land,’ but the way in which one’s identity and actions are bound up in the influence of the geographical/geological particularity of one’s environment. In addition, his work espouses a relationship to nature that would have been irreconcilable with Third Reich or Vichy politics for its compassionate and often empowering treatment of women, non-heteronormative sexualities, and the differently abled. Giono’s particular status as a figure over whose body of work both right and left still argue, and the affect that this polemic is able to arouse, make him a particularly apt illustration of the immediate relevance of the post-pastoral as a place of contestation of the relationship between the human and the natural, conservatism and progress. His writing and its afterlife therefore show how the pastoral and its variants have concrete epistemological and political implications.

Despite the settings of the majority of his works, Giono avoids the idealistic nostalgia often attributed to his relationship to the local and the rural. While critic Richard T. Golsan goes so far as to call Giono’s worldview “antimodern utopianism” (33), rather than *antimodern*, we will see how Giono’s relationship to time is what Bruno Latour characterized as the “*nonmodern*” and what that might imply for future scholars in the interpretation of texts engaging with nature and other traditionally pastoral themes. Holding urbanization and technical progress at a distance but not rejecting it outright, Giono’s writing shows the intimate connection between one’s relation to place and to the environment, and a progressive but non-teleological vision of time. He thus highlights another heretofore ignored element of the “post-pastoral” in that this category articulates a relationship to time and progress that can be used to show the (post)pastoral’s possibilities for effecting political and social change. Beyond acknowledging the ties between environmental and social exploitation, Giono’s work suggests that we must examine both kinds of exploitation to see how they are founded in the idea of a linear, teleological temporality. I will proceed by examining how Giono differs fundamentally from the traditional pastoral and how he instead exhibits a post-pastoral sensibility regarding the relationship between the human and nature. My analysis will show how this sensibility displays a temporality that does not view progress as a unidirectional movement towards the future, but rather a multidirectional movement that allows different combinations of natural, social, and technological developments from multiple temporalities, illustrating the connection between the post-pastoral as a mode and Latour’s “nonmodern” mentality and ultimately gesturing towards the concrete political consequences of such a creative choice.

Giono and the Traditional Pastoral

Giono's affinity for Virgil is well established, but that affinity did not mean that he would address these themes without a certain critical distance.¹ While there is a similarity in setting, occupations of characters, and some themes between Giono's œuvre and classical pastoral modes of representation, he separates himself distinctly from his classical predecessors. His novels do indeed take place almost exclusively in rural or wilderness settings and his characters are frequently the agricultural or forester inhabitants of these places. However, even in Giono's most rurally-focused works, characters often must consciously decide whether they will try to live in harmony with nature, and Giono does not present with any certainty what that harmony will mean. In the experimental farming community portrayed in *Que ma joie demeure* (*Joy of Man's Desiring*), Bobi—the wanderer taken by the farmers as a kind of oracle of what happiness in connection with the natural world may look like—constantly questions why he responds to the demand placed on him by the community, and his outward certainty hides his internal struggle. The members of the community feel the pull of nature in different, conflicting ways, none of which end in their harmony with nature. Bobi's battle for understanding and for harmony with nature is only resolved with his death by lightning strike at the end of the book (777). The concerted attempt to bring human action into line with the natural order results in multiple deaths including that of Bobi by nature itself.

In addition to characters such as Bobi who take on the role of mouthpiece for possible change, other members of the community express affectively and/or physically this profound ambivalence. Nearly all the characters feel interpolated by the natural world in a way that bewilders them—by the vastness of the universe or by the ways in which experiences of nature awaken their sexuality in ways they cannot understand and/or cannot satisfy. They feel impelled towards something they find both liberating and vaguely menacing. The tension between affinity for the natural world on one hand, and uncertainty and threat coming from that world on the other, is a common dynamic in many of Giono's early novels such as *Le Chant du monde* (*The Song of the World*) and *Colline* (*Hill*). In both of these novels a principal character claims some kind of privileged connection with nature, but his veracity is in doubt and his actions do not fit his claims about the correct way to be integrated into his environment. Consistently in Giono's œuvre he problematizes the relationship between humans and nature, underscoring that nature is not a clearly articulated call.

Despite the desire to be in harmony with the world expressed in the aptly-named *Le chant du monde* (*The Song of the World*), even here the meaning of such harmony has to be painfully negotiated. Both the healer who claims a privileged knowledge of nature and the woodsman who at the beginning of the book lives a

seemingly peaceful life in harmony with the river must encounter the limits of their understanding and the necessity to learn new things, to grow and develop with the world. In addition to the uncertainty he portrays, Giono is not afraid to present grotesque characters and situations, violence, and disgust; the intense beauty of some parts of nature contrast sharply with the horror or nausea that other parts provoke, often signaled by intense odor—decomposition in *Noé* or the secretions of a giant squid in *Fragments d'un paradis* ('Fragments of a Paradise').

Insofar as a degree of harmony is attained without violence and conflict, it is reached only through strenuous labor. The difficulty of finding sympathy with the natural world is accompanied by constant work and the rhythms of work following the passage of time. This suggests that Giono's works do not idealize nature but could instead be categorized in the equally Virgilian but less idealizing Georgic genre. As Greg Garrard observes in his taxonomy of pastoral and related modes, "Virgil's *Georgics* shares . . . an emphasis on the relationship of agricultural productivity and ritual observance . . . not depicted as a curse for disobedience, as in the Bible, but rather as the god Jupiter's challenge to human ingenuity" (109). This distinction is helpful when thinking of how Giono views one aspect of the complexity of our relationship with nature—not a prize to be conquered but a mystery or challenge to be resolved.

In addition to the resistance to Brosman's claim of harmony, Giono's writing defies its classification as a traditional pastoral in that it does not figure a "retreat and return," as Terry Gifford phrases it in *Pastoral* (1). Nor does Giono conform to Gifford's interpretation of "William Empson's famous definition of pastoral as the 'process of putting the complex into the simple'" (8).² For Gifford this is exemplified by the creation of "apparently simple and unsophisticated characters" (8) to portray complex ideas or sentiments. In contrast, Giono's characters are not only psychologically complex but, as we have seen in the example of Bobi, highly conflicted. Other examples include the narrators of *Fragments d'un paradis* and the semi-autobiographical *Jean le bleu* (*Blue Boy*), as well as Captain Langlois in *Un Roi sans divertissement* ('A King without Distraction') and Saucisse, the prostitute-turned-innkeeper who watches Langlois's downfall and tries in vain to forestall it. His books rarely feature the retreat from the city or from society followed by a return to that milieu. Angelo, hero of *Le Hussard sur le toit* (*The Horseman on the Roof*) and *Le Bonheur fou* (*The Straw Man*) is the only character who might be considered worldly, and his excursion to the country is anything but peaceful: he finds cholera in the French countryside and civil war upon his return to Italy, with no way back to the urban society in which he grew up. Giono thus takes up the tropes of the pastoral while systematically diverting their traditional ends.

Giono as Post-Pastoral

Since Giono thus engages with characteristics of the pastoral mode while refusing to conform to it, how are we to understand the relationship he portrays between humans and the environment? Terry Gifford offers an alternative way of thinking about that relationship. Instead of portraying rural space as a retreat from a more “sophisticated” urban society:

“A mature environmental aesthetics” would need to recognise that some literature has gone beyond the closed circuit of pastoral and anti-pastoral to achieve a vision of an integral natural world that includes the human. . . . to find a discourse that can both celebrate *and* take some responsibility for Nature without false consciousness. (148, emphasis in original)³

Gifford thus proposes the post-pastoral, a literary style or movement engaging with the natural environment while rejecting some of the aesthetic conventions associated with the pastoral.⁴ This category offers a helpful framework for analyzing fictional works that engage the environment and is particularly helpful in examining Giono. Using criteria proposed by Gifford for the post-pastoral to show how Giono fits into this “mature environmental aesthetic,” we will demonstrate what other characteristics of the post-pastoral are highlighted in Giono’s work.

The specificity of the post-pastoral as enumerated by Gifford are the following: “awe in attention to the natural world” (152), “recognition of a creative-destructive universe” (153), a realization that “the inner is also the workings of the outer” (156), “awareness of both nature as culture and of culture as nature” (162), and the acknowledgments that “with consciousness comes conscience” (163) and that “the exploitation of the planet is the same mindset as the exploitation of women and minorities” (165). Overall, these can be summarized as a sense of vulnerability to a world that is as threatening as it is beautiful, a sense of the union of the inside and outside world, and a coming to consciousness of the wider implications of exploitation of the environment. The post-pastoral acknowledges all the ramifications of a natural world that is “immanent” (152) to its inhabitants.

This immanence is obvious in Giono’s work in his depiction of overpowering vistas; his insistence that the “real” world, and specifically the natural world, is more fantastic than any myth; and the resultant impact on humanity of this real, natural, and often overpowering world. In many of his works the natural world inspires a sense of often fearful awe at its overpowering scale, its intense sensory imposition on the human being, and the ferocity of natural phenomena. Characters cannot successfully shut themselves off from this violence, subject as they are in Giono’s books to flood (*Batailles dans la montagne* [‘Battles in the Mountains’]), famine (*Regain* [*Second Harvest*]), fire (*Colline*), pestilence

(*Colline* and *Le Hussard sur le toit*), and the occasional giant squid (*Fragments d'un paradis*). Humanity can escape neither the awe nor the destruction of the natural world, and in what we could consider the master trope of his literary universe, he depicts the entanglement of humanity with that world. That inescapable bind to the natural world is described as the animating principle of all life:

L'âme est la composante de tout. Elle organise, elle ordonne, elle unit, elle rejoint, elle se marie, elle se mélange. Pure, elle attache les hommes solitaires dans la compagnie du monde. Elle en fait comme des oiseaux couverts de racines" (*Le poids du ciel* ['The Weight of the Sky'] 335)

The soul makes up everything. It organizes, it orders, it unites, it joins, it marries, it blends. Pure, it attaches solitary humans to the company of the world. It makes of them something like birds covered with roots."⁵

In addition to the threat of destruction that comes from our immanent contact with the outside world, however, there is always the possibility of rebirth, a rebirth that is dependent on the persistence and work described earlier. This kind of rebirth, however, also frequently requires sacrifice. In order for the community of *Regain* to begin to rebuild and repopulate, the elderly Mamèche, whose husband has died years earlier digging the village well, has to sacrifice herself by traveling to find a wife for the only man left in the village so that they can plant wheat and repopulate the settlement. This Promethean image recurs often in Giono's writing, as if a character's gift to civilization is only possible in risking liberty, and even one's entrails (*Noé* and *Journal*). This evisceration is emblematic not only of destruction but also the openness and vulnerability of humans to the forces of nature.

The relationship with nature described by Gifford in the post-pastoral is not only one of proximity and vulnerability, but of continuity and congruence between the functioning of the human and the rest of nature. One aspect of this continuity is evident in Giono's insistence that humans can never escape their own animality, bound as they are by their own biological reality and the same drives experienced in non-human nature. As with the awe he expresses towards the sublime and the monstrous in the outside world, the same extremes are present in the inner workings of the human. Capable of great feats and of creations of great beauty, humanity is also capable of the most awful deeds against each other and the world around them. In *Un roi sans divertissement*, for example, the murderer M.V. is characterized by the villagers he preyed upon as a monster, but the *gendarme* 'national police officer' Langlois, who eventually manages to kill M.V., corrects them by saying that the murderer could not be a monster, but only a man like any other (486). He is not outside of humanity, or of nature, but embedded in both. On a larger cultural

scale, humans are capable of destruction as great as any that nature could wreak, with the scenes of war closely echoing those of cholera or flood destruction, and vice versa.

Consciousness of this closeness with and similarity to the natural world provokes both emotional and ethical reactions. It is not only the reader who is called to recognize this reality, but also the characters. The moment of realization of both the extent to which one is implicated in the natural world and the accompanying moral obligations is staged among the characters in multiple works. In *Colline*, for example, a farmer who kills a toad for no particular reason is filled with horror at his savage behavior and dread at the power of nature around him to which he suddenly feels vulnerable. He consequently begins to question what an ethical engagement with the outside world and with other human beings would be—to question his own responsibility for his previous actions. Likewise, the bandit Tringlot in *L'Iris de Suse* ('The Iris of Suse') also acknowledges an ethical attachment to others only after he becomes a shepherd as a way to disguise himself and, despite his ulterior motives, comes into consistent contact with the "real" world outside him. For both these characters it is not a question of an abandonment of crime for a virtuous life inspired by the simplicity and beauty of the countryside. It is rather a turning point at which one who felt no moral obligation to the world understands the connections in which he is embedded and the change of behavior that must follow. For the narrator of *Les grands chemins* ('The Great Roads'), and the captain of *Fragments d'un paradis*, the epiphany occurs prior to the beginning of the book, and they are looking for a way to live consistently with what they have realized. The focus in these books is on the question of what to do once consciousness has been reached and conscience stirred. Is it possible to separate oneself from the world or must one take concrete action? To what or whom does one have responsibility? In what capacity can one engage? For these characters, it becomes clear that they are inseparable from the world and that their responsibility to other humans and the non-human world is equally inextricable. In each case though, they make very different choices based on that responsibility, and it is left to the reader to evaluate whether they have responded correctly.

This entanglement and ethical responsibility is not only between humans and nature, but amongst humans as well. For Giono, the target of exploitation to which he was the most sensitive was the working class, especially the rural working class. He saw the First World War and the subsequent industrialization as equally destructive of the environment and the *paysans* 'peasants' and he wrote a series of well-known essays in the years prior to the Second World War in which he portrayed the rural poor and working class as victims of a transnational, industrialized governing class indifferent to the fate of the environment and the people who occupied it alike: *Les Vraies Richesses* ('The True Riches'), *Refus d'obéissance* ('Refusal to Obey'), and *Lettre aux paysans sur la pauvreté et la paix*

(‘Letter to the Peasants on Poverty and Peace’). In these essays he expresses the suspicion that the exploiting class would both impoverish the lives of the rural poor and prevent them from ever attaining the moment when consciousness becomes conscience.

Giono was not, however, uniformly hostile to all forms of technological innovation. He was in fact delighted by many means of modern transportation, especially cars, in that they could offer freedom of movement and, when open to the elements, a new and exciting way to immerse oneself in the sensory experience of the natural world (*Ennemonde et autres caractères* [*Ennemonde*], *Mort d'un personnage* [‘Death of a Character’]). Scientists themselves are somewhat suspect, at least those who would shut themselves off from the larger outside world for the sake of their studies and who would isolate the object of their studies from its place in the greater world (*L’Iris de Suse*, *Les grands chemins*, and *Le chant du monde*). Giono recognized the beauty and sensory fulfillment to be had in cities as well as in the country, but he believed that the preservation of the natural world and access to it were fundamental both for the sake of that world and for humans. The industrialization of Europe and destruction of natural habitats and the ways of life that remained close to these habitats was a way of exploiting the rural poor and alienating them from the process and products of their labor. Giono’s attitudes towards work therefore more closely echo Karl Marx’s sense of work than Vichy’s.⁶

In addition to the criteria he lays out, Gifford leaves the category of the post-pastoral open to further development, and Christopher Rieger does just that in his book *Clear-Cutting Eden*, adding to Gifford’s criteria a “sense of nature as active agent rather than passive background . . . and a critical consideration of the pastoral mode itself” (140-51). The first of these criteria is consonant with the immanence and awe already mentioned by Gifford but emphasizes the autonomous power of nature, as we see in the natural disasters that highlight the destructive side of nature as well as the human role in creating and responding to these disasters. The environment thus acts on an equal basis with the humans who occupy it. In one salient example from Giono’s work, human exploitation of the land in *Colline* is implied as a cause of the dried-up well which in turn provokes illness and wildfire. Human action does not unfold in front of the rural grassland but, rather, must confront and negotiate the environmental actions of the hill on which they live. Regarding the second criterion, Giono employs many pastoral conventions only to deform them slightly, thus acknowledging the influence of pastoral while simultaneously providing a critique of its conventions. This implicit critique of the mode uses the country settings and the “peasant” characters common to traditional pastoral but complicates the relationship to nature.

In a more explicit set of critiques, however, Giono calls attention to the shortcomings of fictions portraying an imaginary—even if beautiful—version of

the world. For example, he ventriloquizes the sea captain of *Fragments d'un paradis* to deplore those who would content themselves with beautiful fictions. These fictions are colorful and bright but suffer from what he calls a *pauvreté de spectacle* (900) 'poverty of spectacle.' They do not maintain the dense sensory texture of the spectacle provided by the natural world, a density of experience that must inevitably include the destructive capacity of nature. While a writer of fiction, he warns his readers not to be distracted by fictions that make them feel comfortable rather than exposing them to their own vulnerability and ethical responsibility: "*Il faut qu'ils sachent que la réalité est plus fantastique que l'imagination . . . Je veux les délivrer . . . de tout ce qui conditionne leur jardin d'Armide*" (Giono, *Fragments d'un paradis* 967, emphasis in the original) '*They must know that reality is more fantastic than imagination . . . I want to deliver them . . . from everything that conditions their garden of Armida.*'⁷ These words are put into the mouth of the captain, who is himself a writer of the logbook that appears in fragments in the book. The consciousness of this interior-exterior connection is, as for the sea captain, the moment of an activation of his conscience—the impulse towards action through his role as a writer. As with the captain, it is at the moment that Giono starts to write that he realizes, vis-à-vis his reading public: 'I want to deliver them.'

In addition to this portrayal of a writer-character, Giono novelizes his own process of writing in the autofiction *Noé*, which finds him writing *Un roi sans divertissement*. He reflects not only on the importance of portraying the reflection of interior and exterior spaces, but also sees how this is generative of his own creative process. It is illustrative not only of the interconnection of inner and outer world, the creative flight of the writer covered with roots binding him to reality, but also of how he feels an ethical imperative to bring this connection and its value to the attention of his reader. This movement from consciousness to conscience to action—an action that starts with the critical distance from the pastoral mode but ends with what might be loosely termed a call to consciousness on the part of the reader—is typical of Giono himself. While his larger desire 'I want to deliver them' may seem ambitious, the idea that the author is in a position to open his readers' eyes to the immanence of the outside world and to the connections between the readers and the natural world, whether these readers wish to be connected or not, is an explicit articulation of the ideal effects of less grandiose claims of consciousness, conscience, and critique. The author of the post-pastoral is thus a political actor. The writer, for Giono, is in a privileged position with regard to the savant or the scientist, whose knowledge is necessarily limited to a very carefully defined area of study and whose laboratory setup closes this person off from the outside world.

For Giono, the writer is an actor in the world breaking down barriers of consciousness; the savant is in the business of building them. As Giono considered his relationship to the natural world as both primary to existence and troubled, it is no surprise that we find at the same time the previously mentioned ambivalence or

ambiguity regarding “progress,” and in particular technological and industrial progress. While scholarship from Lukács (58-59) to the previously cited Golsan has suggested that Giono was openly hostile to progress, I propose that he instead sought to find a way of not abandoning the past completely but rather of keeping any kind of technological or political change from acting as an additional barrier between the human and the natural world, and equally between different aspects of the natural world. This desire to situate himself as a writer outside the uniform direction of “progress” and also to bring the larger community to consciousness of the interconnectedness of the human or social and nature puts him in line with a larger epistemic commitment and political project proposed by Bruno Latour: the “nonmodern.”

(Post)-Pastoral and Nonmodern Temporality in Giono

Giono can thus be recategorized as an author of the post-pastoral rather than of the pastoral. Such a reevaluation offers at once a new way to read his work beyond a simplistic dichotomy between good and evil paralleled in the traditional struggle of rural versus urban. However, we propose that this shift in critical approaches to Giono’s work also permits a nuanced examination of his representation of the pastoral. Drawing on philosopher of science Bruno Latour’s categories of the “modern,” “antimodern,” “postmodern,” and “nonmodern,” we can begin to articulate a theory placing equal emphasis on the interconnectedness between the internal and the external worlds and the impossibility of separating one object of study from the larger systems in which it is embedded.

The terms “modern,” “postmodern,” etc. do not correspond to specific chronological epochs (contemporary, future, etc.), but refer rather to epistemological differences and ways of viewing the progression of time, just as in fact “pastoral” and “post-pastoral” do not refer to the dates at which certain works were written but rather to the ways they represent the relationship between humankind or society and nature as depicted by the author. As a baseline, those who aspire to be “modern” aim to distinguish fundamentally between nature and culture and posit a continual and progressive subdivision of knowledge regarding these two domains: “*The asymmetry between nature and culture then becomes an asymmetry between past and future. The past was the confusion of things and men; the future is what will no longer confuse them . . . a new age that will finally distinguish clearly what belongs to atemporal nature and what comes from humans*” (Latour 71, emphasis in original).

The modern separates nature (science) and culture (politics), but also separates the objects of study into smaller and smaller divisions. This is the exact practice of separation and subdivision that aroused so much suspicion in Giono vis-à-vis scientists in his books, who separated their laboratories from the outside world

and studied the smallest object possible—in one case the ear bones inside of a tiny rodent (*L'Iris de Suse*). This subdivision is also seen by the “moderns” as an inexorable forward movement in time, that is, as progress: “The present is outlined by a series of radical breaks, revolutions, which constitute so many irreversible ratchets that prevent us from ever going backward” (Latour 72). The modern is thus incompatible with the characteristics of the post-pastoral mode, with the latter’s emphasis on the necessary interrelations between culture and nature. The post-pastoral as a literary mode is itself in opposition to this homogeneous forward movement and progressive separation of all of the elements of life in the world. Latour here proposes “antimodernism,” a reactionary movement backwards that would implicitly acknowledge the trajectory drawn by moderns while trying to unidirectionally reverse the progressive separation of modernism. This reactionary movement encompasses the idea of a catastrophic end to the teleological movement of separation and subdivision feared by the “antimoderns.”⁸ This then begs the question: is the post-pastoral antimodern and does it envision a return along the same chronological line?

According to Latour, antimodernism and modernism share a set of basic assumptions, but differ in their attitude towards the same set of phenomena. The vision of time and progress shared by the “moderns” and the “antimoderns” is one of unidirectional movement, whether that movement is seen as salutary or disastrous. That movement, to simplify Latour’s position, is a movement towards the separation of elements mixed together in the early human perspective, and a continual movement towards subdivision and specialization. As an alternative he proposes the “nonmodern,” which situates itself outside this imagined linear temporality, envisioning time instead as a circle or spiral, in which progressive practices do not shut themselves off from their relationship to the past, creating multiple lateral relationships between different kinds of progression:

Regroup the contemporary elements along a spiral rather than a line. We do have a future and a past, but the future takes the form of a circle expanding in all directions, and the past is not surpassed but revisited, repeated, surrounded, protected, recombined, reinterpreted and reshuffled. (Latour 75)

This kind of experimental, interconnected way of life is dependent on the abandonment of a teleological notion of time. As an example of a post-pastoral writer, Giono does not demand an antimodern return along a straight timeline, but a diversification of possible movements and combinations. As illustrated in the texts we have discussed, Giono proposes that the reader can enjoy the movement of the automobile, of the train, of the motorcycle, but not as an end in itself. A mode of transport allows us to more quickly and immersively experience the natural

world. Similarly, the laboratory should not be hermetically sealed off from the outside world, but rather humans should experience the connections made evident by the writer, by the storyteller.

The post-pastoral, as a literary mode, could be considered the literature of the nonmodern, which, in addition to the characteristics previously noted, is given a proposed constitution by Latour. As with Giono, this is not just a theoretical model, but a project of political and social change stemming from a new epistemic norm. This “constitution” not only provides a description of the conditions of a world conceived along nonmodern lines but also points to how such a mentality allows for real political and social change in two “guarantees”: the first, “nonseparability of the common production of societies and natures”; and the second, “continuous following of the production of Nature, which is objective, and the production of Society, which is free . . . the two are not separated” (141). Both of these guarantees are consonant with the intertwining, inseparable relationship between the human (or society) and nature, and their products. These commitments reflect the interrelations and indeed indistinguishability of nature and society articulated in the definition of post-pastoral literature. Latour's third guarantee also reflects the definition of the post-pastoral: “freedom is redefined as a capacity to sort the combinations of hybrids that no longer depend on a homogeneous temporal flow” (141). Literature that reimagines the relationship between nature and society participates in this “sorting” and in the disruption of a homogenous temporal flow. This literature shows the recombination of the human and the natural, as well as the ability to incorporate new technological and social developments without, on the other hand, committing to a unidirectional flow of specialization and separation of the social and the natural.

Finally, Latour proposes an explicitly political implication of the nonmodern in his fourth guarantee: “the production of hybrids, by becoming explicit and collective, becomes the object of an enlarged democracy that regulates or slows down its flow” (141). This last claim is where the idea of the nonmodern passes epistemological, social, and aesthetic concerns to show the explicitly political consequences of such a project. Latour ties the nonmodern to politics, and specifically to a free society with a broadened sense of democracy—one that must take into account the natural world and includes possible agency of the nonhuman. This society, like Giono, does not condemn technological or societal progress, but insists that the natural not be ignored, or even separated from the social. The nonseparability of nature and culture and the multiplication of possible connections and innovations must include the ability not only to make connections to other places and other kinds of beings, but also other times. This idea of nonmodernity allows one not only to grow outward but to connect back to points already passed if those combinations or hybrids are fruitful, a freedom of movement and innovation denied to the “modern.”

It is here that discomfort regarding Giono and his work is thrown into relief by the virulence of the criticism surrounding him, the stakes heightened by the political dynamics of the time in which he lived and wrote. An association of Giono's work with a movement promoting a "free society with a broadened sense of democracy" contradicts many readers of Giono who see him as an example of a twentieth-century pastoral writer. One criticism dogging the pastoral in general and Giono in particular is exactly that of being "antimodern" (Golsan 33) and nostalgic, a critique that in Giono's case goes hand in hand with accusations of an allegiance to fascist designs for a return to an earlier, mythological time of peasant/autochthonous purity. Richard T. Golsan suggests that if Giono did not specifically endorse Vichy politics as such, he welcomed the régime because:

Vichy's *retour à la terre* is ultimately less a political event for Giono than an affirmation in the real world of the truth of his artistic vision and the rhythm that drives it. Vichy affirms the sanctity of the myth of the simplicity and beauty of provincial life . . . but it *also* affirms the Biblical cycle of apocalypse and renewal that animates his vision . . . (32, emphasis added)

Still, this reading allows for the possibility that Giono saw in Vichy proof of the failure he had predicted of a government he saw as propelling a voiceless working class to slaughter in a war that would benefit not one nation over another but the industrial class over the country dweller such as he had portrayed in the World War I novel *Le Grand Troupeau (To the Slaughterhouse)*. Such a calamity might perhaps allow, in spite of itself, the flourishing of local communities by negligence, if nothing else (although this was clearly proved wrong as the occupation went on). This interpretation might then claim a certain "postmodern" vision of the world in which progress hastens an eventual calamity and destruction of forward movement.

Accusations against the pastoral mode as a whole have been articulated in various ways: "The impulse behind the appetite for rural poetry, non-fiction and novels around the turn of the century is not only nostalgia, but also . . . [a reaction to] the wider crisis of modernity and modernism's challenge to Victorian values" (Gifford 72). This characterization of pastoral writing has also been applied to nature writing in general: "Conservatism that depicts an idealized preindustrialized past as a natural way of life is still strong. Environmentalism is often confused with this nostalgia, sometimes by environmentalists" (Kerridge 138). Any turn to nature is seen as a turn backwards to a pre-civilized time, or at least to the pre-urban. Rather than seeing "nature" as existing in connection with the contemporary world, this reading sees nature as necessarily *prior* to our society or a contemporary vestige of an earlier way of life, a viewpoint reinforced by traditional pastoral rhetoric. Giono, however, as a post-pastoral writer, sees it as an environment in which we are all embedded and implicated and which we ignore at our peril.

The conflation of ecology and nature writing with fascism in Giono's work is suspect. Verena Andermatt Conley in her book, *Ecopolitics: The Environment in Poststructural Thought*, accuses liberal thinkers like Luc Ferry of falling victim to two logical fallacies: the first is a kind of false analogy vis-à-vis the respect for nature and conservation efforts in which anything promoted by Nazis is inherently fascist regardless of any difference of situations or motivations. The second is a belief in the universalism of French rational discourse that any system of belief or division of the world that does not set rationality in opposition to the natural must be on the other side—that of the regionalist, backward-looking Fascist. This last accusation is particularly troublesome when referring to Giono, since his personal political comportment has led some critics to view his entire œuvre with suspicion. Joanna Drugan rebuts this accusation, saying that such an affirmation “necessitates a willful misinterpretation of his work . . . [of] his constant stress on the lack of nationality of the paysan” (58). Giono's so-called regionalism is not nationally or ethnically based with the kind of folkloric overtones encouraged by fascist governments. He did not engage with the separation of national or regional groups, nor of nature from progress overall. For Giono, human character is not nationally bound but created in conjunction with the space in which it develops.

Giono's long-held pacifist beliefs kept him from an active arms-bearing role in the resistance, and his continued personal interactions with collaborators such as Drieu la Rochelle may indeed be viewed with suspicion. Drugan, however, attributes the backlash (including Giono's blacklisting from 1944-1947 and the urging of his execution by Tristan Tzara (Drugan 55) to his position in the public eye and not to the inherent culpability of his viewpoints as expressed in his literature:

His ideas were not particularly unusual but they were held by a figure in the public eye, to whom many people had looked as a role model . . . the irony is that Giono did act to some extent, sheltering refugees including Jews. It was, however, on his failure to set a visible example that he was to be judged. (59)

While the debate over what more concrete action he could or should have taken will continue to be conducted amongst biographers, it is clear that his writing does not, in its portrayal of the rural, depict a national socialist or even a milder reactionary conservative point of view.⁹ Instead, it emphasizes the inextricability of nature and culture, of the individual human and the world around him or her. This connection does not allow for divisions along national or ethnic lines and is open to new ways of experiencing the fullness of that connection in an ethical bond to the world that does not depend on a traditional social or moral imperative.

As magnified by the polemic inspired by Giono's refusal to comply with the "modern" forward movement and his deep attachment to the natural world, his writing presents us with the need to rethink the relationship between writing that thematizes our relationship to the natural and time or progress. Thus "post-pastoral" literature can be considered an art of the nonmodern as it is defined by Bruno Latour. The interconnectedness of the world attributed by Gifford to his "post"-pastoral must necessarily abandon any claim to a unidirectional modernizing movement as much as it eschews the nostalgia of the traditional pastoral. This nonmodern, post-pastoral literature exemplified by Jean Giono thus presents a vision of experimentation with both a freedom for innovation and a broadening of kinship and the attribution of agency beyond the human—not a flattening of difference but the possibility of the creation of new networks and hybrids. Giono, by claiming his desire to save his fellow citizens from their alienation from the natural world through writing—both in his discussion of his own work and his staging of the task of the writer or storyteller—gives the literary mode in which he operates a concrete function in the creation of this new social and epistemic order.

Notes

1. In addition to his introduction to a French edition of Virgil, some of his first published poems were called the *Eclogues* following the example of that poet.
2. Gifford here is referring to William Empson's *Some Versions of Pastoral* (23).
3. "A mature environmental aesthetics" is a citation from page 32 of Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*.
4. This stands in contrast to the "anti-pastoral," which views not only the conventions but also the positive attitude towards the natural environment they express, with suspicion (Gifford 77, 128, 131).
5. My translation. All translations of Giono going forward are mine.
6. This is most explicit in *Que ma joie demeure*, where Bobi condemns the accumulation of money in exchange for the farmers' work as an abstraction. It doesn't increase their happiness, when they could instead use their work to improve their own community and then use the time thus liberated to enjoy the fruits of their own labor.

7. The “garden of Armida” refers to an illusory, enchanted refuge in Torquato Tasso’s *Jerusalem Delivered*.
8. Latour claims that this situation is celebrated by the “postmoderns,” who “accept the idea that the situation is indeed catastrophic, but they maintain that it is to be acclaimed rather than bemoaned” (124).
9. These biographers include Golsan, Drugan, W.D. Redfern, and Maxwell A. Smith, but equally the compilers of his *Œuvres complètes*, Robert and Luce Ricatte in their notices, and Pierre Citron in the same edition and in his biography of Giono.

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