

# The imaginary voyages into the unknown of Edgar Poe, Herman Melville and Jean Giono

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THE IMAGINARY VOYAGES  
INTO THE UNKNOWN OF EDGAR POE,  
HERMAN MELVILLE AND JEAN GIONO

Few books make us so intensively aware of the literature we have read as Jean Giono's *Fragments d'un paradis (Les anges)*, the book which the author dictated to his secretary in 1944 and published four years later. It is quite natural that Giono's imaginary voyage reminds us of "Le voyage", the poem Charles Baudelaire had published in 1859. Giono's voyagers are eager to sail ("gouverner")<sup>1</sup>, not caring where, like Baudelaire's "vrais voyageurs" who "sont ceux-là seuls qui partent / Pour partir"<sup>2</sup>. Another French poem that comes to mind is Arthur Rimbaud's "Le bateau ivre" (1871). The phantastic scenery of the following lines could have been that of Giono's voyagers:

Je sais les cieux crevant en éclairs, et les trombes  
Et les ressacs et les courants: je sais le soir,  
L'Aube exaltée ainsi qu'un peuple de colombes,  
Et j'ai vu quelquefois ce que l'homme a cru voir!

J'ai vu le soleil bas, taché d'horreurs mystiques,  
Illuminant de longs figements violets,  
Pareils à des acteurs de drames très-antiques  
Les flots roulants au loin leurs frissons de volets!

J'ai rêvé la nuit verte aux neiges éblouies,  
Baiser montant aux yeux des mers avec lenteurs,  
La circulation des sèves inouïes,  
Et l'éveil jaune et bleu des phosphores chanteurs!<sup>3</sup>

- 1 Jean Giono, *Œuvres romanesques complètes*, Vol. III, Paris, Gallimard, 1974, *Pour saluer Melville*, pp. 1-77, *Fragments d'un paradis*, pp. 863-1015, here pp. 1013-1015.
- 2 Charles Baudelaire, *Die Blumen des Bösen. Les Fleurs du Mal. Kleine Gedichte in Prosa. Le Spleen de Paris*, Zweisprachige Ausg., München, Winkler, 1979, p. 420.
- 3 Arthur Rimbaud, *Sämtliche Dichtungen. Französisch und Deutsch*, Reinbeck, Rowohlt's Klassiker, 1963, p. 116.

Yet it was Poe's imaginary voyages that had already fascinated Baudelaire. Dictating *Fragments d'un paradis*, Giono was aware of them as well as of the voyage that another American author had contributed to world literature not much later: *Moby-Dick* (1851)<sup>4</sup>. Not long before dictating the *Fragments* Giono had – together with his artist friend, Lucien Jacques, and Joan Smith – translated Melville's novel, published it in his *Cahiers du Contadour* in 1938/1939, and written a novellistic essay on its genesis: *Pour saluer Melville*, published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1940<sup>5</sup>. Patrick F. Quinn called his chapter on Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* "Poe's Imaginary Voyage"<sup>6</sup>. We use Quinn's descriptive title for our own study of Poe's, Melville's and Giono's voyages. Quinn's title of his book on Poe's influence on French literature was *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (1957). Giono's *Fragments*, in a way, represent French faces of Poe as well as of Melville. What actually fascinated French authors and critics was not so much the face that Poe presented them but the "unknown" hiding behind it. The face was only the pasteboard mask that according to Melville's novel – in his "The Quarter-Deck" chapter – man had to "strike through"<sup>7</sup>. For the 20th-century critic Poe and Melville show already an unusual awareness of the modern and postmodern situation. It is the psychological aspect of interpreting the voyage as a voyage into the interior, into the unconscious, elaborated by Marie Bonaparte in her monumental study, *Edgar Poe: Étude psychoanalytique* (1933) and more modestly interpreted in various publications by Gaston Bachelard,

4 The first note on *Fragments* appears in Giono's *Journal* for the 17th of February 1944: "Brusquement ce matin je suis aux prises avec l'idée d'écrire un très grand et très sordide (splendide?) poème avec *Fragment d'un paradis*, grand voyage en mer, journal de bord, et épisodes, aventures particulières? Catalogue des richesses, amertumes. Une condition humaine mais avec des formules artistiques de Renaissance. Je dis très mal tout ce que je sens d'admirable que ce sujet pourrait avoir. Pas Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, mais Lautréamont; Rimbaud, Cook, Dumont d'Urville; Edgar Poe, Faulkner, le Melville de *Moby Dick*; et l'incapacité de jouir. Impuissance des hommes. Vanité de tous leurs moyens de puissance, de toute leur volonté de puissance. Il faudrait que ce soit un grand poème." in Pierre Citron, *Giono 1895-1970*, Paris, Ed. du Seuil, 1990, p. 369.

5 The originally planned preface "va bifurquer sur un véritable roman", Citron says, *op.cit.*, p. 327.

6 Frederick F. Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1957.

7 Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or the Whale*, ed. Willard Thorp, New York, Oxford University Press, 1947, p. 153.

as well as the symbolistic and existentialistic aspect of a voyage into the unknown as represented *par excellence* by Giono's *Fragments*.

Critics have pointed out the numerous influences on Giono's book, or rather the many references it contains to earlier writers, and Michèle Belghmi has competently researched the relation that exists between Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and Melville's *Moby-Dick* on the one hand and Giono's *Fragments* on the other hand<sup>8</sup>. Yet, we think Giono's novel worth reading as a new interpretation of what his two major predecessors were looking for on their imaginary voyages. This is what our paper is going to concentrate on.

Other English language writers have left their traces in *Fragments*. Critics mention R.L. Stevenson or Joseph Conrad. They are minor prototypes for Giono in comparison to the works already mentioned. Yet there are references to at least three other works that are relevant to our reading. These are John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), William Blake's "Marriage between Heaven and Earth" (about 1793) and S.T. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), the latter touching the many references to the ominous albatross, the former the subject of Giono's paranthetic subtitle (*Les Anges*) and particularly that of "fallen angels".

\* \* \*

The imaginary voyages of Poe that matter in our context are "MS. Found in a Bottle" (1833) and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838)<sup>9</sup>. They are voyages into unknown regions, regions beyond everyday reality; they are voyages of the mind into imagined worlds rising out of dreams<sup>10</sup>.

The narrator hero in "MS. Found in a Bottle" leaves his family and his country to go to sea. Sailing from Batavia to the Sunda Islands his

8 As major studies of Giono and his work may be mentioned: Pierre de Boisdeffre, *Giono*, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, Maxwell Smith, *Jean Giono*, New York, Twayne Publishers, 1965, and Michèle Belghmi, *Giono et la Mer*, Bordeaux, Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 1987, and Citron, *op.cit.*

9 *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Vol. 2, *Tales and Sketches, 1831-1842*, Ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott, Cambridge MA, London, Harvard University Press, 1978, *Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, Vol. 1, *The Imaginary Voyages*, Ed. Burton R. Pollin, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1981. For Pollin Poe's imaginary voyages are *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, "The Unparalleled Adventure of one Hans Pfaal" and *The Journal of Julius Rodman*.

10 See Franz Link, *Edgar Allan Poe. Ein Dichter zwischen Romantik und Moderne*, Frankfurt a.M., Bonn, Athenäum Verlag, 1968, particularly pp. 270-298.

premonitions of disaster become true when his ship meets the full force of a simoon and, water-logged and its masts gone by the board, is rushing before the continuing tempestuous winds southwards. The narrator and an old Swede, the sole survivors of the accident, continue their voyage on the damaged hulk of their ship for five days and nights “waiting for the arrival of the sixth day – that day that had not arrived” (138) when the narrator had to stop writing his report. So far, it is a voyage *out* of the reality of everyday life, out of society, out of space and out of time. On their way south they at times “gasped for breath at an elevation beyond the albatross – at times became dizzy with the velocity of [their] descent into some watery hell, where the air grew stagnant, and no sound disturbed the slumbers of the kraken” (139).

In “eternal darkness” the two survivors run into “a gigantic ship” (140), Poe’s version of the Flying Dutchman of myth. Flung into the riggings of the mythic ship the narrator continues his voyage. From now on it is a voyage *into* unknown regions, into “eternal night” (145), night, of course, of the antarctic winter in terms of nonimaginary reality. The ship is no longer driven by the wind but drawn *into* the cataract that opens at the end of their voyage. The narrator is overwhelmed by the terror of the situation and, at the same time, possessed by curiosity about the secrets of the unknown world ahead of him. “To conceive the horror of my sensations is, I presume, utterly impossible; yet a curiosity to penetrate the mysteries of these awful regions, predominates even over my despair, and will reconcile me to the most hideous aspect of death. It is evident that we are hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge – some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction” (*ibid.*). The secret never gets imparted. Going down into the cataract the narrator commits his MS. to a bottle.

While musing on his strange fate on board the mysterious vessel the narrator “unwittingly daubed with a tar-brush the edges of a neatly-folded studding-sail” (142). When the sail was set up “the thoughtless touches of the brush” were “spread out into the word DISCOVERY”. In Giono’s *Fragments* a member of the crew is also painting signs on cloth, but his doing so remains without consequences (35). Poe’s story is a voyage of discovery in the at his time unknown region of the South Pole. Symbolically it is a voyage of discovery of the unknown as such. Yet the voyage of discovery equally is a voyage into destruction. The narrator is fascinated by the unknown. He experiences extreme terror and at the same time is eager to explore its sources. Losing his anchorage in the reality of his

former life, his quest for the unknown ends in destruction. Dissatisfaction with the world as it is causes Poe's heroes to look for imaginary worlds. Yet this imaginary world is never realized and, as experienced by Poe's heroes, cannot be transmitted to the reader.

*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* may be considered as an extension of the earlier tale. The setting is quite different. The voyage starts on a Nantucket whaler and is continued on a sealing and trading ship in the South Seas and the Pacific, later on exploring the waters towards the South Pole. Yet in both cases the voyage starts with a voyage *out* of the known world to end as a voyage *into* the unknown. The unknown again reveals itself as a matter of imagination. Its secret, if there is any, cannot be revealed. Pym returns from the abyss into which the cataract had drawn him together with his companion Peters; yet, on entering the cataract he was welcomed by "a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of snow" (206). The shrouded figure represents death. Pym returns home, yet dies before publication of his manuscript, the chapters describing his experience in the abyss being lost in the mysterious accident that brought about his death.

Cruising in the South Seas Pym explores the different islands they visit – among them Tristan da Cunha – and relates their history. They finally reach an island not yet discovered and called Tsalal by its natives. Everything on the island is black, the natives, their tools, the soil, the animals. Entering the island the ship's crew is deceived by the natives and finds its death. Only Pym and Peters escape without having been able to decipher the hieroglyphs they had found engraved in the rocks of the island. Their ship set on fire by the natives they escape with one of their boats to be drawn into the cataract.

The unknown does not reveal itself in the kindness with which the natives of Tsalal seem to welcome the voyagers. It reveals itself in the horror of the fall into the abyss that cannot be told. 1850 Baudelaire published his translation of Poe's novel, *Les Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym*. In 1859 he sends the old captain in "Le voyage" on a voyage he saw Pym undertaking in Poe's novel:

O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! levons l'ancre!  
Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort! Appareillons!  
Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l'encre,  
Nos cœurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons!

Verse-nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte!  
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,  
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?  
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau!*

It is death who draws Baudelaire's ship into the abyss. It is death whom Pym meets on his way into the abyss. In spite of the horror of the unknown Poe's heroes are driven to explore it, only to find it unattainable or attainable only in death. "With no apparent discontinuity Pym's voyage begins in Nantucket", Quinn wrote, "and ends in nirvana" (203). So does Baudelaire's voyage. Both are voyages of the mind out of our everyday reality into a world of imagination that is unmasked as nirvana. The world of imagination is proved to be incapable of replacing the lost world of belief.

\* \* \*

There is no evidence that Herman Melville had read a line of Poe when he wrote *Moby-Dick*<sup>11</sup>. Yet according to Patrick F. Quinn "to take up *Moby-Dick* after a reading of *Arthur Gordon Pym* is to be struck by the similarities between these two books" (207). The opening sentences, "My name is Arthur Gordon Pym" and "Call me Ishmael", at first sight, seem to indicate quite different attitudes, the one asserting the factualness of the narrator's identity, the other rather hiding his. In both cases they indicate estrangement. Arthur Gordon Pym, following the rhythm of Poe's name, actually represents his fictional *alter ego*. Ishmael, relating the narrator to Hagar's son, the Biblical outcast, who may be seen as Melville's *alter ego*<sup>12</sup>. Pym and Ishmael embark on their voyage from Nantucket on a whaler but are interested in something more than whales. Pym's visions are "of shipwreck and famine [...] in an ocean unapproachable and unknown" (65). Ishmael is interested in whales. Yet it is "such a portentous and mysterious monster" that it "roused all [his] curiosity". And neither the whale nor other marvels are inducements for him. "As for me," he says, "I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts" (8). "Acting under the

11 Quinn, *op.cit.*, p.205, and Merton M. Sealts, Jr., *Melville's Reading: A Check-List of Books Owned and Borrowed*, Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 1966.

12 For an interpretation of the novel see Franz Link, *Geschichte der amerikanischen Erzählkunst im 19. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer Verlag, 1980, pp.168-185.

compulsion of such urgencies as these”, Quinn already wrote, “Pym and Ishmael abandon the circumscribed stability of the land and human society for the mystery and perils of the unknown sea. In their very motives is foreshadowed the experience of disaster to which they both have dedicated their lives” (208). Why, Melville’s Ishmael asks, did others go to sea, why does he go? “It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life”, is his answer; “and this is the key to it all” (5). The voyage becomes an image of the quest for the lost or at all times unknown meaning of life.

On the realistic level *Moby-Dick* is a whaling story, of captain Ahab’s hunting an albino whale called Moby Dick. Possessed by the idea of revenging himself on the whale for the loss of his leg in an earlier encounter, Ahab finds his and his men’s death in finally meeting and challenging the whale. The story is told by Ishmael, and in the opening part of the novel he is also the protagonist of his tale. Gradually he steps into the background and takes the part of an observer. He sees Ahab turning into a Promethean hero who defies God and who is not willing to accept his fate. From the mates, the harpooners and other members of the crew he learns of other ways in which man may face the unknown. He becomes a kind of “everyman”, and the others whom he watches represent particular aspects and attitudes of his situation. So the novel may be read as the story of Ishmael-Everyman who tries to understand the world as well as himself and who, as the only member of the *Pequod*, survives the sinking of the ship.

The standard for measuring their quest is established by Father Mapple’s sermon that Ishmael attends in New Bedford before leaving for Nantucket. According to his interpretation of the story of Job in the second part of his sermon, “Delight is to him – a far, far upward and inward delight – who against the proud gods and commodores of this earth, ever stands forth his own inexorable self” (47). This is set against the first part of his sermon: “And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves, wherein the hardship of obeying God consists” (41). Accordingly the quest becomes man’s struggle to find an adequate relation to God and to other men. Ahab is not willing to obey God; he is challenging Him and is undone. Starbuck knows that Ahab will run the *Pequod* into disaster, but does not have the courage to resist him. Queequeg, the Polynesian harpooner, represents a contrary attitude to that of his friend Ishmael. Ishmael is in quest of the unknown; Queequeg wears it on his skin. A prophet and seer of his island had tattooed the secrets of his world on his skin, “a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth”

(450). He is living this truth without being conscious of it. Ahab considers it a “devilish tantalization of the gods” not being able to read “those hieroglyphic marks” (451), but Queequeg knows no such anguish. Like the other harpooners, representing different races, he is not aware of any transcendence.

Other attitudes are represented by the three mates. Starbuck, a man “to endure always as now” and “to dwell in all climates”, is a religious man and “uncommonly conscientious”. He is “endued with a deep natural reverence” in face of the mysteries of the world. But whereas Ahab’s reverence becomes defiance, Starbuck’s is succumbing to superstition. He is able to face the “ordinary irrational horrors of the world, yet cannot withstand those more terrific, because more spiritual terrors” (106). Stubb, the second mate, is scarcely aware of supernatural forces; he tries to repress his fears and acts the “good-humored [...] good fellow” (109). While Starbuck is afraid of God, Stubb is afraid of suffering and Flask, the third mate, denies all reality. He is a dare devil without any reverence.

Different attitudes towards the mysteries of the world are also represented by the ships the *Pequod* encounters on its voyage. As with the different races of the harpooners, the ships’ different nationalities are supposed to show the different ways of confronting the mystery of life. This differentiation becomes more substantial when the narrator distinguishes the various possible attitudes of his own people: the pragmatic mastery of reality and reckless exploitation of men and nature on the *Town-Ho* or the dream of prosperity and progress on the *Bachelor*.

Another way to assess the possibilities of facing the unknown is represented in the novel by Ishmael’s meditations in the mast-head and at the helm. In the one he is the pantheistic dreamer who is in danger of forgetting the present reality and may “drop through that transparent air into the summer sea, no more to rise for ever” (149). In his second meditation Ishmael, staring into the fire of the try-works and identifying it with hellfire, is in danger of seeing only the black side of the world. Losing his hold on the tiller he nearly capsizes the ship.

In “The Doubloon” the entire crew takes part in solving the riddle of the doubloon which Ahab has nailed to the mainmast as a reward for who ever first sees *Moby-Dick*. Ahab is the first “to interpret for himself in some monomaniac way whatever significance lurks in [...] the strange figures and inscriptions stamped on it” (402). “There’s something very egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things”, he says: “look here, – three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm

tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the courageous, the undaunted, the victorious fowl, that too, is Ahab; all are Ahab; and this round gold is but the image of the rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self" (403/4). Starbuck's comment on trying to read the pictorial language of the coin is that it "speaks wisely, mildly, truly, but still sadly to me – I will quit it, lest Truth shake me falsely" (404). Stubbs uses his almanac to read the doubloon. With its help the signs of the zodiac become for him "a sermon [...], writ in high heaven, and the sun goes through it every year, and yet comes out of it all alive and heartily. Jolly he, aloft there, wheels through toil and trouble; and so, alow here, does jolly Stubb" (406). Then follow Flask, the Manxman, Queequeg, Fedallah and Pip, and each of them sees his "own mysterious self" in the mirror of the coin. The mystery of the world reveals itself as the mystery of the individual self.

The greatest mystery of the novel is, of course, Moby Dick and, in particular, "the whiteness of the whale" (176). Describing it the narrator turns it into a metaphysical principle. Like Poe's imaginary world, it is beyond space and time. Moby Dick seems to be "ubiquitous" as well as "immortal" (171). In Ahab's encounter with the whale his "bodily woe" at having lost his leg becomes "his intellectual and spiritual exasperation" (172). His revenge becomes a monomania. In his madness he sees the whale as an incarnation of the principle of evil that he feels himself committed to destroy. Yet it is an instrument of God's providence for him as well, impenetrable to man "from Adam down". "Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way?" the narrator asks at the end of his exposition of the whiteness of the whale. "Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness full of meaning, in a white landscape of snows – a colorless, all color of atheism from which we shrink? [...] And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol" (183/4). The whiteness stands for all that remains uncertain and unknown to man and calls forth his fear. The secret of the world remains forever inaccessible. He who tries to find it makes himself guilty and will perish.

As a quest for knowledge of the unknown, *Moby-Dick* also becomes a Faustian story, with Ahab its Faust and Fedallah its Mephistopheles. We do not know if Melville had read Goethe's *Faust* at the time he wrote his

novel, but there are a number of passages that may be read as allusions to the German poet's play. In a conversation between the mates God is talked about as the "old governor" on his "flag-ship" (306). Faust appears as John. The literary source is alluded to when Flask thinks to remember such a story as Stubbs is telling him about John swapping his soul in exchange for the devil's help. Ahab engages the help of Fedallah as Faust does that of Mephistopheles.

In many ways *Moby-Dick* shows man in quest of what hides behind the mask of the phenomena of everyday reality. It is the Promethian quest of the 19th-century Everyman for something beyond his everyday reality, in this particular case the commercial success of the whaling enterprise. It is this which makes Melville's novel a masterpiece.

It is, as was said before, not known if Melville had read Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym* when he wrote *Moby-Dick*. Our short description of the novel has pointed out a number of elements that are reminiscent of the earlier narrative. The same is true with regard to Rimbaud's "Le bateau ivre" and Melville's novel. It is not known if Rimbaud had read it before writing his poem, but it reads as if he had read it.

\* \* \*

It is a different case with Giono and Melville as far as the relationship of the former's novels to those of the American author is concerned. Giono, together with Joan Smith and his friend, Lucien Jacques, translated *Moby Dick* in 1938/1939, but he seems to have been well acquainted with the novel long before. "Bien avant d'entreprendre [ce travail], pendant cinq ou six ans au moins, ce livre a été mon compagnon étranger", he writes after the publication of his translation of the novel and opening his essay-story, *Pour saluer Melville* (3)<sup>13</sup>. Reading Melville, the hills of his native country around Manosque, not far from Marseilles, become the crest of the waves in Melville's oceans. When it darkens the hills and the sea become his "inner space", "nos espaces intérieurs, cette poursuite dans laquelle Melville m'entraînait devenait plus générale en même temps que plus personnelle" (3). His reading had become the means of a real identification with the author and his hero. Giono continues: "Le jet imaginaire fusant au milieu

13 First published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 1940, N° 319, avril 433-458, N° 320, mai 606-632, N° 321, juin 767-786. According to Citron: "Il n'est pas exact que Giono [...] ait lu ce roman 'pendant cinq ou six ans au moins' avant 1936". *Op.cit.*, p. 609. Probably not longer than one or two years before the translation.

des collines pouvait retomber et les eaux illusoires se retirant de mon rêve pouvaient laisser à sec les hautes terres qui me portaient. Il y a au milieu même de la paix (et par conséquent au milieu même de la guerre) de formidables combats dans lesquels on est seul engagé et dont le tumulte est silence pour le reste du monde. On n'a plus besoin d'océans terrestres et de monstres valables pour tous; on a ses propres océans et ses monstres personnels. De terribles mutilations intérieures irriteront éternellement les hommes contre les dieux et la chasse qu'ils font à la gloire divine ne se fait jamais à mains nues" (3/4). He sees himself taking over the part of Melville's hero, seeing in Ahab only another Ishmael: "Quand le soir me laissait seul, je comprenais mieux l'âme de ce héros pourpre qui commande tout le livre. Il marchait avec moi sur les chemins du retour; je n'avais toujours que quelques pas à faire pour le rejoindre et dès la nuit noire tombée, au fond des ténèbres, le devenir. Comme si d'un pas plus long je l'avais atteint et que je sois entré dans sa peau, mon corps se couvrant aussitôt de son corps comme d'un grand manteau; portant son coeur à la place du mien, traînant lourdement moi aussi mes blessures sur les remous d'une énorme bête de l'abîme." Like Melville and his heroes he is on his way of "la dangereuse croisière de ses rêves". "Il hante des mers interdites" (4). The world is unaware of these his struggles, and nothing is left when they are over. "Mais même, dans la plupart des cas, tout se passe dans de si vastes étendues, avec de si énormes monstres qu'il ne reste ni trace ni survivants", and concluding his introductory section with the last sentence of *Moby-Dick*, "et le grand linceul de la mer se roule et se déroule comme il faisait il y a cinq mille ans" (4)<sup>14</sup>.

The particularity of Giono's reading of Melville's novel may be seen in his use of Jacob's battle with the angel as a prefiguration of Melville's own struggles with the mysteries of life. Valentine Pease, a young lady Giono introduces in his story as the captain's daughter, sees Ishmael, identifying him with her father, as Jacob struggling with the angel. From her point of view the struggle is described in a rhetoric that is impregnated with the obsession with which the struggle is fought. "Depuis quinze mois qu'il est dans le large des eaux, il se bat avec l'ange. Il est dans une grande nuit de Jacob et l'aube ne vient pas. Des ailes terriblement dures le frappent, le soulèvent au-dessus du monde, le précipitent, le ressaisissent et l'étouffent. Il n'a pas cessé un seul instant d'être obligé à la bataille. S'il

14 Melville later added an epilogue in which Ishmael tells the story of his escape from the sinking ship. Giono read *Moby-Dick* like this epilogue would not exist.

en a (marre), s'il est rompu, s'il est rompu, s'il tombe sur sa couchette: il se bat avec l'ange; [...] et quand le plomb des grands calmes pèse sur des milliers de milles, que toutes les forces du monde dorment, que même captain Pease s'est écroulé: lui se bat avec cet ange terrible qui éclaire de sa bataille l'impénétrable mystère du mélange des dieux et des hommes. C'est là-dedans que ses yeux voient. C'est de ça qu'ils sont pleins d'images. C'est là qu'ils se colorent d'amertume et de tendresse" (16). And the section ends with a seemingly masochistic happiness about being chosen for the struggle: "Bienheureux ceux qui marchent dans le fouettement furieux des ailes de l'ange" (17), the "bienheureux" reminding the reader of Father Mapple's "Delight is to him" and the repetition and the catalogue that follow.

Before taking leave of his companion on his way to the boat that is to bring him back to America, Giono's Melville notices the unusual clouds:

D'admirables nuages s'étaient élargis comme les ailes d'un oiseau qui plane.

«Qu'est-ce que c'est?» dit-elle.

Il baisse la voix:

«Un ange.

– A qui est-il?

– A moi.

– Gardien, demanda-t-elle?

– Oui, gardien de prison.»

Il fit le geste de se débattre.

«Il vous bat?

– Oh! non, dit-il, c'est tout à fait différent: nous nous battons.

– Adieu», dit-elle. (71).

Melville returns to America to write *Moby-Dick*.

In *Pour saluer Melville*, Giono writes down a dream in which he identifies with Melville and his heroes. It is an imaginary description of what he feels Melville must have felt before or while writing his novel, and also describes what made Giono himself dictate his *Fragments* only four years later. In his imagination he wrote *Fragments* at the same time as his essay-tale<sup>15</sup>. Writing about *Moby-Dick* Giono writes about Melville. He sees Melville writing about himself in all his novels. "Ses titres ne sont en réalité que des sous-titres; le vrai titre pour tous ses livres c'est Melville, Melville, Melville et encore Melville, et toujours Melville. [And he identifies with him when he uses reported speech:] Je m'exprime moi-même; je suis incapable d'exprimer un autre être que moi. Je n'ai pas à créer ce que

15 See his prefatory note (865).

les autres me demandent de créer [...]. Je crée ce que je suis: c'est ça un poète" (33). Giono dramatizes in his story Melville's remark in his letter to Hawthorne about the dollars that damn him and tempt him to write what the publishers expect from him.

There are actually two battles that Melville fights in Giono's dramatization, the one when he goes to sea, the other when writing *Moby-Dick*. Accordingly his signing on in Nantucket and his return from London to America to write the novel are the major scenes in Giono's story. For the first of these scenes he introduced Valentine Pease, for the second, Adelina White whom Melville is supposed to have met on his way from London to Bristol. She is engaged in helping the starving people of Ireland. Melville's struggle is seen as a kind of equivalent to her engagement in the riots of the 1840s. Yet she also represents the landbound view in comparison to that of the seafaring Melville. Melville can make her see the world "beyond" so that she is able to partake of it. When Giono lets Melville describe the landscape they have just passed he does so as Giono does it in his own novels. "Il renvoyait les bois à leur place; ils reculaient, diminuait et se couchaient au bord de l'horizon. Avait-elle bien remarqué les bouleaux avec leur écorce en peau de cheval? – 'Non'. Il appelait les bouleaux. Et les bouleaux venaient. Elle les avait non seulement contre elle comme si elle était dans un champ ordinaire et qu'elle soit appuyée contre l'arbre, elle les avait dans son cœur [...] et en même temps elle pouvait toucher l'écorce, et jamais elle n'avait eu si douce sensation que celle de sa main vide qui s'imaginait toucher le bouleau et y sentir ce qu'il disait" (52). The landscape becomes alive again in his imagination and mirrors his secret dreams: "la laine des champs s'enroula autour des grandioses chevaleries de ses rêves" (53/4).

Late one afternoon they walk in a dense fog when Melville sees himself and his companion passing "une barricade mystérieuse" (56). Giono then uses an unusual comparison for what they experience when they feel the mountains enclosing them. "Ce sont les mammy négresses toutes nues qui jouent comme ça à enfermer lentement leurs petits dans leurs bras; oh! c'est pour eux le plus grand jeu du monde. Ils ont un nom qui veut dire 'plus jamais' [...]. Si on y réfléchit, c'est tellement savant, ça contient si bien la réalisation de tous les désirs humains en un seul que ce jeu doit venir du fond des temps. [...] Vous ne m'enlèverez pas de l'idée que ce sont les vagues de la mer qui apprennent ça aux mammy négresses pendant les après-midi où l'eau tourne inlassablement les pages du grand livre bleu l'une sur l'autre au bord de la plage" (57). The child finds peace in the arms

of the mammy: “Sauvé!” And “Plus jamais” is then used in a quite different meaning as in the “Nevermore” of Poe’s “The Raven”: “Plus jamais nu, plus jamais seul, plus jamais faible, plus jamais froid, plus jamais tout, sauf le bonheur ivre! Et c’est comme ça que les montagnes se sont rejointes derrière notre dos” (58). For Poe the “nevermore” expresses the lover’s disappointment never to meet again his beloved Lenore. For Giono’s Melville it is the joy never more to be exposed to the terrors of individuation again. It is a rather queer, because too obvious, image of returning into the womb again. Yet the “nevermore” of Poe’s “The Raven” asserts itself in the supplementary image of the town. Introducing it Giono refers to another game: dies. “Les hommes et les femmes du monde entier ont construit peu à peu en eux-mêmes cette ville, pierre à pierre et fleur à fleur. Et ils ont construit cette montagne vivante qui sait jouer au vieux jeu du ‘bonheur surprenant’ au jeu du ‘plus jamais’, mais, comme le monde entier est plus savant qu’une négresse [...], au lieu de bras ils nous serrent dans ces glaciers inimaginables et c’est vraiment ‘plus jamais’” (58). For Giono’s Melville the mountains are the world of the heart, the town that of the head. The town is unaware of the mysterious forces that draw man into the abyss.

In his essay-story Giono sees Melville occupied not just with “Une passion personnelle”, in this case his own or Ahab’s idiosyncrasy, but with a “passion générale”. He lets the Melville of his story ask Hawthorne: “N’est-ce pas: imaginez quelqu’un qui, finalement, prendrait l’épée ou le harpon pour commencer un combat contre dieu même!” (74). Giono seems to be looking forward to his fight with God or Jacob’s angel as his Melville did in his imaginary talk with Hawthorne: “Je pense [...] à quelqu’un qui verrait dieu aussi clairement que la baleine blanche au-dessus des eaux et qui, justement, le voyant en toute sa gloire, le connaissant en tous ses mystères, sachant jusqu’où peuvent aller les délires de sa force, mais n’oubliant pas – jamais – les blessures dont ce dieu-là déchire – se précipiterait quand même sur lui et lancerait le harpon” (74). When Giono sends his own boat on the imaginary voyage his captain does not throw the harpoon; wonderingly he looks at the phantoms of his imaginary world.

\* \* \*

In 1944 Giono starts his own imaginary voyage when he dictates his *Fragments d’un paradis (Les anges)*. He calls them a “poem” and does not publish them before 1948. He describes his situation at the time of his dictation with a motto from Alfieri’s *Tirranide*: “Io che per nessun’altra cagione, scriverò se non perché, triste miei tempi mi vietavan di fare.” His

circumstances during the war restricted his activities to writing. Like leaving the town for the mountains in *Pour saluer Melville*, he leaves the world of war for a nature untouched by civilization. Like Poe's imaginary voyages, that of Giono is described in realistic terms. The year and point of departure are not mentioned; yet, once under way, time and location are exactly registered. The captain puts down all the details and measurements of his ship in his diary. As in the case of Poe's stories, the impression of *vraisemblance* is attempted. Yet, it is eventually asserted that the imaginary world the ship is exploring is as real as the one that can be measured.

Though intended and equipped to explore the western part of Graham Land in the Antarctic – at about the time the novel was written –, for the captain this is only a “*pretended destination*” (“*but avoué*”). The captain is aware of the fact, “qu’il s’agit moins ici d’une navigation que d’une nouvelle vie”. He claims that they set out “pour ne pas être changés en bêtes” (895) in the world of war that they leave. Their boat is a three-masted sailing ship. There is radio equipment on board, but it is stowed away and not used. Without radio they are in a world “absolument détachés du reste du monde sans limitation de temps et de fortune” (899). “Notre but est partout; ce que nous cherchons va constamment se dérober et nous fuir.” What lies before them is “l’inconnu; *et le plus grand risque que nous puissions courir c’est la mort, autrement dit, nous ne courons aucun risque*”. The world he left is dying “d’ennui, de détresse, et de pauvreté. Je parle d’une pauvreté d’âme, et d’une *pauvreté de spectacle*” (900). He is looking forward to finding the unknown in order to be saved. “Si nous ne trouvons rien d’inconnu, rentrer au port signifiera pour nous mourir, avec plus de certitude que dans un naufrage” (901).

The main images in which the unknown turns up are three phantastic animals: a bird, a ray and an octopus. About seven weeks after their departure a huge yellow bird drops exhausted on the deck. The cook has the impression that a huge flame flicked up beside him when it came down. Nobody is able to identify the bird. Like the animals the ship meets later on, it is of many colors, and difficult to describe. Hour, the biologist of the ship, is going to sketch and to conserve it. Yet the cook gets hold of the dead bird and eats it, thereupon showing symptoms of an unusual kind of small-pox. It is not an albatross such as was killed by Coleridge's mariner who was punished for sacrilege. It is an image of Lucifer, and the cook is punished because he takes the bird, that proves to be undecaying, for reality. This is Giono's way of transferring a well known literary image and myth into his own imaginary world.

The fall of the bird is only a prelude to the meeting with a monstrous ray shortly afterwards. Besides its unusual size – about a quarter mile in extension – the major characteristics of the ray are its colors and its smell. The colors are scintillating and various, like these of the little animals the cook had gathered before and similar to these of the bird. The smell had already appeared before a storm at the beginning of their voyage. “Elle n’avait de rapport avec rien de ce que l’on pouvait connaître. [...] Elle augmentait la solitude, parce qu’elle parlait de choses totalement inconnues, sans commune mesure avec l’homme. Cela pouvait être aussi bien l’odeur d’un énorme animal, que l’odeur d’une énorme plante ou d’un énorme dieu. [...] Il n’y avait qu’une chose certaine: c’est qu’elle était une odeur de vie” (874). The smell did not only announce the storm but was a first sign of the appearance of the gigantic ray. The smell reminded them of huge fields of withering daffodils, and its intensity soon turned to surfeit. It was “une odeur inquiétante” (886). As the different members of the *Pequod’s* crew in Melville’s novel give their opinion on the meaning of the doubloon and only see the mystery of their individual selves, so those of *L’Indien*, Giono’s ship, interpret the imaginary ray and its smell in terms of their individual secret ideas of arcadia. It is a hell (“l’Enfer”, 889) for them. A final interpretation of the smell is given by the captain in his talk with Larreguy, his first officer. According to his explanation the smell is not that of the ray but of the fields in which he feeds on the bottom of the sea. He is reminded of the corpses that covered the battle fields of the war. Giono had endured World War I for four years as a common soldier. He “ne peu[t] pas oublier la guerre”. “L’horreur de ces quatre ans est toujours en moi” Pierre de Boisdeffre quotes him as saying<sup>16</sup>. Accordingly, Larreguy thinks that the smell of the fish had given his captain cause *to be afraid*. The captain adds: “Ou d’espérer” (912). That, of course, can only be understood in terms of Giono’s belief in the natural cycle of life and death. In connection with the dead of World War I it can be understood in terms of Igor Strawinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps* as a celebration of spring by dancing to death, prefiguring the soldiers’ marching to death believing they are fighting for a new world<sup>17</sup>.

Having identified a dead whale’s wound as caused by a gigantic octopus, the captain offers the crew a drink from an old bottle of Pernod. The drink encourages them to look beyond their tedious, everyday reality.

16 Boisdeffre, *op.cit.*, pp. 24/5.

17 See Modris Ekstein, *Rites of Spring. The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, Boston, Houghten Mifflin, 1989.

“Notre esprit a besoin d’espace et de lumière, de cieux embrasés et de l’ivresse que toutes ces choses donnent. Un certain temps”, the captain said, reaching for the Pernod, “c’est là qu’on les chercha” (964) and later continues: “La plupart, s’ils deviennent des hommes de qualité, ne pourront plus vivre qu’en imagination. *Il faut qu’ils sachent que la réalité est plus fantastique que l’imagination*” (967). It is under these conditions that they meet the octopus. The captain finally confesses and declares that he has not gone on a cruise for scientific purposes. “Je suis parti me promener sur les lieux mêmes de ce qui a dû être dans le temps un prodigieux paradis, je veux que nous soyons les témoins qui pourraient certifier que nous avons encore *droit au délire capable d’enrichir les vies les plus longues et de faire aimer les approches mêmes de la mort*” (967). What they finally see is a cloud of birds, albatrosses mainly and petrels, first settling down on the gigantic octopus and cleaning his skin, then pouring down in columns to find their death in the ooze that emanates from it. As in the case of the ray, the apparition is accompanied by the smell of spring. It looks like “un jeu monstrueux et admirable qui se jouait entre l’immense calmar blanc et toute la foule des oiseaux aussi blancs que lui” (975). “Cette infernale puissance marine”, Giono’s Moby Dick, seems to explain “des choses sombres”, the captain thinks. Yet, “Malgré tout notre sens, nous ne comprenons encore qu’à demi-mot, et c’est déjà bougrement effrayant comme ça” (978). What they experience remains finally inexplicable. They are mere on-lookers of the gigantic turmoil: “mais tout était là, comme l’immuable présence du ciel et de la mer. Rien ne paraissait insolite mais au contraire tout était extraordinairement logique et plus encore que l’étrangeté du spectacle tous les hommes oubliant le temps regardaient devant eux comme on regarde sans se lasser la mer vide qui vit paisiblement entre les quatre horizons nus” (981). They see the mysteries, but they are not able to explain them. What they see is a game as well as a battle between the powers of the sky and those of the sea. It is Giono’s equivalent of William Blake’s “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”<sup>18</sup>.

18 M. Belghmi interprets this marriage (or rather, these marriages) as cosmogonical myths: “Ces noces du calmar et des oiseaux ont la puissance des mythes cosmogoniques, elles célèbrent l’union du ciel et de la mer et se déploient sous le signe du renouveau” (177). In accordance with her interpretation of Giono’s imaginary voyage as “un voyage initiatique” (16) to a renewal of his creative life, “le calmar géant est l’image grandiose que Giono appelle pour conjurer toutes les menaces qui l’oppressent, elle est l’image triomphante des formes créatrices qui l’habitent, mais elle est aussi l’image nostalgique du temps mythique des origines suscitées par le rêve obsédant d’une totalité perdue” (181).

The captain makes it a point that they had not brought along any equipment to fight the monster and would not have been willing to do so, knowing, as Blake did, that it was only a matter of imagination. When asked by Blake's poet if "a firm persuasion that a thing is so, make it so?" Isaiah answers: "All poets believe it does, & in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of any thing"<sup>19</sup>. Giono undoubtedly is of the poet's persuasion.

In all three cases of meeting the imaginary animals angels are of the party. Their strange colors and the light they seem to bear suggest Lucifer, the bearer of light and fallen angel. Right at the beginning of the story the evening sky is described "comme si une aile de feu y eût lentement déployé ses plumes" (688). It looked all the time "qu'on côtoyait de chaque côté, et à la lisière de la peau, des choses mystérieuses pour lesquelles on n'avait que deux mots qui pouvaient les désigner, deux petits mots ridicules auxquels personne n'attachait d'importance: l'Enfer et le Paradis" (893). In the captain's talk with Larreguy, the unknown is identified with an angel. Imaginarily embodied in bird, fish or octopus, so the captain thinks, it allows "de le précipiter par l'imagination aussi bien dans *les gouffres du ciel*, que dans *les gouffres de la mer*" (910). In Melville's *Moby Dick* Giono had seen the angel who fought with Jacob. In *Fragments* it is by no means Biblical angels they see; they are rather those of Emanuel Swedenborg and William Blake, authors mentioned by the captain. Giono's bird, ray and octopus are fallen angels, Lucifers; their world is a fallen world, a "paradise lost". Yet, they are more; they represent natural forces; their battles are the battles of life, entailing destruction and rebirth, Poe's destruction and discovery (according to Marie Bonaparte's interpretation: return into the womb and individuation). According to Pierre Citron "Ces anges, symboles des combats de la création, ces êtres qui appartenaient à sa mythologie privée, sans rien de chrétien, existaient pour Giono comme des forces tantôt agressives, tantôt bienfaisantes"<sup>20</sup>. The strange thing is that whereas Giono sees Melville engaged in the battle as Jacob with his angel, the captain and the crew of *L'Indien* remain observers.

Man's situation is defined in *Fragments* in two other episodes. The first one is *L'Indien's* visit to Tristan-da-Cunha. The islands were already

19 *Blake's Poems and Prophecies*, ed. Max Plowman, London, Everyman's Library, 1927, pp.47/8.

20 P. Citron, *op.cit.*, p.329.

visited by Poe's Pym who gives a detailed description, consisting of quotations from earlier travellers. Giono's Tristan follows a similar descriptive technique as far as the facts are concerned, yet is rather to be compared to Poe's Tsalal as far as it represents an imaginary world. The episode is determined by Guinard's, the ship's stock-keeper's adventure of climbing the volcano of the island. On top of the mountain he "se mit à regarder avec une jouissance infinie le vide le plus absolu qui puisse exister sur terre" (939). At night he arranges himself on the ground until he succeeds, "à faire disparaître le monde autour de lui". He now feels part of the cosmos. "Les étoiles se refermaient soigneusement autour de lui, l'entourant d'un globe total. Le silence était si parfait qu'au bout de très peu temps il commença à entendre le grésillement même des étoiles" (944). He listens to "la chanson générale des étoiles" (945) and experiences it as part "de l'ordre général des choses" (106). The crew's meetings with the phantastic world of the bird, the ray, and the kraken are encounters with cosmic forces. Yet the members of the crew are observers only. Guinard feels himself taking part in their interplay. Yet it is a very passive part he plays.

It is also passivity with which *Fragments* end. On its way to the Falkland Islands a seemingly endless dead calm and an equally endless rain set in. They are no longer able to navigate: "Cela nous est parfaitement égal qu'il y ait la mer sans limites, et que la pluie couvre hier, aujourd'hui, et demain, nous pourrions tout supporter, même de ne rien voir jamais rien d'autre que le bout de notre proue repoussant de chaque côté sa lèvre d'eau, ce que nous voudrions surtout *c'est gouverner parce que gouverner nous donne la certitude d'être aussi vivant que la pluie et que la mer [...]*. Car alors ce petit monde que nous habitons obéit à la roue. [...] ce qu'il nous faut: *c'est gouverner; pas sur quelque chose*" (1013/4). Unable to navigate their ship, they are prisoners of the calm and the rain, "*il y a ce fait aussi important que les grandes étendues illimitées de la mer, et le déversement illimité de la pluie, qu'on agit, qu'on pénètre dans les choses, et qu'on conserve le sentiment de la liberté*" (1014)<sup>21</sup>. They are not living as long as they do not act. Yet there is something else for Giono beyond life and death, that is: having a soul. "[...] Il n'est pas question ici de vie ou de mort, il est question de *la chose la plus terrifiante à imaginer pour un homme: c'est d'être inanimé.*" C'est pourquoi tous les hommes du

21 For parallels to Albert Camus's *La Peste* (1947) and Giono's *Le Hussard sur le Toit* (1948), Giono's pest novel, in the case of pestilence see Boisdeffre, *op.cit.*, pp. 81-84.

navire s'empresstent de se découvrir une âme" (1015). These are the last words of the novel. Giono's Melville had found a soul in Adelina (40) and had seen himself driven to write *Moby-Dick* to find his own soul. The men of *L'Indien* have not discovered the unknown; they still are in quest of their own souls. Seeing all of Melville's novels as novels about Melville, the quest of *L'Indien*'s crew may be seen as Giono's own quest for his soul. He, like his heroes, has lost his wings<sup>22</sup>. Drawing on traditional imagery, Giono tries once more to revitalize the myths of cosmic forces. Yet their world is, or rather was, his paradise. It is only "fragments" he now finds on his imaginary voyage<sup>23</sup>. His search into the unknown of its realms no longer supplies a meaning to live by. It doesn't help him to find his soul "pour ne pas être changé en bête" (895)<sup>24</sup>.

It is a long way from Poe to Giono, yet it is a logical way. No longer finding his meaning in transcendental origins Poe obsessively tried to find it in the imaginary world of his art. Melville took up the quest, yet with an obsession that had become madness when he let his hero imagine the unknown in the ferocious brute that mutilated him. Giono calls up the

22 Boisdeffre, *op.cit.*, p.79: "Ses héros ont perdu cette allégresse, cet optimisme inconditionnel, ces ailes d'archange."

23 Originally Giono intended to continue the story of the *Fragments*. There is a second ship that was to meet *L'Indien* again. He finally decided to publish it as the fragment it was when he stopped his dictation at about May 20, 1944. Yet the title may well be understood as concerning the contents of the story. Citron's comment is: "Ou le roman a été conçu dès l'origine comme devant avoir l'aspect d'une série de fragments, ou plutôt le terme s'applique moins au texte qu'à son contenu: le paradis existe sur terre, mais n'est accessible que par fragments" (368).

24 In *The Ariostos* ([1964] London, Jonathan Cape: rev. [4th]ed. 1980), a collection of aphorisms, the British novelist John Fowles comes very close to Giono's use of the image of the drifting ship. In a section called "The Wreck and the Raft" Fowles sees "humanity", having lost paradise, "on its raft [...] on the endless ocean. From his present dissatisfaction man reasons that there was some catastrophic wreck in the past, before which he was happy; some golden age, some Garden of Eden. He also reasons that somewhere ahead lies a promised land, a land without conflict. Meanwhile, he is miserably *en passage*; this myth lies deeper than religious faith" (15). But "there will be no promised land" (16). To find paradise in the regions of the unknown is exposed as myth: "The old myth that his raft, his world, is especially favoured and protected now seems ridiculous. [...] Inwards and outwards the prospect before him is terrifying" (17). For a detailed interpretation of this section see Lothar Fietz, *Fragmentarisches Existieren. Wandlungen des Mythos von der verlorenen Ganzheit in der Geschichte philosophischer, theologischer und literarischer Menschenbilder*, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1994, p.229f.

mythic world of ancient Greece and Rome and a wide range of literature of cosmic battles as images of man's destiny. His mariners take up the imaginary voyages that led Poe's and Melville's heroes into destruction. The quest of Giono's heroes does not end in destruction as did those of his predecessors, yet it ends in the void of the calm and behind the veil of the rain in a world adrift. "Participer à l'expérience dionysiaque, c'est, pour Giono," so Boisdeffre, "le seul moyen d'accomplir sa destinée d'homme [...]. Il exalte le *chant du monde*"<sup>25</sup>. Guinard experiences a cosmic song. *Fragments* was dictated at a time when Giono's idea of living according to the forces of life in nature was dismissed as illusion. For his later books it is true then, as Boisdeffre formulates it, that "du moment où il prit conscience de la malfaisance des hommes, l'auteur des *Grandeurs libres*, se détournant de l'audacieuse Cosmogenèse qu'il avait imaginée, cessa de demander à la Nature plus qu'elle ne pouvait lui apporter. Puisqu'elle s'était montrée impuissante devant l'Histoire, elle aussi se trouva démystifiée"<sup>26</sup>. "Mais le Christ ne semble pas être jamais apparu à Jean Giono. Le monde qu'habite l'écrivain est le vieux monde païen et proto-historique, le vieil univers *fellahique* qui a précédé la technique"<sup>27</sup>. In *Fragments* it has lost its power beyond his imagination.

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The imaginary voyage to the unknown has a longer history than that we traced in this paper. Citron mentions Homer, Dante, Cervantes and others<sup>28</sup>. One, yet significant example can be found in Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani* (1505). The hermit tells one of the young men that are discussing the different aspects of love: "Tanto è largo e cupo il pelago della divina provvidenza, o figliulo, che la nostra umanità, in esso mettendosi, né termine alcuno vi truova, né in mezzo può fermarsi; perciò che vela di mortale ingegno tanto oltre non porta e fune di nostro giudicio, per molto che ella vi si stenda, non basta a pigliar fondo" (book 3, chapt. 12)<sup>29</sup>. From the beginning the image implies the failure of the quest.

25 Boisdeffre, *op.cit.*, p.54.

26 *Ibid.*, p.78.

27 *Ibid.*, p.89.

28 P. Citron, *op.cit.*, p.369.

29 Pietro Bembo, *Prose della volgar lingua. Gli Asolani. Rime*, Turin, Istituto della Letteratura Italiana, (1966) 1989, p.481.

Failure is also predicated by Goethe's Mephistopheles. Asked by Faust to help him to conjure up Helena and Paris before the emperor, he says:

Ungern entdeck ich höheres Geheimnis. –  
Göttinnen thronen hehr in Einsamkeit,  
Um sie kein Ort, noch weniger eine Zeit;  
Von ihnen sprechen ist Verlegenheit.  
Die Mütter sind es!  
[...]  
Und hättest du den Ozean durchschwommen,  
Das Grenzenlose dort geschaut,  
Du sähst doch etwas! sähst wohl in der Grüne  
Gestillter Meere streichende Dolphine,  
Sähst Wolken ziehen, Sonne, Mond und Sterne –  
Nichts wirst du sehn in ewig leerer Ferne,  
Den Schritt nicht hören, den du tust,  
Nichts Festes finden, wo du ruhst!

Faust answers:

Nur immer zu! wir wollen es ergründen:  
In deinem Nichts hoff ich das All zu finden.  
(II,ii,5)<sup>30</sup>

What he finds is the tripod to conjure up chimeras. Waiting in perpetual calm and rain, the phantoms born up by the imagination of *L'Indien's* crew remain but chimeras.

PS: The foregoing paper was already in press when I read Bruno Bontempelli's *L'Arbre du voyageur*, 1992. It should be mentioned as another voyage in search of the unknown, this time not ending, as in *Fragments*, but starting with a calm before a mysterious island. The vessel is again a three-masted sailing ship, but the time is the 18th century. Attempting to reach the island it is wrecked. As in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, each of the characters represents different attitudes in the common quest. The motto of the novel is taken from one of Poe's imaginary voyages.

30 Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Die Faustdichtungen*, ed. Ernst Beutler, Zürich, Artemis, 1950, pp. 338/9, Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche, vol. 5.

## Zusammenfassung

In der langen Geschichte der imaginären Reise in noch unbekannte Welten als Suche nach dem Sinn alles Seienden bilden Edgar Poes *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), Herman Melvilles *Moby-Dick* (1851) und Jean Gionos *Fragments d'un paradis* (1948) eine besonders aufschlußreiche Werkgruppe. Die Reise in die zu seiner Zeit noch unerforschte Welt des Südpols gibt Poe die Gelegenheit zu dem Versuch, diese in seiner Imagination in Erscheinung treten zu lassen. Des Helden "Entdeckung" führt zu seiner "Vernichtung". Melville läßt seinen Protagonisten durch die Weltmeere nach Moby Dick, dem weißen Wal, jagen, der für ihn zur Verkörperung alles dessen geworden war, was ihn an der Welt leiden machte. Das Seil der Harpune reißt ihn mit dem getroffenen Wal in die Tiefe. Im Wissen um die imaginären Schiffsreisen Poes und Melvilles schickt Giono seinen Kapitän mit dessen Mannschaft zur Zeit des Zweiten Weltkriegs auf einem Segelschiff auf eine imaginäre Forschungsreise in die Gewässer der Antarktis. Auf ihrer Fahrt erfährt die Mannschaft das dionysische Ringen der Naturelemente und gelingt es einem Mitglied der Besatzung, sich in Einklang mit dem Kosmos zu setzen. Doch diese Erlebnisse bleiben "Fragmente eines Paradieses". Die Fahrt führt zwar nicht wie die ihrer Vorgänger bei Poe und Melville in die Zerstörung, doch treibt das Schiff in einer nicht endenwollenden Windstille und in anhaltendem Regen dahin, ohne daß die Richtung bestimmt werden könnte. Die Geschichte der vergeblichen Suche nach dem Unbekannten führt in der Folge der drei Werke von der Unmöglichkeit, das Gesuchte imaginär selbst zu schaffen, über den im Wahnsinn endenden Versuch, den Zugang zu ihm zu erzwingen, zu einer Dokumentation der Hilflosigkeit des Menschen, in der Begegnung mit der ihm geheimnisvoll bleibenden Welt sich selbst zu finden.

