

**H-France Salon, Volume 2, Issue 1, no. 1****Introduction to H-France Salon**

The Case of Jean Giono – the Debate Continues

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The issues of literary resistance and collaboration during World War II continue to raise intense debate. Even books aimed at the youngest readers include the writings of authors whose wartime political ideologies were ambiguous. For example, a Gallimard collection of children's stories includes an excerpt from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* immediately preceding Jean Giono's "L'homme qui plantait des arbres."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this placement was coincidental rather than a conscious editorial decision, but these authors side-by-side struck me as highly symbolic of supposedly opposite political positions during World War II. The actions of these two writers during the Second World War have earned them the labels of "resister" and "collaborator" respectively.<sup>2</sup> But are these labels warranted? Clearly both men have made a significant contribution to French literature, but how do we classify their wartime political ideologies? How do we define artistic resistance and collaboration? Why should we care?

These are just some of the issues that Meaghan Emery and Richard J. Golsan address regarding the case of Jean Giono in their articles in the Fall 2010 volume of *French Historical Studies*. Remembered for his literary success during the interwar period, Giono's reputation was tarnished by his wartime activities and writings. Meaghan Emery attempts to make a case against the dominant view of Giono as a collaborator in her article. She argues that placing Giono's writing within the larger historical context of pacifism and ruralism demonstrates that the author was not ideologically committed to Vichy or to collaboration with the Nazis. She asserts that he, his works, and his ruralism cannot be classified as "easily partisan nor inherently reactionary."<sup>3</sup> Richard J. Golsan's response in *French Historical Studies* takes the opposite view

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<sup>1</sup> *Le Trésor de l'enfance*. (Paris: Gallimard Jeunesse, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Saint-Exupéry flew missions for the French after the German invasion in 1940, fled to the United States after the French defeat, and returned to service in North Africa in 1943. While in exile, Saint-Exupéry kept his distance from both Vichy and Charles de Gaulle, though he wrote several pieces calling for French resistance. A French government website characterizes the aviator-author as "neither [a] Vichy supporter nor [a] Gaullist." He and his plane disappeared over the Mediterranean in July 1944 as he was helping the Allies prepare for a landing in Provence. Saint-Exupéry's wartime writings include "An Open Letter to Frenchmen Everywhere" (November 29, 1942) *New York Times Magazine* (November 29, 1942): 7+ (available at <http://www.trussel.com/saint-ex/nytimese.htm>) and *Lettre à un otage* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1945). See the entry on Saint-Exupéry at <http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/page/affichegh.php?idGH=221&idLang=en>

<sup>3</sup> Meaghan Emery, "Giono's Popular Front: La Joie au Grand Air, Idéologie Réactionnaire," *French Historical Studies* 33:4 (Fall 2010): 577.

as he argues that Giono was complicit in supporting Vichy's National Revolution, a position that is demonstrated by Giono's own writings and his wartime journal.<sup>4</sup>

This edition of *H-France Salon* presents three responses to the pair of articles that appeared in *French Historical Studies* in the hopes of continuing the discussion of the issues raised. All the participants point to questions about the role of writers and artists in supporting the Vichy regime or the Resistance, about how to define actions along the resistance-collaboration continuum, and how to interpret pacifism's and ruralism's place under Vichy. First, Meaghan Emery provides a rebuttal to Golsan's response that appeared in *French Historical Studies*. She maintains that the "cultural context" of Giono's ruralism and integral pacifism demonstrates that he was *not* an ideological collaborator. She contends that she is not a Giono "apologist," but rather trying to understand a complex man and his actions within the difficult wartime situation. Julian Jackson, Professor of History at Queen Mary, University of London, offers his analysis of both Emery pieces and Golsan's article. He sides with Golsan and finds that Giono "fails" in every aspect used to judge whether or not a writer collaborated. Vera Mark, Assistant Professor of French, Francophone Studies and Linguistics at Penn State University, also contributes to the debate. She deepens the contextualization of Giono as a writer and a man and asks further questions about his wartime actions and the available archival evidence. It is clear from these exchanges that the "case of Jean Giono" is not yet settled and that it raises issues of concern to scholars across disciplines and periods.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard J. Golsan, "Of Jean Giono and Collaboration: A Response to Meaghan Emery" *French Historical Studies* 33:4 (Fall 2010): 605-624.