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# Adorable Clio: The Prose Poetry of Jean Giraudoux: Writing Against Realism

## **Abstract**

This paper considers the particularities of Jean Giraudoux's war writings *Adorable Clio* in the context of French Literature of the Great War. We focus on Giraudoux's career previous to the conflict and on his prose poetic style in the recollection to study his refusal of realistic novel techniques despite the fact they were mainly used by other contemporary soldiers-writers who wanted to testify. Thanks to previous research on Giraudoux's war writings and descriptions of his war experience, we proceed to a close reading of the text to highlight that, far from his reputation of superficiality, Giraudoux does not write only for art's sake but to express ambivalent feelings and impressions on his war experience.

## **Keywords**

First World War French Literature, Giraudoux, Adorable Clio, realism, prose poetry

*Adorable Clio: The Prose Poetry of Jean Giraudoux: Writing Against Realism*

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In February 1944, on hearing that Jean Giraudoux had just died, his friend Jean Guéhenno felt the need to remember him in his diary and, particularly, the day they met at the hospital for war convalescents in Fougères in October 1914:

I walked into the ward filled with a hundred soldiers, wounded like him. I saw him as soon as I got to the door, sitting on his bed, wearing the obligatory white gown, a man with a long face, a monocle in his eye, reading. . . . Even war had not been able to reduce him to the common measure, distract him from that will for elegance which had made him a poet in 1905. I am sure there was not another sergeant like him in the whole French army. 5th February 1944. (Guéhenno 238)

Thirty years after this scene, Guéhenno stressed that it was impossible not to recognize Giraudoux among the soldiers. The portrait he drew corresponds to the conventional depiction of Giraudoux throughout his career: a typical poet of 1905, in some ways anchored in the past, and at the same time a very singular man, always concerned with literature—even in the heart of war, in his hospital bed. And in fact, in his war writings *Lectures pour une ombre* (*Readings for a Shadow*) and *Adorable Clio*,<sup>1</sup> Giraudoux deliberately remains true to his literary style, a prose-poetic style of writing born before the war.

Jacques Body calls “Adieu à la guerre” (‘Farewell to war’), the closing text of *Adorable Clio*, “a unanimist poem” (366). Sylviane Coyault subscribes to this same terminology when she uses the terms “poème en prose” ‘prose poem’ or “poème” ‘poem’ for “Mort de Ségaux, mort de Drigeard” (‘Death of Ségaux, Death of Drigeard’), and “poetic narrative” for *Adorable Clio* as a whole: “*Adorable Clio* constitue avant tout un recueil de poèmes en prose” (90) ‘*Adorable Clio* is above all a collection of prose poems.’ Claude Allègre, for his part, describes Giraudoux’s technique in his war writings and particularly *Adorable Clio* as “poetic realism” (37). Giraudoux’s self-representation in this text is explicit. He clearly highlights his status as a poet, as in this famous example from “Nuit à Châteauroux” (‘Night in Châteauroux’), the opening text of the collection: “Je suis certes le poète qui ressemble le plus à un peintre” (*Adorable* 64) ‘I am certainly the poet who most closely resembles a painter.’ Giraudoux’s claims about poetry, as well as the writing technique in *Adorable Clio*, some of which were pointed out by Marcel Proust, will be our main concern in this study, since they demonstrate his rejection of the dominant realist or testimonial approaches to writing about war.

Giraudoux, through his poetic prose, followed a way paved by Apollinaire's call for a fully literary literature that goes beyond testimony but is not restricted to the modernist conception of art for art's sake (Beaupré *Écrire* 71-72). In this article, I will examine the way in which Giraudoux negotiated this space between testimony and art. To better understand some of the criticisms Giraudoux received, let us first address the key events in this part of his life.<sup>2</sup> Then we will focus on Giraudoux's career before the war and its influences on *Adorable Clio* and *Lectures pour une ombre*. Finally, we shall study *Adorable Clio*'s prose poetic style and composition to highlight the representation of war Giraudoux drew in this singular text.

Giraudoux, a "poet" writing about war?

Both *Lectures pour une ombre* and *Adorable Clio* mirror Giraudoux's diverse experience of war: the French front line during the first months of the conflict, the Gallipoli campaign, his mission to instruct trench warfare at Harvard University, and several periods of convalescence. In total, he spent twelve weeks on the battlefield, six at the beginning of the war in France and six in the Gallipoli Campaign. Giraudoux's war started on August 1, 1914, when he was first commissioned as a sergeant of the reserve in the 298<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of the same month, his regiment was moved to Vesoul and then spent two weeks in Alsace, without directly engaging the enemy. He was at that time a sergeant-interpreter in charge of the regimental logbook. Like many infantrymen, he often wondered about the purpose of forced marches at night and troop movement. At that point, the conflict had not yet turned into trench warfare, but rather, was still a war of movement. After its campaign in Alsace, his regiment was moved from Picardy to Champagne and then to the Paris region. Finally, it took part in the First Battle of the Marne on September 6. Ten days later, during the First Battle of the Aisne, Giraudoux was injured while engaged in the fierce assault on Vingré and sent to the hospital at Fougères where he met Guéhenno. After his convalescence and until his departure for the Dardanelles with the 176<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment on May 15, 1915, he was an instructor for recruits. His experience in the Gallipoli Campaign, from May 21 to June 21, was perhaps the most traumatic for him (Body 311). Sent back to France, Giraudoux spent a great deal of time in hospitals before being able to undertake missions to Portugal (1916) and the United States (1917). He never went back to the front but suffered from the consequences of his experience all his life, constantly afflicted by enteritis and chronic depression (Berne 76). While brief and not engaged in trench warfare on the French front, Giraudoux's contact with the front was intense enough to give him an understanding of many aspects of the soldier's life. His stylistic choices are, consequently, not to be ascribed to a distant experience of warfare, as Jean Norton

Cru has proposed was the reason for Dorgelès and Barbusse to choose the novel rather than the genre of testimony (Schoentjes 26).

In his highly critical comment on the 1921 version of Giraudoux's *Lectures pour une ombre*, most probably based on the notebook the writer kept during his convalescence at Fougères (Coyault, "À propos" 84), Cru emphasized the fact that this collection aimed primarily at fulfilling Giraudoux's literary ambitions. In his opinion, *Lectures pour une ombre* is a "récit rédigé entièrement dans un but littéraire sans aucun souci d'informer le lecteur sur quoi que ce soit" (Cru 155) 'a narration entirely written for literary ends without any concern to inform the reader about anything.'<sup>3</sup> For Cru, as for Guéhenno, Giraudoux "donne le pas sur toute autre chose à la littérature" 'places literature above everything,' which does no justice to testimony: "Il n'est pas besoin de mentionner ici la réputation d'écrivain de Giraudoux sauf pour constater que son talent de littérateur se révèle comme une faiblesse dans le genre des 'mémoires et souvenirs'" (Cru 155) 'There is no need to mention here Giraudoux's reputation as a writer except to note that his literary talent proves to be a weakness in terms of "memoirs and recollections.'" Thus, *Lectures pour une ombre* appears to Cru as a clear example of ineffective, subjective testimony because, in his opinion, Giraudoux uses an unconventional humour and a literary style that distort reality and make it impossible for the reader to identify any truth about the war. Cru does not even mention *Adorable Clio*, published in 1920, which includes "Dardanelles" (*The Dardanelles*) and "La Journée portugaise" (*Portuguese Days*), two texts from the first version of *Lectures pour une ombre*. Nor does he record Giraudoux's participation in the Gallipoli Campaign, although "Dardanelles" might have alerted him to it. However, he does allude to Giraudoux's missions abroad in Portugal and the United States, evoked in "La Journée portugaise" and "Repos au lac Asquam" (*May on Lake Asquam*) respectively. The latter was first published in 1918 in the collection *Amica America* and later incorporated into *Adorable Clio*. Due to his disapproval of Giraudoux's attitude toward war and use of poetic license, Cru may have simply ignored the rest of his output, considering that one example enough to make his point, as Giraudoux's style appeared to match his "reputation" (Cru 155).

In fact, by removing "Dardanelles" and "La Journée portugaise" from *Lectures pour une ombre* and including them in *Adorable Clio*, Giraudoux restored a certain coherence to the first volume. The timespan covered by the texts now went from August 17 to September 9, 1914, the last explicit date in "Les cinq soirs et les cinq réveils de la Marne" (*Five Nights, Five Dawns on the Marne*), with a chronological narration and a scope restricted to his first campaign. Thus, *Lectures pour une ombre* is perfectly consistent with Cru's "notebook" category, even though he considered it to be too literary. *Adorable Clio*, on the other hand, brings together narratives that are not exclusively centered on the experience of the front, and their textual genre is harder to define. In the second chapter of his book, "La

Nature de ce livre” (‘The Nature of this Book’), Cru specifies six criteria that he established to classify the literary works and testimonies he had read. Actually, the fifth and sixth of these may point to another reason why he omitted *Adorable Clio*. For the fifth, Cru explains that he only took into consideration “combatant writing” and gives to the term “*combattant*” ‘combatant,’ its literal meaning, namely “being exposed to danger” and not just carrying arms and wearing a uniform (10). *Adorable Clio* does of course contain an account of Giraudoux’s mission to the United States. For the sixth criterion, Cru explains that he chose to exclude poetry from his analysis (11), and *Adorable Clio*, as we mentioned, was mainly described as a collection of prose poetry because of Giraudoux’s style and self-portrait as a poet.

The origins of Giraudoux’s image as a poet may be found in his own self-representation, but it could be said that this image of Giraudoux was shared by his contemporaries, as illustrated in Guéhenno’s portrait or the title of Frédéric Lefèvre’s interview with Giraudoux in February 1926, “Une heure avec Giraudoux, poète et romancier français” (‘An Hour with Giraudoux, French Poet and Novelist’). Nevertheless, Giraudoux did not publish any poetry in the strictest sense of the word. In his early career, before the war, Giraudoux had published mainly short stories: some were collected in *Provinciales* (‘Provincial ways’ 1909) or *L’École des Indifférents* (‘School for the Indifferent’ 1911), while others remained uncollected until 1952 (*Les Contes d’un matin* ‘Tales for a Morning’).<sup>4</sup> Additionally, there was a first version of *Simon* (1914) which would become *Simon le Pathétique* (‘Simon the Pathetic’ 1918). Choosing to write short stories was then a way for Giraudoux to participate in the modernist movement, with its search for novelty and surprise for the reader, since he defines the *nouvelle* ‘short story’ as a genre literally based on novelty in his essay “Sur la nouvelle” (‘On the short story’): “La nouveauté sera de deux ordres: la particularité du sujet et la particularité de l’écriture” (196) ‘The novelty will be of two types: that of the subject and that of the writing.’ During the war, Giraudoux continued to experiment with style, thus creating no stylistic distinctions between his wartime texts and his other writing, as can be seen by the inclusion of a passage from his first *Simon* in “Nuit à Châteauroux” (Fouchard 43-44) or by his parody of Ulysses’s return from war in *Elpénor* (1919). In fact, while he maintained his style and originality in these texts, he began to enjoy a good literary reputation, as Cru recalls.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, Marcel Proust was entranced by “Nuit à Châteauroux” and wrote about it in his preface to Paul Morand’s *Tendres Stocks* (*Tender Shoots*), which was published in the *Revue de Paris* in November 1919. He asserted that Giraudoux’s style contradicts Anatole France’s assumption that, since the eighteenth century, French writers had lacked talent. For Proust, new writers constantly appeared on the French literary scene and Giraudoux was one of them, as he proposed a new aesthetic, opposed to realism and based on an unexpected and surprising way of

expressing relationships between realities; this is achieved through images, as in painting.

This new writer is generally fairly tiring to read and hard to understand because he brings things together through new relationships. We follow him easily through the first half of the sentence, but there we flag. . . . Original writers spring up just as original painters do. When Renoir started to paint, people did not recognise the things he depicted. To succeed, the original painter, the original writer, proceed in the way oculists do. The treatment—whether in their painting, their writing—is not always pleasant. When it is over, they tell us: “now look”. And suddenly the world, which has not been created only once, but is recreated as often as a new artist emerges, appears to us—so different from the old world—in perfect clarity. (Proust n. pag.)

The importance and originality of the artist’s individual gaze, valued by Symbolists and Modernists alike (Brix 124), are present in Giraudoux’s texts written during the war. In fact, in most of these writings, with the exceptions of *Simon le pathétique* and *Élpenor* (1918), the narrator is clearly identified as the author. But it is the narrator in *Adorable Clio* who places the greatest emphasis on his vocation and his literary choices: he represents himself as a poet, and the act of writing is described explicitly and insistently (Fouchard 48). Albert Thibaudet claims in “Réflexions sur la littérature, Autour de Jean Giraudoux” (“Thoughts on Literature, around Jean Giraudoux,”) published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in December 1919, that Giraudoux was the writer who fulfilled the Symbolist aesthetic program in the narrative field when none of the original Symbolists had been able to do so (1066). As far as Giraudoux himself was concerned, he explained to Lefèvre in 1926 that he considered the narrative texts he had written up to then to be “a sort of poetic meandering” (“Une heure” 46), refusing to limit poetry to poems composed in verse. In this he was like the Symbolists who developed their theory of the prose poem to satisfy their need for new literary forms to express modern reality, attacking the traditional boundary between prose and poetry (Brix 37). When Giraudoux calls himself a poet in his prose texts or interviews, the meaning he gives the term is not always clear, as he did not write any theoretical texts and often contradicted himself (Coyault, “Les combats” 324). However, his views are generally consistent with the conception of poetry propounded by Symbolism; they also recall Jakobson’s “poetic function” of language, which is not necessarily linked to verse, but created by the use of techniques that highlight the literary nature of texts such as circular structures, the repetition of images, plays on words, or anything else that stresses the materiality of words (Brix 20). The emphasis on literature, already evident in Giraudoux’s early work and noted by Proust in his

comparison of Giraudoux to Renoir, is particularly striking in “Nuit à Châteauroux.”

The narrator of this text, sent on an unofficial mission to bring an officer’s wife two paintings by Falconnet and Natoire for safekeeping, spends a night at the Châteauroux military hospital, apparently suffering from appendicitis. Giraudoux deliberately chose the town where he spent six years as a schoolboy as the setting for his reflection on how war had changed him. He also reinforced the sense of retrospection through a chance encounter with a former friend from his student years in Munich, Pavel Dolgorouki. This parodical rewriting of the typical hospital scene (Giraudoux does not hesitate to use irony), allows the narrator to connect with a past that war had dislodged from his memory and, at the same time, to bid farewell to his childhood: “Mon enfance, adieu!” (92) ‘Farewell, my childhood!’ In addition to reflecting on how war has changed the two men, the text establishes the origin of the narrator’s literary vocation, as the reader is told that he has been writing since his childhood. Giraudoux would later find in Pavel the model for one of his first characters. Another interesting aspect of the text’s structure is that Giraudoux inserts a one-night express correspondence between the two men when they are both unfortunately stuck in bed and only have a few hours before Pavel is to be transferred at dawn to another hospital.

By this narrative subterfuge, Giraudoux draws attention to the centrality of literature in the text. As Maurice Blanchot recalls in “Après *Les Liaisons dangereuses*” (‘After *Dangerous Liaisons*’), when the writer chooses to write an epistolary novel, “Il [l’écrivain] se sert d’une forme de réalisme qui est une entorse au réalisme. . . . Le réalisme du romancier consiste alors dans l’imitation d’une littérature irréfléchie par une littérature calculée” (Blanchot 170-71) ‘The writer uses a realistic form that breaks the rules of realism. . . . The novelist’s realism then consists of an imitation of spontaneous literature by a calculated form.’ In this piece Blanchot in fact refers to Giraudoux’s own article “Choderlos de Laclos” (published in 1941) in the critical collection *Littérature* (‘Literature’) in which Giraudoux asserts that the epistolary novel is a perfect genre to express tragedy and poetry in a tragic age, and especially in a context in which tragedy, as a theatrical genre, has nearly disappeared (*Littérature* 68). Like Laurence Campa who finds a source of poetry in the choral composition of Georges Duhamel’s *Vie des Martyrs* (*The New Book of Martyrs*) (117), Giraudoux postulates that the letters of the secondary characters in an epistolary novel operate like a tragic chorus, while those of the two main protagonists answer each other like gigantic rhyming couplets, or like ode and epode (*Littérature* 68). Even if there are no secondary characters’ letters in “Nuit à Châteauroux,” it may well be that Giraudoux chose the epistolary technique to create his own poetic atmosphere and give his narration a tragic tone through the introduction of correspondence. Furthermore, the narrator’s refusal to speak about his dead friends with Pavel is also significant (*Adorable* 71), enabling



him to create a contrast between the period of his youth, consigned to the past, and the present reality of war.

However, while some Symbolists and Modernists divorced art from reality, Giraudoux's choice of "*fantaisie*" 'fantasy' seems to be a reaction against the aesthetics of realism rather than a rejection of literature's ability to represent reality, as stated in a note he wrote during the Great War: "Il y a un réalisme dans la littérature fantaisiste et autrement difficile à saisir et à tenir que dans la littérature des naturalistes" (*Oeuvres I*, xxviii-xxix) 'There is indeed a realistic dimension in fantasy literature that is much harder to penetrate and hold than in naturalist literature.'<sup>6</sup>

Giraudoux's poetic style: the representation and creation of meaning without realism

The creation of both *Lectures pour une ombre* and *Adorable Clio* was quite complex and attests to the difficulty Giraudoux found in writing about his experience: "L'abondance des réécritures dévoile surtout la difficulté à construire l'œuvre littéraire la mieux adaptée pour surmonter le traumatisme" (Coyault, "À propos" 93) 'The abundance of rewritings mainly reveals the difficulty of constructing the work best adapted to overcoming trauma.' The standpoint Giraudoux adopts to represent war in *Adorable Clio* is characterized by distance: both physical, as when the narrator is writing at a distance from the front, and temporal, for he often recalls his experience. "Nuit à Châteauroux" is written after four years of war and depicts some memories of his childhood and youth in a narration set in a war context. In "Entrée à Saverne" ('Entry into Saverne') Giraudoux describes the moment when French soldiers entered this Alsatian village at the end of the war. "Mort de Ségaux, mort de Drigeard" depicts in retrospective mode the narrator's memories of his Marne campaign: "Il y a aujourd'hui quatre ans" (127) 'Four years ago today.' The two 1917 texts, "La Journée portugaise" and "Repos au Lac Asquam" are written from a distant setting, as the action takes place in two countries affected by war but where there are no battlefields. In "Repos au Lac Asquam," the narrator, sent to Harvard to instruct students in trench warfare, is on furlough at Lake Asquam, which creates a double spatial and temporal remoteness. In the same way, Portugal is a country that has been spared by war, which also creates a double distance for the narrator. From front line and war time: "Ton doux pays était pour moi, depuis deux ans, le premier où il n'y eût pas la guerre" (185) 'Your sweet country has been, for me, for the last two years, the first in which war was not present.' In the case of "Dardanelles," recollections associated with mythological reference to the Trojan war place Giraudoux's testimony in a more global perspective of the nature of war and men's feelings toward it (207). Thanks to his distanced point of view, Giraudoux does not just

represent battles and battlefields; he also draws attention to the fact that he is not writing too close to the event, as if he wanted to point out that this recollection was a piece of literary writing and not solely a testimony directly inspired by the experience of the front.

In this respect, the structure of *Adorable Clio* is fundamentally different from that of *Lectures pour une ombre*, as Giraudoux reorganizes his war time according to an inverted chronological order (Rieuneau 82) while simultaneously using a circular structure whereby the farewell to childhood in “Nuit à Châteauroux” foreshadows the farewell to war of “Adieu à la guerre.” The last text, “Adieu à la guerre” combines past memories and present time—as in “Nuit à Châteauroux”—to bring the parentheses of war to a close (Beaupré, “La guerre” 180). Also, its composition recalls that of a “good student’s essay,” reinforcing the parallels between the two texts (Body 366). The collection can therefore be divided into three parts (childhood and preparation for the war, war episodes depicted in a non-chronological order, and return home). Consequently, it may be considered a variation on the mythic structure defined by John Cruickshank as the dominant model for war novels: “In novel after novel we find a three-part sequence consisting of anticipation of the battle, experience of the battle, withdrawal from battle” (45). Although *Adorable Clio* is not a novel, its structure could be ascribed to a clear attempt at organizing the fragmented reality that influenced the structure of war novels, as Micheline Kessler-Claudet suggests when she analyses the mythic sequence of the same (74). We can argue that the particularity of *Adorable Clio* is to bring together individual memories and new impressions, shared by many young men of the same generation, within a mythic pattern and a circular structure. Maurice Rieuneau classifies this text among narrations that aestheticize war, in contrast to the pathos of Barbusse’s *Le Feu (Under Fire)*, because of the specific conjunction of past and present that bears little relationship to history, and whose muse, Clio, is not really a model for Giraudoux’s narration (82). In fact, *Le Feu* and *Adorable Clio* share the mythic succession but not the individual reflection allowed by the distant point of view and the contrast produced by the union of different temporalities. Like Barbusse, Giraudoux published his texts during the war, but its genre and lack of realistic tone constitute major differences between the two works.

Also, if Giraudoux avoids pathos, it is largely because he believes in the need to adapt his style to his tragic subject matter and not from any desire for superficiality as an escape from reality. Unlike Barbusse or Dorgelès, Giraudoux does not incorporate trench slang into his narration in order to respect “reality.” Giraudoux indirectly criticizes this technique when, in a letter, Pavel portrays the narrator as a man able to use a “noble language” in response to situations that are extremely frequent in wartime: “Je me disais que douce est la certitude de posséder un ami qui, devant la mort, devant le mal, devant un supplice honteux, se plaindrait dans un langage noble, ne pourrait appeler à son secours que les dieux honnêtes,

les hommes honnêtes. Jamais un juron dans ton langage . . .” (*Adorable* 49-50) ‘I told myself: Sweet is the certainty of having a friend who, when confronted with death, with evil, with a shameful torture, would lament in a noble language, would call only upon honest gods, honest men, for help. Never a swear word from you . . .’ This refusal of a very powerful instrument of realistic tone emphasizes Giraudoux’s determination to go beyond this particular war context and escape from pathos without excluding any subject.

This is particularly true of death, which is a central theme of war writing, as indicated in the quote above. In “Mort de Ségaux, mort de Drigeard,” the narrator lampoons Rogers’s practice of making an inventory of how his fellow poets died in war and collecting their last texts: “[il] recueille aussi le dernier poème de tous les poètes tués. Il recueille même leurs dernières lettres en prose, où parfois, comme les armes d’un guerrier qui s’habille un peu vite dans son appartement, deux mots par hasard se heurtent, riment, . . . et l’on tressaille” (*Adorable* 171) ‘[he] also collects the last poem of all the poets who have been killed. He even collects their last prose letter in which sometimes, like the weapons of a warrior getting dressed in a hurry in his quarters, two words chance to clash, to rhyme . . . and we all tremble.’ The trembling may be due either to excitement or to emotion, but for Giraudoux it refers to the search for a voyeuristic emotion that he rejects by refusing to describe Seeger’s death to Rogers. To the reader he is not much more explicit: “oublions qu’il va mourir. Ne parlons plus de la mort de Seeger. Seeger lève la tête. Le ciel est tout bleu . . . . Un peuplier, oui un peuplier se dresse à l’horizon. Seeger gravit doucement la marche de tir. Un oiseau, oui, un . . .” (174) ‘let us forget that he is going to die. Speak no more about Seeger’s death. Seeger raises his head. The sky is completely blue . . . . A poplar, yes a poplar stands on the horizon. Seeger gently mounts the firing step. A bird, yes, a bird . . .’ Here, Giraudoux finds a lyrical way to evoke Seeger’s death by simulating his point of view: the poet fixes his attention on natural elements and does not evoke the attack so that he dies as a poet and not as a soldier-poet. A single element, the “fire step,” gives a hint of the real situation, and the ellipsis conveys tact and discretion. It does not matter how Seeger actually died; what ultimately matters is that he died as a poet, as the man that he was.

Nevertheless, this example does not fully describe the relationship between death and the narrator, who uses a wide range of techniques to represent it, either lyrically, in the most explicit way, or metaphorically, as when he compares a trickle of blood in Drigeard’s mouth to a red thread to indicate that he is dead, in reference to the red thread used to repair French red uniform trousers (130). Often, death comes when least expected, as in “Repos au Lac Asquam,” when the narrator describes a storm as it happens, using a single sentence stretching over two pages. He starts with a subordinate temporal clause introduced by “quand” ‘when’ and repeats the conjunction twenty-three times before ending the sentence with the main

clause: “quand la pluie retombe, s’acharne, la même dont on reconnaît les gouttes; – alors je pense à lui, Seeger, qui aimait les orages, et je frémis . . .” (169) ‘when the rain returns, sets in, the same rain whose drops we recognize; – then I think of him, Seeger, who loved storms, and I shiver . . .’ Giraudoux shows his reader that, even at a distance in space and time, the narrator’s thoughts turn to Seeger, thanks to a highly lyrical movement created by a two-page-long sentence and an unexpected final clause. The depiction of the American landscape and its inhabitants in the storm certainly contains signs of wartime, but the association between a climatic phenomenon and Seeger is not predictable. In this example, Giraudoux chooses to explore the effects of war at a later stage. Indeed, in *Adorable Clio*, war invades times of peace or quiet, while peacetime seems to be used as a comparative term in order to analyse war more exhaustively (Fouchard 52).

Contrary to what many critics have contended, Giraudoux does not avoid the reality of death. His sometimes highly graphic commentaries, not far from black humour, are proof of that. For example, he recalls that Blakely’s remains could fit in a Huntley & Palmers’ biscuit box (170), and he looks in the pockets of Pavel’s uniform, which the nurse brought to him, and finds the same kind of objects and even the same waste as in his own: “Le tout saupoudré de ces grosses miettes de pain, si dures, de ces fragments de chocolat, de ces graines [sic] de riz, qui font que des moineaux se mêlent aux corbeaux pour picorer les cadavres” (57) ‘The whole content sprinkled with those big crumbs of bread, so tough, those fragments of chocolate, those grains of rice which bring sparrows to mingle with crows and peck the corpses.’ Once again, the enumeration leads to an unexpected clause, and as Proust said, the image brings together two distinct realities to create an unexpected way of seeing the dead body on the battlefield.

Unlike most narratives, regardless of national origin, in which characters are more often killed than represented killing their enemies (Compagnon 32), death in *Adorable Clio* is not exclusively provoked by invisible hands, lost bullets, or impersonal shells. Active killing is also present, as in this example: “Mais déjà, sur la gauche, les peuples qui se lèvent tôt attaquaient, et des régiments de Sydney, surprenant les Kurdes, les exterminaient sans merci, car le Turc est l’ennemi national de l’Australien” (197) ‘But already, on the left, the peoples who wake up early were attacking, and regiments from Sydney, as they surprised the Kurds, were exterminating them without mercy, for the Turk is the Australian’s national enemy.’ Behind the fantasist, ironical affirmation that Australia and Turkey somehow had a historic rivalry (like France and Germany, for example), Giraudoux does not hesitate to say quite explicitly that the Australian soldiers are massacring the Turks. There is no prisoner in this attack and it is not made by France’s enemy but by an ally. Death, self-inflicted violence, and killing, whether collective or individual actions, are clearly mentioned. Thus the individual work on style and structure

cannot be considered a denial of reality but rather an attempt to give meaning to an individual experience linked to a collective fate.

#### At the intersection of the individual and the collective

The particularity of Giraudoux's conception of literature produces tension between, on the one hand, a highly personal way of representing war through images, individual perspective, and style, and, on the other, his covert project to provoke the reader to feel and think about war as both a personal and a collective experience. In "Nuit à Châteauroux," the personal recollection of the narrator's youth contrasts with the collective fate illustrated by both his friend's situation and the children of the headmaster and the school staff. After four years of war, Pavel is as mechanically wound up for combat as a watch, just like every man in the conflict: "Cher Pavel, anonyme et parfait dans les combats, ainsi que tous, comme une montre!" (*Adorable*, 58) 'Dear Pavel, anonymous and perfect in battle, like everyone else, like a watch!' At the end of the text, just before the narrator leaves the school to which he had returned in search of his childhood, he feels that the child he was is dead, and he makes this comparison between his destiny and that of the school staff: "Leurs fils aussi sont tués" (*Adorable* 91) 'Their sons too are dead.' In a war context, this image is ambiguous: it can be read in the way Giraudoux uses it or in reference to their sons killed at war. This oscillation between the individual and the collective is complemented by an ambiguous representation of war that is often absent from French narratives generally, whether critical or jingoistic.

Giraudoux creates an ambivalent image of war that both reacts against its intrinsic horror and trivializes its violence thanks to humour and irony, but also patriotism and fascination: "Pardonne-moi, ô guerre, de t'avoir, – toutes les fois que je l'ai pu, – caressée . . ." (epigraph 7) 'Forgive me, O war, for having, every time I could, caressed you . . .' This epigraph addressed directly to the war denotes both remorse and an intimate and somehow pleasant experience of the conflict. We also find these intermingled sentiments in the title, which expresses relief and maybe gratitude for taking part in a historical event of this magnitude. To a certain extent, this may be explained by the French victory: we cannot forget that the closing text of the collection celebrates this victory and at the same time symbolically puts an end to Giraudoux's personal war experience. This passage from "Dardanelles," where the narrator once again addresses the war, shows that Giraudoux could not choose between the two feelings: "Ô toi, je hais qui t'aime et je hais qui te déteste!" (207) 'I hate anyone who loves you and I hate anyone who hates you!' He uses a similarly contradictory formulation to extrapolate his feelings to others. Opposition and contrasts mark a global ambivalence experienced by many, as in the long enumeration that structures "Mort de Segaux, mort de Drigeard," with the regular rhythmic return of the terms "*soudain*" 'suddenly' and

“*parfois*” ‘sometimes’: “Parfois tout était dans l’escouade dévouement, concorde. . . . Nous nous aimions. . . . Soudain tout était colère, amertume. . . . Nous nous détestions” (128) ‘Sometimes, everything was dedication and concord within the squad. . . . We loved each other. . . . Suddenly, everything was anger, bitterness. . . . We hated each other.’

His addresses to the reader give another hint that he is seeking to convey this ambiguity of feelings by extreme and somehow artificial paradoxes or contrasts. The artificiality enhances the impossibility of reducing war experience to an unequivocal representation of facts or feelings. To this extent, Giraudoux seems to accept the inherited visceral patriotism that astonished Morand at the beginning of the war (Body 293) and his own tragic experience of the front. It is highly significant that the last text before “Adieu à la guerre” is the one that narrates the most difficult period on the front for Giraudoux, as if he wished to free himself from these memories, before concluding with his euphoric feelings about the end of the war: “Je suis un vainqueur, le dimanche à midi” (222) ‘I am a victor, on Sunday at noon.’ In Dorgelès’ *Les Croix de bois* (*Wooden Crosses*, published in 1919), this feeling is attributed to Sulphart, not to the narrator: “– J’trouve que c’est une victoire, parce que j’en suis sorti vivant . . .” (Dorgelès 243) ‘I think it’s a vict’ry, cause I got out of it alive . . .’<sup>7</sup> *Adorable Clio* then also belongs to the victory stories that flourished after the conflict, recalling a collective feeling that was nourished, among other discourses, by the educational establishment of the Third Republic: “Revanche” (‘Revenge’ [for the loss of Alsace-Lorraine]).

The sequence of “Nuit à Châteauroux” and “Entrée à Saverne” is meaningful in this respect because it links Giraudoux’s academic training with an important symbol of conflict between France and Germany: Alsace. The narrator’s visit to his former school may evoke war in a peaceful situation, but it also suggests that one purpose of school was to prepare the pupils for war: “Sept heures quarante, les externes surveillés passent dans les cloîtres, avec des murmures et des bruits de relève, leur corps surveillé de tout près par leur maître, leurs ombres du dehors par le censeur; puis la cohorte des demi-pensionnaires . . .” (91) ‘At seven forty the day boys, under supervision, pass through the cloister with murmuring and sounds of troops being relieved, their bodies watched closely by their masters and their shadows by the deputy headmaster from outside the walls; then comes the cohort of the boarders . . .’ The constant control exerted over the pupils at the school reminds the narrator of army discipline. In “Retour à Saverne,” the mention of the popular textbook *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants* (‘The Tour of France by Two Children’ 1877) will connect this memory to the feeling that a new balance had been found by the narrator as France had at last recovered Alsace. From the beginning of this story, the central theme is how the French soldiers, and thus France, will enter Saverne, bringing forty years of German occupation to an end.

The spirit of *Revanche* at the origins of the war, is presented ironically by means of an enumeration of old objects that the people of Saverne had kept from the nineteenth century (Retour 101). As the narrator describes the atmosphere, he appeals to symbolic French names—Clandel, Debussy, Clemenceau, *La Marseillaise*—and saturates the text with the adjective “French.” After a lyrical description of France and a long enumeration of Frenchmen’s actions during the war—“Les Français ont tué avec ces mains pacifiques. Ils ont haï avec ces yeux bons et moqueurs” (114) ‘Frenchmen killed with those peaceful hands. They hated with those good, mocking eyes’—Giraudoux finally finds his own place in this victory parade:

Phalsbourg, Saverne, d’où partirent André et Julien pour leur tour de France, premiers guides de tous les écoliers français, comme tout à nouveau en France paraît simple et logique, si on le revoit de Phalsbourg, de Saverne ! Me voici remis dans le réseau de nos routes, de nos rivières, de nos villes, au point exact où j’y entrai enfant. . . . Lié à chaque ville, à chaque héros de France par un fil bien tendu, et d’exacte longueur, je reste immobile et heureux à mon balcon. (117-18)

Phalsbourg, Saverne, where André and Julien started from on their tour of France, leading the way for all subsequent French schoolchildren, how simple and logical everything seems again in France if we see it from the point of view of Phalsbourg or Saverne! Here I am back in the network of our roads, rivers, and cities, at the exact point where I entered it as a child. . . . Linked to every town, to every French hero by a taut thread, of exactly the right length, I stand motionless and happy on my balcony.

Giraudoux uses the proximity of Saverne to two symbolic towns in this classic textbook of the Third Republic to express his belonging to France by his childhood and education. The return to this period in “Nuit à Châteauroux” is completed by his symbolic double recovery of Alsace: as a soldier and a Frenchman by fighting and as a poet by writing.

## Conclusion

In *Adorable Clio*, Giraudoux does not derive his legitimacy from his experience at the front: unlike his fellow writers, he plays down his identity as an “écrivain-combattant” ‘combatant writer,’ preferring the role of writer and specifically that of poet. He chooses to strengthen his pre-war way of writing, often compared to that of the Symbolists, in the field of prose. Despite the criticisms he received for his apparently light-hearted tone, he manages to express the tragedy of

war in all its aspects, thanks to his constant oppositions (and often reversing the characteristics of peace and war, life and death, love and hatred), his poetic rhythm, his circular structures, and juxtaposed temporalities. He even goes further than realistic narrations in daring to express ambivalent feelings, provoked on the one hand by his patriotic education and on the other by his compassion. Unlike many testimonies from the 1920s and elsewhere (Beaupré, *Écrire* 87, 169), he does not hesitate to mention either collective or individual violence. In the first movement of “Adieu à la guerre,” he admits:

Voici que je ne tuerai plus de Bulgares, que j’ai le droit d’aimer les Turcs; voici que, pour la première fois depuis cinq ans,—car j’ai rendu ce matin mon revolver et mes jumelles à mon dépôt—je me retrouve sans arme. . . . Voici que mon plus grand ennemi au monde, peu acharné, mais le seul que j’aurai désormais à épier le soir dans les forêts, à surprendre à l’aube près des promontoires, celui que dès maintenant je surveille dans ce miroir de poche comme au périscope, c’est ce Français, c’est moi-même. . . . Guerre, tu es finie! (212)

Now I will not kill any more Bulgarians, I am allowed to love Turks; now, for the first time in five years—for I handed in my gun and my binoculars this morning at the depot—I have no weapon. . . . Now my greatest enemy in the world, less fierce, but the only one that from now on I will have to watch in the evening in the woods, to surprise at dawn near promontories, the one I am already watching in this pocket mirror as if through a periscope, is this Frenchman, myself . . . . War, you are over!

A major consequence of war for Giraudoux is expressed in this fragment: at the end of the war, despite the victory and after his exposure to violence and hatred, the enemy has been transformed into himself and is no more just an “other.” In this variation on the warrior’s return, Giraudoux presents his radical transformation which will find echoes in the numerous allusions to the First World War in his narrative works of the 1920s, particularly *Siegfried et le Limousin* (‘Siegfried and the Limousin’ 1922)<sup>7</sup> and the 1930s, with the central theme of the questioning of identity in *Aventures de Jérôme Bardini* (‘The Adventures of Jérôme Bardini’),<sup>8</sup> and of course in *La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu* (‘The Trojan War Will Not Take Place’ or *Tiger at the Gates*, 1935). But, as is the case with many French authors who participated in the First World War, this aspect of his experience, both collective and individual, has long been underappreciated in his work, in his case because of his apparently frivolous style.<sup>9</sup>



## Notes

1. All translations of *Adorable Cléo* are mine.
2. To read a complete account on this period of Giraudoux's life see Body 281-357.
3. All translations of *Cru* are mine.
4. *Les Contes d'un matin* is a posthumous collection published by Laurent Le Sage (Gallimard 1952), bringing together nine stories that appeared in *Le Matin* between 1908 and 1911.
5. *Adorable Cléo* marked a turning point in Giraudoux's career, as Proust championed it (albeit unsuccessfully) for the Prix Goncourt (Body 381).
6. In his study on the prose poem, Michel Brix points out that the term *fantaisie* 'fantasy' could serve instead of "prose poem" (two words that are absolutely incompatible) as it was used in Romanticism (to which Giraudoux was indebted) to characterize those who modestly sought to express daily inspiration in a personal way, in contrast to high-flown Pindarism (Brix 34-35).
7. Jacques Body noted that *Siegfried et le Limousin* could, in a way, be seen as a continuation of "Nuit à Châteauroux," insofar as it evokes the moments Giraudoux spent in Germany before the war as a student ("Notice" 1626).
8. See Lepron.
9. The 45th volume of *Cahiers Jean Giraudoux*, to be published in 2018, will present a collection of studies about the presence of the two World Wars in Giraudoux's writings.

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