



The Serpent of Stars

Jean Giono

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The Serpent of Stars (Le serpent d'étoiles, 1993; reprinted 1999 Grasset) takes place in rural southern France in the early part of the century. The novel's elusive narrative thread ties landscape to character to an expanse just beyond our grasp. The narrator encounters a shepherding family and glimpse by glimpse, each family member and the shepherding way of life is revealed to us. The novel culminates in a large shepherds' gathering where a traditional Shepherd's Play—a kind of creation myth that includes in its cast The River, The Sea, The Man, and The Mountain—is enacted. The work's proto-environmental world view as well as its hybrid form—part play, part novel—makes The Serpent of Stars astonishingly contemporary. W.S. Merwin's "Green Fields" begins, "By this part of the century few are left who believe/in the animals for they are not there in the carved parts/of them served on plates and the pleas from slatted trucks..." This novel leaves the reader believing not only in the animals, but the terrain they are part of, the people who tend them, and the life all these elements together compose.

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