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THE ROLE OF THE FEMININE CHARACTERS
IN THE MAJOR NOVELS
OF
HENRI BOSCO

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts in French at
Massey University

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1972

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INTRODUCTION

Readers of Bosco soon discover that they are entering a world where the visible and the invisible exist side by side and where reality meets the fantastic. Jean Lambert has called him "Un voyageur des deux mondes".¹ To one of these worlds belong the colourful descriptions of the Provençal landscape with its sunshine and soundness of life, and to the other belongs the night with its mystery and intrigue. It is the difference for Bosco between the outer, visible world on the one hand and the inner world of the mind on the other.

These two worlds exist for example in Malicroix, the one represented by the cosy Mègremut settlement with its orchards and beehives in the hills of Les Puyreloubes where the family lives out its ordered life, and the other by the tiny island in the Camargue constantly given over to the whims of nature and the mysteries of the night. There is a line of demarcation, a "frontière",² which has to be crossed to pass from one world to the other and in this case it is the great watery masses of the Rhône. Martial Mègremut crosses it to take up his inheritance on the island and at once enters its secret world where the night and its happenings reign supreme. Once there he learns that according to the terms of

¹ For notes see end of chapters

Cornélius Malicroix's will he must spend the next three months there, without leaving, before he can take full possession of the property. So the river acts as a barrier to the outer world, and the contrast is made all the more striking when in Part Seven he finally does return to visit the warm, intimate world of the Mégremut clan. But this barrier becomes even more restricting when Martial reveals his life-long fear of rivers and their swirling water. It becomes a double barrier because he could not cross it by himself if he wanted to.

Similarly in Le Bas Théotime there is a barrier between the solid world of the Théotime farm and its inhabitants and the menacing threats of the neighbouring Clodius farm. This time it is a line of stones, tall enough to be visible when the crops are at their highest, which has been placed there by the careful Alibert who has a great belief in the "sainteté des bornes agricoles".³ It is on this line that the threatening figure of Clodius stands, watching, when he emerges from the shadows of the trees in which his house is situated. When Pascal Dérivat enters his sanctum in the loft and closes the door behind him so that nobody else might enter, another barrier is created, this time between him and the outside world. He goes to this room in the attic, which he calls the heart of the house, to work at his plant collections and becomes engrossed in a world of his own where people and objects of the past are brought to mind. The immediate world for the time being is far from his thoughts.

In L'Ane Culotte the frontier is the stream which divides the secure world of the Saturnin household and the village of Péirouré from the magical, unfamiliar world of Belles-Tuiles in the hills. In Hyacinthe it is not so much a physical barrier which separates the two houses, but just a stretch of the wild plain with a track running across it.

Once these barriers have been crossed it is not just a simple matter of crossing back into the familiar world to return to the shelter of its security. Once the sanctity of the frontier line is broken, the mystery of the beyond will increasingly permeate and trouble the hitherto undisturbed world from which the adventure has been taken. When Constantin in L'Ane Culotte returns from the hills where he has visited the earthly paradise set up by Cyprien - a journey forbidden to him by his grandmother - the steady Saturnin household becomes more and more involved in the strange happenings occasioned by this and subsequent visits. Finally the household begins to break up - Hyacinthe disappears for the first of several occasions, Constantin is sent away to stay with "les cousins Jorrier" at Costebelle for three months, and then he and his grandmother go away for a length of time while she convalesces. The final event in this chain of disruption is when Hyacinthe disappears altogether.

It is the narrator-hero of each story who bridges the gap between the two worlds. He is the one who enters and returns from the beyond, bringing its mysteries back with

him. But it becomes increasingly clear that the other characters are not at as much liberty. In Bosco's scheme of things certain characters belong on one side of the frontier line and some to the other :

Le choix des acteurs sur la scène humaine de Bosco est accordé à ce double aspect de la terre; d'une part les bons et sages bergers et les laboureurs, créatures heureuses qui jouissent de son inépuisable générosité; d'autre part, des êtres hostiles et menaçants qui correspondent à ses manifestations néfastes.⁴

Bosco has drawn up this world with its two-sided aspect and has apportioned the role of his characters accordingly. From this evolves the important role he has entrusted to the feminine characters for in his works one group of them belongs to the sunny, substantial world of Provence, firmly entrenched in its familiar way of life, and the other to the fleeting world of the night full of visions and dreams. This thesis is an attempt to examine this major division in the feminine characters.

* * * *

Investigation of the major works of study on Bosco to hand indicates that, while the two types of feminine characters and their special roles have certainly been noted, no study as yet seems to have been devoted to this aspect of his work. Jean Lambert talks of "les femmes fatales" and "les sewiteurs maîtres"⁵ and Michel Barbier recognises the importance of the "démon féminin", even calling the characters who embody this description the "héroïnes" of the story.⁶ Jean-Cléo Godin has pursued both these ideas in his major study on Bosco,⁷ and has recognised Lambert's classifications in doing this. In

the light of what has been written before, then, this study will aim at substantiating this concept of the two types of feminine characters.

In doing this it does not claim to be a comprehensive study of the feminine characters of Bosco's works, but rather, restricts itself to the "major novels". Probably in the end the decision about which are the "major novels" of an author resolves itself into being a personal preference on the part of the critic. However, recent critics who have been able to view the whole range of Bosco's work generally agree that the period beginning with L'Ane Culotte (1937) and ending with Un Rameau de la Nuit (1950) is an important one in Bosco's development as a writer. It is during this time that Bosco establishes his own and now much-admired technique, the one for which he will most probably be remembered. Michel Barbier speaks for many when he sums up what is for him the true Bosco :

Pour nous le vrai Bosco est celui des grands romans du mystère et de la solitude: la trilogie d'Hyacinthe, Malicroix, le Mas Théotime, Un Rameau de la Nuit. C'est là que l'écrivain a donné le meilleur de lui-même, qu'il a délivré le chant unique que tout vrai poète porte en lui.⁸

The present study, then, while drawing from most of the works of Bosco, restricts itself for any detailed investigation to these six novels. In them, many of the characteristics of the women portrayed before or after this period of thirteen years can generally be found.

A chapter has been devoted to assessing the character of Tante Martine who featured much in Bosco's childhood and whom the author subsequently included as a character in his books. To do this, use has been made of the books written for children and published in Gallimard's "Bibliothèque Blanche" series, and of the "souvenirs d'enfance". This study of Tante Martine is placed at the beginning because it is intended to follow up Jean-Cléo Godin's suggestion that she is the model on which the housekeepers of note in Bosco's novels are based.⁹

Notes to Introduction

- 1
Jean Lambert, Un Voyageur des deux Mondes (Paris, 1951)
- 2
See J. Lambert, op. cit., pp. 35-39, and Jean-Cléo Godin
Henri Bosco: Une Poétique de Mystère (Montréal, 1968),
pp. 185-189.
- 3
Le Mas Théotime (Paris, 1952), p. 57
- 4
Anne Wertheimer, "En Quête du Paradis Terrestre",
Cahiers du Sud, 294 (1949), 266.
- 5
J. Lambert, op. cit., pp 69, 84
- 6
Michel Barbier, Symbolisme de la Maison dans l'oeuvre
d'Henri Bosco (Aix-en-Provence, 1966), p. 119
- 7
J.-C. Godin, op. cit., pp. 211 ff., 254 ff., 281 ff.
- 8
M. Barbier, op. cit., p. 119
- 9
J.-C. Godin, op. cit., pp. 21, 211.

PART I

THE FORCES OF SECURITY

CHAPTER I

THE FIGURE OF TANTE MARTINE

"Tante Martine est entrée plus tard dans ma vie, je veux dire entrée pour ne plus jamais en partir, sauf pour aller là où fatalement chacun va, un jour, et d'où personne ne revient ... "
(Un oubli moins profond, p.231)

In the solitary life that was Henri's Bosco's when he lived as an only child with his parents at the "Mas-du-Gage", there remained one figure with whom he could identify himself : Tante Martine. She took the place of any companion, provided the affection that would otherwise have been lacking in this household, and played no small part in creating the challenges and mysteries that figured so largely in his childhood. In Le Renard dans l'île the retrospective Pascalet, who is Bosco himself, asks: "Qu'eussent été mon enfance et le 'Mas-du-Gage' sans la présence de cette figure tellement vivante..."¹

Henri Bosco moved with his parents from Avignon to this isolated house in the country at the age of three. Tante Martine joined them there four years later, summoned by Bosco's father who felt the need of "une femme d'âge" in the house: "Ça vous rend sérieux et on y apprend toujours quelque chose."² In fact she was not an aunt at all but a distant cousin elevated to the rank of an aunt because

"elle avait dans le sang une vraie nature de tante
... On n'imaginait qu'elle eût pu jouer d'autre rôle."³

A new phase in Bosco's life began with her arrival and ended four years later when she died. Such was the impact of this woman on the young Bosco that J.-C. Godin can justifiably claim that these four years spent at the "Mas-du-Gage" in her presence were the best of his childhood.⁴ This being the case there is little wonder that she was to play such an important role in his writings.

* * *

Tante Martine appears as a character in four of the five novels written for children (L'Enfant et la rivière, Le Renard dans l'île, Barboche in which she plays a major part, and Bargabot.⁵) These books, no matter how fanciful their tales may be, have as their background Bosco's childhood and life in the Provençal countryside and as such are semi-autobiographical. Taken chronologically they loosely follow one another to form a sequence, le Renard continuing where l'Enfant left off, and Barboche drawing on several elements of le Renard to create some of its mysterious happenings. By Bargabot Tante Martine has died and only remains, along with other important figures of the three preceding books, in the memory of the thirteen year old Pascalet.

Of his "souvenirs", the first volume entitled Un oubli moins profond provides us with the most valuable material on Tante Martine recalling as it does his

childhood from the age of six to ten years when she figured so largely in his life. She appears also from time to time in the three further volumes of his "souvenirs" to date,⁶ often in connection with her now famous proverbs. Another volume of his works, Antonin,⁷ which was originally published as a novel is now usually classed with these "souvenirs d'enfance" as the author himself admits to doing.⁸ We can assume that Tante Clarisse, as she explores the house from attic to cellar to find its hidden passages and secrets in keeping with descriptions of Tante Martine elsewhere, is in fact a direct representation of her. Bosco has just changed the name.

Appearing in these nine books, Tante Martine becomes a familiar figure to the constant reader of Bosco. The author realises this and in Un oubli explains why he has used her character so much: "Si je l'ai évoquée si souvent, c'est que j'en aime la figure."⁹ But, as this thesis will attempt to show elsewhere,¹⁰ the importance of this figure is not so much in the mere representation of it in the books quoted above, but in the fact that it becomes the prototype for a series of feminine characters in Bosco's works. It remains therefore to discuss the main characteristics of Tante Martine as derived from the works in which she appears and then to relate these to other feminine characters of Bosco's work.

Bosco is the first to agree that he may have introduced a slight fictional element into the character of Tante Martine and suggests that something may have been lost by doing this.¹¹ But the personality we come to know through reading these books is a colourful yet recognisably human one and there is little doubt, as R.T.Sussex noted when the true Tante Martine was finally revealed with the publication of Un oubli, that "The real person is very close to the fictional."¹² There is such a diversity in her make-up that she lends herself easily to becoming a character in fiction. This woman, in her sixties when Bosco knew her, had retained a lively interest in life and possessed a youthful exuberance with which she approached everything she did. A "campagnarde", she had lived most of her younger days near to the soil and then spent her time moving from one Bosco family to the other, from town to country, as she was needed.¹³ This was apprenticeship enough for the role of housekeeper and guardian that she was to fulfil in her final days at the "Mas-du-Gage".

In carrying out these duties Tante Martine shows herself to be very much a two-sided character, as much at home in the every-day world of her domestic chores as in the fanciful world of her dreams. It is her special quality that these two sides of her nature do not impede one another, but combine to render the other more worthy:

Tante Martine ... une femme qui savait rêver et travailler en même temps, sans sacrifier son travail à ses rêves ni ses rêves à son travail. C'est pourquoi ses rêves semblaient raisonnables et son travail avait la légèreté des songes faciles.¹⁴

It is this combination of the practical and visionary worlds in her make-up that renders this character so attractive and from which stem many of the qualities which she has bestowed upon the other characters who are portrayed in her image. Being a practical woman, she is saved from the tedium that could result from her chores by this vivid imagination. Much of her day was spent working hard at these household jobs, ensuring that everything was always spick and span, and yet what seems so uncharacteristic in such a competent person is that she never saw an end to them. But that was how she liked it, finding satisfaction in being behind, always trying to catch up. Always thinking ahead of what there was to be done, her imagination would start to work, to such an extent that the young author would find her actually talking to these unperformed tasks: "Vous m'agacez, leur criait-elle. Chacun son tour ! ... Vous ferez la queue."¹⁵

Bosco's parents being so often absent, Tante Martine was entrusted with the complete running of the "Mas-du-Gage" and this responsibility was carried out with skill and economy: "cette femme ... remplie de bon sens, qui avec honneur et sagesse administrait notre ménage, et

sou pour sou."¹⁶ The pedlar who visited the "Mas-du-Gage" each week to restock it was often amazed at the way she could estimate the weight of a rabbit for example by just looking at it. To the last farthing she would haggle over the price of a bunch of grapes or a basket of apples to ensure that she did not overspend. But, while she was very careful about what she did spend, the house never went without anything: "Le raisin ne manquait jamais et la pomme était abondante. En somme, elle comptait, mais chacun y trouvait son compte, et même un peu plus."¹⁷

As well, she had a great love and understanding for objects, treating them rather as if they too were alive: "Cette soupière s'embête toute seule sur ce coin perdu du buffet. Plaçons-la sur la cheminée, entre le compotier et la veilleuse..."¹⁸

They are capable of having feelings like any human being, and just like any human being they can lose track of their place in this world: "Qu'est-ce que me fiche là ce coquetier? Il a dû y venir tout seul... Ce n'est pas ta place, va t'en!... Il ne tient pas debout, et il veut être au beau milieu de l'étagère!"¹⁹

When she stands full of disillusionment looking down on her now much changed childhood village of Pierroure, she only finds comfort in once again being surrounded by familiar objects in the little lodge nearby which belonged to Jean Alibert: "Tante Martine se rassérénait. Cette pièce si accueillante, ces objets, cet outil, encore utiles..."

tout contribuait à un assoupissement de sa peine."²⁰

Included in her management of the house was the care of the animals, which she undertook with great authority, and needless to say she was just as strict with the people who surrounded her: "Elle régentait tout le monde: les gens, le chien, les canards et les poules."²¹ Throughout these books Bosco calls her "despotique" or "autoritaire" and he should know for he was the object of most of this discipline. But such was her way of guiding him that he did not find any difficulty in obeying her: "son bon sens avait une telle saveur qu'on lui obéissait avec plaisir."²² Tante Martine is helped to this end by the imaginative side of her nature since the common sense on which she based her cautions was not without a dash of frivolity from time to time. This made it all much easier to take: "au milieu de tant de bon sens ne lui manquait pas ce grain de folie qui, de la marotte à la fantaisie la plus vive, contredit opportunément ce bon sens et le rend agréable."²³

In this way especially, Tante Martine reveals an instinctive ability to place herself on a level which is acceptable to the child and that is probably why the young Bosco was so attracted to her. This ability goes even further when, considering how widely separated by age the two might be, she treats him almost at all times as an equal, and, without any embarrassment, is able to share her secrets and keep him in her confidence. So

the child is able to do just the same, and a special relationship is built up between them based on mutual trust and understanding. This close feeling for one another allows them to share their thoughts and their dreams: "Nos confins avaient tant d'affinités qu'un de mes songes pouvait les franchir pour aller se fondre dans un autre songe inventé par Tante Martine, cependant que les siens pénétraient souvent dans ma vie secrète, pour l'émerveiller."²⁴ Following from this closeness in their relationship, and probably another reason for it, is Tante Martine's natural ability to grasp a situation and to understand things without any unduly long explanation: "Il suffisait de laisser le coeur dans le jeu pour que tout devînt clair sans qu'on l'énonçât clairement."²⁵ So, while living in the imaginary world she creates and at times almost ignoring the people around her, her understanding of them does not lose by this in any way. When Pascalet returns in L'Enfant from his long adventure on the river forbidden to him by his father, she is ready to accept the situation, understanding what has attracted him there. She calls him several unflattering names and then hugs him warmly, and in this way he returns to the security of her and the "Mas-du-Gage's" protection.

We are not surprised to discover that such a person as Tante Martine is bestowed with a wealth of knowledge about life in general. But in keeping with her simple

attitude to life, she chooses to express this lifetime treasury of wisdom in sayings and proverbs which are to be found all the way through the books. This "sagesse proverbiale" ranges from observations on the signs and vagaries of nature and the weather, through to comments on life and human nature in general.

Consider for example:

"Quand il tonne le soir de Sainte-Rosalie
C'est que l'automne aura du vent et de
la pluie.²⁶

This is just a simple observation on nature's ways, but there are more philosophical ones on man's ways:

Tous les hommes lèvent le nez,
Mais la pluie rabat leur caquet.

or:

Tout le monde se croit certain,
Personne ne te dit peut-être.
Si tu cherche à te connaître,
Tu trouveras que tu n'es rien.²⁷

She was not interested in involved philosophical thoughts and it is enough for her that her beliefs could be summarised in these sayings, stored away for future reference when the need may arise to express them. She is not without a certain amount of superstition either, for she has a great respect for signs that may indicate something in store. On her trip to Pierroure she carries with her a "Clef des Songes" to interpret her dreams, and as we all know:

Songes du matin
Avis du Destin.²⁸

Having awoken on the morning of her departure to the

sounds of a donkey braying in her dreams, she is able to interpret this as a sign from above of good things to come. The fact that nothing good does come from this trip makes her come to the conclusion that she will no longer dream, but sleep, and so she leaves the "Clef des Songes" behind as a token of thanks to the Aliberts. But, as the author notes in Mon compagnon de songes, when she slept in her last years she was heard to mumble the name "Gabriel" and this was no doubt her last, long, uninterrupted dream.²⁹ Bosco learnt a great respect for mirrors too through Tante Martine, who believed the devil lurked behind the image to make us forget that it is only an illusion: "une illusion que nous enchantait dangereusement, car, dans ce cas, le diable, c'était nous."³⁰

While she had a certain amount of belief in the stars and fate, it all tended to be mixed up with her simple belief in God. If anyone dropped a piece of bread it was as well for them to kiss it in an act of regret and reverence because:

Le pain de blé que tu pétris,
C'est la chair et le corps de Jésus-Christ.³¹

She is content to hand this part of her life over to the Supreme Being and live a devout life as she thinks fit:

Tu ne sais que ce que tu crois,
Mets ton coeur au pied de la Croix.³²

And that just about sums up her religious beliefs.

Although she did not overlook such things as fate and predestination, she always held strongly to the belief

that there was a simple way out:

Tout ce que tu es est écrit,
Mais tu peux prier Jésus-Christ.³³

She was able to pray easily, whether to her favourite saints or to the Holy Being himself and there is little doubt, as Bosco said, that this voice would be heard.

There were times, especially at night, when forgetting her household responsibilities, she would give full rein to her imagination and for a while she would live in a world of fantasy, with treasured objects and people from the past:

Si, coiffée de piqué, les clefs et les ciseaux pendus à la ceinture, elle dirigeait de haut et de près la maison, distribuait l'éloge et le blâme, grondait, et faisait trembler jusqu'à la volaille... il lui arrivait quelquefois de passer au-delà de ces choses tellement communes et de poursuivre Dieu sait quels fantômes, là où aucun de nous ne voyait rien que des objets inertes, comme dans la cave et dans le grenier. Dans la cave et dans le grenier, dorment les malles délabrées, vieillissent les meubles branlants, pendent les vêtements rongés de mites. Or, c'est au beau milieu de ces friperies poussiéreuses, qu'elle donnait ses rendez-vous à d'invisibles personnages...³⁴

If she has a fault it is that in pursuing these dreams she sometimes overlooks the supervision of her young charge: "Va t'amuser dans le jardin, me disait-elle. Il faut que je range les fripes."³⁵ Then off she would go to her world of the past, bolting the door firmly behind her so that she might be alone with her invisible friends and ancestors. There, rummaging through the old clothes, furniture and portraits she is able to hold

conversations with those long gone. She was never happier than when she could be alone reliving the past in the familiar objects of the attic and cellar. If not searching through these family possessions, she is probing the depths of the house to find a secret corridor or an underground tunnel. This incredible imagination and her actions which resulted from it did not however override her original responsibility to the house and its inhabitants: "Son commerce avec les mystérieux personnages qu'elle convoquait au grenier ne l'empêchait pas de peser et de repeser très exactement les sous du ménage."³⁶

We return full circle then to the original division in her character, to the division between her practical and visionary worlds where her solid earthiness is made more colourful by her vivid and almost childlike imagination. Having lived all her time in a small area of Provence, going from one family to the other, hers may not have been an adventurous life by some standards. But what she had gained is a fulfilment of life of the highest order and few people can boast the qualities that Bosco attributes to her: "sagesse, savoir, endurance au travail, courage aux peines et, par mystérieuses resurgences d'âmes, une puissante aptitude à rêver."³⁷

A dominating personality, we feel that she is very much at one with life, completely in control of situations and accepting those which defy rationalisation. She does not question, but lives the full and satisfying life she leads with enjoyment and zest. And what more

could be asked of life?

* * *

This chapter has attempted to detail some of the characteristics of a single person who figured very largely in Bosco's life and who also emerges as a colourful personality from the pages of his writings. Leaving aside the important role that Tante Martine played in his childhood for a moment, Bosco, the novelist, is attracted to her no doubt by the fact that she was of country stock. It remains a circular problem as to whether it was because of her that Bosco formulated his admiration for the country people of Provence, or whether he came to admire them through his life spent in the countryside and looks back upon her as a shining example. The answer is not important. What is however, is that as a person born, bred, and who had spent most of her life in the country, Tante Martine embodies much that Bosco came to value in the country people of Provence - qualities like simplicity in one's outlook on life, wisdom and fortitude, but who possessed as well a certain intangible element that lent a mysterious side to their natures. Tante Martine had all these, and there is little wonder that when it came to drawing up some of his feminine characters she provided an excellent model on which to base them.

Notes to Chapter I

(For editions of Bosco's works used see bibliography)

1. Le Renard dans l'île, p.19
2. Un oubli moins profond, p. 231
3. ibid., p.229
4. J.-C.Godin, op.cit., p.21, n.20:
"Henri Bosco avait sept ans, environ, lorsque sa grand-mère mourut. Il en aura onze lorsque Tante Martine mourra. C'est donc entre sept et onze ans que l'enfant a vécu les plus belles années de son enfance."
5. Published in the order as they appear: 1945,1956,
1957 & 1958.
6. Le Chemin de Monclar (1962), Le Jardin des Trinitaires
(1966),
Mon compagnon de songes (1967).
7. Paris, 1952.
8. Le Jardin des Trinitaires, p.11: "Ce dernier [Antonin], bien qu'il soit présenté en roman, n'en est pas moins autobiographique. Seules en effet les toutes dernières pages ont été romancées, et fort peu. Mais ailleurs, au long du récit, personnages et événements sont authentiques."
9. Un oubli, p. 229
10. See p.26
11. Un oubli, p. 229: "Ce qu'on aime, on l'aime tant qu'on le romance et ainsi j'ai un peu romancé Tante Martine. Peut-être y a-t-elle perdu ..."
12. R.T.Sussex, Henri Bosco: Poet-Novelist
(Christchurch, 1966), p.150
13. See Un oubli, p. 230-231. In Le Renard (p.16) we learn that Tante Martine had brought Bosco's father up as well.
14. Le Renard, p. 21.
15. Antonin, p. 270
16. ibid., p. 272
17. Le Renard, p. 19

18. Le Jardin des Trinitaires, p. 21
19. Antonin, p. 270
20. Barboche, p. 125
21. L'Enfant et la rivière, p. 23
22. Un oubli, p. 229
23. ibid., p. 230
24. ibid., p. 68
25. ibid., p. 230
26. Le Chemin, p. 36
27. Un oubli, p. 232
28. Barboche, p. 16
29. Mon compagnon de songes, p. 18
30. Le Jardin des Trinitaires, p. 81
31. ibid., p. 216
32. Un oubli, p. 232
33. ibid., p. 233
34. Le Renard, p. 18
35. L'Enfant, p. 29
36. Le Renard, p. 19
37. Un oubli, p. 231

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSEKEEPERS

The society that Bosco depicts in his novels is almost feudal in aspect. At the centre of each story there is the solitary narrator-hero who surrounds himself with a team of servants to run his holding and domestic affairs. In Le Jardin d'Hyacinthe, Féjan de Mégremut employs a shepherd, a farmer and a housekeeper who, in true feudal spirit, care for, and are dependent on, one another. There is never any suggestion throughout Bosco's works that the narrator might fend for himself, and rare are the occasions when he is seen to prepare a meal for example. In L'Ane Culotte, where the narrator is a child, the situation is a little different, but the household in which he lives is as equally populated with servants. J.-C. Godin compares Bosco with Giono in this respect and finds that there is a fundamental difference in their conception of society. Giono's world is the one before any social restraint or organisation has been put on it, where the individuals are free from the constricting, hierarchical framework of the family. However, in Bosco, it is different: "Les personnages de Bosco... vivent dans une société très fortement structurée et plus proche, sans doute, du monde féodal que de la vie contemporaine."¹

Although servants do abound in Bosco's novels, there

is never any suggestion that they are persecuted or exploited in any way. There is no sense of social disgrace in employing people in this manner, as an author more concerned with social issues might be bent on showing. In fact, there is no sense of their being employed at all - it is instinctively felt by the reader that they form an important and integral part of a family. Following from this, then, they become individuals in their own right, respected for their skills and their wisdom, handed down and developed from generation to generation. They are mostly of country stock, and therefore possess an understanding of, and an affinity with, nature. The shepherds show this to the highest degree, for, in living so close to nature, they have come to scorn the presence of anyone else: "Lents à se mouvoir, à parler, ils préfèrent vivre à l'écart, avec leurs conseils intérieurs et leurs conversations secrètes..."²

These shepherds, independent and sturdy, have their counterparts inside the house in the loyal, hardworking housekeepers who share with them this grasp upon life.³ The housekeepers have an inborn respect for order which shows itself in the way they tend to their duties in the house with remarkable efficiency. From Marie-Claire in Le Sanglier, the earliest of the race, to Valérie in Un rameau de la nuit, all display this "compétence professionnelle"⁴ which makes them admirable members of the brigade called by Jean Lambert, the "serviteurs maîtres"⁵: "ces servantes impeccables comme tout lecteur

de Bosco serait jaloux d'en avoir une: merveilleusement ordonnées, bonnes cuisinières, silencieuses, discrètes jusqu'à se faire invisibles."⁶ They are "maîtres", then, not only in the way they handle their work so skilfully, but also, it could be added, in the way they handle life in general. They are an imposing group and there can be little doubt that Bosco had a special purpose in mind when he brought them into his novels.

* * * * *

After having read of Tante Martine, readers can be almost certain that Bosco was thinking of her when it came to drawing his housekeepers. This is the belief of J.-C. Godin: "Comment parler des serviteurs sans évoquer, une nouvelle fois, la figure symbolique de Tante Martine?"⁷ Her presence can be felt in every one of them, and even more positively in the three housekeepers who come to life in the Hyacinthe trilogy.⁸ Yet, while each of these three in particular takes on facets of her personality, it is equally true to say that housekeepers of other novels have not escaped the influence of Tante Martine either. However, the Marie-Claires, the Anne-Madeleines and the Valéries, more ambiguous in their roles, belong more to the mystical side of Bosco's writing, and hence a chapter has been devoted to them in the second part of this study.⁹ The housekeepers of the Hyacinthe trilogy, older and portrayed in a less ethereal way are definitely more entrenched in the familiar world of Provence. The three have lived out their lives there and taken on the

characteristic virtues that in Bosco's view, such an existence engenders.

When the reader first meets la Péguinotte of L'Ane Culotte, he could be justified in thinking that this was Tante Martine under a different guise. Just like Tante Martine, la Péguinotte (whose real name is Claudia) appears to take the role of governess and guardian, and just like Bosco's parents, the grandparents of Constantin seem to take a secondary place behind la Péguinotte in bringing him up. Having lingered on his way home because of the appearance of the donkey called "Culotte" in the village, Constantin is rebuked sharply by la Péguinotte in a way that is very reminiscent of Tante Martine. Yet she notes his preoccupation during the meal, and afterwards, when he joins her in the kitchen, she questions him sympathetically about what had happened. Constantin is able to talk freely to her since they have the same special relationship that existed between Tante Martine and the young Bosco:

De tout temps elle avait été ma confidente. Curieuse autant que bavarde, tendre autant que bougonne, il ne se trouvait personne au monde qui pût accueillir avec une sympathie aussi vivante, ni commenter avec autant de verve, mes petits secrets. ¹⁰

Her reaction to learning that the donkey was in the village is quite marked, and the child's curiosity, already stimulated, is aroused even more when, told of the priest's kindly advice to the village children about the donkey, she utters the enigmatic statement: "S'il savait d'où il

vient l'âne Culotte..."¹¹ With these brief words, Constantin is introduced to the notion that there exists a place beyond the village with which this peculiar donkey is to be associated and from this point onwards he becomes increasingly attracted to Belles-Tuiles in the hills, where the old man Cyprien lives and whence he sends his donkey down to the village for supplies. What makes la Péguinotte's statement even more mysterious is that she refuses to qualify it at Constantin's entreaty: "Fais-toi. Tu m'en ferais trop dire... Mais par bonheur, je sais aussi me taire. Parce que, comme on dit chez moi:

Celui qui parle sans raison
Tire le diable à la maison. ¹²

At that point, Constantin is left to his own devices to ponder the mysteries of the "beyond" that will eventually engulf him.

Already la Péguinotte's resemblance to Tante Martine is apparent,¹³ for not only does she share her superstition, but also the expression of her thoughts in proverbs and sayings:

la Péguinotte communément ne parlait que par sentences, proverbes et fleurs de poésie. C'est ainsi qu'elle illustrait toutes les saisons de petits dictons cueillis dans je ne sais quel jardin de populaire sagesse. ¹⁴

Like Tante Martine, she is in her sixties, versatile, and can undertake almost anything that needs to be done round the house. She cares for the house and most certainly its inhabitants, as well as the garden and the animals. She is even able to give a hand when it comes to threshing the

corn and all this is done with the enthusiasm of a person half her age. Nevertheless, she would often be heard to grumble at the animals and even at the wind if it did not blow to her liking. It all stemmed from the fact that she was never satisfied with what she did: "Rien ne pouvait la satisfaire. Elle avait un haut sentiment de la perfection."¹⁵ This has strains of Tante Martine when she was continually making jobs up to be done, never wanting to see an end to them. La Péguinotte does much the same. On going to bed at night, she could never be sure that all had been done:

Tous les soirs, un problème domestique l'arrêtait un instant sur le palier du premier étage. Elle y délibérait, et même y faisait des projets d'avenir. Quelquefois elle redescendait en gémissant jusqu'à l'office.¹⁶

In return for her involvement in all that is going on in the Saturnin household, she believes it is her right to comment on anything she may wish to: "Moyennant quoi elle s'était arrogé le droit de tout dire, et particulièrement ce qui lui semblait désagréable à entendre."¹⁷ After the incident in the church involving the mysterious presence of the oriental incense and the branch of almond blossom which Constantin has surreptitiously brought back from his first visit to Belles-Tuiles, la Péguinotte is only able to contain herself until she gets home. Then she has much to say - to her, well versed in country lore, it is almost sacrilege to cut a branch of flowers and deprive them of becoming fruit:

"quelle honte ... d'arracher bêtement tant de fruits à la force d'un arbre !"¹⁸ The scent of such unfamiliar incense could only suggest a "mauvaise paroisse", and is therefore most unacceptable in the stable, untroubled village of Péirouré. Anything which could upset the stability around which the Saturnin household is built is immediately suspect in her eyes. That is why the appearance in the village of the donkey from Belles-Tuiles worries her; that is why the presence of the gypsies in the area causes her concern. In their mysterious, itinerant ways, they go against all that she holds to be important in life.

With all her comments on the happenings of the village and the household, she stands like a chorus on the sideline, and in doing this it is as if she represents all that is steady and unchanging. The other characters may come and go and become involved in the mysteries of the plot, but she remains steadfast in her responsibility to the house. When Constantin returns home with his grandparents after grand'mère Saturnine's convalescence, the first thing that he sees is la Péguinotte standing on the doorstep waiting for them.¹⁹ Later, as the mystery of the story begins to reach its climax, a temporary respite in the action is associated with la Péguinotte working in the kitchen: "A la maison tout respirait le calme. Grand'mère absente devait se trouver au rosaire. La Péguinotte occupait la cuisine, Hyacinthe demeurait invisible."²⁰ The reader feels that she becomes

increasingly associated with what is rational and stable in the world and soon realises that because of this, her position in the book is an important one. With her insight into the other world of Belles-Tuiles in the hills, she is the point where the two worlds meet.

La Péguinotte is a strong, forceful character who, in sharing Tante Martine's efficiency and understanding of life, is portrayed very much in her image. However, it is clear that she does not possess such a strongly developed imagination as Tante Martine, or at least it is not stressed in this portrayal. There are times, when she grumbles at the wind for example, when we catch glimpses of the characteristic Tante Martine imagination, but these occasions are rare. Tante Martine surrounded herself with her imaginary world much of the time, but this is not so with la Péguinotte, who stands firmly in the domain of the Saturnin household.

The second housekeeper of the Hyacinthe trilogy is Mélanie Duterroy who is entrusted with the care of the house called La Commanderie where the unnamed narrator of Hyacinthe lives. She is a sullen, morose person of about forty who this time does not live in the house she keeps. Instead, she walks several miles twice a week from the village of Pontillot to bring provisions and tidy the house. In doing this she shows the characteristic skill of the housekeepers in Bosco's novels, following a regular routine each time she comes to La Commanderie:

En entrant dans la cuisine, elle jetait, devant la cheminée le sac à provisions. Quand elle avait fini de ranger le pain, le savon, le sucre, elle tirait de son cabas un petit bouquet. C'étaient tantôt des pâquerettes, tantôt des boutons d'or, tantôt des soucis... Elle plaçait son bouquet dans un pot de terre, au-dessus de la cheminée et, sans lui accorder un regard, empoignait son balai et se mettait à l'ouvrage... Son travail achevé, elle prenait le bouquet, le replaçait dans son cabas, s'enveloppait dans une longue pèlerine beige et ouvrait sur l'hiver la porte de la maison... Elle restait un moment, immobile, sur le seuil, comme si elle eût voulu que le vent pénétrât jusqu'au fond de la vieille bâtisse... Brusquement, elle baissait la tête, et partait. Sans se retourner une seule fois, elle s'éloignait à grands pas de bête, vers les étangs. 21

She is completely reliable in her comings and goings. Always she would arrive at nine o'clock and leave at midday and in the meantime all would be done, even when the narrator is absent, with what almost amounts to a religious fervour: "Avec une conscience irréprochable, une sorte de foi domestique, elle lavait, cuisinait balayait..."²² Taciturn to the point of hardly sharing any conversation with her master - "nous échangeons huit ou dix phrases"²³ - she shows no interest in him at the start, and without question accepts the strange, solitary existence in which he has placed himself. Coming with her great dog from the village, she never feels inclined to reveal any news or gossip, and that is just as the narrator would wish it to be. It is as if she shares Tante Martine's ability to understand situations without explanation: "elle comprenait vite et, ayant touché son dû, ne réclamait jamais rien."²⁴ Very much a recluse herself, she is able to sense that her presence is only tolerated at La Commanderie be-

cause of its usefulness. So she does not intrude upon his world of contemplation, and her presence becomes nothing but a shadow passing before him: "Melanie passe, entre moi et la lumiere, sans hate, avec obstination; et son ombre seule projette quelques variations dans mon desert."²⁵

Just like Tante Martine and many of the other housekeepers, she has a regard for objects, and, in keeping with her rather sombre character, she treats those of La Commanderie with some distaste:

on sentait qu'elle désapprouvait, secrètement, à peu près tout, la place des objets, les objets eux-mêmes. Elle les traitait avec ces précautions et cette méfiance qu'inspire une animosité sourde, un regret hostile.²⁶

When we catch a glimpse of her working at her own home, we see that she remains very close to the country existence, as do the other housekeepers. There she maintains a fine vegetable garden and works as calmly and as methodically in it as she does at La Commanderie:

"Mélanie se trouvait dans le potager. Une pioche à la main, elle creusait une rigole. Ses mouvements étaient calmes, puissants..."²⁷ She shares with all her predecessors this natural affinity with the earth.

Since she only visits La Commanderie twice a week, it might be expected that, unlike other housekeepers, she stands apart from the events which befall her master. At first, we are lead to assume that she is not aware of Hyacinthe's presence in the house, and she appears to be

indifferent to the signs left about, such as a scarf, that suggest that there is a woman there. But we realise later, as does the narrator when he overhears a conversation between the two women, that there is indeed a link between Mélanie and the arrival of Hyacinthe. For we learn that Hyacinthe is Mélanie's mistress and Mélanie has lead her to La Commanderie, to take refuge there from her enslavement at Silvacane, the earthly paradise set up by Cyprien.²⁸ In so doing, Mélanie involves her master directly in all the mysterious happenings that the presence of Hyacinthe at La Commanderie brings. We can see Mélanie's ambiguous position in all this, for, by virtue of the gypsy blood which she has inherited from her nomad mother, she has a holding in both worlds and is therefore in the valuable position of understanding both. It is to Mélanie that her half-brother, Gatso a full-blooded gypsy, goes to find information on the characters of the story whom even the gypsies have lost track of: "Gatso... se plaignait que tout le monde eût disparu: Cyprien, Hyacinthe, l'hôte de La Geneste, moi-même. Il montrait la plus méchant humeur: Mélanie devait savoir quelque chose."²⁹ But, it is just as easy for the narrator to go to her to find solace as a representative of the normal, solid world to which she herself feels she belongs, with her "sang des villages".³⁰ She, like la Péguinotte, is where the two worlds meet.

Towards the middle of the book, just before the appearance of Hyacinthe on the doorstep of La Commanderie on Christmas night, there is a definite mellowing in

Mélanie's attitude towards her master and this reaches a point towards the end, where he can claim that there is a degree of friendship between them: "Je pense aussi qu'elle m'aime."³¹ She becomes more protective and more concerned with her master's well-being, and she first displays this when she leaves her dog behind because of the people who "rôdent dans le bois de la Deonne."³² Although she does not admit it, she probably has the safety of Hyacinthe in mind as well, but later the dog proves invaluable in rescuing the narrator from the underground cavern in which he has fallen.³³ After Hyacinthe is safely lodged in La Commanderie and the dog has been handed over for their protection, the mysteries of the story take over and Mélanie once again fades into the background, occasionally making an appearance to tend the house in the same clock-work manner as before. But there is a subtle change in her position, for, rather like la Réguinotte, she now stands aside, although ready to give the benefits of her protection and understanding. Twice, especially, the narrator avails himself of this. When, after the strange relationship between him and Hyacinthe has broken up, he wanders full of disillusionment "à l'aveuglette, perdu, sans but",³⁴ he ends up by going to Mélanie at her house, where she affords him the care and attention that he is in need of. Then, after his fruitless pilgrimage to Silvacane, he arrives back at La Commanderie, weak and in a state of near insanity, to find Mélanie there and once

again she is able to provide for him in his greatest time of need: "Quand je suis revenu, elle était là. Elle balayait la cuisine. Je ne lui ai rien dit... Elle m'a apporté à manger et à boire."³⁵ In this way, she becomes increasingly identified with what is normal in the narrator's life.

Mélanie is at the centre of the story, which is an ironic position for a main character who appears the least. It is because her identity with the gypsies, through her blood ties, allows her to have a foot in both worlds as J.-C. Godin notes: "Elle participe des deux mondes: elle est enracinée et nomade, civilisée et sauvage, adaptée aux coutumes paysannes et initiée aux rites ésotériques."³⁶ It is for the very reason that she is "initiée aux rites ésotériques" that she takes on such an important role. Her domain is definitely shown to be the solid world that the village of Pontillot represents, and she is able, from there, to provide her protection and solace with an understanding and sympathy that only an acquaintance with the "other" world of the gypsies could give.

With Sidonie Méricot of Le Jardin d'Hyacinthe, whom Lambert has called "la patronne",³⁷ we arrive at the exemplary figure of the group. Less vociferous than la Réguinotte, yet displaying more obvious affection than Mélanie, she combines her housekeeping virtues with less tangible virtues belonging to the mind and the heart. This two-sided nature reminds us very much of Tante Martine. At the age of sixty nine, she is the oldest of the house-

keepers whom we see, but she still has not lost the intrinsic skill and efficiency of her breed. Her household tasks are carried out to perfection for she has a firm belief in the order of things: "Il faut de l'ordre, monsieur Frédéric. Sans ordre, que devient la vie?..."³⁸ So she goes about her duties with an eagerness and confidence that only an instinctive love of order could provide: "son besoin d'ordre partait de coeur, et c'est sur le coeur que sa logique reposait."³⁹ Because of this she, like Tante Martine, believes in the hierarchy of objects, placing them on a shelf, no matter how much inconvenience it may incur, according to their "noblesse":

Sidonie ne disposait pas les objets en vue de ses commodités ou des miennes, mais plutôt suivant leur noblesse... Ainsi du haut en bas de la maison, la moindre tasse, le plus humble balai, occupait, à son rang, la place dont le jugeait digne le coeur de Sidonie.⁴⁰

As well, she attaches much sentiment to these objects, and when they are rendered useless by their age, it does not necessarily mean they will be disposed of. An old knife, now chipped and unusable, is retained by the loving Sidonie at the back of a drawer to be brought out at polishing time and praised for past services well done.⁴¹

In keeping le Liguset, her master's home, well run and tidy, she concerns herself little with the outside world. For her, those people who matter are those with whom she is in immediate contact and so her devotion to Méjan, her master, and to the girl Félicienne when she arrives, is steadfast. There is a very special relationship built up between Méjan and Sidonie which recalls that

between Bosco and Tante Martine. For, he holds a special place in her world, where people, like objects, are not spared from being classified according to their merit: "J'étais au sommet de l'échelle et ne l'ignorais point."⁴² There is no suggestion that, since she is in his service, there is a gulf between them. The relationship goes deeper than that: "Sidonie ne me servait pas: elle m'aimait."⁴³ So they are able to share their thoughts and their worries without any verbal communication whatsoever: "Sidonie et moi, nous sommes liés par des fils sensibles. Son souci, ses pensées, dès qu'ils ont trouvé une forme, apparaissent en moi sans qu'elle ait besoin d'en parler."⁴⁴ All the way through, Sidonie is able to sense her master's mind and react accordingly. More often than not this means that she will stay discreetly in the background, as when he returns with the news of the death of Guériton,⁴⁵ until he is ready to speak to her.

The devotion and understanding which she displays towards her master extends towards the house as well. She feels the need to stay with it when Méjan goes to the village of Les Amélières to convalesce. For her it is not just a wish, but a necessity, that someone should stay behind: "Sidonie avait déclaré nécessaire que l'on gardât quelqu'un au Liguset."⁴⁶ She, like the other housekeepers, becomes increasingly associated with the house and on the narrator's trips away from le Liguset, is always there when he returns, her very presence being reassuring to him. At one point, when looking back at le

Liguset from the middle of the wood in which he is walking, Mejan is struck by the "message de confiance" which it conveys through its lighted windows and in this he recognises "la main de Sidonie".⁴⁷ The house is rather like a bastion of the solid, secure world in which her presence is supreme.

Of all the animals she tended with great care at le Liguset, it was the two Persian cats which caused her the most trouble. For, while she attended to them "avec adoration", in their communications with the dark world beyond, from which they would return "plus troublants que jamais",⁴⁸ they reminded her of the one thing that she firmly believed would happen in her lifetime: "Ce qu'elle attendait de la vie c'était une âme, car la vie lui avait promis une âme".⁴⁹ With steadfast confidence in the arrival of this "âme", she would wait, and meanwhile, anything that suggested the outside world and the possible end to her expectation, whether it be the cats or a stranger in her midst, would cause her the greatest perturbation. The long evenings of summer were especially favourable in her opinion for the arrival of her guest which she believed would take place between "chien et loup".⁵⁰ Such is her confidence that she remains always ready for this unknown traveller, having prepared two beds, one on the first floor of the house and the other in the orchard summerhouse. So the whole household becomes invested with this feeling of waiting and expectancy and not even the objects escape being associated

with this "âme attendue". The bread becomes "le pain de l'âme", "une nourriture sacrée", because it has been kneaded "dans l'espérance". The fire, never allowed to go out, is "le feu saint" on which the meal of the traveller is left to simmer all day.⁵¹ Yet, like Tante Martine, she can combine this more imaginative side of her nature with what she is entrusted to do in the house and nothing is lost by it: "On est plutôt sensé dans nos campagnes. Elle l'était aussi et l'économie de ma vie n'avait pas à souffrir de la présence de son rêve."⁵²

Surrounded by all this, Méjan can hardly escape being caught up in the preparations and their significance to Sidonie. However, at first, he cannot share her optimism and is even a little amused by her activities which she pursues quite openly: "J'avais beau, personnellement, n'y attendre personne, je ne pouvais pas ignorer les préparatifs ... qu'avait faits ouvertement Sidonie."⁵³ It is only after the visit of the abbe Vergélian who reveals the plight of the Guériton couple, in whose care the young girl Félicienne is, that he begins to see some meaning in Sidonie's faculty: "j'inclinai tout doucement ... à ce goût de l'attente qui depuis tant d'années inspirait le coeur de Sidonie."⁵⁴ After the death of Guériton, he becomes even more convinced of the imminent arrival of the long awaited guest and for three days he and Sidonie share the wait together:

Nous n'attendîmes que trois jours. Mais alors, je compris ce qu'est l'attente. Sans doute, je ne portais pas (comme depuis longtemps le portait Sidonie) le poids d'une obsédante promesse. Nulle bouche surnaturelle ne m'avait explicitement annoncé l'approche d'un événement ou d'un être prédestiné à changer, fût-ce peu, le cours monotone de ma vie. J'éprouvais seulement une confiance ingénue, une foi sans objet ... J'attendais comme tout le monde, qui n'attend rien de singulier; et plus je me disais que cela serait simple, plus l'objet de ma confiance me semblait extraordinaire.⁵⁵

So the "âme attendue" arrives in the form of Hyacinthe who is now called Pélucienne, the name given to her by the gypsies.⁵⁶ Sidonie's wait appears to be over and she can now return to her responsibilities towards the house and its inhabitants with a renewed peace of mind that is brought by the fulfilment of her lifelong belief. But it is Néjan who then becomes involved in the mysteries and events that evolve with the presence of Hyacinthe at le Liguset, while Sidonie, as the loyal, understanding representative of the normal world, remains the person to whom he can turn for comfort and counsel. Like la Péguinotte and Mélanie, Sidonie introduces her master to the world of mystery and then, like them, assumes the role of representing what is secure and solid in the world.

These three great personalities are exemplary models of the band of people who make up the housekeepers of Bosco's novels. It is not difficult to see how, in sharing facets of her make-up, they closely resemble Tante Martine. Like her, they are masters of their trade. They show remarkable efficiency in caring for their respective houses and in their relations with their masters are eternally loyal and discreet. Like Tante Martine and

Bosco, they share with their masters a mutual trust and understanding which can only benefit their masters in time of need. They are all country people, as was Tante Martine, and remain firmly rooted in this world, strong in their beliefs which are nevertheless very simple. Yet in common with Tante Martine, they possess the intangible element that made her character so attractive, whether it be la Péguinotte's "insight" into Belles-Tuiles, Mélanie's association with the gypsies, or Sidonie's belief in the coming of the "âme". All three are colourful, attractive figures of the solid world of Provence. It remains to place an interpretation upon their role in the novels.

* * *

Michel Barbier has compared one type of house in Bosco with the part of the mother - it is there to protect the individual and to shelter him against the ravages of nature and, more metaphysically, of the mind: "Comme la mère, la maison est essentiellement l'être puissant qui protège, le refuge du corps et de l'âme."⁵⁷ "Les Ramades" of Le Sanglier is the first of a long line of country houses which provide such shelter for the narrators against the storms of Provence and of the mind, and R.T. Sussex sums up briefly its purpose in the novel:

It is a small Provençal farm-house - kitchen, stairs, bedroom, attic - and a reassuring, solid, domestic element in the great wilderness of scrub and stone that hems it in. Behind its shutters and tiles, though its timbers quiver to the enormous electric storms of in-

land Provence, there is a sense of security and assurance. It is only a temporary hospice, but a fortress with a real protective function in the plot.⁵⁸

At the same time, J.-C. Godin has talked of the housekeepers as the "créatures du foyer", being "les personnages dont la grandeur tient avant tout à la dévotion absolue qu'ils portent à une famille, à un maître."⁵⁹ While the houses of the Hyacinthe trilogy all suggest this idea of protection in their own ways, it could be proposed that these "créatures du foyer", the great animators of the houses in the way they run and keep them, fulfil much the same role. Each of the housekeepers discussed in this chapter, for example, is associated with a return home by the narrators after one or several journeys away. In returning home, they are often tired, distraught or upset and they find comfort there under the steady hand of the housekeeper.

Yet this is not the only role they play in the novels, for, as J.-C. Godin has suggested in talking of the servants in general, it is for them to introduce the narrator-heroes of the story to the world of mystery: "ils n'existent qu'en fonction du maître mais ils sont, par rapport à lui, les messagers des dieux chargés de l'introduire au mystère."⁶⁰ This chapter has indicated the way in which the housekeepers of the Hyacinthe trilogy do this. *La Péguinotte*, in talking mysteriously of *Belles-Tuiles*, incites a curiosity in her young master; because of *Mélanie's* involvement in the gypsy world, she

involves her master in it once she succeeds in having him shelter Hyacinthe at La Commanderie; Méjan de Négremut, at first **s**ceptical about Sidonie's belief in the eventual appearance of the "âme", finally does succumb to this belief and becomes involved in the events that Hyacinthe's presence heralds. They are all fine examples of what Jean Lambert has called "des héros involontaires" because, "Ils se trouvent mêlés à l'action malgré eux, parce qu'ils sont là et que le mystère les intrigue."⁶¹ They have been innocent bystanders, drawn into the action, in these cases, by their housekeepers. This is the main, active role of the housekeepers, for once they have done this, they return to their normal course of duties and, in so doing, provide the normality of life to which the hero can return for repose and **r**efreshment.

Notes to Chapter II

- 1 J.-C.Godin, op. cit., p.209
- 2 Le Jardin d'Hyacinthe, p.26
- 3 cf. "Provençal People" (anonymous),
Times Literary Supplement, 2759 (Dec. 17,1954), p.820.
- 4 H.Barbier, op. cit., p.57
- 5 J. Lambert, op. cit., p.84
- 6 ibid., p. 85
- 7 J.-C.Godin, op. cit., p.211
- 8 Hyacinthe trilogy: L'Ane Culotte (1973),
Hyacinthe (1940), Le Jardin d'Hyacinthe (1946).
- 9 See ch.V
- 10 L'Ane Culotte, p.25
- 11 ibid., p.26
- 12 ibid., p.26
- 13 The nearest Tante Martine and la Péguinotte come to meeting in Bosco's works is in Barboche where Tante Martine has made a fruitless pilgrimage to her childhood village of Pierroure (Péirouré in L'Ane Culotte) with a view to visiting the Saturnin household for one thing. She says of la Péguinotte: "Elle a un mauvais caractère. Mais du coeur à revendre" (p.128).
- 14 L'Ane Culotte, p. 23
- 15 ibid., p. 22
- 16 ibid., p. 72
- 17 ibid., p. 22
- 18 ibid., pp. 69-70
- 19 cf. ibid., p. 119
- 20 ibid., p. 149
- 21 Hyacinthe, pp. 13-14
- 22 ibid., p. 39
- 23 ibid., p. 13
- 24 ibid., p. 13

- 25 ibid., p. 239
- 26 ibid., p. 13
- 27 ibid., p. 201
- 28 Hyacinthe's strange association with Mélanie as her mistress has to do, no doubt, with the hold, which Mélanie reveals in talking to the narrator, that Cyprien has over the gypsies: "Cyprien, dont la puissance étrange les dominait..." (p. 206). Hyacinthe, who is Cyprien's female counterpart, if unwilling, at Silvacane, and around whom the gypsies have built a cult, would therefore become their mistress. Mélanie, as the narrator tells us near the beginning, is related to the gypsies by blood.(p.52).
- 29 Hyacinthe, p. 208
- 30 ibid., p. 123
- 31 ibid., p. 239
- 32 ibid., p. 123
- 33 cf. ibid., p. 143
- 34 ibid., p. 200
- 35 ibid., p. 239
- 36 J.-C.Godin, op.cit., p. 219
- 37 J.Lambert, op. cit., p. 88
- 38 Le Jardin d'Hyacinthe, p. 81
- 39 ibid., p. 81
- 40 ibid., p. 82
- 41 cf. ibid., p. 82
- 42 ibid., p. 82
- 43 ibid., p. 82
- 44 ibid., pp. 140- 141
- 45 cf. ibid., p. 105, p.172
- 46 ibid., p. 219
- 47 ibid., pp. 95- 96

- 48 ibid., p. 83
- 49 ibid., p. 83
- 50 ibid., p. 84
- 51 ibid., p. 85
- 52 ibid., p. 84
- 53 ibid., p. 86
- 54 ibid., p. 98
- 55 ibid., p. 123
- 56 It may be wondered whether Hyacinthe, under the guise of Félicienne, is the complete fulfilment of the "âme attendue". She turns out to be a shell of a person, completely emotionless and almost devoid of life. As is quite specifically stated by Méjan, "Félicienne n'était pas une âme" (p.200). Although Sidonie is quite content with her arrival, suggesting that her wait is over, there is some cause to think that Félicienne did not bring her waiting completely to an end: "quelques allusions me donnèrent, un soir, à penser que, pour elle (contrairement à ce que je pensais) Félicienne n'était pas tout à fait l'être attendue, mais une préfiguration de cette fameuse promesse qui annonçait à Sidonie l'arrivée d'une âme" (p.200). Why did she prepare two beds? Is the arrival of Constantin Gloriot, who brings out the first real signs of life in Hyacinthe when he calls to her (p.286), the true fulfilment of the "âme attendue", in that he is a type of complement to Hyacinthe?
- 57 M.Barbier, op. cit., p. 77
- 58 R.T.Sussex, op. cit., p. 49
- 59 J.-C.Godin, op. cit., p. 210
- 60 ibid., p. 216
- 61 J.Lambert, op. cit., p. 68

CHAPTER III

THE PEASANT FAMILIES

Jean Onimus has talked of Bosco's work as a series of journeys to and from the beyond: "toute son oeuvre ne consistet-elle pas tour à tour ... à plonger dans le sauvage et à revenir, épuisé de fatigue et vaguement gêné, vers les créatures intelligibles, les gens raisonnables?"¹ As has been shown in the previous chapter, the housekeepers, as representatives of the normal, solid world, may well be some of these "créatures intelligibles", for it is to them that the narrators turn initially for reassurance and comfort once they have become involved in the mysteries of the "other" world. But it also became evident that the housekeepers have an active association with this "other" world of mystery, if only that they are spectators who introduce its presence to their masters.

There is, however, a group of characters, closely associated with the housekeepers, which remains firmly embedded in the rustic world of Provence, the normal world to which the heroes return from time to time, and these are the country folk, the peasants of Provence. They are the people who inhabit the "paradis terrestre"² of which the attractive descriptions, suggesting the beauty and tranquility of the Provençal countryside, abound in Bosco's novels. In living in this countryside (a love of which

Bosco himself readily admits³), they take on the unsophisticated, quietly reflective life that it permits and which becomes characteristic of their type. The article "Provençal People", suggests the author's attitudes towards these people: "He has a natural liking for people who lead simple lives and he respects the wisdom that has accumulated throughout generations of traditional life."⁴ Their demands on life are modest and, because they live so close to the earth, they feel satisfaction in working with it. These are the characters who inhabit what Anne Wertheimer has called, "un monde solidement enraciné dans le simple courant de la vie."⁵ The narrators separate themselves from this world when they become involved in the strange events of the story, and while the country people do not ignore the presence of these mysteries of the other world, they are content to stand back and let them take their course.

* * * * *

One of the qualities of these characters that Bosco stresses is that they remain close to one another in faithful, family groups, which can take several forms: on the one hand there are the smaller family units such as the Alibert couple with their two children, or the Saturnin couple, an ageing man and wife, and on the other hand, there are the major family groups like the Mégremut clan in Malicroix. The one essential feature of these families, whether they be a married couple or of clannish proportions, is that members are closely identified with

one another and therefore an individual rarely emerges. If a person does leave the fold, as the narrators do, it is generally because he possesses blood, through his mother, which is foreign to the family.⁶ There is only limited scope for the personality of an individual to develop in its own right in these family groups, where all members take on the same fundamental attitudes to life. However, where he has thought it necessary, Bosco has allowed certain of the characters in these families to stand out, and there are some feminine characters who are worthy of investigation beyond the general characteristics of the families.

Of the great families that we meet, the Mégremut clan of Malicroix, and its subsidiary in Sylvius,⁷ is the most striking. The great Métidieu and Dérivat families of Le Mas Théotime, once a flourishing and admirable example of a close family association, are nevertheless seen to be in a process of decline:

Frappés d'une langueur sans cause apparente, Métidieu et Dérivat commencèrent à dépérir. En quelques années ils perdirent cette vitalité et cette puissance de joie qui devait être leur profonde raison de vivre, puisque dès lors les plus robustes de la race déclinerent et un à un s'acheminèrent vers le tombeau.⁸

However, there is no suggestion that the Mégremut clan, in which the young people are content to remain,⁹ is in any imminent danger of collapse. In fact there is a timeless quality about the settlement in the hills of Provence, where is found the "berceau des Mégremut".¹⁰

In this peaceful setting, less than a mile away from the nearest village, Anthebaume, and in a cluster of houses with their gardens full of flowers and trees, the family lives out its calm and ordered life: "Dans un pays calme, six toits, une trentaine d'âmes. Un peu de neige sur les toits, et déjà de grands feux de bois pour réchauffer ces âmes... Je les voyais, les Mégremut."¹¹ Further back still in the hills is the idyllic orchard of Pomelore, common property of the Mégremut family:

Au pied d'une falaise, une conque peuplée d'arbres et de plantes précoces, à l'abri des vents. Tout y pousse; il y fait chaud l'hiver; les sources d'été y sont fraîches, et les racines les plus délicates ne s'y brisent pas. Pomelore est un bien indivis entre les Mégremut. Ils en parlent avec amour. C'est, disent-ils, leur paradis sur terre;¹²

A sweet and gentle-natured family, the Mégremuts. Theirs is a comfortable and secure life surrounded by one another in their settlement in the hills where their exploits are wholesomely close to nature. A devout and benevolent family, with no blemish in its history, it is made up of honest, sensible people:

Des femmes calmes et honnêtes, toutes ruisse-lantes de bonté, des hommes calmes et honnêtes, la bouche pleine de bon sens. Et les uns aux autres liés, cordés, enchaînés par les goûts, les idées, les sentiments, les plus honorables du monde; ¹³

We are not surprised to learn that they form a very domesticated community, which no one member has any great desire to leave.¹⁴ When somebody, like Martial, does leave, it is a time for great consternation and

it is a concern which the family as a whole shares. For he, with his botanical pursuits, had up to then been an admirable member of the family and it had been planned that he should marry his cousin, Inès, and another line of Mégremuts would thus be ensured. So Tante Philomène speaks for all the family when she writes to him the day after he has left: "Mon enfant, tu nous fais mourir d'inquiétude..."¹⁵ For the keynote of the Mégremut family is "l'unanimité"¹⁶ - there is no action, and indeed no feeling, amongst the family without there first being a consensus of opinion on it. Yet, while there is this unanimity in all that is done, there emerges one figure, Tante Philomène, who leads the family in its feelings: "Une seule émotion chez tante Philomène, et voilà toute la famille émue, jusqu'aux arrièrepetits cousins."¹⁷ She is undeniably the leader of the family, a role which has become synonymous with the name of Tante Philomène, the name which Bosco later gives to the leader of the Balesta family in the first two novels of that trilogy.¹⁸ In the Mégremut circle, even the men take a secondary role behind her and when there is a discussion, it will always be Tante Philomène who is at the head: "Ils tenaient chaque soir de petits conciliabules. Tante Philomène trônait."¹⁹ While he undoubtedly holds a position of importance in the family, her husband, Mathieu, a yielding and tender soul, is seen to be much in her shadow. He will often equate his and the family feelings with those of Tante Philomène's when, for example, he is expressing some reaction to an event. The joy which is

felt when it is realised that Martial, "un simple Négremut", and, then, the whole family, could hold an upper hand over such an imposing figure as Dromiols, is simply expressed as, "Tante Philomène en était aux anges..."²⁰

In this role of leader, Tante Philomène shows typical protective qualities. The eight pages of her letter to Martial on the island are full of censure and advice. When she first hears of his island inheritance, she is full of concern for his health: "Et surtout n'y va pas! me supplia Tante Philomène si bonne, et que ma santé tourmentait toujours. Tu y prendrais la fièvre quatre. C'est le pays."²¹ For Martial, who has no parents, she fulfils the duties of a mother almost to an excessive degree.

This, then, is the family, "la tribu la plus douce de la terre,"²² which Martial leaves to take up his inheritance on the Camargue island, and it is much the same type of family that Pascal Dérivat leaves when he goes to his inheritance on the Théotime farm. Both families are content with their lot and are therefore gentle by nature, and these qualities are in turn endowed upon their members. Part of the struggle for the narrators is that they cannot throw off these tendencies. Obviously attracted to the ruggedness and solitude of the life which they inherit along with their respective properties, the ability to identify themselves completely with their new lives, especially at first, is inhibited because of their connections, both physically

and mentally, with these families. Hence, to a large measure, the drama of the story.

Of the farming families seen in Bosco, there is none more noteworthy than the Aliberts of Le Mas Théotime. Alibert, his wife, Marthe, and their two children display a remarkable skill in working with the land. Within a year of their being employed by Pascal, the Théotime farm, much of which had lain fallow for years, had become a productive concern once again. They come from a family with a long tradition in farming in the very area of the Théotime farm. In fact, the Aliberts live in a house which bears their name, it having been associated with the Alibert family over the years, and this house is not four hundred metres from the Mas Théotime.²³ Near to the Alibert home is the graveyard of the family.²⁴

The Aliberts are therefore closely identified with the area and in working for Pascal, they show much love and understanding of it. They are honest, hard-working people who labour with patience and pride in what they are doing. Taciturn and cautious, they do not comment on anything other than that with which they are immediately concerned:

Les Alibert ont une sorte de culte du silence qui les rend à peu près muets, sauf sur les questions de labour, de dépiquage et de vendange, dont ils parlent sobrement, quand la nécessité les y oblige. Les Alibert entendent tout et ne répètent rien.²⁵

This reticence means that they are restrained when it comes to expressing their feelings: "Leurs propos ne

vous livrent jamais l'expression claire de leur sentiment."²⁶ This is especially so of the father who is the most reserved and controlled of the family. His words are so few that, to be able to understand him, a special ability is required for, "C'est un homme qu'il faut traduire."²⁷ Only in matters dealing with the farm is he forthright in what he says. He has very little to say about the beehive which, unknown to him, had been placed by his son on the neighbouring property to trick Clodius into coming out into the open to deal with it. Because such action violates his belief in the "souveraineté des bornes", he does not feel inclined to condone it, yet nor does he outrightly disapprove of it: "Le reproche n'est point dans sa manière, qui procède par allusions générales et sous-entendus."²⁸ He is a man who is only at his happiest when he is working close to his beloved soil.

The two women of the family, when compared with Alibert, appear to be more open and more communicative. They - Marthe, and their daughter, Françoise - combine their tasks in the fields with those of keeping the Mas Théotime and also of providing Pascal's meals. So when Geneviève arrives, all preparations in the house are left to them and they are on hand to show her around. Eventually, a familiarity is built up between her and the Aliberts in a way that had had no precedent: "Or les Alibert l'avaient admise sur les terres avec une familiarité dont jamais jusqu'alors, à ma connaissance,

ils n'avaient donné d'exemple."²⁹ In this, it is Marthe who shows the initiative, for she takes a certain degree of predominance in the family: Marthe Alibert qui avait de l'âge, du sens et un certain esprit de domination, abandonna sans s'en apercevoir ses positions habituelles de défense; et comme Geneviève ne parlait guère, c'est elle qui rompa la première la glace..."³⁰ Compared with her husband, who is a rather sullen individual, she is more forthright and resourceful. After Pascal's encounter with Clodius,³¹ it is she who thinks up the plan to place the dead beehive on Clodius's property to make him reveal himself after days of leading them to believe, through vengeance no doubt, that he was dead or badly wounded.³² She is flattered by the success of her scheme and all this reveals a very human element in this woman, whose outer appearance is normally so impassive:

Marthe Alibert n'en resta pas moins satisfaite du succès heureux de son entreprise. Car la bonne issue d'une ruse, surtout quand on l'applique à un homme aussi retors que Clodius, flatte naturellement la vanité des femmes, fussent-elles aussi sages que Marthe Alibert. Il y avait d'ailleurs, dans son stratagème une imagination vive et plaisante qui décelait la bonhomie cachée de cette femme, par ailleurs si laborieuse et si grave dans ses devoirs.³³

While she can work beside her husband and children in the fields with a steady and tireless hand, she is just as competent in carrying out her domestic duties. For she has, "cet air de compétence qu'ont les femmes âgées de la campagne, habituées ... à se contenter de l'eau,

du bois, du feu, et de quelques déchets domestiques pour l'accomplissement des gros travaux ménagers."³⁴ So, the Alibert household and the *Mas Théotime* are well cared for under her steady guidance. But, as far as Pascal is concerned, the care which she feels towards the house extends to him as well, and in this she reveals the protective tendency common amongst Bosco's older feminine characters. She agrees with Genèvieve that Pascal's life in the country has done him good,³⁵ and then later, with a true motherly concern that reminds one of Tante Philomène, she even feels free to comment on how he should take care of himself: "A votre place, j'irais dormir vingt-quatre heures d'une pièce. Vous en avez besoin. On lit sur votre figure."³⁶

It is, however, Françoise who remains the most communicative towards Pascal. He often calls on her to interpret her father's mind, whose workings are never very obvious to an outsider. She tells him, for example, that her father appeared to be a little annoyed at the incident concerning the beehive: "Françoise pensait qu'il était mécontent. Il avait prononcé, dans le courant de la journée, deux ou trois paroles sur l'imprudence des femmes, sans préciser de quelles femmes ni de quelle imprudence il s'agissait."³⁷ Of the four Aliberts, she is the one who talks freely with Pascal: "Françoise s'ouvre volontiers à moi et cette confiance me plaît beaucoup."³⁸ He therefore finds her presence reassuring in times of stress. She does not have to say

very much, but her instinctive gentleness and calmness work almost like a soporific. During Geneviève's absence from the Mas Théotime following the incident with Clodius, and all the disconcertment that this brings for Pascal, it is a visit from Françoise that eases his mind:

La visite inattendue de Françoise m'avait apporté une langueur étrange ... Je venais d'assister au passage d'une figure de songe, tant il me paraissait peu croyable qu'en pleine nuit, cette fille si prudente fût venue, toute seule, en ma maison, pour m'y entretenir de la peine de Geneviève et prononcer mon nom avec une telle douceur."³⁹

Pascal is obviously attracted to this girl who has such a natural affinity with the earth and whose country existence has given her such a characteristic bearing: "Françoise était belle et n'en savait rien. Elle avait un corps calme, un peu gauche, mais la tête puissante, très douce; et de grandes épaules brunes qui remuait lentement quand elle marchait."⁴⁰ When working, she applies herself diligently to whatever she is doing, and she will labour alongside her brother and father without any sign of being inferior to them. When Geneviève compliments her on her strength, she is obviously pleased and blushes with pleasure.⁴¹ Françoise is the only person to whom Pascal knowingly reveals the presence of his sanctum in the loft when they pass through it after having stacked the hay.⁴² She realises that this confirms her view that Pascal is a little different from any other person she has known, and she promises not to tell anybody about it. In this and other ways, there is an

intimacy built up between Françoise and Pascal, and once Geneviève has gone, he realises his deep attachment to her and to her sober qualities which reflect what is good about the country life in which she has been brought up:

Malgré sa jeunesse et ce je ne sais quoi de plus charmant qui lui donne (surtout quand elle se contient) une grâce assez tendre, Françoise est bien de sa race sérieuse. Tout en elle annonce le goût du calme: son pas qui prend si bien possession de la terre, ses mains lentes et laborieuses, son regard attentif, et sa parole utile, sensée. Mais la voix reste toujours douce et d'un timbre pur. Prise au coeur, elle tient d'une âme sans impatience cette douceur et cette pureté. ⁴³

Pascal, "né pour habiter les terres basses, dans les quartiers où on laboure, avec les hommes, autour des maisons familiales",⁴⁴ realises, once his strange relationship with Geneviève, "cette fille du vent",⁴⁵ is over, that his future lies with Françoise, "une vraie femme de la terre".⁴⁶ The indication given of a meaningful relationship developing between Pascal and Françoise is certainly noteworthy, for rare are the occasions when we see, in Bosco's novels, what promises to be a lasting association between one of the narrators and a woman. It is significant (and perhaps indicative of Bosco's mind) that in this case Françoise should be involved, since she is a true peasant girl whose family has been associated with the soil for many generations.

This, then, is the quiet, unassuming Alibert family who works for Pascal Dérivat on the Théotime farm. They

are devoted to their work, and show, in their individual ways, a concern for the land and their master. But, above all, they are content with their lot and do much to contribute to "cette vie de Théotime, où personne ne cherchait le bonheur et où tout le monde était heureux."⁴⁷

While a woman appears to dominate in the big Mégremut family, as well as in the smaller Alibert family, the wives of the married couples are seen to be also in much the same position. At first, it seems that Grand'mère Saturnine of L'Ane Culotte takes a secondary role in her household behind the more voriferous la Péguinotte, but we soon realise that, in her quiet, unassuming way, she is very much in control: "ce qui frappait, dans cette femme calme et secrètement tendre, c'était l'esprit de souveraineté."⁴⁸ It is she who sternly forbids Constantin to go beyond the "pont de la Gayolle", which separates the steady world of the village of Péirouré from that of the strange Belles-Tuiles in the hills.⁴⁹ It is she who decides to send Constantin away to the "cousins Jorrier" where, nevertheless, her presence continues to be felt: "Grand'mère écrivait une fois par semaine. Des lettres calmes. De loin elle veillait à tout."⁵⁰ Throughout, she governs the affairs of the people who surround her because of her authoritative instinct, and if this may give the appearance that she is very independent, she readily admits, to the contrary, the part her husband plays: "Ma part est admirable, disait-elle. C'est celle qui revient naturellement à la femme... Mais sans un

homme, près de nous, ce labour n'aurait plus aucune raison d'être. Il y faut sa présence."⁵¹ So, this patient man who is rather deaf, and who is never happier than when he is contemplating under the fig-tree,⁵² is never neglected by her. For, without him, her temperament begins to wane: "Sans lui, en effet, grand'mère Saturnine perdait force, entrain, gaité, en somme les trois quarts de son incomparable génie."⁵³ While she is content to run the household and its people, his is a more subtle role. It is to create "le spectacle du bonheur" which gives a moral strength to the people with whom he is surrounded, and especially to his wife: "Dans ce monde si bien organisé par grand'mère Saturnine, il ne gouvernait pas; il donnait au gouvernement le secours d'une âme innocente. Chacun sait que, sans ce secours, nul ne saurait bien gouverner."⁵⁴ They are therefore a loyal and devoted couple who find strength and true companionship in each other's presence.⁵⁵

The peasant families of Provence are an important element in Bosco's writing, and in nearly every novel they are there in varying degrees of size, whether it be the Mégremut clan or the Saturnin couple. But, as has been seen in this chapter, there is often a woman who stands out and generally takes the initiative for the family. Compared with the men of the family, she will be more imposing and have more to say. It is interesting that Bosco should attribute this role to a woman, for it reflects the position that existed in his

own family in which he talks of his mother as being "Volontaire, dominatrice, révoltée."⁵⁶ She, who was diametrically opposed to his father, "à l'excès taciturne, séparé, souvent maussade",⁵⁷ would have undoubtedly been the most striking figure in the household, and it appears that Bosco has retained this image of her position in drawing these families.

Apart from this, the essential, and most striking, feature of the families is that their members unite into a cohesive group in which each person is dependant on the other. In doing this, however, they show themselves to be wise and content people who spend their lives at one with the countryside of Provence.

* * *

In comparing Bosco's use of nature with that of Giono's, Konrad Bieber finds a fundamental difference in their attitudes towards it. While they share the faculty of ennobling it, Giono invests it with a truculency that Bosco, in his pleasant, impressive descriptions, does not do. Rather, Bosco's nature "n'est qu'une simple toile de fond, un tremplin d'où s'élancera le narrateur dans des évocations surnaturelles."⁵⁸ The country folk, these families, who share with nature its calm ways and its simplicity, also form a group which is "une simple toile de fond."

Pascal Dérvat says of his forefathers, who have farmed the land, that "ils n'ont pas cédé aux attraites du sauvage, car c'étaient des paysans sûrs, des laboureurs

qualifiés."⁵⁹ At this point it is useful to recall Jean Onimus's words which began this chapter:

"toute son oeuvre ne consiste-t-elle pas tour à tour... à plonger dans le sauvage et à revenir ... vers les créatures intelligibles, les gens raisonnables?"⁶⁰

The peasant families, who have retained their forefathers' disregard for the "attraits du sauvage", have no interest in the beyond and so they are, along with the housekeepers and other servants who come from the same stock, these "créatures intelligibles", and these "gens raisonnables". But, in this role, they are even less involved in the action than the housekeepers - they are the anchor of the story.

Notes to Chapter III

- 1 Jean Onimus, "La poétique de l'eau d'après l'oeuvre de H. Bosco", Cahiers du Sud, 46^e année, 353 (décembre, 1959), 93-94.
- 2 cf. A. Wertheimer, op. cit., p.261
- 3 cf. Un oubli, p.39: "j'ai été élevé à la campagne... Cela compte. Je puis même affirmer qu'il n'y a que cela qui compte, pour moi, la campagne. J'en ai gardé le besoin et l'amour toute ma vie."
- 4 "Provençal People", op.cit., p. 820
- 5 A. Wertheimer, op.cit., p. 264
- 6 e.g. Martial Mégremut of Malicroix, and Pascal Bérivat of Le Mas Théotime. There is also the case of Sylvius Mégremut who is also something of a misfit in that, while he is a Mégremut, he does not conform to the others by outgrowing his inclination to dream on reaching adolescence when the others "entrent en bons sens". (Sylvius, p.23)
- 7 Sylvius, p.11: "il y a deux races Mégremut, celle des champs, qui est la souche, et celle de la ville. J'ai parlé quelque part de la race des champs [in Malicroix]. Quant à la tribu de la ville, elle est restée à demi campagnarde." This branch lives in Pontillargues, a modest sized town of sixteen hundred inhabitants of which a hundred and fifteen are Mégremut.
- 8 Le Mas Théotime, p.31
- 9 cf. Sylvius, p.12: "On envoie les fils au collège, les filles, au couvent; mais les fils et les filles, un beau jour, leurs études finies, rentrent au bercail Mégremut."
- 10 Malicroix, p. 281
- 11 ibid., p.155
- 12 ibid., p.281
- 13 ibid., p.128
- 14 cf. ibid., p. 289: "En général, les Mégremut sont casaniers."
- 15 ibid., p.127
- 16 ibid., p.128. Also Sylvius, p. 9: "Cent coeurs, un Mégremut. Cent Mégremut, un coeur."

- 17 Malicroix, p. 128
- 18 Les Balesta (1955), Sabinus (1957). There is also a Tante Philomène at the head of the "town" branch of the Mégremut family in Sylvius.
- 19 Malicroix, pp.155- 156
- 20 ibid., p. 288. Dromiols had been surreptitiously trying to enlist the help of the Mégremut family to lure Martial off the island. But, as Mathieu says, the Mégremuts realised there were some "vues quelque peu ténébreuses" behind Dromiol's wishes, and as a family, "on a ete ferme".
- 21 ibid., p. 15
- 22 ibid., p. 128
- 23 These preliminary notes are taken from pp. 10-11 of Le Las Théotime.
- 24 Le Las Théotime, pp. 90-91
- 25 ibid., p. 13
- 26 ibid., p. 41
- 27 ibid., p. 117
- 28 ibid., p. 117
- 29 ibid., p. 45
- 30 ibid., p. 46
- 31 cf. ibid., pp. 80-81
- 32 cf. ibid., pp. 112-113
- 33 ibid., p. 118
- 34 ibid., p. 90
- 35 ibid., p. 44: " Vous avez bien raison, Mademoiselle, fit alors remarquer Marthe Alibert. Monsieur Pascal a une bonne santé. Ça se voit à la mine."
- 36 ibid., p. 241
- 37 ibid., p. 117
- 38 ibid., p. 150
- 39 ibid., p. 99
- 40 ibid., p. 46

- 41 cf. ibid., p. 48
- 42 cf. ibid., p. 182
- 43 ibid., p. 340
- 44 ibid., p. 338
- 45 ibid., p. 58
- 46 ibid., p. 357
- 47 ibid., p. 357
- 48 L'Ane Culotte, p. 118
- 49 cf. ibid., p. 30
- 50 ibid., p. 94
- 51 ibid., p. 140
- 52 ibid., p. 71
- 53 ibid., p. 140
- 54 ibid., p. 141
- 55 There is also the Guériton couple of Le Jardin d'Hyacinthe. They appear so close to one another in their "Paradis terrestre" (p.42) that it is true to say that neither seem to dominate. However, la Guéritone prevails through circumstance for early in the story her husband dies and leaves her to care for the holding and the gypsy girl, Félicienne, whom they had taken in/
- 56 Henri Bosco, "Mes Origines", Cahiers du Sud, 44^e année, 343 (novembre, 1957), 421.
- 57 ibid., p. 420
- 58 Konrad Bieber, "Le Dédoublément de la personnalité chez Henri Bosco", Modern Language Notes, 73, 4 (April, 1958), 273.
- 59 Le Mas Théotime, p. 354
- 60 cf. n. 1 to this chapter.

PART II

THE FORCES OF INSTABILITY

CHAPTER IV

THE YOUNG WOMEN

While Bosco fills his novels with pleasant, and often overpowering, descriptions of the Provençal countryside and its natural phenomena, he shows just as much skill in creating another world, which is a world of obscurity and night. In fact, as Konrad Bieber suggests, it is this part of his writing that Bosco himself finds the most interesting: "si Bosco nous brosse ... un riant tableau du jour provençal, ce n'en est pas moins la nuit qui est son élément de prédilection. La nuit avec ses silences, ses murmures indistincts, son mystère impénétrable."¹ From his earliest years, Bosco has retained a love of the night and its "mystères nocturnes",² nights where "on entre dans un autre monde où tout a un sens différent".³ There is little wonder that he learnt to respect these special properties of the night, surrounded as he was by people whose lives seemed to be subject to nocturnal pursuits: his mother who, on many a sleepless night, roamed the house, examining "les coins et les recoins"⁴ to discover the source of a noise that she (and only she) had heard; his father who, in his old age, would wander round at night, "poursuivi par ce qu'il appelait 'le noir'";⁵ and of course Tante Martine whose night-time antics have already been discussed. So, the night, with

its activities and its mysteries, has always remained very real and alive to Bosco.

In his books, he has developed his concept of the night. Because it facilitates secret movements of people and complex actions of the mind, it becomes increasingly identified with what is inscrutable in the story. On the other hand, the day-time sequences tend to bring relief, and J.-C. Godin has shown how this reveals a proximity to the "night and day" concept of the primitive mind.⁶

In this, he has drawn from Jung's observations which state that, while the sun shines, only the visible, tangible world has any significance for the primitive, but, "que survienne l'obscurité et tout devient magique et bruisant d'esprits."⁷ It is clear that these notions are directly applicable to Bosco whose nights are full of magic and abstractions.

It is this night which renders man, "plus vulnérable, inconfortable dans un monde aveugle de tâtonnements, dans une réalité devenue floue et angoissante."⁸ Its effect is felt mostly by the narrators who are at the centre of the story and around whom the action takes place. They try to rationalise the mysteries of the night according to their normal concepts of the world,⁹ and since they can find no logical conclusions, an inner searching and a temporary derangement of the mind will often result.¹⁰ Bosco evokes nights full of uneasiness and uncertainties, murky nights that defy rationalisation. It is this landscape which is the realm of many of Bosco's younger women.

This chapter brings together three important women characters of Bosco's work: Hyacinthe (Hyacinthe trilogy), Clotilde de Queyrande (Un rameau de la nuit) and Geneviève Métidieu (Le Mas Théotime).¹¹ They are all shown to have varying degrees of affinity with the night, and what they have in common is their respective influence upon the narrators. They appear and disappear with ease and at times they seem to be almost incorporeal. Compared with the peasant characters, who are solid, steady souls, they tend to be more restive and more passionate. Such characters could only bring intrigue and disorder in their wake.

I. HYACINTHE

The threats which Bosco suggests are everywhere in his nocturnal landscape, are never made more concrete than when he evokes the presence of the gypsies. These people who haunt the shadows and the wild places, become increasingly associated with the physical menaces of the night: "Toujours errants, toujours fuyitifs ... ils représentent les forces mauvaises de désordre et de destruction."¹² It is with the gypsies that Hyacinthe, "cette Ombre de créature devenue inhumaine",¹³ becomes increasingly identified. She is a strange character whose insubstantiality is at times much stressed.

Her origins may possibly be found, as J.-C. Godin suggests, in Bosco's sister who died a year before his birth.¹⁴ Her presence was long felt in the house because

of his mother's prolonged period of mourning: "Dieu sait ... combien ce sujet et cette Ombre revenaient souvent parmi nous..."¹⁵ Although he had never known her, the feeling of her existence amongst them was so marked by his mother's continual references to her, that he admits even today to sparing a thought for her before retiring at night.¹⁶

This concept of the invisible person was reinforced for the young Bosco when he and his mother visited an old couple, M. and Mme Segou, who had living with them, their grand-daughter Cyprienne. Her presence was always felt, since she was always talked about, but she never appeared in person.¹⁷ For, she preferred to spend her whole day reading or dreaming in the forks of a nearby cypress tree and not even visitors to her grandparents' home would make her show herself: "Mais sa présence était tellement sensible dès qu'on arrivait, quand on traversait le jardin, quand on tricotait au salon, et surtout alors qu'on lisait, qu'elle finissait par tourner à la hantise."¹⁸ He never succeeded in casting his eyes upon this elusive person.

At times, Hyacinthe is depicted as being just as elusive. When, in L'Enfant et la rivière, she appears on the banks of the river, Gatzö and Pascalet believe that she is an apparition: *L'âme se manifesta vers minuit. Elle marcha le long du rivage... Elle m'y apparut, comme une petite blancheur.*¹⁹ It is this image that she retains throughout the trilogy and in L'Ane Culotte, the first of the three books, we witness the creation of it. An orphan, she had been brought into the Saturnin household

as a type of kitchen-maid two years before. She minds the fowls and helps la Péguinotte from time to time in the kitchen. But, it is obvious that she is awkward in this every-day world: "elle s'avavançait d'un pas mécanique, sans regarder ni à droite ni à gauche. On eût dit un jouet en bois."²⁰ Very much aware of her inferior position in the household, she is so self-effacing that she is barely perceptible: "Cette modestie physique et morale faisait qu'on l'oubliait facilement. Elle devenait un objet; objet mobile mais inexpressif qu'on remarquait à peine."²¹ Yet, this allows her a certain amount of freedom to move about unnoticed, and especially to follow Constantin, her young master, whom she seems to worship, on his escapades to Belles-Tuiles.²² She is prepared to lie for him,²³ and it is obviously she who has snatched the branch of almond blossom from the Saturnin orchard for Constantin to give to Anne-Madeleine in place of the one he had failed to bring from Belles-Tuiles.²⁴ In this way, a special relationship, based on shared secrets, is built up between the two children, and it is a relationship which will have some bearing on the other two novels of the trilogy. At first, Constantin is quite indifferent to Hyacinthe: "Je n'aimais pas Hyacinthe ... Mon antipathie était si visible que la petite n'osait jamais m'adresser la parole."²⁵ But, he becomes more and more fascinated by her and even watches when she retires to her private world in the huge dog-kennel, Noir-Asile, in the garden.²⁶

However, while she stands by him in his difficulties, motivated by love and respect no doubt, and while he is attracted to her, it is a strange relationship based on avoidance of one another: "Hyacinthe et moi, nous évitions de nous rencontrer."²⁷

The attraction which Constantin feels towards her is intensified towards the end of the book, at a time, however, when she becomes increasingly identified with the night and her ethereal qualities are even more stressed. When the family returns home after their long stay away during Grand'mère Saturnine's convalescence, Constantin is strangely affected by Hyacinthe's absence: "sans elle la maison n'était plus la maison."²⁸ But, three days later, when she does return, she has become so elusive that she is like "un esprit invisible": "Elle n'apparaissait, par miracle, que pour disparaître, non moins merveilleusement, aussitôt."²⁹ It is at this point that the book moves into the uneasy night sequences which bring with them the enigmatic visits from Cyprien, the appearance of the donkey "Culotte" in Noir-Asile, and the arrival of the gypsies - the point when Constantin readily admits his love for Hyacinthe: "c'était elle que j'attendais, et je souffrais qu'elle n'eût pas répondu plus tôt à cette attente ... Je l'aimais."³⁰ She belongs more and more to this night in which she takes on a more attractive appearance: she, who was once "lavée, savonnée, lisse et comme vernissée",³¹ now smells of "l'herbe sèche, le genêt et le jeune sang."³² Her hair, which once sported "un bout de tresse, roide

comme un bâton,"³³ now "flottaient sur ses épaules."³⁴ But, it is into this night that she vanishes altogether, caught up in Cyprien's hypnotic powers, while Constantin stands by helpless and unresponsive to her calls:³⁵ her disappearance coincides with the departure of the gypsies from the area.³⁶

In the second volume of the trilogy, *Hyacinthe*, eight to ten years have elapsed since Cyprien had exercised his hypnotic powers over Hyacinthe and stolen her from the Saturnin household. After the failure of *Belles-Tuiles*, the old man had created another earthly paradise at Silvacane, to which he had taken Hyacinthe.³⁷ It is from this domain that Hyacinthe has escaped when she appears at the door of La Commanderie on Christmas night. Her unexpected arrival does not trouble the narrator at all: "Je ne crois pas qu'elle m'ait expliqué les raisons de sa présence. Sa présence était si merveilleusement inexplicable que je n'eusse pour rien au monde souffert qu'elle éclairât ... un événement qui pour moi tenait son ombre du destin."³⁸ The gypsies with their curious circus had preceded her arrival the night before,³⁹ and their strange visitations ensue after it. It is almost as if they accompany her presence.

With her arrival at La Commanderie, the narrator is plunged into peculiar and inexplicable events, for she fills the house with mysteries even more complex than before: "Peu à peu la grande maison, cependant si mystérieuse, prenait un caractère plus étrange encore."⁴⁰ She

retains the ghostlike image that is attributed to her in the preceding book and spends most of her time exploring the depths of the house, to such an extent, that the narrator sees her only rarely: "Hyacinthe vit à part; je ne la vois que très rarement, même aux repas."⁴¹ She remains so invisible that the narrator can only associate her being there with the noises she makes: "Elle peuplait ainsi la maison de pas, de bruits, de frôlements, devenus familiers à mon silence. Emanés d'un être invisible dont la présence me hantait, ils pénétraient, pour l'alimenter d'événements imaginaires, le plus naturellement du monde, dans ma rêverie."⁴² When Hyacinthe visits the narrator who is being cared for at La Geneste, the house across the plain, during his sickness, she only comes in the dead of night, almost as if she were "une apparence",⁴³ and nothing more than a "voix chuchotante."⁴⁴ She brings with her an "odeur sauvage de femme libre", and leaves behind "la vapeur de son sang."⁴⁵ At times she is so ethereal and so much a part of the night, that her presence seemed to him, "à peu près irréaliste".⁴⁶ But, these visits are made even more mysterious because they are the prelude to the strangest of relationships that Bosco could devise. For, in the narrator, Hyacinthe comes to see Constantin Gloriot, her childhood love. It is the mind of Constantin, the person who lives in the neighbouring La Geneste, that the narrator enters when he contemplates, during the long winter months, the lamp in la Geneste's window.⁴⁷ He has therefore come to know of the events in L'Ané Culotte,

the only events of her life which remain clear in Hyacinthe's memory when she talks to the narrator during her nocturnal visits: "Hyacinthe me parlait chaque nuit de sa première enfance. Rarement elle me faisait de confidences sur les jours qu'elle avait passés dans le domaine si mystérieux de Silvacane..."⁴⁸ So they build up an intimacy based on her former love for Constantin:

Elle aimait. Et celui qu'elle aimait, il était pareil à moi. Car il était l'enfant dont j'avais retrouvé, au fond de moi, l'enfance, avant de la connaître, et qui maintenant devant elle, était encore moi, mais ce moi étrange à qui elle adressait l'aveu de son amour, sans savoir qu'elle lui parlait.⁴⁹

Finally, she becomes completely convinced of Constantin's presence in the narrator, and is more passionate than ever in her love for him:

Déjà elle touchait à mon visage; et le feu qui brûlait mes joues trahissait la puissance de cette passion. En moi, j'étais tout à fait l'autre et Hyacinthe me disait:
- Je vous ai retrouvé sans doute...⁵⁰

Disillusionment, when it does come,⁵¹ is a bitter experience for both, and it is at this stage that Melanie offers her greatest comfort to the narrator.⁵²

The story of the final book of the trilogy, Le Jardin d'Hyacinthe does not follow chronologically that of Hyacinthe, but is related to it more by circumstance. For in it, we see the release of Hyacinthe, a girl of eight to ten years once again, from the powers of Cyprien and her reconciliation with Constantin. But, in his attempt to return his child-heir to a state of "primeval innocence",⁵³ Cyprien has left nothing but a shell of a human being, almost completely without emotions or power of speech. This is the state of the child whom the gypsies leave on Christ-

mas night in the care of the Guériton couple. The next day, they abandon her to them **after** indicating that she should be called Félicienne.⁵⁴ Her body is stiff and taut and in her face there is no sign of life whatsoever: Le visage était séparé de toute pensée. Sa forme ne dessinait pas le contour d'une âme. Tout y restait impersonnel, et marqué par l'absence."⁵⁵ When later she arrives at le Liguset, in what, Sidonie believes, is a fulfilment of her wait for the "âme attendue",⁵⁶ Félicienne shows herself to be just as detached and vague in her everyday life: "Elle ne fixait rien, elle ouvrait de grands yeux sur un espace vide, ailleurs, peut-être nulle part. Son visage restait inexpressif..."⁵⁷ It is almost as if she were a void: "j'avais la sensation bizarre que si je tendais la main vers cette figure réelle, pour la toucher, je ne trouverais plus que le vide."⁵⁸ She is a child completely deprived of a soul and hence does not show the normal vivacity of childhood: "elle ne riait jamais. Pour l'enfant, le rire est un jeu violent. Les jeux de Félicienne étaient doux et singuliers, comme elle. Si doux que bien longtemps je me suis demandé si quelquefois elle jouait."⁵⁹ She is hardly heard to speak, for one of the most alarming manifestations of this condition is that, when she speaks, she is overcome by a trauma which induces a deep and unnatural sleep.⁶⁰ Yet, on occasions, there is a glimmer of emotion revealing itself in muffled, fleeting signs:

Elle entendait, sentait, voyait; car, à peine touchée d'un mot, d'un parfum, d'une forme colorée, elle s'illuminait, semblait prendre son élan, voulaient crier de joie, ébauchait un geste; puis, tout à coup, son oreille, son nez, ses yeux devenaient insensibles et, l'air indifférent, elle tournait d'un autre côté sa tête vide et légère.⁶¹

Although not to the same extent, her ghostlike image, already established in the other two books, is here retained, for since she shows no emotion or thought, she is seen to wander aimlessly and on several occasions disappear altogether.⁶²

Méjan, the narrator, soon realises that, with the arrival of Félicienne at le Liguset, its hitherto untroubled aspect is likely to be disturbed:

Je venais de comprendre brusquement l'étrangeté de sa présence au Liguset. Car le Liguset (que je sache) n'est rien d'autre qu'une bâtisse propre à sa mission domestique. Tout s'y présente très simplement et y a son usage. Ses hôtes eux-mêmes sont simples et positifs. Félicienne en troublait le caractère. Elle en modifiait inexplicablement le dessein, l'ordre et le calme génie rustique. Elle y avait introduit son silence et la menace du sommeil magique.⁶³

So, like his counterpart in Hyacinthe, Méjan becomes involved in a series of events - dreams, night-time treks into gypsy territory, much inner-searching - which culminate in a state of delerium in which he has a vision of the events that took place in L'Ane Culotte.⁶⁴ With this vision, his original quest to know Hyacinthe's origin is over,⁶⁵ and life begins to settle into a normal routine once again. Perhaps in this book, the role of Hyacinthe is most obvious. The narrators of the trilogy

are attracted to her, and in trying to understand this elusive creature, they are taken beyond themselves into an uneasy world which is completely foreign to them. Hyacinthe embodies the mystery which the housekeepers of the trilogy introduce to their masters.⁶⁶ Once they are acquainted with this mystery, she leads them further into its increasingly dark and shadowy realm.

Bosco concludes his trilogy on an optimistic note, for in the last pages of Le Jardin d'Hyacinthe, he introduces Constantin Gloriot once again who is now a collector of wild plants and has come to le Liguset. Hyacinthe has been drained of any emotion by Cyprien's powers, but a flicker of recognition can be seen in her eyes when Constantin calls her by her proper name: "la vie montait dans ses yeux, en troublant la paix des profondeurs."⁶⁷ Constantin appears to have broken into her dark and silent world.

II. CLOTILDE DE QUEYRANDE

The novel, Hyacinthe, has already introduced us to the notion of a woman's love for a man other than himself whom she sees in the narrator, but in Un rameau de la nuit, this idea is pursued with much more elaboration. It is very much a book of the night and Clotilde is portrayed as belonging almost entirely to it. She is a passionate, sensuous woman who forces her attentions unmercifully upon the narrator. In this, she resembles the two gypsy girls of Le Sanglier and Le Trestoulas, who in their passion and impetuosity are, "de véritables vampires."⁶⁸ But Clotilde, in her affair with the narrator, is much more

subtle, much more ambiguous.

When Frédéric Meyrel goes to the domain of Loselée, he becomes increasingly possessed by the soul of its former inhabitant, Bernard Dumontel,⁶⁹ who had lived there ten years earlier and who had since left for, and died in, the South Seas, because of his impossible love for his niece, Clotilde. This property he had left to Clotilde who, after six months, had preferred not to stay there, but live the life of a traveller and only return once a year for several weeks during autumn. However, of late, she had not made an appearance for three years. In renting out Loselée, she has retained, for her own use, a smaller house in a secluded corner of the property, hidden from the main homestead by a great wall and a canopy of trees.⁷⁰ It is to this house, Fontanelle, that she returns two months after Frédéric's arrival.⁷¹ At once they are immersed in a passionate and violent love-affair based tenuously on the presence, within Frédéric, of the soul of the other man, Bernard.

When Clotilde makes her first appearance in the grounds of Loselée, it is on a moonless night in June, and her whole bearing is so ethereal, that she is almost like a spectre to the concealed Frédéric:

il semblait qu'elle flottât au-dessus du sol en marchant, telle qu'un nuage. Dans sa longue et docile robe blanche, cette créature glissait, et le mouvement de sa marche imprimait à ses vaporeuses mousselines un balancement doux qui la soulevait et lui donnait une indéfinissable aisance. ⁷²

It is on one of these nocturnal visits to the garden, in which she lives again her past love,⁷³ that the first encounter between her and Frédéric takes place, and he feels himself possessed more and more by the "other", who is Bernard: "Je n'en pouvais douter: l'autre aimait; il brûlait encore; et il tentait en moi d'introduire son Ombre pour se faire aimer."⁷⁴ However, in this encounter, filled with sensuality and ardour, Frédéric, in his own right, is also attracted to her: Mais moi aussi j'aimais; moi aussi j'étais là, présent, et c'était dans mes propres bras que Clotilde laissait son corps à la merci d'une étreinte de plus en plus ardente."⁷⁵ It is not until he asks Clotilde, "N'est-ce pas que c'est moi que vous aimez?"⁷⁶ that the spell is broken, and she vanishes. The next day, Frédéric realises his ambiguous position in Clotilde's love for him: "Clotilde en moi cherchait une âme, qui n'était pas mon âme ... Mais sans moi cette union ne pouvait pas se faire et j'interposais un amour fort, exigeant."⁷⁷ If he tried to assert his own strong love for her, in banishing that of Bernard's to which she is attracted, he would lose her altogether: "Ecarter l'Ombre (je l'avais compris) c'était perdre Clotilde."⁷⁸ So, in the strange affair that ensues between him and Clotilde, Frédéric accepts in the end that he is only playing a role: J'ai alors accepté un rôle. Car je n'étais qu'un personnage, un masque. Et parfois, je le crains, j'ai trop bien joué. Le masque devenait vivant."⁷⁹ But, in accepting this role, he becomes so identified with Bernard,

that finally, she is able to declare that it is Frédéric alone whom she loves: "Je vous aime, disait Clotilde. C'est vous que j'aime. Non un autre... Celui que vous nommez un autre... maintenant c'est vous-même."⁸⁰ In winning her love, which is his only aim, Frédéric, has completely smothered his own self and taken on the personality of another.

Their meetings continue in the night, the nights of July which are "lourde et fauve".⁸¹ Together they enter another world, where they lead a life which is "mentale et passionnelle",⁸² where the real world is banished from their minds. She holds him back from his other duty which is at the bedside of the dying boy, Marcellin, for he cannot seem to break from her spell. Together they wait, "Car Clotilde attendait de moi que je ne fusse plus moi-même et moi, simplement d'être aimé."⁸³ For it is her purpose to have Bernard reveal, through Frédéric, whether he loved her truly or not. The answer when it does come, however, does not seem to satisfy her.⁸⁴

In his affair with Clotilde, Frédéric has entered a dark, misty world where he is no longer master of his own actions. This alluring, hypnotic woman of the night, from whom emanates, "une volupté chaude, odorante et lente à passer",⁸⁵ is one of the true sirens of Bosco's work.

III. GENEVIEVE METIDIEU

The ethereal aspect of Hyacinthe and Clotilde is shared by the third young woman to be studied in this chapter,

Geneviève **Métidieu** of Le Mas.Théotime. She is a true "créature du vent",⁸⁶ so that, when she roams the hills, possessed by a "désir presque surnaturel de liberté",⁸⁷ she is just as free and just as unpredictable. When Pascal learns that she is to come to the Mas Théotime, he rightly fears that she may upset the balance and peace of life there, for, with her vivacity and restlessness, she has come to represent the opposite to that which he holds dear in Théotime's stable world. Like Pascal, she too has become separated from the secure family background, and has become, instead, a soul "en quête du bonheur".⁸⁸ She has not found this in two violent and impulsive love affairs and so is pleased of the relief which her time at the untroubled Théotime farm gives. Contrary to what Pascal had feared, her presence there does not disturb its tranquillity, since she is grateful for it, and she readily accepts its ways. The members of the Alibert family receive her without question into their lives and she brings out in them a sensibility to the beauties of the life they lead: "Ainsi, au lieu de troubler la paix des champs, comme je l'avais craint, Geneviève en avait seulement adouci la rudesse."⁸⁹ She finds at last that her life has taken on the characteristic steadiness of the surroundings in which she is now living.

However, while Pascal is prepared to share his life with her and reveals, and finally presents her with, Micolombe, a deserted building in the hills where he had

spent many a solitary day at peace with his plant collections, he is never prepared to admit her to his true sanctum in the loft. For he is only too aware of her passion to dominate and seize everything: "Pour calme qu'elle me parût, je craignais que ce feu ne revînt la surprendre."⁹⁰ He explicitly prevents her from entering and hopes in this way to help hold her true nature in check. He had understood that her arrival at the Mas Théotime after the failure of her second love, was a "recours du désespoir",⁹¹ and that she would make every effort to find in it the protection and peace of mind which it could afford. He is therefore not blind to the fact that, beneath her facade of contentment, there ripoles a suppressed soul of passion and impulse:

je n'étais pas dupe de cette activité nouvelle ni de cette fausse sérénité... Je savais que l'âme y vivait d'une vie seconde, brûlante, et que les coups portés à sa chair secrète y traçaient des blessures ineffaçables. Je recevais à tout moment des signes de détresse qui me parvenaient de ces retraites éloignées et que semblaient pourtant démentir trop de gestes minutieux et tant de soin à bien conduire le ménage. Et c'est pourquoi je n'étais pas heureux de la voir s'attacher de cette façon, cependant si touchante, à l'entretien du vieux mas Théotime, parce que j'y voyais une discipline imposée, et comme le dernier effort d'une volonté déjà défaillante, contre l'élévation de la flamme intérieure et je ne savais quel désir presque surnaturel de liberté.⁹²

It is during the night that this suppressed soul frightens Pascal the most, for he realises that in her state of semi-consciousness, it is likely to take over and charm him into yielding to her. It is Bosco's belief in the intoxicating

quality of the night once again: "Je sentais que, la nuit, la passion l'embrasait, alors que, le matin la lumière et la pureté de l'air la rendaient uniquement tendre."⁹³

During the day, she has control over the passionate part of her nature, but the night is likely to render her powerless and make her give in to this "ardeur charnelle de la terre"⁹⁴ which has separated her from the rest of the Métidieu family. We are witnesses to Geneviève's complete abandonment of herself to the earth's forces one night when in a state of hypnotic possession, she is able to pacify a stampede of wild boars and lead them away, so preventing them from devastating the Théotime crops.⁹⁵ It is as if within her own body, she possesses all the magic powers in the earth, powers which she glimpsed in the water the night she and Pascal had walked beside the stream.⁹⁶ She has to cut herself off symbolically from the earth, by entering the church, before she can be completely free to control these great forces which lurk within her.

In keeping with the other feminine characters of this chapter, Geneviève brings with her the menaces which form the centre of the story and which belong to the night. She strays onto Clodius's property and involves Pascal in a skirmish with him, which casts a gloom over the Théotime inhabitants.⁹⁷ It is because of her that the threatening and violent personnage, which is her husband, comes and kills Clodius by mistake, thereby setting into motion a string of circumstances which undermines the equilibrium of the Théotime world.⁹⁸ It is not until she and her

husband, whom Pascal had been sheltering unknown to anyone, leave to go their separate ways, that the characteristic calm and stability of Pascal's former life at Théotime gradually return. She, who had so loved the security and calmness of her life there, but because of whose presence it was beginning to disintegrate, realises that she must leave. Geneviève's and Pascal's respect for each other had not allowed them to enter into communions of the flesh, so she realises that her place is not with him since she cannot control her "ardeur charnelle de la terre", however hard she might try to suppress it. It can only be controlled by channelling it, and all the strange powers which it has given her, into the spiritual world which she finds in the church.⁹⁹

Geneviève is a remarkable and tragic woman and probably the most human of all Bosco's younger feminine characters. This is due to the fact that within her an intense drama is created with which she tries desperately to come to terms. She is not an incarnation of sensuality as is Clotilde - she is able to deprive herself of the expression of her love for Pascal - nor is she prepared to give in completely to the outside forces which drain Hyacinthe of her spirit. With her arrival at Théotime, she brings to the house a renewed feeling of amiability, and she is able to use her unnatural powers to save it from the impending disaster which the stampede of wild boars represents. But, although she does find peace and contentment in her new life there, it is not enough to resolve

her own inner conflict and in her and Pascal's recognition of this fact, they show much maturity.

* * *

As was indicated in the Introduction,¹⁰⁰ terms like "femmes fatales" and "démon féminin" have been used by critics in relation to these younger feminine characters of Bosco's novels. These are terms, which, while possibly difficult to define, do suggest the unstable relationships which the narrators undergo in their affairs with the younger women. For, if there is an intimacy developed, it is usually based on infatuation rather than moderation, or else on a mistaken identity. In depicting his young women as light and ethereal, Bosco suggests that they are physically elusive and therefore unpredictable. In addition, they become very much associated with what is intangible in Bosco's world, since they bring with them into the novels, the mysteries of the night and of the mind: "Créatures de chair - de chair ardente - ou de rêve ... les femmes font partie du mystère, elles en sont l'un des éléments."¹⁰¹

Notes to Chapter IV:

1. K. Bieber, op. cit., p.276
2. Un oubli, p. 119. cf. ibid., p.276:
"j'ai toujours aimé la nuit."
3. ibid., p. 50
4. ibid., p. 309. He states as well that he is grateful for his mother's nightly rambles, for he learnt from her, "une connaissance des secrets nocturnes" (p.310).
5. H. Bosco, "Les Origines", op. cit., p. 420
6. cf. J.-C.Godin, op. cit., p. 130. Any person wishing to pursue Bosco's concept of the night could do no better than to consult Godin's chapter, "Les paysages nocturnes", p. 129
7. J.-C. Godin, op. cit., p. 130. Godin is here quoting from C.G.Jung's L'Homme à la découverte de son âme. Structure et fonctionnement de l'inconscient, Genève, 1948, p. 133.
8. J.-C. Godin, op. cit., p. 129
9. cf. ibid., p. 131: "Tous les héros^{des} romans de Bosco essayent jusqu'à la fin de comprendre, comme si en eux dialoguaient la conscience diurne et l'être secret obscurément accordé à la nuit."
10. For example, the drama of the unnamed narrator of Hyacinthe. The mysteries of the night appear to reach a climax and become intolerable: Hyacinthe has become an "être invisible" within the precincts of the house (p. 134); the lamp from La Geneste, the other house, appears erratically and no longer offers any comfort (p.135); the menacing presence of the three men can still be felt on the plain, and there are still prowling visitations. (p.136) In his state of "nervosité extrême" (p.134), the narrator decides to go to Malecord (p.136), a deserted house which troubles him a little, in an attempt to throw some light on events. There he falls in a cavern(p.137), is rescued by Mélanie's huge dog,Ragui (p.143), and a feverish sickness ensues (p.145 ff). This sickness is what has been called, an "Evanouissement qui fait tomber le rideau sur une scène confuse et qui nous laisse en mal d'explication."(K.Bieber,op.cit., (p. 276).
11. Not in chronological order.
12. M. Barbier, op. cit., p. 88

- 13 Mon compagnon de songes, p. 227
- 14 J.-C. Godin, op. cit., p. 17, n.5
- 15 Un oubli, p. 22
- 16 cf. ibid., p. 23
- 17 cf. ibid., pp. 161-193. cf. also, Simone Hilling, "Henri Bosco: Vérité biographique et création romanesque", The French Review, 38, 3 (January, 1965) 367-368.
- 18 Un oubli, p. 179
- 19 L'Enfant et la rivière, p. 80. Bosco has drawn on the situation he created for L'Ane Culotte several times in his later books for children, e.g. Le Renard, pp. 115-120, Barboche, pp. 152-163.
- 20 L'Ane Culotte, p. 67
- 21 ibid., p. 80
- 22 cf. ibid., pp. 89-90. It is likely that the signs left behind by a "pied d'enfant", which Cyprien discovers the day after Constantin's first visit to the earthly paradise, are those of Hyacinthe (p.226).
- 23 ibid., p.77
- 24 cf. ibid., pp. 89, 92
- 25 ibid., p. 67
- 26 cf. ibid., pp. 110-111
- 27 ibid., p. 139
- 28 ibid., p. 125
- 29 ibid., p. 142
- 30 ibid., p. 144
- 31 ibid., p. 79
- 32 ibid., p. 153
- 33 ibid., p. 67
- 34 ibid., p. 153
- 35 cf. ibid., p. 166

- 36 cf. ibid., p. 168. Hyacinthe had been attracted to the gypsies when they performed with a dancing bear outside the Saturnin house one evening. She had wanted to follow them and it was only Grand'mère Saturnine's appearance that prevented her from doing so (p.159).
- 37 cf. Hyacinthe, p. 204
- 38 ibid., p. 112. The circumstances and reasons surrounding her arrival are discussed in ch.II, p. 34 of this study.
- 39 Hyacinthe, pp. 96 ff.
- 40 ibid., p. 134
- 41 ibid., p. 127
- 42 ibid., p. 134
- 43 ibid., p. 169
- 44 ibid., p. 174
- 45 ibid., p. 170
- 46 ibid., p. 174
- 47 ibid., pp. 79 ff.
- 48 ibid., p. 175
- 49 ibid., p. 175
- 50 ibid., p. 177
- 51 cf. ibid., pp. 186,187
- 52 cf. ch. II, p.35 of this study
- 53 R.T.Sussex, op. cit., p. 84
- 54 cf. Le Jardin d'Hyacinthe, pp.66,70
- 55 ibid., p. 67
- 56 cf. ch.II, p. 41 of this study
- 57 Le Jardin d'Hyacinthe, p. 125
- 58 ibid., p. 132
- 59 ibid., p. 132
- 60 cf. ibid., p. 138

- 61 ibid., p. 143
- 62 cf. ibid., pp.163,182.
- 63 ibid., p. 141
- 64 cf. ibid., pp.213-217
- 65 cf. ibid., p. 143: "Il faut d'abord savoir d'où elle vient".
- 66 cf. ch.II, pp. 43-44 of this study.
- 67 Le Jardin d'Hyacinthe, p. 286
- 68 J.-C.Godin, op. cit., p. 255.cf. Le Trestoulas, p.72, and Le Sanglier,pp.171-172, 196-197.
- 69 Also called Bernard de Lutrey (Lutray). cf. Un rameau de la nuit, p. 300
- 70 These notes are taken from Un rameau, pp.109-110
- 71 cf. Un rameau, p.106
- 72 ibid., pp. 202-203
- 73 cf. ibid., pp.203-204: "Elle joua sans doute, et pour elle seule, peut-être, une fiction; mais un homme [Frédéric], caché dans l'ombre, observait les gestes ... les désirs encore vivants de ce retour imaginaire aux lieux où l'amour était né, où il avait brûlé deux âmes irréconciliables."
- 74 ibid., p. 235
- 75 ibid., p. 236
- 76 ibid., p. 236
- 77 ibid., p. 238
- 78 ibid., p. 238
- 79 ibid., p. 279
- 80 ibid., p. 282
- 81 ibid., p. 289
- 82 ibid., p. 283
- 83 ibid., p. 284
- 84 cf. ibid., p. 284

- 85 ibid., p. 283
- 86 Le Mas Théotime, p.15
- 87 ibid., p. 137
- 88 ibid., p. 31
- 89 ibid., p. 48
- 90 ibid., p. 56
- 91 ibid., p. 38
- 92 ibid., pp. 136-137
- 93 ibid., p. 133
- 94 ibid., p. 29
- 95 cf. ibid., pp. 161-162
- 96 cf. ibid., pp. 50- 51
- 97 cf. ibid., pp. 81-113
- 98 cf. ibid., pp. 192 ff
- 99 cf. J.-C. Godin, op. cit., pp.289-290: "c'est en son âme et en son cœur passionnés que les sortilèges de la terre ont établi leur emprise. Une emprise sûre, reconnue et contre laquelle elle ne peut rien ' sur terre'; l'amour et le bonheur purement humains ne lui sont plus accessibles. Mais Geneviève peut échapper au magnetisme en transformant son exaltation, en la faisant monter tout entière vers le monde spirituel".
- 100 cf. p. 4 of t is study.
- 101 J. Lambert, op cit., p. 70

CHAPTER V

THE YOUNG HOUSEKEEPERS

The younger housekeepers of Bosco's novels form a group as interesting, if not as imposing, as the housekeepers of the Hyacinthe trilogy discussed in Chapter II. While they take on the characteristic skill and efficiency of their older counterparts, they are, by their very stature, less impressive, for Bosco depicts them as light, ethereal creatures in accordance with his concept of other younger women. Unlike *la Péguinotte* and *Sidonie*, they have not been associated with their masters for a number of years, but are only engaged during a temporary stay in the area by the narrator. Although they come from the same country background as the older housekeepers, anything we learn of their identity is scant. We only know of them by their first names, for example, and nothing like the full account of *Mélanie's* history is ever given of them. Their role remains equally vague. Whereas the housekeepers of the Hyacinthe trilogy appear to introduce their masters to the mystery of the story, and then offer a hand of comfort, nothing as decisive can be said about these young girls, for we can never be sure with whom their loyalties lie. At one time, they seem to be involved in the drama, and then again, at another, they appear to be standing aloof from it. While on certain occasions they give the appearance of protecting

their masters, on others, they are seen to be coaxing him further into the menacing action.

Jean-Cléo Godin wonders whether these young housekeepers come from the same mould as the little girls who appear from time to time in the books for children: "il faut se demander si ces filles de seize ou dix-huit ans ne sont pas de la même lignée que les fillettes que les jeunes héros des récits pour enfants rencontrent, inévitablement, sur leur chemin."¹ These feminine sprites appear suddenly, having spied on the young narrators, and after a brief encounter, disappear almost as quickly. In the meantime, they have shown some predominance over the narrators in their own ways.² They are almost as intangible and unpredictable as the young housekeepers.

* * *

In this chapter, it has been decided to include the character, Marie-Claire of Le Sanglier, since she is the obvious forerunner of this breed, although this novel occurs before the period on which this thesis is concentrated. She is engaged by M. René, the narrator of the story, to take over the care of Les Ramades, the house in which he is staying, on the withdrawal from his service of La Titoune, an old peasant woman who visited the house each morning to bring supplies and keep it tidy. Marie-Claire performs much the same tasks with as much, if not more, efficiency:

A dater de l'apparition de Marie-Claire, tout rentra dans l'ordre aux Ramades. La maison fut purifiée de ses moindres poussières et, si des larves y traînaient encore, balai et plumeau les pourchassèrent dans leurs moindres retraites ... L'air et le soleil entrèrent partout, séchant, assainissant, de la cave au grenier, les murs, les planchers, les plafonds, les meubles. Tout reprit une place sage.³

All that we learn of Marie-Claire is that she is an orphan and that her mother, dead for ten years, had been a first cousin to Firmin, the poacher who holds a prominent position in the story. She now lives with her grandmother in an isolated farmhouse, the position of which Rene can never firmly establish. Whenever asked where exactly the house is situated, she makes a vague gesture and utters, "Là-bas..!"⁴

She arrives each day on her donkey, with the supplies stuffed in baskets strapped to either side of the animal. Her housekeeping chores are done with what almost amounts to a magical ease. On her first day, René finds her sitting in the best chair, reading, waiting until the lunch hour when she might leave. But nothing has been overlooked: "J'inspectai rapidement la maison. Tout y était épousseté, lavé, balayé, astiqué, propre. Un miracle!"⁵ She has a firm business head, and enters the household expenses in a small book. Somewhat shrewd, and even a little contemptuous towards her master for a girl of fifteen, she nevertheless adds a note of order to his life when he becomes progressively involved in the mysteries of the story.

It is, however, with her first visit to Les Ramades during the night, that we become aware of her enigmatic position in the story and realise that she is not as detached from the happenings as her attitude might suggest. Her arrival is so imperceptible that René thinks he is dreaming: "Deux coups légers, pas timides, légers simplement"⁶ She has come to pick up her book, left behind that morning, but her whole bearing is fearful and hesitant. She murmurs a warning to René, who has been on a painting excursion into the mountains with Firmin that day, to go there no more: "Monsieur René ... N'y allez plus!"⁷ Then, without enlightening him any further, and after having ensured that the light of the lamp has been smothered, she disappears: "Je vis son ombre se glisser dehors et disparaître le long du mur."⁸ However, the next day, she becomes the ordinary peasant girl who comes to clean Les Ramades at ten o'clock each morning and there is no reference to the strange visit the night before: "Quant à Marie-Claire, elle ne fut rien autre que Marie-Claire, c'est-à-dire une petite paysanne propre, diligente, silencieuse."⁹ Nevertheless, she repeats this strange warning several times further on in the book.¹⁰

Although she gives the impression in this way that she is protective towards her master, there are other indications throughout that her position is open to question. The first of these is when she asks René to open the wardrobe on the pretext of there being a rat in it.¹¹ The

wardrobe is the only part of the house which is inaccessible to her, for in it René has placed his rifle under lock and key and it is obvious to René that she is wanting to confirm its presence. When Firmin suddenly suggests to René that he take his rifle on their second trip into the mountain region,¹² it confirms the feeling that there is some connivance between her and Firmin. Later developments in the novel suggest this as well. When the narrator decides to leave, it is Marie-Claire who persuades him to stay on, asking, "Et Firmin ... est-ce que vous allez aussi l'abandonner?"¹³ She is strangely involved in the action of the story, which is Firmin's type of vendetta to avenge the death of his brother-in-law by the gypsies, but we wonder, as does the narrator, just where her sympathies lie:

Le souvenir de sa visite nocturne et cette prière si maladroite qu'elle m'avait faite, restaient d'un sens obscur. Mais s'il était certain que Firmin l'avait enrôlée dans son jeu volontaire, elle était pourtant venue une nuit, aux Ramades, me supplier de sortir de ce jeu. Elle avait donc, à l'écart du camp de Firmin, son camp à elle.¹⁴

On the one hand, she wants to protect her master, and on the other, she seems compelled to carry out Firmin's wishes.

Yet, in serving Firmin, it is never made very clear whether she is serving good or evil forces, for his role is just as ambiguous. It becomes clear that it is his hand which guides the events of the story which lead to

the final skirmish involving all the characters and in which Marie-Claire is killed. But we are lead to ask, like J.-C. Godin, just what is his goal and where he stands in all this: "Firmin joue-t-il, dans ce massacre qu'il a provoqué, le jeu de quelque ange sauveur, ou d'un force maléfique?"¹⁵ We can never be very sure, but what we do know, is that somewhere in the middle of all this, is Marie-Claire with her divided loyalties.

While Marie-Claire is engaged formally by René, Anne-Madeleine of Malicroix is not sought by Martial, but, rather, appears at the right time to take over from Balandran, the old Malicroix retainer, who has disappeared from the island. In Martial's fevered state, he can only sense her before his eyes as a shadow which is always associated with a smell of wind and water:

J'ai cru voir apparaître une ombre. Elle venait de loin, peut-être. Elle est entrée sans bruit, et s'est arrêtée un instant, devant la porte. Avec elle, dans la maison, a pénétré cette odeur de vent et d'eau qu'elle porte partout où elle va. C'est son signe vital.¹⁶

She retains this image throughout the remainder of the book. When he first becomes aware of her presence, she is leaning over him and seems to transmit a "douceur animale", while from her hair fall "parfums d'herbe et arbre."¹⁷ The hand with which she strokes his forehead is "fluide comme l'air".¹⁸ She is a true creature of the night, only ever appearing after nightfall and leaving before daybreak: "Elle tient à la nuit d'où

elle est née."¹⁹ She only reluctantly reveals her "nom de la terre", which she gives as Anne-Madeleine, and, as Martial adds rather wistfully, "son vrai nom, elle le cache encore."²⁰ Any indication of her identity is equally vague. *Oncle Rat* tells Martial that she has no known father and that she has been brought up by *Le Grelu*, the blind and ageing ferryman whom she now looks after.²¹ When asked by Martial where she comes from, all that she can answer is, "Je ne sais pas."²² Any further attempt by Martial to establish any facts about her background is similarly brushed aside. In keeping with her rather shadowy existence, little is said of the task she has taken on herself in fulfilling *Balandran's* role of looking after *La Redousse* and its master. But, as Martial notes the first time he wanders round the house once his fever begins to subside, "Tout est resté en place."²³ Later, when she and Martial care for *Balandran* together, she is seen to prepare herbal medicines for him,²⁴ and, being so close to nature, nobody would be in a better position to understand their powers.

While she cares for Martial with devotion, her role, like *Marie-Claire's*, remains obscure. Like her, she appears to be caught between two camps. On the one side, there is Martial who must stay on the island for three months before he can claim his inheritance to it, and on the other is *Dromiols*, the contriving lawyer, who is trying to lure him off. In between is *Anne-Madeleine*,

who gives the appearance of serving both masters. Dromiols plans to use her to lead Martial off the island to Balandran who is ill at the old Malicroix homestead, La Regrègue, on the mainland. There in the presence of witnesses, he would seize them and Martial's claim to the inheritance would be lost.²⁵ It almost goes according to plan, Anne-Madeleine arriving suddenly one night to ferry him to the mainland, whence he would help her to bring Balandran back to the island.²⁶ Dromiols believes the scheme has worked and is heard to mutter, "La fille aussi a bien servi,"²⁷ but Martial had been saved at the last moment by some strong compulsion to stay back on the island:

J'ai cédé. Elle m'a conduit avec précaution, à travers les broussailles, jusqu'à la berge. La pluie et le vent avaient redoublé. J'enfonçais dans la boue. On n'apercevait ni la barque ni le fleuve dont la pluie et le vent recouvraient par moments le murmure. Elle a tiré sur une corde. Une proue est sortie de l'ombre. Le fond de la coque a raclé la vase et la barque s'est arrêtée juste devant moi. Elle a sauté dedans et puis m'a tendu la main. Alors j'ai fui. ²⁸

In this drama, we can never be sure of her true position, for, if in Dromiol's eyes, she has "bien servi", it might be that he was relying on her natural instincts to help Balandran whom he was holding at La Regrègue. Once he and his party's presence had been removed from the building, she might spontaneously enlist the help of Martial - the only other able-bodied person - to move Balandran to the island. Because Martial has, in Dromiols' words, "du

coeur",²⁹ he would feel compelled to oblige. Whether Dromiols was depending on Anne-Madeleine's instinctive feelings, or whether she was well apprised of the plan, is open to conjecture. All that we know is that she has "joué gros jeu", according to Oncle Rat, Dromiol's assistant, and that "Cela se paye."³⁰

Since one of the qualities possessed by all housekeepers in Bosco's works is that they are discreet, Michel Barbier is correct to say of Valérie of Un rameau de la nuit, that she "réalise la perfection du genre."³¹ For, she is a deaf mute and is therefore portrayed as being incapable of communicating with the rest of the world.³² She is so unobtrusive, that her presence can hardly be felt in Loselée, the big house which she tends with much efficiency: "Sa retenue, son mutisme l'avaient fait passer de ce monde ... dans un autre région de la vie domestique, celle des fantômes utiles, dont le service exige le silence et l'invisibilité."³³ The only indication of her being in the house are the faint noises she makes from time to time while going about her duties: "Dans la maison on entendait quelquefois craquer une planche, tinter un verre. Ainsi doucement Valérie exprimait-elle sa présence par des bruits qu'elle-même n'entendait pas."³⁴ Although Frédéric, her master, makes a conscious effort to seek her out after his arrival at Loselée, he does not succeed in seeing her for some days.³⁵ It is almost as if his meals are prepared, and the house is kept clean, by magic. So, he can only

associate her with the things which seem to appear, or be set in action, by themselves:

Pour moi, elle n'était plus que le pain, la table servie, ou la lampe. La table se dressait devant moi, toute seule; le pain s'y posait par enchantement; personne n'allumait la lampe qui se mettait à briller d'elle-même. Ces miracles s'accomplissaient avec exactitude, sans qu'on vît passer une main, jouer une ombre sur la nappe bien tirée.³⁶

Since Valérie's engagement at Roselée had been arranged prior to Frédéric's arrival, he is never told anything of her background. She comes each day from Grangeon, a neighbouring hamlet, until it is arranged that she live in.³⁷ While this sixteen or seventeen year old girl is called Valérie, it is only a name "qui lui va",³⁸ and, as with Marie-Claire and Anne-Madeleine, no indication is ever given of her surname. She appears to belong by blood to no one.

Since she is both deaf and dumb, her other faculties of sight and feeling are highly developed, and so the night, the only time when she is at an advantage over other people, becomes her realm: "Elle avait besoin de la présence des ténèbres. Car je soupçonnais Valérie d'avoir rêvé sur son infirmité et conçu le désir d'en utiliser les forces secrètes qui naturellement s'apparentent à l'ombre..."³⁹ The night, therefore, more than anything, renders her invisible since she is able to move about in it with much ease, and it is at this time that she presents to Frédéric her most frightening as-

pect. He is seized by a feeling of uneasiness one night when he enters the darkened house and can sense her presence on the other side of the room. As she comes towards him, he evades her by slipping out and entering the house from the back.⁴⁰ Later, when the events of the story begin to gather momentum with the arrival of Clotilde at the neighbouring Fontanelle, his uneasiness about Valérie's part is made explicit: "Un instinct me faisait redouter Valérie. Elle me paraissait la plus dangereuse."⁴¹ However, the nature of the threat which, he feels, lurks within her, is never made clear.

Her care of Frédéric is nevertheless carried out with much devotion and, often, with tenderness. Each morning she puts a vase of wild flowers on his table, and while he is asleep on the garden seat following his first encounter with Clotilde, she places a blanket over him.⁴² She feels a need to protect him from Clotilde and in this, she sides with Mus, the insane gardener at Loselee, who had seen the ruin of his first master because of Clotilde. Mus, being just as invisible as Valérie, seems to be the only person who can communicate with her by sound.⁴³ Together they barricade the house and the garden,⁴⁴ and it may be more than coincidence that Valérie moves into Loselée soon after Clotilde's arrival.⁴⁵ Mus has every reason to fear Clotilde since he, in his madness, believes that his original master has returned and that he must be protected from her fateful influences once again, but

Valérie appears to be motivated by a great hatred of her.⁴⁶ Like Anne-Madeleine, she seems to be able to direct events, their outcome apparently depending very much on her position. Mus recognises this when, with Clotilde at residence in Fontanelle, he mutters to Frédéric, "Le tout, alors, c'est de savoir ce que va faire la muette..."⁴⁷ However, their combined forces are not enough to prevent Clotilde from finally ensnaring Frédéric, and the two servants become victims of their own cause: Mus dies in the fire that either he or Valérie started at Fontanelle, and Valerie is found wandering insane in the hills.⁴⁸

In their duties, Marie-Claire, Anne-Madeleine and Valérie all display the remarkable skill and efficiency which have become a notable feature of the housekeepers in Bosco's novels. But, they differ from the older members in their group in that, by night especially, they become light, ethereal creatures who appear and disappear at will. Having no definite background, they are bound to no one, and so the reader can never be very sure what their position in the novel really is. They are too obscure, and too ambiguous.

* * *

Michel Barbier has discussed briefly this ambiguous role played by Marie-Claire in Le Sanglier:

Elle remet de l'ordre dans la maison maudite et du même coup, le héros retrouve aussi l'ordre de ses pensées. Mais cette charmante fille n'a-t-elle pas parti lié avec les puissances hostiles de la montagne, comme le sanglier colossal apparu un matin devant le seuil...?⁴⁹

Her strange and indecisive position typifies the role of the young housekeeper in Bosco's novels. They are instrumental in furthering the uneasy action of the story, so involving the narrators more in it, and yet they feel a responsibility to protect them from the threats which evolve: "Leur rôle reste plus obscur que celui des grandes figures de servantes ou de serviteurs. Mais elle sont engagées davantage dans ce destin dont elles sont les messagères: elles sont en même temps les victimes."⁵⁰ Marie-Claire is killed, Valérie goes insane, and Anne-Madeleine is only saved from the threat placed upon her by Uncle Rat, as J.-D. Godin suggests, because of the love and affection that she and Martial feel for one another: "Seuls les liens de profonde affection qui unissent, alors, la servante et le maître, amèneront celui-ci à la sauver."⁵¹

Perhaps Anne-Madeleine's love for her master is a clue to the inconclusive role that these young housekeepers play in the novels. For, we can almost be certain that Marie-Claire and Valérie have fallen in love with their masters as well, although, in their case, this affection is not noticeably reciprocated. Marie-Claire shows much delight when René admits to liking the poems which she is reading, and is obviously hurt at his patronising insistence of calling her "ma pauvre petite."⁵² The fact that she has a warm affection for Frédéric would explain Valérie's hatred of Clotilde and her other strange

actions in the book.⁵³ It is this affection, the presence of which is noted in each case by R.T. Sussex,⁵⁴ that places these housekeepers in their predicament. For, while all three, in their different ways, display a threatening aspect, they are induced at the same time to protect their masters because of the love they feel towards them.

Notes to Chapter V

- 1 J.-C. Godin, p. 220 e.g. Anne-Madeleine (L'Ané Culotte), pp.81-83; Marie (Antonin), pp.113-143; Pétronille (Barboche), pp. 147-163.
- 2 e.g. Anne-Madeleine goads Constantin into bringing her back a branch of almond blossom from Belles-Tuiles and the sacrilege thereby created has a direct bearing on the remainder of the novel's events (L'Ané Culotte, p. 82). Only when he teams up with Marie, is Antonin game to cross the wall into the world beyond which had been attracting him (Antonin, p.136).
- 3 Le Sanglier, p. 49
- 4 ibid., p. 48
- 5 ibid., p. 47. All other details in this paragraph are from pp. 45-49.
- 6 ibid., p. 97
- 7 ibid., p. 98
- 8 ibid., p. 98
- 9 ibid., p. 99
- 10 cf. ibid., pp. 126, 160-161
- 11 cf. ibid., pp. 55-57
- 12 cf. ibid., p. 103
- 13 ibid., p. 190
- 14 ibid., p. 124
- 15 J.-C. Godin, op. cit., p.227
- 16 Malicroix, p. 206
- 17 ibid., p. 204
- 18 ibid., p. 212
- 19 ibid., p. 209
- 20 ibid., p. 235. Anne-Madeleine had already evaded Martial's question about her name several times before, cf. pp. 208, 215.

- 21 cf. ibid., p. 246
- 22 ibid., p. 213
- 23 ibid., p. 205
- 24 cf. ibid., p. 236
- 25 cf. ibid., p. 225. Partial overhears Dromiols discussing this plan.
- 26 cf. ibid., p. 221
- 27 ibid., p. 225
- 28 ibid., pp. 221-222
- 29 ibid., p. 225
- 30 ibid., p. 259
- 31 R. Barbier, op. cit., p. 58
- 32 Because of this, she may possibly become a symbol of the discreet and unobtrusive housekeeper in Bosco's novels.
- 33 Un rameau de la nuit, p. 153
- 34 ibid., p. 160
- 35 cf. ibid., p. 148. Also p. 144: "je me mis en quête de ... Valérie."
- 36 ibid., p. 154
- 37 cf. ibid., p. 198
- 38 ibid., p. 129
- 39 ibid., p. 158
- 40 cf. ibid., p. 158
- 41 ibid., p. 232
- 42 cf. ibid., pp. 186,238
- 43 cf. ibid., p. 192: "Mus a sifflé doucement un appel d'oiseau. Il devait se trouver du côté des volières. Valerie a tourné la tête de ce côté-là..."
- 44 cf. ibid., p. 229

- 45 cf. ibid., p. 192,198. Clotilde had arrived on the night of the 7th.June, and Valérie moved in on the 16th.June.
- 46 ibid., p. 231
- 47 ibid., p. 199
- 48 cf. ibid., p.329
- 49 M. Barbier, op.cit., p. 94
- 50 J.-C. Godin, op. cit., p. 223
- 51 ibid., p. 223
- 52 cf. Le Sanglier, pp. 127,190
- 53 cf. Un rameau de la nuit, p. 158, when Valérie lurks in the shadows, waiting for Frédéric, and pp. 243-244, when she visits Pontanelle and lies on Clotilde's bed.
- 54 cf. R.T.Sussex, op. cit., p. 47, "Marie-Claire falls in love with the narrator, 'Monsieur René', whom she tries unavailingly to defend, and to prevent from venturing into gypsy territory"; p. 94, "Martial and Anne-Madeliene are already deeply in love"; and p. 113, "Valérie wanders off into the hills (a prey to her hopeless love for Peyrel)".

CONCLUSION

The two parts of this study, entitled "Forces of Security" and "Forces of Instability", indicate the two major divisions into which the women of the six novels studied in this thesis fall, and the role they play in them in relation to the narrators. To the first division, "Forces of Security", belong the older, maternal women, who are, for the most part, either housekeepers, or the leaders of a family. They are all peasant characters, firmly rooted in the Provençal countryside, who have been acquainted with the narrators for a number of years. They are there especially to lend a hand of comfort at the times of greatest stress for the narrators.

The second division, "Forces of Instability", groups together the younger women of the stories. They are portrayed as being essentially ethereal, and belong mostly to the night, which in Bosco is fraught with confusion and intrigue. They bring with them the mysteries of the story and lead the narrators, who often fall in love with them, into the disorder which is synonymous with their presence.

The impression that emerges from this study, therefore, is that Bosco's is a world in which the older women dominate, although they are not particularly domineering, and the younger women are to be mistrusted.

The only relationship between a man and a woman which has any sign of lasting is that between Pascal Dérivat and Françoise Alibert, a peasant girl, in the novel, Le Mas Théotime. She is the only one of her type to come alive in the novels studied, being the only young girl belonging to the secure and sunny world of rural Provence. All the other relations between the narrators and a woman are fleeting, transient affairs with the possible exception of the one between Pascal and Geneviève Létidieu in the same novel. They appear to be able to rationalise their situation and act accordingly.

This study has indicated the important part played in Bosco's own life by Tante Martine and his mother, and how their images may be directly seen in the figures of the older housekeepers and Tante Philomène, women who dominate in the lives of the narrators. It may therefore be asked whether the position of all the women in Bosco's novels reflects his own background and beliefs. A suggestion of this is given in a conversation that Jean-Cléo Godin had with Bosco on this subject, and which he subsequently summarised in his study on the author. It is here quoted in full:

Ce mépris de la chair, de l'amour physique et charnel, l'écrivain nous confiait qu'il lui a été inculqué par sa mère. Très jeune, on le mit en garde contre la femme. Qui a été élevé ainsi, ajoute l'écrivain, arrive à l'âge de l'amour rempli de timidité et de méfiance et, fatalement, tombe toujours sur la pire de toutes celles qu'il pouvait rencontrer, ce qui ne peut que confirmer l'éducation reçue. La femme lui apparaît, plus que jamais, calculatrice - même dans la passion -, possessive, "biologiquement égoïste". Trois voies s'ouvrent alors sur l'amour: le refus de la femme par la pédérastie; la perdition par la femme, dans la débauche; enfin, l'approfondissement de l'amour. C'est dans cette troisième voie que Bosco a orienté sa vie et son oeuvre. (Entretien avec Henri Bosco, le 10 décembre, 1964).

J.-C. Godin, op. cit., p. 256

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