

ALAIN-FOURNIER: HIS LIFE AND HIS WORK

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Chapter   | Page |
|---|------|
| I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .                                 | 1    |
| II. BIOGRAPHY . . . . .                                   | 3    |
| III. ALAIN-FOURNIER AND EDUCATION . . . . .               | 17   |
| IV. ALAIN-FOURNIER AND RELIGION . . . . .                 | 21   |
| V. ALAIN-FOURNIER AND AFFAIRS OF THE HEART . . . . .      | 25   |
| VI. ALAIN-FOURNIER AND LITERARY MOVEMENTS . . . . .       | 33   |
| VII. ALAIN-FOURNIER AND OTHER AUTHORS . . . . .           | 36   |
| VIII. ALAIN-FOURNIER AND HIS WRITINGS . . . . .           | 41   |
| IX. ALAIN-FOURNIER AND <u>LE GRAND MEAULNES</u> . . . . . | 50   |
| X. ALAIN-FOURNIER AND IMAGERY . . . . .                   | 56   |
| XI. CONCLUSIONS . . . . .                                 | 66   |
| SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .                           | 68   |

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

When an author creates an unforgettable place for himself in the world of literature with just one major work, there is something to be said about this person. Henri Alban Fournier was such a man. His novel, Le Grand Meaulnes, was published just one year before his untimely death in 1914. This book is a landmark in the area of French adventure stories. Many authors have tried to imitate the style employed by the author of this charming story of youth: its dreams and its realities.

Henri did not ever want to lose the essence of youth. Writers and critics have discussed the viewpoints concerning adolescence established by Fournier in his work. In The Quest of Alain-Fournier, Robert Gibson says that Fournier achieved all that he set out to do in Le Grand Meaulnes: he expressed the tragic impact of life on the dreams of childhood; he marked the end of youth; and he immortalized every memory that he held dear.<sup>1</sup>

Another point of discussion concerns the "other landscape" which was Fournier's term for the unknown. He was sure there was an existence beyond this life, but he was not sure just what it was. He

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Gibson, The Quest of Alain-Fournier (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), p. 210. Each quotation taken from this work will be identified by the author's last name and the page number following the quotation in the body of the thesis.

never gave up searching for it. He would not accept answers given by such organizations as the Catholic church, but preferred to remain open-minded and to continue looking for what he called the "other landscape."

The work of an author is best understood by a complete study of the events in his life that affected his writing. This paper is such a study.

Alain-Fournier was fond of using comparisons to put his point across. This paper is also to be a study of the imagery employed by the author, especially in his novel Le Grand Meaulnes.

The study is organized in the following manner: a biography followed by three chapters explaining some of the events of Alain-Fournier's life which influenced his writing; two chapters discussing the effects of literary movements and other authors on Alain-Fournier; a chapter dealing with the letters and minor writings of Alain-Fournier; a chapter giving a summary of Le Grand Meaulnes; a chapter discussing the imagery of Le Grand Meaulnes; and a chapter stating the conclusions of the study.

## Chapter II

### BIOGRAPHY

Henri Alban Fournier was born in the home of his maternal grandparents in the village of La Chapelle d'Angillon on October 3, 1886.

Later on he was to take the name Alain-Fournier for writing purposes when he discovered there were several Henri Fourniers in his day. His father and mother were both school teachers although his mother did not start teaching until after she had been married for several years.

'Auguste', as Henri's father was called, was employed as an assistant schoolmaster in the small hamlet of Gué de la Pierre, located a few miles from La Chapelle, when he met and married Albanie Barthe, the only child of Matthieu and Adeline Barthe. The Barthes lived in La Chapelle which is on the main highway from Paris to Bourges.

Two days after the birth of Henri, his father was transferred to the village Marçais, located in the same district. Henri was to spend his first five years here, where his father was instructor in the school. While the family was living at Marçais, Henri's closest life-long friend was to come into his life. His sister, Isabelle, was born on July 16, 1889. "It was mainly the admiration of his sister which permitted Fournier to play the spoiled child, the leader of games, and the adventurous hero."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Robert Champigny, Portrait of a Symbolist Hero: An Existential Study Based on the Work of Alain-Fournier (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), p. 32.

The first really important event in Henri's life occurred on October 1, 1891, when his family moved south to the small village of Epineuil-le-Fleuriel which is at the other end of the Cher department from La Chapelle d'Angillon. Epineuil would serve as the model for Henri's Sainte-Agathe in Le Grand Meaulnes.

The family lived in the schoolhouse at which 'Auguste' taught. Madame Fournier started teaching the second year of their stay at Epineuil. Henri, age five at the time of the move, was to remember the 'Red Room', so called because of its red velvet upholstery. It was the best room in the house, and it was here that the family treasures were kept.

The attics were the special domain of the children. They would go there to read or to play. The whole family enjoyed reading the book, David Copperfield. Henri had particularly enjoyed Robinson Crusoe. A subscription for one year to Le Petit Français Illustré was to introduce Henri and Isabelle to "Willie, l'écolier anglais"--an English school boy with a bandaged head. The subscription ran out in the middle of the story so the children had to imagine what happened to him.

"A great deal of Alain-Fournier's sense of the world's mystery was due to his own impressionable nature, his sheltered childhood which allowed him to people the outside world with dreams, and also his early visits to the strange, brooding Sologne countryside. . ." (Gibson, p. 123). Henri was impressed by the wandering players who would come to perform in the small square by the village church. He was moved by visits made with his mother to the 'show piece' houses of the village, particularly Madame Benoist's where he would play with Alfred, the son



of Madame Benoist, while their mothers conversed about the village happenings. The feelings of peace and well-being Henri felt during these visits were never to be equalled at any other time in his life.

The childhood of Fournier has been described as ". . . comfortable, but not wealthy, happy, but somewhat strict" (Gibson, p. 118). The community in which the Fournier children grew up was composed of people who were neither widely read nor widely traveled, and who lived by the simple rules of conduct. The railway was still new at this time, and any trip beyond the next town was an adventure even for the adults in the village.

Summers for the Fournier family were spent at the grandparents at La Chapelle. While there, the family would make trips to the birth place of Monsieur Fournier at Nançay to visit his brother-in-law, Florent Raimbault, who kept a large general store. Henri's uncle and aunt Augustine were the parents of eight daughters, including Marie-Rose, the loveliest and best loved. Henri was to write of his childhood: "Ce qui m'y a intéressé, ça m'a jamais été ni les gens, ni peut-être le pays, mais probablement mon enfance."<sup>3</sup>

Henri had his first contact with Paris before his twelfth birthday, when he left his family to study at the lycée Voltaire. By 1902, Henri and Isabelle were both boarding students: Henri at the Lycée Lakanal in Paris, and Isabelle at the Lycée de Jeunes Filles in Moulins. Henri wrote to his parents from Lakanal on the sixteenth of October,

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<sup>3</sup>Clément Borgal, Alain-Fournier, Classiques du XX<sup>e</sup> Siècle, 22 (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1955), p. 45.

1905: "Je m'exerce cette année à ne pas penser, à ne pas sentir, à n'être que: 'un candidat à l'Ecole Normale'."<sup>4</sup>

A close relationship between Henri and Jacques Rivière was to have its beginning during these days at Lakanal. Jacques was a boy with a more serious nature than most boys his age and was a young man with a sense of propriety and high moral purpose.

As they became better acquainted, Henri and Jacques began to realize all that they had in common. They had long talks concerning the joys and sorrows of childhood and formed the nucleus of a small group of friends who delighted in discussing the current literature of the day. They admired the writings of Claudel, Gide, and Rimbaud, and they were particularly impressed by the Symbolist school of writing. They had been introduced to this movement suddenly at Christmas time in 1903, when one of their teachers, a Monsieur Francisque Vial, read to their class "Tel qu'en Songe" by Henri Régner.

Symbolism was a movement in literature that started as a protest against materialism. The symbolist writers affirmed a belief in a world beyond the senses.

Jacques and Henri were to become more and more united because of long conversations they had while students at Lakanal. It is hard to imagine two men of such opposite spirits relating so well to each other. Jacques was such a skeptic, and he was to write to Henri on September 7, 1905: "C'est ici que je sais la différence sans doute essentielle entre

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<sup>4</sup>Lettres d'Alain-Fournier à sa Famille (Paris: Emile-Paul Frères, 1940), p. 122.

nous deux: "Nous n'accordons pas à l'ironie la même valeur."<sup>5</sup> There was no discord between the two friends, except the deepening of the suffering and solitude concerning Henri and for this there would be no human solution that Jacques could help with. Henri was to write to Jacques on October 4, 1905: "Je me sens de moins en moins médiocre en face des hommes et des champs."<sup>6</sup>

Henri did write to his parents and to Jacques in 1905 hinting that he would like to be a writer. He wrote his parents in March, "I want to write book upon book for you about all that I have seen and felt in that little patch of land which was the world for us" (Gibson, p. 38). In August he mentions to Jacques a possible novel which he has spoken of several times and states: "Dès mes jours anciens d'enfance à la campagne, de nuits dans les dortoirs, le projet se dessinait dans ma tête, projet que je n'osais pas même m'avouer à moi-même-d'écrire."<sup>7</sup> He was first thinking of becoming a poet, but the ideas that kept coming to him seemed to be ideas for a novel.

In October, 1902, Henri's parents had been transferred from Epineuil to the little village of Menetou-Ratel, thirty-two miles to the north-east of Bourges. In the summer of 1903, they again moved: this time to La Chapelle beside 'Maman' Barthe.

Henri's novel and his life were both greatly influenced by a

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<sup>5</sup>Correspondance--J. Rivière et Alain-Fournier (1905-1914), Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée. Vol. 1, (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 56.

<sup>6</sup>J. M. Delettrez, Alain-Fournier et le Grand Meaulnes (Paris, Editions Emile-Paul Frères, 1954), p. 159.

<sup>7</sup>Correspondance, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 31.

young lady, Yvonne de Q, who was to become Yvonne de Galais in Le Grand Meaulnes. He saw her for a short time in the late spring of 1905, and then once more in 1913. When he knew that Yvonne could not be his, Henri searched for love with several girls, but none could ever fill the place in his heart that he had created for Yvonne.

The summer of 1905, Henri had another experience that was to affect his life in a permanent manner. He went to London to learn English in preparation for the Ecole Normale examination which he would take the next year.

His job in England was that of translating and classifying letters, and it was exciting at first, but proved to be dull routine work as the summer progressed. He missed his sister, Isabelle, and wrote his parents asking them to tell her to write him long letters, for that was his only source of joy in England. He also missed his French bread and wine.

Henri missed his friends. This trip to England was to be the beginning of a long separation of Henri and Jacques but also the beginning of a correspondence which was begun during this time when Henri was in London, and Jacques in Bordeaux, where he had obtained a "bourse de licence." Henri wrote Jacques once about missing a life on the sea: "je regrette de n'être pas enseigne sur ce bateau, de ne pas vivre une vie en uniforme noir, autoritaire et rude à travers la mer, pour aller un jour demander à Toulon la main d'une hautaine jeune fille blonde, dont le père a traversé cinq fois l'Océan."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

He admired the distinctive traits of the English which he found to be "réserve, correction, sobriété de paroles et de tenue, vie intérieure."<sup>9</sup> It has been stated that this stay taught him of himself-- of his literary ambitions, of his love for his native countryside and the lost Yvonne (Gibson, p. 51).

Henri returned from London to Nançay, and then in October he returned to Lakanal to prepare for the Ecole Normale examination which was to be the next July.

At this time in his life, Fournier felt that there was a separation between him and his parents as he was looking for his own way of life. He wrote to his sister:

Ma seul remords va à mes parents. Depuis longtemps j'ai cessé de voir avec leurs yeux. Et je ne réaliserai pas ce qui était leur idéal et pour quoi ils ont donné beaucoup d'argent. J'ai pourtant essayé de leur donner cette joie sans me détourner de ma vie.<sup>10</sup>

He did remain close to his parents, if not in person, then by letter.

The novel that Henri had been thinking about was to take a long time to become a finished product. He worked on it for seven years and included phrases from it in a letter to Isabelle in March, 1906.

When the fall school term began in 1906, Henri again went to Paris to prepare to retake the Ecole Normale examination the next year. He had company this time because Isabelle entered the lycée Fenelon, and 'Maman' Barthe, alone, since the death of her husband, consented to leave La Chapelle and accompany her two grandchildren. They rented an apartment, and 'entre-sol', at Number 60, rue Mazarine.

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<sup>9</sup>Lettres. . . à sa famille, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

During this time, Henri studied at the famous boys school, Louis-le-Grand, and was introduced to literary society at the Café Vachette. He found it disappointing because there was a lot of small talk and not enough brilliant discussions on new literary movements as he had hoped.

At twenty-one years of age, Henri reported for military duty with the twenty-third regiment of the Dragoons at Vincennes on October 2, 1907. The cavalry seemed too rough for him; so, with the intercession of some friends he transferred to the infantry at La Tour Maubourg, Les Invalides. Although it appears that he did not like military life, he did try to be a good soldier. He wrote to his parents in June, 1908, telling them what his captain had said about his maturity: "Voilà Fournier qui se fait homme! Ce n'est plus l'enfant qui nous est venu au mois d'octobre."<sup>11</sup>

Henri was eventually successful in the officer qualifying test and was sent to school at Laval on the Mayenne river in the west of France. The surroundings were pleasant, but he still felt out of place. He wrote to a friend that he was so disgusted with military life that he had twice tried to resign his commission. While he was in this mood, he composed a prose poem, "La Femme Empoisonnée," which was completed in December, 1908, but was not published until long after his death. He completed his training at Laval and was sent with the rank of second Lieutenant to the town of Mirande, in the Gers department in the extreme southwest of France.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

It is known that as an officer he felt a genuine compassion for his men. In May, 1909, he wrote to his parents: ". . . il y a des choses que je ne ferai jamais aux hommes, des supplices que je ne leur ferai pas endurer, des humiliations qu'il est d'usage de leur faire subir, qu'ils ne subiront pas sur mon commandement."<sup>12</sup>

He was so lonely on arriving at Mirande that he agreed to share his living quarters with a fellow junior officer, an athletic man who gave him boxing lessons. Fournier was also studying English while at Mirande, for he still had not given up hope of receiving a licence. Other than studying, he spent his off hours going to the Tennis Club, "insupportablement correct et élégant" as he described it in a letter to his mother.

Henri went on a long cycle trip through Tarbes, Pau, Laruns, and Eaux Bonnes at Easter-time in 1909. He traveled through the mountains which had been beckoning to him since his arrival in Mirande. He then journeyed to Lourdes on his trip. A description of his feelings about the city can best be given by noticing how he felt after tasting the water at the fountain: "L'eau était froide et bonne, mais quel était ce goût que j'aurais voulu y trouver et que je n'ai pas encore senti."<sup>13</sup> He resolved to return to Lourdes soon.

While he was in the service, his parents were transferred to schools in Paris and so his home was now lost in the past. "He had one more world to recapture in the magic of art" (Gibson, p. 107).

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 336-7.

The family life of Henri had also been affected by an event of August 24, 1909. His close school friend and writing companion, Jacques Rivière, became his brother-in-law. Jacques and Isabelle were married in the great church of Saint-Germain-des Prés where Henri had once followed Yvonne. He had written them before their marriage saying that he hoped their love would be a refuge for his torment, but in seeing them when he was on leave, he sensed that he was asking more than he had a right to expect, or they the power to give (Gibson, p. 110). The marriage of Jacques and Isabelle did not separate them from Henri.

Henri finished his tour of duty with the army on September 25, 1909. Instead of returning to his beloved countryside and La Chapelle as one might think he would, he went directly to Paris where he wanted to rest and think about what he wanted to do with his life. He found a job; not what he would want ideally, but more pleasant than many. He worked as a newspaper reporter for a Paris daily newspaper which is no longer in existence, the Paris Journal. His job was rather uncommon, in that he wrote a daily column of literary gossip. During this time he failed once again the examination for the licence d'anglais. While working for the newspaper, he became acquainted with numerous writers and artists including Charles Péguy, Marguérite Audoux, and Jean Giraudoux. Henri and Giraudoux played rugby for the Paris Université club.

An interesting sidelight concerning the now famous people with whom Henri became acquainted concerns a young American that he tutored in French. A student from Harvard, he wanted to improve his knowledge of the French language and literature. When asked to recall his memories of his tutor, T. S. Eliot spoke of his exquisite refinement, his quiet humor and his great personal charm (Gibson, p. 159).



In the spring of 1910, Henri, Jacques, and Isabelle found new living quarters at Number 2, rue Cassini, in the Observatory quarter of Paris. Outwardly, life seemed to be one great game for Henri, and he, himself, still a child (Gibson, p. 158). During this time, Henri became a contributor to the Nouvelle Revue Française which had been established by a group of seven writers including André Gide, Jacques Copeau, and André Ghéhon, who were wanting to encourage new tendencies in writing and wished to set up a literary school.

Henri was continually working on and thinking about the novel that he was writing. The last important event that was to influence the yet unfinished work occurred on August 23, 1911, when a daughter was born to Isabelle. She was christened Jacqueline. "His collection of experiences was now complete--infancy, childhood, youth and manhood, dream and reality, innocence and experience, human and divine love, the love of the soul and the love of the body, birth and death, the infinite wonder of the world" (Gibson, p. 173).

When he was able to return to Lourdes, he cried upon seeing crowds seeking miracles. He wondered what would have happened if he had prayed for Yvonne at Lourdes. Would a miracle have happened?

By 1912, Jacques Rivière was the secretary for the Nouvelle Revue Française, where he had been the first author to be paid for an article. Henri, with the aid of his friend, Péguy, was able to find a similar position so that he could devote more time to his novel. On May 7, 1912, he began work for Claude Casimir-Périer, the wealthy son of a former president of the Republic. Henri's job with the young Casimir was to collaborate with him in polishing up literary work on Brest, a project that was never completed.

In working in this situation, Fournier was introduced to yet another new world, the world of the extremely rich and the genuinely cultured. The most important thing concerning this job was that he no longer had to do daily work just to earn money and could devote more time to his novel. He worked for the Casimirs until after the publication of Le Grand Meaulnes.

"He was in possession of all the material that he would use, but seemed reluctant to complete the work, almost as though he were afraid to kill his subject in life by creating it in art" (Gibson, p. 146). He had written to Jacques on September 2, 1912, saying that the book would be finished on October 1, but he was still working on it in November, and it was not completed until the end of December. Even though he did not come back to it, he still was thinking of changing this final version.

As has been stated, Henri completed Le Grand Meaulnes in December 1912. It appeared in successive issues of the Nouvelle Revue Française from July to November 1913. It was published in book form by Emile-Paul, most probably to help him get the Prix Goncourt, a prize of five thousand francs established at the beginning of this century, which was awarded annually to the author of the best new imaginative book. Le Grand Meaulnes did not win the prize that year.

Henri sent a copy of the book to Yvonne de Q. He might have written for the dedication: "See what you have missed."<sup>14</sup> "But on the other hand, the 'muse' could not very well ignore, on reading the novel,

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<sup>14</sup>Champigny, op. cit., p. 65.

that all that Meaulnes could do with Yvonne de Galais was to abandon her and let her die."<sup>15</sup>

Although he was still young in years, Fournier had lost more than one friend in death in recent years. Alfred Benoist, his childhood playmate at Epineuil, had died at nineteen. "Pony" a companion at Brest, shot himself at the age of twenty-four. Marie, his favorite girl cousin at Nançay, died in March 1913. His friend from Lakanal, the poet René Bichet, died from a shot of morphine injected while visiting with some old school friends who were experienced with drugs and he was not.

It is not easy to give a detailed report of the last months of Henri's life. It is known that he saw most of his friends in Paris frequently. The spring and early summer of 1914, Henri spent touring the southern part of France by car with the Casimir-Périers. He saw Jacques and Isabelle on July 18 for what was to be the last time.

When the war broke out in 1914, it was a call to real adventure at last. Fournier went into the army on August 2, 1914, with the rank of full lieutenant, and he joined the twenty-third company of the two hundred and eighty-eighth Infantry Regiment at Mirande. He was a member of the same army corps, the seventeenth, as Jacques Rivière.

His parents came to Mirande on August 11, 1914, to go with him to Auch, where he joined his regiment. The train ride to the front lines took him through the Cher Countryside that he loved so much.

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

On August 28, Henri wrote to Isabelle telling her to burn his personal papers if anything were to happen to him while he was in battle.

Henri's army division was one of the many that were engaged in the battles for Verdun and the Marne. By the end of September, his unit was in the Saint Rémy woods where there was an undetermined no-man's land between the French and German lines.

There are many stories concerning the events of September 22, 1914; so the truth will probably never be known. On that day, the commanding captain ordered a reconnaissance patrol of two companies to go into the woods. A sudden outburst of gunfire caused the men to scatter, and many ran for their lives. The officers continued forward with their revolvers in hand and a few of their men were with them.

Henri was never seen again. Jacques Rivière searched for his grave later, but could not find one. No one knows what happened to him.

Robert Gibson, in his biography of Alain-Fournier, states that he who created the "Mysterious Manor" as an expression of his everlasting longing to escape into some other world of peace and beauty, could not have devised a more appropriate ending for his own life" (Gibson, p. 258).

Alain-Fournier was not to become really famous until after his death. In 1930, the Nouvelle Revue Française dedicated an entire issue to him. This is an honor that is reserved for figures that are outstanding in the literary world. The lycée Bourges was renamed the lycée Alain-Fournier on February 11, 1937.

### Chapter III

#### ALAIN-FOURNIER AND EDUCATION

During his years of schooling, Henri seems to have been accepted as a leader due to some power within him such as his great sensitivity or his intelligence. While attending the lycée Voltaire in Paris the first year (Henri was to be a student there for three years), he boarded with Madame Bijard, who, when single, had been the school-mistress at Epineuil. She was now married and keeping a 'pension' for girls. Madame Bijard, no longer young and carefree, was distraught and harrassed by her work and a temperamental drinking husband. The girls who boarded with her were not like Isabelle, and Henri did not care for them.

Deleltrez, in his book Alain-Fournier et le Grand Meaulnes, says of Henri during this first stay in Paris: "Il semble qu'il ait vécu dans un engourdissement qui ne se dissipait qu'aux vacances lorsqu'il retrouvait ses parents à Epineuil."<sup>16</sup> During these first years in Paris, Henri was quite a prize winner for his school work: the first year, winning first place prizes in every subject plus the prix d'excellence for the outstanding pupil of that year (1899); the second year, again the prix d'excellence along with fourteen other prizes; and the third year, again all the prizes.

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<sup>16</sup>Deleltrez, op. cit., p. 16.

After having studied at the lycée Voltaire in Paris, Henri decided to transfer to a lycée in Brest where he could study for the entrance examination to the training ship 'Borda', the naval equivalent to the famous Saint Cyr military academy. A love for the sea that he had never seen was yearning in his heart.

He seemed to have little in common with his fellow-students, who can best be described as "coarse, brutal, unimaginative" (Gibson, p. 25). Henri, in fact, termed them "le plus indiscipliné de France."<sup>17</sup> He was to find comfort in his discovery of correspondence. A. Sonet in Le Rêve d'Alain-Fournier states it in this manner: "Henri Fournier cherche un remède à sa douleur: Il le trouve dans la correspondance, et, à Brest, nous voyons percer ce furieux désir d'écrire, de notes, de correspondre."<sup>18</sup> His love for literature was to continue to grow, and while at Brest, he discovered Fromentin's Dominique, a story of hopeless love, which he described as "a long fine needle driven into my adolescent heart" (Gibson, p. 25).

During his second year at Brest, a naval career seemed to lose its charm to Henri, and he left the school in December, 1902, after receiving the first part of his baccalauréat, a certificate which is essential for entrance into any of the French liberal professions. He transferred almost at once to the lycée at Bourges, where he played rugby on the school team. This is interesting to note because interscholastic sports were viewed unfavorably at this time by authorities.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>18</sup>André Sonet, Le Rêve d'Alain-Fournier (Gembloux: Editions J. Duculot S. A., 1965), p.22.

He was only at Bourges for one year, completing the second part of his "bachot".

His next schooling took place at the Lycée Lakanal in Paris which could be considered a progressive school in some ways: each student had a separate cubicle, or study, to call his own. Students were permitted to leave the campus on Thursdays and Sundays, and Henri would leave supposedly to visit his Parisian locum parentis (Gibson, p. 29), Monsieur Bernard, the father of a friend at Lycée Voltaire. But Henri usually spent this time wandering through the streets of this city which he was beginning to love with an admiration that would endure all of his life.

It has been stated that it was during his first term at Lakanal that Henri first fell in love with literature (Gibson, p. 30). Knowing how he reacted to works such as "Tel qu'en Songe," it is possible to believe that a deep love for literary works did develop here.

After his trip to London the summer of 1905, Henri returned to the lycée Lakanal to prepare for the Ecole Normale examination which was to be the next July. His disappointment concerning Yvonne was to be followed by his disappointment in failing this examination for admission to the Ecole Normale Supérieure. He did not even do well enough on the written part to proceed to the oral.

When the fall school term began in 1906, Henri again went to Paris to prepare to retake the Ecole Normale examination the next year. He spent this year studying at Louis-le-Grand.

The following July, when he again took the examination, Henri passed the written part of the test, but failed the oral. He had rested

a week before in order to be strong enough, but even this did not help him to succeed. It was hard for someone so interested in current literary movements to study for such an examination. He wrote to Jacques on July 24, 1907: "Je suis refusé même aux Bourses de Licence. Je suis plus bas que la terre. J'en étais arrivé à espérer l'Ecole."<sup>19</sup> His experience at Louis-le-Grand was the last of Henri's formal schooling other than what he had to study during his time of military service.

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<sup>19</sup>Correspondance--J. Rivière et Alain-Fournier, (1905-1914),  
Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée. Vol. II, (Paris: Gallimard, 1946),  
p. 129.



## Chapter IV

### ALAIN-FOURNIER AND RELIGION

Alain-Fournier, to whom Christianity seemed important as a child, maintained a religious nature as he grew older, but not a Catholic one. He was tempted to return to the Church several times, but he never did, even under the influence of such men as André Gide and Paul Claudel, whose Partage de Midi, and other works was almost persuasive enough to return him to Catholicism.

According to Robert Gibson in The Quest of Alain-Fournier, Henri wanted Catholicism to purify him, to take him to its breast like a mother, and to let him set out again with his faith renewed (Gibson, p. 134). He continues by mentioning that conversion to Catholicism would have meant a complete break with the past, and that the ties that bound Henri to his past were too strong to break (Gibson, p. 136).

Included in his correspondence with Jacques Rivière in 1907, were reasons by Alain-Fournier as to why they were no longer Catholics. Here are several of his reasons:

- 1) Parce que notre amour ne peut pas être abstrait.
- 2) Parce que nous ne voulons pas cesser de chercher d'autre chose.
- 3) Parce que je ne veux pas me résigner à une vie à moi.
- 4) Chaque vie m'a fait désirer une autre vie. C'est peut-être que je ne suis pas assez haut encore pour désirer Dieu. Voilà ce dont j'ai peur.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

These reasons would seem to indicate that it was his questioning nature and adventurous mind which kept Henri from remaining a practicing Catholic.

Henri stated in a letter to Jacques in 1913 that he would never be a good Christian. He said that if he were to be a Catholic, then he would be as complete a one as possible.<sup>21</sup> Robert Champigny believes that Alain-Fournier tried to make God his debtor.<sup>22</sup> He says that Fournier thought he could earn grace. He calls Henri's faith that of Thomas, indicating that he did not want to believe in God, but wanted to experience the divine.<sup>23</sup>

Fournier defined the word 'soul' in a letter to Rivière on June 18, 1909: "Pour moi, l'âme est comme une vallée illimitée qui s'ouvre: un geste de bras, un regard, une inflexion de voix me donnent le vertige d'y entrer."<sup>24</sup>

Deleltrez writes that Henri did retain from his religious education a belief that there was a death worse than that of the body, that being the death of the soul because of sin.<sup>25</sup> The sin that he was worried about was that of impurity.

Henri kept a Bible with him most of the time. Most of his reading at Mirande appears to have been of a religious nature, and the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>22</sup>Champigny, op. cit., p. 151.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>24</sup>Correspondance, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 304.

<sup>25</sup>Deleltrez, op. cit., p. 171.

Bible was at his bedside on the rue Cassini. Once, after reading from the Holy Book, Fournier said that he discovered the answer to all of his questions about man in it.<sup>26</sup> He not only read the Bible for spiritual reasons, but for literary ones as well. He knew that there was no better example for types of stories than in this Book of Books.

An incident can be told showing that Alain-Fournier was still concerned about his Faith during the last month of his life. On September 6, 1914, he was detached from his own unit for liaison duties at Souilly on the Meuse. During this time he met a young officer, Pierre Maury, who later was to become a Protestant minister. Once, during a burst of firing, a captain came over to Maury and asked the question, "And where would you say was this God of yours in all this?" Before Maury could answer, Henri replied, "I don't know where God is in this war, because we cannot solve the riddle of the world, but I know well, that I shall be struck down when He wishes, how He wishes and where He wishes" (Gibson, p. 257).

Thinking of Henri's religious nature, it is interesting to note his words concerning God written to Jacques in 1907:

Dans chaque chose, nous avons désiré Dieu. Dans chaque chose nous avons trouvé Dieu et le plus ardent désir de Dieu. Dans chaque chose, il y a Dieu en tant qu'elle est cette chose et non pas une autre. Dieu n'est pas ailleurs que partout.<sup>27</sup>

In his search for the "other landscape" on this earth, it is interesting to note that Henri continued to believe in God, with the faith of

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<sup>26</sup>Borgal, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

Thomas, perhaps, even though he did not return to organized religion in the Church.

## Chapter V

### ALAIN-FOURNIER AND AFFAIRS OF THE HEART

A search for love in its purest state was to occupy much of Henri's life and perhaps a glimpse of how his life was to be spent may be seen by looking at one of his first experiences of love. A procession was to be held celebrating a wedding in the village. As the day approached, there was a young lady with whom Henri dreamed of walking in the procession. This dream turned into reality on the day of the wedding when the girl walked with someone else, and Henri went home in tears after his hat had blown away and the others laughed at him as he chased it.

In 1904, Henri had what is called "a mild affair of the heart" with a young lady called Yvonne, a name that is to prove more interesting later in his life. Like other brief encounters with girls, this one proved to be sadly disappointing to Henri, and the relationship was broken off at his parents' insistence, when Henri's mother opened two letters filled with romantic statements from the girl.

The most important event in the life of Alain-Fournier was his meeting with Yvonne de Q. She symbolized for him all that was lovely and pure in this world. The fact that she was to prove to be inaccessible makes this symbol most appropriate (Gibson, p. 263). They met for the first time on Ascension Thursday, June 1, 1905. Henri had been to an art exhibit at the Salon d'Automne, and as he was returning, he saw her on the steps of the Grand Palais on the Cours-la-Reine. "L'apparition

surgie en haut des marches du Grand Palais va prendre les proportions d'un mythe, bouleverser son existence pareille à une réincarnation de l'Ananké hellénique."<sup>28</sup> Henri followed the girl and her woman companion to a house on the boulevard Saint-Germain.

Whenever he could get away from Lakanal, he would take up a vigil outside the house, and watch constantly for any sign of her. He described seeing her for only a moment on the day before Pentecost: "Par une grande averse éclatante, habillée de noir, un livre à la main, elle a soulevé le rideau et elle a souri de me retrouver là." <sup>29</sup>

On the day of Pentecost, June 11, 1905, he began his watch of the house hoping that she would come out, to go to Mass. When she did come out, he followed her, getting close enough to speak. He told her of his plans, and his dreams; but as he described his projects, she kept frowning and repeating, "mais à quoi bon?"<sup>30</sup> When they arrived at Saint-Germain, he followed her inside. He asked for her forgiveness. She wondered what for. He said he wanted to be forgiven for what he termed "pestering and annoying" her. She did not seem to give Henri encouragement, but he was sure that she had committed herself in some way after she said: "Nous nous connaissons mieux que si nous savions qui nous sommes."<sup>31</sup>

Henri had not learned very much about the girl. "All he knew of her was her name, that she lived somewhere in Toulon, that she came

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>29</sup>Sonet, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>30</sup>Harold March, " 'The Other Landscape' of Fournier," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, Vol. LVI, (1941), p. 72

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

from a naval family, and was probably much richer than he--the rest had to be supplied by his own imagination, encouraged by his faith in his intuition" (Gibson, p. 44). He recorded his thoughts concerning his meeting with Yvonne in verse, a month after the event and included it in a letter to a friend, poet René Bichet, on September 6, 1908.

Vous êtes venue  
 une après-midi chaude dans les avenues,  
 sous une ombrelle blanche,  
 avec un air étonné, sérieux  
 un peu  
 penché comme mon enfance,  
 Vous êtes venue sous une ombrelle blanche  
 avec toute la surprise  
 inespérée d'être venue et d'être blonde  
 de vous être soudain,  
 mise  
 sur mon chemin  
 et soudain, d'apporter la fraîcheur de vos mains  
 avec, dans vos cheveux, tous les étés du Monde.

It is said that Fournier always believed that he was in a state of grace when he met Yvonne de Q.<sup>32</sup> For him, there were two Yvonne: "the Yvonne he met, and the Yvonne he created out of his meeting, out of his childhood and out of his knowledge of literature and painting."<sup>33</sup> He was to see her only once more several years later.

As time passed, Henri could not, and would not, forget her. On the first anniversary of that Ascension Day meeting, Henri went to the Cours-la-Reine, but he did not find Yvonne. Her features were becoming harder to remember, but the emotion associated with her memory was growing stronger. He spoke of Yvonne in a letter to Jacques Rivière on January 26, 1905:

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<sup>32</sup>Champigny, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 61.

A cette heure, j'ai à peu près perdu son visage, il ne me reste que son expression et sa beauté. A moi qui demandais un grand amour impossible et lointain, cet amour est venu. Et maintenant je souffre. A moi qui croyais aux paroles de visage, cette tête si belle a parlé.<sup>34</sup>

Henri seemed to realize that even if Yvonne did come back, she would not be the same. He was reminded of her in art, as is seen from a description he gave of a painting he saw in November, 1905, at the Salon d'Automne:

Un tout petit tableau (de G. Décôte), une pianiste, le dos tourné, blonde, un grand manteau marron. . . Je ne pouvais plus m'en aller. Depuis deux mois, je n'avais pas eu un reveil aussi précis du souvenir. C'était à mourir, à jurer que c'était elle, grande, la tête un peu tombée, un soir.<sup>35</sup>

Yvonne had told Henri not to see her again, but instead of his sorrow disappearing, it increased with the years.

It is interesting to note the feelings of Henri concerning Yvonne during his time of military service. He expressed his feelings toward her in a long letter to Bichet just as he was about to depart on maneuvers along the valleys of the Loire and his own beloved Cher:

Un jour à force d'élans vers elle, je serais si haut que nous nous trouverons réunis dans la grande salle, chez nous à la fin d'un soirée où elle aura fait des visites.<sup>36</sup>

By January, 1908, Henri knew that Yvonne was married. He had hired a private agency to trace her because he was so desperate to see her or just hear of her again. In September, 1909, they told him where she was, that she was the mother of two children, and was very happy. He wrote

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<sup>34</sup>Correspondance, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., Vol. I, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>36</sup>Delettrez, op. cit., p. 189.



then, "Elle est plus perdue pour moi que si elle était morte."<sup>37</sup> Even with comments like this, Fournier never seemed to give up hope that he would find Yvonne someday for himself.

Also, during his time of military service, Henri experienced feelings of doubt, anguish, and extreme weariness. This most probably stemmed from one cause, the loss of his physical purity. A girl by the name of Laurence is called "son amie à la fin de son séjour à Mirande."<sup>36</sup>

Henri was undoubtedly attractive to women. He is described as being elegant, refined, and extremely courteous, with a quiet sadness in his eyes and smile which did much to heighten the attraction" (Gibson, p. 238). Henri wrote to his sister in 1913 that he wanted to get married, but he did not know to whom.<sup>39</sup> He excused himself from earthly happiness by claiming divine happiness was more beautiful. In 1910, he wrote: "Crois-moi, quand le véritable amour vient, il n'y a pas une hésitation, pas un doute."<sup>40</sup>

Henri, now that Yvonne was lost forever, tried to find in other women "the lost invitation to spiritual adventure."<sup>41</sup> In 1909, he had written his friend Bichet that he was no longer the inexperienced young man that he had been. After the marriage of Jacques and Isabelle, Henri included in one of his letters a list of all the women that he had

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<sup>37</sup>Correspondance, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 325.

<sup>38</sup>Deleltrez, op. cit., p. 189.

<sup>39</sup>Correspondance, Vol. II op. cit., p. 424.

<sup>40</sup>Lettres d'Alain-Fournier au Petit B, (Paris: Emile-Paul Frères, 1930), p. 165.

<sup>41</sup>March, op. cit., p. 276.

known on his "voyage towards everlasting happiness" (Gibson, p. 138). All of these women with all of their charm, beauty and intelligence, could not be the one that he wanted the most: Yvonne. None of these could ever match the woman that his memory had created. This is not to say that each time he had a liaison with a young lady he was insincere. Henri was continually searching for his great love and engaged himself each time in an affair with sincerity.

Searching for happiness did not bring it to Henri, and he grew to believe that his unhappy sense of exclusion from that for which he searched was due to his loss of purity. He was conscious of the fact that his dream of pure love could never be realized now, and that he was not able to live up to the high ideals which he had set for himself.

The affair with Laurence has been mentioned. The liaison which is most often written about concerns Henri and a young milliner by the name of Jeanne. Their relationship had its beginning in June, 1910. It is not known how or where they met. What is known is that Henri was not the first lover for Jeanne, and this would seem to doom their relationship from the start due to Henri's feelings concerning pure love. One of Jeanne's lovers had killed himself in despair over her.

Jeanne is described as having been shy, hardworking, and pretty, but pleasure seemed to be what she lived for. Henri made her suffer, most probably because of her lack of purity. He seemed to know that what he was doing was wrong, but he would not stop seeing her. He tried to create some happiness with her by attempting to change her to the way he wanted her to be in his heart, but she would not be changed.

The affair with Jeanne was to continue in an on-again-off-again manner through 1912. Both seemed to be victims of the past, doomed to

hurt one another because they were powerless to undo the work of time (Gibson, p. 166). The basic problem for Henri was that he would never meet the standards that he had set for Yvonne that he had created in his mind.

Robert Champigny suggests in Portraits of a Symbolist Hero that through his cruelty to Jeanne, Henri was trying to deserve retroactively the wrong that he believed had been done to him. He took revenge on Yvonne through Jeanne, because she was never able to compare favorably with his ideal.<sup>42</sup> He was able to come to treat her with a real tenderness, but he was never able to forgive or to forget her faults.

Not much is known about a short affair that Henri had with a girl by the name of Henriette. She, too, was unable to give him the love and happiness that he was searching for; and Henri tried to imagine that he was guiltless because he was only a child (Gibson, p. 192).

Mention is made of a final liaison for Henri with a woman identified as Sophie, or simply "S". This affair which began in June, 1913, was to continue until his death. It is known that they were introduced by Henri's friend, Charles Péguy, and that she was older than he. She was an actress. Clément Borgal, in his biographical work, Alain-Fournier, states the following: "Au sein de la famille, la nouvelle amante est considérée comme une véritable épouse."<sup>43</sup> It is disputed as to whether this relationship brought Henri lasting happiness.

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<sup>42</sup>Champigny, op. cit., p. 166.

<sup>43</sup>Borgal, op. cit., p. 116.

In 1913, Henri was to have the second meeting with Yvonne. The tracing of her whereabouts has been mentioned. In April of that year he returned to Mirande for three weeks of Reserve Army training, and on the way home, he spent some time at Rochefort with Marc Rivière, a brother of Jacques, who was acquainted with the father of Yvonne. Henri hoped that he could arrange a reunion with her for him. He met a sister of Yvonne, who, by coincidence was named Jeanne.

He had to make a second trip to Rochefort between the dates of May 16-19, 1913, in order to see again his "Yvonne de Galais." She still remembered their first encounter. Their conversation was of the past, the present and the future. Henri played with her children. Having dreamed of her for so long, this second meeting was a deliverance from her in the mystical sense (Gibson, p. 203). Henri wrote after this meeting: "C' était vraiment le seul être au monde qui eût pu me donner la paix et le repos. Il est probable maintenant que je n'aurai pas la paix dans ce monde."<sup>44</sup> Henri and Yvonne were never to meet again.

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<sup>44</sup>March, op. cit., p. 277.

## Chapter VI

### ALAIN-FOURNIER AND LITERARY MOVEMENTS

Symbolism is described by André Sonet: "Le symbolisme était né du désir de libérer la poésie que les naturalistes et les parnassiens avaient conduite dans une impasse. Plus de rêve, partant plus de poésie."<sup>45</sup> He continues concerning Henri and Jacques, and their interest in the movement:

Le vers français tenu captif depuis le romantisme se voyait libéré: il allait fixer les harmonies intérieures de l'âme.

Tel qu'il se présentait ce mouvement ne pouvait manquer de séduire deux adolescents épris de rêve et de poésie.<sup>46</sup>

Certain qualities are visible in the writings of Alain-Fournier which tend to make readers think that he was a part of this movement in literature, although most critics do not like to label his work 'Symbolist'. Rivière states in his introduction to Miracles, a collection of the short works of Alain-Fournier: "Il y a quelque chose qui n'est plus et dont tout écrivain qui veut vivre doit maintenant se dégager: c'est le Symbolisme."<sup>47</sup> Robert Champigny, in Portrait of a Symbolist Hero, even feels that the term Symbolism is ambiguous with Fournier.

The writers of Fournier's time had been brought up in the

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<sup>45</sup>Sonet, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>47</sup>Deleltrez, op. cit., p. 185.

Symbolist movement; therefore, many of the works appearing at the beginning of the twentieth century are "spontaneous manifestations of the Symbolist spirit."<sup>48</sup> Authors who are educated when a particular school of thought is in vogue, naturally receive ideas from the works they read. So it is with Symbolism in the writings of Alain-Fournier, especially in the "paysages" which he describes.

Champigny, who has been mentioned, states that the Symbolist pattern is subjectivity revealed in a "paysage", which is found in Le Grand Meaulnes (Champigny, p. 122). He also compares Romanticism with Symbolism by saying that the Romantic is looking for power in nature, while the Symbolist is looking for harmony in his "paysage" (Champigny, p. 98). This author feels that the nostalgic praise of childhood and adolescence assumes its fullest form with Romanticism (Champigny, p. 126). According to him, sight is the basic sense in Symbolism because a 'paysage' is essentially seen (Champigny, p. 97).

Henri liked the Symbolist movement because it was a reaction against other literary movements, such as Naturalism and Realism, to which he seemed to have an aversion. In a letter to Jacques Rivière on December 15, 1906, Henri expressed his opinion of Symbolism:

Les symbolistes sont mal nommés. Ce sont des gens qui substituent mais en fonction de l'impression unique. Le terme substitué n'est quelconque que chez les nullités ou les faiseurs de réclame.

Moi, je pose de façon très mystique peut-être, que le paysage à substituer existe, qu'il faut l'atteindre pour le décrire.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Champigny, op. cit., p. 32. Each quotation taken from this work in this chapter will be identified by the author's last name and the page number following the quotation in the body of the thesis.

<sup>49</sup>Correspondance, Vol. I, p. 416.

Rivière wrote to Fournier that one could achieve the quality of Symbolism "en remplaçant les mots dans l'ordre qui s'approche le plus de l'ordre vrai des sensations."<sup>50</sup> Again, it should be stated Alain-Fournier saw himself as being apart from the Symbolists.

Concerning realism, Henri wrote to Jacques on April 2, 1907:

"Le principe de réalisme, c'est ceci: se faire l'âme de tout le monde pour voir ce que voit tout le monde; car ce que voit tout le monde est la seule réalité."<sup>51</sup>

If Symbolism is considered dead as a literary movement by the time of Fournier, and a label is wanted for his work, then the one that is most often used and that he would probably have chosen himself is Idealism. Deleltrez states the following: "L'idéalisme le persuadait que la misère des corps n'était que la projection de la pire misère des âmes; et qu'il n'était rien que son art ne put transformer en beauté."<sup>52</sup> Henri was always searching for the ideal in life and this is what he expressed in his art.

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<sup>50</sup>Sonet, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>51</sup>Correspondance, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>52</sup>Deleltrez, op. cit., p. 138.

## Chapter VII

### ALAIN-FOURNIER AND OTHER AUTHORS

In any field of endeavor, a man is influenced by his compatriots. Alain-Fournier was no exception. He was acquainted with authors both because of his job as a literary columnist which enabled him to meet many of them personally, and because of his love of literature which helped him to meet others by their works. Some of these authors can be labeled "passing fancies" for Henri, while others made deep impressions that could never be erased.

Henri wrote to his sister Isabelle on the subject of Mallarmé's writing: "Il y a là pour la première fois dans la langue une puissance presque surhumaine de précision."<sup>53</sup> He told Jacques that what he admired in the works of Rimbaud were the "qualités de Peintre."<sup>54</sup> After reading The Idiot in 1909, Henri described this novel as "perhaps the bridge I have long sought between the Christian world and mine" (Gibson, p. 128).

Pélléas et Mélisande by Maurice Maeterlinck so moved Henri that when he first saw Yvonne de Q., he wanted to call her Mélisande.

Two of the foreign authors who impressed Alain-Fournier were Mark Twain and Charles Dickens. He wrote in a letter in 1906 concerning Twain:

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<sup>53</sup>Lettres. . . à sa famille, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>54</sup>Correspondance, op. cit., p. 146.



Je crois que le comique de Twain est surtout d'expression (anglo-américain), perdu dans la traduction, d'allusion, qui peut échapper aux non-avertis, avec ça, c'est de l'humour, c'est-à-dire que ça vaut par l'absurde, l'intérêt et surtout que ça s'étale interminablement sans récompenses l'attente impatientée du Français par un mot de la fin. J'ai lu de lui dernièrement, Le Duel de Gambetta, qui est inénarrable buffonnerie. Et je ne puis oublier l'intéressant et prodigieux Tom Sawyer, rempli d'attitudes et d'intonations vous gonflant d'un rire qui n'éclate jamais.<sup>55</sup>

Deleltrez says that Charles Dickens was the only author that Fournier always liked.<sup>56</sup> Henri wrote to Jacques in 1905: "Il faudra absolument que je te parle de Dickens qui m'a ému aux larmes dans le texte anglais. Je crois avoir démêlé les éléments de mon admiration et même de son génie."<sup>57</sup>

One of Henri's lasting friendships was with Marguërite Audoux, author of Marie-Claire, which was really the story of her own life as a young girl who had loved and lost. Robert Gibson suggests that Henri reminded her of the young man of long ago who had left her (Gibson, p. 184). Henri and Marguërite were able to communicate because of similar tastes: both were country born and bred; both loved the French countryside and its simplicity. Marguërite Audoux was one of the first to praise and encourage Alain-Fournier's first writing attempts.

Jules Laforgue and Francis Jammes were two poets who influenced the thoughts of Alain-Fournier. According to Clément Borgal, Henri found in Laforgue the echo of his great desire for purity, innocence,

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<sup>55</sup>Lettres. . . au Petit B., op. cit., p. 83-4.

<sup>56</sup>Deleltrez, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>57</sup>Correspondance, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 22.

tenderness, and pride.<sup>58</sup> He wrote to Jacques in 1905 while he was in England:

Avec Laforgue, il n'y a plus de personnage du tout, c'est-à-dire qu'on s'en fiche absolument. Il est à la fois l'auteur et le personnage et le lecteur de son livre.<sup>59</sup>

Henri wrote of Jammes in a letter of 1906:

Jammes, déjà, quoi que tu en penses, est d'un art très accessible à ceux qu'il chante et ce n'est pas son sensibilité qui le rend accessible, mais son art de description qui remontre ce qu'on a vu en le disant comme on n'osait et ne pouvait pas le dire.<sup>60</sup>

In remembering the life of Alain-Fournier, the influence of Jammes is evident if a thought from his De l'Angelus de l'aube à l'Angelus de soir is read, as it was by him:

Je sens que je suis fait pour un amour très pur comme le soleil blanc qui passe un bas du mur.<sup>61</sup>

Henri told Jacques in a letter that he liked Laforgue because no one could pass him without stopping, and he liked Jammes because he did not separate life from Art.<sup>62</sup>

Alain-Fournier, like all the other young Frenchmen of his day, was moved by the writing of André Gide. For a while "Voyage d' Urien" by Gide was Henri's favorite piece of literature in the Symbolist mood. He told Jacques that he adored Gide's impressions of the desert and the countryside.<sup>63</sup> He considered Les Nourritures terrestres "uniquement

<sup>58</sup>Borgal, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>59</sup>Correspondance, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., pp. 172-3.

<sup>61</sup>Deleltrez, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>62</sup>Correspondance, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 338.

sensuel,"<sup>64</sup> and had read La Porte étroite only a short while before beginning his own novel.

One of Alain-Fournier's dearest friends was the poet and author, Charles Péguy, whose writing, according to Robert Gibson, is "distinguished by its nobility and power of vision, and by the rendering of sublime thoughts and feelings in words and metaphors of popular speech" (Gibson, p. 175). Gibson also tells of the things that these two men had in common which kept their friendship fast until their deaths in the war; a love of the French countryside, a feeling of the imminence of some marvelous other world in everyday life, and a child-at-heart spirit (Gibson, p. 177). Their discussions would concern any number of things in their fields of interest including art, religion, life, and death.

Paul Claudel is probably the most important author to be considered when remembering those who influenced the life of Alain-Fournier. His writings and views concerning Catholicism were to cause Henri more mental torment than any other single source. Henri, according to Gibson, constantly referred to Claudel when speaking of his religious difficulties (Gibson, p. 135).

Much can be learned of Fournier's feelings about Claudel by reading his correspondence with Jacques Rivière. A letter written March 7, 1906, contained these words: "Claudel, apprends-moi à sentir : et à écrire selon moi, à moi qui sens selon moi."<sup>65</sup> Henri wrote Jacques on March 19, 1906, that he had learned from Claudel "que la passion sous

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<sup>64</sup>Lettres. . . au Petit B., op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>65</sup>Correspondance, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 193.

toutes ses formes était le véritable acquiescement, la véritable participation à la nature."<sup>66</sup>

A letter dated March 21, 1906 included several statements on the subject of Claudel. Henri mentions at one point in this letter that Claudel's ideas were cold and dead like the memory of a memory.<sup>67</sup> But he also writes the following: "J'ai eu tort de dire que Claudel ne serait pas mon maître. Je crois que son influence morale sur moi est énorme."<sup>68</sup> Thinking of his own writing, Henri wrote in this letter concerning Claudel: "Il m'a renforcé aussi dans cette conviction que j'ai toujours eue (comme Jule Vallès) que je ne serai pas moi tant que j'aurai dans la tête une phrase de livre."<sup>69</sup>

An interesting remark is found in a letter dated April 21, 1906, when Henri mentions Claudel's ideas: "Il me semble à moi que ces idées ne sont rien en dehors de la vie qu'elles vivent dans le livre."<sup>70</sup> Finally, speaking of symbols and Claudel, Henri wrote to Jacques in a letter of February 8, 1907:

Il les cherche, il prétend recevoir d'eux la leçon terrible. C'est pourquoi je repose si délicieusement en lui mon besoin de vérité, de réalisme, de naturalisme; voilà pourquoi aussi en même temps lui seul promet quelque chose à mon inquiétude.<sup>71</sup>

It can be understood then that if Alain-Fournier felt that Claudel was the only one who promised something that would help him with his uneasiness, then he was certainly the most important author in his life.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 199

<sup>67</sup>Sonet, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>68</sup>Correspondance, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>71</sup>Correspondance, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 37.

## Chapter VIII

### ALAIN-FOURNIER AND HIS WRITINGS

As a young writer, Alain-Fournier tried at first to write in a very stylized manner with a lot of literary ornamentation. According to author Stephen Ullman, a recent critic has said that the young writer is still reluctant to blot a line, to be selective, to save some of his images or memories for the next composition.<sup>72</sup> Henri writes of what he calls his Damascus road experience concerning his writing style:

J'ai trouvé mon chemin de Damas un beau soir. Je me suis mis à écrire simplement, directement, comme une de mes lettres, par petits paragraphes serrés et voluptueux, une histoire assez simple qui pourrait être la mienne. . . Depuis ça marche tout seul.<sup>73</sup>

Once his style was established, Henri could begin to work in earnest on what he wanted to write: a novel dealing with the reality of the experiences of life.

Henri had thought that he wanted to write poetry, but he was a man with a poetic nature, not a poetic writing ability. All of his best ideas lent themselves more easily to prose. He did write some poetry early in life, but none was written after 1906. Robert Gibson states in The Quest of Alain-Fournier that his poems are not typically adolescent, that his manner of expression is delicate to the extreme,

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<sup>72</sup>Stephen Ullman, The Image in the Modern French Novel (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), p. 100.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

and that Henri fails as a poet because he only partly succeeds in transmitting feelings, and has no sure touch (Gibson, pp. 76-7).

The subjects of the poetry that Henri wrote were chosen from the people and places with which he was acquainted. "Sous ce triste restant" is about Rosine Deschamps, a little old woman who was a friend of Maman Barthe. The family vacations in Nançay are told about in "Premières brumes de septembre." The poem written shortly after the meeting with Yvonne has already been quoted. The following is a verse written much later about her:

Tout mon rêve au soleil  
N'aurait jamais osé vous espérer si belle  
Et pourtant, tout de suite, je vous ai reconnue.<sup>74</sup>

A poem of eighty lines in length entitled "Chant de route" has little importance except for the images that Fournier created. The following is a portion of this poem:

Nous avons eu des histoires  
de brancards  
cassés,  
de fers perdus  
de chevaux blessés  
d'ânes fourbis  
et suants qui refusaient d'avancer<sup>75</sup>

Jacques Rivière wrote Henri on the subject of this particular work in 1905:

Le grave défaut c'est je crois que c'est vraiment trop différent de toi, de ta manière. Je ne retrouve plus de tout ou à peine là dedans. Et je ne crois pas que ce soit une création originale pour motiver un si brusque changement de direction.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Sonet, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>75</sup>Deleltrez, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>76</sup>Correspondance, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 55.

The poetic nature of Alain-Fournier was to be at its best in prose form. His word pictures were best painted in prose and not in poetry.

An essay entitled "Le Corps de la femme", appearing in La Grande Revue on Christmas Day in 1907, was the first work to be published with the name Alain-Fournier. In this article Henri described his feminine ideal: "Elle était la petite fille, la fiancée, et la maman."<sup>77</sup> Robert Gibson states that this essay reveals the essential purity and innocence of Alain-Fournier at this stage of his development, and also the strong influence of his mother on his upbringing (Gibson, p. 103). The purpose of the article was to refute one written by Pierre Louys which Henri called "très fort et très faux" in a letter to Jacques because Louys treated the feminine body as if it were an "idole païenne" or a "nue de courtisane."<sup>78</sup>

The prose poem, "La Femme empoisonnée", which was completed a year after the publication of "Le Corps de la femme", was inspired by Henri's sadness at his own lost love, and his pity for the victims of the world's harshness. If "La Femme empoisonnée" is read immediately after "Le Corps de la femme", the reader sees how much Alain-Fournier has been made to take note of men: how he has been forced to realize that his childhood world can be lost. "La Femme empoisonnée" is more adult from other points of view than just subject matter; the style is more tense and more incisive; the sentences have a more sure rhythm; and there is an

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<sup>77</sup>Champigny, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>78</sup>Deleltrez, op. cit., p. 110.

advancement of technique, especially in the artistic use of the author's reminiscences (Gibson, pp. 114-5).

Two other prose poems are found among the short works of Alain-Fournier. A shorter one entitled "La Partie de plaisir" and dedicated to Claude Debussy was finished in March, 1909. The narrator of this selection describes a scene with two girls in a silk-lined boat; he then sees the world to which they send their hidden desires. At the end, another girl appears and tells the two young ladies that their dream kingdom is a world of make-believe (Gibson, p. 119).

The longer prose poem, "Madeleine", was not published until June of 1918 even though it had been written in July and August of 1909. This work is in short story form and, according to Robert Gibson, is an amalgam of three styles that Alain-Fournier liked; symbolist, Biblical, and that of his own letters (Gibson, p. 145). The story has two main characters, Madeleine and Tristan, who have both had many lovers and feel a longing to escape. They set off in the darkness through an unknown forest and arrive at a farm that is crowded with people. The angel Gabriel is looking down on these people because it is the Day of Judgement (Gibson, pp. 145-6).

Henri is writing of himself in each of the two characters. With Madeleine, he recalls the journeys that he made, especially to Nançay, and his longing for a never-ending happiness. The women in the life of Tristan are for the most part the women that Henri had known (Gibson, p. 1).

Three short prose descriptions were written by Alain-Fournier during the month of September, 1909, while he was on autumn maneuvers. "La Chambre d'amis du tailleur" describes a room that is waiting for the



coming of happy children or lovers, but the author arrives sad and alone. "Marche avant le jour" gives Henri's impressions of a long, forced march with his men through the night. "L'Amour cherche les lieux abandonnés", said to be the best of the three, was published in the review L'Occident in January, 1910. The selection describes a rainy September evening where the narrator and his love are wandering and searching for a lonely place to rest (Gibson, p. 148).

The first article by Alain-Fournier to appear in the Nouvelle Revue Française was a short review of the Derniers contes of Villiers de l'Isle Adam.

A more important work, "Le Miracle des trois dames du village", appeared in the Grande Revue on August 10, 1910. Robert Gibson says that the suggestion of atmosphere, the ephemeral mystery, and the brooding reality are the most successful parts of the story (Gibson, p. 182).

By the time "Le Miracle de la fermière" was published in the Grand Revue in March, 1911, Alain-Fournier was considered a part of the writing community of France. This piece was praised by Marguërite Audoux and Charles Péguy who wanted to print a cahier of such "Miracles" when Henri had written seven of them. The story is about Claude, a country boy, who has been sent to a boarding school at the request of his father. The boy and his mother are unhappy about this. The mother cannot read or write, so not being able to communicate with her son, she sets out in a cart on a wet October night to find him. She is lost for two days, but does return on the third with her boy. Fournier's ability to create characters is noticed for the first time in this short story (Gibson, pp. 184-5).

"Portrait", the last of Alain-Fournier's short stories, appeared in the September, 1911 issue of the Nouvelle Revue Française. It is concerned with what he remembered about Brest and was inspired by his reading of the suicide of one of his companions from those days. "The young man had killed himself in a fit of despair because of unrequited love" (Gibson, p. 189).

Alain-Fournier wrote differently for publication than he did when writing letters to family and friends. There was a forced quality in his first stories that did not match the naturalness of his letters. His friend, Jacques Rivière, noticed this difference, and mentioned it to Henri hoping that he would benefit from this information.

Henri went through several titles and many ideas in the seven years that he spent working on his novel before it was published. It has already been mentioned that he was not yet satisfied with the book even in its published form.

In Le Rêve d'Alain-Fournier, André Sonet states that the first étape of Le Grand Meaulnes was composed while Henri was in London. The title was 'A travers les étés.' The action took place at Epineuil in the garden of Madame Benoist.<sup>79</sup> In a letter to Jacques on July 28, 1905, Henri wrote what he would say about Yvonne in "A travers les Etés":

Pour ce qui est de ma pièce, j'ai dit tout ce que je voulais dire sur Elle. J'ai dit tout ce que j'avais pensé et rien de plus près d'elle. Mais j'ai tout dit, tout ce que je voulais dire.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Sonet, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>80</sup>Correspondance, Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 21-2.

By November, 1905, the title was Les Gens du domaine. Only a few fragments of the novel under this name were completed by Fournier "because what he had to express was something powerful, but vague and elusive, and he could not hope to produce a sustained, co-ordinated novel as long as his plan for his book was a novel without characters" (Gibson, p. 79). Henri wanted to "evoke the spirit of things past" (Gibson, p. 80). The Domain of these fragments was inhabited mainly by children.

In 1909, the title of the projected work was Le Pays sans nom. Again, only fragments were completed. One of these fragments, untitled, tells of the author and his beloved, now called Madeleine, arriving at an isolated little house. They go through a garden that has been devastated by a torrential rain: the flowers beaten down; a child's hoop in a puddle; and a brood of soaked chicks, nearly all dead, lie near an open door. Madeleine carries them in and puts them into a basket lined with down (Gibson, p. 118).

Robert Gibson says of Alain-Fournier's plans in Le Pays sans nom:

His plans as a novelist were to show this other world, the land without a name, and in it he aimed to transplant all that life had prevented him from clinging to: his childhood, the lost Yvonne, a large country house with its own grounds (Gibson, p. 118).

According to Gibson, "Dialogue aux approches de Noël" is a fragment that deals with two characters, a boy and a girl (clearly Yvonne), who are married. The boy asks his wife to return home, and she recalls her childhood. This portion of the proposed novel ends with the escape to happiness being foiled by the clear thinking and common sense of the girl (Gibson, p. 120).

Another title for the novel comes into the picture with Le Jour des noces. This is the last title mentioned other than the one finally selected, Le Grand Meaulnes. The fragments of this work are interesting because they show an increasing use of his memories by Alain-Fournier in his writing. The character Meaulnes remembers visiting the lawyer's old house at the crossroads and Seurel's mother playing the piano in the "Red Room". Seurel, the son of the village schoolmaster, lives in his own small room in one of the attics of the school. The plan for Le Jour des noces seems to be fairly complete, but Alain-Fournier did not write more than twenty-five or so pages of isolated episodes of various chapters. Le Jour des noces remained just a plan with several unrevised fragments (Gibson, p. 127).

After the completion of Le Grand Meaulnes, Alain-Fournier had several projects in mind. One was a second novel to be called Colombe Blanchet. This was to be the story of a young schoolmaster, Jean-Gilles Autissier, in a small country town that was divided by political strife. In his last letter to Jacques Rivière on July 13, 1914, Henri told him that he had received three offers for Colombe Blanchet (Gibson, p. 254).

A play entitled La Maison dans la forêt was another project that Alain-Fournier had in mind. When it was begun is not certain and the notes are very incomplete, but it did seem to hold promise of being a light, but wistfully charming play (Gibson, p. 241).

Extremely tentative in his plans was a dramatization of La Jeune dame de village. When he left for the front in August, 1914, Alain-Fournier left a note concerning all of these projects that were in the planning stages: "This is all unrevised and must not be

published as it stands" (Gibson, p. 24).

His wishes were not to be kept because as his novel became more popular, the demand had to be met for more details of his life and thoughts. The fragment of Colombe Blanchet was published in the Nouvelle Revue Française in 1922. His earlier writings were collected into one volume, Miracles, published in 1924. The correspondence between Alain-Fournier and Jacques Rivière was first published between the years 1924-26 and the letters of Henri to his parents and sister were published in 1930. These volumes of correspondence were edited by Isabelle Rivière (Gibson, p. 259).

## Chapter IX

### ALAIN-FOURNIER AND LE GRAND MEAULNES

Le Grand Meaulnes can be termed semi-autobiographic because Alain-Fournier used people, places, and events with which he was acquainted. Seurel, the narrator of the story, is the son of a village schoolmaster as was Alain-Fournier. The name "Meaulnes" was taken from a village near Epineuil, Meaulne. The given name of Meaulnes, Augustin, was probably chosen because it was the name of Alain-Fournier's father. The village of Sainte-Agathe is modeled after Epineuil. The book is filled with the memories of Alain-Fournier, but he arranged them in the order he wanted so that it is a novel and not an autobiography.

The story relates the events that occur in the life of Meaulnes beginning with his arrival in November at the school of Seurel's father. He is about seventeen at the time and Seurel is fifteen. The narrator had not ventured out much as a youth because of a limp, the result of a childhood illness. His world is changed by the arrival of Meaulnes. Seurel, even though he is the storyteller, does play an important role in the life of Meaulnes.

The adventures for Meaulnes begin shortly before Christmas when M. Seurel wants a student to accompany his son to get the boy's grandparents at the train station in Vierzon. Meaulnes wants to go, but is not chosen, so he starts out on his own in a horse-drawn cart. Seurel goes with someone else to get his grandparents. Later, the horse and

cart in which Meaulnes left are brought to town by a man who found them wandering along a lane. Meaulnes does not return until four days later.

During his absence, Meaulnes comes across a run-down estate, Les Sablonnières. He does not know where it is because he fell asleep both going to and coming from the Mysterious Manor. Remembering that the month is December, it is interesting to note that the weather at Les Sablonnières is described as seeming like April. The estate is peopled mainly with children who are in a holiday mood. Meaulnes crawls through an opening into a room where he falls asleep. When he is awakened for dinner, he is told that he is in the Wellington room. The clothes that he is given to wear are in the old-fashioned manner of a dandy. (When he returned to Sainte-Agathe he still had on a silk waistcoat under his school coveralls.)

The conversation at dinner centers around a person that the crowd seems to be waiting for, Frantz de Galais, who is returning with his fiancée. When the dinner is finished, Meaulnes searches for a quiet place to rest and finds a room where a girl with a brown cloak over her shoulders is playing the piano. Children are seated about the room looking at books and when Meaulnes sits down, they gather around him and share their books with him.

The next morning, the party goes for a boat ride, and Meaulnes finds himself in the same boat as the young lady who had been playing the piano. While on the excursion, he tells her that she is lovely but gets no reply. Later, he asks for and receives her forgiveness for what he said.

Frantz does return, but without his fiancée. He sees Meaulnes

and tells only him that he has returned alone. He then leaves and when the people learn that Frantz has come and gone, they depart. Meaulnes leaves Les Sablonnières in a carriage with two small children. As the carriage is moving away from the estate, Meaulnes notices a figure in white carrying a body through the woods. He then falls asleep, as has been mentioned, and is awakened six kilometers from Sainte-Agathe and told by the driver that he must walk the rest of the way.

Upon his return to Sainte-Agathe, Meaulnes and Seurel are treated as loners by their fellow students. Meaulnes works on a map of what he remembers of his trip, and he and Seurel are then attacked by a group of town boys, led by a stranger, who are after the map.

A new student has come to the school of Seurel's father. He is young and fair, but has one side of his head bandaged. This young man works with Ganache, a pierrot, in a traveling show. It turns out that he was the leader of the group who attacked Meaulnes and Seurel and took the map. He returns the map to Meaulnes telling him that he has made some additions to help him in finding Les Sablonnières.

Ganache and the young man put on a show for the town folk. During the performance, the young man is seen by Meaulnes without his bandage and is recognized to be Frantz de Galais. Frantz had tried to kill himself after leaving Meaulnes, and then Meaulnes had seen Ganache carrying him through the woods. Frantz leaves Sainte-Agathe with Ganache after obtaining a promise from Meaulnes and Seurel that they will come to his aid if he ever gives a special signal. He also gives Meaulnes an address in Paris where the young lady of the Manor, his sister Yvonne, spends the holidays.



M. Seurel's classes go on a country outing and Meaulnes uses this opportunity to search for the way to the Mysterious Manor, but he has no luck. He then decides to go to Paris to search for Yvonne, and leaves Sainte-Agathe with his mother who has come for him. Seurel then receives three letters from Meaulnes which tell of his trying to find Yvonne, but without success.

A student at Saint-Agathe, Jasmin Delouche, talks of having visited a place such as Les Sablonnières in the region of Vieux-Nançay, a town in which Seurel has relatives. On a visit to his uncle Florentine's in this town, Seurel learns that Yvonne de Galais trades at his uncle's general store. He is able to see her when she comes to the store, and knowing how Meaulnes feels about her, Seurel sets out on a bicycle to tell him that he has found Yvonne.

On the way, he stops at an old aunt's home and discovers that she had been at the same party as Meaulnes at Les Sablonnières. On the way home from the party, his aunt Moinel and her husband had stopped and picked up a girl who turned out to be Frantz's fiancée, Valentine. She had stayed with them that winter and worked, and then had gone to Paris where she was working as a dressmaker.

When he reaches Meaulnes, he is getting ready for a trip, but Seurel convinces him to go to his uncle Florentine's to see Yvonne. A country outing has been arranged and she will be sure to be there.

Meaulnes changes his plans and goes with Seurel to the outing. While there, he asks Yvonne to marry him. They are engaged for about five months before the wedding takes place.

As fate would have it, Frantz comes and gives his signal just after the wedding, but Meaulnes is persuaded by Seurel from answering

the call right away. Seurel also talks to Frantz about a delay. Yvonne becomes sick with a fever, but Meaulnes finally heeds Frantz's call and leaves his wife, not knowing when he will return. Seurel continues to visit Yvonne, and on one of these visits she takes him to a small house which had been built by her father for Frantz.

After Meaulnes leaves, Yvonne learns that she is expecting his child and in time gives birth to a baby girl. It is a difficult birth and Yvonne dies after being critically ill for a short while. The stairway to Yvonne's room is so narrow that a coffin cannot be taken down it, and it is decided to lower it by ropes from the window. Rather than have this happen, Seurel carries Yvonne down the stairs in his arms, and then she is put in the coffin.

Seurel, who has become a schoolteacher like his father, is employed near Les Sablonnières and spends most of his off-duty hours there. One day, he comes across an old trunk which he recognizes as Meaulnes' school trunk. He finds in it a composition book in which Meaulnes had written about his days in Paris. He tells of meeting a girl in front of the house where he was told he would find Yvonne. He begins to frequent this girl, and they even go to the country to visit friends.

To avoid gossip, Meaulnes has introduced the girl as his wife. He discovers that she is Valentine when she shows him some letters from her former fiancé and Meaulnes recognizes Frantz's handwriting. He then tells Valentine to leave.

There is then a break in the journal, but Seurel finds some notes a few pages later in which Meaulnes writes of his searching for Valentine who had threatened to become a streetwalker. It is here that

Seurel interrupted Meaulnes to tell him that he had found Yvonne. It is to be remembered that Meaulnes was getting ready for a trip when Seurel came. He was going to look for Valentine again.

The last note in the composition book states that Meaulnes will not come back to Yvonne until Frantz and Valentine are together in "Frantz's House" at Les Sablonnières.

Meaulnes' daughter is about a year old when he returns. He has accomplished his mission: Frantz and Valentine are together. He learns of his wife's death and that he is a father, and Seurel wonders just when Meaulnes is going to include his daughter in his adventures.

## Chapter X

### ALAIN-FOURNIER AND IMAGERY

A writer who proves to be successful in communicating with his readers will always have at least one aspect of his work that stands out as that which the public enjoys. In the case of Alain-Fournier, the imagery he used seems to be the most noticeably liked part of his writing. Stephen Ullman states in The Image in the Modern French Novel: "The most important aspect of the imagery is, however, its structural role, the notable part it plays in the total effect of the book."<sup>81</sup> An examination of some of the types of images that Alain-Fournier employed is most profitable in order to appreciate more Le Grand Meaulnes.

There are preferences that can be noted concerning the imagery that Alain-Fournier chose to use: a preference of short images to long ones, and a preference of the simile to the metaphor. The number of images used is substantial: one image to every three pages according to Mr. Ullman.<sup>82</sup> Perhaps Alain-Fournier felt that he could best picture this "other landscape" that he was searching for with comparative descriptions.

Examples of imagery can be found in his letters and earlier writings which would indicate that Alain-Fournier found this a helpful

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<sup>81</sup>Ullman, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

way to express his feelings. In a letter to Jacques Rivière on November 9, 1906, he described Yvonne:

Sa figure avait la douceur d'une hampe de lilas blanc caché sous les feuilles, mais les feuilles étaient blondes.<sup>83</sup>

A change in the season of the year was often employed by Alain-Fournier to describe his feelings. Again in a letter to Rivière, he wrote of his lost love:

Cet amour qui me soulève lorsque dans la rue un souffle plus tiède de novembre me suggère le printemps.<sup>84</sup>

Robert Gibson believes that the most successful part of the story "Le Miracle des trois dames de village" is "the suggestion of atmosphere, ephemeral mystery, and brooding reality" (Gibson, p. 182) which is accomplished by Alain-Fournier's method of description.

The fact that Alain-Fournier preferred similes to metaphors has been mentioned, but he did use metaphors once in a while. For example, to describe how Meaulnes and Seurel saw the caravan of Frantz de Galais, he used the following words:

Pleins d'angoisse et de fièvre, nous restions là sans oser approcher de l'humble bicoque, qui nous paraissait être le mystérieux passage et l'antichambre du Pays dont nous avons perdu le chemin.<sup>85</sup>

Yvonne de Galais is said to have been "la fée, la princesse et l'amour mystérieux de toute notre adolescence" (L. G. M. p. 274). These are two illustrations of metaphors found in Le Grand Meaulnes.

<sup>83</sup>Correspondance, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 324.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., Vol. II, p. 326.

<sup>85</sup>Alain-Fournier, [Henri Alban Fournier], Le Grand Meaulnes (Paris: Editions Emile-Paul Frères, 1913), p. 148. Each quotation taken from this work will be identified by the initials L. G. M. and the page number following the quotation in the body of the thesis.

Similes are plentiful in the novel. The reader is able to imagine more effectively the people, places and events of the story because of these comparisons. When Meaulnes was returning with Seurel to Vieux-Nançay to see Yvonne, he is said to ride like "un coureur de bicyclette" (L. G. M. p. 231). On the trip to the country with Meaulnes, Valentine acts like "une menagère dans sa demeure" (L. G. M. p. 289). The courtyard at Les Sablonnières is pictured as "une longue cour étroite toute remplie de voitures comme une cour d'auberge un jour de foire" (L. G. M. p. 66). Alain-Fournier's love of imagery is best seen in the similes that he created and used in his writing.

Stephen Ullman uses the term "pseudo-simile" to explain what he says is "a parallel between objects or experiences which are too close to each other to yield a genuine simile."<sup>86</sup> He gives as examples the meal at Les Sablonnières being compared with the banquet that precedes a village wedding, and the corridors of the domain with the corridors of a theater.<sup>87</sup>

A study of similes and metaphors is interesting enough, but a more exact study of the imagery employed by Alain-Fournier can be made by categorizing the images that he chose to use. Several categories can be determined to be examined.

The first is that of sound images. At the performance put on by Frantz and Ganache, the laughter and screams of the audience are compared to the shrieks heard when a flock of geese is chased by a

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<sup>86</sup>Ullman, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

spaniel (L. G. M. p. 152). One of the most effective images in the book is created when Seurel expresses his feelings upon hearing a piano in the distance after the wedding of Meaulnes and Yvonne:

C'est d'abord comme une voix tremblante qui, de très loin, ose à peine chanter sa joie. . . C'est comme le rire d'une petite fille qui, dans sa chambre, a été chercher tous ses jouets et les répand devant son amie. . . Je pense aussi à la joie craintive encore d'une femme qui a été mettre une belle robe et qui vient la montrer et ne sait pas si elle plaira. . . (L. G. M. p. 252)

The sounds of the wind are compared throughout the novel with such things as an overflowing river (L. G. M. p. 245), and the hiss of a waterfall (L. G. M. p. 93). Robert Gibson, in The Quest of Alain-Fournier, states that the frequent use of the wind in the imagery of Alain-Fournier can be accounted for by the fact that, as a boy, he slept in the attic where the voice of the wind spoke to him often concerning his sorrows and fears (Gibson, p. 234).

Visual images help the reader to picture more exactly that which the author is describing. Twice in Le Grand Meaulnes, houses are compared with cardboard boxes (L. G. M. p. 121, p. 300). Mr. Ullman points out that some of the visual images are amusing in tone; for example, "quelques vieilles paysannes avec de rondes figures ridées comme des pommes" (L. G. M. p. 80). A shadow is personified with these words: "une grande ombre inquiète et amie passe le long des murs et se promène" (L. G. M. p. 3). Valentine is described at one point in the story by the words:

Fine et grave, vêtue de noir, mais avec de la poudre au visage et une collerette qui lui donne l'air d'un pierrot coupable.  
(L. G. M. p. 303).

Seurel's grandfather is presented as looking like an old Gascon shepherd.

The main character of the book, Meaulnes, is imagined in numerous ways. When he leaves to get Seurel's grandparents, Alain-Fournier gives

this impression of Meaulnes:

Meaulnes change soudain d'attitude. Un pied sur le devant, dressé comme un conducteur de char romain, secouant à deux mains les guides, il lance sa bête à fond de train. . . (L. G. M. p. 24-25).

When he returns from finding the Mysterious Manor, he is shown as a typical returning traveler: "son air de voyageur fatigué, affamé, mais émerveillé" (L. G. M. p. 33). Seurel believed that the carriage bearing Meaulnes to Paris was taking away his youth forever (L. G. M. p. 177).

Alain-Fournier gave opportunities to visually imagine the characters and events of his story. Perhaps he thought that this would help his "other landscape" to become more of a reality to others.

The other senses besides those of hearing and seeing were employed by Alain-Fournier in the imagery of Le Grand Meaulnes. The sense of smell is used to describe Meaulnes' feelings as he is searching for Yvonne in Paris:

Suis-je condamné maintenant à suivre à la trace tout être qui portera en soi le plus vague, le plus lointain relent de mon aventure manquée? . . . (L. G. M. p. 299).

The sense of taste is used to describe such things as farmhouses, "de délicieuses maisons-fermières" (L. G. M. p. 319); evenings, "La soirée avait un goût amer" (L. G. M. p. 310); and light, "une lumière si douce qu'on eût cru pouvoir la goûter" (L. G. M. p. 62). As Seurel carried the dead Yvonne down the stairs, wisps of her hair touched his mouth, and to him, the hair tasted of earth and death (L. G. M. p. 292). The sense of touch is illustrated with phrases such as these: "une brise tiédie coulait sur le visage du promeneur" (L. G. M. p. 86). In fact, it can be said that Alain-Fournier used all the senses in developing the imagery of his novel.

A type of imagery that is discussed by Mr. Ullman concerns



abstract phenomena described in concrete terms. For instance, to show Meaulnes' feelings during his school days with Seurel, Alain-Fournier used a winter storm brewing (L. G. M. p. 114). The last traces of the adventures of Meaulnes and Seurel were buried by a winter snowfall (L. G. M. p. 190). These intangible elements were given tangible images for the reader to grasp.

Alain-Fournier's time in the army left an indelible mark on his life and his writing. There are a number of images in Le Grand Meaulnes that pertain to the military. Meaulnes remains fully dressed at night when he returns from the Manor: "tout habillé comme un soldat au cantonnement d'alerte" (L. G. M. p. 42). The relationship between Meaulnes and Seurel after the fight over the map is shown to be "comme deux compagnons d'armes le soir d'une bataille perdue. . ." (L. G. M. p. 125). Frantz explains his appearance after his attempted suicide as being that of a soldier of 1870 (L. G. M. p. 139). These are but three of the many comparisons to soldiers, battles, and military life that are made by the author.

In A Short History of French Literature, Geoffrey Brereton states concerning Le Grand Meaulnes:

Adolescents totally unlike animals, with their aura of idealism and make-believe still clinging to them, were the characters of Le Grand Meaulnes. . .<sup>88</sup>

His speaking of animals brings to mind the fact that there is animal imagery in Le Grand Meaulnes. Most of the imagery in this category is associated with birds. Seurel's mother is working on a hat at the

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<sup>88</sup>Geoffrey Brereton, A Short History of French Literature (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 245.

beginning of the novel and this hat is continually referred to as a nest (L. G. M. pp. 6-7). In this same section of the book, Meaulnes' mother is described with these words: "avec cette air suppliant et hagard de poule qui aurait perdu l'oiseau sauvage de sa couvée" (L. G. M. p. 7). The image of geese being chased by a spaniel has already been mentioned (L. G. M. p. 7).

There are two descriptions of the girls in Meaulnes' life that compare them with birds. In his journal, Meaulnes writes of seeing Valentine asleep during their sojourn in the country, and describes her in the following way:

Elle dormait, absolument immobile et silencieuse, sans qu'on l'entendît respirer, comme un oiseau doit dormir (L. G. M. p. 307).

Yvonne is pictured as being close to Meaulnes in the manner of a swallow:

Elle était auprès de lui toute frémissante, comme une hirondelle un instant posée à terre et qui déjà tremble du désir de reprendre son vol (L. G. M. p. 94).

Another point can be made concerning Alain-Fournier's animal imagery as seen in these examples. Most of the imagery pertaining to birds is concerned with women.

The love that Alain-Fournier had for the sea did not die when he gave up the idea of a naval career. It is most evident from the number of water images that appear in his work that he continued to be impressed throughout his life by the mystery and the wonder of the sea. According to Stephen Ullman, there are eighteen examples (or one-seventh of the total) of sea imagery in Le Grand Meaulnes.<sup>89</sup> He also suggests

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<sup>89</sup>Ullman, op. cit., p. 102-3.

reasons for the prominence of sea imagery in the writings of Alain-Fournier:

1. It was the symbol of his profoundest aspirations.
2. It had fascination of immensity, of purity, and of unattainable ideal.
3. It had the lure of the unknown, of adventure and mystery.<sup>90</sup>

Considering the imagery found in Le Grand Meaulnes, the sea proved to be the most important asset of Alain-Fournier.

Water imagery can be found in the early works and letters of Alain-Fournier. In a letter to Jacques Rivière in 1905, Henri wrote these thoughts:

Et puis, je reviens par les rues, seul, seul, pas triste (jamais triste, depuis un mois) en pensant! "Oui, mais voilà, le bateau faisait un bruit calme. . . Et je ne pense plus qu' à la Seine, à l'avenue et à Toulon."<sup>91</sup>

In "Le Miracle de la fermière," farms are compared to blue islands in a river. In the first of three short texts collected under the title of Grandes Manoeuvres, a room is said to be like a boat drifting silently across the sea, and also the sky on a rainy day is pictured as a great lake. In "Le Miracle des trois dames de village," moonlight is imagined to be like a sheet of water.<sup>92</sup> These are but a prelude to the water images that are found in Le Grand Meaulnes.

Concerning the characters in the novel, Yvonne de Galais' father had been a sea captain (L. G. M. p. 206), and the allusion is made that her brother had been a naval cadet (L. G. M. p. 81). When Meaulnes first

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>91</sup>Correspondance, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>92</sup>Ullman, op. cit., pp. 107, 112.

meets Frantz at Les Sablonnières, Frantz hums a tune such as sailors might sing (L. G. M. p. 99). Seurel compares Meaulnes with landlocked sailors when he finds him pacing the attic:

Je le trouverai ainsi, vers une heure du matin, déambulant à travers la chambre et les greniers comme ces marins qui n'ont pu se deshabituer de faire le quart et qui, au fond de leurs propriétés bretonnes, se lèvent et s'habillent à l'heure réglementaire pour surveiller la nuit terrienne (L. G. M. p. 43-4).

After their wedding, when Meaulnes and Yvonne are alone, they are compared to two passengers in a drifting boat (L. G. M. p. 259-60). In the English version of Le Grand Meaulnes as translated by Françoise Delisle, Meaulnes is referred to as Admiral Meaulnes throughout the book.

Alain-Fournier described a funeral procession as seeming like muddy water passing in a gutter (L. G. M. p. 175), and light is given the ability to flow like a fluid in a dream that Meaulnes has while on his way to the Mysterious Manor (L. G. M. p. 62).

The first part of Meaulnes' adventure is referred to as a wave by Seurel when he tells of the attack on the house (L. G. M. p. 114). While looking at the empty cart that has returned to Sainte-Agathe Seurel thinks of wreckage washed ashore. He also describes some of Meaulnes' thoughts about Yvonne while they are at the country outing:

La jeune fille ne lui rapporterait pas une épave, capable de prouver qu'ils n'avaient pas rêvé tous les deux, comme le plongeur rapporte du fond de l'eau un caillou et des algues. . .  
(L. G. M. p. 242).

Seurel's house is given as the launching place for the adventures of Meaulnes and Seurel, and their return is imagined in this manner: "se briser comme des vagues sur un rocher désert, nos aventures" (L. G. M. p. 2).

Stephen Ullman makes note of the fact that the title of Chapter Three, "Je fréquentais la boutique d'un vannier," is a title phrase

from Robinson Crusoe one of the books that Alain-Fournier admired as a boy.<sup>93</sup> This is evident also from the fact that Seurel is reminded of Robinson Crusoe by Meaulnes on the eve of his departure. (L. G. M. p. 20).

From a critic's viewpoint, Alain-Fournier's imagery may not be the best in the world; but on the basis of this study, it can be said that he does use it effectively in creating the atmosphere of dreaminess and other-worldliness for which he was striving in Le Grand Meaulnes.

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

## Chapter XI

### CONCLUSIONS

The impact that the writings of an author have on society can best be measured when results can be seen. Alain-Fournier had not intended his book to be a religious work. He even spent time deleting details that made it seem too theological. Today, however, it is a fact that many young people have been helped in their conversion to Catholicism by the reading of Le Grand Meaulnes (Gibson, p. 269). The conclusion is that there is something important being said in this seemingly childish story of adolescence.

Le Grand Meaulnes is considered by many critics to be the outstanding example of Idealism. Knowing this, a comparison can be made of what Alain-Fournier wanted to achieve with his writing, and what the actual result was. His "other landscape" had no shape or form when he started out. In the reality of words on paper, it became a run down estate somewhat lost in the woods. The narrator, Seurel, is more or less the person that Alain-Fournier was in real life. The one exception to the description given of the character in the book and the author himself would be the limp that Seurel had sustained from a childhood illness; Alain-Fournier is remembered as having been proud of his athletic ability. Meaulnes was the author's ideal, that which he wanted to be. Girl winner, darer, adventurer; these are all labels that can be applied to the boy Alain-Fournier imagined himself being in the

person of Meaulnes. Frantz de Galais also possessed some of these idealistic tendencies of the writer.

Yvonne, unreachable for Alain-Fournier, was still unattainable in the novel for Seurel. It is interesting to note that Meaulnes, the ideal Alain-Fournier in the novel, was ready to go on to new adventures after he had conquered and married Yvonne. The real Yvonne grew to almost myth proportions in the author's mind. The Yvonne of the novel remained a human being who grew to adulthood, married, bore a child, and died. From these examples, it is evident that when the ideal in Alain-Fournier's mind became reality in black and white, some of the mystery was gone. The author had sacrificed something of his ideal, perhaps to make his story more believable. He did not lose, however, an aura of mystery which makes Le Grand Meaulnes a captivating piece of literature.

To help create this aura of mystery, Alain-Fournier used his favorite tool for description, imagery. Stephen Ullman uses a term, "transposition" pertaining to words that "transport the reader into a remote and totally different sphere."<sup>94</sup> This is what the writer would have liked to accomplish with his work, and his imagery. Did he do this? On the completion of this study, it can be stated that Le Grand Meaulnes is one of those books which gives the reader a feeling that cannot be expressed in words. Perhaps it can be described as the sensation of having been somewhere while reading the book. However, this question of whether Alain-Fournier accomplished his goal in his work is one the individual reader must answer for himself.

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

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