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Nature and lineages in the novel *Le Mas Théotime* of Henri Bosco

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Abstract

The novel *Le Mas Théotime* is characteristic of Henri Bosco's style marked by a syncretic mysticism mixing Pagan and Christian symbols. The pastoral writing illustrates a deep struggle between unknown drives. The hypothesis of this article is that these spiritual forces are linked to old alliances between families. To some extent, the pastoral narrative activates ethnic links between characters that are not always conscious about the power of these relations. By referring to the dream analysis proposed by Carl Gustav Jung, it is possible to read the pastoral in *Le Mas Théotime* as an ancestral tragedy where old alliances can be betrayed and questioned.

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1. Introduction

"I am not a novelist but a storyteller. I have only written one novel, *Le Mas Théotime*" (Cahiers Bosco 1987, 78) declared the writer Henri Bosco in one of his interviews. Bosco perceived his own work as a combination of short stories taking place in different locations of Provence. He was born in Avignon in 1888 and died in Nice in 1976 and is considered as a typical writer of *Provence*. Henri Bosco has a prolific work with the publication of thirty-five books from 1924 until his death in 1976. When *Le Mas Théotime* was published in 1945, he was already an experienced author with the publication of *Pierre Lampédouze* (1924), *Le Sanglier* (1932), *Le Trestoulas* (1935), *L'Âne Culotte* (1937), *Hyacinthe* (1940), *L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean* (1942) and *Bucoliques de Provence* (1944). *Le Mas Théotime* was published in 1945 and translated into English in 1947 as *Farm in Provence* (1947); Bosco became famous after receiving the literary prize

Théophraste-Renaudot for *Le Mas Théotime* (Beckett 2005, 48). He is well-known by French pupils as his novel *The boy and the river* has been studied at school for many years (Bosco, 1967). Antoine Compagnon wrote a biographical article and qualifies his pastoral style in the following manner: “*Le Mas Théotime* (1945) places in a rustic setting a sentimental intrigue that the very mystery of nature is enough to make oppressive. As a matter of fact, it is difficult to admit with the writer that this peasant existence can lead to wisdom, the very one that is lacking in our civilization of knowledge”¹. *Le Mas Théotime* is about a character, Pascal Dérivat, who comes back to a family property, the *Mas Théotime* and who is confronted to an ancestral hatred with his cousin Clodius. Pascal Dérivat’s cousin, Geneviève, came back to the farm *Théotime*. Geneviève’s man believed that Geneviève had a lover and therefore murdered by mistake Clodius whom he suspected to have a relation with her. This assassination made Pascal Dérivat the heir of Clodius’ domain.

In all his books, Bosco gives a substantial voice to pastoral life. Pastoral narratives are produced by Bosco to describe a true relation to the environment and engage the reader’s dreaming part, it is like a journey in the unconscious part of the nature. The nature connects characters to permanent forces, there is here a distinction between the perceived world and its image as the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung explains it: “all the contents of our unconscious are constantly being projected into our surroundings, and it is only by recognizing certain properties of the objects as projections or imagos that we are able to distinguish them from the real properties of the objects” (Jung 1986, 50). The pastoral description in *Le Mas Théotime* is the primitive scene of drives where unknown forces model the environment. The hypothesis of this article is that there is a regeneration of family ties with the help of those supernatural forces. The characters do not seem to understand all their actions that appear to be determined by these ancestral events. It is as if pastoral writing conserved traces of those old conflicts throughout generations. The novel engages the reader in thinking about the system of loyalty that was built during ancient times and that affect the relations between characters. The assassination of Clodius could be read as a way of reinforcing the system of loyalty between Pascal and his cousin.

Henri Bosco developed in *Le Mas Théotime* a style that goes beyond the traditional approach of the regionalist novel in Provence (with authors such as Jean Giono or Alphonse Daudet). On the contrary, the pastoral narrative is structured around a differentiation between hostility and protective frame. The pastoral narrative structures the deep loneliness of characters, it is indifferent to the crime which is done in the novel. In fact, there is no idealization of the past but rather a mythological presentation that shows a confrontation of families and lineages. As it happens, *Le Mas Théotime* employs the landscape as a setting for a pure form of tragedy. Characters reproduce ancestral gestures, they come back home in order to pursue what was done by their families in centuries. The deep loneliness of characters seems to reflect incestuous relations between characters and landscapes. The novel *Le Mas Théotime* can also be read as a thriller with the death of Clodius that indicates a deep betrayal from families and a form of curse. Then, the presentation of dreams with the help of these elements is interesting as several temporalities are mixed to describe the relations between families around the *Mas Théotime*. The lineages with the families Métidieu, Dérivat and Alibert translate the property relations to the landscapes. “If I have named the Alibert, it is because their old lands, bordering ours, but which have belonged to us for eighty years, have not yet been able to merge with the larger and stronger goods of the Clodius (Bosco, 1946, 67). There is an ancestral rivalry between those owners that can be studied with the categories produced by the dream analysis (Jung, 1986). The nature integrates a series of symbols (graves, names, relation to water sources) that enlighten

the competition between ancient families. Moreover, the nature is linked to the question of heritage of properties (Clouscard, 1972). The personalization of natural entities gives a very specific echo to the environment in Bosco's novel as if the landscapes also had internalized the human conflicts. This is why the pastoral narrative here seems to engage the reader to go over the ancestral links that exist.

2. Pastoral writing and psychic forces

2.1. The specificities of Bosco's style

The pastoral description of an environment that does not move may not illustrate a harmony to rediscover, it could also be the symbolic projection of a spiritual conflict. For instance, Carl G. Jung's work focuses on the interpretations of symbols and institutions in mythologies and narratives (Jung 1985, 105). Indeed, Jung showed that mythologies used a cosmic matter in order to project an image of the *psyche*. Even though the pastoral seems to be realistic in Bosco's novel, the paradox is that it activates an internal conflict of the *psyche*, where characters are attracted by invisible forces.

Henri Bosco is a French novelist known for his manner of engaging the Provençal pastoral. He lived in a farmhouse in Châteaurenard that he remembered later on as an extraordinary location to experience rural life (Vitaglione 2000, 65). The nature shapes Bosco's imagination and gives him a kind of spiritual force to confront people with landscapes. There is also a classical approach on the pastoral in Bosco's work where nature is perceived as a mysterious drive that is not always understood by human beings. Pastoral writing does not focus on a naïve relation to nature, it is rather associated with the expression of complex forces that the individual cannot control (Alpers 1996). When Bosco reflected on his style in *Le Mas Théotime*, he declared that this novel was written in a difficult context after the defeat of France during the Second World War. He also explained that he did not know really what he would write and he referred to the first meanings that determined the rest of the novel. "In fact, it is simply a matter of writing any sentence, the very first sentence of a magical essay. It may be suppressed a little bit later. But it must fall on the page. It is an invitation. There will be a word on this, which, with an echo, will do its job, a word intended by sound, meaning, image, intimate energy, to touch another echo, the unknown echo where this word will take its magnitude still hidden" (Cahiers Henri Bosco 1982, 16). According to Bosco, the act of writing reveals a total engagement of the writer into the first meanings. The sentences set up a frame where sounds, words and images reveal a world which is in the shadow. Bosco describes the act of writing the novel *Le Mas Théotime* with positions that are very close to the ones of Maurice Blanchot in the following excerpt: "the solitude of the work has as its primary framework the absence of any defining criteria. This absence makes it impossible ever to declare the work finished or unfinished. The work is without any proof, just as it is without any use" (Blanchot 1982, 21). The invitation to write is something that the writer experiences, he does not know exactly why he does that. This Mallarmean experience of a depersonalised relation to writing is fundamental (Skriabine 2015, 310): the writer is not the source of creation but his medium. He transmits feelings to readers without controlling the whole artistic process. Blanchot criticized *Hyacinthe* as the mythological style remained for him a form of syncretism (Santi 2005, 121), Bosco is thus a storyteller who reused a series of myths (Blanchot, 1943, 221) instead of being more creative. At the same time, the

recollection of myths engages the reader to analyse and question the presence of those spiritual drives.

In the same vein, Bosco commented his own work and the extreme banality of its first meanings. He pointed out the fact that some ellipses were efficient by avoiding logical connectors such as it is written in the sentence “it was about five o’clock in the afternoon. I was alone” (Cahiers Henri Bosco 1982, 16). No connection between both sentences is indicated, which reinforces the feeling of loneliness. There is here a distinction between loneliness and solitude.

“Loneliness is an experience of loss and solitude is an experience of renunciation” (Gadamer 1988, 104). The loneliness is a deprivation of the being-with. On the contrary, the reader of Bosco has to rebuild connections between sentences. In this perspective, the pastoral description works as a piece of text that is detached from the plot.

2.2. Names and Gods

In the first pages of *Le Mas Théotime*, the loneliness is described several times (Bosco 1946, 7-8). When it is too warm during the day, it is better to stay at home until the evening, this banal remark illustrates the difficulty for characters to develop social relations. The name “Dérivat” is closed to the drift, it suggests a fundamental detour (*dérive* in French) whereas “Métidieu” is a compound name with the Greek work *metis* (the trick) and God. Métidieu is like a demigod or an ancestor that is strongly present in the domain whereas Dérivat refers to a source of water and the description of a river that overtops its bank. These names seem to have a mythological signification in the novel. Bosco did not comment the names Dérivat nor Métidieu but said a few words about the choice of the name Théotime for his novel. Théotime is an old name which is not used in Provence, the name Timothée exists but with Théotime, Bosco wanted to reverse the syllables of Timothée to create a new name that inhabits the whole novel. In several excerpts, Théotime is personalized and described as a character (Bosco 1952, 95). Bosco wanted to have Théotime as a kind of rural God that has to be adored by the family members (Cahiers Bosco 1982, 18). Timothée refers to the Antiquity as the research reveals that Timothée of Thèbes was maybe serving the emperor Alexandre (Bélis 2002, 119). There is somehow this exploration of a local God, a *deus absconditus* (Jung 1968, 104) which is prevailing in *Le Mas Théotime*. Some passages deal with the presence of altars that suggest the adoration of local Gods and that are like Gallo-Roman altars (Nicolas 2011, 16). The nature preserves those religious beliefs and reminds the characters of these existing spiritual forces.

The landscape is often perceived as the interplay between these basic elements, it reminds what the German philosopher Heidegger named the *Vierung* (the quadrature), the composition of elements that reflects the relation between Gods and Humans (Harman 2002, 177). In reality, the quadrature reveals a constructive alignment of elements. There is no necessary harmony as the nature can be the scene for a fight between human beings and their hostile environment, but there is a spiritual breath in the correspondence of the elements. The pastoral represents in the novel a conflict between local Gods that inhabit the environment and the unique God of Christianity. The composition of elements characterizes a diffuse presence of spiritual and divine essences.

The poetics of elements guides the structure of the novel as if the air, the earth, the water and the light were the primary elements that remind the mystery of creation. Henri Bosco is obsessed by the concurrence between a Christian project characterized by the sacralisation of the space (unification and harmonisation) and a Pagan frame where the environment

contains disseminated beings (form of polytheism based on the *anima*, the breath into natural forces). The earth is a living and erotic body attracting characters. “The earth saved me and I remained attached to the earth. But the earth seems sweet to me and I cannot live far from it” (Bosco 1952, 245). Pascal is attached to the earth, he works on the earth and experiences his relation to it. The “passionate dirt” (Bosco 1952, 245) represents the way the earth cleans up body and soul but these passionate defilements remind at the same time the Christian sins. In fact, the earth is the intangible support for human desires, it challenges the Christian dimension of creation. By working the earth, Pascal feels a spiritual force which is equivalent to a rebirth. There is a biblical vocabulary which is mixed with the earth that replaces God. “The earth saved me and I remained attached to the earth” exemplifies the sacred and intimate relation that binds Pascal to the earth. The earth also represents the fixity of things and lineages, inviting characters to come back to their birth place. There is an ancestral regeneration through the earth.

3. The relation between ethnicity and tragedy in *Le Mas Théotime*

The presence of spiritual forces reminds the importance of ancestors. In fact, there is a specific relation to the question of ethnicity. The ethnicity is dealt with in two ways, the first one is the form of incestuous relation that Pascal Dérvat has with his cousin Geneviève and the second one the relation between ancient families and properties. Many passages reveal the close relation of Pascal and Geneviève. “Since our games had been separated from each other, we had, on both sides of the hedge, to replace the absence of our usual companion. We had to create an imaginary being that complied docilely with the conventions of these little dramas” (Bosco 1952, 13). As if they were children, the pastoral engages both characters with the creation of imaginary figures that are enrooted in the environment. In the above excerpt, the narrator found it difficult to invent an imaginary figure in this silent game with Geneviève, he dealt with a ghost that cannot reach the imaginary figure created by Geneviève. “Names impose a form and even a soul to so many invisible essences that I thought, through this efficient power, that I could easily tell and seize a ghost” (Bosco 1952, 13). The narrator has a fixed idea of an imaginary being that cannot move. Those imaginary beings seemed to have liberated new spiritual forces. This imaginary being strengthens the desire of the narrator for Geneviève, this is why they use this game as a symbolic ritual of communication. Pascal and Geneviève know that they cannot be together, they have a distant and passionate relation. Pascal is afraid of Geneviève, he desires and fears the danger of an impossible and incestuous love as they are cousins. The alliance of their families makes them cousins which delegitimizes and condemns the secret love. Pascal has to abide by the rule of loyalty that is prevailing in the novel.

The use of internal focalization is also powerful to describe the relation of the narrator Pascal to Geneviève, both of them seem to have secret codes to communicate with each other. The hamlet is the dramatic *locus* where the plot is concentrated but the limits with the domain of Clodius as well as his fields is determining. The territory is composed of a hamlet and fields, the story looks like a Greek tragedy with characters searching and avoiding contacts with each other. Furthermore, Pascal has a dilemma regarding what happened to his cousin Clodius. “In some abstract way, I considered the hard alternative: either Clodius is dead, I said to myself, and the debt will have to be paid from tomorrow on; or Clodius is only wounded and it will be necessary to pay another debt a little bit later and from man ton man; but I cannot

escape it” (Bosco 1952, 76). There is no easy choice to make because the destiny of Pascal is a confrontation with Clodius either through his heritage (formal debt) or through a form of duel (honour). The *fatum* of Pascal Dérvat is to be able to choose one option. As a matter of fact, the debt is a typical characteristic of a Greek tragedy where characters have to experience strong decisions inside families. The pastoral represents in the novel the setting of the tragedy. The question is to know whether families are strongly determined by these ancient ties or not. Pascal Dérvat knows that the murder of Clodius implicitly serves his interests as he can be the heir of the property and extend the limits of the family domain. The complicity with the murderer who was described as a peddler (Bosco 1952, 171) helps Pascal Dérvat to assume this new role. It is as if he came back to Théotime to ensure this transaction. In a way, Pascal Dérvat was not disloyal to his own family, the sacrifice of his cousin Clodius reinforces the ethnic links and the cohesion of the clan. In that perspective, the sacrifice of Clodius can be seen as a reconciliation with the lineage, it is the possibility of the heritage and the continuity with the ancestors.

4. The symbolic order of properties

The pastoral writing in Bosco’s work is like a magic realism enlightening the spiritual forces present in the nature. There is a spiritual openness to the sense of things expressed by the poetic style² of Henri Bosco. The environment is also dreamed as every single thing had a kind of being. In this way, Bosco is often perceived as a mystical writer, a kind of pagan writer where the things have a force of accompanying human beings. There is a storytelling process where the reality becomes an “hallucination”³, the dream engages the reader who is overwhelmed with the feeling of nature as a book of mysteries. “I did not forget Geneviève anymore, but awkwardly, I lowered my eyes in front of her memory. It seems to me that I detached my mind at the moment when, tired of travelling through many countries in search of exotic plants, I came back, driven by the attraction of my home place, to establish myself first in Sancergues, then in the Théotime farm, in Puylobiers” (Bosco 1952, 27). In the above sentence, the zeugma, which means the alliance between concrete and abstract words, seems to present the piece of memory as an independent being. The use of past historic and imperfect tenses refers to two grammatical aspects, the time for the reverie and the travels of the narrator. The exotic countries cannot make the narrator avoid coming back to his birth place where he describes and dreams at the same time the environment. The pastoral writing in Bosco’s novels reveals a form of sacralisation where the environment is dominated by mysterious and sometimes terrifying forces that challenge the human consciousness. These dreams are not a coincidence in the text, they translate a symbolic order and indicate a conflict of values between characters coming from ancient families. These characters are dedicated to the maintenance of properties. In that sense, the description of natural elements refers to the limits of these properties and engages a social critic of this conflict.

The philosopher Michel Clouscard commented the dialectic relation between paganism and feudal life and proposed an interpretation of the resurgence of these paganist elements (Clouscard 1972, 144). Clouscard applied a Marxist approach to the understanding of Paganism when he compared the concentration of power and the production of different types of relations between individuals. In this frame, paganism is a form of rebellion against the expropriation of power that rural chiefs experienced in feudalism. Writing pastoral engages the reader in this lost world, the rural economy which is

threatened by new urban owners that want to break this ancient order. The stability of landscapes illustrates the need to reinforce this rural culture (Clouscard 1972, 162). There is a relation between the hamlet (family properties) and the small village. In the novel, the favourite location is the little hamlet (Bosco 1952, 144). The hamlets represent the different clans that are separated by paths and woods. They have a distant relation to other small villages or urban units. Pascal Dérivat comes back to Théotime in order to rediscover the suzerain power that his family had in this region.

In the symbolic order of the properties, the water source is the decisive element as it indicates the possibility for the clan to survive and extend the limits of its domain. The topic of source water is recurrent in the Literature of Provence, it is possible to refer to Marcel Pagnol's works such as *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des sources* (Pagnol 1962). "Yet [Geneviève] rarely came down to the source; she claimed that even limpid waters are not always friendly. It is true that one never knows where they come from when they gush from the earth; and perhaps there is, not far from their resurgence, an abyss where underground rivers nourish liquid depths from their silent stream which no one has ever explored [...]" (Bosco 1952, 38). The earth and the water are linked to each other, they contain obscure forces that metaphorically represent the unconscious. The hidden rivers exist without us being aware of them, they transport a stream of representations. The metaphor of sleeping water is a Bachelardian motive where the immobility of elements is associated with a mysterious force from the earth (Bachelard, 1999). Bosco was a friend of Bachelard and was sensitive to a sort of material imagination where the environment is described and dreamed, as it is illustrated by the correspondence between both authors on these matters between 1957 and 1962 (Cahiers Bosco, 2011/2012). In *Le Mas Théotime*, the nature has powers that emanate from the sources. "[The powers] seek to find there both the primitive and the eternal. They prevail over season and history. In nature, within us and without. They produce seeds – seeds whose form is embedded in a substance, whose *form is internal*" (Bachelard 1999, 2). The water source is unknown and linked to the couple creation / destiny. Consequently, the liquid deepness is associated in *Le Mas Théotime* with the idea of a mysterious and sacred origin of the environment. The source is prevailing in the landscape, it is something that nourishes the imagination. Tobie Nathan often comes back to the idea of a source as a fundamental element in the production of mythologies (Nathan 2013). The water source is a metaphor for the impossible love between Pascal and Geneviève who come back to the birth place. It refers both to the ancient order of properties and clans and to the possibility of regeneration.

The cavern and the lexical field of darkness also express the deep force that inhabits the relationship between the earth and the human beings. There is a vivacity in the relation between the soul and the materiality of the elements. The reverie is important in the novel as the narrator is between a state of dream and awakening as suggested in the following passage: "Indeed, I have always heard that we have two dreams in common. One would come from the Métidieu, the other Dérivat. Each of us can have access to them and I dreamed both of them myself in my childhood" (Bosco 1952, 62)⁴. The dream is not individual but it is a characteristic of a lineage, a clan. The clans Métidieu and Dérivat have dreams that mixed with each other. The narrator tells this legend as an illustration of spiritual and metaphysical forces that determine the alliance of lineages. Carl C. Jung analysed the structure of the dream "Ferocious war between two peoples" (Jung 1986, 227). As for him, "the conscious mind is defending its position and trying to suppress the unconscious" (Jung 1986, 227). The union of clans Métidieu and Dérivat is like an alchemical fusion of irreconcilables. "But the principle of the

unconscious is the autonomy of the psyche itself, even though it utilizes the illustrative possibilities offered by the sensible world in order to make its images clear” (Jung 1986, 220). The assimilation of dreams of each clan contributes to the exploration of a form of collective consciousness. In a nutshell, the presence of the water source in the text of Bosco reminds the omnipresence of the unconscious.

Broadly speaking, the pastoral writing in Bosco’s novel is affected by the diffusion of reveries. The elements go through the characters and activate this mental state of reverie. In the reverie, the narrator feels the soul of the world, he can locate himself between the robust elements of the world and his consciousness. Geneviève and Pascal had to invent an imaginary mediation in order to go over the limit and what is prohibited. They created imaginary friends that could create a bridge, those friends were like natural beings similar to trolls in Nordic fairy tales (Blais 1984, 61). The connector “*par contre*” (on the contrary) is often used by the author to qualify the existing limits between characters (Bosco 1952, 13). These magical beings appear and disappear, they activate the search for boundaries between characters. The question is to know whether the characters have the resources to go over the rivalry of clans. This is why the mixture of dreams and pieces of reality presents the possibility of a connection between the symbolic order of properties (ancient heritage, incestuous life) and the tragedy. In the common sense of tragedy, characters are conscious that the price to break the rules of the traditions is very high. The characters who experienced a tragic choice (the repetition of the fundamental laws of the clan) can be sentenced to death or exile (Leech 1969, 14). In fact, the tragedy reveals in Bosco’s novel the fundamentals of social reality: “social reality is based on both the respect for other agreements: those between men and their gods. Not complying with this basic principle is equivalent to showing arrogance and contempt for the gods” (Andina 2016, 4).

In this context, the pastoral writing creates anonymous spiritual characters giving a feeling of a fairy tale inserted in the middle of the tragedy. Bosco often refers to the presence of a hedge in *Le Mas Théotime* that represents the border between characters and properties (Bosco 1952, 13). The Gods from the sources mix different mythologies and the *Rhône* flood is omnipresent without being explicitly named. The elements in the novel seem to refer to the power of Mithra which mixes as a divinity Pagan elements with Christian principles (Blais, 1984, 52). Life is the association of all forces fighting against death and the trees are important elements in the novel as they represent the solidarity with the roots. “On a line of two or three hundred meters, and in the middle of these poor lands, there is a mass of tall trees, plane trees, oaks and poplars. They grow there, probably thanks to the groundwater that does not go back through the limestone to the humus, but that the deep roots, always in search of a little freshness, had to reach after a century or two of penetration. And now they bite the water” (Bosco 1952, 48). The deep roots “bite the water”, which shows how the narrator, in his dreams, empowers the natural elements. The trees embody this sense of presence, they are the emerging link between forces of earth and human beings. Their roots are in contact with water, the author refers to “deep roots” where the trees endeavour to reach a form of stability during centuries. The image of the roots reflects the ongoing fight for water and humidity. Roots and water sources are the main allegories for this fight for survival, they refer to the order of properties. The pastoral writing represents in a tragic way the determinism of landscapes and clans. The type of trees as well as the variety could be seen as an image of ethnic differences between families. “I took a few steps in the direction of chestnut trees. I came suddenly out of the weak zone of light that barely passed the threshold of the door and I was seized by the darkness.

Their thickness was so dense that I floated slowly being afraid of hitting a tree. However, I reached the chestnut trees of which the dark masses were only dimly glimpsed” (Bosco, 1952, 50).

The description of trees corresponds to different sensations in Bosco’s style. The trees represent the attachment to the earth with the solidarity of generations, they work as benchmarks in the above excerpt. The pastoral writing is a detailed description of the interplay of light and shadow, it is similar to a painting revealing the fragility of things. At the same time, the light works as a possible openness, the tree compels the character to find the path. The dynamics of the text shows a symbolic interpretation where the light reveals this quest of the true origin.

5. The lineage curse in *Le Mas Théotime*

If the tragedy includes some pieces of hope where characters could themselves discover the hidden path to God, the murder breaks this possible redemption by trapping the main characters and pushing them back to their ethnicity. Bosco’s words are quite disorienting as he uses mystical terms to describe the family tragedy. “I felt inside me the unsatisfied family effusion that turned to passion and then Clodius’ blood was warming in my veins, my soul was burning me. I felt that the dark flame was warming the inner limits of my body; and I slept, without even being able to exhale a sigh of distress, the martyrdom of this private pyre” (Bosco 1952, 16). The “effusion”, the “martyr” represent a scene of primitive culprit throughout the zeugma “my soul burnt me”. The tragedy in *Le Mas Théotime* is that the characters are guilty and try to penetrate the path of the redemption to go over the determinism of ethnic links. There is this mixture of ancient tragedy and Christian hope (Elliot 2017, 161) in this novel. The lexical field of blood makes it possible to elaborate an imaginary of the ethnicity, the atavism and the inheritance. The above excerpt shows a mystical experience with biblical expressions. The word “race” is also written to qualify the difference between families Dérivat and Métidieu. “Perhaps we were made for each other, and our union would have characterized the purest love at the summit of the two allied races; but, such strong ties are not knotted in this world; we have in this world constantly tormented each other” (Bosco 1952, 23). The alliance of Dérivat and Métidieu clans did not succeed in creating a common consciousness, there is still a separation of attitudes and bloods that the narrator experiences (Zaïem 2000, 284).

In addition to this, it would be possible to analyse the alliance of clans in terms of socioeconomic relations. In the novel of Henri Bosco, the heritage of properties reflects the social and generational determinism. In that case, the alliance of ancestors is prevailing in a discrete pact, a common regulation that structures the social relations. Bosco describes the farms and their complex connections to each other. Interestingly, the pastoral writing encodes these social relations based on the importance of the heritage and the delimitation of the territories. In this perspective, the size of the farms depends on the status of the family. Michel Clouscard analyses the relation between the development of codes such as *amour courtois* and the structuration of feudalism. “Land ownership, as an economic necessity, seeks its greatest extension and the highest production. And the big domain, the exploitation of the *villa* type, fixed this rural production, compresses it, measures it, by another production, that of the self-produced handicraft by the villa” (Clouscard 1972, 90)⁵. There are traces of ancient big properties that were shared in *Le Mas Théotime*. The fusion of properties is the dream of having a stronger and bigger family. The book opens up with the story of the marriage between Sylvestre Dérivat and Anne-Marie

Métidieu. “On the occasion of our weddings, all children were paired, each boy having his daughter and each daughter his boy. None of them had to leave the place during the whole festivity” (Bosco 1952, 16)⁶. Pascal Dérvat and Geneviève Métidieu were paired during this wedding, they became officially cousins, the cross-cousin marriage had both consequences for their lives and for the possible heritages. The word smallholding (*métairie*) is often used by Henri Bosco to refer to the properties of Pascal and Clodius. The description of properties and domains is very accurate in the novel. Even if there is an old hatred between Clodius and Pascal, the heritage has to be transmitted. The murder of Clodius does not change this fundamental rule. The murderer of Clodius is protected by Pascal, the betrayal cannot break the rules of clans and the fundamental pact that was done under the wedding of Métidieu and Dérvat. “Between this earth uplift and the oak-truffle wood [...], the *carraire* follows the hollow. It penetrates almost immediately the territory of *Théotime* to leave only half a kilometre further at the east of Genevet garden. At the entrance, a small shallow ravine, bordered by rocks, limits it perfectly for a hundred meters; then the path goes up on a plateau that it crosses before vanishing behind the hedges of the orchard garden in a deserted scrubland” (Bosco 1952, 95). The trees always refer to a consistent presence as well as an ethnic origin. The truffle oak is different from poplars or plane trees, the soil texture is different from one domain to the other, the landscapes reflect the strict delimitation of ethnic origins but at the same time, the path indicates an openness. Bosco used an old word of Provençal, “carreirou” (Pallas 1723, 66) to qualify the path. The word “carraire” is used in the East part of Provence, it defines a small passage. The whole novel is built on this extreme variety of landscapes, trees, soil textures that translates the diverse local ethnicity. The nature is an open book where the lineages are remembered by the texture of the elements. In *Le Mas Théotime*, the elements remind this transgenerational stability (Tristmans 2015, 105), which means the fundamental link to the ancestor like the “ancient oaks” (Bosco 1952, 105). Writing the pastoral deeply challenges the Christian representation of the creation. Bosco seems to be attracted by the idea that nature has a multitude of beings. The dreams represented in the novel are based on the moves of these spiritual forces. There is a continuity between landscapes, local gods and properties but at the same time the enclosure cannot be completed as secrete paths appeal a form of transgression. The novel compels the characters to seek something outside the clan. The lineage curse is not a deterministic fatality, there is hope in the links between properties. The openness on something else can also illustrate the arrival of a new form of socialisation which is not based on rural values (Clouscard 1972, 164).

6. Conclusion

The style of *Mas Théotime* is influenced by a conception close to ethnopoetics (Beaujour 2017) and oral traditions where lineages and families develop an intimate relation to natural elements and domains. Bosco is a storyteller that uses the pastoral as an open book where spiritual forces can be perceived. Ancestral disputes determine the share of hamlets but the tragedy has to be read throughout the ontological struggle between unknown spiritual forces (local Gods) and the possibility of an openness (redemption which is not reached in the novel). The mysticism in Bosco’s novel reflects the difficulty to seize a form of spiritual unicity as there is a multiplicity of beliefs present in the nature. In a nutshell, the dreams are determined by the delimitation of properties and territories between clans. If the religious questioning has been commented in Bosco’s work, not much is said about the sociological and political meaning of the ancestral power of

clans. In our mind, the heritage of property reveals political alliances between clans. The fusion of properties means an increase of political power, the imaginary symbolism of feudalism is extremely present. In other words, the ancestral alliances work as oaths between families which establish strong boundaries throughout times. By connecting a dream analysis based on the works of C. G. Jung to the perspective of social classes, it is thus possible to study the development of big properties and domains and their impact on the local community. The weddings create the possibility of fusion of properties in an incestuous vein. The regulation of this Provençal world seems to be disconnected from other places, as if the ancient social structure that guided local clans was always there. The pastoral narrative reveals the conflicts around the possession of domains by local nobles and tribal leaders. The delimitation of domains is threatened by possible links between families that can extend their local power and the possibilities of negotiating other goods. This is the reason why literary criticism has to introduce in Bosco's novel new categories to deconstruct the mechanism of loyalty / disloyalty between ancient families enrooted in this local community.

Footnotes

¹ Antoine Compagnon, <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/henri-bosco/> (Retrieved from 20 February 2018). No date of publication is mentioned about this short biographical notice.

² See the radio programme sent in 1995 on *France Culture*. <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/les-nuits-de-france-culture/une-vie-une-oeuvre-henri-bosco-1ere-diffusion-27071995> (Retrieved from 30 January 2018)

³ See the radio programme sent in 1995 on *France Culture*. In the programme, some short interviews of Bosco are broadcasted. Bosco tells his stories are based on a form of "hallucination". <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/les-nuits-de-france-culture/une-vie-une-oeuvre-henri-bosco-1ere-diffusion-27071995> (Retrieved from 30 January 2018)

⁴ It is our translation.

⁵ The translation is ours. The book *L'Être et le code* was never translated into English.

⁶ The translation is ours.

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