

This is a translation from the French of a flier about Jean Raspail, author of The Camp of the Saints. It was printed by Raspail's publishers, Editions Robert Laffont of Paris, in connection with his most recent novel, Seven Horsemen. The translation is by Laura Tanton, a school teacher, linguist and translator based in Elizabeth City, North Carolina.

The Traditionalism of Jean Raspail

*It is always the soul
that wins the decisive battles.*

"In 1951, during a trip to Tierra del Fuego, in crossing the Strait of Magellan, I found, in the space of an hour, under the snow, in the wind, one of the last boats of the Alakalufs. I will never forget it."

This vision — these survivors of a people forgotten by God in an inhuman climate — would never leave Jean Raspail. His books are haunted by it, and it is at the heart of the Patagonian myth created by Raspail, made so real that it almost lives. It also sparked his romantic imaginings.

He was 25 then, living the adventure of his first book of travels: *Tierra del Fuego to Alaska*. In it he explores the two poles of the American continent — seeing and experiencing the greatness between them.

Jean Raspail favors naked, rocky, limitless landscapes. These are the writer's landscapes, populated and animated by the imagination's whim which brings meaning to the unfolding story. They are internal landscapes, seen only by the author and the characters he projects onto these empty spaces.

For always — or almost always — the characters in Jean Raspail's novels disappear. If they don't disappear, they dream, which is the same thing. Whether they flee (voluntarily), are chased and pursued, or are given an order or mission, they leave. And space opens up in front of them, absorbs them, like the time of which they lose track. They are not hopeless — or perhaps they are beyond hopelessness ... so much so that they no longer hope for anything. It may come to pass that at the end of a long voyage a door will open, the characters pass through it, exhausted but serene, having accomplished their mission and met their destiny. It is a matter between them and God, whether or not they are believers. The essential matter is to venture forth, to undertake the search. And what is one looking for?

One gets the impression that the characters are

not alone and abandoned during their protracted wanderings. One would say that someone watches over them as they discover trails and road signs. These are not easy to interpret, just small pebbles which permit progress bit by bit. Someone has certainly laid them on their path, someone never named but always present, though sometimes inattentive. Then one realizes that their march is a conquest, and the men are actually knights.

There is something of a medieval verse chronicled in this work. Better yet: an echo of the legend of King Arthur.

The *Seven Horsemen* — after *The King's Game*, after *Septentrion*, after *Who Remembers Man* — appeared suddenly, in this light, as the richest expression to date of Jean Raspail's work.

***"Jean Raspail makes it
understood that he does not share
the 'values' of the modern world."***

They are seven — imagine! — that leave the city at dusk, facing the setting sun, through the Western Gate which is no longer guarded. The only men still able to carry arms in a kingdom devastated by the worst imaginable calamities. They have received an order from their sovereign, the hereditary margrave, to go see what remains of life in these domains which flourished not long ago. "They didn't flee, and betrayed nothing, hoped for less still, and did not allow themselves to dream." They obey; they are soldiers.

They are young. Colonel-Major Count Silve de Pikkendorf, who commands them, is 35 years old; so is Osmond Van Beck, the coadjutor-bishop (there must be a man of God in the troop); the three other petty officers are between 16 and 20 years of age; only Vassili the corporal and Abai the stable-keeper

are older. (They're young as the heroes of Jean Raspail's novels often are: the little boy in *The King's Game*, the boy and girl in *The Blue Island* and in *Sire*). With these seven horsemen he represents that which anyone steeped in history and tradition would consider the ideal society, according to the three orders: the nobility, the clergy and the third estate. But, as in all harmonious societies, they are fundamentally equal.

This aristocratic view of the world is the signature of the works of Raspail — it is readily evident in *Sire*. It is the sought-after dream of a society of upright citizens driven by noble sentiments: honor, and loyalty to the chosen cause — with the opposite as well: arrogance, pride, contempt. These are contrasted further with the virtues of self-respect, gallantry and courage. Thus Jean Raspail makes it understood that he does not share the "values" of the modern world. He finds refuge in his imaginary

worlds, in his timeless stories which, however — because nothing is simple — speak of today. "Never," he said, "will I write a historical novel about the Templars of the 12th century; but about the Templars of today, yes." And so it is that the conjured-up calamities that led the kingdom of the *Seven Horsemen* to ruin is a transposition of actual evils: epidemics, violence, drugs. In addition to these evils are "the others," the Chechens that prowl about at the borders and infiltrate — reminiscent of *Camp of the Saints*, and the infernal vision portrayed in the last pages of that book.

A stack of books does not necessarily constitute a great work. The ten books that Jean Raspail created from 20 years of writing, these constitute a great work: because an ambition and great expectation live within them, and because they were born of great spirit and vision. ■

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Associate editor Wayne Lutton discusses how *The Camp of the Saints* was received by reviewers when it first appeared in the United States in 1975, and illustrates this with excerpts from some of the many reviews that were published.

The Emergence of a "Classic"

By Wayne Lutton

"Forget *Jaws* and *The Towering Inferno*.

This is the ultimate disaster novel."

—from an ad in the *New York Times*
August 19, 1975

The Camp of the Saints first appeared in France in 1973. It soon became a best-seller and foreign rights were sold. By November 1973, the Trade Division of the respected New York firm of Charles Scribner's Sons contracted to publish an English-language edition. Scribner's secured the services of Norman Shapiro of Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, to translate the novel. *The Camp* was released in this country in the late Summer of 1975.

The book was immediately attacked by the guardians of liberal opinion. Paul Gray fired one of the first salvos in the August 4, 1975 issue of *Time* magazine. Under the title of "Poor White Trash," Gray dismissed it as a "harangue" and a "bilious tirade" that read as if it had "come off a mimeograph machine in some dank cellar." He accused Raspail, and by clear implication his American publisher, of "exacerbating" racial enmity.

The editors of *The New York Times* found the book so offensive that they published two attacks on it, the first in their issue for Wednesday, August 13, 1975 where Richard Lingeman fumed that "reading Jean Raspail's novel *The Camp of the Saints* is like being trapped at a cocktail party with a normal-looking fellow who suddenly starts a perfervid racist diatribe." As far as Mr. Lingeman was concerned, "on the subject of race [Raspail] apparently becomes a bit loony." Dubbing him "the white man's Franz Fanon," Lingeman dismissed his assumptions as "preposterous" and the story as "grotesquely orchestrated." The novel is "bilge," he warned.

After this panning by America's "newspaper of record" failed to kill sales of the book, the Sunday *New York Times Book Review* launched a second attack on October 5, 1975. If readers and other book

reviewers who take their "cue" from the editors of *The Times* didn't get the message the first time, Thomas Lask repeated the charge that the story line was "preposterous." Granting that "we may need the message," Lask chided the author for engaging in "windy rhetoric." *The Camp's* "moral is overwhelmed by its flaws as a work of art: the narrative is sluggish, the symbolism banal, the scolding tone an affront to the readers."

The New York Times "line" was parroted by other reviewers, especially on the East Coast. Representative of these was the review written by short-story writer and critic Silvia Tennenbaum for *Long Island Newsday* of September 10, 1975. Ms. Tennenbaum called it a "Fascist fantasy...a disgusting book" purveying a theme that was "hideously corrupt." "Fascist rhetoric" marred what she emphasized was "the crudest kind of propaganda, the kind that works on our deepest fears and exploits our hidden disaffections. It is, as I said in the beginning of this review, a truly disgusting book."

To Bruce Allen, in *The Providence Journal*, September 28, 1975, *The Camp* was "a jerrybuilt nightmare," a "diatribe," and a "psychotic fantasy." Moreover, the story was "foolishly conceived" and "blindly over-written." Finally, his Rhode Island readers were advised that Raspail's novel was simply "a dull and stupid book." So there was certainly no need to go out and purchase a copy.

Further afield, one Virgil Miller Newton Jr., writing for the *Tampa Tribune* of September 5, 1975, complained that his editor had forced him to review what amounted to "a flood of bilious exacerbation from France."

Conceding that Raspail was an award-winning author in France, the Florida critic noted that his work "hasn't raised a ripple in the more realistic American literary world." Newton the Younger came up with a new literary twist of the knife: he attributed much of Raspail's "vitriol" to the "fact" that Frenchmen