Fathoming the depths: a critical examination of the characters and their world in Henri Bosco’s *L’Ane Culotte*

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Being the occasion of my Grandmother’s 98th birthday, I would like to dedicate this thesis to her, and also to my other dear Nana, who is recalled, with love, every day.
Abstract

My thesis explores the nature of the fictional world of *L’Ane Culotte* and examines how the two main characters, Constantin and Cyprien, succeed or fail in their endeavours as a result of their decisions, and their actions. Motivating factors are identified, character development discussed, and the links between the two characters examined. The notion of what constitutes happiness, for these characters, is addressed. How they try to achieve their goals, their reactions to triumphs and setbacks, and the reactions their behaviour attracts from certain elements within the universal order, is analysed.

I discuss the philosophical notions, and the mythological and religious ideas, which are built into the fabric of this fictional world. The interplay between them and their impact on the characters is examined. The power of magic, and the significance of the earth are also analysed.

The conclusion I draw is that in the world of *L’Ane Culotte*, the key factors required for achieving a meaningful contentment in this life are showing compassion, and acting with consideration towards one’s human and animal neighbours, and indeed towards the earth itself. Ignoring the instructions of superiors, and pushing on heedlessly with one’s own agenda, ultimately result in trouble and affliction.

*
Introduction
Being possessed of a lively interest in history, philosophy and religion, coupled with a love of the countryside, the works of Henri Bosco, particularly those featuring the child exploring his or her natural environment, immediately appealed to me. My decision therefore, to base my research on the characters of *L’Ane Culotte* was an obvious one.

Henri Bosco was born in Avignon, France, in 1888. At a young age he moved to live in the countryside of Provence, close to the Durance river. His experiences, explorations, and discoveries alongside the dreams that entered his mind during those childhood years had a very strong influence on him and his writing through the rest of his life. He himself said that he is, in many ways, the twelve-year-old Constantin whom we meet in *L’Ane Culotte*. The character of Cyprien shares certain attributes with him too¹.

It is evident in Bosco’s many books which portray the child seeking independence, yet also firmly and happily anchored in a loving family, that Bosco’s own family was of the highest importance to him and that what he was taught at home remained with him always. Bosco’s beloved Aunt Martine, two sides of whom, perhaps, come out in *L’Ane Culotte* in the motherly characters of Grand-mère Saturnine and la

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¹ When interviewing Henri Bosco in July 1970, William Van Grit asked him if he himself ever slipped into the skin of his characters. The reply given was that yes, he does. The “I” in Bosco’s novels indicates more than first-person narration, it tells us that Bosco himself is in that character: “Notez que j’écris partout “je”. Cela montre que c’est moi qui parle et éprouvais des aventures imaginaires dans mon pays provençal, près du Luberon, ou dans un petit village dans la montagne. Dans chaque ouvrage, c’est moi qui étais là dans l’aventure…” (883). Later in the same interview he confirms that he is present in the character of Constantin: “Le garçon dans *L’Ane Culotte*, Constantin, c’est encore moi,…” (884). In her Introduction to the English translation of *L’Ane Culotte*, *Culotte the Donkey*, the translator, and friend of Bosco, Sister Mary Theresa McCarthy, writes that “(n)ot only does the author give Cyprien a certain participation in his own personal, Franciscan devotion, he also gives him his own birthday, 16 November” (ix). Of the character of Constantin, she writes: “Constantin is the fictionalisation of H.B.’s fondest memories of childhood” (ix). Some use of contextual elements in this thesis, particularly references made to other examples of Bosco’s written works, are rendered useful by such clear statements of authorial presence, which infuse a certain unity into Bosco’s fictional universe.
Péguinotte, exercised a particularly profound influence on him. The devout religious belief, coupled with an equal measure of ‘old world’ superstition, which Aunt Martine displayed to the young Henri Bosco, is sprinkled liberally throughout his novels and his recollections of childhood.\(^2\)

*L’Ane Culotte* was published in 1937. A single mention of railway lines on a map and the existence of the battery situate the action of the plot in modern times, but otherwise the experiences the characters undergo could have occurred at any time in history, giving the narrative a universal quality.\(^3\)

Critics have remarked on the singularity of Bosco’s writing in that it does not appear to have any obvious connection to the twentieth century, nor does it mirror the types of works which were being produced by other French writers of the time; the upheavals caused by war and depression are not the upheavals that Bosco’s characters undergo.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) An example of this mixture of superstition and Christian devotion can be seen, for example, in the following episode in Bosco’s *Souvenirs*, in which he relates the mistrust in which mirrors were held in his family: “Or, j’avais contre les miroirs une prévention. Chez nous, dans cette famille attentive à la nature des objets, à leurs pouvoirs, à leur vie si particulière, les miroirs n’étaient pas en odeur de sainteté, bien au contraire. […] Tante Martine un jour m’ayant surpris à me regarder dans l’armoire à glace m’en avait écarté vigoureusement. Et elle s’était écriée: - Mais, petit malheureux, tu ne sais pas ce que tu risques!… - Et qu’est-ce que je risque, dis, Tante Martine? - Ni plus ni moins de voir le diable. Et si tu crois qu’il est joli!… - Mais, Tante Martine, c’est moi que je vois… - Justement, et voilà le mal! Tu crois te voir, mais ce n’est pas toi que tu vois. C’est quelque chose qui n’est rien. Essaie un peu de l’attraper… Tu touches du verre… Et alors?… Ecoute-moi, j’ai de l’expérience… *(Trinitaires 80-81)*

\(^3\) Bosco’s characters, in his opinion, represent people of the world. As he once told Jean-Pierre Cauvin: “Je suis un écrivain humain, non régionaliste. Mes personnages sont provençaux en apparence seulement. Ils sont surtout universels et humains” (233).

\(^4\) In retrospect, Jean-Pierre Cauvin wrote in 1974: “Dans un siècle où la veine orphique semble épuisée, l’œuvre d’Henri Bosco présente un aspect insolite, inactuel” (11). “Sa notoriété soudaine, à partir de 1945, fut elle-même un paradoxe puisqu’elle coïncidait avec une tendance opposée et beaucoup plus forte. La vague existentialiste déferlait en effet parmi des générations que la tourmente avait lavées de toute illusion et rendues exsangues” (43). In a similar vein are some of the comments made by critics in the 1950s:
In creating the setting: a small village in the south of France named Peïrouré, and the countryside that surrounds it, Bosco drew on his own Mediterranean heritage in which animals have lived alongside humans for centuries; in early times forming objects of veneration and symbols illustrating the divine plan; at all times providing food, clothing, entertainment and company. The vegetal world, too, connects the earliest times with today. The plants featuring in the myths of antiquity are of the same species as those that Bosco looked upon and wandered past daily in his native Provence⁵, and they in turn create the backdrop to *L’Ane Culotte*, as well as to his other works. From his Mediterranean inheritance too, he has drawn on some of the major belief systems which have guided people through the ages in their quest to understand the fundamental questions of existence.

My intention in writing this thesis is twofold: to explore the nature of the fictional world created by Bosco in *L’Ane Culotte*, and to investigate the relationships between that fictional world and the characters who act and interact within it. As Constantin’s narrative and Cyprien’s journal are presented together in the same book, and concern the

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“(Bosco’s) novels are set in villages and farms in a world abstracted from ours […] Several of Bosco’s best stories […] centre on children; and the general spirit of these stories is well suited to the fresh visions of childhood, uncorrupted by any form of modern living” (Brée and Guiton 105). “Au milieu du tumulte de notre siècle, loin de l’agitation fiévreuse, de la grossièreté et vulgarité croissantes que l’on rencontre presque partout dans les lettres, fleurit une oasis. Le temps s’est arrêté dans le monde d’Henri Bosco” (Bieber 272)

⁵The essential unity and the common features of the landscapes bordering on the Mediterranean are underscored, for example, in the words of Bosco’s character, Aristide de Cabridolles, the greatly admired teacher of French, Latin and Greek: “Mais sachez qu’il n’existe pas un seul chant bucolique dans lequel il n’y ait, visible ou caché avec soin, un bouquet rustique, tel qu’on en cueille en plein soleil sur nos collines. Jusques au sang nous sommes Grecs!” (Pascalet 160).
same characters, the thesis also explores the connections between the two tales and the two characters of Cyprien and Constantin.

By way of introduction, it is perhaps useful to note some of the ideas which are prominent in the novel under investigation. In L’Ane Culotte the foremost questions seem to be: how does one find happiness? Where is that happiness to be found? Is it actually possible to find it? The reader meets two characters, two older men, whose lives and beliefs illustrate two different paths. One of these men, Cyprien, makes the pursuit of personal happiness his all-encompassing quest, and he believes that after a life-time of searching, he is finally on the right path and close to achieving it. The other is the village priest, abbé Chichambre, who is far from being preoccupied with achieving happiness, but through his gentle acts of kindness and charity (coupled with the example his own way of living provides to his parishioners) shows a pathway to an achievable contentment, where appreciation of the earth’s beauty is paramount and excesses are tempered by moderation. The path of one of the men offends the prevailing universal order, and the path of the other pleases it.

Bosco’s technique of planting Cyprien’s journal within Constantin’s narrative allows for quite a rounded view of Cyprien to be built up. We learn about Cyprien as Constantin does, we meet him when the boy does too, always being mindful of the fact that Constantin’s re-telling of events is coloured by his perception of them. Then, after the plot has reached its climactic point, the reader gets the opportunity to witness the build-up to it again, but this time through Cyprien’s eyes, as recorded in his journal. Constantin’s narrative picks up again, very briefly, bringing the book to an end, and effectively framing Cyprien’s story within his own.

The reader does not get quite such a rounded view of Constantin, although there is more interaction with other characters presented in his narrative, allowing the reader to catch glimpses of how he fits into his society, and making of him “a more solid figure” (Lubbock 90). Furthermore, a third narrative voice, that of abbé Chichambre is given in a series of notes attached to the conclusion of Cyprien’s journal, which comment on both Constantin and Cyprien from his perspective.

Percy Lubbock, commenting on the structural technique of framing one character’s story within another’s, notes that it allows the reader to both step into the world of the characters “to get an immediate taste of it” (84), and to view it from the outside as well “to get the full effect” (84).

An understanding of what is meant by a character offending or pleasing the universal order may be perceived through drawing an analogy with Aristotle’s definition of the tragic hero in Poetics. The tragic hero, a person neither all good nor all bad, but rather one who reflects the mixture found in most people,
It is proposed that the characters in *L’Ane Culotte* are free to act as they wish, but that certain actions will attract a reaction from supernatural forces. These forces include the power of the earth and the malignant energies housed within it, various potencies associated with the natural elements located on the earth’s surface and in the sky, the influences of pagan nature deities and ultimately the interplay between forces, good and evil, in a Christian sense. It is my observation that in *L’Ane Culotte* pagan practices mix, both passively (for the majority of characters) and harmfully (for those who consciously become too heavily involved in probing their inner mysteries), with Christian beliefs.

A second significant notion, which forms a substratum layer to *L’Ane Culotte*, develops, it would seem, out of Bosco’s tender memories of the way the child perceives the world; particularly the youthful capacity to see and believe in the wonderful and the marvellous. Constantin, the other character whose personality and actions will be examined, personifies this notion. His love of nature, his willingness to believe in magic, his imagination, and his readiness to see about him beauty and even perfection, makes him a very endearing character. Constantin, quiet, but certainly not immune to the attractions of adventure, finds himself at a crossroads point in his life. We see him torn between being obedient to his grandmother and conforming to the village way-of-life and experimenting with thinking (and acting) independently. The two paternal figures of abbé Chichambre and Cyprien present to Constantin two different paths; one of which, of

makes an error of judgement. Frequently this error results from the hero’s pride, which makes them confident enough to rely on their own judgement, and by doing so to “disregard a divine warning or to violate an important moral law” (Abrams 322). The hero goes on to suffer a reversal of fortune, followed perhaps by recognition of their error, and misery. The error which causes the turn of events is one they freely make; it cannot be imposed on them by circumstances or by a higher power.
course, seems so commonplace as to be boring, while the other may be the passage leading to who knows what adventures. Constantin’s decision and his ensuing adventures link his story with Cyprien’s.

This thesis follows a line of inquiry which utilises elements of hermeneutics and is underpinned by the theories of character creation and character development within the structure of the plot as discussed principally by Vincent Jouve in *L’Effet-personnage dans le roman* and by Percy Lubbock in *The Craft of Fiction*.

Hermeneutic theories were considered useful as a means of approaching and examining how Bosco put together a world, and what kind of characters he placed in it. The author’s wide interests, the influences that shaped him, the aesthetical and philosophical notions which attracted him and made sense to him have been considered, to a degree, and are referred to on occasion, as the thesis proceeds. It is felt that, where a

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8 Certainly two realities co-exist in *L’Ane Culotte*. Constantin steps out of the world of everyday reality into the world of the marvellous, expressing his pleasure in the experiences the new reality affords him, *without showing the least sign of fear or disbelief*. This marvellous world is created by Cyprien’s magic, and significantly only child characters penetrate it. This acceptance of the marvellous as completely normal reflects the distinction made by Roger Caillois between the marvellous and the fantastic; the fantastic involving the occurrence of an unbelievable event in everyday empirical reality, causing astonishment and fear: “Le fantastique manifeste un scandale, une déchirure, une irruption insolite, presque insupportable dans le monde réel” (8). However, it must be noted that one does find, within the freely-accepted marvellous world, elements of the fantastic, as defined by Tzvetan Todorov, wherein the reader perceives hesitation on the part of a character signifying their inability to decide whether a certain phenomenon is real or not: “Le fantastique, c’est l’hésitation éprouvée par un être qui ne connaît que les lois naturelles face à un événement en apparence surnaturel” (29). This occurs principally when Constantin states that he feels like he is dreaming.

9 Michel Foucault aptly described hermeneutics as: “Ensemble des connaissances et des techniques qui permettent de faire parler les signes et de découvrir leur sens;...” (44). Originally a means of Biblical interpretation, the first proponent of the usage of hermeneutic methods to assist in the understanding of all types of texts and oral deliveries was Friedrich Schleiermacher. Schleiermacher was concerned with how information is not only passed from one person to another, but most importantly how it is understood by all the participants, be they author – reader, or a pair or group of interlocutors. Subsequent developments of Schleiermacher’s ideas include, for example, Wilhelm Dilthey’s ‘hermeneutic circle’, according to which the parts of a text are comprehended through a perceived knowledge of the whole and vice-versa, and E.D. Hirsch’s expansion of this idea, whereby the reader brings an hypothesis to a text and then adjusts it as necessary during the reading process according to cues and clues perceived in the text.
point in the narrative of *L’Ane Culotte* clearly corresponds to an occurrence in Bosco’s *Souvenirs* of his childhood, for example, or a statement he made in an interview, that there is some value in considering the connection and the correlative insights which may be uncovered. Of course, the notion of what constitutes verbal meaning, as intended by Bosco, and what constitutes textual significance to the reader, has been kept in mind, and possible meanings or interpretations remain suggestions.

Certainly the reader brings elements of their own personality, background and life-experience to a text. As Vincent Jouve writes: “les univers narratifs, incapables de constituer par eux-mêmes des mondes possibles, sont obligés d’emprunter certaines de leurs propriétés au monde de référence du lecteur” (27-28). Jouve emphasises the fact that not only does the text rely on the reader to build-up, in conjunction with it, a picture of the narrative world, but that the creation of character also demands this: “La perception du personnage ne peut trouver son achèvement que chez le lecteur” (34). Furthermore, he recognizes the fact that the reader’s perception of a character automatically draws upon his or her recollections of other characters. These may be in widely different texts, but ones which nevertheless alert the reader to a similarity or connection: “du point de vue du lecteur, la figure romanesque est rarement perçue comme une créature originelle, mais rappelle souvent, de manière plus ou moins implicite, d’autres figures issues d’autres textes” (48).

This is not to say that the links all come from the memory and imagination of the reader. Many times the author would seem to be directing his or her reader to draw certain connections: “Le texte peut toutefois orienter de façon décisive l’identité intertextuelle des figures qu’il met en scène” (Jouve 49). Jouve notes how a certain
name, given to a character, for example, may oriente the reader towards making a connection between their character and a well-known figure from literature or history. The name of the autodiegetic narrator in *L’Ane Culotte*, Constantin, for example, may evoke in the reader an association with the Roman Emperor, Constantine, which in turn carries associations of the influence of the ancient Mediterranean world on Provence, the legacy of which is still felt today. These connections are quickly confirmed by the reader, as he or she proceeds through the narrative.

The numerous intertextual layers of *L’Ane Culotte* are examined in some depth in this thesis, as they form a fundamental basis to the creation of both the fictional world and the characters. The multiple levels that *L’Ane Culotte* can be read and enjoyed on call to mind some comments, made by Umberto Eco, on intertextual irony. They seem to be particularly relevant to this book, which has frequently been classified as a tale which appeals to both adults and children. Clearly the experience and intertextual knowledge brought to the text by such a diverse readership must be very wide-ranging. To quote Eco: “the text can be read in a naïve way, without appreciating the intertextual references, or it can be read in the full awareness of them, or at least with the conviction that one has to go looking for them” (219). In this statement, Eco makes the same point as Jouve, that effectively the author and the reader together fill out the characters and envisage the universe they live in, with a hint, inserted by the author, sometimes setting the reader off in a certain direction.

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10 *L’Ane Culotte* is published, for example, by Gallimard both in its ‘Collection Folio’ and in its ‘Collection Folio Junior’.
The first chapter of my critical examination of *L’Ane Culotte* explores the character of Cyprien: the nature of his quest, and the ways in which he develops and changes.

Chapter Two has Constantin as the point of focus. The general goal of this chapter is to illustrate how and examine why Constantin gets involved, ever deeper, in a situation where he offends the universal laws, and brings retribution upon himself.

I have looked at the writings of a number of critics who have discussed Bosco’s characters and proposed hypotheses regarding the workings of Bosco’s universe. They have provided invaluable assistance, and some of their many ideas are discussed in the two chapters which follow.

Finally, I believe it may be helpful to give a brief introduction to the characters in *L’Ane Culotte*, who are mentioned in my thesis:

**The characters**

**Grand-mère Saturnine:** Constantin’s grandmother. Greatly loved and esteemed by Constantin. Leader of the household of ‘La Saturnine’. Kind and loving, but not given to showing strong emotion, she is, in addition, almost always all-knowing. She makes the rules and expects to be obeyed.

**Grand-père Saturnin:** Constantin’s gentle grandfather. A good-hearted man of few words. He is quietly supportive around the house, where his role is effectively more symbolic than practical. He loves to sit, looking at nature.

**Hyacinthe:** a girl of around Constantin’s age, who was an orphan prior to being taken in by Grand-mère Saturnine. She develops from being something of a wooden figure
around the house into a real, much-loved, person. She possesses a unique ability, seemingly, to appear and disappear for long periods of time. She has multiple roles in the story; one of the principal ones being that of Constantin’s guardian angel. In many ways she also constitutes a ‘double’ to Constantin. She proves to be very susceptible to enchantments, and is abducted by Cyprien at the end of Constantin’s narrative, to be the young human heir his garden requires.

**La Péguinotte:** a long-standing, live-in, domestic servant at La Saturnine. She is hard-working, sharp-tongued, but kind-hearted. She utters many proverbs. She has firm ideas about what is right and what is wrong. Constantin is her friend, but he also likes to goad her from time to time. Her superstitious nature makes her very gullible.

**Anselme:** the long-standing, live-in, shepherd at La Saturnine. He is taciturn, kind and wise. Constantin admires him. Frequently he is the only person in the household who will give Constantin information. He is open-minded. He is the only adult character, other than the priest, to approach Cyprien, up at Belles-Tuiles, and converse with him. He is devout, and in many ways, constitutes a lay double to abbé Chichambre.

**School boys:** Antoin Toquelot, Rapugue, Claudius Saurivère, Sucot, … These are the local scallywags and peers of Constantin, with whom he attends the local school. These are the boys who tease Cyprien’s donkey, Culotte, hunt birds in their spare time, and whose behaviour has persuaded the teacher that his class should only be taught practical things!

**Anne-Madeleine Bourguelle:** is the local saddler’s daughter. Constantin describes her as a bit older than himself, tall, assertive, confident, aggravating. She only comes into the
story once, but her desire that Constantin deliver to her an almond branch, to flatter her vanity, has a profound effect on the plot.

Abbé Chichambre: is the local priest, who is ostensibly in retirement, but who wholeheartedly serves the local community. He is held in awe by Constantin, yet he is very approachable. He advocates strongly for the charitable treatment of others, both human and animal. He responds to Cyprien, reaching out to him and maintaining a friendship with him, despite the admonitions of his parishioners. He continues to pray for Cyprien, even after he has vanished with Hyacinthe. He is open-minded, sympathetic, and a nature-lover. He is also eloquent, with a talent for delivering vivid and beautiful sermons. He is a priest, according to Constantin, who is well-suited to a country parish.

Cyprien: is seventy-one years of age when the story begins. Formerly a self-employed sailor and trader in the French colonies, not of excellent reputation, but not the ‘worst sort’ either, according to abbé Chichambre, who first met him in that location. At an early age he became disillusioned with life, and how society teaches us to live, which later made him determined to seek out happiness for himself. He comes to feel that the key to happiness lies in the innocence of nature. Eventually he spurns the company of other humans, and buys an isolated property, named ‘Belles-Tuiles’, in the hills above Peïrouré. There he sets about creating a beautiful garden, in a very short space of time, using magical formulas learnt in ‘the islands’. He names his garden ‘Fleuriaide’. His plan is to have the local animals come to live in the garden. He uses his magical knowledge to coax them to come.

Constantin: twelve years old at the beginning of the narrative, which he relates in the first person. It covers a period of just over two years. An only child, he enjoys a happy
and stable life at La Saturnine (the biggest house in the village) with his grandparents, Hyacinthe, la Péguinotte and Anselme. He loves nature. Shy, he has no particular friend, but makes an effort to fit in, at least superficially, with the other school-boys. His imagination and curiosity, coupled with his capacity to perceive the beautiful and the marvellous, have made him ready for adventure and exploration. In the second part of his narrative, Constantin becomes increasingly pensive and we also see him warming towards Hyacinthe, whom he had scarcely noticed before, perceiving in her a sensitive nature and a kindred spirit. When Hyacinthe is kidnapped, Constantin is devastated.

**Culotte:** the donkey who gives his name to the book. Owned by Cyprien, he functions as something of a companion and a messenger for him. He descends the mountain in Cyprien’s stead to buy supplies in the village. He is petted by some, feared by others because of his extraordinary capabilities and dedication. The local school boys tease him when he appears in trousers during winter. He captures Constantin’s imagination and the two eventually become friends. In many ways they mirror one another: both being ‘awakened’ by Cyprien’s magic. A strong bond develops between them. Culotte is a gentle and kind animal, but nevertheless a shadow surrounds him because he does Cyprien’s bidding, and while appealing to children’s sense of the marvellous, he also leads them into trouble.
Chapter One:

The Quest for perfect happiness on Earth: Is it attainable?

“Vous autres Européens, dont l’esprit se remplit dès l’enfance de tant de préjugés contraires au bonheur, vous ne pouvez concevoir que la nature puisse donner tant de lumières et de plaisirs. Votre âme, circonscrite dans une petite sphère de connaissances humaines, atteint bientôt le terme de ses jouissances artificielles: mais la nature et le cœur sont inépuisables.”

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie
The creation of Paradise

Cyprien’s quest is to find happiness on earth. He believes that innocence, love, purity, and sincerity exist in nature, so he decides to cast aside everything else, and create a garden to live in, full of plants and tame animals, where he hopes to be able to share in their simplicity and guilelessness. There, he maintains, he will find perfect happiness.

Cyprien tells us that as a child and a young man he had been taught many things, most of which he found to be useless, because they did not bring him the one thing he truly wanted: happiness. So, he went out, through the world, in search of it himself:

Alors, j’ai tout quitté, et j’ai cherché le simple, le pur. J’ai pensé que peut-être, si je retrouvais cette naïveté, je serais plus crédule […] j’ai parcouru la terre durement, car j’ai croisé bien des aventures. Rien ne venait pourtant; mais j’ai la tête dure et je me suis obstiné dans mon dessein. Hélas! Si j’avais oublié presque tout ce qu’on m’avait appris de force au temps de ma jeunesse, le monde, lui, ne m’offrit guère par la suite de spectacles propres à me faire croire au bonheur. Je n’y étais pas meilleur que les autres. Cette poursuite a duré des années. Et puis j’ai fait le Pacte… (Culotte 149-50)

For some time he had no success, until he happened upon an island where a tribe of native animal charmers were living in what Cyprien perceived to be an earthly paradise. Believing he was at the end of his quest, he settled amongst these people11.

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11 Interestingly, Cyprien’s early journeyings and quest for happiness strongly call to mind the real-life experiences of the eighteenth-century author, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Having finished his education in France, Saint-Pierre “devient ingénieur aux armées, perd son grade et va chercher fortune dans plusieurs pays étrangers: Hollande, Russie, Pologne, Allemagne. Hanté par le rêve d’une vie selon la nature, il saisit avec empressement l’occasion qui lui est offerte de se rendre à l’île de France (l’île Maurice). Il y séjourne
At a later date, when travelling to another island, for whatever reason, he visited the local church, where it would seem he felt compelled to speak to the priest about his discovery. Having had a Christian upbringing, perhaps Cyprien regarded the priest, abbé Chichambre, as another who is ultimately searching for paradise. The celestial paradise that is, promised to those who follow the way outlined by Jesus, and found in the next life. Cyprien decided to confide in the priest, that he has found paradise in this life.

Abbé Chichambre relates his astonishment at the words of this visitor to his church:

Paradis terrestre…» […] Il devina mon étonnement (il y avait de quoi…)

[…] L’homme dit:

- Je vous étonne, monsieur l’abbé, et vous devez me prendre pour un fou.

Il ne se trompait guère. Il le comprit et ajouta avec une violence contenue:

- Et bien, non! je ne suis pas un fou! Et cette découverte, je l’ai faite.

(Culotte 108-9) 12

Chichambre goes on to relate how, by chance, he met Cyprien five years later, and the latter related to him how the island paradise had been destroyed by a band of white men:

Le Paradis! Il n’existe plus, me dit-il. Les blancs y ont finalement abordé. Tout y est mort, et j’ai dû m’enfuir, moi aussi, mais je le garde en moi, ce Paradis; j’en conserve la force, j’en connais le secret, j’emporte le pouvoir de le faire renaître, partout où je le voudrai, même là-bas, en Occident, dans les jardins barbares. (Culotte 109-110)

I suggest that this reflects both the arrival of Christianity in Europe in the early centuries AD, and the superimposition of both Christianity and western practices and values onto non-Europeans in more recent times: the ‘animal charmers’ represent pagans, or followers of indigenous nature-based religions, adherents of a theology pertaining to survival and happiness in this world. The band of white men represent a new group in

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12 This action highlights Cyprien’s ambiguous relationship with Christianity: he is self-reliant, and later declares that he serves the earth, not God. He goes on to set himself up in the role of creator of the paradise garden, seemingly in direct competition to God; yet it is he who goes to great lengths to establish a friendly relationship with the priest, Chichambre. Furthermore, it is the Biblical Garden of Eden that he wishes to re-create or, in his words, release from its imprisonment within the earth.
society which introduced the religion of Christianity, and their actions on the island reflect the efforts made to stamp out other religious practices. In Europe, at least, this ultimately brought about the end of classical paganism, notwithstanding the fact that numerous superstitions and practices were never successfully annihilated. Cyprien embraced the polytheism of nature deities, which he found on the island, and when it was swept away he held on to it, and carried it away inside himself, to practise elsewhere. Returning to France, Cyprien re-creates this pagan world inside the local Christian one. However, we shall see that the community of Peïrouré, while being strongly Christian, remains nevertheless firmly influenced by its pagan past.

In the above quote, Cyprien speaks of having made a ‘pact’ with the earth. This statement prompts the reader to consider what he may mean by this, and how one could enter into a pact with a non-human entity. Perhaps a partial answer, at least, lies in Bosco’s recollections (Souvenirs) of his childhood. In the third volume, Le Jardin des Trinitaires, Bosco writes how, as a child, he became very aware of the presence of things both animate and inanimate, and that it came to him naturally and simply to communicate with them:

Mes relations avec les objets ont été étranges du jour (j’avais huit ans) où je me suis aperçu qu’ils existaient. Jusque-là je les avais vus sans les voir, […] Et puis, un jour, la bouteille a été une bouteille, avec ou sans vin, avec ou sans eau. […] Elle a pris sa forme, elle a exprimé. Quoi? Mais son être, cette présence de bouteille qui a surgi comme un personnage nouveau et tout à fait inattendu. […] elle est passée magiquement à la dignité de cette bouteille, de bouteille à part, de
bouteille présente aux yeux, de bouteille individuelle […], de bouteille ayant corps et âme, comme vous et moi, mais plus simplement. Enfin, je l’ai vue!…

Bientôt la révélation de l’humble bouteille s’étendit aux autres objets de la maison, et à tous, mais selon leur rang, d’où émanait plus ou moins d’être.

(19-20)

Picking up on this capability - “[ce] don étrange de communiquer intimement avec les choses” (“A l’écoute” 126) - Jean Onimus writes that Bosco’s characters resemble him in possessing this gift, which is at once marvellous, but also has its inherent dangers. Of Bosco’s relationships to objects, Onimus writes, in the same article that: “Il entre en contact, par delà les apparences extérieures, avec leur réalité secrète, leur «essence», une essence chargée d’inépuisables significations pour qui sait s’arrêter et interroger le monde. […] Ses personnages en effet lui ressemblent; ils font de ce don un usage tour à tour merveilleux – source de joie - et dangereux…” (126)

Onimus’s statement immediately brings to mind the image of Cyprien; a man who, like Bosco, has the ability to scratch beneath the surface, and enter into veritable contact with a selected object. For Cyprien, the object of desire is the earth itself. Cyprien records that he has learned the secrets, which involve the use of magic, from the native animal charmers, but we suspect that he was also already in possession of a natural talent, which synthesized easily with the skills and incantations learnt on the island. As Onimus suggests, Cyprien went on to use his power to do wonderful things, or so they
seemed at first, but as time passed, he became submerged within that which he sought to
honour [and control] and he began to lose his humanity\(^{13}\).

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Character Contrast

"Have pity, O Lord God, lest they who go by the way trample on the unfledged bird,
and send Thine Angel to replace it in the nest, that it may live till it can fly."
Saint Augustine

Set, as a foil, against the character of Cyprien is the local priest, abbé
Chichambre. They share many similarities, but always with distinct and important
differences in terms of what is deemed right and what wrong in the universal order. Both
seekers, one finds his needs met in surrounding himself by the earth’s beauty and being
the master of his own paradise garden; the other is also a lover of the earth’s beauty, but
appreciates it as a reflection of its creator’s benevolence, power and love. To abbé
Chichambre the beauty of the earth offers a glimpse of the celestial paradise, the goal of
the Christian pilgrim. Chichambre’s focus is on others, that is, on his parishoners. He
exhorts them to love each other and the earth, to work hard, but to enjoy life, to manage
themselves and nurture self-control. These are the keys to arriving eventually at the

\(^{13}\) Charles Du Ry makes an interesting comparison between the similarities in the magical knowledge of
Cyprien [Bosco’s character] and that attributed to St. Cyprien of Antioch, known as ‘the Magus’, in a long
poem written about him by the Empress Eudoxie of Byzantium around 440 AD. As an adolescent, Cyprien
of Antioch was initiated into the Mithraic cult, and became privy to the secrets of penetrating the inner life
of natural phenomena: “…il se tourna vers le culte de Mithra et, à quinze ans, il participe, au sommet de
l’Olympe, à des célébrations d’initiation à des pouvoirs magiques avancés, lui permettant de pénétrer la vie
secrète des plantes, des minéraux, des bêtes et des êtres humains” (136). Du Ry comments further that
recent studies have shown that a Greek form of shamanism existed, in ancient times. These Greek shamans
were capable, amongst other things, of taming animals, and summoning birds and beasts with certain
evocative strains of music. [A skill which Bosco’s character, Cyprien, also possessess, as we shall see
presently]. Du Ry obtained this information from studies conducted by W. Burkert and Mircea Eliade.
Perhaps Bosco’s selection of the name ‘Cyprien’ was a purposeful intertextual clue for the knowing reader?
celestial paradise. Cyprien, on the other hand, while also extolling the importance of love, peace, and innocence, is focussed entirely on himself and his own needs. The idea of a paradise in a future life is meaningless to him. The need to curb one’s desires and practise moderation does not, therefore, carry the same depth of meaning. Nor does a more humanistic plea for self-discipline and awareness of the needs of others register with him. He has cut himself off from other people, and is fully in the centre of his own universe.

The most obvious attribute shared by Chichambre and Cyprien is their love of animals. On numerous occasions the reader is shown examples of this; however, while both characters clearly feel great affection for their animal friends, Cyprien’s need to control and dominate always comes through, whereas Chichambre’s attitude is that wild animals have the right to be free. Consider the following examples: in the first Constantin records an example of the priest’s tender-hearted eloquence on the need to extend Christian charity to animals:

Mes enfants, nous disait-il, vous pensez bien que ce n’est pas simplement pour se donner un divertissement agréable que saint François d’Assise a parlé aux pinsons et aux bergeronnettes. Si le Paradis est un jardin, il y pousse des arbres; et s’il y pousse des arbres, comment voulez-vous qu’il n’yienne pas des oiseaux? Alors est-ce que vous vous voyez là-haut en train de dénicher des roitelets à la barbe des anges? Quel affreux scandale! Saint Pierre aurait tôt fait de vous lancer, la tête en bas, les pieds en l’air, dans le trou le plus noir du Purgatoire. S’il en est ainsi, pourquoi donc voulez-vous qu’un crime qui, au ciel, paraîtrait abominable, devienne un
péché gros comme le doigt, sous pretexte que vous habitez a Peïouré sous les plantanes? (*Culotte* 16)

In this quote, Bosco, I believe, encourages the reader to compare the love of abbé Chichambre to those saints who had an affectionate relationship with animals\textsuperscript{14}. Look, for example, at the following quotes from an article entitled *Les Animaux dans les vie des saints*, in comparison with the content of Chichambre’s sermon above:

Il y aurait beaucoup à dire sur l’amour de saint François d’Assise pour les animaux; […]. François ne pouvait souffrir qu’on maltraitât une bête, si infime fût-elle. Il racheta un jour un couple de tourterelles qu’on allait vendre et leur rendit la liberté, un autre jour des agneaux qu’on portait tout liés à la boucherie. […] On connaît le discours qu’il tint à ses freres les oiseaux, dans la campagne d’Assise, pour les engager à louer Dieu… (Durand 129)


\begin{center}
\textbf{\textsuperscript{\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldOTS
compulsion rather than affection. He is aware of their suffering, yet he persists in keeping them there. His love does not allow for freedom of the will:

En trois jours, j’ai vu accourir toutes les bêtes que j’aimais, mes amis de l’automne, même le hérisson, même le sanglier. Il n’en manque pas une. Plus familières que jamais. Plusieurs, encore engagées dans leur sommeil d’hiver; elles se laissent approcher. Elles sentent le terrier et la feuille morte. 23 mars (Culotte 164)

Je les aime. Pourtant elles ne viennent pas à moi de leur plein gré. Elles sont attirées de force. Leur méfiance cède aux puissances d’une magie. Je les sens plus domptées qu’affectueuses; mon amour leur pèse, mes bienfaits les enchaînent; ce ne sont plus des bêtes libres. Je le vois, elles souffrent.

24 septembre (Culotte 159)  

\[\text{\textsuperscript{15} That Cyprien and Chichambre are supposed to be viewed as a type of double, perhaps as two sides of one person even, is hinted at also, I believe, in the ability of both characters to communicate with animals. In the case of Cyprien, although the reader does not actually witness him talking to the donkey, Culotte, it is clearly indicated that he is able to give him instructions as to what jobs he is to perform down in the village, for example. With regard to abbé Chichambre the reference to his talent is much more obscure. Early in Constantin’s narrative, the boy observes, at a distance, the priest talking to the donkey, whilst removing a gift of flowers from his saddlebag; an occurrence which is, of course, not particularly unusual. What is unusual though, is that later in the book, after Constantin has been absent from Peïrouré for three months, and is not expected back, Chichambre correctly ascertains from the donkey, who makes a din outside the presbytery to get his attention, that Constantin is in trouble, and that the priest must get help, and follow him up the mountain:}\]

- A trois heures, il a fait un tel boucan à ma porte!…
- Il se tut.
- Mais comment avez-vous compris que c’était pour notre petit? demanda Anselme.
- Je ne sais pas; un instinct; il m’a ensuite amené ici… Vous l’avez vu, il nous tirait vers la montagne… (Culotte 91)

Such abilities link up with the setting which Bosco is striving to create: this is a small village where Christian and pagan practices and influences intermingle. In The Mythical Zoo, Boria Sax writes of very early religious worship being directed at animals, then later at human divinities who were often accompanied by a particular animal; as the centuries passed and tribes and empires were amalgamated, new
Cyprien and Chichambre also both have close dealings with the earth. However, again there is a marked distinction between the type of contact they have with it. Chichambre is seen digging his garden, displaying the flora of the earth in his church and encouraging his parishioners in their agrarian tasks. In the following extract, Constantin declares how suitable abbé Chichambre is for this countryside parish and how his very shoes remind the people of the earth, from which they all make their living:

Colossal, sous sa chape d’or et de soie, l’abbé Chichambre officiait avec cette brusquerie familière, ces gestes impétueux, ces agenouillements formidables […]. Dès qu’il entrait, une houle agitait ces têtes paysannes, pourtant dures et calmes; et, quand il gravissait l’autel, ses grands pas soulevaient sa soutane; et l’on voyait des souliers plats, larges, cloutés qu’on n’oubliait plus. C’étaient des souliers faits pour la terre. La messe, plus ou moins, célébrait les travaux de la saison, … (Culotte 58-9) [My highlighting].

Cyprien, on the other hand, while venerating the beauty and the fecundity of the earth, essentially makes use of it to provide for his happiness. Furthermore, as time passes he unwittingly allows himself to become more and more aligned with it (and what it represents). Constantin’s impression of Cyprien, at their first meeting, (nine months after Cyprien’s arrival at Belles-Tuiles), reveals to the reader the type of relationship Cyprien has with the earth by this point – he barely seems to be distinct from it: “Ses

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religious influences came, but “archaic practices sometimes continued as local cults or customs. […] A few holy men and women retained the shaman’s gift of speaking with creatures of the woods and fields” (xiv). Interestingly, Sax goes on to name Saint Francis’s preaching to the birds, and Saint Anthony’s preaching to the fish, as examples of this.
doigts noueux étaient encore rouges de terre et lui-même, avec sa culotte de bure, sa
chemise brune, sa peau recuite, il semblait à peine detache d’un lit d’argile ferrugineuse”
(Culotte 47). Arlette Smith comments that such ‘fusions’ with the earth, in adult
characters, intimate an abandonment of self to the heady powers of the earth and
constitute a curse in terms of the ideology of the Boscovien universe: “L’état psychique
qui le definit, dépossession de l’identité et du vouloir, abandon délibéré aux forces
telluriques, quasi-fusion avec ces dernières, est le signe même de sa malédiction selon les
normes qui régissent l’univers bosquien. L’identification à la matière y est condamnée
comme perverse quand elle est accomplie par l’adulte” (68). She goes on to quote from
the work of Michel Suffran16, that such ‘fusion’ indicates that the character no longer
holds the interior, spiritual and distinctly human part of the self to be important, rather
they identify their exterior, physical, selves, the only part of themselves they recognise,
completely with the physical environment. The important task, in the Boscovien
universal order, of developing the spiritual as well as the physical self, is thus denied.

At first, it is Cyprien who makes all the overtures and establishes the connection
between himself and abbé Chichambre. There is the initial meeting in the church,
followed by Chichambre’s visit to Cyprien (at Cyprien’s request) five years later when he
was ill; then after Chichambre’s return to France, he received a letter from Cyprien
telling him that having discovered his place of retirement, he too had decided to purchase
a property there. Abbé Chichambre is staggered by Cyprien’s growing attachment to
him:

Il y a deux ans, je reçus une lettre. Elle me stupéfia. C’était lui: il m’écrivait! Tout d’abord, moi aussi, je le crus fou; mais cette obstination à s’attacher à moi et le rappel qu’il faisait de son étrange histoire, m’inclinèrent ensuite à penser qu’il y avait là quelque chose de moins (ou de plus) que la folie. Ayant découvert ma retraite, il m’annonçait son arrivée; il achetait aussi une petite bicoque, Belles-Tuiles, près de Peïrouré. (Culotte 110)

Cyprien arrives in Peïrouré, and to the surprise and annoyance of the local village shopkeepers, makes his way straight up the mountain to Belles-Tuiles. Cyprien has made a decision to cut himself off from other people, regarding human interaction as an obstacle in his search to rediscover his own lost innocence. He does not, therefore, want to have any dealings with the village folk, and hence he resolves to send his donkey, Culotte, down the mountain to buy any required provisions. This behaviour, on the part of Cyprien, brings to mind a comparison made by Jean Onimus regarding the notion of locating innocence in nature. Onimus makes the interesting observation that the theme of the search for innocence in nature, found in Bosco’s works, resembles that of certain German romantics of the nineteenth century. These writers placed innocence in nature and depravation in humans. What we notice in Cyprien’s attitude to other people is exactly this. However, in the Boscovien universe, this is not the case; nature does attract, but an overriding devotion to it leads one not to happiness and innocence, but rather to despair and the void.

Cette nostalgie, ce sentiment de la proximité du paradis […], tout cela rapproche étrangement le provençal Bosco des romantiques allemands.
Pour eux aussi – je songe en particulier à J-P. Richter, à Hölderlin et à Novalis – *la nature est innocente* et c’est autour de l’homme que se concentre le mal. Plus on se rapproche de la création, plus on se revêt de l’innocence préadamique. […] La différence avec les romantiques c’est que, pour Bosco, […] l’innocence de la nature est peut-être un leurre: il y a en elle des forces funestes et son attrait peut se révéler trompeur.

(“A l’écoute” 129)

Abbé Chichambre describes Cyprien’s ‘paradise’, in the early days when Cyprien first moves there, as a dry and barren place: “Je la connaissais bien, sa bicoque, Belles-Tuiles: quatre murs et tout autour des rocs, des ronces. Terriblement sec et maigre, ce Paradis” (*Culotte* 111). No-one visits him, save Chichambre, who, two months after his arrival finds him there very contented, with the place cleaned up, but the section still dry and barren. Cyprien declares to the priest that in a year “nous aurons le plus beau verger du monde” (*Culotte* 111). In response to Chichambre’s continued scepticism, Cyprien goes on to assert that he will make a paradise, just like the first one, with all its tamed animals and trees. “Je connais les secrets” (*Culotte* 112), by this indicating that he will use some kind of magic to create it. At this point Chichambre, also recalling the original paradise garden of Eden, reminds Cyprien that it was lost by its inhabitants committing the sin of pride. He warns Cyprien that the same thing could happen to him. Cyprien is so delighted that the priest believes in his power to create the garden, that he does not take the warning in: “Il ne m’entendit pas” (*Culotte* 113). Chichambre states that what he, Chichambre, *does* believe in is God: “Je crois en Dieu […] comme un vieux curé de campagne, tout simplement; un curé qui aime les croyance droites” (*Culotte* 113). We
see the contrast: Chichambre believes in God, and puts his trust in him, his faith is simple, and Christian teaching directs his life; Cyprien, on the other hand, trusts in himself and has taken charge of his own life, he makes his own decisions, and, it seems to be implied, that he feels that ‘he knows best’.

Abbé Chichambre continually relates that he has an uneasy feeling after his meetings with Cyprien; which I believe is an indicator that something is going to go wrong. After that first visit to Belles-Tuiles, he remarks: “Ce diable d’homme avait fini par me troubler” (Culotte 113). After his next visit, several months later, he experiences the same feeling. He finds the orchard, named Fleuriade, blossoming and beautiful; but his feelings of misgiving are alerted when Cyprien comments that the animals are starting to come: “Ce ton confidentiel, je ne sais pourquoi, me donna soudain une étrange inquiétude” (Culotte 113). This feeling increases sharply when Cyprien remarks that only one animal is refusing, and he senses that it is hostile. However, he declares, it must come: “Son œil s’était durci et il affirma aussitôt avec une sorte de passion: ‘Il le faut. Tout doit obéir. Sinon, le jardin lui-même sécherait sur pied et il sortirait de la vie’” (Culotte 114).

Finally, Chichambre notes that he did not return to Belles-Tuiles again, but once a month he received a visit from Cyprien at the presbytery. Furthermore, for every church feast day, Cyprien sent a loaded basket of stunning flowers down to the church, on the back of his donkey, Culotte. The priest believed, or tried to, that this indicated that Cyprien was following the feasts of the Church, from up on the mountain. However, there is more than one case of characters misunderstanding, and misinterpreting one another’s actions in L’Ane Culotte, and it is likely that this is one of them. Chichambre
himself admits that what he took for Cyprien’s obvious love for God, bothered him:

“Mais cet amour lui-même continuait à m’inquiéter sourdement. Je n’avais point tort, vous le savez. Cela devait mal finir et je crois bien que les choses se sont passées un peu comme je le redoutais. Un mouvement d’orgueil et tout s’est écroulé” (114).

* *

The fox

“Pour que les dieux s’amusent beaucoup, il importe que leur victime tombe de haut.” Jean Cocteau, La Machine Infernale

A little over three months after Cyprien takes up residence at Belles-Tuiles and starts to construct his garden ‘Fleuriade’, he first hears the howl of a fox, one stormy night. Two months later, in very early January, he awakens one morning to find a half-eaten hare at his door. A few months later, he comes upon a couple of slaughtered doves. [An indicator that the period of peace in his garden has come to an end, one wonders?]. From this point onwards, the killings become more and more frequent. Cyprien’s stress levels rise simultaneously.

Arguably the fox destroys Cyprien’s world, or at least Cyprien’s notion of the fox, because he never actually sees the fox kill. Cyprien assumes that it is the fox who is killing. He becomes obsessed with it – what it is doing, its reasons, and most importantly, why he is not able to control it. The fox is an interesting character, apart from the fact that it is such a major catalyst to the action of the plot, but also because its

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17 Is it a coincidence that the date is January 6 – the feast of the Three Kings? Or, is there a deliberate link here between the Magi bringing Jesus precious gifts, which anticipate his future kingship; and the fox leaving a ‘gift’ on Cyprien’s doorstep of a half-eaten hare, anticipating the ultimate failure of his plans?
actions and functions, which are never entirely clear, can be seen on so many different levels; some of those actions and functions are outlined below.

On one level the fox embodies death, and its constant occurrence. The time when Cyprien begins to find animals dead coincides with his hearing a fox’s howl and finding footprints in the snow, which he attributes to it. Cyprien blames the fox for causing these deaths, because it is the one animal which does not succumb to his enchantment. This fact puzzles Cyprien. All the other animals are drawn to Fleuriade, but the fox is somehow able to resist the magic. It also, clearly, chooses not to come.

The fox mirrors Cyprien (and Constantin, as we shall see in the second chapter) in its decision to rely on itself and do its own thing. It chooses not to join the other animals in Fleuriade. It exhibits pride. Cyprien likewise chose not to honour God the creator of the earth; instead he chose to assume the role of creator himself – creator and master of Fleuriade, that is. Cyprien reserved the right to make his own decisions and to attempt to solve the ‘big problems’, like the occurrence of death, himself. The irony is that Cyprien, as self-styled master of the mountain, cannot cope with the fox’s pride. Cyprien offered love, but the fox rejected it. Its refusal wounds his pride, and he eventually decides to kill it.

On another level, the fox can be seen as Satan’s tool. Satan makes use of him – plants him there to kill. The fox’s presence upsets Cyprien dreadfully; principally because he cannot control him or stop him, but also because he inspires in Cyprien a feeling of hatred, which is absolutely contrary to his whole plan of creating and ruling a garden where love and peace reign. Cyprien reaches a point of utter despair because his feelings of hatred towards the fox are so intense. These two factors, indeed, are crucial to
the survival of the garden: without love the garden will perish, and if ALL the local animals do not come to it, then the garden will also perish.

Cyprien himself regards the fox as “l’anti-paradis. Le mal, la mort” (Culotte 188). It is something which says ‘no’ in the mountain; it is ‘the spirit of refusal’: “Le sang, et l’esprit de refus. C’est quelque chose qui dit: non! dans cette montagne âpre” (Culotte 188). In fact, Cyprien, although not understanding what exactly is happening, or why, may be close to the heart of the matter in the above statements, considering the universal order in which he is living. Cyprien has developed a garden in a specific, limited area of the mountain. He cultivates it, but he has developed it, for the most part, using the power of magic. The earth, within the confines of Cyprien’s property, is completely dominated by magical forces and it can exert no will of its own. It is completely subjugated to Cyprien’s will and his magical powers. However, this is not the case outside of the garden. Beyond the boundaries, Cyprien’s property is, on all sides, surrounded by the uncultivated, savage mountainside, with its traits of incoherence, malevolence, and unrestrained forces. I propose that the fox may be an animated manifestation of the earth’s untamed and unruly passions. The surrounding mountainside, I believe, is continually exerting pressure on Cyprien’s garden; within the garden the earth is unable to act against Cyprien, but beyond the boundaries it can and does act. Later we will witness Constantin feeling the strong movements and currents of the earth beneath his feet as he approaches the mountain, for example. The forces of the mountain, I suggest, are present in the fox and also in the serpent, who later makes his home at Belles Tuiles. The earth appears to be acquiescent to Cyprien, and it even appears to be assisting him from time to time (for example, in its active role in enticing
Constantin); however, really it is working to ultimately destroy him. Cyprien’s growing pride in his power to dominate the earth blinds him to seeing the trap he is walking into. The fact that Cyprien will later decide to use, or rather, allow the serpent to kill the fox does not undermine my suggestion that both beasts are manifestations of the same earth force, because it must be remembered that the force is an untamed, incoherent one.\(^\text{18}\)

On yet another level, the fox reminds the reader of the trickster Renard from the medieval fabliaux found in Le Roman de Renard. He mirrors Renard in his behaviour: he looks after himself, heedless of the other animals; he is a bit cheeky – he kills right outside Fleuriaide and leaves dead animals in spots where Cyprien is bound to find them; he refuses the call of Cyprien to join the other animals in Fleuriaide, just as Renard refused the summons of the king, Noble the lion, to come to court.

In Eastern mythology, the fox also plays the role of crafty and clever trickster. He is capable of transforming his shape, and in some stories takes the form of a beautiful, but trouble-making girl. That the fox in L’Ane Culotte could be a shape-shifter is also plausible. A trouble-making girl, Anne-Madeleine, does indeed enter the story and her demands are pivotal to the plot and the ultimate destruction of Cyprien’s garden. (The role of Anne-Madeleine, in connection to Constantin and Cyprien, is discussed in Chapter Two).

When the serpent comes to live with Cyprien, the idea comes to him that his new guest could be used to rid him of his fox problem. This development, in light of the universal order proposed, can be viewed as an amalgamation of the untamed earth’s

\(^{18}\) In The Illustrated Book of Signs and Symbols, for example, Miranda Bruce-Mitford informs us that: “Images of two creatures used to represent opposing forces are widespread” (8). She gives the example of a bird of prey [representing the sun] fighting a serpent [representing the earth]. Together they represent “the precariously balanced forces of nature” (8).
malevolent forces with the cunning deeds of Satan. ‘The voice of Evil’ is mentioned from time to time throughout *L’Ane Culotte* and I suggest that a diabolical plan to raise Cyprien to a high point in his pride, and then to watch him tumble into despair and thence into evil deeds, forms a substratum layer to the plot. Both factions meet in the character of the serpent: he is the son of the earth, and the traditional servant of Satan. This idea will be further developed later in the chapter.

In considering the motivation for Satanic interference, it is helpful to refer to the writings of Saint Augustine, which suggest that after the ‘Fall’ of those angels who wished to exalt themselves in place of God, and who wished to be themselves creators rather than creatures [like, indeed, Cyprien does], they took to ingratiating themselves with humanity, with the purpose of promoting sin, pain, destruction, and ungodly independence. They perceived that they were completely cut off from God, and could affect Him in no way save by seeking to annoy and sadden Him, through their influence on humans. Simultaneously, they could enjoy some sport with humanity: tempting them into sin, and then watching them suffer the resultant pain. Writing about the activities of Satan, post-fall, in *Paradise Lost*, C.S. Lewis notes that after suffering defeat in his fight “for ‘liberty’, however misconceived; [Satan] almost at once sinks to fighting for ‘Honour, Dominion, glorie, and renoune’ (VI.422). Defeated in this, he sinks to […] the design of ruining two creatures who had never done him any harm, no longer in the serious hope of victory, but only to annoy the Enemy whom he cannot directly attack” (99). On this subject, Saint Augustine writes:
… we think that the two companies of angels are also meant by the terms ‘Light’ and ‘Darkness’\(^\text{19}\). One of these companies enjoys God, the other swells with pride; […] The one brings merciful aid, or just punishment, in obedience to God’s bidding; the other seethes with the lust to subdue and to injure, at the behest of its own arrogance.

(468) [My bold-type].

Alternately, I have also considered that the fox theme may allegorize, in microcosm, the actual story of the Fall of the Angels (as opposed to how they sought to influence humanity after their fall) or indeed that of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Cyprien may be considered in the role of creator of paradise, who establishes a population there and offers it love, happiness and security in return for obedience. The fox may be considered as one who refuses that offer, and decides to be his own master and make his own decisions. To again quote from C.S. Lewis’s commentary on the Augustinian theology found in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: “What we call bad things are good things perverted (*De Civ. Dei* XIV.11). This perversion arises when a conscious creature becomes more interested in itself than in God (*De Civ. Dei* XIV.11), and wishes to exist ‘on its own’. This is the sin of Pride. The first creature who ever committed it was Satan …” (66).

Finally, in a completely different vein, I would like to propose that the fox also could recall Jesus and the coming of the one being into the world who was free from the effects of original sin, and was therefore able to resist the magic [representative of evil and sin], which the other animals were not able to resist. They, tainted by humanity’s

\(^{19}\) Augustine is referring to Genesis 1:3-4.
first ‘fall’, could not resist Cyprien’s enchantments, just as we, according to Christian
teology, cannot help but sin, no matter our efforts to the contrary. In support of this
theory, consider the following points: the fox first appears in winter. Cyprien talks about
winter as a time when the ‘old gods’, are rejuvenated under the snow-covered ground, but
it is also the time [in the northern hemisphere] that Jesus was born into the world.
Cyprien is devastated by all the killings around Belles-Tuiles and Fleuriade, but he
admits that he does not know for certain that the fox is doing them.

D’abord j’ai cru aux méfaits d’un serpent. Mais des serpents, il y en a
trois maintenant à Fleuriade; […] Toutes trois inoffensives et qui vivent,
glissent, sommeillent, au milieu des oiseaux. Le blaireau est domestiqué;
fouine, martre, de même. **Seul le renard se tient à l’écart. Il ne répond
pas à l’appel.**

**30 mars**

........................................................................................................

J’ai fait un pacte avec la Terre. […] Elle vient de répondre à mon appel:
bêtes et plantes m’obéissent. Je les aime. Mais pourquoi le renard ne
s’est-il rendu? Pourquoi vient-il tuer jusque dans le Jardin de Fleuriade?
**Car c’est lui.** Faut-il tuer à son tour?…

**1er avril**

........................................................................................................

… j’ai éloigné le renard de Fleuriade. Il n’y entrera plus, je crois; mais il
rôde autour. **J’ai beau guetter, jamais je n’arrive à le surprendre.**

[...] je hais le renard, et ma haine me désespère.
He reasons that the fox is the only animal who has not responded to the call, so he must be the culprit. However, perhaps the fox is a scapegoat for the actions of another; like the one whom the prophet Isaiah spoke of:

… for having exposed himself to death

and for being counted as one of the rebellious,

whereas he was bearing the sin of many…

(Is.53.12)

Words which have been understood, by Christian theologians, to anticipate the death of Jesus. Could it be, that in like vein, the fox is blamed for the transgressions of another or others? When Cyprien decides that it is time for it to die, the fox, appearing to be aware that it is in mortal danger, nevertheless answers the call and comes to Roches-Blanches, where it is killed at the culmination of a heady magical ceremony. Note that moments before its death, it looks up to the sky and howls mournfully: “Le renard s’arrêta, leva le museau vers les astres et poussa un glapissement lugubre” (Culotte 90).

Building on the Christian theme, this image could certainly bring to mind the calls of Jesus on the cross, just prior to His death; but equally, of course, from a pagan point of view, they could represent a cry directed, unhappily, towards the goddess Fortuna.
Earth Magic

“I am Nature,” declared the great goddess, “the universal Mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, the sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead, queen also of the immortals, the single manifestation of all the gods and goddesses that are. My nod governs the shining heights of Heaven, the wholesome sea-breezes, the lamentable silences of the world below. Though I am worshipped in many aspects, known by countless names, and propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole round earth venerates me.”

Apuleius, The Golden Ass

Having considered some of the relationships which exist between human characters and other living beings, let us now take a wider look at the manifold elements of religion and magic evident in the text, which will fill out our understanding of the universal order that the characters exist in. Cyprien’s religion and his magic relate solely to the earth, and so this examination will begin with a consideration of the significance of the earth in the text.

The earth is a major focal point in L’Ane Culotte. Abbé Chichambre extolls the beauty of the earth from the pulpit, he encourages his parishoners to respect it and enjoy it, and he continually displays examples of its floral beauty in the church. “…l’abbé Chichambre officia devant un autel tout fleuri [des] plantes d’hiver. L’église embaumait la montagne” (Culotte 31).

In a delightful passage, the reader is treated to a birds-eye-view of the classroom at the local school in spring time, full of boys distracted and bemused by the activity of nature all around them:

A l’école, où M. Chamarote s’obstinait à nous enseigner le carré, le triangle, le verbe «coudre», les sous-préfectures de l’Allier, le decalitre et la pile électrique, régnait une sourde agitation. C’était l’époque où les
hannetons naissent familièrement dans les plumiers, où le ver à soie file son cocon dans les ténèbres du pupitre et où, à l’improviste, à travers la torpeur des classes, s’envole un absurde bourdon ou quelque bombyx aux ailes de feu. (Culotte 37)

Affected by the Spring air, we find Grand-mère Saturnine singing, and Grand-père smiling: “’Il voit les anges’, murmurait [Grand-mère]” (Culotte 37). La Péguinotte, the housekeeper, is quoting proverbs in abundance. Anselme, the shepherd, takes his reed pipe and plays, while his sheep bleat longingly for the high pastures of the mountain.

In fact, the mountain, which dominates Peïrouré, constitutes a major point of interest in the plot, and it figures largely in the consciousness of the inhabitants of the village. It is surely not a coincidence that Cyprien lives on it. Mountains are significant in cultures around the world, and Bosco is perhaps drawing on these wider connotations. To quote Stein and Stein:

To many people, […] a mountain is much more than a physical thing. The mountain might be the home of the gods or the place where the souls of the dead congregate after death. Mountains figure prominently in many Biblical stories; for example, Mount Sinai was where Moses received the Ten Commandments, and Mount Ararat was where Noah’s ark came to rest. […] Other sacred mountains include Mount Olympus, where the gods of ancient Greece lived, and the four sacred mountains of the Navaho world. (16)

Constantin becomes obsessed with the mountain, and its inhabitants. It is a living force to him: “La montagne!… Ses grandes griffes arrivaient jusqu’au pont et mordaient
dessus” (Culotte 29). Its potency and its presence are felt universally. Grand-mère Saturnine forbids Constantin to approach it, and she, like many of the villagers, seems to associate it with some kind of feeling of fear and anxiety. She says to Constantin: “…je ne veux plus de ces vagabondages, surtout du côté de ces collines” (Culotte 28). Constantin remarks, further, that he never sees anyone near the foot of the mountain, where the mysterious path leads upwards: “On n’y voyait jamais personne. Ce fait éveilla mon attention et donna encore plus de charme à cet au-delà mysterieux et attirant du pont qui marquait la limite de mes libertés” (Culotte 29).

When Constantin takes the fatal step and approaches the mountain, his wildest imaginings rapidly become reality. The mountain is a different kind of place, a place where magic can and does occur. The mountain, which may already have been regarded with some distrust by the superstitious of mind, is made the site of veritable magic and contact with the supernatural by Cyprien. Cyprien’s magic is earth magic. It is focussed on the generative qualities of the earth, and it invokes the Power of the Earth.

At the heart of Cyprien’s earth magic lies the Great Mother goddess.

Archeological discoveries inform us that a Great Mother goddess was worshipped in much of south-eastern Europe, as elsewhere in the world, in very ancient times. She was venerated for her power to grant fertility to humans, animals and the earth, at a time when the regeneration of plants and animals was crucial to the survival of the local people. In time, when the ancient Greeks came to populate much of the area, bringing their own pantheon of gods and goddesses, the worship of the Mother Goddess was maintained.

20 Jean Onimus, quoting from Le Récif (136), suggests that savage mountains reflect the dark side of the earth, and that the plains reflect the light side, the latter living in fear of the unknown which the former could at any moment reveal: “Les plaines vivent dans la hantise des montagnes sauvages, c’est-à-dire de l’Ailleurs qui fait peser sur elles «un danger vague qui n’a pas encore révélé son visage»” (“Le Mal” 135).
simultaneously for many centuries. Hesiod, in his poem the *Theogony*, proclaimed the Earth, a female goddess named Gaea, to have been the mother of the first race of gods, the Titans, and of humanity.

According to Hesiod it seems likely that Gaea, from whom all things issued, had been the great deity of the primitive Greeks. […] This is again confirmed by the Homeric hymn in which the poet says: ‘I shall sing of Gaea, universal mother, firmly founded, the oldest of divinities.’ […] Later, when the victorious dynasty of the Olympians was established, Gaea’s prestige was not lessened. It was still she whom the gods invoked when they made oaths. […] Later, as other divinities rose in the estimation of men, the role of Gaea gradually became less important. Her cult, however, always continued in Greece. (Guirand 89)

In Ephesus the goddess Artemis, known as the ‘mother’ goddess and ‘the mistress of all wild nature’, was worshipped, as the bestower of fertility, from the earliest times. Marble copies of the original statue of Artemis show her “as she appeared at the climax of the festivals held in her honour, decked with offerings” (Attenborough 106). From Egypt spread the cult of Isis, who was venerated for her power to bring new life; she too was offered gifts by her devotees: “One of the most important festivals of Isis was held at the beginning of spring. […] At the harbour, a special newly-built ship was moored. […] First the high priest dedicated the ship to Isis and offered prayers; then the priests and people loaded it with gifts of spices and flowers;…” (Cambridge University Press 126).
We also read of Rhea, a goddess possibly of Cretan origin, who personified the Earth, and Cybele, the Phrygian goddess of caverns: “She personified the earth in its primitive and savage state and was worshipped on the top of mountains. [...] She exercised dominion over wild beasts who habitually formed part of her retinue” (Guirand 150). The location of Cyprien’s garden high up on a mountain, in a wild spot, and his utterances about the powerful ‘Mother Incantation’, which can hold latent water and subterranean air under a spell (Culotte 207), coupled with his assiduous donations of beautiful flowers to the local church, for the adornment of the Virgin’s altar, strongly suggest that Cyprien honours the Great Mother goddess of antiquity. Cyprien’s earnest friendship with abbé Chichambre and his interest in the little parish church encourage the reader to wonder if he uses the church as a place where he can honour the earth. When he is busy laying a magic trail to lure Constantin up to Belles-Tuiles, for example, he states that he must make an offering to the God of the Plain. He then adds that there is a little church and a priest in the village, and he will send some incense there as a sign of friendship: “De l’encens, du pur encens mâle, voilà ce que je donnerai en signe d’amitié, à ce sanctuaire de campagne” (Culotte 186-7). Blending elements of Christianity and paganism together, as Cyprien is here doing, was not at all uncommon in the past. History tells us that when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, many people transferred, with relative ease, their affection for a pagan goddess to the Virgin Mary; as Mary, mother of Jesus, and by extension mother of all Christians, embodied many of the same traits:

Similarities between Mary and some of the Near Eastern pagan goddesses have also been noted. (For example, Isis is also referred to as “Great
“Mother” and “Queen of Heaven” and is depicted seated and holding her son.) Mary fits nicely into the role of these goddesses as protectors and sustainers. Some researchers think that devotion to Mary is actually derived from earlier worship of the Mother Goddess. (Stein and Stein 214)

In a similar vein, it is thought that a Christian sanctuary was often built on a site which had previously held a pagan one:

When in 313 Christianity obtained complete toleration in the Roman Empire, […] it signalled the general retreat of what Christians termed ‘pagan’ mythology. […] Christian zealots, moreover, seized the opportunity to destroy ancient cult centres, like the Serapeum at Alexandria. […] Elsewhere temples were either demolished, the stones being used to erect churches, or converted, the clergy purifying them of pagan associations. […] A consequence of the policy of adaptation was undoubtedly a lingering paganism. […] In the old western provinces of the Roman Empire the pagan myths openly persisted, especially in the nature cults of the countryside. (Cotterell 137)

There are numerous instances in L’Ane Culotte where we see a mixing of some of these ancient pagan traditions with those of Christianity, including Cyprien’s pagan veneration of the earth. Examples include abbé Chichambre’s declaration that the olive tree is the tree of the Virgin Mary, because it was her special gift to humanity – in the guise of holy wisdom [given that the appearance of the olive tree on earth pre-dated the birth of Mary]: “…nous possédons les plus beaux oliviers du canton et l’olivier, mes
enfants, le père de l’huile, c’est aussi l’arbre de la Mère-de-Dieu. Il a été crée par la Sainte-Sagesse” (39).

Cyprien venerated the earth, the ‘Great Mother’ and other nature deities because he hopes to have their assistance in creating a beautiful garden, but perhaps they have another purpose too, of which Cyprien is largely ignorant; that is a spiritual purpose. All Bosco’s characters have a spiritual side: some recognize it and nurture it, but others are ignorant of it, and suffer as a result. Cyprien is spiritually alienated in his garden, all alone. He venerates nature, and he wants to live in harmony with it. He concentrates on the physical, ignoring the spiritual (or at least trying to). However, his fascination for, and enjoyment of the earth deities, perhaps indicates to the reader, that he inwardly yearns for spiritual interaction as much as any other human. Jean Onimus, commenting on the world view underlying Bosco’s universe, makes the point that in the human’s desire to relate to their surroundings, to be able to interact with them on a spiritual level, we look for signs and indications of a connection between ourselves and the world we live in, and that we project aspects of ourselves onto nature, in order to find companionship and enrich ourselves. It is for this reason that humanity has so often put a soul into the non-human and created divinities out of nature.

Etant nous-mêmes esprits, nous voudrions spiritualiser le monde qui nous environne; l’humaniser, y reconnaître des correspondances, des images, des symboles, des projections de notre être. Nous voudrions nous ouvrir, dialoguer, nous renouveler, nous féconder au contact de la nature et nous connaître mieux nous-mêmes en nous projetant sur elle comme sur un
I would now like to examine, in more detail, the ways in which Cyprien interacts with the natural environment: how he seeks support from it, how he makes use of it, and how he perceives its influence. It is my opinion that he has created a garden, which though purposefully based on the Biblical Garden of Eden, in reality is a garden where the pagan nature deities of Mediterranean antiquity are in the ascendant. The magical knowledge which Cyprien is possessed of revolves entirely around the manipulation of natural elements and phenomena. He uses these to create his ideal environment. Often nature appears benevolent towards Cyprien, but is this really the case? Is nature a more formidable partner than Cyprien supposes?

As a starting point, let us consider how the natural world, within the greater cosmos, was perceived in classical times. In his efforts to refute pagan ideas, Saint Augustine provides us with an example: a description of the wider universal order, according to the Roman philosopher, Varro [116-28 B.C.]:

In Varro’s preliminary remarks about ‘natural’ theology he declares that, in his belief, God is the Soul of the world, or as the Greeks say, the *cosmos*, and that this world itself is God. […]
plurality of gods also, he adds that the world is divided into two parts, the sky and the earth, and the sky is subdivided into ether and air, and the earth into water and land [...]. All these four parts are full of souls, immortal souls in ether and air, mortal souls in water and earth. Between the highest circumference of the sky and the circle of the moon there are ethereal souls, the planets and stars [...]. Between the moon’s sphere and the summits of the clouds and winds there are aerial souls, but these are visible only to the mind, not to the eyes; and they are called ‘heroes’, lares, and genii. (262-263)

The sun, the moon, the stars, earth and water, and even aerial bodies play a role, or at least exercise a certain sphere of influence in Cyprien’s world.

Cyprien makes frequent reference to the presence of the stars in the night sky; however I believe that it is hinted that their real function in relation to Cyprien, and to other characters as well, is their astrological influence. Cyprien is aware of this, to a degree, but, it seems that they may have a greater connection to him than he realizes. On Cyprien’s birthday, 16 November, he notes in his journal the attempts the star constellations of his birth date have made to shake him: “Constellations que celles de ce mois cruel. Elles m’ont secoué, nuit et jour, depuis tant de Novembres, mais n’ont pu arracher de mon être une seule parcelle de sa force.” (Culotte 162). Cyprien, believes that they have made an attempt to influence his life, but that he has been able to succeed in spite of them. Cyprien’s birth date makes him a ‘Scorpio’. Having considered one of the stories associated with the creation of this constellation, I propose that Cyprien’s fate is tied in with his star sign. The story referred to is that of Orion and the scorpion:
One story tells how Earth sent the scorpion to sting Orion, **to punish him for being boastful**. ‘I am such a strong and powerful hunter, I could easily rid the Earth of any beast or creature’, Orion had once declared proudly. ‘Indeed’, said the Earth. ‘Try this!’

And up from her breast rose a great scorpion, full of venom which stung Orion and immediately sent him to his death. The scorpion was put up as a constellation by Earth to mark her victory, … (Sharman-Burke 54) [My bold-type]

We have already noted above abbé Chichambre’s warning to Cyprien regarding the dangers of pride. As our examination of the character of Cyprien proceeds we will see that he does become proud, and that he is punished for it. Within the wider picture of Cyprien’s rise and fall occurs an interestingly illustrative incident when Cyprien is able to calm a deadly serpent, by summoning the ‘breath of the Mother’ through a set of panpipes. He is very proud that he has been able to do this, as the snake charmer, whom he had snatched the pipes from, had been unable to manage the animal. The serpent then appears up at Belles-Tuiles and makes its home in Cyprien’s home. Slowly its malefic influence is felt and Cyprien’s world begins to tumble. In a direct parallel to the story of Orion being sent the scorpion by the Earth, Cyprien, I propose, in an act of collusion between the earth and the sky [an underlying theme throughout Bosco’s works] is sent the serpent.

Our most important star, the sun, also plays a role in Cyprien’s world, both physically and symbolically. Its warmth is soaked up with great appreciation by the animals residing in Fleuriade and it helps the plants to grow. When Constantin visits
Belles-Tuiles, he notes how the animals emerge from their burrows and crevices to bask in its light. However, it is more than this, as Constantine declares that the sun, ‘the king’ in this empire, actively captivates them and sends them into ecstasies. “Le limbert et la reguindoule se risquèrent hors de leur trou et, saisis par la présence du soleil entrèrent aussi en extase. Car le soleil paraissait le roi de cet empire” (Culotte 49). The brightness of the sunlight stunned Constantin when he first entered Cyprien’s property; and intriguingly, he also notes the presence of a sundial ‘standing guard’ outside Belles-Tuiles. One cannot help but make a connection between the brilliant sunlight Constantin encounters and the assistance of the shining sun god, Apollo: “As a solar god Apollo made the fruits of the earth to ripen” (Guirand 113). Furthermore, the sun has been traditionally “equated with life force and masculine creative strength” (Bruce-Mitford 6). The sun is, therefore, a counterpart to the Earth Mother. Both of them are necessary to Cyprien’s plans; consequently the sun is given special honour in Fleuriade.

Perhaps the effect sunlight has on the animals prefigures the effect we see moonlight having on the serpent later in the novel. The moon, too, features prominently in Cyprien’s universe, carrying both positive and negative overtones. It is mentioned frequently in the journal and indeed plays a quasi-active role in the events of the story. It appears that Cyprien enjoys walking beneath the full moon, using its light to guide him. The presence and the light of the moon, therefore, inspire a certain feeling of companionship and a comforting sense of security within the great universal order.

With the arrival of the serpent at Belles-Tuiles, the moon takes on more malignant overtones. Cyprien notes, as soon as he returns home from breaking the gipsy circle and calming the serpent, as mentioned above, that the moon has risen. Moments later, under
the striking light of the moon, Cyprien sees the serpent lying on the ground out in front of his house, watching him. Entering the house, Cyprien watches the snake to see what it will do: it slithers up to the threshold, where it pauses and sways in the moonlight, as though curious, before moving inside.

Elle s’était dressée à demi et se balançait lentement en pleine lune, dans l’encadrement de la porte, juste devant le seuil. Dans ce cadre, sous cette clarté elle se détachait comme un esprit flexible en proie à la curiosité.

De toute évidence, c’était le génie de la Mort. Je sifflai doucement. Et le serpent passa le seuil. (Culotte 177) [My bold-type].

Five days later, Cyprien records that it is the habit of the serpent to await nightfall, each evening, and then to leave the house and sit out in front, waiting for the moon to rise. As soon as it appears, the serpent sways ecstatically in its light: “Immobile, elle attend le lever de la lune. Dès que celle-ci apparaît, à l’Est, elle lève le col, et commence un dandinement à peine coupé quelquefois par des moments d’exstase” (Culotte 181). It does this for hours, Cyprien notes, while he watches it.

In past times the moon was considered by many to be connected with witchcraft and evil deeds. For example, in Greek tradition, Hecate, the daughter of Perses, was a magician. She built a temple to the goddess Diana [Greek goddess of moonlight], in which she sacrificed strangers. The Egyptian god of knowledge and magical powers, Thoth, was also associated with the moon. In his Souvenirs, Henri Bosco tells us that in Provence, in his childhood days, the moon was still associated with evil by many. In one anecdote he recalls a local man who was thought to speak to the moon, and how he was ostracized by others:
… a très haute voix [M. Ancelin] parlait à la lune. «Il l’appelle, disaient ces gens, et il lui en dit, et il lui en dit!… Il lui parle même latin… C’est ce que prétend M. le curé…» Et M. le curé était bienveillant. Or la lune, depuis des siècles, a mauvaise réputation dans beaucoup de campagnes. De là à supposer que ce latin servait à des sorcelleries, le pas était vite franchi… En somme, M. Ancelin, qui peut-être n’avait que des manies, faisait peur. *(Le Jardin des Trinitaires 202)*

One further episode, which strongly emphasizes the connection between the malefic effects of the moon and Cyprien’s activities, is that of the sacrificing of the fox at Roches-Blanches. Interestingly, we read that the rocks are called that because of the colour they take on when the moon shines on them. Little wonder, then, that Cyprien selected this spot as a suitable location for the sacrifice [echoes of Hecate]. Constantin, observing events from above, notes the potent presence of the moon:

… à peine apparue, elle enchantait déjà les profondeurs de la forêt. Elle n’était pas encore très haute, mais c’est (…) au moment singulier de son aube nocturne, quand elle pointe sur des crêtes, que son attrait trouble le plus profondément la cime des arbres, où dans les rames, dès que les atteint sa lueur, le vent, si ce n’est une âme plus tendre, éleve sa plainte et la livre au silence de la nuit. *(Culotte 86)*

He further comments on the fact that the animals, who have been attracted by the music of Cyprien’s syrinx, gather and dance in a ring of oaks. [Oaks traditionally being sacred to the Earth Mother]. As Cyprien plays, with increasing intensity, Constantin observes that he extends this ‘magnetic circle’, presumably to encapsulate also the white
rocks, to which he is straining to draw the fox. I suggest that the music of the syrinx, working in conjunction with the malevolent, magnetic powers of the moon, together create the magic circle, to which the animals are irresistibly drawn, and to which the fox ultimately also comes. Though whether the fox is in fact drawn to the rock by the magic, or whether he comes of his own volition is a point of conjecture, as discussed above. When the fox finally becomes visible, in full moonlight, on the ‘white rock’, the serpent is revealed just above, waiting to deliver death to it.

Curiously, it is also at Roches-Blanches that Constantin, who by seemingly pure chance, happens to walk straight into Cyprien’s magical gathering of all the beasts of the forest, perceives the presence of an ‘aerial body’. Recalling the theory of the antique philosopher Varro, these beings, which can only be seen with the mind, not the eyes, are usually found “between the moon’s sphere and the summits of the clouds”. Constantin later recalls that Cyprien played the pipes, and then following a short period of silence, a note of great violence burst out, alarming him. At that point the musical note enveloped an aerial body, detaching from that body a melody: “le souffle enveloppa je ne sais quel corps aérien et, calme, il en détacha une brève mélodie: quatre ou cinq notes passionnées qui avaient touché au bois humide de la flûte, qui sentaient l’herbe d’été et le roseau magique” (Culotte 87). Could this have been one of the aerial bodies described by Varro, or was it merely a bird21?

21 No doubt throughout the ages following on from the classical period, a belief in the existence of aerial bodies continued in the minds of many. C. S. Lewis points out that during the period of Scholasticism, it was held amongst prominent scholars [for example Saint Thomas Aquinas] that angels and the like were immaterial; however, with the arrival of the Renaissance in Europe, many thinkers turned back to earlier ideas, and in the realm of the supernatural, the doctrines of Platonic Theology were developed. According to these, much of what the pre-Christian philosophers said was accepted as true and seen as a prefiguring of later Christian teaching. Lewis comments that “[b]ound up with this is a belief that the pictures of non-human, yet rational, life presented in the Pagan writers contain a great deal of truth. The universe is full of
In passing it should also be noted that demons play a role in the world of Cyprien. Demons, according to classical sources, are a type of aerial body, possessing a soul like gods and men, and occupying the skies which lie between the two. Saint Augustine records the teaching of Apuleius the Platonist on this subject:

Apuleius the Platonist also treats of the character of the demons, and says that they are liable to the same emotional disturbances as human beings. They resent injury, they are mollified by flattery and by gifts, they delight in receiving honours, they enjoy all kinds of rites and ceremonies and they are annoyed at any negligence about these. \cite{De Deo Socratis, 12;14]. Among their functions he mentions divination by means of auguries, haruspication, clairvoyance, and dreams; and he ascribes to them the remarkable feats of magicians \cite[De Deo Socratis, 6]. He gives this brief definition of demons: species, animal; soul, subject to passions; mind, rational; body, composed of air; life-span, eternal. (321)

In \textit{L'Ane Culotte} three characters are connected with demons, and naturally enough, they are the three who are involved in the magical world of Belles-Tuiles and Fleuriade. Firstly, there is Cyprien, who describes himself, on occasion, as being possessed by demons. The most significant example of this is when he is attempting to calm the serpent. In order to release the soothing ‘breath of the Mother’ from the Earth, he has to play the syrinx in a special way, which requires great skill and stamina on his part. To do this, he states that he must collect all his demons inside himself, and against himself, which causes him considerable physical strain: “J’avais ramassé mes démons, en
moi, contre moi-même, et, sous leurs efforts, tous les tendons de ma chair vivante vibraient à se rompre. Mais déjà je tenais la voix, je la dégageais du non-être, et l’appel de la Terre commençait à troubler le fils amer et triste du limon” (175). This passage strongly suggests that Cyprien calls on ‘his’ demons to enter him and help him, which is one of the functions of the demon [to effect ‘the remarkable feats of magicians’], as denoted by Apuleius in the above quote. It seems perhaps likely, considering this, that the aerial body Constantin perceived at Roches-Blanches was a demon lending Cyprien assistance.

Cyprien records in his journal that Constantin, when he comes to visit Belles-Tuiles, is haunted by a demon [17 April, (Culotte 187)]. What are the implications of this statement? Is Cyprien implying that a demon has entered Constantin, and that is one of the reasons why the boy was so attracted to the mountain and able to be led up to Belles-Tuiles? Again, this would fit in with the power of demons to assist magicians.

Constantin, seemingly unaware of his own demonic possession, notes in his narrative that Hyacinthe, about a week before her kidnapping, appears to be touched by strange forces: “Ses joues avaient maigri et son regard, touché maintenant par d’étranges puissances, s’était constellé de points sombres” (Culotte 128). This suggests that the move to enchant her has already been taken. Not long afterwards, at the point of her kidnapping, Constantin records that she appears to be torn by opposing demons: “Elle semblait ivre, en proie aux demons opposés de la magie et de l’amour, pantelante. Elle tomba. Dans l’herbe, étendu de tout son long, son corps tressautait. Je m’agenouillai près d’elle. Elle me parut évanouie. Je n’osai la toucher. Ce corps frémissant me faisait
peur” (Culotte 139). At this very moment, Constantin hears Cyprien calling her on the magical syrinx. Are his demons again lending him assistance?

Finally, I would like to briefly consider the role of the ‘genius’ and its connection to the generative powers of the earth. The genius is a feature of Roman mythology. There appear to be two aspects to the genius, although they are related, and both aspects are of relevance to our consideration of Cyprien’s character and world. In one facet, “[t]he Genius was the anonymous deity who protected all groups of people and the places of their group activities” (Guirand and Pierre 213). It is in this sense of the term, that Cyprien, with regard to his garden, makes such comments as “Son génie familier c’est l’Amitié humaine” 4 Septembre (Culotte 157). Cyprien, noting with great delight that the earth is ‘performing’ and the animals are beginning to come, speaks happily of the genius of the garden being one of ‘human friendship’. He believes that a spirit of human friendship is protecting and indeed inhabiting his garden. Some months later, while contemplating the serpent, swaying in his doorway in the moonlight, Cyprien muses that it embodies the genius of death. Has the genius of human friendship been replaced by the genius of death? It is interesting to note that Cyprien, shortly afterwards, states that the garden is in a state of peace, the peace of the serpent. “Fleuriade repose en paix, la paix du serpent. On ne le voit pas. Ainsi n’effarouche-t-il point les bêtes apprivoisées” 14 avril (Culotte 183). And, indeed, a spirit of death, though yet unperceived, is reigning there. Soon, Cyprien and the serpent will kill the fox and Fleuriade will, in turn, be destroyed.

In its other capacity “[t]he Genius was by definition the creative force which engendered the individual; it watched over his development and remained with him until
the hour of his destruction. It presided over his marriage and over the nuptial bed, for this reason being entitled *genialis*” (Guirand and Pierre 217). This implies that the genius not only presides over a human’s birth, but also gives him the power of generation. This power of generation is a key factor, which relates strongly to the character of Cyprien. It forms the foundation of Cyprien’s garden and lies at the heart of his quest.

In its generative capacity, there is a merging of the powers of the genius with the powers of the earth. Initially we witness Cyprien setting about creating a paradise garden. His role will be that of creator, protector, and leader. Effectively, he will also be the principal beneficiary, because he hopes to find within it his ideal lifestyle and perfect happiness. He hopes that the animals, who come to live there, will also be happy under his protection. In order to create the garden, Cyprien needs the earth’s help. He uses magic, in an effort to compel the earth to grant his requests. This magic consists largely of special words and signs. He was trained in the use of this magic on the island, where he had previously lived for a time in a paradise garden
cited 22: “Aux pays lointains de la mer, de vieux hommes m’ont initié aux mystères” 1er avril (*Culotte* 165). Cyprien declares that he will use his magical knowledge for the sole purpose of creating natural beauty: “Mon secret, murmura-t-il, avec une sorte d’innocence, je n’en userai que pour la beauté de vie” (*Culotte* 113). This statement implies that he knows his magical powers could be put to less noble uses, but he intends to use them only for good. Cyprien also makes

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22 Cyprien is one of the ‘initiated’: he has been ‘let in on’ the secrets of the mysteries of the earth. To Bosco the world was full of mystery. To him, the earth and the universe hold secrets, which remain as unclear to the majority of us today, as they were to most people in ancient times. “Le monde, la maison, la terre, enfin tout pour moi est plein de mystère. C’était aussi l’attitude des hommes primitifs et des anciens qui voyaient partout des dieux, des déesses, des mystères en somme. Leur signification est souvent cachée, mais révélée seulement aux initiés” (Van Grit 882). The earth reveals its secrets to some, like the ‘bird charming’ island dwellers, who passed their knowledge on to Cyprien.
floral offerings to the earth, via the local Christian church, as discussed above, and he entreats the spirit of the mountain garden for assistance.

Puissance du jardin de montagne, à l’heure ou défaillent les sèves, toi, si sensible aux soins que déjà pendant l’été, j’ai donnés à la terre, tu vas fermenter sourdement, sous ta mince couche de tuf et d’argile; et tu me rendras ce paradis. Tous les arbres, toutes les bêtes! Il n’en manquera point à Fleuriade! (Culotte 161)

Ich glaube, die Wellen verschlingen
Am Ende Schiffer und Kahn;
Und das hat mit ihrem Singen
Die Lorelei getan.
Heinrich Heine, Die Lorelei

It begins to become apparent that active communication with the earth is a double-edged sword. Cyprien gets what he wants [almost]: birds and animals come to live in the garden, and beautiful trees and plants grow there miraculously quickly. However, he also rapidly becomes aware that his power is limited. Problems arise, which his magic cannot deal with. For example, he can draw the animals to Fleuriade and compel them to live there, but he cannot make them love him. This fact causes him great sadness. And, he finds that his magic has not had any effect on the fox. Not only does the fox refuse to be drawn to live in Fleuriade, it also flouts Cyprien’s law that there shall be no killing in the area of Fleuriade and Belles-Tuiles.

In societies where magic is practised, it is commonly accepted that if the practitioner enacts the ritual correctly, then the magic must work. Magic does not
involve the petitioning of a supernatural force, rather it compels that force to work in the magician’s favour.

Magic involves the direct manipulation of the supernatural. There is a sense of control. If one performs the ritual correctly, one will automatically obtain the desired result. […] Magic compels the supernatural to bend to the person’s wishes, and success is seen as inevitable (provided one knows the formula). (Stein and Stein 141)

Cyprien, as a result, cannot understand why the fox does not obey. He keeps asking himself this question: “…bêtes et plantes m’obéissent. Je les aime. Mais pourquoi le renard ne s’est-il pas rendu?” 1er avril (166). The refusal of the fox creates a worse problem: Cyprien recognises feelings of hatred towards the fox entering his heart, and that hatred leads him to feel despair. He feels despair because the garden is supposed to be built on a foundation of love and innocence. Without these, in fact, Cyprien declares that the garden will perish. “…je hais le renard, et ma haine me désespère. […] Le refus d’une bête!… Faut-il que ce refus menace l’avenir du Pays d’innocence? Pour l’honneur de la Vie, n’importe-t-il pas qu’en ces lieux, à Fleuriade, s’établisse et prospere un coin issu de Paradis” 5 avril (Culotte 167). It is here that Cyprien raises the point, perhaps unexpected, that it is his belief that his garden is not new, but is in fact drawn from the original Paradise Garden of Eden, which has been lying, intact, under the ground for thousands of years:

Car le Paradis est sous terre, le vieux Jardin d’Adam, englouti après le péché, intact. Depuis des milliers d’années partout, de la pointe des arbres, il travaille l’argile humaine, sans réussir à la briser. J’ai dégagé ses
hautes branches, ici, dans le verger de Fleuriade. Il a jailli. 5 avril

(Culotte 167)

This is a surprising statement for someone to make who has rejected Christianity in favour of a form of paganism. Cyprien makes it clear in a number of statements that it is the earth he is serving. In his journal entry on 16 April, for example, he writes: “Je n’ai plus de secours que de moi-même, depuis que je me suis tourné du côté de la Terre. C’est elle que je sers;…” (Culotte 186). So, we see here a man focussed on this life, with the desperate desire to recover a part of the earthly paradise. And he asks the earth, not God, to help him recover it. [In contrast to abbé Chichambre’s ultimate quest of honouring and worshipping God in this life, in order to find a celestial paradise in the next]. Perhaps the crux of the matter is that Cyprien is searching for a happiness which he equates with innocence. He is longing for innocence, rather than God. What attracts him about the lost Garden of Eden, is that it was a garden of innocence, which was lost with the Fall. Cyprien clearly regards nature as innocent; he thinks it may be possible to rediscover innocence for himself through interaction with nature. It may be a fact that Eden is lost forever, but this fact does not stop people yearning for it. Cyprien’s mind is alive with nostalgia for the lost garden. He seeks it, putting his hope in nature. Cyprien hopes that his ability to communicate with nature will enable him to take on some of its innocence, yet at the same time he is anxious to be in control23.

23 Cyprien’s longing for innocence and his efforts to re-create it call the reader to consider Jean Onimus’s assertion that evil, in Bosco’s world, is hidden, not just in tangible objects, but also in the most pure of values: “… le mal se cache au cœur des plus hautes valeurs; par leur attrait il attire et trompe les meilleurs.” (“Le Mal” 129) To believe that one has found, or indeed created innocence, is to assume the power of Heaven for oneself. Innocence is a pure trait of God and the heavenly; it cannot be fully comprehended or perceived on earth, and those who maintain that they have found it are, in effect, styling themselves as gods. Ultimately this amounts to another form of pride. “[Cyprien] a voulu sortir de sa condition, se substituer à l’Esprit créateur qui seul peut rénover le monde” (132).
The powers of the earth, it is important to note, in the world of Bosco’s novels are ambiguous: what grows from the earth is beautiful, and feeds us; however, the area beneath the earth’s surface is also the home of evil. Cyprien is ignorant of this, so focussed is he on nature’s apparent purity and innocence, and so confident is he in his own knowledge. His strategies for generating soil fertility and attracting animal life to his garden rely heavily on evocation of, and communing with, the double-sided ‘powers’ of the earth. As time passes, it becomes apparent that by indulging in this communication, Cyprien is also becoming infected by the inherent evil of the earth.

Interestingly, Jean Onimus, writing about the character of Cyprien, notes the increasing harshness and cruelty which become evident in Cyprien’s temperament as he aligns himself with nature; he becomes less human, and the great human capacity to love diminishes: “En s’approchant de trop près de la sauvagerie du monde il trahit l’humain, il devient dur, presque cruel. Il s’éloigne de ce qu’il y a de plus spécifique dans l’homme qui est l’amour” (“A l’écoute” 134).

The development of the theme of the malignant powers of the earth and their effect on certain characters reflect, I believe, a notion, which Bosco was taught by family members as a child, and which had a profound influence on him and his writing. This notion, which was perhaps widely believed in Europe in past centuries, was that evil exists beneath the ground, and that there is inherent danger, therefore, in elements and substances which issue from the earth. An example of this is water, rising to the surface from an underground source. An extract from Bosco’s Souvenirs illustrates this. The young Henri, walking with his aunt Martine, alongside a wall bordering a disused convent, with a very large, but now abandoned park, notes that his aunt makes the sign of
the cross and quickens her step. Henri asks his aunt why she made the sign of the cross. The reply is that there is a deep pond in the park over the high wall, which is fed by a source of water so deep that not one bubble reaches the surface, and that source itself comes from the darkest depths of the earth. That renders the pond mysterious and potentially dangerous, and Henri is told never to go near it.

- Ce qu’il y a? Tu veux le savoir? Bon! Tant pis pour toi!… Il y a de l’eau.

Elle prononça ces six mots, cependant d’usage courant, sur un ton si mystérieux et d’une voix si étouffée que j’en fus, comme on dit, «tout chose»… […]

- Ecoute, petit, tu entends?
J’coutai. Je cherchais naturellement le bruit d’une fontaine. Pas un filet d’eau ne coulait.

- Alors? Tu n’entends pas?… Et pourtant elle arrive… Elle vient en dessous… Et tu sais par où elle arrive?… Par le fond… Et de quel endroit?… Du plus noir, du plus noir de la terre… C’est ça, une source… Mais sa bouche, ici, tu ne la vois pas… Le bassin est bien trop profond… Tellement, tiens, qu’à la surface il ne crève pas une bulle d’air… Drôle d’eau!… Te voilà renseigné?… N’y reviens plus!…

En route!…

(Le Jardin des Trinitaires 245-6)

This superstition about the danger of the interior of the earth no doubt, at least partly, comes from its being the traditional location of hell. In his second epistle, for
example, Saint Peter writes of both the fallen angels, and evil-doing and self-willed humans, being cast down into underground caves:

When angels sinned, God did not spare them: he sent them down into the underworld and consigned them to the dark abyss to be held there until the Judgement. (2 Pet.2.4)

………………………………………………………………………………

… the Lord is well able to rescue the good from their trials, and hold the wicked for their punishment until the Day of Judgement, especially those who follow the desires of their corrupt human nature and have no respect for the Lord’s authority. (2 Pet.2.9-10)

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People like this are dried-up springs, fogs swirling in the wind, and the gloom of darkness is stored up for them. (2 Pet.2.17)

In traditional pagan theology, the ‘Underworld’ – the realm of the dead, is also located beneath the earth’s surface. Originally said to be at the extremity of the earth, beyond the encircling waters of the vast river Ocean, it was later relocated to within the earth, when it was discovered that, far to the west, lands were actually inhabited by living people.

Popular belief then placed the kingdom of Shadows elsewhere: from then on it was situated in the centre of the earth. It continued to remain a place of shadows and mystery, of Erebus. Its approaches were no longer the Ocean. The Underworld communicated with the earth by direct channels. These were caverns whose depths were unplumbed [...]. In the same way
certain rivers whose course was partly underground were thought to lead to the infernal regions. (Guirand 164)

The forces at work within the earth in Bosco’s novels are, I believe, an amalgam of the above Christian and pagan beliefs, along with the notion of the void. To reach the abyss or the void is a state portrayed with great negativity and fear by the author. The risk is always present to those characters who attend too much to the physical and not enough to the spiritual aspects of themselves. The spiritual aspect is not just the religious aspect, but all the specifically higher virtues that humans are capable of like love, kindness, patience, generosity, selflessness, and so on. Nature, though beautiful and essential to humanity, is entirely physical and continually subject to death and decay. A flower which is beautiful today, for example, is dead a week later and returns to the great general void of nature. An alignment with natural forces, like living entirely according to one’s instincts, for example, lures one towards fusion with nature and ultimately leads one to the great abyss. In my opinion, there is, in _L’Ane Culotte_ a particular emphasis on satanic forces working in conjunction with the savage and uncontrolled aspects of the earth [that is to say, areas of the earth where nature has been left free to grow as it wills, where it has been able to unleash its savagery unimpeded, as is the case on the mountain where Cyprien lives]. Not only does Satan with his evil cohort dwell beneath the earth’s surface, but so too do the nature deities of antiquity. Are they working together? The following quote points out that with the coming of Christianity to Europe, it was taught that the pagan deities were nothing more than the deceitful work of the devil:

The Christian theology of the time argued that pagan magic and religion were all the work of the Devil, part of his plan to lure people away from
the truth of Christianity. The pagan gods and goddesses were thus redefined by Christians as servants of Satan. (Stein and Stein 233)

Together, therefore, the evil forces contained within the earth, in the fictional world of L’Ane Culotte, are formidable.\(^{24}\)

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\(^{24}\) The notion of what exactly the evil beneath the earth’s surface consists of has been explored by various critics. The indications in the text are often obscure or cryptic. In this novel the arrival and influence of the serpent, coupled with the fact that Cyprien and Constantin both undergo ‘falls’ so reminiscent of the Fall of Adam and Eve, strongly persuades me that the Satan of Christian doctrine is manifestly present as an unseen character in L’Ane Culotte. Bosco himself once remarked that the devil is always roaming about in his writings: “Le diable se promène partout dans mes écrits. C’est, direz-vous, avoir une vision sombre de l’univers. Mais ces romans s’ouvrent à leur fin sur une victoire, un espoir, et le ciel” (Cauvin 238). The notion of human-type figures dwelling beneath the earth’s surface may seem a little bizarre, but their physical presence is indicated in some of Bosco’s other novels as well. For example, the main character in Le Récif, Markos, becomes aware that the Kariatidès family, with whom he is staying on the Greek island of Paros, are living in fear of the ancient gods. Devoutly Christian, though they are, they are too afraid to destroy the remaining vestiges of the family’s much earlier devotion to the pagan gods, the gods who sleep beneath the Christian sanctuaries and who, if woken, could be vengeful: “Je pense à de vieilles prières païennes, des prières dont plus personne ne psalmodiait les paroles mais que l’on gardait, qu’on n’osait pas détruire, de peur d’offenser les fantômes à peine endormis sous les ruines des sanctuaires où une oraison imprudente pouvait éveiller leur mémoire et leur rendre, ne fût-ce qu’une heure, une puissance et une colère de dieu” (93). Later, Markos, drawn increasingly into an hallucinatory state of mind enters the sea and finds, in its depths, an eerie realm, the home of the ancient gods of antiquity, who are waiting, patiently, but determinedly, for their chance to re-surface, and re-claim the honour which was once afforded them. The attraction Markos felt to enter the sea and visit this obscure region is presented by Bosco as dangerous, and compelling only to a person existing in a weakened spiritual state, a person who has ‘let their guard’ down, and is able to be so ensnared. Markos, like Cyprien, risks finding the abyss.

In general, critics have interpreted such occurrences and notions as metaphors for a fear, or an awareness of uncontrolled thoughts and desires existing within the character’s own mind and body. Georges Poulet, for example, in an article discussing the rising of subterranean forces in Bosco’s novels, puts the dread of what lies below the depths of a peaceful body of water down to a fear of the active presence of the earth: “Derrière la paix d’une onde pure, ce qui se devine et inspire une crainte religieuse, c’est la présence active de la terre” (194). Michel Suffran writes of the meeting, within the human body, of one’s dreams and one’s blood with both the divine side and the animal side of one’s being. Quoting from Le Récif, he makes a comparison calling the reader to consider the similarity between the instincts and malefic powers resting in the interior of the person with commonly-held notions of the classical gods of old: “...ce monde engloui n’est-il pas le piège suprême – là où dorment les instincts et les puissances maléfiques, les exilés, ces vieilles divinités de la Terre, les forces que jadis on vénérait en haut sous le soleil?” (110). The idea of the human being torn between two forces active within the body has been, indeed, pondered by thinkers for centuries. In classical times the depiction of man as centaur, intellect and animal, expressed this idea. In the eighteenth century, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre addressed the notion in these terms: “[L’homme] n’est point formé d’une nature simple comme les autres animaux, dont chaque espèce conserve constamment son caractère, mais de deux natures opposées, dont chacune se subdivise elle-même en plusieurs passions qui se contrastent. Par l’une de ces natures, il réunit en lui tous les besoins et toutes les passions des animaux; et par l’autre, les sentiments ineffables de la Divinité” (Etudes 366). I certainly would agree with this; however, it is my feeling that a literal apprehension of this layer of Bosco’s universe should not be ignored. Jean Onimus comments that the obscure beings inhabiting Bosco’s world have the purpose of both personalizing and spiritualizing the evil which is everywhere present: “...les dieux morts attendent la moindre occasion propice pour faire irruption sur l’autre versant [du monde (celui de la lumière)]. Un peuple d’esprits, telles les empuses, goules, wivres, striges de la Fable, guettent l’âme
However, whilst saying this, it is important to note that the references to the pagan elements of nature are not all malign. They also have their poetic and beautiful side. There are numerous echoes of the ancient cycle of nature, with a hint of its connection to the old gods. In his journal entry of 16 November, Cyprien writes of the regermination of seeds during winter, for example: “L’hiver!… Je ne puis le haïr: c’est la saison des serres tièdes et des vieux sortilèges des dieux qui naissent sous la neige close, des prières. Je l’attends” (Culotte 163). Perhaps this is a reference to Saturn, who “had the habit of devouring his offspring” (Augustine 276) only for it to be reborn again later\(^25\).

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\(^25\) “Saturn was a very ancient agricultural divinity of Latin and Roman origin. […] His name may be connected with *satur* (stuffed, gorged) or with *sator* (a sower): in either case he is synonymous with abundance. Saturn was a working god and a vine-grower. Under the name Stercutius he saw to the manuring of fields. […] Saturn was supposed to have been king of Italy during the golden age” (Guirand and Pierre 205).
The first stage of pride is to desert the Lord 
And to turn one’s heart away from one’s Maker. 
_Ecclesiasticus 10:12_

Cyprien’s call is answered, and the earth assists him in generating a beautiful garden. However, the earth also generates that which Cyprien did not ask for, that is, evil. The evil the earth generates is embodied in the serpent, which of a sudden comes into Cyprien’s life, and installs itself at Belles-Tuiles. The serpent is a key figure: it is the symbol not only of Gaia, the Earth Mother, but also of Satan. The introduction of the serpent into the plot ties together the various strands of nature veneration, the emanations of diabolical evil from the earth, and the re-enactment of the Fall which occurred in the original Eden.

Basing my conclusions on an examination of the commentary of Saint Augustine on the Fall of Adam and Eve and on my consideration of the characters and what happens to them in _L’Ane Culotte_, I suggest that Cyprien’s earth worship has drawn him progressively away from God, and has left him exposed to the influences of Satan. Satan, observing that the time is ripe for temptation, sends the serpent to work on Cyprien. This reflects the role of the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

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26 Michel Suffran comments that the very act of attempting to re-create Eden, implies a sacrilegious desire to rival God. For all that a great degree of power may lie within the earth, this cannot be effectively exploited for creative purposes by a mere human. In making his creative ‘pact’, Cyprien has been forced to go further:

Que ce vieux rêve humain exige, pour s’accomplir, des forces plus qu’humaines, M. Cyprien, très vite, le mesure. Sans doute, il existe dans l’argile charnelle, dans les replis ténébreux de l’être, toutes sortes de puissances endormies, ligotées, baillonnées dont il est possible de rompre l’enchantement. […] Pourtant, rien de tout cela ne suffit à passer du rêve à la création: c’est pure magie ou simple illusion. Seul, le rêve de Dieu s’est fait chair. Il faut donc aller plus loin encore, jusqu’à ce rêve créateur; irrésistiblement, le _pacte avec la Terre_ prend une autre dimension. Il devient appel au «tentateur redoutable et aimé». Dès cet instant, ce qui est amour de la vie se corrompt, marqué du signe de mort.” (111-112)
After [Satan’s] fall, his ambition was to worm his way, by seductive craftiness, into the consciousness of man, whose unfallen condition he envied, now that he himself had fallen. To this end he selected as his mouthpiece a serpent in the material paradise where the other terrestrial animals lived, tame and harmless, with those two human beings, male and female. This animal, to be sure, was suitable for the rebel angel’s work, with his slippery body, moving along in tortuous twists and turns.

(Augustine 569-570)

Before progressing further with this examination of the diabolical influence of the serpent on Cyprien, it is interesting to note that Cyprien not only calls the serpent by his deeds, but he also calls him literally, though unwittingly. In his journal entry of 24 October, Cyprien notes the changes in the weather he is observing, as winter draws closer. He feels that soon storms will break. He petitions the spirit of the mountain garden to work the soil over winter and grant him paradise, as quoted above. He supplicates that he should be repaid for the care he has lavished on the garden over the summer months. Then suddenly the thought comes to him that a paradise garden needs a guardian at the gate. After all, this is, he believes, a re-surfacing of the original Garden of Eden, and it had a guardian. Who, he asks, will fill that role? “Mais quel Dieu gardera la porte du Jardin?” (Culotte 161). The earth responds by sending the serpent. Looking in Constantin’s narrative, we find the serpent indeed guarding the gate to Fleuriade. When Constantin tries to leave Fleuriade with his stolen almond bough, he finds he cannot because there is an enormous serpent sitting on the portal of the gate, and he knows it would be foolish to try to pass it [page 73].
As noted above, Cyprien also calls the serpent to him by his actions and his pride. His pride is born and grows from a strong feeling of self-satisfaction in his own achievements. In the following passage, Saint Augustine describes how the perversion of what was originally good occurs. It all starts with a placing of oneself in a central, preeminent position, leading onto pride [or a desire for ‘a perverse kind of exaltation’], which in turn links to an evil will, which culminates in open disobedience.

It was in secret that the first human beings began to be evil; and the result was that they slipped into open disobedience. For they would not have arrived at the evil act if an evil will had not preceded it. Now, could anything but pride have been the start of the evil will? For ‘pride is the start of every kind of sin’.* And what is pride except a longing for a perverse kind of exaltation? For it is a perverse kind of exaltation to abandon the basis on which the mind should be firmly fixed, and to become, as it were, based on oneself, and so remain. This happens when a man is too pleased with himself: and a man is self-complacent when he deserts that changeless Good in which, rather than in himself, he ought to have found his satisfaction. The desertion is voluntary, for if the will had remained unshaken in its love of the higher changeless Good, which shed on it light to see and kindled in it fire to love, it would not have been diverted from this love to follow its own pleasure…” (571-572)

*Sirach 10:13

Reading through Cyprien’s journal, we can see the chains of his words and actions linking together in the same way as the chain outlined by Saint Augustine above.
Let us take a closer look at these links below. In our consideration of Cyprien’s character above, it has been made clear that Cyprien has placed himself in the centre of his universe – he will have nothing to do with other people, and he thinks that he can find happiness and innocence for himself, through his own efforts. We can see that Cyprien has also become self-reliant: “Toute ma pensée est en moi, encore en moi. Je créerai le jardin. Bientôt, par lui, quand l’hiver sévira, je travaillerai en secret l’esprit de la Terre” 16 novembre (Culotte 162-3). Cyprien does not need God, he is in possession of creative powers of his own. He prefers to put his trust in magic. Following the Augustinian line of theology, Cyprien has got his point of focus all wrong: one cannot attribute any type of real creative power to the earth, and far less to one self, as all are powerless without God. It is He who is the true creator:

We do not call farmers ‘creators’ of crops, since we are told, ‘The planter does not matter, nor does the waterer. It is God who matters, for it is he who makes things grow.’* We do not even ascribe creative power to the earth, although it is clearly the fruitful mother of growing things, promoting their growth as they burst out into shoots, and holding them safely by their roots; …” (Augustine 505)

* 1 Corinthians 3:7

The next link in the chain is the growth of pride. On a number of occasions abbé Chichambre warns Cyprien to keep things simple, and to beware not to let himself succumb to the sin of pride. In fact, the growth of Cyprien’s pride is developed at great length; we witness his growing self-satisfaction in his journal recordings, and at other times we see it exhibited through interchanges with Chichambre. For example, when the
priest visits him after winter, Cyprien is so proud to be able to show him his garden: the
garden that had blossomed in three weeks, with trees newly-grown, yet taller than them
already:

Nous nous sommes levés et je l’ai conduit jusqu’à Fleuriade. Devant la
porte de l’enclos, il s’est arrêté, frappé de stupeur. Le jardin était là, le
jardin fou, jailli, le paradis éclos en trois semaines, là, devant lui, avec ses
beaux arbres tout frais, qui nous dépassaient de quatre coudées franches
[…]. Il a posé sa grande main sur le pilier droit de la porte et il a regardé.

Longtemps. Il ne disait rien. J’étais heureux. 9 avril (Culotte 170)

After a while, the reader begins to see that Chichambre’s concerns were well-
founded. Cyprien is happy in his new surroundings, but this is not quite enough. He also
wants to be in control. His evil will arises when he begins to realize that he cannot
control everything. This fact first begins to dawn on him when he realizes that the
animals are unhappy and live in the garden against their wills. However, it is when the
fox appears and starts to roam about killing, and is somehow able to resist Cyprien’s
magic, that the realization that his control is only partial, really hits home. The fact that
he cannot draw the fox to his garden, nor prevent it from killing, serves to seriously
wound his pride\textsuperscript{27}.

\textsuperscript{27} Amongst these recordings in which we can see the growth of Cyprien’s pride, there also occur incidents,
which prefigure what is going to happen. These involve abbé Chichambre, whom Bosco has placed as a
foil character to Cyprien. For example, early in Cyprien’s journal, he relates the occurrences of an evening
when he went to the presbytery, with the intention of visiting Chichambre. However, on seeing from
outside, that the priest was busy eating his dinner, Cyprien waits outside and observes him. Finishing
eating, Chichambre steps outside for a moment, and Cyprien, hiding behind a bush, can hear him
murmuring. Straining his ears, Cyprien manages to catch the words «Sed et serpens erat callidior
animantibus terrae…». Cyprien is left feeling perplexed, and perhaps a little anxious, though he does not
know why. He writes: “Pourquoi a-t-il parlé du serpent? Pourquoi a-t-il cité les paroles de la Géneese: «La
plus rusée de toutes les bêtes de la terre?» 16 août (Culotte 155-6). There follows a note inserted by
Chichambre, offering an explanation: he recalls that Cyprien had sent a floral offering down to his church
The ingredients required for the appearance of the serpent at Belles-Tuiles are now present: 1) Cyprien has reached a sufficiently high level of self-satisfaction with his ability both to use magic and to create a beautiful garden; 2) His pride is suffering from a blow, in his inability to control the fox; 3) He has actively started to venerate the earth. [Note that the fox first appears directly after Cyprien makes his petition / prayer to the spirit of the mountain garden]. The second factor, the wounded pride, is the most crucial. It is this which will allow the serpent entry into Cyprien’s life. Cyprien’s pride hits its highest point when he is successful in summoning the ‘Breath of the Mother’, and, of course, he does this to calm the serpent, as discussed above, in the gipsy ring episode. The proud exaltation that Cyprien feels in his power occurs at the very moment of his first dealings with the snake. The serpent is also a concrete symbol of Cyprien’s own pride. The hole made in Cyprien’s pride by the fox’s refusal to respond to him is filled in rapidly by the joy of getting a response from the Mother.

Cyprien, more confident than ever in his powers, is yet more bothered than ever by the fox’s killings. Being in possession of a snake, who urgently desires to bite, Cyprien is presented with a potential solution to his fox problem. The temptation presented by the serpent echoes the tempting suggestion made to Eve by the serpent in Genesis, chapter 3. Cyprien had been told, like Eve, that to do such and such a thing, the night before, and the following day, he had asked a group of boys, helping him, to arrange the flowers on the Virgin’s altar. The boys raced back to him, a short time later, terrified, because they had found a viper in amongst the flowers. The priest asserts that his words that night, which Cyprien overheard, were his musings on the events of the day. [If we recall that the snake is the symbol of the Earth Mother, of Gaea, then we will realize that Cyprien’s offering, including the snake, was, symbolically, perhaps a fitting one]. Above all though, the offering serves to indicate that Cyprien’s garden (and his pride in it) is going to attract a snake; something wicked is going to come to live amongst all the beauty.
would bring about negative repercussions, but both of them listened to the voice of temptation just the same.

Now the snake was the most subtle of all the wild animals that Yahweh God had made. It asked the woman, ‘Did God really say you were not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?’ The woman answered the snake, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees in the garden. But of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, “You must not eat it, nor touch it, under pain of death.”’ Then the snake said to the woman, ‘No! You will not die! God knows in fact that the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good from evil.’ The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and pleasing to the eye, and that it was enticing for the wisdom it could give. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it.

(Gen.3.1-6)

It must be noted that in L’Ane Culotte, the serpent does not actually speak to Cyprien, and tempt him directly, like he did Eve. Here his influence is subtly suggested. For example, the first time Cyprien considers whether it may be necessary to kill the fox coincides exactly with his first sighting of the gypsies on the road to Peïrouré [1 April, page 166]. The gypsies bring the serpent with them. Five days later Cyprien declares that he hates the fox, and his hatred is driving him to despair, although he does note that if the fox would only stop now, then there is a chance he could still love it. Cyprien muses on the implications of the fox’s refusal: the garden is effectively a temple to life. Life is integral to it; the ‘Pact’ Cyprien has made with the earth has the honour of life as
its cornerstone. That is why killing is forbidden in it. That is why Constantin will
commit such a grievous error when he rips the almond bough off the tree, and why the
fox, in killing all around, threatens the survival of the garden. So, logically, how could
Cyprien hope to solve his problems by killing the fox?

One answer is that Cyprien is tempted, and his mind is twisted, by the serpent.
According to Bosco, it is the devil who separates: “Le diable est celui qui sépare” (Van
Grit 886). The serpent functions, amongst other things, to separate: in this instance he
spurs Cyprien on to an act which will separate life and love from the garden. As the
mastermind behind the Anne-Madeleine episode [explored in the next chapter], the
serpent separates Constantin and Cyprien. Later, he will again induce Cyprien to perform
an act of separation: that of tearing Hyacinthe away from the boy and the family who
love her.

Another answer was also indicated by Bosco, in the same interview: Cyprien, like
many prominent historical figures, was trying to create a perfect place. He shows himself
to be unable to compromise: the fox presents a problem; it is different from the other
animals, and it will not conform. As I have stated earlier, Cyprien cannot cope with this.
In the words of Bosco, Cyprien is trying to achieve an ideal which is ‘too pure’.
Unfortunately, in the end, he will sacrifice anything that lessens the perfection of his ideal
place:

L’homme moderne aspire aussi au paradis, un lieu de bonheur. Lénine,
Staline, et le communisme aussi, mais c’est un paradis cruel, inhumain.
Hitler et le nazisme aussi. Ils étaient trop consacrés à un idéal auquel ils
étaient prêts à sacrifier n’importe qui et n’importe quoi. Ils étaient trop
purs. Ils voulaient absolument ce paradis mais sans accepter de compromis. Méfiez-vous des purs! Cyprien, le sorcier de L’Ane Culotte, [...] échoue quand il assassine le renard. Cyprien, qui essaie de construire un paradis terrestre, échoue quand la mort y entre. (Van Grit 887)

The arrival of the serpent also ushers in a new anxiety: Cyprien begins to dwell on the fact that he does not have an heir to pass the garden on to, someone who will continue to practice the necessary magic to maintain and protect it, after he has gone. This, in fact, constitutes a second major problem. Cyprien finds that he has two burning issues on his mind simultaneously. Magic has not been able to help him fix the first one, but could it lend him aid in luring a child to the garden and in making that child fall in love with it? Before the serpent’s arrival, we note in Cyprien’s journal references here and there to the fact that he has observed a child sitting down at the Gayolle Bridge, looking up to the mountain. Cyprien is interested in him and he finds out from Anselme who he is. (It is, of course, Constantin). However, it is not until the influence of the snake comes into his life, that Cyprien starts to covet him. In fact, he becomes desperate to draw him up to Fleuriade, to show him the garden, and to ultimately pass his magical skills on to him. Under the serpent’s influence, Cyprien seems to develop a heightened awareness of his mortality, of his solitude and of his lack of successor. [Echoes of the heightened awareness promised by the snake to Adam and Eve if they were to eat of the forbidden fruit, perhaps?]

13 avril. Il y a des moments où je me sens si vieux! Plus vieux que le serpent peut-être, et je désespère du paradis. Combien de temps encore pourrai-je de mes vieilles mains le soutenir? […] Pour en prolonger la
durée, à qui léguerai-je les Mots, ces Mots magiques dont le murmure bien réglé peut suffire pendant longtemps à le défendre des ténèbres? Car il y faut un homme, au cœur de notre paradis. Il n’est point de jardin terrestre sans la beauté de l’homme, si c’est d’abord en lui, à son désir, que se forment les plantes, que s’assemblent les bêtes. *(Culotte 182)*

14 avril. Je suis triste. Il me faut l’enfant *(184)*.

15 avril. Il me faut l’enfant *(184)*.


Cyprien has decided that he must have the child, Constantin, no matter what. He still has scruples at this point. He does debate whether he has the right to draw him to Fleuriade by the use of magic. In the end he resolves to mark out a magic trail. He sends Culotte, the donkey, down to get him. Constantin visits Fleuriade, and Cyprien delightedly records that the charm of the earth caught hold of him, and when he left, he took the garden, bursting with vitality, away with him. He comments: “Le Jardin parlera” *(17 avril (Culotte 187)*. Does this statement indicate that the ‘power of the earth’ entered Constantin, and that it will affect him? This would explain why Constantin feels so restless after that visit, for a long time. Even when he is away ‘in exile’ in Costebelle,
he tells us that he spent his time thinking about Belles-Tuiles: “…avec un furieux ravissement, je me remis à penser à Belles-Tuiles. Pendant les trois mois que je restai à Costebelle, je ne pensai guère qu’à cela” (Culotte 79).

After Constantin’s visit, which seemed to be successful, Cyprien waits in hopeful expectation for his next visit. However, events do not come about as planned. [Not as planned by Cyprien, that is. One does suspect diabolical interference here]. Constantin does return to the Fleuriade, but it is with the intention of stealing an almond bough, to keep the village girl, Anne-Madeleine, quiet. In ripping the bough from the tree, Constantin, the heir to the Garden, brings death into it. This act seriously undermines the ‘Pact’ of life which Cyprien has made with the earth. It also destroys his hopes of nurturing Constantin as his successor. As abbé Chichambre later stated: “Fait d’autant plus grave que ce bout de paradis terrestre avait été créé à son intention. Il en était l’espoir et le futur maître” (Culotte 201). Cyprien becomes depressed and mentally unbalanced. A consideration of the notion of what the mind does when it loves, as expressed by Gaston Bachelard, that: “On s’aime en toute idéalité, chargeant le partenaire de réaliser l’idéalité telle qu’on la rêve” (64), brings the reader to a realization of how shattering Constantin’s inadvertent offence must have been to Cyprien. Cyprien’s love, together with his hopes and dreams for the future, had, in the course of his reveries, been placed in Constantin. Constantin’s failure to realize the ideality as Cyprien had dreamed it, effects a crushing blow.

It is at this time, when Cyprien hits at an all-time low, that the snake is able to put across to him its strongest influence. Cyprien’s hope has been replaced by despair, and he affirms that he had been right in believing that there was no true loyalty amongst
humans. This is a crushing blow to the garden of innocence and it serves to intensify Cyprien’s feelings of isolation.  

Abbé Chichambre notes that Constantin’s grandmother’s decision to send the boy away, after the almond bough episode, added to Cyprien’s pain. Now there was definitely no chance of his seeing Constantin again, and so no chance of a re-establishment of their friendship nor of the re-establishment of the necessary atmosphere of innocence in the garden. “Car ce depart, après la douleur que lui apporta ce que j’ai appelé «le sacrilège», le laissa seul en face de lui-même; et il était alors tenté par son plus sur démon. […] …dans cette voix encore émouvante de solitaire à son déclin, tout à coup vibre le timbre inattendu d’un Autre” (Culotte 202). Cyprien, with plenty of time on his hands, meditates on the depth of his solitude; and if Chichambre is correct, the voice of ‘Another’ can also be detected within his meditations. This is the voice of despair:

«…Que t’a apporté l’innocence?… L’enfant a trahi, le renard tue. Tu es seul…»

[…]

«… Tu es seul, comprends bien cela, tu es seul. Cent fois par jour, on te le dit. Assez!…

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28 It is the opinion of Benoît Neiss that the universal order in Bosco’s novels revolves around a search to recapture the lost innocence of childhood: “La persistante rêverie sur les jardins heureux n’est autre qu’une rêverie sur l’enfance perdue” (88). In a universe powered by a yearning for innocence, the occurrence of infidelity is highly consequential. Cyprien craves fidelity. He ironically senses that the snake, traditionally the most deceitful of all creatures, may be faithful. He is doubtful whether any human can be. His decision to bring Constantin into his life involved a degree of trust, alongside a lot of hope. According to Neiss, the one major stumbling block in Bosco’s universe is infidelity: “… la grande, unique faute dans un pareil univers est l’infidélité;…” (93). In L’Ane Culotte the painful impact of infidelity can be seen, both in the consequences of Constantin’s attack on the almond tree and, again, like a mirror, in Cyprien’s own infidelity to his dream. The destruction begun by Constantin, of Fleuriade, is completed, viciously, by Cyprien himself, in the committing of an act of killing and the subsequent burning of the garden.
«On n’est vraiment seul qu’à jamais. La solitude n’est pasisolement
d’une heure mais désert éternel. Je puis rencontrer demain d’autres
hommes; même en leur compagnie, je serai seul.»

«Cette corbeille de printemps que je ne saurais plus transmettre, elle
périra…»

(Culotte 202-203)

It appears that the ‘Other’ is reinforcing into Cyprien’s mind, that not only has his
garden ultimately been a failure, that he has not succeeded in getting an heir, and the
garden will perish, but also that he has been abandoned by both heaven and earth. Abbé
Chichambre’s reflections on what happened during this period, tie the threads of solitude
as bad counsellor, the sly and very subtle influences of the snake, and the malignant
powers of the earth itself, together. “…à travers son corps miné par l’inquiétude, ébranlé
par la déception, la folie de la Terre monte” (Culotte 203). And, Cyprien called these
currents from the earth to him, over successive months. Cyprien’s incoherent
deliberations and thoughts now fully reflect the inconsistent passions of the earth. I
suggest that, in terms of Arlette Smith’s viewpoint, Cyprien has now, for all intents and
purposes, surrendered himself to the malefic telluric forces: “[il] cède à la puissance de la
terre et à l’ivresse qu’elle dispense” (Smith 68). He is nearly ready to give in and kill the
fox.

Like Adam and Eve, Cyprien let himself be persuaded that there was a good
enough reason to do that which had been forbidden. By way of comparison: “The
woman saw that the tree was good to eat and pleasing to the eye, and that it was enticing
for the wisdom it could give. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some
to her husband who was with her, and he ate it” (Gen.3.6). Now, when Cyprien saw that the serpent needed to bite, he decided that the fox could justifiably be used as a victim. After all, it was he who had started all the problems, and he who initially brought death into the world of innocence. “Ne serait-il pas légitime de conduire le monstre vers la bête cruelle qui a réveillé l’antique désir de la mort!” (Culotte 204).

And so, Cyprien resolves to use the magical syrinx to make the irresistible call to assemble all the beasts of the forest at Roches-Blanches. The sacrifice of the fox takes place. Cyprien commits an act of open disobedience. The following evening, Fleuriade goes up in flames; but at whose hand? Was this an act of despair on Cyprien’s part? Or a dramatic display of triumph by the malefic earth forces? Chichambre later recalls that “Fleuriade et Belles-Tuiles avaient brûlé le 31 juillet, au soir. Du village, on voyait monter les fumées. Mais personne (pas même moi) ne pensa que le vieux Cyprien venait d’incendier son domaine. Nul n’alla y voir” (Culotte 204-205).

The worst, however, is yet to come. We see now a different Cyprien from the man we got to know at the beginning of the book. The gentle man, full of hopes, has been replaced by the harsh man, twisted by pain and despair. Significantly he is not repentant. Fleuriade may be no more, but as noted by abbé Chichambre, pride in his ability to manipulate ‘the Powers’ lives on. Cyprien resolves to create another garden: “Demain, un autre Fleuriade… Le meilleur de la Terre…” (Culotte 207). He still requires a successor. He cannot have Constantin, so he determines to take the other child, who has also been up to Fleuriade on numerous occasions, who has been affected by the magic, and who has proved to be very susceptible to spells. This is Hyacinthe. He will not waste time trying to lure her, or risk the failure of such an enterprise again, rather he
will simply enchant her. He expresses some sadness about this, but at the same time congratulates himself on his marvellous luck in being able to obtain her. “Maintenant je la tiens, oui. Elle me suivra partout. Il le faut, sans doute. Mais je ne lui apporte pas le Bonheur (le bonheur il était pour l’autre, que j’aimais). Et cependant quelle merveilleuse fortune...” (Culotte 207). This time, his scruples are very much weaker. His justification for taking Hyacinthe, much feeble: I have suffered, and to take her is the only option left open for me: “Je n’ai pas le choix; désormais il ne me reste qu’elle; je dois la leur arracher sans tarder; demain il serait trop tard” (Culotte 207). Cyprien’s attitude and his speedy descent from one foul deed to another, now that the initial transgression has been committed, recalls that of Shakespeare’s famous character, Macbeth:

... I am in blood

Stepped in so far that should I wade no more,

Returning were as tedious as go o’er.  (3.4.136-138)

Though in two completely different contexts, the same desire for happiness, for power, for more, fired by temptation, eventually pushed both these characters to go to extreme lengths to try to obtain their wishes. And, at the end, neither was prepared to repent. Cyprien kidnaps Hyacinthe, an act of open disobedience to the laws of both heaven and earth. His ‘Fall’ is complete. He and Hyacinthe vanish, along with the gypsies.
I have explored, in this chapter, the development of the character of Cyprien. He undergoes massive change in the course of the novel, and I have attempted to show how this occurred through the influence of the various elements of the universal order interacting with what lay inside his own mind. A contrast to the rise and fall of Cyprien is offered in the next chapter, in an examination of two episodes in which Constantin undergoes temptation and fall. The conscious decision to rely on one’s self underlies the action once again. The marked difference between these two nature-loving dreamers, one young and one old, is in their reactions when things go wrong.

* * *
Chapter Two:

**How should one behave?**

*The Initiation Journey: the fork in the path.*

“Où il n’y a point de maître, tout le monde est maître; où tout le monde est maître, tout le monde est esclave” Bossuet. *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l’Écriture sainte, I, 3.*
Constantin: Temptation and Fall #1

At the commencement of his narrative, Constantin presents the reader with a wide view of the natural setting of Peïroué before ‘zooming in’ on the character of abbé Chichambre celebrating Mass. We see here a typical snapshot, that of the priest painting a verbal picture of the celestial paradise for his congregation, and teaching about the importance of showing respect for animals. It is worth examining Chichambre’s description of paradise more closely, and noting the effect which such lyricism has on Constantin. The reader sees him being awakened to the idea of the beauty of a paradise garden. It is the celestial paradise, yet the priest describes it in human terms, with a rustic beauty that gives it a reassuring familiarity.

Ce brave abbé Chichambre!… Il avait un don, et qui était de voir le Paradis.[…] Seulement, son paradis, ce n’était pas un paradis de cathédrale, c’était un paradis pour petite paroisse. Un joli paradis humain, tiède, bien clos, un de ces paradis de campagne qui groupent trois cyprès autour d’un puits. Tendrement il nous le montrait, […] un paradis sur lequel veillait un vieux saint un peu somnolent à barbe blanche, un vieux saint assis devant la porte, sur une chaise de paille; un paradis que visitait, chaque année, tout seul, et monté sur son âne, le Dieu de la Fête des Palmes. […] Naturellement, nous l’admirions, ce paradis. (Culotte 15)

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29 It is evident from the very first page that Constantin is a pensive boy, who is attracted to nature, and that the changing of the seasons is significant to him. At this very early point in his tale, he is already thinking about what the wild animals up in the mountains must be doing: “Déjà sans doute, sur les hauteurs, les bêtes libres, en quête de terriers plus chauds, avaient changé de quartiers” (Culotte 13).
Constantin goes on to say that story-tellers had spoken, on winter evenings, of heaven with its angelic musicians, but that remote and unfamiliar presentation of heaven had not appealed at all. To find, instead, some of the beauty of their own corner of the earth, was the universal hope: “nous préférons tous le plaisir d’y retrouver, peut-être, quelque coin connu” (Culotte 16). Constantin notes that this was all abbé Chichambre’s fault, because he possessed a tender-hearted eloquence, which had the congregation hoping for a heaven as he described it. Constantin’s appreciation of Chichambre’s words reveals, perhaps, a feeling of nostalgia for the rosy world of the past. In a hint of intratextual play, Bosco’s remembrance of the childhood capacity for a sense of the wondrous and the marvellous comes through from his Souvenirs:

Vraiment âge d’or, si j’en juge par ma propre enfance. Pourtant, elle ne fut pas toujours très heureuse. Loin de là! Mais je sais maintenant d’expérience que rien n’a pu en égaler plus tard les vertus extraordinaires. Et entre toutes la plus précieuse, la vertu d’émerveillement.

(Trinitaires 151)

The aforementioned description of the Paradise Garden, with a local flavour, was, I believe the first factor which set Constantin on his path of adventure, up to the garden at Belles-Tuiles. The second factor is also introduced by abbé Chichambre: after exhorting his parishioners to show some Christian charity towards animals, as well as people, he makes the final remark, in a confidential tone, that it would please him very much if they

30 The desire, expressed by characters, to re-discover things loved, unaltered and unaffected by changes in state (as is seen here) or by the passing of time (as Aunt Martine hopes in Barboche) is a recurring theme in Bosco’s novels.
were to show a little kindness to the donkey, Culotte. Constantin immediately pricks up his ears and starts dreaming of this ‘special’ donkey, whom he has often observed about the village. He describes it in the most poetic and complimentary terms, for example: “…un âne pour tout dire qui se trouvait à sa place aussi bien dans son écurie que sur le parvis de l’église; un âne doué d’âme, bon aux faibles, honorant ses dieux; un âne qui pouvait passer partout la tête haute, car il était honnête; un âne qui, s’il y avait une justice parmi les ânes, eût été la gloire de sa race” (Culotte 18).

So, first Chichambre mentions Culotte specifically at Mass, and we must remember that Constantin has great admiration for ‘ce brave abbé Chichambre’; then he sees Culotte, during the winter months, making his rounds of the village shops, with trousers on his forelegs and baskets on his back. Constantin watches the other school-boys, his peers, hassling Culotte and calling him names, and he observes that the donkey remains aloof and committed to his mission. The effect of all this on Constantin is that he becomes very interested in Culotte, and starts to wonder where he goes, and who his owner could be.

Constantin’s reaction to the sight of Culotte ascending and descending the mountain paths and doing the shopping, also brings to mind a point made by Danièle Henky that Bosco inserts certain enigmatic and enticing ‘traces’ into his novels. Upon discovery of such a trace, the character is effectively lured into an adventure, the initial goal of which is to unearth some information on the identity of the person or thing who made or left the trace. Henky gives the example of Pascalet, in L’Enfant et la Rivière.

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31 We will see, on various occasions, that curiosity is a trait which leads characters into trouble in Bosco’s universe, a fact which has been commented on by various critics. In L’Ane Culotte we see Constantin displaying curiosity in good measure, and it has repercussions. In this instance we note that Constantin is the only boy who remains behind at the edge of the village, standing, watching the donkey, and pondering, whilst the other boys turn back.
Pascalet is a boy leading a quiet country life, in a secure family environment (just like Constantin), who dreams of adventure, and one day finds a footprint on the riverbank, a footprint which both scares and entices him. Henky describes the two-fold effect the discovery of the footprint has on Pascalet: “Il fait alors la découverte de la marque d’un pied dans le sable des berges et cela a sur lui de curieux effets. D’une part, cela stimule sa curiosité et sa tentation d’évasion. D’autre part, cela freine, dans un premier temps, ses envies de fugue en l’effrayant” (226). The footprint captures the imagination of the boy, as a physical manifestation of that ‘other world’ of adventure, which potentially lurks beyond the confines of his home. In *L’Ane Culotte* we witness a clearly similar occurrence: Constantin is attracted by the sight of the donkey in trousers (the ‘trace’), travelling up and down the mountain paths. His curiosity is aroused; he wants to know who he is, where he comes from, and who owns him. Out wandering alone one day, like Pascalet, he feels a momentary grip of fear when he sees the donkey approaching, followed by a prompting to know more: “… il descendit le raidillon. Saisi de je ne sais quelle crainte, je me retirai dans le pré. […]Les couffins, qui bringuebalaient sur son dos, étaient pleins jusqu’aux bords de branches d’argélas en fleur. […]Le chargement de l’âne m’étonna. De loin je le suivis” (*Culotte* 30). Henky adds that the trace indicates not only a living being, who will act as a type of guide, but also the path itself, which leads to the other world.

When in the village, Constantin wonders why not one of the boys tries to touch Culotte or throw anything at him, and he notes this is remarkable, because some of the boys are known scallywags. He also observes that when Culotte leaves town, the boys stop following him. That in itself is curious. Constantin comes to the conclusion that
“Un je ne sais quoi de puissant et de tendre semblait veiller sur l’âne. Où qu’il allât, cette bienveillance occulte l’accompagnait” (Culotte 21). Constantin asserts that only a magical protection could keep that band of ruffian school-boys at bay. This is the first indication, in the text, that magic is going to play a role in the story. Constantin’s remark shows that he is able to believe that that is possible. This capacity to accept the marvellous is, according to Konrad Bieber, alongside a propensity for reverie, one of the essential elements enabling one to pass beyond one’s quotidian life, and into the realm of the supernatural: “Quelles sont donc les différentes étapes qui peuvent mener l’homme à dépasser la sphère quotidienne? Tout d’abord, c’est l’extraordinaire disposition au rêve, l’acceptation du merveilleux, d’un merveilleux dont on déploie devant nous les ingrédients” (278). It is interesting that Constantin is the only boy who is attracted by the idea of magic, or indeed by the magic itself perhaps. If we compare what is happening up at Belles-Tuiles and Fleuriade at this time, as recorded in Cyprien’s journal, we observe that Cyprien has spoken the magical words, the animals are starting to feel an irresistible force drawing them into the garden of Fleuriade, the trees and plants, under the snow, are preparing to sprout, and Cyprien has observed Constantin at home at La Saturnine and found out his name from Anselme. So, magic is being performed in the environs of Peïrouré at this time, and the reader is driven to wonder if Constantin, even at this stage, is being affected by it.

Pierre Verdaguer notes that for him the interesting characteristic of the fantastic in Bosco’s novels, is not so much its tranfigurative function, as the way in which the character gets to the point where he or she is able to step out of the ordinary world and into the extraordinary one: “…ce qui importe surtout est la façon dont se fait l’accès à la
dimension magique. [...] Les héros parviennent chaque fois à un état privilégié qui autorise la sortie du quotidien…” (111). Constantin’s progress towards the point where he is able to enter, and appreciate, the magical world of Cyprien certainly illustrates this. As each small episode unfolds, the reader finds themselves becoming just as eager as Constantin to find out more information about the mysterious donkey and his equally mysterious owner.

The passages describing Culotte’s shopping trips to Peïrouré and Constantin’s delighted, yet concerned, observation of him, also serve to paint a picture of a boy who is both imaginative and sensitive, and who loves animals. A similar picture has already been drawn, by the author, of abbé Chichambre and another will later be drawn of Cyprien.

The darkly attractive scraps of information that Constantin is successful in gleaning about Culotte and his owner, from various sources around the community, and the extreme response he gets to his tentative inquiries to Péguinotte, the Saturnine’s domestic servant, constitute a third factor in drawing Constantin up to Belles-Tuiles. Péguinotte makes Constantin swear not to go near Culotte again and never to follow him, declaring that if abbé Chichambre knew where he came from, he would never have encouraged the people to show him kindness. Such comments fuel Constantin’s desire to know more about the mysterious owner.  

32 Péguinotte’s reaction to the donkey in trousers is that of the superstitious, and perhaps ignorant, village person of days gone by. Boria Sax, while commenting on the ancient practices of animal worship, the veneration of totems, and the frequent pairing-up of a deity with an animal (Athena was often pictured with an owl, for example), informs us that with the advent of Christianity, stringent efforts were made by the Church to stamp out any lingering remains of either animal or pagan deity worship. However, “[t]he old totems would not simply disappear; they often became devils. […] In witch trials of the Renaissance […] people claimed that demons would visit a sorcerer as an animal companion. […] For the poor and vulnerable, keeping pets or even feeding animals could arouse suspicion of witchcraft” (xv). The following statement, uttered by Péguinotte on the subject of Culotte and his owner, reflects such a viewpoint: “«Et
Now occurs an episode wherein Claudius Saurivère invites Constantin to join him in a little bird-hunting. This scene is a clear catalyst to Constantin’s adventure up the mountain in a number of ways. Firstly, it causes Constantin to cross the Gayolle bridge and enter the wooded area at the foot of the hills. In doing so he moves closer to Cyprien’s domain than he ever has previously; and he is excited because this is where he has seen Culotte descend. Secondly, it shows an episode where Constantin is disobedient. He knows he is not allowed to set traps for birds. He knows that he is not allowed to stay out late. He is told-off by an acquaintance of his grandmother, but he chooses to pay no heed to this. He also knows that he is associating with a boy his grandmother considers to be a scoundrel. He is aware, too, that he is compromising his values of caring for animals. Even more importantly, however, is what occurs when he finally returns home: his grandmother forbids him to cross the Gayolle River again and he admits to himself [and the reader] that he should have cried during the stern scolding he received, but he comments that a wicked pride prevented him from doing so. This admission indicates that Constantin has reserved the right, despite what his grandmother says, or what he knew she would say, to make his own decisions. He knows he has been disobedient, but he is not entirely sorrowful. This is Constantin’s first “Fall”. It is a mini-fall, which prefigures the next, much bigger, one.\footnote{The term ‘prefiguring’ indicates, on the simplest level, an occurrence in the text, preceding another occurrence, which possesses a striking similarity to the first one. The first of these occurrences would seem to anticipate the second. ‘Prefiguring’ is a feature of the typological method of interpretation. Typological interpretation is historically a method applied to Biblical exegesis, wherein “the key persons, actions, and events in the Old Testament are viewed as ‘figurae’ which are historically real themselves, but also ‘prefigure’ those persons, actions, and events in the New Testament that are similar to them in some aspect, par-dessus le marché, cet âne! Un âne apprivoisé![…].Ah! Ah! Je vous le dis, ça sent le soufre et sabot du Bouc-Fantôme!» Par ce bouc, la Péguinotte entendait désigner le Diable, sans le nommer, comme l’exigent la politesse et la prudence” (Culotte 35).}
Grand-mère Saturnine’s command that Constantin does not cross the Gayolle again has an immediate effect: “…à partir de ce moment, je n’eus plus qu’un désir, un désir absurde, un désir sacrilège: franchir le pont de la Gayolle” (Culotte 28). At first, he does not think that he is capable of breaking such a clearly-stated command, declaring that he does not have the spirit of some of the other boys at his school, who would think nothing of it. The next section of the narrative shows us how Constantin obtained that spirit.

There follows a period where Constantin gives expression to his obsession with the bridge which crosses the Gayolle. He does not cross it, but he allows himself to spend as much time there as possible. Not surprisingly, he becomes intrigued with what he sees on the other side: a small wood, and a mysterious, winding path leading up to the mountain. “Si je n’osais encore m’y engager, il m’arrivait parfois de courir tout seul, en cachette, jusqu’au torrent; et là, assis sur le parapet du vieux pont, je passais une heure ou deux à regarder cette route sauvage qui conduisait vers les forêts, les combes et les plateaux que tourmente la tramontane” (Culotte 29).

If we return to consider Pierre Verdaguer’s quote, above, that there is a distinct preparation process through which a character of Bosco’s goes, in order to arrive at the point where they are able to gain access to the world of the magical and the supernatural, we may note that we have arrived at a significant point in Constantin’s “initiation journey”. Constantin is at the Gayolle bridge, passively watching and waiting, which is of the greatest significance. As Verdaguer goes on to explain:

function, or relationship” (Abrams 132). Typological methods have been adapted and used by various authors, generally in the writing of books with religious or moral themes, in more recent times.
…chez Bosco, la mise au contact des puissances souterraines se fait d’abord par l’observation, première phase de l’initiation, passive par définition. On ne peut manquer de s’interroger sur la valeur de cette apparente passivité liée, chez le personnage principal, à un impérieux besoin de guetter et d’attendre, longuement si besoin est, et avec une infinie patience ce qui viendra s’offrir au regard.[…] …c’est cette inertie contemplative qui permet l’ouverture à la dimension spirituelle et qui explique l’importance de cette apparente passivité chez le héros. La quête spirituelle ne se conçoit donc pas sans l’observation contemplative depuis un refuge d’où l’on pourra épier le pourtour après s’être pour ainsi dire retiré du monde. (113)

I would like to suggest that the need to wait, which characters experience, comes about when they are spending a lot of time around non-human objects, be they animate or inanimate, and I believe this sense of being in a curious state of waiting is a human counterpart to the torpor which, according to Bosco, objects, animate and inanimate, natural and man-made, exist in. By waiting passively, the character is, to a degree, participating in the existence and the experience of their surroundings.

A slightly different angle is taken by Lynn Penrod. In an article focussing on Bosco’s child character, Pascalet, from the book *L’Enfant et la Rivière*, Penrod emphasizes the centrality of the ‘initiation journey’ in Bosco’s work. She pays attention particularly to the often extraordinary experiences undergone by child characters on the

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34 For example, Bosco to Jean-Pierre Cauvin: “La Terre elle-même cherche à atteindre la puissance: l’intelligence, le sentiment. Elle n’y arrive pas. Mais lorsqu’elle envoûte un homme, c’est ce dernier qui est happé, car elle ne s’élève pas à lui” (238).
verge of early adolescence. She describes these experiences as ‘rites of passage’, a term first used in the writings of Arnold Van Gennep in 1909. She points out that Bosco’s child characters conform to Van Gennep’s tripartite process, consisting of initial separation, followed by a period of time where the character is left to their “own devices”, and concluding with reintegration back into the community. These ‘rites of passage’ mark a transitional phase, “put[ting] in place a time and space of separation designed to underscore the difference between before and after” (Penrod 104). Viewed in this way, Constantin, at this point, is effectively preparing himself for an up-coming period of what will be principally mental and spiritual separation, which will constitute an intense learning period for him, over an extended period of time.

To me, the forbidden bridge and the mysterious path leading from it, seem to function as an echo of the forbidden fruit, we read about in Genesis. Constantin is allowed to wander around Peïrouré and environs freely; however there is one place he is forbidden to go to, and that is the bridge crossing the Gayolle. In like vein, Adam and Eve are allowed to wander freely about Eden and eat from any tree they wish, save the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil: “Then Yahweh God gave the man this command, ‘You are free to eat of all the trees in the garden. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you are not to eat; for, the day you eat of that, you are doomed to die’” (Gen.2.16-17). In Constantin’s narrative, the superior power of Grand-

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35 The trip up the mountain to Belles-Tuiles is, I believe, only the beginning. Although returning home to La Saturnine just a few hours later, Constantin has become a different boy: he is now tied in heart and mind to life up the mountain. He says himself that he becomes obsessed with the thought of Belles-Tuiles and the mysteries it holds; long periods of physical separation from it, do nothing to lessen the hold it has over his spirit. He is only released at the very end of the narrative, having learnt a good deal about the fundamental principles of right and wrong and of temptation and the need for moderation. His reintegration is marked by the outpouring of his experiences to the gentle ear of abbé Chichambre who enables him, through the granting of reconciliation, to recover peace of mind and to step back into the everyday life of the community of Peïrouré.
mère Saturnine says: “Je n’ai pas l’intention de t’emprisonner ici, […] mais je ne veux plus de ces vagabondages, surtout du côté de ces collines. Désormais tu ne dépasseras pas le pont de la Gayolle. J’ai dit. Va te coucher” (Culotte 28). Constantin has been expressly forbidden to cross the Gayolle Bridge. If he chooses to do so now, he will be actively disobedient. The scene is being set for Constantin’s major fall. He is experiencing temptation, but at this point is still reluctantly adhering to his grandmother’s command. Constantin is tempted by the sight of the path, which winds upwards to an unknown destination: “Ce chemin âpre, tordu, noir, grimpait rapidement et tournait parmi les rocs et les racines noueuses. Où menait-il?” (Culotte 29). He is tempted by the mountain itself, whose great claws clutch at the bridge. He is fascinated by the fact that on one side of the bridge, the countryside is cultivated and inhabited by a human population, but on the other side it is wild, with only the path to indicate previous human contact. “…l’intérêt commençait brusquement dès franchi le ruisseau” (Culotte 29). Constantin is also intrigued that he never sees anyone in the vicinity of the bridge, and this adds to its attraction for him. Constantin’s statements reflect Verdaguer’s observation that the hero’s place of contemplation sits at the junction of two worlds: “L’observatoire a aussi une valeur particulière: il se situe à la jonction des deux mondes, celui de l’équilibre et de la douceur quotidiens et celui du merveilleux. C’est un peu comme un avant-poste en territoire dangereux, mais qui offrirait toutes les garanties de sûreté” (113).

It is interesting to note that at this point Constantin mentions, for the first time, that he can feel a vegetal fermentation rising from the earth. As discussed in Chapter One, there are certain malignant forces housed in the earth. I suggest that, at this point, it
is being indicated that the earth, in its darkest capacity, is now playing its part in the
temptation of Constantin. Constantin’s sensing of the rising fermentation accompanies
the sight of Culotte coming down the path, leading from the mountain, with his saddle
bags full of wild genista. Significantly, Constantin notes that Culotte has his nose
pointing down, almost touching the path, as if sniffing it. This reinforces the suggestion
that earth magic is present. Perhaps the path is enchanted in such a way as to lead the
donkey down to the village? And it may be that Constantin is affected by that same
scent?

In church the next morning, Constantin breathes in with delight, the scents
coming from those wild genista plants. “L’église embaumait la montagne. Pendant toute
la messe je pensai à l’âne Culotte qu’une main mystérieuse avait, la veille, chargé de ces
branches au parfum amer” (Culotte 31). Constantin’s imagination is working hard; he is
captured up with the romantic idea of the mountain and its mysterious inhabitants. He is
strongly affected by odours. This scene also prefigures the Mass on Palm Sunday
morning, when Constantin will again be affected by the scents of the wild countryside,
and the moving words of abbé Chichambre, to the point where he will make the decision
to cross the Gayolle.

For Constantin, the arrival of Spring is accompanied by the strongest feelings of
temptation yet:

C’est alors que je sentis vraiment la tentation. A mesure que montait le
printemps, une inquiétude se levait en moi. Je ne tenais plus en place.
Une sourde envie me prenait de quitter les lieux que j’habitais avec les
miens, […] et d’aller ailleurs, plus loin que les haies connues, dans les
chemins inexplorés, et singulièrement dans ce sentier de la Gayolle qui, depuis quelques mois, avait orienté mes rêves. (Culotte 33)

Frequent references to the air and the scents travelling on the breeze compel one to wonder whether the magic of Fleuriade is being transmitted in the wind. Constantin is now visiting the Gayolle before school as well as after, even occasionally setting foot on the forbidden side. He notes that the hardier grass and trees on that side release unknown scents, which later re-manifest themselves as a type of memory in his dreams. “J’en rapportais chez mes grands-parents le souvenir d’une zone fraîche et odorante, qui me poursuivait dans la nuit au plus profond de mon sommeil. […] C’était une passion montante. Elle occupait la partie la plus active de mon âme, troublait mes sens, obsédait mes yeux” (Culotte 36). All the characters are affected by the spring breeze in some way or another, as noted in the previous chapter, and I wonder if the collision of the elements could be behind this springtime breeze which affects all the characters so deeply? The breeze (air) comes, Constantin notes, from the sea (water); it mixes with the smoke (fire) from the chimney up at Belles-Tuiles, and travels across the land (earth) infecting everyone: “Depuis les premiers jours du printemps, la fumée, qui montait quelquefois au loin du toit de Belles-Tuiles, était devenue plus fréquente. Ce filet bleu, délié, pur, s’élevait plus légèrement dans un air qui, touché par les premières brises venues de la

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36 The inner drive to leave one’s home and make some kind of journey, is a call experienced time and time again by the range of Bosco’s characters. Children feel it: Constantin feels that he simply cannot remain in one location; Pascalet in L’Enfant et la Rivière feels the strong attraction of the river, and the need to leave his house and go to it. Adults feel it: in Malicroix, for example, on receipt of the letter informing him of his inheritance, Martial Mégremut hastens to the lonely island in the Rhone, despite the sorrowful admonitions of his family. Even the elderly feel this strong force; Aunt Martine speaks of the grip which the desire to make a journey got on her, despite her tired legs and advanced years: “Je sais qu’il n’y a plus dans ma pauvre pelote beaucoup de laine à dévider. Alors, avant que le fil ne se coupe, j’ai envie de changer de place… C’est un besoin… Et depuis quelques jours, il me mord les mollets…” (Barboche 54). [My bold-type.]
mer déjà tiède, gonflait les plantes, troublait les hommes et les bêtes” (Culotte 36). [My bold-type]

At this point, it is worth considering again if anything is occuring up at Belles-Tuiles which may throw light on Constantin’s temptation. Cyprien noted, on various dates in his journal, in late March, that lately he had seen a boy sitting at the Gayolle Bridge every day, who seemed to be fascinated with the opposite river bank. On 4 April he recorded that he now knew that the boy was Constantin Gloriot, after he saw him with Anselme. By mid-April, Cyprien writes that he regularly hides down by the Gayolle in order to observe Constantin. On 16 April the tone drastically intensifies; Cyprien declares that he must have Constantin, and he expresses his intention of passing on all his magical knowledge to him. There are a number of points of interest here: firstly, between 4 April when he realises who Constantin is, and 16 April, when he declares he must make him come up to Fleuriade, the serpent has come to reside at Belles-Tuiles. As noted earlier, the presence of the serpent seems to emphasize to Cyprien his essential solitude and the vulnerability of both his own life and that of his garden. Secondly, it must be considered whether Constantin is supposed to be viewed as a type of being who, like the wild animals, is susceptible to spells? In his journal entry of 15 April, Cyprien comments that Constantin has a dark blood, the same type that is found in animals, and also in him. The animals could not resist the Words; and although Constantin was not in the direct locality of Belles-Tuiles, there are many references, as mentioned above, to the intoxicating effects of the breeze. When comparing Cyprien’s journal and Constantin’s narrative simultaneously, it seems certainly possible that this is what is being implied,
despite the fact that Cyprien states that he could not let himself draw Constantin there by enchantments (or at least enchantments made for that specific purpose).

In addition, I wonder if an obscure link is being forged between Constantin and Culotte. In Cyprien’s journal entry of 26 July (of the previous year) the old man had noted that ‘the Powers’ had not acted directly upon Culotte, forcing him to submit, but rather that they had awakened him. As a result, Cyprien perceived that Culotte wished to be an associate of his, a friend even, rather than a servant: “Non que les Mots l’aient soumis. Mais il a eu l’air de les comprendre; il a été ému de leur sens d’amitié plutôt que de leur puissance magique” (Culotte 153). In a very similar way, Constantin is attracted to Cyprien and befriends him. Culotte waits, and Constantin waits. Constantin and Culotte also form a strong bond with each other: soon we will witness Constantin receiving the gift of being able to communicate with the donkey, temporarily, and becoming one body with him as they climb the mountain towards Belles-Tuiles.

“Does a clay pot dare to argue with its maker [...]? Does the clay ask the potter what he is doing? Does the pot complain that its maker has no skill?” Isaiah 45:9 (Good News Bible)

Palm Sunday morning ushers in a climactic point in the story. At the excited exhortations of abbé Chichambre, to go out into the countryside and gather olive tree branches to decorate the church with, the children disperse on their mission. Constantin separates from the others, and knows that he is going, very happily, towards the Gayolle: “Je descendais vers la Gayolle, le savais et n’en étais que plus heureux” (Culotte 40). He tells the reader that just prior to this he had reasoned with himself that there was no valid
ground for being forbidden entry to the land on the other side of the Gayolle. He had asked himself what his grandmother had made such a prohibition for. If it was on account of Culotte, then she surely had no cause for concern, because he is such a good and kindly donkey, and therefore, must belong to a good and kindly man. This was a fatal mistake, and Bosco steps into the story at this point to explain why.

Du moment qu’on raisonne, on est perdu. Dès qu’on examine une loi, on en viole le mystère. Il faut obéir sans discuter aux ordres des Puissances supérieures, si l’on ne veut se trouver un beau jour, seul, égaré dans ce pays terrible de la liberté, où l’on ne peut plus compter que sur soi-même, c’est-à-dire un peu sur le démon. Car alors on passe le pont, on le franchit fatalement, dès que la crainte religieuse qu’on attache aux Défenses obscures s’est dissipée. (Culotte 38)

The comparison is clear between Constantin’s disobedience to his grandmother and Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God. All three were guilty of using and relying on their own reasoning, resulting in disobedience to a superior power. From this point, we see Constantin indeed ‘lost’ in “ce pays terrible de la liberté”. He gets tied up in one entanglement after another, his adventures leading on into each other like a domino effect; and he has no-one to help him extricate himself. He has to rely on himself, and becomes increasingly embroiled, in his efforts to keep matters quiet.

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37 The reader may observe a clear example of ‘metanarrative’ here, defined by Umberto Eco as “a reflection that the text carries out on itself and its own narrative, or the intrusion of the authorial voice, reflecting on what it is narrating, and perhaps appealing to the reader to share its reflections” (213). It seems also to be one of numerous indicators that this tale is lightly didactic; it is an imaginative, fictional work, with a moral theme, giving proofs and examples of what happens when one ‘goes it alone’. The characters are full of human interest. Their very real feelings and desires lead the reader to associate with them, to enjoy participating in their adventures and watching their ideas develop from plans into actions. As a result, their failures and successes strike ‘home’ more forcibly with the reader.
Sure enough, on this Palm Sunday morning, the air is full of the wildly enticing scents of Spring and the countryside: “… je marchais à grands pas, à pleins poumons, respirant cet air unique dans l’année, vierge, si frais, du matin des Rameaux, qui sent, autour de nos villages, l’eau nouvelle, la moelle d’arbre et l’odeur de l’argile” (Culotte 40). As Jean-Pierre Cauvin points out, Constantin’s exuberance grows as he breathes in the various scents: “Son exaltation croît au fur et à mesure qu’il hume les différentes senteurs sur son chemin” (148). It is surely significant that the odours Constantin can smell are ‘new’ water [which likely signifies water newly risen up out of an underground source], the pith of trees [this too carries overtones of a storage place for below-ground energy], and the odour of clay [again found in soil and for the most part, underground]. The effects of the earth’s forces are being felt by Constantin.

When Constantin arrives at the bridge, he deliberates: “Irais-je plus loin?…” (Culotte 40). He explains that the orderly and prudent fields and houses on his side seemed to recommend to him to resist the temptation. According to the ideology of Bosco’s universe proposed by Arlette Smith, this deliberation by Constantin at the Gayolle bridge could be seen as reflecting a state of being torn between indulging the more primitive and physical side of himself, prompting him towards discovery and adventure, and represented by the thick and randomly growing vegetation on the other side of the bridge, versus his conscience reminding him of what family and society have taught him of right and wrong and telling him to remain on the cultivated side and occupy himself in a more tempered fashion.
Lending support to these ideas is the fact that in France the imposition of order onto gardens, and particularly their laying-out in a formal style or in geometric patterns has traditionally symbolised the dominance of civilisation over the haphazard burgeonings of nature. Land which is worked for the purposes of horticulture or used in a controlled way by humans to form gardens, as on the village side of the Gayolle River in *L’Ane Culotte*, is land which has come under the dominance of human civilisation. That land no longer has free rein, it is managed. The cultivated side reminds Constantin, in turn, to manage his own behaviour, while the uncultivated side encourages him to cast aside such notions, and to go with his desires.

I have considered the possibility of whether the malignant force of the earth in *L’Ane Culotte*, as well as its natural growths and features, could also be symbolic of those things on earth which can get between a person and God, like money and material goods. Things that, according to Christian teaching, are fine in moderation, but if you let them get the upper hand in your life, they can pull you down and away from the goal of heaven. Such a notion brings to mind the ‘twin characters’ of abbé Chichambre and Cyprien. Chichambre, we are told loves the earth, and all of its beautiful features, but he does not let this love become the dominant force in his life. He loves the earth in moderation, and keeps his eye firmly focussed on heaven. Cyprien, on the other hand, wants to experience total happiness now, and he gives himself entirely over to obtaining it. Earthly objects and pleasures, whether they be plants and animals and notions of love and innocence, or money and worldly goods, have gotten between Cyprien and God. Constantin is presented as a young adolescent who is subject to the influence of both men and their respective world views.
The immediate issue, however, for Constantin is to decide whether to respect his grandmother’s instructions or to rely on his own judgment, and go with his desire. He feels that he can no longer resist the temptation, crosses the bridge and enters the forbidden lands. C.S. Lewis, discussing the Augustinian theology of the Fall, used by John Milton in *Paradise Lost*, notes that the essence of the Fall of Adam and Eve lay not in the fruit, but in the act of disobedience committed by eating it. Yet again, we find Constantin’s actions reflecting those committed ‘at the dawn of time’ by the first humans: the bridge in itself is harmless, but the crossing of it constituted a clear act of disobedience to his grandmother.

The Fall consisted in Disobedience. All idea of a magic apple has fallen out of sight. The apple was ‘not bad nor harmful except in so far as it was forbidden’ and the only point of forbidding it was to instil obedience. […]

St. Augustine considers the disobedience heinous precisely because obedience was so easy. (*De Civ. Dei*, XIV, 12) (68)

However, was obedience for Constantin so easy? He has been strongly tempted, and there was magic involved, as well as the fact that he is a twelve-year old boy, who likes to have the occasional adventure. This is evident in the way he stayed out late, setting bird-traps with Claudius, putting on an attitude of indifference to the precepts of his upbringing; and again in the episode where he purposefully keeps aside one of the potent incense balls, given to him by Cyprien to deliver to abbé Chichambre, and puts it secretly into the coal range at his home in the middle of the night, in order to terrify Péguinotte and cause a little amusing disorder in the household [pages 61-65].
… ce jour-là, je ne sentais en moi que le souffle de la révolte. Les cris et l’indignation de la Péguinotte m’inspiraient une joie sourde, et, loin de me terrifier, ses menaces me poussaient à des élans téméraires. Je méditais, depuis un moment, une ruse contre ma vieille amie; et, plus sa colère montait, plus le désir me tourmentait de l’exaspérer davantage.

(Culotte 61)

It is hard to discern whether these acts of bravado and mischief are supposed to be interpreted as relatively regular manifestations of Constantin’s youthful personality, or whether they are meant to be seen as signifying the wider effects of earth magic on him, or even whether they have been given as an example of what can happen to a person when they start acting independently! Perhaps a hint of all three factors can be found.

Returning to the crossing of the Gayolle Bridge: Constantin feels the power of the earth immediately. It physically lifts him and carries him to the woods. What is more, he notes that a dark subterranean force enters him:

Et tout à coup je tremblai, car alors je sentis sous mes pieds le premier mouvement de la terre. Elle montait. […] Un brusque élan du sol me porta jusque dans le bois de chênes. Cette terre sauvage me soulevait; d’autres pentes, d’autres traces s’emparaient de mes pas. […] mais de ces mouvements du sol, de ces rocs éboulés, de ces chênes noueux aux racines torses, passait en moi comme une **noire force souterraine**. (Culotte 41)
Constantin has entered into Cyprien’s land, where the powers of the earth, through the use of magic, have been invoked, and are active; and diabolical interference is growing. One needs only recall, that the night prior to this, Cyprien had set a magic trail, in order to bring Constantin up to Belles-Tuiles. Here we witness the earth playing its role, by physically thrusting the boy onto the trail. A certain ambivalence can be detected in the earth’s participation in the luring of Constantin: it seems to be lending aid to Cyprien; however, ultimately, we may recall, the earth is playing an extended trick on Cyprien. In the bigger picture, it is Cyprien who is being slowly lured into a trap; Cyprien may exert domination over the earth within the demarcations of Belles-Tuiles, but outside of those limits, the earth exists in its savage, passionate form, and it slowly works to ensnare the man who venerates, yet seeks to control it. The act of getting Constantin up to Belles-Tuiles starts off the process which will eventually bring Cyprien down.

It may be too, that the earth’s movement is symbolic of Constantin’s new-found self-reliance; in crossing the bridge, Constantin has resolved to act independently, and the mood of self-reliance takes a sudden and violent hold on him. It is interesting to note that the earth not only moves him physically, but also captures his soul and thereby leads him through the woods: “L’attrait qu’elle exerçait dans mon âme m’attira sous le bois de chênes” (Culotte 41).

Once again, a consideration of the story of Adam and Eve can throw some light on these events. God forbade them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After they had eaten the fruit, Adam and Eve changed; they became more aware of themselves and realised they were naked, for example; and they also became aware of the
potential for evil, which included the setting of themselves at the centre of their lives and actions. There seems to be a recurring theme throughout Bosco’s novels of the attraction experienced by the human soul towards both light and dark. I suggest that this theme is also present in L’Ane Culotte, and at this point in the book, we see Constantin, now having committed his act of disobedience, and ‘fallen’ so to speak, experiencing a new kind of awareness. He himself declares that his soul has been moved, and it is with a good deal of delight that he is exploring this new environment. “J’avais peur et j’étais pénétré de joie” (42). Perhaps Bosco is suggesting also, that because of the Fall of Adam and Eve, humanity is forever after fated to be attracted and moved by forces both good and evil.

Georges Poulet also comments on this section of L’Ane Culotte, suggesting that it is at this moment that Constantin directly experiences a jolt of energy originating in the centre of the earth: just as the earth’s energy is visibly manifest in the geography of the landscape, Poulet maintains that this same energy rises up out of the earth, and is able to travel beyond the surface, up into the beings who move upon it:

La terre est avant tout une énergie qui se déploie, qui se fait sentir concrètement et même brutalement, au-delà et au-dessus des limites de sa sphère orginelle, par le mouvement qu’elle engendre et poursuit jusqu’à la surface du sol. Mais elle est aussi ce qui en engendrant les levées et les accidents du sol, détermine des levées et des accidents de toutes sortes dans l’âme même de celui qui s’y trouve sujet. Sous l’action de la terre, la surface du sol se soulève, mais je me soulève aussi moi-même. (187)
According to Poulet, Bosco’s main characters are able to sense a particular force of reanimation taking effect within themselves; an animation, sourced directly from the depths of the earth, which makes contact with the soul, but affects the body. It is an outside force acting on them: “…c’est renaître essentiellement par le truchement d’un mystérieux autrui” (186). This action on the part of the earth, enables it to continue its sphere of influence above and beyond the boundaries of its surface. Poulet asserts that there is an underlying, and constant, sense of vertical movement in the universe of Bosco’s novels. In its flow, this vertical movement of telluric energy, now reaching above the earth’s surface, carries the character, in its ascension, to new levels of consciousness; at the same time, making use of the person to facilitate its own upward movement. “Elle constitue ce sens essentiel de la verticalité qui se montre sans cesse dans son œuvre, parfois en empruntant la direction d’en bas, sous la forme d’une descente dans l’abîme, […] mais qui, le plus souvent, s’affirme par le mouvement contraire, par la montée de l’être et son émergence à quelque haut niveau” (188). Poulet further proposes that the scents and odours that affect the characters, along with rivers, fires, smoke and other natural phenomena, are vehicles of upward movement, agents effectively of the earth, participants in its surge. This power, originating from the earth, enters the human and penetrates his or her thoughts, often playing a dangerously powerful role: “Sans doute la puissance qui vient de la terre constitue une transcendance. […] Elle pénètre à l’intérieur même des pensées humaines et y exerce un rôle parfois despotique” (196). Certainly, this idea fits with the negative development of Cyprien’s personality and character; Constantin, too, comes to feel the strong pull towards Belles-Tuiles and an inability to clear his mind of it, over an extended period of time.
Jean Onimus comments, too, on Bosco’s skillful evocation of scents and odours, emphasizing both their poetic function of expressing the inexpressible, and like Poulet, their power to enter the body of the character, thus bringing the influence of their point of origin into that human body. Taking it a step further, he suggests that while the human body takes in the odour and is thus infiltrated with nature, so too does the body become more aligned with nature, implicitly giving something of itself to the natural world:

“Prodigieux élargissement de la conscience qui, en embrassant le monde, en se «cosmosant», en se diluant dans la vie universelle, imprègne la nature de sa propre substance” (“A l’écoute”131). Poetically, this is a beautiful idea, but in Bosco’s universe, as pointed out by both Onimus and Smith, fusion with nature smacks of danger for the individual: the danger of losing one’s unique humanity and dissolving into the greater natural world.

There is a definite echo here, I think, of the pagan worldview colliding again with the Christian one. Alongside notions of the underworld, it was also widely held in ancient times that at death the body rejoins the natural cosmos. This notion of the person becoming absorbed into the earth or the sea implies the loss of that human’s individuality and specificity; in effect, the loss of the individual soul, the link with God. To merge with nature in Bosco’s universe is, as discussed in Chapter One, to enter the void. This occurrence poses a great risk, and it can occur when one lets oneself become absolutely aligned and associated with nature. Going ‘one’s own way’, ignoring the instructions of
superior powers or following the promptings of curiosity are all, I suggest, deemed to be following the ways of nature (as opposed to the ways of grace and salvation)\textsuperscript{38}.

Constantin, having made a conscious decision to follow the way of nature, has entered the uncultivated, wild zone, and has literally felt the earth thrust him further in. Thinking himself free of strictures, he does not realize that his act of disobedience has now opened up the way for malevolent influences from the earth to infiltrate him.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Culotte appears at this point. Note that, for the first time, Constantin begins to experience a feeling of unreality. This will occur every time he is with or near Cyprien and / or Culotte, on the mountainous side of the Gayolle. My feeling is that this is an indication that the influence of magic is present and active. Arlette Smith’s interpretation is that the feeling of unreality results from the malevolent forces of the untamed earth, exerting their power to destroy the rational faculties of anyone who is not pre-armed against them: “[la terre en friche] est redoutable parce qu’elle dégage une puissance maléfique dont l’effet est entamer et même de détruire les facultés rationnelles de quiconque ne se prémunit pas contre elle” (67). Constantin, having just committed an act of disobedience, and being very young and quite innocent still, is not pre-armed against malefic forces, rather he is wide-open to their influence. At this very moment, he is exposed to undesirable temptations and passions in the guise of the tumultuous earth. The reader can immediately see the effects: Constantin appears

\textsuperscript{38} The fifteenth century writings of Saint Thomas à Kempis provide us with some helpful guidelines to discerning a person who follows nature:

Nature desire sçavoir choses secrètes et sçavoir nouvelletéz; elle veut apparaor par dehors, et experimenter plusieurs choses par sens; elle desire estre cogneue, et faire choses dont puissent venir louenges et grans admiracions. Mais Grace ne desire sçavoir ou congnoistre nouvelletez ou curiositez, car toutes telles choses viennent et naissent de la première corruption de nature, pour quoy rien n’est durable ou parmanant sur terre. (353)
to have entered into a state of rapture, declaring that Culotte is no longer an ordinary earthly donkey, but rather a model, or a form of the perfect donkey; strongly recalling Plato’s notion of ‘The Forms’. “Il etait beau, le poil luisant, étrillé de frais, couvert de rosée odorante et il semblait irréel. Ce n’était plus un âne de la terre, un baudet de village; mais l’âne-type, l’âne pur, l’idée même de l’âne” (Culotte 42). For Constantin, Culotte miraculously embodies all the donkeys from history, including the one which carried Jesus into Jerusalem. Culotte, like the fox, takes on echoes of other members of his species, which have travelled down to us through history; animals possessing special literary and cultural associations. We are drawn to think of the Golden Ass of Apuleius, of Cadichon, the intelligent and good-hearted donkey character in the Comtess de Ségur’s Mémoirs d’un âne, and Bottom the Donkey, doted on for an evening, in Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream: “C’était l’âne enchanté, l’âne magique. Il n’avait plus d’âge. Il arrivait du fond de l’histoire des ânes, chargé de toutes les légendes d’ânes qui peuvent courir le monde; mais les dépassant toutes. C’était l’âne du Jour des Palmes, l’âne de la Fête des Rameaux” (Culotte 42). Curiously, this passage strongly links Constantin’s journey up to Belles-Tuiles, where he encounters Cyprien’s paradise, with that of “le Dieu de la Fête des Palmes” who visits the Paradise of abbé Chichambre’s sermon, each year, all alone, on the back of his donkey.

Significantly, Culotte is covered in fragrant dew. As Jean-Pierre Cauvin remarks, Culotte appears as a: “véritable distillation des senteurs de la montagne” (149). Constantin hears the donkey speak to him, asking him to climb onto his back. Culotte verbalises an important link between himself, Cyprien and Constantin, of which the reader has already seen some development. Culotte states that all three of them are
united in their love for the mountain: “Je sais que tu aimes la montagne, comme moi et comme mon maître, M. Cyprien, que tu ne connais pas” (Culotte 43). This is yet another example of the skillful character linking, which is evident in L’Ane Culotte. As mentioned earlier, Cyprien and abbé Chichambre are linked in their search for paradise and love for the earth; Cyprien and Constantin are linked in their temptations and falls; and Constantin and Culotte are linked by the fact that they both experience a similar reaction to Cyprien’s earth magic, as discussed above.

Constantin rides up to Belles-Tuiles on Culotte’s back; it is a magical journey, seemingly untouched by the notions of time and distance. In his rapture, Constantin fuses (dangerously) with his surroundings. He comments, without showing the least surprise, that he has become one body with Culotte:

…je faisais corps avec l’âne; sa chaleur se glissait tout le long de mes cuisses et passait dans mes reins; le jeu du moindre de ses muscles était sensible aux miens. Il ne marchait plus; je marchais moi-même, et nous formions comme un grand être tiède touché par le printemps, un quadrupède humain, ... (Culotte 44)

This is, of course, tantamount to becoming a type of centaur, a creature which has traditionally represented the two sides of man: the civilised side versus the animal side, intellect versus instinct. Constantin lets pleasure, the animal pleasures of the senses, fill him and take him over until he actually feels that he has ceased to exist as an individual entity, rather he has become one with the natural elements around him: “Mes plaisirs occupaient toute mon étendue intérieure. Je n’étais plus moi-même; je n’étais plus Constantin Gloriot, comme je l’avais cru jusqu’alors sur la foi de mon entourage; j’étais
la montagne et le ciel …” (Culotte 45). Looking into European history, we learn that blendings between animals and humans were once greatly feared, along with an anxiety about the types of passions such a being may possess: “In the Middle Ages, […] before modern biology revealed that humans are simply the most highly developed animal species, the divide between human and animal was even vaster, and the idea of any crossover at all was abhorrent. According to medieval belief, the outward adoption of an animal form implied the loss of a human soul, …” (Morrison 84). Constantin may indeed be compromising the existence of his soul at this point. According to Jean Onimus, when a character declares that he has become one with an aspect of the natural environment, he or she is, in fact, plunging into the void:

Fréquentes sont dans l’œuvre de Bosco ces syncopes de la conscience, lorsque le personnage se dissout dans l’informe, perd ses prises sur le «réel», […]. Impardonnable trahison! Et quel mensonge! Car, loin de «devenir le monde» le contemplateur plonge dans le néant. La nature est impersonnelle: quand on s’en approche de trop près on se dépersonnalise, on n’est plus rien…” (“Le Mal” 133-134)

On arrival at Belles-Tuiles, Constantin awakens a little; however, the magic is still present: Culotte seems to glide through the gate, in a stream of white light, making no noise with his hooves whatsoever. Constantin records that he felt he was being transported by a supernatural donkey, the shadow of a donkey, yet he could feel its warmth between his thighs. The whole episode is very reminiscent of a dream, and in
fact, when Constantin sits down to talk with Cyprien he notes this fact: «Nous nous avons assis. Je croyais rêver» (Culotte 47).

39 An interesting comparison can be made between this scene featuring Culotte and Constantin ascending the mountain, with an exchange which takes place between Culotte and the boy, Pascalet [Constantin’s cousin, incidentally], in Barboche. Pascalet, also seated on the verge between sleep and wakefulness, is approached by Culotte and offered the opportunity of riding on his back up the nearby mountain: “«Et nous n’irons plus à travers ces champs, qui sont plats, mais sous les pinèdes pleines d’écureuils et sous les chênes accrochés aux pentes. Toutes ces herbes qui embaument l’air, l’air si vif des collines, …»” (Barboche 52). Pascalet does not take the opportunity, but the experience offered is painted in very similar colours to the one actually experienced by Constantin. Significantly, in Barboche the donkey’s offer is clearly treated as a temptation. Pascalet, who willingly admits that the donkey spoke the words his heart wanted to hear, words that were, in fact, already in him, alongside his dreams of the ‘earthly paradise’, is on the point of mounting the donkey, when the little dog, Barboche, whose role is that of guardian angel, appears, barking, and sends Culotte away. One wonders if the child’s hunger for ‘the marvellous’, whilst being portrayed by Bosco as one of the great gifts of childhood, could also at times act as a lure, leading child characters astray? In both cases, after all, to accompany the donkey calls for an act of disobedience. Had he gone, Pascalet would have effectively abandoned his Aunt Martine, sleeping in the straw alongside him all the while, and in whose care he was under. Just as in Constantin’s case, would this not have constituted an act of disobedience to one’s superior powers?

40 L’Ane Culotte is a book which presents a mixture of the everyday realities found in the novel, alongside examples of the supernatural and the fantastic, which form part of the romance tradition. Romantic elements are ever-present in the journal recorded by Cyprien, who after all, is the possessor of supernatural powers. However, in Constantin’s narrative, the slant is different: in a series of episodes, like those just considered, when Constantin ascends the mountain on Culotte’s back, Bosco has portrayed his young hero’s journey up the mountain in such a way as to render the boy’s recollection of events equivocal; for example, Constantin declares that he does not know how he got onto Culotte’s back, he states that he could not even guess how long the ascension of the mountain took, because his sense of time had vanished, he declares that when Culotte stopped, he was awakened, and that when Cyprien invited him to sit at a little stone table, he thought he was dreaming. All of these comments serve to make an alternative understanding of events possible: Constantin may have dreamt the whole thing, or he may have been hallucinating. Bosco uses this device again, later in Constantin’s narrative, when the boy stumbles upon Cyprien’s magical gathering of the animals of the forest. Constantin had been walking under the hot Provencal summer sun all day, and had fallen asleep, desperately tired, a few hours earlier, only to awaken and witness the extraordinary scene of the animals dancing to Cyprien’s music and the sacrifice of the fox on the white rocks. “Je ne me souviens pas de m’être parfaitement éveillé, tant ce qui m’arriva ensuite reste encore aujourd’hui enveloppé d’étrangeté et contredit aux habitudes de ma raison. Je pris sans doute une autre position entre le sommeil et la veille, j’occupai un point de moi-même où me parvenaient à la fois et les mystérieuses fées de rêve et la simple fraîcheur de la nuit” (86-87). The reader is left wondering if Constantin indeed actually saw this, or did he dream it?
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**Constantin: Temptation and Fall #2**

The ‘domino effect’ is in full swing now: Constantin’s yielding to temptation, and entering the forbidden lands has led to his finding himself up at Belle-Tuiles and having an interview with Cyprien. His curiosity has been satisfied, and now he knows where Culotte comes from, and who his master is. The seeds of Constantin’s next temptation, are sown during this visit to Belles-Tuiles. The ‘seeds’ are the almond bough and the incense, which Cyprien gives him, with the instruction to take them to abbé Chichambre. In doing so, it will turn out, that unwittingly Cyprien is sowing the seeds also for the destruction of his dream and his happiness. Diabolical interference is clearly suggested: when Constantin turns to wave goodbye to Cyprien, he sees two mysterious eyes gleam out of a niche in the house, for a split second. Constantin is stunned. “Je vis le vieux qui me faisait un petit salut amical. Mais tout à coup ce que je découvris derrière lui m’emplit de stupeur. Dans l’intérieur de la maison le rideau de la niche avait glissé. On apercevait un large trou noir. Au fond de ce trou étincelaient deux yeux” (Culotte 56).

This is the serpent, doing the devil’s work: setting up a situation, which, when it unfolds, will cause destruction and bitter pain for Cyprien, and banishment for Constantin.

This is a clear set-up, evidenced by the fact that when Constantin arrives at Peïrouré, anxious because he is carrying a huge almond branch, and worried sick that he is going to be seen with it, miraculously he finds the village deserted. Everything goes well, he says, until he reaches the church; then the next action in the devilish plan occurs. Just as he thinks he is safe, he hears a laugh above him: “J’étais sauvé. Au moment de pousser la porte j’entendis quelqu’un qui riait. Je levai les yeux. Dans une lucarne, sous
le toit de Bourguelle, une tête se retira vivement que je ne reconnus pas. On m’avait vu” (Culotte 57).

Ten days later, the plan unfolds yet further. While walking near the church, the saddler’s daughter, Anne-Madeleine Bourguelle, steps out. She confronts Constantin with the fact that it was she who saw him bringing the almond bough to the church. She assures him that she has been so kind in not telling anyone, but if Constantin wants her to continue to keep silent about it, then he must bring her a similar almond bough by the following evening. Constantin is frightened. He spends a sleepless night wondering where he can obtain an almond branch from. “Anne-Madeleine m’effrayai. Elle parlerait sûrement si je n’obéissais pas à son caprice. Mais pourquoi ce caprice?…” (Culotte 71). He does not even consider the option of not doing her bidding. He is very scared of his grandmother finding out. This is another case of the transgression of a rule given by superiors. The rule being that of the village, in general, that you do not cut off almond branches when they are in bloom. “Crime impardonnable! Car personne, chez nous, ne touche à l’amandier au moment de la floraison. L’arbre semble sacré;…” (Culotte 56). However, this time there is a slight twist: Constantin did not rip the branch off, which Anne-Madeleine saw him with, but, because he was seen carrying it, he knows he would be accused of it. Were his grandmother to question him, he would have to admit everything, in order to explain, and this would involve telling her that he had disobeyed her and crossed the Gayolle.

The thought of his grandmother finding out everything, frightens Constantin to such an extent, that he determines to obtain a branch from somewhere in order to keep Anne-Madeleine quiet. In the end, he decides that it will have to be from Fleuriade,
because there are people watching everywhere else. He does not want to go and steal from Cyprien, but at the same time he admits that a violent and bizarre feeling is drawing him up there. Apart from the effects of Cyprien’s magic, which Constantin is unaware of, he explains that he is drawn by a mystery he has perceived there: “Dans un coin de ce paradis, M. Cyprien nourrissait un secret; et je pensais, au milieu de la nuit, à cette niche noire, où j’avais vu deux yeux étinceler, puis brusquement s’éteindre” (Culotte 71).

Curiosity leads one astray in this universe! Constantin’s desire to uncover the secret also recalls the teachings of à Kempis, quoted above: “Nature desire sçavoir choses secrètes…”.

Constantin goes up to Fleuriade and, despite his regret and sadness in having to do so, he rips, with great difficulty, a branch from one of the almond trees there. This action marks Constantin’s second fall; it reflects his decision to ignore the instructions of superior powers [the adults of the village] and to rely on himself to fix a situation. Like before, at the bridge, the significant fact is not so much the ripping of the branch, as the fact that he knows he is committing an act of disobedience, yet still does it.

Furthermore, Constantin has no notion of the ramifications for the garden, and Cyprien, that ‘killing’ a branch will have. John Leonard, in his Introduction to Paradise Lost, comments that “[Milton’s] Adam and Eve know what is required of them. But they do not understand what is at stake” (xxxi). Similarly, Constantin knows that it is wrong to take branches from almond trees, but he does not know that by taking it, he will bring about the eventual destruction of Cyprien’s garden.

A fascinating point, which is worth noting, is that in the first ‘temptation and fall’ episode, Constantin is tempted like Eve; and in the second episode, he gives in like Adam
[save the fierce desire he feels to go to Belles-Tuiles, there is no temptation the second time, he feels he has to get a branch, and sets about doing it, even though he knows it is very wrong]. If we compare this episode in L’Ane Culotte with the story of the Fall of the first humans, we can easily identify the points they have in common: Eve converses with the serpent, gives into the temptation presented to her and eats of the forbidden fruit, and then gives some to Adam. It is not stated, in the Bible, whether Adam put up any objection to this, it merely says that he then ate of it too; Saint Augustine, however, declared that it is likely that Adam only agreed to eat of it because of the relationship between he and Eve:

The rebel, in virtue of his angelic prestige and his superior nature subdued the serpent to his will in spiritual wickedness, and by misusing it as his instrument he had deceitful conversation with the woman – no doubt starting with the inferior of the human pair so as to arrive at the whole by stages, supposing that the man would not be so easily gullible, and could not be trapped by a false move on his own part, but only if he yielded to another’s mistake41. (570)

This is the interpretation followed by John Milton in Paradise Lost. In L’Ane Culotte I suggest, it is implied that, in like vein, Constantin gave in to Anne-Madeleine’s request, not because he too was tempted, but rather because he felt he had to. Reflecting

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41 Not without a touch of humour, Bosco puts words with a similar meaning into the mouth of the retired religious, [hired as tutor to Pascalet and Gatzol], Frère Théopiste, in Le Renard dans l’île: “Si le pauvre Adam a fini la pomme, c’est tout simplement par bonté. Il ne voulait pas vexer son épouse” (111). The question of who was more at fault develops into a heated argument, conducted via the two boys, between the elderly Brother and Pascalet’s Aunt Martine, who holds the opposite opinion [i.e. that Eve merely tasted it, but Adam, gobbled up the whole thing, and enjoyed it]: “Et il la mange toute, jusqu’aux pépins. Il la finit! C’est ça et rien que ça, le gros péché, le plus gros de tous les péchés, la gourmandise!” (Le Renard dans l’île 110).
the Augustinian version of the Fall story, Anne-Madeleine looked out her bedroom window and saw the magnificent almond branch that Constantin was carrying, a thing that no-one in the village would ever countenance cutting down in its prime, and she looked at it and was tempted. She decided she wanted one for herself. The implication is there that the devil was behind Anne-Madeleine’s temptation, because although she never saw the serpent, the serpent was up at Belles-Tuiles, where the almond bough came from, and has been seen to be the orchestrator of a carefully constructed plan. The reader may recall that Constantin saw the serpent’s eyes gleaming from the depths of the dark niche as he made his way back down to Peïrouré with the almond branch.

Constantin is aware that the need to obtain an almond branch is a direct consequence of his initial disobedience, and is very serious. He describes it as “mon dessein sacrilège” (Culotte 73). He does not realise how true his words actually are, and that this action will devastate Cyprien and lead to the end of his garden. However, he is prepared to do it in order to save his own skin. It is interesting to note that one of his biggest fears, prompting him to commit the sacrilege, is that if found out he may be sent into exile. “Et alors on apprendrait tout; on connaîtrait mon escapade à Belles-Tuiles, et grand-mère Saturnine me parlerait sans doute, comme elle ne l’avait jamais fait; après quoi on m’enverrait en exil” (Culotte 72). [My bold-type]. This, of course, recalls what happened to Adam and Eve [and Satan and his followers], after their act of disobedience. Before entering Fleuriade, Constantin talks about his fear of being exiled from his family home; he did not expect that he would end up being exiled from Fleuriade, but that is what occurs. So, ironically in his fear of being exiled from one
place he loves, he commits an act, which results in his being exiled from another place he has grown to love, with a somewhat alarming passion.

The act of exiling Constantin from Fleuriade is reminiscent of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise as related in Genesis. Conversely, the serpent sitting guarding the gate of Fleuriade recalls the creature Satan encountered in *Paradise Lost* on his first attempt to leave hell. Let us consider what happens in Constantin’s narrative first: after having removed an almond bough, with great difficulty, Constantin makes his way towards the gate of Fleuriade. He suddenly sees a beast sitting on the left portal. Night is falling, so he cannot see the beast clearly. He realises that it is a huge, exotic serpent: “C’était un serpent de la mort, grand et noir, gardien des arbres” (*Culotte* 73). Terrified, Constantin stands, uncertain what to do. Suddenly, Cyprien appears behind him, and taking the almond branch from him, pushes him towards the gate. Constantin feels terribly remorseful and wants to cry. When Cyprien removes his hand from Constantin’s shoulder, Constantin feels a horrible sensation of separation, detachment and eternal loss. “C’était une Ombre, un vieillard irréel, détaché de moi et perdu pour toujours. Le lien qu’il avait établi entre mon épouvante et son amitié pitoyable, cette vieille main calme, maintenant ne me touchait plus, et j’étais seul” (*Culotte* 74). Constantin in despair, and desperate for a word of pardon, is compelled to climb onto the back of Culotte to be taken down the mountain. Cyprien finally says that he, personally, forgives him, but in meddling with Paradise he has committed a serious act of violation.

In Genesis 3.24 we read that “[God] banished the man, and in front of the garden of Eden he posted the great winged creatures and the fiery flashing sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.” In *L’Ane Culotte*, significantly, we read that the serpent is sitting
on the gate portal as ‘guardian of the trees’. Cyprien’s actions, in this episode, recall those of God. He forces Constantin out of ‘Paradise’, he shows his intense disappointment, yet, like God, he still loves Constantin. However, in other ways, this scene demonstrates just how far removed Cyprien’s paradise is from the Eden created by God. The serpent sitting on the gatepost calls to mind a similar scene in Paradise Lost. It suggests perhaps why Constantin found the serpent there. The following lines describe the serpent-like creature Satan encountered when he made to leave hell, on his first ‘mission’ up to earth:

“… Before the gates there sat

On either side a formidable shape;

The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,

But ended foul in many a scaly fold

Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed

With mortal sting:…” [II.648b-653a] [My bold-type].

This woman turns out to be Satan’s daughter, namely “Sin” and the other hideous shape, also guarding the gate, their son “Death”. The significance that these lines of Milton’s bring to bear on the episode being examined in L’Ane Culotte, is worth considering. Firstly, Cyprien could not physically put cherubim on his gate, because despite his good intentions of creating a garden of love and innocence, his garden is nourished by evil. So, although resembling Eden, it is also in many ways, its opposite. Therefore, it is a serpent Constantin finds at the gate, not cherubim. This is a garden created by a creature of the earth, and it is guarded by another creature of the earth. There is no suggestion that Cyprien actually put the snake at the gate, leaving the reader
to consider whether the serpent positioned itself there. In doing so it asserted its
dominance in the garden. Symbolically, it may highlight both Constantin’s and
Cyprien’s sin.

Finally it is worth considering Constantin’s feelings of separation, despair and
remorse. Considering again the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, surely
Constantin’s feelings of separation echo the separation brought about at the dawn of time
between God and humanity. Prior to this God had let himself be seen by the human pair,
and He had communicated directly with them, and provided them with a secure place to
live, where they did not have to work. After the expulsion, humanity became separated
from God. Another significant fact is that this feeling of separation, which Constantin is
experiencing, parallels that soon to be felt, much more intensely, by Cyprien. That
feeling of abandonment, and total aloneness, which he expresses in his post-journal
writing; that desperate loneliness which allows the serpent room for effecting temptation:
“On n’est vraiment seul qu’à jamais. La solitude n’est pas isolement d’une heure mais
désert éternel. Je puis rencontrer demain d’autres hommes; même en leur compagnie, je
serai seul” (Culotte 203).

The feeling of separation and the loss of something loved, gives rise to despair for
both Constantin, in this episode, and for Cyprien later. The big difference between these
two frequently linked characters is made manifest now. Constantin’s feeling of despair
makes him long for forgiveness and freedom from his transgression: “… mon désespoir
me retenait là, dans l’attente d’une parole de pardon, pour me détacher de ma faute et me
rendre à moi-même” (Culotte 74). This remorse of Constantin’s shows a movement in
his state of mind, from when, earlier in the narrative, he is told-off by his grandmother for
trapping birds with Claudius, and he comments that he knew he should have cried, but a wicked pride had stopped him from doing so, to now, when he is devastated with shame over what he has done, and is desperate for Cyprien’s forgiveness. Inspired once more by Saint Augustine’s discourse on the evils of pride, Constantin’s remorse could be seen to reflect that of the apostle Peter, after he had denied knowing Jesus.

At this, Peter said to [Jesus], ‘Even if all fall away from you, I will never fall away.’ (Matt.26.33)

Peter followed [Jesus] at a distance right to the high priest’s palace, and he went in and sat down with the attendants to see what the end would be. (Matt.26.58)

A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, ‘You are certainly one of them too! Why, your accent gives you away.’ Then he started cursing and swearing, ‘I do not know the man.’ And at once the cock crowed, and Peter remembered what Jesus had said, ‘Before the cock crows, you will have disowned me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Matt.26.73-75)

According to Saint Augustine, the pain and remorse this event caused Peter taught him a well-needed lesson: “Peter’s dissatisfaction with himself, when he wept, was healthier than his complacency when he was over-confident” (574).

According to this theory, Constantin is now on the road back to redemption.
Cyprien, on the other hand, allows himself to sink further and further, and does not seek any kind of pardon, (perhaps because he does not realise that he needs to). Rather, he gets worse, he slips ever further from grace; he kills the fox and kidnaps Hyacinthe.

Constantin’s desire for forgiveness in this instance prefigures his act of reconciliation at the end of the narrative, when he says his confession to abbé Chichambre. Interestingly, Cyprien gives Constantin his word of pardon, though negating it to an extent by his statement that paradise is not to be meddled with. “Pour moi, je te pardonne; mais, vois-tu, mon enfant, il ne faut pas toucher au Paradis” (*Culotte* 75). What Cyprien means by this statement is conjectural. Perhaps he is indicating that he can give his personal forgiveness, but there is now a force in the garden which is extra to him (i.e. the serpent), or perhaps he is referring to the earth magic he has set in place.

E.D. James suggests that the magic of the garden is broken, at least in part, by Constantin’s sacrilegous action: “A venomous oriental serpent introduced rather casually into the plot destroys the harmony prevailing among the animals in Cyprien’s paradise by killing a fox. Constantin also helps to break the spell by detaching a bough of blossom from an almond tree in the garden” (12-13). This is also the view expressed by Arlette Smith. Her argument runs that Cyprien’s dominating will is the essential force behind the garden: he has obliterated the free will of the animals gathered to live there, and his will is behind the miraculous growth of the plants from the earth. When another will, a free will – that of Constantin, comes along and exercises its right to act, then the spell holding everything together breaks, or is at least weakened: “A ce propos, lorsque le jeune Constantin casse une branche d’amandier dans ce jardin dont l’essor est entièrement régi par les sortilèges de Cyprien, il commet un acte libre qui, émanant d’un
vouloir autre que celui du magicien, compromet par conséquent fatalement l’économie du projet de création de ce dernier” (69-70). Given the nature of the prevailing universal order, this argument seems to be very plausible. What is certain is that for Fleuriade, the garden of love and innocence to survive, no killing can take place there, especially by its designated heir. In some ways, that heir, Constantin, and the garden are symbolic of one another: when Constantin fails, so does the garden.

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Conclusion
This thesis has considered the fictional world of *L’Ane Culotte*, a world which is imbued with a variety of philosophical, mythological and theological elements, and it has examined the ways in which two of the characters placed in it act and interact, succeed and fail.

Chapter One commenced with a consideration of Cyprien’s quest, followed by a comparison of his character with that of the priest, abbé Chichambre, and an identification of the fundamental similarities and differences in their respective searches for paradise. The role of the fox was evaluated, leading on to an examination of the role of the earth itself: the characters’ perception of it, its influence, and the ambiguous nature of its power. The possible constitution and function of the malefic energies housed beneath the earth’s surface, and the influence of the elements, celestial bodies, and various ‘aerial souls’ were noted, as was Cyprien’s use of magic and the expectations its usage created. The final section delineated Cyprien’s moral downfall, brought about by the simultaneous growth of pride and despair. The changes that the character of Cyprien underwent through the course of the book were discussed.

Chapter Two analysed Constantin’s pursuit of adventure, or his ‘initiation journey’ towards adulthood, the temptations which beset him and the results of his choices. The connection between his ‘falls’ and those of Cyprien, were examined in the light of the Fall of Adam and Eve. Constantin’s reaction to events was compared with Cyprien’s.

It seems to be clear that in the fictional world of *L’Ane Culotte* there exists a duty to obey, without questioning, the rules and instructions of superior powers, and that to disregard them and rely on one’s own power to make independent choices amounts to a
pride which attracts punitive consequences. Cyprien and Constantin both claim the right to make their own decisions, in the full knowledge that to do so is tantamount to disobedience. The types of superior powers and the types of rules are many and varied, ranging from Grand-mère Saturnine’s interdictions, to the instructions of the island shamen who taught Cyprien magic, from the terms of the pact Cyprien made with the earth, to the duty to honour God as creator, rather than oneself.

Ultimately Cyprien chooses not to accept this. In *L’Ane Culotte* we see him move from a state of relative innocence and happiness, through to one of distress and anxiety as he grapples with personal disappointment, his inability to control everything in his garden, and the resulting damage done to the magic holding it together. Finally, giving in to the promptings of pride and despair, he performs the one action which is forbidden in the paradise he has created, and destroys it. However, he determines to proceed with his plans, still confident in his own power, or at least stubbornly set on not giving-in.

Constantin, on the other hand, whilst giving in temporarily to the temptations of adventure, is aware of his disobedience all along. Once he realises that he has gone too far, he quickly reverts to the precepts of his upbringing, expresses remorse, eventually seeks forgiveness, and, though remaining somewhat puzzled by the unfolding of events, reintegrates back into the community

It is not until we read the notes which Constantin added to Cyprien’s diary, when he is no longer recalling the events of his early adolescence, but is now recording his thoughts as an adult, two decades later, that the reader perceives in him a fuller, though, as he himself concedes, far from complete, understanding both of Cyprien’s motivations and his own burning attraction for Belles Tuiles: “Pour moi, je ne saurais relire ces quelques pages sans une émotion que les ans n’ont pu atténuer. J’y retrouve ces purs moments où je croyais toucher au jardin d’innocence. J’y vois poindre l’inquiétude et peu à peu s’offrir les prémices de l’ombre” (Culotte 149). It was, it seems, the parallels the boy drew between the celestial paradise, featuring familiar elements of earthly beauty, which abbé Chichambre had described so eloquently in church, and the magnificent and magical garden that he found up at Belles-Tuiles, so other-worldly in its perfection, yet clearly of this earth, which made Constantin feel that he had really found the earthly paradise. Writing of the landscapes of heaven, he notes: “Mais à l’image de l’abbé
Which of the two older gentlemen demonstrated to the young Constantin the path that leads eventually to paradise? It was, of course, abbé Chichambre, and Constantin’s later reflections show the reader that he ultimately worked this out:

Nous voulons tous le paradis sur terre, et l’homme se croit né pour le bonheur. N’est-ce pas naturel? Mais il est d’un esprit économe de l’âme de réserver une part de désir jusqu’à la fin. Ce n’est pas faire offense aux dons de la Terre que de les accepter et d’en jouir avec mesure; c’est plutôt donner forme à son plaisir, le marquer d’une dignité. Le reste, l’ardeur réservée, vaut pour les promesses du Ciel. Quant à moi, je crois que ce sont les plus belles. (Culotte 148)

Abbé Chichambre’s love of the earth, and his way of working with it, not against it, nor by ignoring it, alongside his charitable actions towards others, human and animal, demonstrate the ideal formula for achieving happiness in the fictional world of L’Ane Culotte.

Finally, it should be noted that an examination of the characters in L’Ane Culotte could have focussed on many other aspects; however, due to space and time constraints my research has, unfortunately, had to be confined to a single area. It would, for example, have been interesting to have made a close examination of the character of Hyacinthe, and the relationship which develops between she and Constantin, or to have made a fuller analysis of the many links and parallels existing between characters in this book. I could have considered, in more detail, the narrative techniques used in relation to

Chichambre, je ne saurais les concevoir qu’ouvertes sur des amitiés humaines, où les souvenirs de la Terre, avec ses plantes et ses animaux, ses eaux, ses nuages, formeraient l’horizon de ces lieux élevés. C’est pourquoi je n’ai pas voulu écarté de ces pages les confidences de ce vieil homme étrange qui, malgré un éclair d’égarément, eut ce sens du bonheur et me l’a donné” (Culotte 148).
character portrayal, or analysed the use of first-person narrators as main characters. The question of concurrence between the chronologies of events could have been investigated, along with an appraisal of where emphasis was placed by which character, or the ways in which the character-narrators give life to the other characters in the book. Indeed, the effect of placing a diary, describing the present and the very recent past, within a narrative which is being related at least two decades after it occurred, could have been evaluated. The characters’ linguistic registers, and the different voices perceptible within one character and between characters would also have made an absorbing study. I hope I may have the opportunity to explore one or other of these aspects in the future.

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Works Cited

Books


**Articles**


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