

PASTORAL BRIC-A-BRAC: JOSEPH CORNELL'S ARTISTIC RESPONSE TO ALAIN-FOURNIER'S *LE GRAN MEAULNES*

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Abstract

It has become a staple when Joseph Cornell's art is analyzed and commented on to mention the novel *Le Grand Meaulnes* (1913) by Alain-Fournier. The novel is referred to many times in Cornell's diaries and projects. It is well-known that Joseph Cornell felt a strong attachment to anything French (especially from the fin-de-siècle period), but such is too broad an explanation for his interest on that particular novel. In this article we analyze the bond between Cornell's art and Alain-Fournier's novel, taking them as two artistic examples of the pastoral mode. We try to explicate the connection between Alain-Fournier's novel and many of Cornell's most relevant assemblage boxes, such as the *Palace* series, the *Medici Slot Machine* boxes and *Untitled (Bébé Marie)*. This relation can be traced both in the themes and the assemblage technique used by Cornell: they seem to replicate Meaulnes's experiences during the narration in the novel, and to reproduce, with Cornell's use of the glass panel, the narrative strategies of denouement delay that Alain-Fournier employed in *Le Grand Meaulnes*.

Keywords: Joseph Cornell, Alain-Fournier, pastoral, art and literature relation, assemblage art.

Resumen

Se ha convertido en lugar común la mención de la novela *Le Grand Meaulnes* (1913), de Alain-Fournier, cuando se analiza y comenta la obra artística de Joseph Cornell. Cornell se refiere a menudo a la novela en sus diarios y notas para proyectos. Es bien sabido que Cornell sentía una fuerte predilección por la cultura francesa y todo lo relacionado con ella (especialmente del periodo fin-de-siècle), pero tal explicación es demasiado vaga para justificar su interés por esta novela en particular. En este artículo analizamos la relación entre la obra de Cornell y la novela de Alain-Fournier como el resultado de ser dos manifestaciones del modo pastoral. Intentamos explicar la conexión que se establece entre *Le Grand Meaulnes* y algunas de las cajas más relevantes de Cornell, tales como las de la serie *Palace*, las de la serie *Medici Slot Machine* y *Untitled (Bébé Marie)*. La relación entre las obras y la novela se manifiesta tanto en los temas como en la técnica de ensamblaje utilizadas por Cornell: las cajas presentan temas que también encontramos en las experiencias del protagonista Meaulnes en el transcurso de la novela y reproducen, con el uso del panel de cristal frontal, las estrategias de posposición del desenlace narrativo que Alain-Fournier emplea en *Le Grand Meaulnes*.

Palabras clave: Joseph Cornell, Alain-Fournier, pastoral, relación entre arte y literatura, arte de ensamblaje.

The poet Charles Simic says of Cornell: “Joseph Cornell could not draw, paint, or sculpt, and yet he was a great American artist” (16). The statement expresses, on the one hand, that Cornell’s art is not related to the traditional fine arts. He, certainly, does not physically produce his creations in the traditional way; his works were mainly collages and box constructions, similar to doll houses, in which he assembled images and objects, displayed behind a glass, in a shop-window manner. What is harder to come to terms with in Charles Simic’s statement is the boldness with which he affirms that Cornell is an American artist. Certainly, he was an American citizen, from a long-established Dutch family, and never in his life did he leave the New York state; nevertheless, many of Cornell’s collages and objects of his assemblages do not contain any reference to the American social or cultural milieu (except for some female movie stars); rather, those images and paraphernalia are of French origin, which expresses Cornell’s love for a culture and a country he knew only through its literature, its art and dated periodical publications from the fin-de-siècle period. In this paper my intention is to explore one of the most significant interests in French culture that Cornell showed, namely his continuous perusal of and reference to the novel *Le Grand Meaulnes* (1913), by Alain-Fournier, and to argue that this book, so distant from the avant-garde tastes of the most salient surrealist artists who Cornell admired so much, such as Max Ernst or Marcel Duchamp, came to figure so prominently among his own references and inspirations because it offered him an artistic model to deal with his own tendency to idealize the past.

A past barely within living memory is the unifying theme of the box constructions that Cornell started to build in the 1940s. In them he arranged the objects he had purchased in second hand shops, used bookstores and junk shops: bits and pieces Cornell had been given to collecting in between appointments and lunch breaks during his workdays in New York City as a salesman (Blair 8). Most of those objects were not of intrinsic artistic value, but odds and ends consisting of low-quality reproductions of works of art, old French books and magazines, discarded Victorian toys, family films and stacks of photographs of unknown people —things that, to Cornell, oozed the mixed aura of the foreign and of his own past childhood. In a way, Cornell’s pastime can be likened to collecting drifting oddities that came to America’s shore; as Simic says: “America is a place where the Old World shipwrecked, flea market and garage sales cover the land” (18). Thus it takes an American artist to take notice of such wreckage, the way another American, T. S. Eliot, did it in poetry, when in *The Waste Land* he declares: “These fragments I have shored against my ruins / Why then Ile fit you” (1282). Cornell collected and arranged those fragments so as to turn them into his own personal expression. An expression, nevertheless, with which Cornell does not announce nor denounce the ruin, neither remains laidback, amused at the spectacle of the whole social parade, the way we can imagine Duchamp or Joyce doing. Cornell reacted to his objects in an involved

and personal way, and so he employed them into telling his own unlived story. The same goes for the books he read and appreciated; his interests both in his collections and his readings were not an intellectual game from which he remained aloof; for him, artists and the characters in books he loved were heroes, role models to live up to and respond to in artistic form. It is in that way that *Le Grand Meaulnes* was viewed by Cornell.

In *Le Grand Meaulnes* Joseph Cornell found a convenient summation of his engagement with the past time of his own childhood and his inveterate idealization of the women towards he felt attracted. That novel is one of the literary works that Cornell mentions more frequently in his profuse handwritten notes for his files and journal entries (Caws 189). Such notes, as usual in Cornell, were not primarily a personal or private record but an open-ended research on his own cultural and artistic obsessions, sometimes—but not always—materialized in his boxes and assemblages. The project to which Cornell relates *Le Grand Meaulnes* more directly is his “GC44” working dossier, abbreviation of “Garden Center 1944.” It was focused on the ideas and impressions he gathered as he was doing voluntary work for his religious community (the Church of Scientology) in Flushing, Queens. In that dossier Cornell attempts to devise a personal method that could transform into artwork his tendency towards the accumulation of material (Blair 53). For that method the inspiration of the novel *Le Grand Meaulnes* was acknowledged as fundamental; Cornell makes that explicit in his notes: “At the time of experience compromising this collection [GC44] thought was strongly preoccupied with, impressed by, one of the supreme literary achievements of this century, namely, Alain-Fournier’s *Le Grand Meaulnes*, translated into English as *The Wanderer*” (110). The laudatory terms bestowed on Alain-Fournier’s work prove how affected and filtered Cornell’s own experience was by that novel in particular, to the point of making his own *wanderings* in the City a search for suitable spots and scenery where the narration of the novel could have taken place. Even before the summer of 1944, in many entries of his journal Cornell speaks of “the “Grand Meaulnes” flavor” (209) of certain images and scenes; on September the 8th 1943 he wrote:

“variable day” cool morning –warm aft[ernoon]– cold evening

Lunch along water bakery

Hampton cafeteria

(Central Park –perfect setting for Gran Meaulnes)

Clear fine sky gold clouds over Plaza Hotel like large French Chateau

Beautiful feeling of exaltation and inspiration (101)

Along with comments of a middle-aged bachelor obsessed with weather nuances, these Cornell’s jottings also show Cornell’s willingness of establishing a parallel between his own pedestrian experience and the setting in the novel, letting the latter overflow into the former. So, there is no denying of the importance of Alain-Fournier’s novel for Cornell, and relevant critics, such as

Dore Ashton (1974), have agreed on that. (Shockingly enough, Cornell's biographer Deborah Solomon does not even mention the novel in her minutely informative biography of the artist, *Utopia Parkway*.) But why, we may still ask, is *Le Grand Meaulnes* the chosen book to be at the core of the "CG44" dossier and, thus, to contribute to Cornell's "method for crystallizing experiences" (110) into artwork? What could Alain-Fournier's novel offer Cornell at that crucial moment for his own self-aware artistry development? To answer these questions we must resort to the novel itself, namely, to the actions it narrates and the narrative technique in which they are rendered; only after that survey can we appreciate the possibilities that the novel could offer to Cornell's assemblage medium.

The main protagonist in *Le Grand Meaulnes* is a 17-year-old young man that comes to a provincial French village as the only boarding student of the local school. He will share his room with François Seurel, the timid and limping teacher's son from whom, in his role as witness narrator, we received the story that unfolds in the novel. Unlike François, Meaulnes is bold, and audacious to the point of impudence. Thus, when there appears the opportunity of going on an errand, which implies borrowing a cart and a mare to pick up the teacher's parents at a distant train station for the Christmas break, Meaulnes does not hesitate to take the vehicle without asking permission, and departs to fulfil the task that nobody had entrusted to him. But he gets lost in a region he does not know very well, from which he is not a native, and in the cold of the winter night he falls asleep on the driver's seat while the mare keeps pulling the cart. Those snaps of sleep only contribute to increase Meaulnes's disorientation when he awakes. The narrative technique of the novel reflects this lack of direction in the surroundings, so that Meaulnes seems to be moving through a labyrinthine winter landscape, which leads to long-untrodden paths and into forlorn cabins:

Disheartened, worn out, he decided despairingly to follow the path he was on till the end. After walking some twenty or thirty yards he emerged into a broad grey meadow where he could make out, at wide intervals, deeper shadows that must be juniper bushes, and there, in a depression, a building of some sort. He plodded on towards it. It seemed to be a large pen for livestock, possibly an abandoned sheepfold. The door of the shed yielded, opening with a groan. The light of the moon, when the wind swept the clouds away, came through chinks in the wall. A mouldy smell pervaded the place. (Alain-Fournier 43)

But the different stop-overs and forking paths on his journey take him finally to an isolated manor house where some form of betrothal or wedding party is taking place, carried out in the form of a fancy-dress masque, or *fête galante*. As soon as Meaulnes arrives at that place, he feels overwhelmed by the ethereal, light-hearted atmosphere of the festivity and, at the same time, he finds himself an intruder in a world so departed from his ordinary experience. In this *fête* he finds children dressed up in fanciful costumes, mirthful old folk and a couple of adults dressed as *commedia dell'arte* characters. He is also offered a costume, which helps merge him further into the festive experience. The tattered

manor-house contributes to renew the perplexity in him with its maze-like architecture, in which the merry-makers take on a fragmented, evanescent quality:

At the far end of this hall there was a corridor at right angles. He was trying to decide between exploring it and opening one of the doors behind which he heard voices, when he saw two girls running down the corridor, one chasing the other. On tiptoe in his fine pumps he ran forward to see and catch up with them. A sound of doors opening, a glimpse of two fifteen-year-old faces flushed by the sharp night air and the keenness of the pursuit, faces framed in tall Directoire hats tied under the chin, about to vanish in a great blare of light. For one moment they pirouette, their wide skirts swirling and billowing, revealing the lace of quaint pantalettes; and then, their performance finished, they dart into a room and close the door behind them. (Alain-Fournier 52)

The old-time fancy dresses, such as the Directoire hats the girls wear, as well as the presence of Pierrot and Harlequin are indications that the festivity in the domain is a *fête galante*, the direct successor of the court masques of the Renaissance. Those *fêtes*, as their forebears, were a noble-class pastoral celebration held in parkland settings in which participants dressed in shepherds' attire and *commedia dell'arte* disguises, including both in the setting and in the costumes loose references to Greek and Roman mythology. Thus, the pastoral element is central in the *fête* of *Le Grand Meaulnes*, and therefore in the novel itself, since the latter develops from Meaulnes's experience in the lost domain and his subsequent desire and aspiration to return to it. Pastoral itself is a literary and artistic mode imbued with nostalgia for a return to a mythical Golden Age, which is viewed as an example of a more harmonious relation between man and nature than the present social milieu. This Golden Age is presented as previous to the historical rise of cities and courts as centers of power, and it is symbolically opposed to them. The pastoral ideal, thus, is rooted in a loosely Neolithic social fabric, in which the relationship between man's work and the means of subsistence is unmediated and placidly embedded in a general feeling of leisure. The first literary realizations of the Pastoral mode were the poems by Theocritus and Virgil, in which the shepherds participate in musical and poetic contests, remember other shepherd-poets who have passed away or complain for unrequited love. This literary pastoral is a nostalgic exploration of a dimly-seen, mythical origin, located in previous and imprecise time (a utopic place which Virgil named after the Greek region called Arcadia), from which the state of his contemporary society is severely cut off. Therefore pastoral poetry amounts to a vicarious retreat into a simpler, pre-lapsarian milieu from which the present civilized state can benefit and improve. According to Terry Gifford, such movement of retreat and return is the essence of the pastoral: "a retreat to a place apparently without the anxieties of the town, or the court, or the present, actually delivers insights into the culture from which it originates" (82). In *Le Grand Meaulnes* we can trace this pastoral movement of retreat and return: the *fête* offers Meaulnes the retreat from his own social context into a more basic and

direct fellowship among people, and accordingly it returns a dull vision of his own present times. At the *fête*, the narrator remarks, Meaulnes enjoyed a feeling of benign community in the company of aged country folk and children: “There was no one there with whom Meaulnes did not feel safe and at ease” (Alain-Fournier 63).

The *fête galante* in the novel is an example of a social meeting in which the reenactment of a pastoral origin is staged. As in any pastoral manifestation, their partakers wanted to feel and show a closer relation with more natural and simpler ways of life, hence following William Empson’s definition of pastoral to the letter: “the process of putting the complex into the simple” (22). The paradox behind such social gatherings, though, is that only the educated noble class could appreciate such simplicity: pastoral is not aimed at real peasants but to a sophisticated, urban audience. Not surprisingly, the *fêtes galantes* became the main subject for the successful 18th century painter Antoine Watteau (1684–1721), whose clients were members of the highest European nobility. The amicable and courteous atmosphere that Meaulnes encounters in the celebration seems to stem from those Watteau’s paintings, whose influence went on into the second half of the 19th century, making itself felt on Manet’s *The Luncheon on the Grass* (1863), Cezanne’s many *Pierrots* and *Harlequins*, and Picasso’s Blue and Pink periods. Literature did not escape its influence; witness the fact that the Symbolist poet Paul Verlaine called his 1869 poetry collection *Fêtes Galantes*. That particular motif (and its allegoric value as a more authentic life) was far from dormant when Alain-Fournier wrote *Le Grand Meaulnes*.

The *fête galante* is the core of *Le Grand Meaulnes*, and it exerts its influence on the rest of the novel in such a way that the possibilities that the future may hold for the pale in comparison; driven by the allure of the *fête* experience, for the rest of the novel Meaulnes would try an impossible and wishful return to that original moment. The towering role of the *fête* is expressed in a narrative form in the novel, by turning the subsequent chapters into tantalizing instances of Meaulnes’s search for that return, only to frustrate the denouement expectations that have been raised. This narratological disappointment, built into the very structure of *Le Grand Meaulnes*, did not escape Cornell, who regarded it as one of the most outstanding features of that novel; as Blair points out: “The first thing (...) that Cornell perceived in the novel was the significance of the narrative order or sequence” (61). In his “CG44” dossier, Cornell entered the following insightful comments on *Le Grand Meaulnes*, shortly after introducing the novel as “A ‘key’ to the portfolio of plates and notes known as ‘GC44’”:

Once having entered the domain of “the mysterious castle” the title of each succeeding chapter is pervaded by an expectancy that is something more than the stimulus of the average mystery story or detective tale.

The titles comprising the separate categories of this compilation [CG44] might be likened to the chapter headings of an adventure or

mystery novel, but one in which the sensational element is entirely missing. (It was under the influence of such a work —“*Le Grand Meaulnes*” of Alain-Fournier and etc.— make this a footnote?) (110)

Cornell did more than turn *Le Grand Meaulnes* into “a footnote”; using the novel’s structure as the key to his “CG44” dossier, he started to arrive at a level of awareness about his assembling art and boxes that he had not mustered before. He was working towards a “method for crystallizing experiences” of the past, at the same time as he was trying to find an alternative to “the habit of too much piling up of diverse material” (Cornell 108), and it is easy to verify that Cornell’s boxes moved into that new direction in the early 1940s. While the first box constructions created by Cornell in the 1930s showed the characteristic variety of flea markets and used bookstores (the places where the different elements inside the box came from) and the objects included in them “draw attention to the function they had before they entered his created world” (Blair 202), in the immediate years preceding his “CG44” dossier Cornell starts producing a more clearly themed sort of assemblage box, one which incites expectancies on the part of the viewer more than his or her puzzlement about the incongruity of the elements inside it. Those expectancies are related to a narrative which the viewer is spurred on to provide; in this new style of boxes Cornell is presenting us with the scenery or the protagonists for that narrative and, by the same token, is demanding our collaboration, even if its results are bound to be equivocal. This is the main lesson that Cornell seems to take from the structure of *Le Grand Meaulnes*: he adapts to his artistic *medium* the enticing relationship that the novel establishes with the reader’s expectations, in such a way that, as the latter reads on, the either confirmation or frustration of his expectations cannot but contribute to his further engagement in the narrative. Therefore Cornell’s constant perusal of *Le Grand Meaulnes* during the “CG44” period greatly enlightens us about this shift of style in his boxes, which now allow a permeable, open-ended dialogue with the spectator’s involvement with and reaction to them.

The boxes of the *Palace* series that Cornell started in the early 1940s illustrate the new, more restricted and involving style of Cornell’s boxes at the same time that they show thematically the influence of *Le Grand Meaulnes* in this development. Indeed, those boxes can be considered as *mise en scènes* for the *fête* in *Le Grand Meaulnes*. In these boxes we find an engraving of a palace similar to an *Encyclopedia* plate in the objective essentiality that it presents; that palace is surrounded by trees, represented by leafless sticks. In some of the versions of that motif, the three-dimensional scene is framed by a blue surface, sprinkled with shiny white paint, resembling the frost forming on a winter night, like the one on which Meaulnes started his adventure. In the box *Untitled (Pink Palace)* the image of the building shows tiny human figures at the bottom, which make the building a disproportionate massive element by comparison, almost a menacing one. If, as Barthes says, “the entire *Encyclopedia* (and especially in its images) supposes a world without fear” (223), Cornell, by choosing an image with such disproportionate scale sizes between men and objects, lets the uneasy anticipation of a terrible denouement percolate the scene.

In each of boxes of the *Palace* series the reproduction of the building is mounted on a mirror; the windows and doors of the engraving are cut out, so that the mirror shows and the viewer can see himself or herself reflected in it. So, although in some of the versions the engravings do not show the people that *Pink Palace* includes, the building is still inhabited: the spectator, while gazing at the box, finds himself dwelling there. In this way the involvement of the viewer is increased to the point of becoming part of the latent, hibernating story that, in order to unfold requires, like a Sleeping Beauty of sorts, precisely the viewer's *speculations*. This involvement of the spectator can be related to Meaulnes's arrival to the *fête*; by describing the *fête* as if it were a unique and magical discovery by Meaulnes (who is ignorant of the tradition of the *fête galantes*), Alain-Fournier's narrative technique succeeds to make that sense of novelty shared by the reader. Meaulnes's ignorance of the formulaic nature of the experiences that he encounters in the *fête* contributes to revive it for the reader, who can accordingly experience it as a novelty with Meaulnes as his appointed proxy. This renewal of an established convention is another feature of pastoral literature and art, and both the *fête* in the first part of *Le Grand Meaulnes* and Cornell's theatrical series of *Palaces* share that conventional quality, together with the intention—to alter Ezra Pound's adage—of making it *be experienced as new*.

Convention is a dominant element in the pastoral mode: it is what creates the sense of tradition from which it evolves, and it is also what lends pastoral that sense of being too *traditional* for which it is often reproved. But there is another possible interpretation for pastoral convention that both Alain-Fournier's novel and Cornell's *Palaces* exemplify: convention as a "coming together" (Alpers 81). The etymology of the word seems to support that interpretation; it comes from the Latin word *conventio*, which, according to the *Collins Concise Dictionary*, means "assembling, agreeing." Certainly, in both the novel and the *Palace* series we find convenings: on the one hand, the *fête*, where different sort of people flock together in a harmonious assemblage (or convention); on the other hand, the viewer's expectancies that the scene of the *Palace* series arises escort him into it while the mirrored windows "draw the viewer into the scene as an unwitting performer in his or her own imagined drama" (Sharp 148). This means that the spectator is brought inside a shareable space where his own narratives can develop. The box itself becomes the assembling ground, the agreed (common)place where the spectator can encounter his own expectancies and interpretations as if new. In this non-material sense, too, Cornell is an assemblage artist.

Nonetheless, the convening that takes place in Cornell's *Palaces* is a flitting assemblage; they do not offer us a permanent dwelling: they do not accommodate our present personal self, who we are, but our unrealized narratives: who we *might have been*. That is how they activate the distance between the pastoral retire and return, and so, due to that created distance, they are able to offer insights into our present. Cornell was clearly exploring this capacity of his art in the "CG44" dossier; in it, under the heading of "The Past,"

he wrote: “a feeling that a particular moment of the past was transmuting a present moment with an unnamed but significant touch (a lyrical feeling although there was the ever lessening strain of morbid obsession with the past — a thing from childhood never outgrown)” (109). What we obtained by the subtle influence of the past is the present *transmuted*, altered: still the present and yet not *our* present. The *Palace* series, with the disproportion between the building and the people that inhabit it (as in *Pink Palace*) or the barren, isolating environs of the palaces themselves, offers a visual equivalent of the foretaste and the consequences that ensue from the fact that such place cannot be returned to in our present.

Neither can love dwell there: a love found in that altered time could only be lost in our ordinary time. In that aspect the boxes of the *Palace* series keep performing their role as a fitting stage for the events during the *fête* in the first part of *Le Grand Meaulnes*, because Meaulnes falls in love in a dreamy and romantic way at the festivity but only to find, as the novel unfolds, that his passion will be harshly frustrated. At the *fête* he meets Yvonne de Galais, the younger sister of the bridegroom who has commissioned the celebration. Yvonne and Meaulnes exchange a few words, and then the young girl walks away, leaving Meaulnes with the task —the lover’s task— of questioning himself unendingly about the labile meaning of his love-object’s words and acts:

Disconcerted, Meaulnes stood and watched her move away. A little later, when he too had reached the shore, he saw her turn, before losing herself in the distant throng, to look back at him. For the first time her eyes rested on him in a steady regard. Was it meant as a final farewell? Was she forbidding him to accompany her? Or was there perhaps something more she would have liked to say?... (Alain-Fournier 63)

The fictional meeting between Meaulnes and Yvonne is based on a real one which took place in Paris between Alain-Fournier and a young Parisian woman, also called Yvonne. But in all probability such real encounter was modelled on a mythologized one: the meeting of Dante and Beatrice in Florence. As in the case of the Italian master, the unrequited love Alain-Fournier professed for Yvonne got transformed, in a compensatory mental economy, into the quintessential romantic love. And as in Dante’s case, Meaulnes’s love-object is unattainable; Dante placed her beloved in the Heavens, that is to say, in the future after-life, while Alain-Fournier kept his in the past: in the distance established by the nostalgia for a perfect moment: a Golden Age which has *already* taken place in the *fête galante*.

It is remarkable that the narrative strategies that are employed in the chapters that follow the ones devoted to the lost domain make every effort to ensure that the *fête* remains in the past. In similarly ill-fated narratives it is common to find that the impossibility of the protagonist’s love is caused by the intrusion of some external or fatal element, against which the lover proves powerless. We find that narrative structure, for instance, in the film *Portrait of Jennie* (1948), where a young girl from the past (role performed by Jennifer

Jones, actress to whom Cornell devoted a box) appears iteratively to a penniless painter, and succeeds to kindle both his artistic inspiration and his love. Such apparition, however, by her own nature, cannot settle in the present and share the painter's life. In *Le Grand Meaulnes*, however, none of the characters presents those supernatural characteristics but, surprisingly enough, the narrative strategies employed by Alain-Fournier work to render Meaulnes's beloved, Yvonne de Galais, utterly ghostly. What kind of strategies are those? Mainly dilatory ones which consistently postpone and trouble the possibility of Meaulnes's return to the ambiance of the *fête* and to the love he chanced upon there.

Those continuous postponements in *Le Grand Meaulnes* are brought about by different causes and agents, among which we must count some of the main characters. On the one hand, a very important reason why Meaulnes cannot find his way back to the domain is that he returned to his school at night, as passenger in a carriage; in the dark he could not learn the way that could have taken him back. On the other hand, a much more striking delaying role is played by the narrator François Seurel: he is always trying to convince Meaulnes, whenever the latter, restless, feels the urge to start the search for the dominion, to remain in the school, and to that effect he puts forward such weak and unconvincing arguments as that he should wait until spring or until a bad turn in the weather is passed. Shockingly, Meaulnes considers those faltering reasons well-grounded, and thus complies with his friend's wishes. Another dilatory role in the novel is played by Yvonne's brother, Frantz de Galais, who becomes a student in Meaulnes and François's school, and offers mistaken clues as to the whereabouts of the house, so that he can count on Meaulnes's help and promise that he would search for his own fleeing fiancé, Valentine. Such postponing strategies, such filibusterism on the part of the narration in *The Grand Meaulnes* is the reason behind the uneven, unbalanced structure of the novel, something which has been frequently stressed by literary critics. Such unevenness in the plot springs from the author's main interest to preserve the *fête* in a nostalgic distance. The celebration casts its spell over the rest of the actions of the novel, which is thus infused with a pervading effect of "suspension," an effect that, according to Alpers, is distinguishingly conveyed by the pastoral mode:

"Suspension" is a modal term, in that it directly reflects the protagonist's strength relative to his world. The herdsman of pastoral poetry is conceived as the opposite of the hero: he is able to live with and sing out his dilemmas and pain, but he is unable to act so as to resolve or overcome them, or see them through to their end. (68-69)

Meaulnes is so haunted by the *fête* and the pastoral ambiance he experienced there that, even when action is required to make the return possible, he is unable to meet that demand. Meaulnes's heroism is to shun any heroism: in that way the experience of the *fête* is tucked away from any other possible action in the narrative which could be set in comparison with it. This affects even his eventual marriage with Yvonne. François Seurel comes to meet her by chance in a visit to some relatives, and then he organizes an outing so that Meaulnes and

Yvonne can reunite in a situation as similar as possible to the *fête*. But the realistic aspects included in the description of this second celebration —the common folk attending this time are portrayed as gross, not as agreeably simple— only consolidate the ideal status of the previous one. Nevertheless, Meaulnes and Yvonne get married soon after that reunion. The day after their marriage, however, Frantz suddenly appears to remind Meaulnes of his promise to search for his runaway bride, and he keeps his word. A pastoral interpretation of such departure cannot consider it as “the plot correlative of Meaulnes’s own fundamental refusal, ultimately, to content himself with reliving an oneiric past” (Brosman 507). Indeed, the reverse is true: Meaulnes’s departure from domesticity seals his life off within the oneiric past that he experienced at the *fête*.

This is something that Cornell did understand about the novel: that its structure creates the expectancy of a reenactment of the Domain experience and with the same gesture, it takes every measure to impede it. For many literary critics, such as Andre Gide, Alain Buisine and Léon Cellier, it is precisely its structure which can be considered the novel’s weakness; let’s consider the following account of Cellier’s critique:

Cellier enacts what might be called, *avant la lettre*, a “deconstruction” of the novel, subjecting Alain-Fournier’s text to a double reading. In a first section, he shows that the archetypal scheme of the text, the fundamental form that subends it, is that of the quest novel: in this perspective, Alain-Fournier’s modern work would be a rewriting of Chrétien de Troyes’s *Perceval*. Meaulnes would be an initiate; his task would be to decipher the mystery of the Domain; his adventures would constitute a series of mystical ordeals on the path toward final understanding. But in a second section Cellier attempts to demonstrate that the narrative progression of quest and initiation stalls and stagnates: between the discovery of the Domain and the pages that follow the novel undoes itself; it metamorphoses from quest novel to simple adventure novel, in which the theme of remorse (or of sin, of Meaulnes’s moral waywardness) takes center stage. (Ellison 118)

Cornell probably values so much that “undoing” process in *Le Grand Meaulnes* because, as his own artistic endeavors in the 1940s, it produces (and is achieved by) expectancy on the part of the reader, expectancy which gives way to nostalgia precisely by that undoing. Cornell propels a similar *expectant nostalgia* with his boxes; they are windows into an idealized Arcadia, a pastoral space that Marinelli defines as follows: “It is a middle country of the imagination, half-way between a past perfection and a present imperfection, a place of Becoming rather than Being, where an individual’s potencies for the arts of life and love and poetry are explored and tested” (37).

The viewer’s capacity for the arts of love is especially tested in Cornell’s *Medici Slot Machine* series. The interior of those boxes is arranged in compartments which make it vaguely resemble a doll-house. The central focus of

attention in this boxes is a reproduction of an Italian Renaissance painting, a portrait of a pre-nubile member of the highest Italian nobility. The other spaces are filled with objects related to their daily occupations, such as stenciled letters, children's blocks or marbles, but they also contain smaller reproductions of the princely boy or young girl featured in the box, and, in a cross-pollinating fashion, of those present in other boxes. Those children, sexually immature as they are, sprout by germination. With their multiple compartments filled with *mise-en-abyme* motifs and portraits, those boxes are in the process of becoming an emblem before the viewer's gaze that their inhabitants calmly meet in the chamber of their childhood. They progress towards the stylization of heraldry: after all these boxes pertain to members of a noble family, and their focus on childhood implies the theme of parenthood, which the boxes all too readily dispose of. Do they become an emblem of a possible fusion of times? Maybe — and by the same token — of the diffusion of time? As Solomon points out, these boxes emphasize Cornell's dialogic relation between past and present: "what makes *Medici Slot Machine* so memorable is not merely the mixing of disparate elements but the potent new meanings they acquire in the process. A Renaissance princeling is made to seem part of the present, and a candy machine in a subway station becomes the vaulted palace in which he resides" (ch. 8). The treatment of the images of those painting reproductions also adds a sense of time past and present overlapping and merging in the rarefying chambers that the boxes provide them with. The paintings are often turned into monochrome copies, sometimes reminding of old photographs, as it is the case of the sepia print in *Untitled (Pinturicchio Boy)* (1942-52). As Sarah Lea specifies about that box, "The historical distance of the portrait thus telescoped, the boy's presence is rendered strikingly immediate" (144).

Those young princes and princess are both immediate and distanced: the same way as Yvonne's Meaulnes's love-object, is portrayed by Alain-Fournier, not sooner longed for than abandoned. Indeed, it is possible to consider the portraits in these boxes as longed-for objects who *have to* remain longed-for; the fact that they are made look credibly contemporary and, at the same time, kept firmly in the past only contributes to secure their position at the far-end on an ever-receding process which skews our tentative guessing and explanations about them: our longing is not diluted by or dissolved into knowledge and data. The idea of the inescapable unattainability of the love-object points back not only to *Le Grand Meaulnes*, but also to Dante's unrequited love for Beatrice. After all, there is a clear reference to Italian Renaissance in the title of this series which reinforces the impression that contemporary artist and Cornell's friend Dorothea Tanning had of him as being "a modern Dante": "His was like the courtly love of the thirteenth-century troubadours: the relation of lover to adored lady as a pure passion, ennobling, ever unfulfilled and ever innocent" (88). Besides, Dore Ashton informs us, this lofty attitude towards his love-object is shared by many of the artists and writers that Joseph Cornell admired, such as Shumann, Novalis, Christian Andersen, or Nerval (Ashton 1-114). Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855) was, certainly, one of the main heroes in Cornell's personal pantheon —and as such he is often mentioned in his diaries. One of Nerval's

works, his novella *Sylvie* (1853), is centered on the unrequited love the male protagonist harbors for the unattainable eponymous woman, and thus it invites comparison to Alain-Fournier's novel. Some critics find Nerval more consistently Romantic: he does not "commit the aesthetic (and moral?) error of giving Sylvie as wife to the narrator-protagonist of his novella" (Ellison 119). But, once again, if *Le Grand Meaulnes* is so present in Cornell's "CG44" dossier and in the pivoting, method-developing period of the early 1940s, it is precisely because of what many critics consider the novel's great weakness: "the faultline that divides it at its centre", that is, the narrative and stylistic distance that separates Meaulnes's encounter with Yvonne de Galais in the Mysterious Domain and the ensuing actions in the novel (Ellison 119). But that gulf can be bridged if we consider *Le Grand Meaulnes* as a pastoral narrative which does not move towards achievement, towards a future time. Indeed, that is the reason why we must consider Alain-Fournier and Cornell as pastoral artists: for them the possession of the dream, of the unrequited love, *must* prove less important and portentous than the possibility of dreaming itself. The time they care about is certainly neither the future nor merely the past but the pastoral time of the *might-have-been* which amounts to a suspension, and therefore it can affect the present possibilities. It offers something that attained dreams cannot: a vicarious sense of loss. As Laurence Lerner points out about Virgil's first Eglogue, in it "The beauty of home is seen through the eyes of loss" (41), and that is one of the main uses of nostalgia that Pastoral literature affords and in which both Alain-Fournier and Cornell excel.

The portraits in the interior of the Medici boxes give us the impression of immediate presence and distance also because of the way glass has been employed in them. There are glass panels fronting the compartments of the reproductions with painted lines on them, as if, once finished, the original Renaissance artist had forgotten to erase some gridlines; the created condition of the images is thus emphasized and set in contrast with their naturalistic and photographic finish. The glass panels for the whole box are tinted (in blue, in orange). Glass, therefore, keeps the reproduced masterpiece enclosed within different depths and planes, more patently framed and also further enshrined. In doing so, Cornell's art is pointing back to the origins of perspective in painting, namely to the *perspective box* that Giotto employed to give his painting an architectural space for the bodies of saints and Madonnas to occupy, becoming more corporeal as a result (Fossi152). The different glass panels act on the portraits as protection from and projection into the present. Susan Stewart explains that Cornell's use of glass "eliminates the possibility of contagion, indeed of lived experience, at the same time that it magnifies the possibilities of transcendent vision" (Stewart 68). But it is a transcendence that is confined in immanence: the picture and the bits and pieces inside the box do not refer to the future, but to past and a present time alike, with both times reified into a different state as a result: out of lived historical time but able to overspill into it. The Medici boxes do not aspire to a future transcendence but to ooze their presence in and out, as a token of the past that remains with us —affecting our way of experiencing the present— in a tantalizing physical way: what Cornell describes

in “CG44” as “a thing from childhood never outgrown” (109) and we could call *ready-made nostalgia*.

The use of glass to create that sense of both physicality and estrangement was something that Cornell could have learned from the inventor of the ready-made himself, Marcel Duchamp, with whom Cornell collaborated in the early 1940s to make the miniature version of Duchamp’s key works called *The Box in a Valise* (Blair 41). Certainly there is, for Cornell, a possible connection between Duchamp’s *Le Grand Verre* and Alain-Fournier’s *Le Grand Meaulnes*, beyond sharing the same template for their titles. Firstly, both are narrations, and teasingly frustrating ones for that matter; Lyotard encourages the idea that *Le Grand Verre*, or *The Bride Stripped Bared by Her Bachelors, Even*, contains a story: “Is the argument of the *Large Glass* a narration, as its title indicates?” (132). Lyotard moves on to point out the kind of narration present in “So is there a story? Rather the heading of a ‘scene’ or of a ‘tableau vivant,’” that is, as he further specifies, “a fragment or an embryo of a narration” (133). Secondly, both *Le Grand Verre* and *Le Grand Meaulnes* are diptychs, composed in two parts from whose complex relation the narrative stems: the bachelors in the lower part of *Le Grand Verre* and the bride in the higher one can be seen as a parallel to the division of *Le Grand Meaulnes* in two parts: the *fête* in the domain and the appearance of Yvonne as opposed to the search for them. This binary structure is also shared by Cornell’s *Medici Slot Machine* series. The little realm that is contained in those boxes is presided over by the image of the young prince or princess, setting a contrast then between their centrality and the other compartments and objects in the box. Furthermore, the illusion of a perspective distance inside the boxes is also attempted in the lower part of *Le Grand Verre* but there, as in the *Medici* boxes, glass disrupts the distance effect; we resort to Lyotard again:

The effect produced is in principle that of the virtual three-dimensional, that of the deep space dug out in the support by perspective. But as the support is made of transparent glass, the eye paradoxically cannot traverse it to explore the virtual space. When it traverses it, it encounters the “real” objects that are behind the *Glass*, for example the window of the exhibition room in the Philadelphia Museum. It is thrown back onto its own activity, without being able to lose itself in virtual objects, as the reality effect would have it. A transformation of the perspectivist transformation. (33-34)

In Cornell’s *Medici* boxes the tenuous perspective effect is applied to the reproduction of the noble child, so that it recedes further from the viewers. Therefore, they are taking the role of the bachelors in *Le Grand Verre* in a reflected way: real, three-dimensional entities, the viewers are nonetheless intensely pulled towards an illusory, contrived representation of childhood from the past. So much so that it could be possible to say that Duchamp’s last work, *Given*, defined as a “projection” of *Le Grand Verre* (Lyotard 35) and consisting in an assemblage of the naked body of a woman lying down on a natural setting – a *tablaeu* which the viewer is forced to peep into through two holes in a door –

amounts to a Cornell box *blown up*. As the Medici boxes, *Given* requires a frontal viewpoint, and it turns the spectators into working elements within its machinations. Unlike the boxes, however, the circuit that *Given* and its blueprint, *Le Grand Verre*, establish does not include the past: “the time of the *Large Glass* is that of stripping naked *not yet done*; the time of *Given* is that of stripping naked *already done*” (Lyotard 36). It is a circuit that runs through the present moment: it is kept in motion, then, unrelentingly, splitting the present—but without abounding it—the way the arrow in Zeno’s Paradox rests in its flight. In contrast, Cornell models the Medici boxes on the paradoxical temporal axis that is employed in *Le Grand Meaulnes*: the viewer’s interest and involvement only result in deferring any denouement. So the boxes of the *Medici Slot Machine* series are actual *vending machines*; operated by the viewer’s gaze, they dispense *mise-en-abyme* longing and ready-made nostalgia.

The unattainability and loss of the love-object is, ultimately, what ensures that the machinery for the promotion of nostalgia keeps working. In *Le Grand Meaulnes* such function is performed by the death of Yvonne: it is what makes the impossible return to the past utterly evident. The importance of her death for the past to achieve such supremacy in the novel can be better understood in the light of the following quotation from Jankélévitch about the idealization of a dead beloved:

Simplification, or sublimation, or general stylization, the retrospective process that starts among those who remain alive after a death has occurred is analogous to love’s crystallization; posthumous crystallization is the belated symmetrical equivalent of the original passionate crystallization; death eliminates from our existence the changes in humour and the myriad discomforts that were continuously working against the image of its perpetual character. (Jankélévitch 224-255) [My translation]

So, the preservation of a beloved who has passed away is a process of crystallization, which ultimately forces us to see that beloved through a *glass*, darkly: a distillation of the dead person takes his or her place. On this side of the glass, the lover obtains his or her original passion back, completing thus a diptych in which the latter part is a mirror reflection of the former. In *Le Grand Meaulnes*, what the death of Yvonne preserves and thus crystallizes is her original image, the one that Meaulnes glimpsed at the *fête*. Thus Meaulnes does not get possession of his beloved, but her preservation. It seems as if she *had to* die so that the return to the lost domain, an inevitably altered place now, could not be possible, and we could have instead the nostalgic impossibility of such return. In this Alain-Fournier is following his model, Dante, very closely. Indeed, in the literary edifice created by Dante, a promise of progress in time, the death of Beatrice is the cornerstone: it is what makes the lover’s future reunion with the beloved *necessary*; without Beatrice’s death, that edifice would simply collapse. This is betrayed by Dante himself in his *Vita Nuova* (1295), the work in which the Florentine poet comments on the origin of his passion for Beatrice and analyses his own poetic compositions and dreams about her. Thinking about the

brevity of life, Dante Alighieri cannot avoid connecting such dark mood with her beloved, and he expresses it in the omen “Di necessitate convene che la gentilissima Beatrice alcuna volta si muoia” (88). In this sentence the Italian verb *convenire* refers to something that happens from logical necessity, but here it might also refer, in a sort of Freudian slip of the tongue, to an action that becomes *convenient*. The death of his beloved is required in Dante’s work: it urges the poet towards the future Heaven in which to meet again as much as Yvonne’s death preserves her crystallized past in Meaulnes’s present.

In Cornell’s art, death also proves the perfect preservative for the love-object. After all, the ultimate encasement is the coffin. Many of Cornell’s boxes resemble coffins, and more particularly so those that contain dolls, the first one being *Untitled (Bébé Marie)*, dated in the early 1940s. Those boxes offer a sinister feeling of confinement which is far more restrained in the boxes containing reproductions of works of art. Typically, in the doll boxes such as *Untitled (Mélisande)* or *Untitled (Doll Habitat)*, nature is present, by synecdoche, in the bare twigs and tree barks that surround the doll, which even seem to *swallow* it, in the way that in some *frottage* pictures by Max Ernst, plastic mineral substances seem to envelop human figures. The dolls in those boxes are miniatures of young women who seem to be assimilated not only into another space but also another time. According to Susan Stewart, that is the main effect of miniaturization:

The miniature always tends toward tableau rather than toward narrative, toward silence and spatial boundaries rather than toward expository closure. Whereas speech unfolds in time, the miniature unfolds in space. The observer is offered a transcendent and simultaneous view of the miniature, yet it is trapped outside the possibility of a lived reality of the miniature. Hence the nostalgic desire to present the lower classes, peasant life, or the cultural other within a timeless and uncontaminated miniature form. The miniature is against speech, particularly as speech reveals an inner dialectical, or dialogic, nature. The miniature’s fixed form is manipulated by individual fantasy rather than by physical circumstance, its possible linguistic correlations are the *multum in parvo* of the epigram and the proverb, forms whose function is to put an end to speech and the idiosyncrasies of immediate context. In its tableaulike form, the miniature is a world of arrested time; its stillness emphasizes the activity that is outside its borders. (Stewart 66)

In Cornell’s doll boxes the miniaturization is certainly apart from any “lived reality”: it is used as a resource to represent *another realm*: Jankélévitch’s *crystallization*. That is a space of imagination from which the observer is both in contact and excluded: the unattainable beloved is preserved there, impervious to the erosion of every day’s events. It is locked inaccessible in a pocket of still time. But here the distance that creates is the means of the relation with our historical time. It is a pastoral relation of retreat and return: our present is affected by that past, still element which resists its assimilation into an unfolding

narrative reality. With this, a sense of limitation in that reality, of which we did not know anything nor did we care before, has materialized.

Such uncanny resistance to assimilation into the present historical time, as it is revealed by Cornell's doll boxes, is also present in *Le Grand Meaulnes*. In the novel we find two instances that bear connection with those doll boxes; the first one takes place in Chapter 7 from the Part Two of the novel, titled "The Bandage is Removed." In this chapter we find Frantz de Galais dressed as Pierrot, working for a touring theatre company. He performs a pantomime with a doll which verges on the sadistic in its cruelty:

During the second part of the pantomime the 'poor pierrot who couldn't stand' produced from his sleeve—I can't remember why—a little dog stuffed with bran, and with her as a partner enacted a scene half tragic, half comic. This culminated in the doll being made to vomit up the entire contents of her body. Then, to the accompaniment of pathetic stifled plaints, he refilled her with something that looked like porridge, and at the moment of greatest tension, when everyone was staring open-mouthed at the unfortunate slimy young personage over whom poor pierrot was moaning, he suddenly seized her by the arm and flung her straight at the head of Jasmin Delouche, whose ear she merely grazed, bouncing off with a splash just under the chin of Madame Pignot. (Alain-Fournier 102)

Pierrot, the pensive and sad clown who suffers from unrequited love, is, we must remember, a staple character in the pictorial genre of the *fête galante*: we are, as readers, still traversing the aftermath of the original fête; and Frantz, in the role of Pierrot, is taking his symbolic revenge on Valentine, the woman who left him on their wedding day. The connection between this cruel passage and Cornell's doll boxes, certainly the most disturbing works in his production, is the presence of shared sadistic drives in both, but they are restrained in Cornell's case. In fact, for the doll to function as a miniature representation of the beloved, restraint is needed: the doll, a toy that invites tactile manipulation, must be protected from the sense of touch, which would turn it eroded, abject: present. Frantz's performance only shows how necessary the preservation of the beloved in an unattainable space and time can become. If not, nostalgic feelings may turn into grudge.

The other passage in the novel that we can relate to the pathetic feelings triggered by Cornell's doll boxes is the description that narrator, François Seurel, makes of Yvonne's dead body when he carries it downstairs to put it in her coffin:

Soon both arms are aching. At each step, with this burden on my breast, I find it more difficult to breathe. Holding close the inert, heavy body, I bend over her head and take a deep breath, drawing into my mouth some strands of golden hair: dead hair that has a taste of earth. This taste of earth and of dead, and this weight on my heart, is all that

is left to me of the great adventure, and of you, Yvonne de Galais, so ardently sought, so deeply loved... (Alain-Fournier 187)

Indeed, that is all that is left for François Seurel, but not for Meaulnes: there is a distance between Meaulnes and Yvonne that is not available for François: the distance of crystallization. Such distance prevents the bourgeois life that Meaulnes and Yvonne's marriage would have led to, but, more importantly, it impedes the disappointment and tactile frustration, even tangible menace, that François experiences carrying Yvonne's body. Such distance is also achieved in Cornell's doll boxes, but it is particularly accomplished in *Untitled (Bébé Marie)*. The similitudes between the long hair of the Victorian porcelain doll, which gets caught and tangles around the twigs that ominously surround her, and the description of Yvonne's hair, almost with a life of its own, make possible to conceive here more than just a general influence between the novel and this particular assemblage box. But the most remarkable element that this box and *Le Grand Meaulnes* share is the *crystallization* of the nostalgic feeling. We must bear in mind that such process is *created* in both the novel and the box. Although the elements that are the reason for such nostalgia are old-fashioned—an almost lost celebratory tradition, popular with noble classes of the past, and a flamboyant *Art Nouveau* token of childhood—and therefore lending themselves to nostalgic readings, Alain-Fournier and Cornell channel that nostalgia into the contemporary present, making it bear on the reader's and viewer's experience of their own present. Just like the peasants from Arcadia in pastoral poems do not live the life of real peasants, the nostalgia we experience in reading *Le Grand Meaulnes* or in gazing into Cornell's boxes is not the one pertaining to the motifs in them: its effect is craftily generalized and made available to any eventual reader or viewer, regardless of their personal experiences. As the poet Frank O'Hara expresses it in a poem titled "Joseph Cornell", "You are always a little too / young to understand" (237); indeed, the narrative techniques of the novel and the assemblage organization of the boxes make sure that the *always* that prevents us from fully understanding (and eventually discarding) them remains in force.

In Cornell's art what contributes to the efficiency of that suspension—which allows the process of crystallization—is the glass panel. The availability of longing and nostalgia in *Le Grand Meaulnes* is achieved by means of narrative techniques that entice readers into a reenactment of the *fête* which, by being continually protracted, actually frustrates their expectancy and trades it for an unaware *suspension of belief* in the preeminent superiority of the present (we get the remittent anteriority of the past instead). In Cornell's work the suspension and distancing effect are achieved with the use of glass, and, above all, of the front glass panel. Cornell's biographer, Deborah Solomon, appraises the crucial function of the glass panel when she compares the boxes and the colorful collages that Cornell worked on in the last decade of his life:

The 1960s collages are typically described as the two-dimensional equivalent of the boxes. They're certainly the product of the same junk-into-art sensibility. Still, the collages, I think, are generally less

satisfying than the boxes. Something is lost by the absence of the pane of glass. The viewer is deprived of what we most enjoy about the experience of looking at the boxes — which is to say, peering into a shallow, sealed space and seeing unrelated objects cohere into a miniature universe. (Solomon, ch. 21)

The viewer's attention requires the encasement of the box as well, which lodges it in another time: the crystallized past. It entices a roaming narrative within that suspended time in a way the two dimensional collages cannot.

It cannot be ascertained that Cornell found the controlled effect of his boxes because of reading Alain-Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*. He had done very successful assembling boxes before his "CG44" dossier; but in the late 1930s and early 1940s he was achieving further control over his materials, and managing a nostalgic stylization of his boxes that did not depend so much on the contents inside the box but on the arrangement that the artist's hand conferred on them. However, it is not less true that in *Le Grand Meaulnes* Cornell came across with a method of treating the past that acted both as a reaffirmation on his own stylistic development and as an encouragement into enticing and achieving control of the viewer's expectancy. The rendition of that deferring narrative method from the novel into the assembling medium results in exploiting the use of glass further: in employing mirrors (as in the *Palace* series), in creating subtle compartments that invite perspective (as in the *Medici Slot Machine* series); or in frustrating physical seizure of the miniature woman represented by a doll we have to observe as it is being assimilated to nature, like a Daphne of sorts. All these crystallized experiences of loss and longing become generalized and available due to the use of glass.

Cornell and Alain-Fournier are pastoral artists because they delved in nostalgia — "the basic emotion of pastoral" (Lerner 41)— not as passive receptors of it, but as their active controllers and administrators: as Deborah Solomon points out, "Cornell was not a slave to nostalgia but rather its master" (ch. 9). In order to become its master, Cornell, adapting the narrative strategy of *Le Grand Meaulnes*, has to escape the historical, unchangeable past, that is, their nostalgia cannot be about what has already happened but about what *might have happened*. To achieve that, Alain-Fournier and Cornell hence follow the conventions of the pastoral mode, the most accomplished examples of which, such as Virgil's *Eglogues*, "create connections by explicitly confronting the experience of separation, and present us with fictions whose power depends upon their acknowledged fictionality" (Haber 52). Those are the kinds of connections and fictions that the *methodological nostalgia* (or *methodology of nostalgia*) employed by Cornell and Alain-Fournier can offer us.

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