

## Durham E-Theses

---

### *Family relationships in the novels of Francois Mauriac*

Prudence J. Winnett

#### How to cite:

---

Winnett, Prudence J. (1982) Family relationships in the novels of Francois Mauriac. Masters thesis, Durham University.

#### Use policy

---

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a <https://etheses.durham.ac.uk/id/eprint/7798/> is made to the metadata record in Durham E-Theses
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Please consult the [full Durham E-Theses policy](#) for further details.

PRUDENCE J. WINNETT

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE NOVELS OF FRANÇOIS MAURIAU

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the study of the extent to which the family relationships portrayed in Mauriac's novels can be regarded as channels of love and the role played by the members of the families described as vehicles of or obstacles to divine grace. Attention is focused on the insight Mauriac's treatment of family relationships gives us into the true nature of love, as this is understood by the Christian, man's need for it and the effect it has on the emotional and spiritual development of the individual. Since Mauriac's characters are generally shown to be egoistic in their relationships, to confuse their love of others with love of self or to communicate even disinterested affection in a meaningless way, an analysis of the vast majority of the families Mauriac describes reveals an almost total absence of genuine love, according to the New Testament interpretation of the word. Mauriac is shown to emphasize throughout his novels that family relationships are not naturally loving ones and that, far from being common, even minimally happy homes are rare phenomena, not born but painstakingly made. The secret of their relative success is shown to lie according to Mauriac in Christianity's law of love and its understanding of 'God' and 'Love' as synonymous. Whether or not they are aware of it, the most effective transmitters of this message are shown to be those who love others selflessly 'in deed and in truth', whilst those who fail in this respect prove to be correspondingly misleading. In the final part of the thesis, however, it is pointed out that God is shown by Mauriac to reveal himself constantly in various and often mystical ways, so that, however beneficially loving, or harmfully unloving, family relationships may be, the only force that can ever be said to constitute an essential obstacle to divine grace is an individual's own will.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE NOVELS OF  
FRANÇOIS MAURIAC

Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the University of Durham

by

PRUDENCE J. WINNETT, B.A.

July 1982

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author.  
No quotation from it should be published without  
his prior written consent and information derived  
from it should be acknowledged.



22. MAY 1984

## CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION ... ..	1
CHAPTER I - THE SOURCE AND NATURE OF LOVE ... ..	13
CHAPTER II - THE DYNAMICS OF MAURICIEN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS	36
1. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PARENT/CHILD AND BROTHER/SISTER RELATIONSHIPS ... ..	37
2. THE COMMUNICATION BARRIER ... ..	69
3. BLOOD-TIES AND LOVE-BONDS ... ..	81
CHAPTER III - THE QUEST FOR HAPPINESS -IN LOVE AND MARRIAGE	90
1. MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND SOCIETY ... ..	91
2. PASSIONATE LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIPS ... ..	107
3. CONJUGAL BLISS - DREAM OR REALITY? ... ..	135
CHAPTER IV - THE SCHOOL OF CHRISTIAN LOVE ... ..	146
1. INTERDEPENDENCE AND THE DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN ...	147
2. THE HUMAN REFLECTION OF DIVINE LOVE ... ..	158
3. DISTORTED CHRISTIANITY AND THE IMPOSTER IMAGE OF GOD	167
4. NON-PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES ... ..	197
5. THROUGH THE HUMAN TO THE DIVINE LOVE AFFAIR ... ..	214
6. SUMMARY ... ..	241
CHAPTER V - THE FREEDOM AND POWER TO LOVE ... ..	244
CONCLUSION ... ..	259
BIBLIOGRAPHY ... ..	270

## REFERENCES

With the exception of the works listed below, all the references to Mauriac's novels, plays and essays quoted in this thesis have been cited from the Oeuvres complètes de François Mauriac, Paris (Grasset, chez Fayard) 1950-56, 12 volumes - abbreviated henceforth to 'OC'.

Un adolescent d'autrefois, Paris, Flammarion, 1969.

Maltaverne, Paris, Flammarion, 1972.

La Pierre d'achoppement, Monaco, Éditions du Rocher, 1951.

Mémoires intérieurs, Paris, Livre de Poche, 3<sup>e</sup> trimestre 1973.

Nouveaux Mémoires intérieurs, Paris, Flammarion, Collection Folio, 2<sup>e</sup> trimestre 1974.

Ce que je crois, Paris, Grasset, 1962.

## STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author.

No quotation from it should be published without her prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author wishes to express appreciation to her supervisor, Dr. B.G. Garnham, for his helpful advice, constructive criticism and unfailing encouragement throughout the preparation of this thesis.

To  
my parents  
and  
Kieran

INTRODUCTION

In her full-length study of François Mauriac Nelly Cormeau emphasizes that love is of supreme importance in his work. Her statement that 'l'amour est le thème principal du roman mauriacien'<sup>1</sup> is true from whatever angle the novels are viewed. Samuel Silvestre de Sacy maintains that 'l'homme, pour Mauriac, ne s'accomplit que dans l'amour'.<sup>2</sup> Love is certainly the essence of the religious convictions described by Michael Moloney as 'the warp upon which the fabric of [Mauriac's] art is woven'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Jean de Fabrègues refers to 'cette foi-amour, cet amour-foi' that is 'partout dans cette œuvre, au cœur de cette œuvre'.<sup>4</sup> Referring to Christ's disciples who have learnt 'que leur ami est Dieu et que Dieu est amour', Mauriac writes in Vie de Jésus:

Qu'avaient-ils besoin de comprendre autre chose? Toute la Loi Nouvelle tenait dans un seul mot, le plus profané dans toutes les langues du monde: amour. (OC, VII, 133)

Mauriac's unswerving conviction that 'rien ne compte en ce monde que l'amour' (Ce que je crois, p. 75) is reflected throughout his novels. They are concerned substantially with human passion, love is the inspiration behind them, and, although, in the words of Eva Kushner, Mauriac 'pratiquait l'œuvre-question et non l'œuvre-réponse, le cri plutôt que le sermon',<sup>5</sup> he implies throughout his works that Love Incarnate is the solution to the conflicts and evil inherent in the human condition.

- 
1. N. Cormeau, L'Art de François Mauriac, Paris, Grasset, 1951, p. 217.
  2. S. Silvestre de Sacy, L'Oeuvre de François Mauriac, Paris, Paul Hartmann, 1927, p. 75.
  3. M.F. Moloney, François Mauriac: A Critical Study, Denver, Alan Swallow, 1958, p. 13.
  4. J. de Fabrègues, Mauriac, Paris, Plon, 1971, p. 181.
  5. E. Kushner, Mauriac, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 'Les Écrivains devant Dieu', 1972, p. 106.



In this thesis I have considered the extent to which the family relationships portrayed in Mauriac's novels can be regarded as channels of love, and I have attempted to focus attention on the insight they give us into the nature of love, man's need for it and the effect it has on the emotional and spiritual development of the individual.<sup>6</sup> In so doing I have explored various ways in which the members of the families Mauriac describes help or hinder each other in their conscious or unconscious search for the Christian God of Love. These two superficially different themes of a) the extent to which the families in Mauriac's world prove or fail to be networks of love and b) the role played by the individual members of these families as vehicles of or obstacles to divine grace, are in fact very intimately connected, for, as Nelly Cormeau indicates, 'l'amour et la religion touchent, au plus profond de notre être, des régions si proches qu'elles sont presque coextensives et qu'on pourrait considérer l'expérience de l'amour comme une manière d'introduction à la vie dévote'.<sup>7</sup>

Excluding the Introduction and Conclusion, this thesis is divided into five chapters, the second and fourth of which - 'The Dynamics of Mauriacien Family Relationships'<sup>8</sup> and 'The School of Christian Love' - are concerned with the two main subject areas referred to above. Owing to their length the three middle chapters -

---

6. Although this thesis is concerned primarily with the family relationships portrayed in Mauriac's novels, I have made occasional references to his drama and short stories and quoted passages from his memoirs, essays or articles which complement or shed light on the fictional evidence of the novels themselves.

7. N. Cormeau, op. cit., p. 202.

8. As no general rule has been found for the formation of an adjective from the name of Mauriac, 'Mauriacien' has been used throughout this thesis in accordance with the example set by M.F. Moloney (op. cit., p. 21).

II, III and IV - are divided into subsections as listed in the Contents table. In Chapter I, 'The Source and Nature of Love', essential definitions and background information are given. Through the argument developed in the course of Chapter III, 'The Quest for Happiness in Love and Marriage', the transition is made from the theme of Chapter II to that of Chapter IV. The final chapter, 'The Freedom and Power to Love', corresponds in length to the first; without clarification of the point raised in it the central message arising from Mauriac's overall treatment of family relationships as reviewed in the preceding chapters, would risk being considered either hopelessly pessimistic instead of realistically hopeful, or, to a certain degree at least, a non sequitur.

From whatever viewpoint Mauriac's fiction is considered, an insight into his faith is highly relevant, and in his preface to Volume VII of his complete works he writes:

Je me demande même si le meilleur de mon apport religieux ne se trouve pas dans mon oeuvre romanesque, là où il est le plus mêlé, le plus compromis avec la chair et le sang.  
(p. iii)

In fact Mauriac's Catholicism impregnated everything he wrote, whether obtrusively or discreetly, consciously or unwittingly. In his Journal d'un homme de trente ans Mauriac compares himself with Stendhal:

Beyle gavé de religion la vomit. Moi gavé de religion, je l'assimile au point que je vois tout à travers elle.  
(OC, IV, 228)

In order to assess the extent to which the family relationships Mauriac portrays can be considered channels of love and to appreciate the metaphysical role they fulfil, a knowledge of the author's faith is essential. For him 'l'Amour' and 'le Christ'

were synonymous, so that in Mauriacien terms love inevitably appears an enigma unless interpreted in the light of 'le mystère de Jésus'. One might argue that, as Mauriac's religious views were fundamentally Roman Catholic, they should require little clarification, since Christianity is an old and widely accepted religion which has made its mark on the whole of western civilization. However, as a study of Mauriac's novels clearly indicates, the Christian faith is in just as great danger of misinterpretation as any modern, less formalized philosophy, precisely because it is ancient and well established. It has been so open to adulteration in the course of its history that the word 'Christianity' often evokes in men's minds an understanding of the religion which Mauriac would regard as blatantly false. At the same time, although the western world may have been christianized for several hundreds of years, the number of Christians as committed as François Mauriac is relatively small. I have consequently devoted the first chapter of this thesis to an outline of Mauriac's faith and especially his spiritual crisis of the 1920s, to a survey of the kind of religious upbringing he received and the extent to which he assimilated or rejected this, and finally to an analysis of his understanding of love.

At the beginning of Chapter II there is a reference to the way in which many of the families Mauriac describes have already been struck by tragedy and are therefore depleted even at the beginning of the story itself. I have then considered how the offspring in such maimed families suffer through what is, in some cases, an inevitable shortage of care and affection. This is followed by an examination of the way in which the remaining parents almost

invariably fail to give their children the love they desperately need. Mauriac has been remembered by many for his 'prédilection pour les situations cruelles et les âmes féroces'<sup>9</sup> and criticized for his depiction of sinners as 'unreal creatures seen through a sombre lens',<sup>10</sup> by a number of Mauriacien scholars who do not seem to have appreciated the fact that the histories of Mauriac's most unpleasant if not monstrous characters have been charted with the thoroughness of a clinical psychologist. I have consequently drawn particular attention to the abundant evidence in the novels showing how the personalities of the protagonists have been conditioned and adversely affected by love starvation. Even in novels such as Les Anges noirs, where the interest of the reader is sustained largely by the action of the plot rather than by psychological analysis, Mauriac is careful to give small though highly significant details concerning the childhood background of his characters. However, whilst the majority of critics tend to discuss the author's standing as a Catholic novelist, to praise his caustic, satirical criticism of bourgeois hypocrisy and to wonder at his uncanny understanding of the female mind, relatively few have emphasized that his penetrating observations of mankind led Mauriac to record and highlight in fictional form numerous case histories illustrating important truths in the area of child psychology. In the first part of Chapter II I have also shown how Mauriac suggests that the pernicious effects parental neglect can have on individuals, not only in their youth but in later life, do

---

9. P.-H. Simon, Mauriac, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 'Écrivains de toujours', 1974, p. 90.

10. M. Jarrett-Kerr, François Mauriac, Cambridge, Bowes and Bowes, 'Studies in Modern European Literature and Thought', 1954, p. 52.

not necessarily have their root in evil intentions on the part of parents and that very often a total absence of genuine love is disguised under a cloak of doting adoration. Where possible I have put forward explanations for the most characteristic parental attitudes held by Mauriac's protagonists, once again to highlight the fact that however one-sided and negative a picture of humanity Mauriac may paint, it was not without foundation but drawn from his very detailed and accurate observation of man's nature and based on a profound understanding of the human psyche rather than on an arbitrarily jaundiced personal outlook.

After considering parental attitudes I have also commented on those of children towards their parents, and discussed a number of general reasons why the family relationships Mauriac describes - notably the parent-child relationships - are often empty or shallow. Although Chapter II is concerned with the dynamics of family relationships generally, I have concentrated primarily on parent-child relationships for two main reasons; firstly, it is on them that the development of all other relationships ultimately depends, for whilst a wholesome parent-child relationship is likely to lay the foundations of other fruitful relationships in later life, it is probable that poor parent-child relationships will have an equally damaging effect; secondly, the psychological phenomena highlighted in Mauriac's depiction of parent-child relationships recur to a large extent in those between siblings or married couples, so that the same sort of pattern emerges whether one is considering relationships between parents and offspring, brothers and sisters or husbands and wives. In Chapter II I have reviewed in some detail the relationships between the siblings depicted by Mauriac but have

left full consideration of conjugal relationships until Chapter III, where all love relationships between the sexes, in or out of marriage, are examined in depth. The next section of Chapter II is given over to an analysis of the problem of poor verbal communication as both a symptom and a cause of the breakdown of the family relationships described. I have concluded Chapter II by examining the degree to which Mauriac implies in his novels that family relationships are essentially more loving than any other personal relationships and finally by considering what solution, if any, Mauriac suggests for an individual to shed his fundamental sense of solitude once and for all and to span the gulf which is bound to exist between himself and other human beings, however intimately related they might be.

At the beginning of Chapter III it is suggested that the social norms of the era in which the novels are set exacerbate the difficulties Mauriac's heroes experience in their conscious or unconscious attempt to establish meaningful family relationships. To support this argument I have outlined the attitude to marriage which was prevalent at the time and which is illustrated in the majority of the novels, and have explored the motives of Mauriac's protagonists for embarking on the formation of new family units with marriage partners with whom they are not in love. Since 'the family' can be viewed in Mauriac's fiction as a collective entity in itself and because it is, as Nelly Cormeau remarks, 'un des personnages les plus constants, les plus puissants, les plus autoritaires de cette oeuvre et l'un des ressorts les plus efficaces du drame',<sup>11</sup> I have also considered the general characteristics of

---

11. N. Cormeau, op. cit., p. 141.

the average Mauriacien family and the grievous effects which these have on the lives of individuals. In the second section of Chapter III I have analysed the psychological mechanisms involved in the development of love relationships between the sexes in an effort to show that the real sickness from which the families described are suffering is far more radical than it appears to be at first, and that it cannot be attributed simply to the dispassionate conjugal unions at their origin. In order to make this analysis as thorough as possible and in view of the fact that the sacrament of marriage is meaningless for much of the society Mauriac describes, I have stepped outside the bounds of the family and considered the sentiments exchanged by lovers, whether their affairs develop subsequently into conjugal relationships or not. Having surveyed the minefield of difficulties that beset Mauriacien men and women in their attempt to establish mutually satisfying love relationships and after suggesting that the passionate relationships depicted tend in fact to be as devoid of genuine love as the dispassionate marriages of convenience reviewed in an earlier part of the chapter, I have discussed the extent to which Mauriac implies conjugal happiness can ever be achieved and the insinuation made through the novels that the solution lies in man's learning how to love.

Chapter IV opens with a reference to the interdependence of all human beings which takes on added significance in the context of Christianity with its law of love. This is followed by a short survey of the miscellaneous and often mysterious ways in which Mauriac's characters help or hinder each other in their conscious or unconscious search for the pure love of God. I have summarized

these briefly at the beginning of the chapter so that when examples from specific family relationships are considered later in greater detail I can refer to the concepts of atonement and the reversibility of merit, for instance, knowing that the reader is already familiar with their mystical significance. This first section of the chapter is followed by an analysis of the way in which the parents Mauriac describes act as instruments of or obstacles to divine grace, primarily through their love or lack of it. As the emotional and the spiritual development of individuals cannot be divorced one from the other, there is some unavoidable repetition at this stage of points made earlier in Chapter II. Attention is also drawn to the poor examples of Christianity set by many of the Catholic parents in the novels. Moreover, a substantial part of Chapter IV is concerned with the criticism Mauriac makes through his fiction of various unbalanced types of Christian upbringing and with the question of whether or not these can be considered preferable to a total absence of religious education. After commenting on the extent to which the offspring in Mauriac's novels help or hinder their parents, and siblings each other, in their spiritual journey through life, and after surveying miscellaneous general ways in which the husbands, wives and lovers in the novels act, like the parents, offspring, brothers and sisters just mentioned, as obstacles to or instruments of divine grace, I have given particularly detailed consideration, in the penultimate section of the chapter, to the special, metaphysical role love between the sexes plays in advancing or impeding the individual's search for God. Chapter IV as a whole is both lengthy and involved, since it is concerned with the second, more complicated of the two main themes of this thesis, namely the

examination of the principal ways in which, through the medium of family relationships in general and love relationships between the sexes in particular, Mauriacien characters may be helped to find the God who is according to Mauriac the source of all true love. As it is a long and particularly important chapter, the main arguments discussed in it are drawn together at the end in a separate, concluding section.

Having made the point that 'l'histoire de l'oeuvre de Mauriac c'est l'histoire de la recherche et du sens de l'amour, de l'amour qui commande tout', Jean de Fabrègues continues: 'Il faut seulement l'atteindre, cet amour, et cela, est-ce possible? Telle est la grande question'.<sup>12</sup> It is to a study of this crucial question that Chapter V is devoted. The degree of free will Mauriac allows his characters has been debated by numerous critics, some of whom like Jean-Paul Sartre have accused him of manipulating his characters so that they behave as he wants them to rather than as they would naturally, given their freedom as self-determining individuals.<sup>13</sup> Others have approached the subject from the theological viewpoint of the fatality of sin and predestination to evil. Reviewing the oscillating arguments to which Michael Moloney refers, 'with Mauriac now emphasizing the power of the downward thrust of man's fallen nature and now the upward lift of Grace',<sup>14</sup> in the final chapter of this thesis I have investigated

---

12. J. de Fabrègues, op. cit., pp. 135-36.

13. J.-P. Sartre, 'M. François Mauriac et la Liberté', Nouvelle Revue Française, 1 February 1939, pp. 212-32.

14. M.F. Moloney, op. cit., p. 30.

whether Mauriac's protagonists are actually in a position to establish loving family relationships and to find the source of true love or whether one must conclude that the deprivation of parental love, or the overwhelming pressures and contaminating influence of a materialistic and hypocritical society, or the absence of any Christian education during childhood, or the noxious effects of an unbalanced and unwholesome religious training, put the characters at such a disadvantage that their search for the God of Love is necessarily thwarted, except in a handful of arbitrary cases, and that family relationships which can be regarded as channels of love are bound to be mysteriously abnormal.

CHAPTER I

THE SOURCE AND NATURE OF LOVE

Mauriac's faith remained intact, though not unquestioned, from his earliest childhood to death. It was based firmly on the evidence of the New Testament, and his understanding of the essence of the Gospel message has been accepted throughout Christendom from the time of the early Christians to the present day. As far as doctrine was concerned he looked to the interpretation of the Roman Catholic Church, of which he was ever a loyal defender, although he saw and pointed out its imperfections and did not hesitate to oppose the policies of the Establishment in accordance with his conscience. His essential allegiance and gratitude to the Church of Rome went hand in hand with a religious tolerance, and in this respect he agreed with the Jesuit priest who told him one day, 'Le catholicisme, c'est la grande route carrossable pour aller au ciel, mais il existe des sentiers de chèvres . . . .' (OC, IV, 327).

Mauriac admits in Ce que je crois that he found no answer to his inner loneliness in the social aspect of parish life (pp. 94-95). He valued the Church as a vessel providing him sacramentally with the supernatural food of his soul and safeguarding the truths of his religion. If he had not accepted the authenticity of Christianity, Catholicism would have meant nothing to him. 'Je me moquerais bien que la religion fût touchante si elle n'était pas vraie!' he writes in Mes grands hommes (OC, VIII, 379), and he makes the same point in La Rencontre avec Barrès:

Mais un garçon catholique de mon espèce, tout ankylosé par ce qu'un contemporain a appelé 'la crampe du salut', exigeait avec violence que le christianisme fût métaphysiquement vrai. S'il m'avait été démontré que Jésus n'est pas le Christ et qu'il n'y a rien de divin dans l'Eglise de Rome, dans la minute même j'eusse rejeté avec horreur et dégoût les harnais dont elle m'empêtrait, dût la société s'écrouler sur mes épaules. (OC, IV, 211)

Thus, unlike Maurice Barrès who influenced the young Mauriac in other ways, he did not appreciate the Church as a bulwark of western civilization, and he always considered 'comme les pires adversaires de la religion les hommes qui l'utilisaient pour servir des intérêts de parti ou de classe' (OC, XI, ii). However, it was of paramount importance to Mauriac that his faith should find expression through a practical application in day-to-day living, and his Christian principles permeated every aspect of his existence. An entry in his Journal du temps de l'occupation suggests that whenever Mauriac's spiritual life was neglected his whole being felt threatened:

Il faut avoir de la religion la connaissance que le poisson a de l'Océan. Ces jours-ci, je la considère depuis la rive. S'y replonger. (OC, XI, 354)

Although Mauriac's interpretation of the essential Christian message is neither personal nor new, the family situations he portrays serve as a vehicle through which he expresses his own spiritual problems, tensions and frustrations. He admits this himself in Le Romancier et ses personnages:

Derrière le roman le plus objectif, s'il s'agit d'une belle œuvre, d'une grande œuvre, se dissimule toujours ce drame vécu du romancier, cette lutte individuelle avec ses démons et avec ses sphinx. (OC, VIII, 303)

In his introduction to Commencements d'une vie Mauriac again points out that his novels reveal the truth about his inner self far more accurately than his more directly autobiographical essays and articles, and he maintains that 'seule, la fiction ne ment pas' (OC, IV, 129). In the 'Postface' at the end of Galgaï he concludes:

. . . il n'existe aucun roman qui participe à l'indétermination de la vie véritable.

Tout ce que l'on peut donc concéder, c'est que le roman qui ne nous éclaire sur personne nous renseigne pourtant sur le romancier lui-même. (OC, XII, 169)

The main impression which the reader of Mauriac's novels receives concerning the inner self of the author is one of tension and friction. Michael Moloney accounts for this in the following terms:

Although man, in Mauriac's view, can never escape his sense of divine filiation, his earthly pilgrimage is fixed in an environment which openly conspires with the inclinations of his physical nature. The earth from which he springs bespeaks the pagan deities rather than the Christian God.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Mauriac's soul as reflected in his writings as a whole can be viewed as a metaphorical battle-ground where a continuing war between various representatives of good and evil is perpetually in progress. An indication of the kind of metaphysical battle being waged might be expressed in terms of a table, as below, where the two protagonists are backed up by their respective troops:

G(O)OD	(D)EVIL
supernatural grace	human nature
'le Christ'	'le Cybèle'
soul	body
spirit	flesh
divine love	human love

Whilst according to Christianity God and the Devil are inevitably and irrevocably in total opposition to one another, it is an oversimplification to claim that their forces have to stay neatly behind set demarcation lines, but Mauriac's strict Jansenist upbringing encouraged him to polarize them to an excessive degree,<sup>2</sup> so much so

---

1. M.F. Moloney, op. cit., p. 20.

2. The heresy known as Jansenism, which led to the influential reformist movement based at Port-Royal in seventeenth century France, had its origin in the work, Augustinus, written by Cornelius Jansen, Bishop of Ypres, who held that since the Fall of Adam man's nature has been radically corrupt, so that he is unable, either by faith or by good deeds, to work towards his own salvation. His pessimistic followers preached the absolute sinfulness of this world and made rigorous demands on penitents and communicants.

in fact that the real confrontation at the root of his dilemma is summed up most accurately in the title of a newspaper article, 'Paganisme et Jansénisme de François Mauriac' in which Thierry Maulnier points out 'que l'oeuvre mauriacienne a deux faces, qu'elle est ambivalente':

Mauriac, c'est la misère de la chair promise à vieillir, à pourrir, la misère de l'âme tentée et pécheresse au coeur de la pure lumière spirituelle, c'est l'angoisse de Dieu au coeur même du mal. Fils d'un incroyant et d'une chrétienne fervente, Mauriac poursuit en une seule personne le dialogue, la confrontation parentale. . . .

L'oeuvre de Mauriac est un champ clos où s'affrontent dans le combat de Jacob et de l'Ange, infatigables et insatiables l'un de l'autre, le premier et le second Augustin, le Racine des tragédies et le Racine de Port-Royal, le bel adolescent Atys et le janséniste au coeur consumé.<sup>3</sup>

Mauriac's spiritual life was certainly marked by a religious upbringing that stressed the 'God' of Terror which tyrannizes several of his protagonists.<sup>4</sup> In Les Maisons fugitives Mauriac writes, 'Quant à la pureté . . . Là encore il vaut mieux se taire' (OC, IV, 329), implying that it is too horrifying to contemplate the sexual complexes fostered by the teaching that the slightest infraction of the purity rule would result in eternal damnation unless the culprit were sacramentally absolved, and in Ce que je crois we are told that 'il est difficile de concevoir aujourd'hui ce monde d'avant Freud' (p. 71). Madame Mauriac undoubtedly introduced her son to Love Incarnate, but as a boy he was naturally inclined and actively encouraged to fear as well as to love God, and this fear often resembled a negative dread rather than a wholesome awe, with the result that, as Eva Kushner points out, the religious sentiments of the young Mauriac were a strange

---

3. T. Maulnier, 'Paganisme et Jansénisme de François Mauriac', Figaro Littéraire, 28 April 1951, p. 1.

4. See below, Chapter IV, pp. 178-80.

mixture of 'terreur amoureuse' and 'joie pathétique' (Commencements d'une vie, OC, IV, 138, 139).<sup>5</sup> It is likely that the life of Sainte Thérèse of Lisieux influenced the adult Mauriac; she is the model for Marie Ransinangue in Le Fleuve de Feu. However, Thérèse Martin's message of taking the 'petite voie' to Heaven, 'la voie de l'enfance spirituelle, le chemin de la confiance et du total abandon' (Pèlerins de Lourdes, OC, VII, 469), came too late to help the young, fearful 'Bordelais'. This philosophy of putting one's absolute trust in the infinite mercy of God finds an echo in the meditation of Alain Forcas at the end of Les Anges noirs, but in view of the fact that Sainte Thérèse was only writing her autobiography in 1895, just a few years before Mauriac started to read Pascal, whose thinking and spiritual history were to have a marked influence on him throughout his life, it is not surprising that Alain is held back from abandoning himself to 'une folie de confiance' by an afterthought: 'Oui, mais le sacrilège? Il n'y a pas de confiance qui tienne contre le sacrilège' (OC, III, 339-40).

In her essay entitled 'François Mauriac and Jansenism' Margaret Mein refers to Mauriac as perceiving 'his own inner duality, a conflict between two aspects of his nature, austerity and self-indulgence'.<sup>6</sup> It is as if he were so terrified of the great enemy Sin that he turned with vehemence against any aspect of his humanity or nature that might lead him astray. This could only have the effect of making the lure of the flesh still more attractive, thereby accentuating the conflict which finds dramatic expression throughout

---

5. E. Kushner, op. cit., p. 24.

6. M. Mein, 'François Mauriac and Jansenism', Modern Language Review, 58 (1963), 516-23, p. 519.

his works. Thus, in La Chair et le Sang Claude Favereau, 'brûlant de sang' on the one hand but fearful, on the other, of the sin involved in unbridled sexual desires is persuaded 'qu'on ne saurait fixer à la volupté des limites' and that 'il est plus facile de s'abstenir que d'appliquer une règle à l'ivresse sensuelle' (OC, X, 212). Deciding never to put his powers of moderation to the test, Claude rejects 'pour lui la joie des noces' (OC, X, 212). Denying himself the hope of finding fulfilment in conjugal love, he exaggerates the virtues of celibacy and turns, with a perverted kind of vengeance, against May:

L'égoïsme forcené de la passion le défigurait: bestial, cruel, il attendait l'heure où, caché parmi les branches, comme un dieu sylvestre et plein de désirs, il pourrait repaître ses yeux du spectacle d'un jeune corps violé qui se cache, fuit, pleure d'être à jamais voué aux quotidiennes violences, aux souillures nocturnes. (OC, X, 220)

As Samuel Silvestre de Sacy points out, Daniel Trasis of Le Fleuve de Feu 'est l'image de l'homme normal, écartelé par deux aspirations contraires, tendant à la fois vers l'Ange et vers la Bête'.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes the duality finds expression in a pair of characters rather than one. Thus, Bob Lagave and Pierre Gornac can be seen as fictional incarnations of the factions in Mauriac's personal battle. Writing about Destins in his preface to Volume I of his complete works, Mauriac states:

Les deux garçons dressés l'un contre l'autre, ce Bob Lagave et le pieux fils Gornac sont également tirés de ma propre substance et incarnent ma profonde contradiction. (p. iv)

Mauriac's inner conflict reached its climax in the crisis of 1925-30. Augustin Léonard sums up Mauriac's spiritual condition at this time in the following terms:

---

7. S. Silvestre de Sacy, op. cit., p. 39.

Ce qu'il a été incapable de réaliser à cette époque, à cause de son impuissance à quitter le domaine de la sensibilité et de l'imagination, et de l'aspect négatif et étroit de sa conception catholique du monde, c'est le passage de l'aspiration rêveuse au réalisme spirituel lorsque la religion doit cesser d'être un ensemble d'émotions et d'habitudes mentales de la superficie de l'être, pour devenir l'adhésion lucide et volontaire de la personnalité profonde, beaucoup moins accessible au trouble et au changement.<sup>8</sup>

The results of the crisis of the 1920s are revealed in the 'cri du cœur', Souffrances du pécheur, where Mauriac maintains that the Christian religion is impracticable. The skirmishes then grew less intense, and a truce was apparently made when he retracted or modified in Bonheur du chrétien much of what he had written in Souffrances du pécheur. Peace, however, was never fully restored and the struggle continued throughout Mauriac's life at a lower pitch, the warring parties being partially and gradually reconciled. Yet this itself is a generalization, and a graph of Mauriac's life of faith would not show a smooth curvature from the crisis point of the 1920s onwards. According to Margaret Mein,

It is difficult to prove a complete evolution from the novelist's own cast of Jansenism to a more tolerant attitude. Even after the 'conversion', the two conceptions seem to exist side by side; the two parts of his personality which are in mutual contradiction have constantly to come to terms.<sup>9</sup>

Mauriac's own statements on Jansenism in his non-fiction can be misleading. Indeed, if they are accepted without careful interpretation, much of what the author writes in his novels and essays seems enigmatic, inconsistent or illogical. One can account for this to a large extent by the fact that an individual's spiritual progress throughout life is rarely smooth or regular, and people seldom reiterate an opinion of faith maintained at a particular point in time in exactly the same

---

8. A. Léonard, François Mauriac ou la psychologie du pécheur, Liège and Paris, La Pensée Catholique and Office Général du Livre, 1951, p. 26.

9. M. Mein, op. cit., p. 519.

terms or with the same degree of emphasis several years or even months later. Besides, it is quite possible for a person to sympathize with the spirit of a movement and its followers whilst not subscribing intellectually to its teaching. Cecil Jenkins suggests that, irritated by an envious kind of resentment, Mauriac 'turned cruelly outwards, upon those "lukewarm" Christians whose lives did not appear to be broken by the great internal struggle between sin and Grace', 'the undeviating glance with which he stalked sin within himself';<sup>10</sup> whatever his motives it is certainly true that Mauriac never ceased to be repelled by hypocritical, half-hearted or uncommitted Christians.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore to be expected that he should continue to admire the strict standards that the sincere Jansenists of genuine piety imposed upon themselves, whilst at the same time recognizing the very real dangers of a Jansenistic imbalance in religion. In his study of Mauriac Cecil Jenkins considers him as an 'instinctive' writer and highlights 'the extraordinary complexity of the interplay of emotional, metaphysical, and moral tensions in the world of Mauriac's novels'.<sup>12</sup> In so doing and by referring to 'two concentric vicious circles' of a philosophical nature to illustrate 'the entanglement of Mauriac's world',<sup>13</sup> Jenkins reminds the reader that a writer's ideas and attitudes are not formed simply by rational thinking processes but may be conditioned by strong, deep-seated and sometimes highly illogical feelings. Thus the mature Mauriac may admit that Pascal inculcated Jansenist ideas into him 'avec une excessive et

---

10. C. Jenkins, Mauriac, Edinburgh and London, Oliver and Boyd, 'Writers and Critics', 1965, p. 31.

11. See below, Chapter IV, pp. 171-74.

12. C. Jenkins, op. cit., p. 50.

13. ibid., p. 50.

injuste rigueur', but as a credulous youth he nevertheless accepted this teaching which 'Tui' apparaissait d'une terrible évidence' and made an indelible mark on him (Dieu et Mammon, OC, VII, 289).

As an adult Mauriac rejected with horror the implications of the Jansenist doctrine of predestination, writing in

Blaise Pascal et sa soeur Jacqueline,

. . . si certains casuistes sont ridicules, lorsqu'ils rurent avec Dieu et qu'ils opposent à sa justice une procédure imbécile et retorse, les Jansénistes sont encore plus affreux lorsqu'ils assignent des bornes à la miséricorde infinie et qu'ils en fixent les lois. (OC, VIII, 226)

Similarly, in Mémoires intérieurs he speaks of 'le poison janséniste, caché dans les veines de Phèdre', and states his surprise that as a school-child he resisted it 'malgré le prestige de Port-Royal où déjà Pascal l'avait introduit' (p. 242).<sup>14</sup> He admits, however, that he did not escape its influence entirely, and the fact remains that the young Mauriac imbibed the ethos of Jansenism so much that the tendency to make a radical separation between the flesh and the things of the world on the one hand, and the soul and the things of the spirit on the other, remained with him throughout his life, at least to a certain degree. Consequently, although Mauriac reacted against the negative influences of his early religious training and was largely successful in freeing himself from them, as Eva Kushner points out, 'on ne se remet pas de son enfance, et réagir contre elle, même violemment, c'est encore témoigner de son emprise'.<sup>15</sup> In the opinion of Nelly Cormeau Jansenism therefore appears 'comme une disposition congénitale chez François Mauriac ou bien, s'il est acquis par

---

14. For further comment on Mauriac's attitude to the question of free will and predestination see below, Chapter IV, pp. 177 and 211, Chapter V, pp. 246-56 and Conclusion, p. 269.

15. E. Kushner, op. cit., p. 30.

l'éducation, il a réussi d'une manière si complète qu'il a pris la force d'un caractère inné'.<sup>16</sup>

However, notwithstanding the argument outlined above, one can say that, even if the process was neither smooth nor linear, Mauriac's inner conflict was largely resolved or aggravated, at least at the intellectual level, in accordance with the degree to which he bore in mind or overlooked the fact that, through limited compromise, Roman Catholicism does much to reconcile grace and nature, 'le Christ' and 'le Cybèle', soul and body, spirit and flesh, divine and human love. Mauriac appears to have achieved a sense of spiritual equilibrium in as far as his understanding of the significance of the Incarnation grew or diminished. As Nelly Cormeau points out,

En langage platonicien, l'on pourrait dire que Mauriac passe de la conception d'un dualisme radical où le monde divin est transcendant et incommensurable au nôtre, à un monisme où la notion de participation réduit la dualité. Cette participation<sup>17</sup> est illustrée, réalisée, par l'humanité de l'histoire de Jésus.

Though he remained inconsistent to a certain degree, Mauriac did come to terms with the Catholic belief that the supernatural is not magical but works through the natural, and that the extraordinary, miraculous intervention of God is actually a rare occurrence - which explains why the conversion experiences Mauriac describes and which arise gradually and naturally from the logical consequences of plot and character combined, are the most acceptable to both the Christian and non-Christian critic. He also accepted the doctrine that God's grace is not in direct conflict with nature but permeates, sanctifies and builds on it, producing a harmony that, as Margaret Mein notes,<sup>18</sup> he recognized and appreciated in the Pauline of Corneille's Polyeucte: 'La beauté du caractère de Pauline, c'est que la Grâce n'y détruit pas

---

16. N. Cormeau, op. cit., p. 174.

17. ibid., p. 194.

18. M. Mein, op. cit., p. 521.

La nature' (Journal III, OC, XI, 254). Mauriac himself stresses that the body and soul are inextricably bound up together, so inseparable in fact that Christians believe both will be resurrected on the last day. In Le Jeudi-Saint he maintains:

La véritable Église ne divise pas l'homme, ne le traite pas comme un pur esprit. Elle capte en lui tout le sensible, source des plus grands crimes et des plus ardents dévouements . . . . (OC, VII, 173)

The body is even considered sacred, for it is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the flesh, insists Mauriac on several occasions, is not to be despised:

Cette chair, il ne faut surtout pas la mépriser. Elle n'est pas l'ennemie dont on m'apprenait quand j'étais enfant à avoir honte et à avoir peur. Telle qu'elle est, elle a été sanctifiée par le Fils de l'Homme qui l'a revêtue et elle est sanctifiée par cette présence de l'âme qui la pénètre, qui est capable de Dieu . . . . (Ce que je crois, p. 85)

Mauriac admits too that, whilst the natural world symbolized by 'le Cybèle' was in constant danger of enticing him away from his faith, for others it is simply a reflection of the Creator and fights for, not against, 'le Christ'. Thus, while it is important to remember that the metaphysical conflict of the Mauriacien spiritual debate persists, as Nelly Cormeau points out, 'dans les couches sous-jacentes même lorsque l'auteur, passionnément, en cherche, en proclame la conciliation amoureuse et exaltée',<sup>19</sup> it is also possible to conclude, as Margaret Mein does, that 'there emerges from Mauriac's writings a belief in "un Dieu de douceur" as opposed to "le Dieu impitoyable de Saint-Cyran"' and that 'the conception of God chiding his people, as we encounter it so often in the Old Testament, yields in favour of the

---

19. N. Cormeau, op. cit., p. 178.

reconciliation between God and man, an ideal realized in the New Testament'.<sup>20</sup>

It is certainly fallacious to speak of a clear-cut Mauriacien conflict between human and divine love. Mauriac persistently reminds his readers that according to the Christian 'Dieu est l'amour', and therefore all true love must be at least minimally divine in as far as it partakes of the nature of the absolute love that is God. Moreover, the world of human beings is the only sphere of action in which a Christian can live out his vocation to love, and as Christ is believed to be in every individual, when a man loves his neighbour he is loving God. As Mauriac points out in Ce que je crois, 'l'amour du Christ, c'est l'amour des autres' (p. 84). Consequently there is no essential difference between love of God and love of man, and the first and second Commandments are inextricably entwined. Mauriac's repeated references, both in his directly apologetical works and in his novels, to Christ's injunction that his followers should love him more than their closest relatives,<sup>21</sup> have to be considered in the light of his conviction that the Christian's love of his Lord above all things is reflected primarily through and in human relationships where the love exchanged is sincere and disinterested. Mauriac sums this up particularly well in Le Jeudi-Saint:

Aimer le Christ, singulièrement dans l'Eucharistie, et aimer le prochain, c'est même chose; les deux commandements ne font qu'un. 'Ce que vous faites au plus petit, c'est à moi-même que vous le faites.' Il ne s'agit pas de calculer, d'escompter d'avance le salaire, il s'agit d'aimer. (OC, VII, 183)

Echoing the words of Lacordaire, Mauriac emphatically maintains that there is ultimately only one love and that every form of love has a

---

20. M. Mein, op. cit., pp. 518-19.

21. e.g. Préséances, OC, X, 322; Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 59.

unique source. Having commented on the way Félicité Cazenave's love for her son is as dramatically jealous as that of any passionate, frustrated lover, Mauriac suggests that there are not several 'amours' but only one. In this case Mauriac is making the point that there is no fundamental difference between the various kinds of love, between maternal and sexual love, for example, but when the theme recurs in Le Désert de l'amour or Le Mystère Frontenac it clearly reveals Mauriac's conviction that there is no intrinsic difference between human and divine love. In his study of Mauriac Jean de Fabrègues notes that ten Mauriacien characters 'répètent ce que lui-même n'a cessé de dire . . . il n'y a qu'un seul amour'.<sup>22</sup> This belief, however, undoubtedly calls for an explanation, since much of the so-called love exchanged by human beings, either in Mauriac's fiction or in reality, often appears to be the antithesis of love. Aware of this dichotomy Mauriac writes in Sainte Marguerite de Cortone that 'rien ne ressemble moins à l'amour que le Christ inspire à ses bien-aimés que la passion humaine' (OC, VII, 369). At this point a closer look at Mauriac's understanding of the nature of love is helpful. At first it may seem that the simple word 'love', 'le plus profané dans toutes les langues du monde',<sup>23</sup> scarcely needs to be defined, and yet it is in fact so pregnant with overtones and associations that it would be truer to say that it defies definition.

Any understanding of what Mauriac meant by true love must involve an analysis of what he believed to be the absolute and infinite love of God as revealed in the Gospels. Such love imposes no obligations. It

---

22. J. de Fabrègues, op. cit., p. 155.

23. See above, Introduction, p. 2.

respects the complete freedom of the one who is loved to accept or reject the love given. Mauriac writes in Ce que je crois:

Je crois que le monde refuse la lumière. Et qu'il soit libre de la refuser, c'est la condition même de l'amour. (p. 127)

At the same time this kind of love is given unconditionally and has an endless capacity to forgive. God loves his creatures as they are, not as they ought to be. Mauriac also makes this point in

Ce que je crois:

Je crois que je suis aimé tel que j'ai été, tel que je suis, tel que mon propre cœur me voit, me juge et me condamne. (p. 174)

God's love demands nothing in return. Mauriac stresses that God loves men whether they respond to his love or not and even when they sin.

In Vie de Jésus he refers to God's passion 'qu'aucune de nos passions les plus tristes ne rebute' (OC, VII, 105). True or pure love is shown in the New Testament to be characterized by selflessness.

Consequently, from the Christian point of view, one can say that the measure of impurity in man's love for man is equal to its measure of selfishness: the purer the love, the more altruistic it is. It is important to note that purity of love in this respect is unrelated to sexual purity,<sup>24</sup> and the consummation of the love between a man and woman is irrelevant except in as far as it may reflect a lack of charity or constitute an act of positive selfishness on either part. At the same time it is indisputable that man's tendency to expect too much from sexual relationships undoubtedly provokes an element of conflict in Mauriacien terms between human and divine love. However, as this is largely a separate and certainly a central issue, it is

---

24. Throughout this thesis, when love is being described, the adjectives 'pure/impure' will be used as synonyms of 'selfless/selfish', unless I indicate that the specific area of sexual purity is in question.

considered as such and discussed in depth in Chapter IV.<sup>25</sup>

Whilst Mauriac insists that there is no fundamental difference between the various forms of human affection, nor between divine and human love generally, he never denies that all love shared by human beings is bound to be at least slightly impure. Thus, one is led to draw the paradoxical conclusion that human love is simultaneously a reflection of divine love and distinct from it because of its limitations. Yves Frontenac does not simply assure his mother that 'tout amour s'accomplirait dans l'unique Amour', but goes on to say that at the same time 'toute tendresse serait allégée et purifiée de ce qui l'alourdit et de ce qui la souille' (OC, IV, 61). To a certain extent the love which man shows to man is inevitably impure according to the Christian because of the doctrine of original sin. The inevitable impurity of human love will be minimal in the saint who has died to self and is living fully and consistently in and through the power of Christ. On the other hand so-called love which is directed wholly towards self is in fact so polluted in Christian terms that it is no more deserving of the name of love than blatant lust or idolatry.<sup>26</sup> In Mauriac's words it amounts to 'l'amour qui n'est pas l'amour' (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 61), as totally impure as 'l'Amour incarné' is absolutely pure. Consequently, one cannot maintain that there is no fundamental difference between human love and divine love if the so-called human love of which one is speaking is in point of fact not love at all. However loosely, indeed incorrectly, the word may be used in everyday speech, if the love in

---

25. See below, pp. 222-36.

26. See below, Chapter III, pp. 127-29 and Chapter IV, pp. 224-32.

question is not at least minimally pure, if it is actually lust or idolatry, it is certainly not the love referred to in the statement repeated so frequently by Mauriac: 'Il n'y a qu'un seul amour'. As Jean de Fabrègues points out, 'Amour-passion, amour conjugal, amour maternel: aucun n'est un amour s'il use seulement des autres pour soi-même'.<sup>27</sup> Passion experienced by human beings can vary so much in its level of purity that it is often difficult to recognize whether it can be called love in the Christian sense of the word or not. In Journal d'un homme de trente ans Mauriac writes:

- Il faut bien donner le nom de l'amour à tous les sentiments tendres que nous eûmes. Mais nous ne saurons jamais si c'était lui . . . (OC, IV, 223)

An objective onlooker might be able to make some analysis of the sentiments involved, but as far as human relationships are concerned love remains a highly subjective, mysterious experience. The sort of misunderstanding that can occur because individuals interpret the meaning of love in various ways is highlighted particularly well in the confrontation between Thérèse Desqueyroux and the young Christian she meets 'à l'hôtel'. Frustrated that he is not charmed by her as so many other men in her life have been, Thérèse exclaims that she detests him. When he replies that he loves her, Thérèse realizes that these are not in fact the words she has been longing to hear, because the young man's interpretation of the word 'love' is so entirely different from her own. This kind of confusion recurs, to a less obvious degree, throughout the novels. Many of Mauriac's characters do not even believe that disinterested love exists. Erroneously excluding his mother as an exception, Fernand Cazenave

---

27. J. de Fabrègues, op. cit., p. 154.

makes the following generalization: 'Toutes les autres femmes sont des étrangères. Elles croient nous aimer et ne pensent qu'à elles' (Genitrix, OC, I, 362). Paulo de la Sesque mocks the whole idea of selfless sexual love when she says to Élisabeth Gornac, 'Eh bien! j'imagine qu'à votre âge, le désintéressement est l'unique forme possible de l'amour . . . ' (Destins, OC, I, 507). Marcel Revaux dismisses the idea of confiding in Marie Chavès because she loves him and 'l'amour le plus généreux est encore terriblement intéressé' (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 67). The same point is made in La Fin de la Nuit when Thérèse realizes that Marie has come to see her for selfish ends and not out of love:

Mais il n'existe pas d'amour tout à fait désintéressé. Aussi peu que ce soit, nous attendons quelque chose en retour de ce que nous donnons. (OC, II, 350-51)

Indeed Mauriac insists that man will only ever receive completely disinterested love from God. However, although man's love for his fellow man cannot avoid being at least minimally tainted by the natural egoism inherent in human nature, the Christian considers it justifiable to describe human love as disinterested in as far as it resembles to a greater rather than a lesser degree the pure love of God. In reply to this one might argue that human beings cannot control the level of purity of their love, since, as Mauriac himself emphasizes in his novels, the emotion of love cannot be produced, manipulated or even simulated successfully by man's efforts. It is this kind of thinking which helps to explain why there should be so much confusion in man's interpretation of the concept of love. However, light is shed on the matter if one refers again to the New Testament model upon which the Catholic Mauriac must have based his understanding of love. Christ, who for Mauriac incarnated love in its purest form, loved others enough to suffer death for them.

Accordingly Mauriac insists that to make any move to love another person inevitably involves making sacrifices and taking the risk of being hurt; the mystery of the Cross lies in this fact, since Christ's supreme act of love was the sacrifice of his life on behalf of others. Not surprisingly, therefore, Mauriac's novels convey the message that genuine love must involve much more than a warm glow of affection, passive tenderness, wild admiration or passionate desire, and that to love in the truly Christian sense of the word is on the contrary something extremely challenging which demands the active co-operation of the entire person. Thus, whilst an individual is not in control of the intensity or purity of the natural affection or passion he arouses in others and they arouse in him, he is responsible for the degree of egoism or selflessness of the acts of love he makes in his personal relationships: he may not be able to regulate the level of purity of the love he feels, but he can purify the love that he expresses in action. Speaking of Pauline in Corneille's Polyeucte, Mauriac uses the terms 'tendresse passionnée' and 'amour de devoir' to make this kind of distinction (Journal II, OC, XI, 124). 'Tendresse passionnée' cannot be equated with selfish affection any more than 'amour de devoir' can be assimilated to unselfish love. However, although it would be quite wrong to conclude that dispassionate, detached love is invariably purer than natural, spontaneous passion, the giving of pure love often engages more than an individual's emotions, as it may call for action and therefore be largely dependent on his will.

Natural generosity of spirit and spontaneous genuine love are clearly the ideal, but when these are absent because of an individual's temperament, mood or ill health, acts of love have to be willed and

subsequently put into effect, whatever the cost to self. Usually some sacrifice has to be made, since, in the words of Xavier Dartigelongue, 'presque toujours le vrai chemin est du côté qu'il nous coûte de prendre . . .'

 (L'Agneau, OC, XII, 203). For all his filial adoration of Blanche and his subsequent remorse Yves Frontenac still fails to act in accordance with that love on his return journey from Guéthary to Paris. Despite the excuses he makes he knows he has only himself to blame for actively failing to love his mother. On the other hand, Thérèse Desqueyroux's self-sacrifice on behalf of her daughter is all the more noble in view of the fact that she is 'inexplicablement dénuée de cet instinct qui permet aux autres femmes de transférer leur propre vie dans les êtres qu'elles ont mis au monde' (La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 377). If it were possible to draw any conclusion from the two examples just cited, one would have to say that, paradoxical though it may seem in theory, Thérèse Desqueyroux actually loves her daughter more than Yves Frontenac loves his mother.

The practical application of Christian love is illustrated particularly well by Mauriac's portrait of Blanche Frontenac. 'Cette mère tragique' can be regarded as the fictional incarnation of Mauriac's concept of selfless maternal love. We are told that 'tout son être trahissait la fatigue, l'épuisement de la mère que ses petits dévorent vivante' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 6). It is typical of her that she should fear she may have cancer less for her own sake than for that of the children. However, Mauriac is careful not to make her too perfect a model of ideal motherhood. Blanche would seem less human and less imitable in the context of Mauriac's fiction as a whole, if she were too saintly. There are days when

she feels irritable and exasperated by her brother-in-law who does not appreciate her. She objects to being taken for granted and resents the loss of what she has had to sacrifice. Then, when she has lost her temper with Xavier, who she knows has also made sacrifices for the children, she immediately becomes a prey to scruples which reflect her 'piété un peu minutieuse et aride' (OC, IV, 6). Nevertheless, however reluctant she may sometimes be to do so, Blanche actively loves her children, not with a superficial affection but 'in deed and in truth'. She puts their welfare before her own, although she gives herself no credit for her actions:

Il ne lui appartenait pas de frustrer ses petits de la moindre part d'elle-même; aucun mérite, elle était faite comme cela . . .  
(OC, IV, 14)

Blanche may be irritated by Yves's whims, his poetic nature, his excessive dependence on her affection, she may be annoyed and alarmed by José's behaviour, but she shows no preference for Jean-Louis. She gives priority to whichever child is in the greatest need at any moment in time. She may understand, even like, her children to varying degrees, but as human beings in need of care and attention she loves them equally. In this respect Blanche stands out in contrast to a mother such as Léonie in Les Chemins de La mer, who does not hide the fact that 'son enfant chéri' is Gaston, 'le beau Costadot' (OC, V, 12).

If conjugal love, as the Christian Mauriac understands it, did not depend to a certain extent on man's will, Noémi Péloueyre's attempt to respect her marriage vows would appear less heroic than tragically absurd. Even if she had been in love with Jean, she could not have promised to be so till parted from him by death, since the feelings of the most noble, selfless creature are largely out of his control.

Assuming that one's interpretation of conjugal love is strictly Christian, it is quite accurate to maintain that throughout their married life Jean and Noémi Péloueyre love each other more than any other Mauriacien couple, with the exception of the Puybarauds. Every act of unselfish love that is made in Le Baiser au lépreux, however small it may be, is shown to play a significant part in the fight against the evil of their monstrous union. By drawing attention to the details of the couple's behaviour, Mauriac stresses that loving is not an ethereal concept but a way of life that involves an unlimited succession of highly practical, moment by moment decisions:

Chacun veillait à ne pas toucher la blessure de l'autre. Leurs gestes furent mesurés pour se faire moins souffrir: quand Noémi se déshabillait, il regardait ailleurs et n'entrait jamais dans le cabinet de toilette quand elle s'y lavait. Il prit des habitudes de propreté, fit venir de l'eau de Lubin dont il s'inondait, et, grelottant, inaugura un tub. (OC, I, 177)

The Péloueyre ménage is an extreme example, and Mauriac is clearly not suggesting that the marital situation of Jean and Noémi is exemplary. However, the point which he makes in Le Baiser au lépreux is also implied in a variety of ways in Mauriac's other works, and has an important bearing on the desire, which almost all of his characters share, to find fulfilment through love.

Whether or not they accept the veracity of the precept that 'tout bonheur humain durable, quotidien, se crée à force de renoncement' (Journal d'un homme de trente ans, OC, IV, 257), few of Mauriac's heroes put it into practice. Fernand Cazenave is not alone in learning too late that 'notre corps lui-même cherche, découvre son plaisir enfoui hors de lui, tout mêlé à la chair d'un autre corps que nous rendons heureux' (Genitrix, OC, I, 350).

Many of the characters think of love as nothing more than a feeling

which they want to experience; they appear to be ignorant of the fact that the joy of true love they are anxious to sense would be most likely to fill them, if they actually did something positive for someone else. Yet, in Mauriacien terms, it is only this active kind of 'pur amour' that should be considered love at all: the love of the parent 'qui n'exige rien en échange de ce qu'il donne' (Genitrix, OC, I, 369); the love of 'cette race presque perdue des femmes qui s'immolent et ne savent même pas qu'elles s'immolent' (Trois récits, OC, VI, 147); the love of all those who are 'du parti de l'Agneau' (Le Noeud de vipères, OC, III, 482); the love of a Rose Révolou who points out to Robert Costadot that she understands something about the nature of love even before she enters into a living relationship with its source:

. . . moi je sais ce qu'est l'amour, je sais qu'il ne pense pas à sa peine future, qu'il n'existe pas de charges pour lui ou plutôt que toute charge est aimée d'avance et bénie.  
(Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 123)

CHAPTER II

THE DYNAMICS OF MAURICIEN FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

1. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PARENT/CHILD AND BROTHER/SISTER RELATIONSHIPS

As Mauriac indicates in Le Romancier et ses personnages, the life which he depicts in his novels is a complex mixture of fiction and non-fiction, a 'mélange' formed from and transfused with memories and personal impressions. Thus the influence Mauriac's own life had on his art is reflected in his novels not only in the metaphysical preoccupations which are brought to light in them, but also in the descriptions of the countryside of Les Landes, the homes of bourgeois families in and around Bordeaux, and the region's provincial society generally. Moreover, certain circumstances of Mauriac's personal history which are described in autobiographical works such as Commencements d'une vie and Les Maisons fugitives find themselves, with modifications, in his fiction. The adolescent heroes of the novels are of a type and remind the reader who is familiar with Mauriac's own life of the sensitive, scrupulous school-child/adolescent who in the 1920s became the introspective loner torn by inner conflicts. Like the author such characters are largely the product 'd'une adolescence refoulée, d'une sensibilité contre laquelle une famille provinciale et catholique inventa mille barrages' (La Province, OC, IV, 476). In Le Romancier et ses personnages, however, Mauriac warns that such similarities should not be over-emphasized:

Les héros de romans naissent du mariage que le romancier contracte avec la réalité.

Dans les fruits de cette union, il est périlleux de prétendre délimiter ce qui appartient en propre à l'écrivain, ce qu'il y retrouve de lui-même et ce que l'extérieur lui a fourni. (OC, VIII, 287)

With the exception of La Robe prétexte and Le Mystère Frontenac the majority of Mauriac's novels offer few examples of caring,

solicitous parents who resemble his own mother. However, the fact that Mauriac himself was brought up in a one-parent family no doubt explains why there is an imbalance in most of the parent-child relationships he depicts. Sometimes the father and/or mother has died or deserted. In the remaining families often one of the parents is by far the more domineering character whilst the other slips into insignificance. The de Cernès, Pian and Dubernet households are striking examples of this, and throughout Destins Bob's mother is referred to repeatedly as Madame (Augustin) Lagave rather than Hortense, as if her personality is overshadowed by her imperious husband. Thus Mauriac's fiction provides numerous examples of the deprivation of love that can be suffered by children brought up in broken homes especially when the parent who is left to take care of any offspring is neglectful or insensitive. In the case of Daniel Trasis of Le Fleuve de Feu there is no surviving parent since his father commits suicide after the death of his mother, and the boy's attachment to his grand-uncle Louprat for whom we are told he has 'une sorte de goût' (OC, I, 220), gives him neither security nor guidance. It is largely because of her unhappy home-life that Gisèle de Plailly becomes suitable 'prey' for Daniel. Her mother has died and there is little love lost between daughter and father whose one 'idée fixe' is to economize. In La Chair et le Sang Edward and May Dupont-Gunther, whose mother dies when they are young and whose coarse, lecherous father does not care about them, are similarly deprived of parental affection. Mathilde Cazenave's miserable youth also contributes to her tragic destiny. Once her mother has gone off with another husband, the neglected Mathilde is obliged to nurse, support and mother her unappreciative father and

brother instead of being cherished herself. Her later union with Fernand is a desperate attempt to escape a life of utter lovelessness. Irène de Blénauge can likewise be seen as the tragic by-product of domestic strife. After the separation of her parents her father leaves her alone at night and Irène suffers acutely from the same kind of 'solitude' that frightens Thérèse in La Fin de la Nuit. Noble by nature Irène feels no resentment against her mother:

Elle ne reproche rien à sa mère: on a le droit de refaire sa vie. Pas de place pour Irène dans la seconde vie de sa mère: un autre mari, un autre pays, d'autres enfants. Ne pas feindre d'en avoir beaucoup souffert.  
(Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 89)

However, the very pathos of these lines suggests how much Irène does in fact suffer from her loveless childhood.

Louis of Le Noeud de vipères states that 'ceux qui ont l'habitude d'être aimés accomplissent, d'instinct, tous les gestes et disent toutes les paroles qui attirent les cœurs' (OC, III, 485). The destinies of several of Mauriac's heroes suggest that the reverse of this is equally true, and the novels bear witness to the fact that parents who actively despise their children do untold damage. The latter are often too vulnerable and insecure to resist the noxious influence which the opinions and prophecies of their parents can have on them. Instead of resolving to prove the negative judgments of their parents unfounded they unconsciously convince themselves of their truth and live in accordance with the pattern set for them. Despite Hubert's hypocrisy in Le Noeud de vipères there is some truth in his analysis of his youth:

Le mépris que j'inspirais à mon père a empoisonné mon adolescence. J'ai longtemps douté de moi, je me suis replié sous ce regard impitoyable, il a fallu bien des années pour que je prenne enfin conscience de ma valeur. (OC, III, 530)

Andrès Gradère accuses Mathilde Desbats, by whom he is brought up, of actually persuading him of his own stupidity, whilst Guillou of Le Sagouin is told so repeatedly that he is 'vilain, sale et bête' that he is gradually conditioned to accept himself as an inferior being:

'Et s'il /Jean-Pierre Bordas/ m'avait vu, il m'aurait trouvé vilain, sale et bête.' C'est ce que sa mère lui répète chaque jour: 'Tu es vilain, sale et bête.' Jean-Pierre Bordas ne saurait jamais que Guillaume de Cernès était vilain, sale et bête: un sagouin. (OC, XII, 63)

Bob Lagave provides another good example of the psychological phenomenon of the self-fulfilling prophecy. His father's fixed idea that the boy is destined to become 'un propre à rien' is transmitted to Bob who dutifully fulfils the allotted role. When his son passes his school examinations Augustin is temporarily perturbed lest his prediction might prove faulty. He turns Bob's success into 'un prétexte pour dénoncer l'abaissement de la culture, puisque les "fruits secs" réussissaient d'emblée' (Destins, OC, I, 416). Although he would never admit it, Augustin is jealous of Bob's youth, passionate temperament and natural flair which he has never enjoyed. Madame Oscar Révolou resembles Augustin Lagave in the way she is irritated by Rose whom she uses as an outlet for her own frustrations and nervous tension, whilst convincing herself that whatever she says is for 'le bien de la petite'. In fact we are told that 'elle se déchirait en la déchirant avec une verve cruelle' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 5). In a similar way Jean de Mirbel in L'Agneau is irritated by his foster son, Roland,

who symbolizes his impotence and whom he considers 'un reproche vivant et une dérision vivante' (OC, XII, 261). Michèle and Jean make no effort to hide their boredom and their contempt of the child, who responds as one might expect with 'un air buté, fermé. Impossible de ne pas penser à l'insecte qui fait le mort' (OC, XII, 228). This tendency of parents to use their child as a whipping-boy is carried to extremes in Le Sagouin where Guillou is forced to endure the hatred of a positively antagonistic mother whose cruelty leads literally to his death. Paule detests Guillou because he is the living reminder of the greatest mistake of her life, namely her union with Galéas:

. . . une présence, une contemplation de tous les instants, un face à face avec cette vanité imbécile, avec cette bêtise criminelle, clef de son irréparable destin.  
(OC, XII, 5)

At the same time she is so bitter that an innocent friendship with the former 'curé' of the parish has made her an outcast from society that the mere sight of her son exacerbates her resentment and self-disgust for which Guillou is the scapegoat.

If one took a cross-section of present-day families and analysed the personality of each of the younger generation one would almost certainly not find exception-free evidence of the need emphasized by psychologists and social workers for mother and father to give their young abundant affection. Similarly, in the families Mauriac describes there are examples that flaunt the rule. In Le Noeud de vipères Louis praises Luc for his fine nature but cannot understand how he can have grown up such a joyful, lively and innocent boy:

Je pensais à tous les éléments dramatiques de cette jeune vie: sa mère morte, ce père dont il ne fallait pas parler chez nous, l'internat, l'abandon. Il m'en aurait fallu bien moins pour que je déborde d'amertume et de haine. Mais la joie jaillissait de lui. Tout le monde l'aimait. (OC, III, 436)

Mauriac was too perceptive a psychologist not to take account of such exceptions and very aware that the formation of character is as dependent on heredity as it is on environment. 'Un enfant naissant est déjà terriblement vieux, déjà chargé de tendances, d'inclinations', he writes in L'Éducation des filles (OC, VIII, 322). In his novels, however, Mauriac draws attention to the fact that parental neglect or cruelty tends to have not only negative but also long-term consequences which can take their toll in more than one generation. Thus, La Pharisienne opens with a very telling scene in which lie the seeds not only of the unfortunate events described in the novel itself but also of much of the tragedy of L'Agneau. The brash recalcitrance of the young Jean de Mirbel and his defensive armour of rebellious cynicism are shown to be a predictable reaction to the physical violence of his sadistic uncle. Desperate to be loved, he feels the need to defend himself against a loveless world by becoming hard and insensitive himself. This process leads in turn a generation later to his own harsh treatment of Roland. Similarly, Gabriel Gradère's childhood appears to have turned him into a potential criminal in his youth. Having lost his mother at the age of eighteen months, he is the victim of his father's jealousy and brutality:

Il haïssait en moi ma supériorité future. A treize ans, je fus placé chez un forgeron. Je ne pouvais pas soulever la 'masse' tant j'étais faible encore. Je devais m'aider de mon ventre, et les coups pleuvaient. (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 148)

Bearing in mind Gradère's subsequent history the implication behind this reference to his past is that violent parents will probably, though not inevitably, bring up violent offspring.

The majority of the parents Mauriac describes, however, are not so openly or viciously hostile towards their children. Traces of an instinctive maternal or paternal attachment can be detected, but they have a tendency to place limits on their love for offspring in whom they may be only mildly interested. They give priority to the amassing of wealth, the extension of their property or the betterment of their career. Superficially they want their children's happiness but do little to achieve it. The maternal feelings of Madame Gonzalès in La Chair et le Sang exemplify the shallow 'love' of a doting mother who idolizes her offspring as the image of her younger self. In fact she cares very little for Édith whom she is anxious to see married to the debauched Bertie Dupont-Gunther because she is personally interested in the fortune to be gained by such a union. La comtesse de Mirbel devotes her time to her lovers rather than to her son. Gabriel Gradère insists that he loves André, but he does not love him enough to refrain from exploiting him, at least to a certain extent, so that he can maintain his own sordid life-style. Paul Courrèges remembers how his father spent his fortune on women and paid no attention whatever to his son. It appears that the Révolou children received as little consideration from their father when he was alive. After Oscar's suicide Denis tries to turn his thoughts to 'ce père qui ne lui avait guère prêté d'attention, que n'intéressaient pas son travail, ses succès' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 38). Although he seems to have cared more for Rose, 'de brèves crises de tendresse' do not constitute love.

One of Mauriac's earliest novels, L'Enfant chargé de chaînes, illustrates particularly well the fact that the very absence of parental attention during the formative years may encourage the development of a morbid introspection, especially in a sensitive child. Monsieur Johanet feels a certain paternal affection for his son. This is revealed when Jean-Paul goes to the Balzons' retreat at Castelnaud before going home, and his father decides to join them all there rather than wait and see his son the next day. Nevertheless, Monsieur Johanet is concerned primarily with his land and his own pleasure. He neglects the lonely Jean-Paul leaving him to read in peace and to become more and more of an introvert. In adulthood Jean-Paul needs less to be loved than to love, but his acutely analytical mind developed throughout the lonely years of his childhood seems to be his worst enemy for 'quel visage, quel cœur résisteraient à sa cruelle clairvoyance?' (OC, X, 56). His salvation lies in loving another, but he is so caught in the bondage of self that he is as good as blind to Marthe who loves him with a pure love. Unfortunately, the more he tries to free himself from his own ego the more self-preoccupied he becomes, and the more difficult he finds it to love. His heart it seems 'possède également le désir et l'incapacité d'aimer' (OC, X, 75). Later, through the 'action mystérieuse de la grâce' (OC, X, 79), the 'chaînes' are broken, at least temporarily, but the fact remains that this vicious circle which has such pernicious consequences in his emotional life had its origin in a childhood deprived of parental attention.

The lack of parental care which is evident in Jean-Paul's history has an equally damaging effect on Thérèse Desqueyroux. The lonely, inactive life Thérèse leads during her holidays at Argelouse is highlighted by Mauriac, for it is largely responsible for conditioning her future. The haunting anguish which remains with her till the end of La Fin de la Nuit perpetuates itself in ideal surroundings throughout her childhood, until 'sa solitude lui est attachée plus étroitement qu'au lépreux son ulcère' (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 244). Neglected by her father Thérèse desperately needs company, and she is deprived of it in her formative years to an unhealthy degree. She, too, is driven to turn in upon herself and this exacerbates the self-centredness in which, as an adult, she finds herself imprisoned.

Mauriac describes other parents who are neither as cruel as Paule de Cernès, nor as ignoble as Madame Gonzalès, nor as selfishly indifferent and neglectful as Monsieur Larroque, and yet, although they love their children emotionally, they still fail to translate this love into practical terms; they do not express it meaningfully or effectively. It is especially during the crucial period of adolescence that even the caring parents Mauriac describes prove to be such poor psychologists that their children do not benefit from their love as much as they might.

Although he is in fact good-looking, Raymond Courrèges's inferiority complex is such that he believes himself to be 'le centre de la risée universelle' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 30). In this respect he resembles André Gradère who 'au moindre mot s'assombrissait, car il était méfiant et croyait toujours qu'on se moquait de lui' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 211-12), Denis Révolou who

'n'avait jamais cru que les femmes pussent l'aimer'  
(Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 212) and Louis who confesses to Isa:  
'Ma jeunesse n'a été qu'un long suicide. Je me hâtais de déplaire  
exprès par crainte de déplaire naturellement' (Le Noeud de vipères,  
OC, III, 360). All these young Mauriacien protagonists yearn to  
know whether they are capable of arousing love in others outside  
the family orbit. This obsession develops into the 'mal des garçons  
qui croient qu'aucune femme ne peut les aimer pour eux-mêmes'  
(Un adolescent d'autrefois, pp. 115-16). As their sense of inadequacy  
grows, they become trapped in a vicious circle, for 'rien n'éloigne  
plus sûrement l'amour que la persuasion de ne le pouvoir inspirer'  
(Le Jeune homme, OC, IV, 440). Unfortunately, even the well-  
intentioned parents Mauriac describes tend to aggravate rather than  
to alleviate this condition.

Raymond Courrèges is a classic example of the frustrated  
adolescent as described by the Jesuit psychologist John Powell:

The most serious adjustment of the adolescent is the emanci-  
pation from family bonds. Overprotective or possessive parents  
are terribly frustrating to him, and he may develop an allergy  
for all authority as a result. He may even try to appear to be  
dirty or dishevelled to serve notice to the world that all  
parental training in cleanliness has been successfully rejected.<sup>1</sup>

However, neither Raymond's nagging mother nor his timid father sees  
in him a vulnerable, insecure adolescent totally lacking in self-  
confidence. They are deceived by the show of bravado he makes for  
their benefit:

Cette ostentation dans le désordre et dans la saleté, parents ni  
maîtres ne surent y voir une bravade misérable de l'adolescent  
pour leur faire croire que sa misère était voulue: pauvre  
orgueil de cet âge, humilité désespérée. (Le Désert de l'amour,  
OC, II, 26)

---

1. J. Powell, Why Am I Afraid to Love?, London, Fontana/Collins,  
1977, pp. 92-93.

Paul Courrèges is so anxious to give love to his son and to establish a relationship with him that he does not realize that his soft treatment of the boy is positively cruel. Like the weak Madame Augustin Lagave who does little to neutralize the pernicious effect her husband has on Bob, Dr. Courrèges contributes to Raymond's undoing by spoiling him. He fails to appreciate that a display of tenderness or indulgence is not always an expression of love and will not be received as such. The sagacious abbé Calou himself falls into this trap in his dealings with Jean de Mirbel, and acknowledges his error in his log-book:

Je me suis découvert trop tôt: il hait ma douceur . . . .  
Je voudrais qu'il n'y eût rien dans mon aspect, rien dans mon langage qui écoeurât. Oui, c'est bien cela: rien d'onctueux au sens écoeurant. Que l'onction du Christ était dure!  
Quel diamant il faut devenir pour fendre les cœurs!  
(La Pharisienne, OC, V, 273)

Lucie Courrèges, for her part, cares enough about Raymond to worry about his physical welfare, especially when he starts staying out late at night. Unfortunately, when she speaks to him, it is usually to reproach him: 'Ainsi, dès son apparition, naissaient à son propos d'aigres paroles' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 12).

Lucie is one of several Mauriacien parents who are very concerned about the material needs of their family but quite insensitive to their emotional needs. Louis's mother errs this way in

Le Noeud de vipères and Pierre Gornac complains that Élisabeth takes an interest in his body but not his heart. On one occasion he tells her:

Ah! je te connais: tu ne t'es jamais préoccupée que de mon corps; tu ne penses qu'à la santé physique; ta religion même fait partie de ton confort, de ton hygiène. (Destins, OC, I, 464)

One of the best examples to be found in Mauriac's novels of the over-protected child is Alain Gajac. It is largely because of his pampered

upbringing that Alain is what modern educators would describe as a 'late developer'. He is shown to have been as stunted in his psychological development as if he had been totally deprived of parental love. The maturing process has been artificially held back by his mother so that as he leaves adolescence he is quite unprepared for adulthood. As a young man Alain is incapable of making a moral decision on his own. His conscience dictates to him that he should try and see his dying brother whatever the risk, but he still yields to his mother's influence:

Je me laissai faire. Tout se passa comme maman l'avait décidé. A dix-neuf ans, je me laissais porter par elle comme un nouveau-né. (Un adolescent d'autrefois, p. 82)

However, it is Félicité Cazenave who is Mauriac's most outstanding example of the excessively possessive mother. Fernand is far more emotionally retarded than Alain Gajac. He behaves like a spoilt child even in his fifties: 'il demeurait ce même petit garçon trépigant qu'elle avait nourri' (Genitrix, OC, I, 353). Although Félicité may sincerely believe in her own misguided way that she loves her son, Mauriac shows that it is a travesty of love which seeks to possess another, as it deadens rather than vivifies its object, hindering rather than helping the fulfilment of the latter's personality. If Félicité had loved Fernand rather than herself she would not have deprived him of a good education or crippled him emotionally. The possessive attachment she feels towards him is in fact as destructive as true maternal love would have been beneficial. In Mauriac's terms this 'désir de possession, de domination spirituelle' is worse than its carnal equivalent (Genitrix, OC, I, 357). Where this reification of another's personality is successful the individual possessed becomes a kind of

appendage to the one who dominates. Michel Suffran maintains that it is incorrect to describe people like Félicité Cazenave as egoists: 'au vrai, leur moi ne leur suffit plus'.<sup>2</sup> Such a tyrannical parent reduces his or her offspring to an immature puppet-like creature with no sense of autonomy. Félicité never considers Fernand as an independent human soul quite outside herself. When he ceases to rely on her and moves physically and emotionally away from her, it is as if she is losing part of her own self without which she cannot survive. Similarly, when Félicité dies Fernand is utterly lost. She was so responsible for forming him, ruling and regulating his every thought and action that his personality only existed in conjunction with hers. After her death he is completely disorientated:

Si sa mère avait voulu qu'il ne vécût que par elle et comme suspendu à son souffle; si elle n'avait souffert la concurrence d'aucun travail, d'aucun divertissement, d'aucune espérance, d'aucun amour, elle pouvait, du fond de ses ténèbres, se glorifier de l'oeuvre accomplie: le soleil maternel à peine éteint, le fils tournait dans le vide, terre désorbitée.  
(OC, I, 389-90)

One of the principal causes of possessive parental love is shown to be the failure of the mother or father in question to find fulfilment in a conjugal relationship. The parent tries to satisfy his starved affections through his offspring. Disappointed by his marriage to Lucie, Dr. Courrèges adores his children. For a short time at least Madeleine takes the place of the romantic kind of wife he does not have but dreams in his fantasy world of possessing:

Plus tard, lui qui avait toujours détesté de sortir avec Mme Courrèges, il aimait qu'on le rencontrât avec cette jeune fille: 'On croit que tu es ma femme!' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 38)

---

2. M. Suffran, François Mauriac, Paris, Éditions Seghers, 'Écrivains d'hier et d'aujourd'hui', 1973, p. 143.

It is likely that Symphorien Desbats's attachment to Catherine whom he loves 'autant qu'il pouvait aimer une créature humaine (ce n'était pas beaucoup dire)' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 218) is due to the same kind of phenomenon, for Mathilde ceases to be a real wife to Symphorien two or three months after their marriage. As for the unloved Mathilde, she transfers her frustrated affection for Gabriel to the latter's son who helps her to submerge her grief. Later, when André is a young man, she acknowledges that 'elle s'était servie de lui, nourrie de lui: c'était sa bête familière, l'enfant de l'homme qu'elle avait aimé' (OC, III, 217). It is as if Jérôme Péloueyre whose wife has died of tuberculosis cannot live without a human satellite. Although he shows little concern for his well-being, Jérôme needs his son's presence in the house. Félicité reminds her brother of 'les faux départs de Jean Péloueyre pour le collège, lorsque la place retenue, le trousseau préparé, la voiture devant la porte, son père, à la dernière seconde, le retenait' (Le Baiser au lépreux, OC, I, 160). Anxious to keep the Péloueyre inheritance out of the hands of his sister, Jérôme allows Jean to marry, but arranges the match carefully enough to ensure that he will gain a daughter rather than lose a son. After Jean's death he merely transfers his possessive attachment to his daughter-in-law, whose future happiness he does not hesitate to restrict by insisting that she does not remarry.

Although there are examples of possessive fathers in the novels - Jérôme Péloueyre and Monsieur de Plailly are two cases in point - there are biological and sociological reasons why the possessive parents in Mauriac's world should tend to be female rather than male. Defying all accusations of male chauvinism,

Mauriac maintains in L'Éducation des filles that in his opinion women's raison d'être can be summed up by the word 'maternité' (OC, VIII, 318). Thérèse Desqueyroux considers Anne de la Trave would make a typical mother:

Anne, elle, n'attend que d'avoir des enfants pour s'anéantir en eux, comme a fait sa mère, comme font toutes les femmes de la famille. (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 272)

In Le Noeud de vipères Louis says that Marinette is tempted by marriage purely for the sake of having children. If it is natural for a woman to find a sense of personal fulfilment in her offspring, this instinct is likely to be intensified when she is deprived of her mate. Moreover, whereas an unloved husband such as Louis can turn to a mistress for affection or have recourse to a life of debauchery, a wife such as Isa is deprived of any such outlet by the quasi-sacred 'préséances' of bourgeois French society at the turn of the century. Louis ultimately seeks some kind of satisfaction in his avarice, his thirst for revenge and his journal. Isa gives her frustrated conjugal affection to her children. Louis is bitterly aware of this:

Dès la naissance d'Hubert, tu trahis ta vraie nature: tu étais mère, tu n'étais que mère. Ton attention se détourna de moi. Tu ne me voyais plus; il était vrai, à la lettre, que tu n'avais d'yeux que pour les petits. J'avais accompli, en te fécondant, ce que tu attendais de moi. (Le Noeud de vipères, OC, III, 389)

Félicité Cazenave is amongst those destined never to find fulfilment in a meaningful sexual relationship. When Fernand asks her whether she loved her husband Numa as much as she loves him, she replies that 'ça n'avait aucun rapport' (Genitrix, OC, I, 378). Lacking in education she can find no escape from her loveless existence in books or a career as a man might have done. Unlike Élisabeth Gornac she has little to occupy her on the estate, and she turns all her wasted capacity for love on to her son.

The widowed Madame Gajac is similarly disenchanted with sexual love, 'persuadée que . . . l'amour physique . . . est une invention des romanciers, qu'il est un devoir exigé de la femme par Dieu pour la propagation de l'espèce, et comme remède à la bestialité des hommes' (Un adolescent d'autrefois, p. 105).

However, she has her interest in and love for Maltaverne as well as her children to compensate for the gap in her life which might have been filled by a loving husband, and it is ironic that Alain should feel resentful towards his mother, not just because she possesses him, but because he believes that she does not love him enough:

. . . la répulsion que Marie n'avait pu se défendre de manifester, je l'éprouvais, moi aussi, et en plus . . . une rancune démesurée à cause de cet abandon où maman me laissait: le crime de ne pas me préférer à tout . . . (Un adolescent d'autrefois, p. 109)

This kind of attitude illustrates how the thirst for love can be so demanding during childhood that if parents, who may be quite loving and considerate in objective terms, fall short and fail to satisfy it, the offspring may suffer and subsequently grow bitter and resentful. In the de Villenave case cited by Louis in Le Noeud de vipères the son is driven to parricide 'jaloux de son père trop aimé' (OC, III, 397). This is an exceptional 'fait divers', but there are other less extreme examples in Mauriac's novels of boys who want to monopolize their mother far more than she does them. This tendency is especially noticeable amongst his more sensitive, poetic or romantically inclined protagonists. Jean de Mirbel's need for the affection and attention of his mother is as exigent as Alain Gajac's, Pierre Gornac remembers that as a child he felt for his mother 'une tendresse souffrante et jalouse' (Destins, OC, I, 527), and, although Yves Frontenac is certainly not deprived of a mother's

love, Blanche despairs of ever being able to satisfy his inexhaustible appetite for her affection.

So far in this chapter attention has been drawn to the way Mauriac's novels highlight the universally accepted fact of life that children generally are hungry for and dependent on parental affection and that human beings need to experience practical and meaningful expressions of love during their childhood perhaps more than at any other time in their lives,<sup>3</sup> and yet parent-child relationships cannot be considered merely as if any love expressed through them could travel only from parent to child along a one-way channel, for man's need for love never dies and it is only natural that parents should look partly to their children for a response to this need. Leaving aside such possessive parents as Félicité Cazenave, mothers like Madame Plassac, Léonie Costadot, Isa in Le Noeud de vipères, Lucie Courrèges and Blanche Frontenac show to varying degrees that they would like the efforts and sacrifices they make on behalf of their families to be recognized, if not rewarded; usually, however, they are not appreciated. In Mauriac's novels filial affection is shown to be demanding and fundamentally selfish. Instinctive filial attachments develop so long as the parents remain loving and lovable in the child's eyes, but whereas maternal and paternal affection may tirelessly survive rebuffs and ingratitude, the love of children for their parents is much more vulnerable. Louis comments on how resilient parental love can be in Le Noeud de vipères:

Aussi loin qu'allât mon ingratitude, impossible d'atteindre l'extrémité de cet amour. Délogé de ses positions, il se reformait ailleurs. Il s'organisait avec ce que je lui laissais, il s'en arrangeait. (OC, III, 373)

---

3. I shall return to this subject in Chapter IV where the influence parents have on the spiritual development of their offspring is considered. See below, pp. 158-67.

The resources of selfless filial affection appear to be less deep, and there is a general tendency for children to take for granted any parental affection they receive. According to Xavier Dartigelongue:

Aimer les enfants, c'est d'abord ne rien attendre en retour.  
L'enfance ne peut être qu'ingratitude: c'est sa loi.  
(L'Agneau, OC, XII, 276)

Several of the sons and daughters Mauriac portrays reflect this law of human nature. They act as if they have a right to the unconditional love of their parents but feel no reciprocal responsibility.

Marie Desqueyroux is an example of a daughter who demands and expects much more from her mother than she gives or repays. She is neither ashamed nor even aware at times of how selfishly she is behaving. She is no doubt sincere when she tries to reassure Thérèse that she loves her in her own way. She has many fictional brothers and sisters in Mauriac's other novels who 'love' their parents to a limited extent. In Le Noeud de vipères Louis refers on more than one occasion to the way his children love Isa 'à leur manière', and yet often they treat her disrespectfully. The attitude of the two Frontenac girls towards Blanche is such that Jean-Louis imagines 'sa mère sous l'aspect un peu dégradé d'une vieille métayère que les enfants se renvoient de l'un à l'autre' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 74).

Just as love of wealth, property or career can kill or poison parental love, so it can have an equally devastating effect on filial affection. Mauriac points out that children can be so unresponsive to what their parents have done for them that they go as far as stripping them of their wealth and then simply letting them die. He writes of the sick the abbé Calou visits:

. . . les vieillards surtout, que leurs fils faisaient trimer parfois jusqu'à la mort. Et il y avait souvent à leur chevet une bru pour leur reprocher le pain noir que mâchaient leurs gencives avec une lenteur de ruminant. (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 400)

Louis of Le Noeud de vipères has learnt that this kind of thing happens 'avec un peu plus de formes et de manières' in bourgeois families and not just among the poor (OC, III, 375).

Mauriac repeatedly draws attention to the fact that, as a result of a quirk of human nature, people tend to be irritated by those in whom they inspire more love than they can reciprocate.<sup>4</sup> In Le Noeud de vipères Louis is exasperated by the very depths of his mother's love for him. He reproaches her for 'l'excès de son amour' (OC, III, 360) and speaks of his 'implacabilité de garçon trop aimé' (OC, III, 358). This kind of irritation can often be explained by the individual's need to defend himself against an offensive passion which seeks to reify and control his body and/or soul. As if he is subconsciously aware of the possibility of reciprocated conjugal love of which his mother will so coldly and calculatingly deprive him later, Fernand Cazenave develops at an early age a desire to hurt and punish her. It is largely a thirst for revenge which motivates Fernand in the first place to pay court to Mathilde who 'n'était rien entre ses mains qu'une arme dans le combat quotidien où jusqu'alors le fils avait toujours été jugulé par la mère' (Genitrix, OC, I, 332). Félicité is prepared for her son's resentment after the death of Mathilde:

Certes, Félicité avait prévu la rancune du fils bien-aimé, sa haine, et même que serait déçu ce besoin de la faire souffrir qu'il eut toujours (enfant, il donnait des coups de genou dans le fauteuil de sa mère jusqu'à ce qu'elle criât grâce). (OC, I, 352)

---

4. See below, Chapter III, pp. 131-32 and Chapter IV, pp. 226-27.

In Le Noeud de vipères Louis is so terrified and pained by the thought that no one other than his mother will ever really love him that he turns against her and treats her cruelly. When she throws doubts on the sincerity and detachment of the Fondaudège family at the beginning of his relationship with Isa, he harbours 'une rancune presque haineuse' against his mother, whom he considers a threat to his new happiness (OC, III, 369).

Thus Mauriac shows that children often feel a hate towards their parents which is only symptomatic of pain, frustration or fear. Just as Paule de Cernès inflicts pain on Guillou because she is in pain and craves the same life-giving force of which she persistently deprives him, so a number of Mauriacien characters inflict on their parents or guardians the anger they feel against themselves or life in general. Marie Desqueyroux tells Thérèse that she would not hate her father and grandmother if she were not so dependent on them and so frustrated of her freedom. Jean de Mirbel refuses to let himself be loved and protected by the abbé Calou, who realizes that his ward is antagonistic towards him simply because he is emotionally wounded:

Comme il souffrait, le pauvre petit! 'Il s'acharne contre moi parce que je suis là, et qu'il n'a personne d'autre à mordre . . .'

(La Pharisienne, OC, V, 321).

Similarly, Paul and Lucie Courrèges become scapegoats for their son's self-hate. Raymond consistently rejects his father's efforts to show tenderness. Indeed the more affection the doctor shows, the more he irritates his son, who is frustrated in his psychological need to despise his family. In fact Raymond loves his father far more than he would ever admit. Whilst Paul Courrèges is very conscious of his affection for his son which he tries in vain to express, Raymond has an artificially repressed affection which he often has to try not to

express. Raymond is typical of several of the sons and daughters Mauriac describes who, consciously or unconsciously, put on a show of indifference or hostility to their parents and some of whom become aware of their hitherto latent or disguised filial affection only when they are older and when it is often too late.

The tendency to take near and dear relatives for granted is not simply a characteristic of the young. In Journal d'un homme de trente ans Mauriac writes:

C'est peut-être qu'il a toujours suffi qu'une créature aimée vive auprès de nous, non peut-être pour que nous l'aimions moins, mais pour que nous ne sentions plus que nous l'aimons.  
(OC, IV, 271)

Moreover, as the abbé Calou points out to Jean de Mirbel, 'on peut haïr quelqu'un qu'on aime':

Notre-Seigneur exige que nous aimions nos ennemis; c'est plus facile souvent que de ne pas haïr ceux que nous aimons.  
(La Pharisienne, OC, V, 339)

Such fundamental truths concerning human nature complicate the development of all family relationships, not just parent-child ones. At the same time man's basic, driving need for love and his perpetual sense of loneliness, which are constantly recurring themes in Mauriac's novels, intensify his natural desire to relate in a meaningful way to those around him. The frustration of this desire may cause or arise from an absence of any kind of rapport between even intimately related people. In Dieu et Mammon Mauriac maintains that 'chacun de nous est un désert' and that 'tout homme souffre d'être seul' (OC, VII, 308). In Journal d'un homme de trente ans he writes, 'Chacun se plaint de sa solitude mais demeure sans compassion pour toutes les solitudes qui l'entourent' (OC, IV, 236). Such a statement certainly applies to several of Mauriac's fictional characters, but even when they try to be less selfish and to make

meaningful contact with others, they often fail despite themselves. This is largely because any attempt to establish a relationship and thus to bridge the gap separating human beings clearly requires mutual knowledge and understanding which should be profound and free from illusions. Mauriac insists that this is often particularly difficult to achieve within the family. Sometimes the more intimate the relationship involved, the bigger the problem can be. With reference to the Johanet parent-child relationship Mauriac writes:

Il ne connaît pas son fils et Jean-Paul ne connaît pas cet homme hâlé, hirsute, mal tenu, qui est son père et il se demande parfois: 'Comment suis-je sorti de lui? . . . .' (L'Enfant chargé de chaînes, OC, X, 4)

Similarly, when Pierre Gornac is struggling to understand his mother, Mauriac asks in Destins, 'D'ailleurs, que savons-nous de ceux qui nous ont mis au monde?' and he continues: 'Aucune chair ne nous est moins connue que celle dont la nôtre a tiré sa substance' (OC, I, 521).

The very proximity in which people live can be a hindrance rather than a help to the development of a meaningful relationship. Maria Cross tells Raymond Courrèges that he does not really know his father because he lives too near to him:

Nos proches sont ceux que nous ignorons le plus . . . Nous arrivons à ne plus même voir ce qui nous entoure. (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 114)

Elsewhere in the same novel Mauriac states that 'les membres d'une famille trop unie ne se voient plus les uns les autres' (OC, II, 48). When Maria wants to know what Bertrand was like as a child Victor cannot tell her. She points out to Raymond how incredible it is 'qu'un père ne trouve rien à dire sur ce que fut son fils' (OC, II, 147). The fact is that he never stopped to observe him properly.

As people tend to behave in different ways in various sorts of company, a parent, for example, may see only one side of his child's character. Maria Cross points out to Raymond how people in society saw her physical appearance with quite different eyes from those of her family:

Tenez, dans ma famille, on m'a toujours crue laide, parce qu'étant enfant je louchais un peu. Au lycée, à ma grande stupéfaction, des camarades m'ont dit que j'étais jolie. (OC, II, 114)

Madame Lagave can scarcely believe how popular her son is. His visitors see in him something she has never noticed:

Mme Lagave n'aurait jamais cru que son petit pût avoir tant d'esprit. D'ailleurs, à peine aurait-elle reconnu le son de sa voix: un tout autre Bob, en vérité, que le garçon taciturne qui s'asseyait à la table de famille. (Destins, OC, I, 425)

In Le Fleuve de Feu Daniel observes the way 'Mme de Villeron, rien qu'en étant là, décelait une Gisèle inconnue' (OC, I, 254). He remembers noticing how differently Raymond Courrèges behaved inside and outside his family:

Il se souvenait qu'un été, ayant rendu visite à Raymond Courrèges dans sa famille, il avait découvert au contact d'une mère, d'une soeur, un garçon très différent du ravageur qu'était son ami, un fils et un frère qu'il ne connaissait pas. (OC, I, 254)

Mauriac suggests that the gulf between human beings is widened still further by a difference in sex. Paul Courrèges has little hope of being understood by his mother simply because she is a woman:

Et d'ailleurs cette vieille femme qui est là que comprendrait-elle à cette musique profonde de son fils, à ces dissonances déchirantes? Ce fils d'une autre race, puisqu'il est d'un autre sexe . . . Rien que cela, le sexe, nous sépare plus que deux planètes . . . Devant sa mère, le docteur se rappelle sa douleur, mais ne la raconte pas. (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 45)

On the other hand the chasm between father and son is aggravated, because there is no difference in sex:

L'homme et la femme, aussi éloignés qu'ils puissent être l'un de l'autre, se rejoignent dans une étreinte. Et même une mère peut attirer la tête de son grand fils et baiser ses cheveux; mais le père, lui, ne peut rien, hors le geste que fit le docteur Courrèges posant la main sur l'épaule de Raymond, qui tressaillit et se retourna. (OC, II, 71)

When Monsieur Balzon comments on how sad it is that Bertrand Johanet feels awkward with his son, Jean-Paul's father makes a gesture of resignation, signifying, 'Que veux-tu? C'est comme ça . . . Les jeunes et les vieux ne se comprennent jamais . . .'  
(L'Enfant chargé de chaînes, OC, X, 86). However, Dr. Courrèges wonders how responsible the generation gap really is for the alienation between Raymond and himself:

Y a-t-il si loin d'un père à un fils? Qu'est-ce donc que les vingt-cinq années qui les séparent? J'ai le même cœur qu'à vingt ans, et tu es sorti de moi: il y a des chances pour que nous ayons en commun des inclinations, des dégoûts, des tentations . . . (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 71)

Jean-Paul Johanet and his father are literally strangers. During the dinner with the Balzons Jean-Paul offers some water to his father who replies as he might do to a newly met acquaintance: 'Tu es trop généreux' (L'Enfant chargé de chaînes, OC, X, 60). This estrangement, however, is not due entirely to a lack of effort on the part of Bertrand nor to the generation gap, but rather to genetic differences of character and temperament which hinder the development of their relationship despite the blood-tie. We are told that Monsieur Johanet 'était gêné devant ce fils trop délicat comme autrefois devant la jeune femme qui vécut et mourut à ses côtés, fidèle, silencieuse, résignée . . .'  
(OC, X, 60). Their interests are diametrically opposed: Bertrand loves to hunt,

Jean-Paul to read; the former is a practical materialist, the latter a poet.

Even before the fateful summer which marks both their lives Pierre Gornac irritates his mother, because he is romantic like his father, whilst she is much more practical. The gulf is still greater between Pierre and his anticlerical grandfather:

Nul ne pourrait croire qu'ils sont du même sang: Pierre si religieux, mystique même, 'toujours à rêvasser', comme dit le vieux, - si détaché de la terre, de l'argent . . . .  
(Destins, OC, I, 431)

Élisabeth is aware that her relations with her son are scarcely more satisfying and that 'leur commune foi ne les unit guère' (OC, I, 432).

The same kind of problem is to be found in Les Chemins de la mer in the Costadot family. Mother and sons simply cannot understand each other. Léonie realizes that Pierrot and Robert will judge her harshly for extorting a signature from Lucienne Révolou, even though she was acting on their behalf. She knows them well enough to fear the reception they will give her, but she cannot really empathize with their inner selves. Something much more fundamental than a difference of opinion is in question:

Ce qui empoisonnait ses rapports avec ses deux derniers fils, ce n'était pas une divergence d'opinion. Gaston et elle ne semblaient d'accord sur rien, mais ils s'entendaient à demi mot. Ce noceur, dont la vie était un défi à tous les principes dont se réclamait sa mère, la comprenait et elle le comprenait. Les deux autres, si travailleurs, si graves, elle ne prévoyait jamais leurs réactions. (OC, V, 17)

To describe the abyss between Léonie and her sons Mauriac this time uses the image of an ocean separating them:

Maintenant leur silence la gênait. Elle était séparée d'eux par une mer: à quoi leur eût-il servi de se parler d'une rive à l'autre? (OC, V, 24)

Once again this gulf between parent and children is due partly to the fact that Léonie's focal point of interest is materialistic;

that of the two boys is not. The poet Pierrot is always very concerned with things spiritual, and Robert at this stage still believes he is in love.

Mauriac stresses repeatedly that anyone who feels unchecked passion for another is wholly absorbed by that love. There is no room in his life for anything else. We are told in Le Noeud de vipères that nothing exists for Janine but her passion for Phili and with respect to Andrès Gradère, who lives in hope of receiving a letter from Tota, Mauriac writes in Les Anges noirs:

On ne peut penser qu'à un être à la fois. Il n'y a jamais qu'un être qui existe pour nous; et tous les autres, on fait semblant de croire à leur existence . . . (OC, III, 248)

Consequently, when sons and daughters are obsessed by a passionate relationship outside the confines of the family they tend not to care about their parents who mean nothing at all to their lover. Madeleine Courrèges's so-called love for her father is a good example of how shallow filial affection can be in this respect. It quickly turns to hate when Dr. Courrèges threatens to come between Gaston and herself, and as quickly reverts to adoration when he eventually yields and withdraws his opposition. Once again she addresses him as 'Mon petit papa chéri' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 39), but he is free from illusions. The doctor ceases to look to Madeleine for a genuine response to his love. In Galigai Marie Dubernet's feelings turn with a vengeance against her mother when the latter threatens to end her relationship with Gilles Salone. At the end, when her mother has died and her dreams have come true, Marie tries to shake off a feeling of triumph and struggles to pray for 'sa mère morte, sa mère qui n'aimait pas Gilles, qui le haïssait peut-être, qui aurait fini par

les séparer . . .' (OC, XII, 152). She then remembers the time when 'elle ne pouvait rester une heure séparée de sa mère qui s'en plaignait: "Cette petite est toujours dans mes jupes"' and when 'on disait: "Elle n'aime personne, il n'y a que sa mère qui compte"' (OC, XII, 152). Marie Desqueyroux is interested in her mother's history only in as far as it is likely to affect her relationship with Georges Filhot:

Georges! Georges! Il occupait Marie tout entière, à cette minute. Ce que pouvait éprouver sa mère, qui était revenue se blottir sur la chaise basse, n'avait aucune réalité.  
(La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 366)

Immediately she is jilted by Georges, Marie turns vehemently and without thinking against Thérèse:

Pas une seconde, Marie n'arrêta sa pensée aux raisons que Georges pouvait avoir de provoquer cette rupture. Elle obéit à son instinct de petite fille qui était de simplifier de chercher d'abord le coupable, de fixer sa haine sur un seul être qui ne fût pas celui qu'elle chérissait. (OC, II, 467-68)

However, it is not only the passionate love affairs of the offspring which can menace parent-child relationships. In Le Désert de l'amour Mauriac makes this observation: 'On ne pense jamais que ce sont les passions des pères qui le plus souvent les séparent de leurs fils' (OC, II, 92).

The passion Paul and Raymond Courrèges have for Maria Cross, which each keeps secret from the other, isolates father and son. Each is too preoccupied with his own passion really to care about anything else. Raymond is going through a very egoistic phase of adolescence anyway, and one would not expect him to be sensitive to his father's emotional preoccupations, but Paul Courrèges would no doubt have been less blind to his son's problems if he himself had not been tortured by his frustrated love for Maria. On the morning of François Cross's funeral, when they are in the car together, Raymond

observes his father 'avec une curiosité ardente, avec le désir de recevoir une confidence'. Mauriac points out: 'Voici la minute où ils eussent pu se rapprocher, peut-être' (OC, II, 23). However, Dr. Courrèges misses his chance. His mind is too far away. Totally oblivious to Raymond he is wondering what else he could possibly have done in an effort to save the life of Maria's son. When Raymond begins to take a pride in his appearance and becomes 'un être neuf' (OC, II, 48), his father is slow to recognize the transformation, partly because he is so absorbed in his own little world of which Maria Cross is the centre. It is significant that his eyes are eventually opened to the new Raymond on the very day when, as he believes, everything is at last finished between Maria and himself. Later Lucie tries to make Paul take a greater interest in the comings and goings of his son. The doctor stammers that 'la sagesse est de fermer les yeux' and, though he dare not, would like to exclaim, 'Rien n'existe pour moi que mon tourment' (OC, II, 92).

It is paradoxical that the father and son should eventually grow closer through their mutual contact with Maria Cross, although neither Raymond nor Paul ever realizes the exact nature of the other's involvement with her. This subtle change in their relationship begins on the evening Raymond comes home and introduces the subject of Maria Cross into the family conversation:

Le père et le fils avaient envie de causer, ce soir. Une force, à leur insu, les rapprochait, comme s'ils eussent détenu le même secret. Ainsi se cherchent et se reconnaissent des initiés, des complices. Chacun découvrait dans l'autre l'être unique avec qui s'entretenir de ce qui lui tenait le plus à cœur. (OC, II, 83)

On occasions Maria is a cause of dispute between them, but gradually in the course of time she proves to be such a common denominator in their lives that she unwittingly helps to unite them. In his book

Maria Cross Donat O'Donnell says that Maria's surname is not 'Cross' by chance, pointing out that the word 'passion' is used to refer not only to 'a certain kind of sexual desire' but also to 'the sufferings of Christ on the cross' and in this respect O'Donnell quotes the words that Paul Claudel puts in the mouth of his heroine, Prouhèze, in Le Soulier de satin: 'La passion est unie à la croix'.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Courrèges and his son share the same passion, the same cross, and it is this that narrows the abyss which separates them until 'entre eux se noue un autre lien du sang, plus secret: ils sont parents par Maria Cross' (OC, II, 163).

There is no common 'Cross' to unite Pierre and Élisabeth Gornac. They are separated by their own particular passions. Guilty though he is of pharisaical hypocrisy, Pierre is a committed Christian whose faith involves a living, personal relationship with Christ. The joy he derives from this is meaningless to Élisabeth 'dont la piété demeure, le plus souvent, aride et sans consolation' (Destins, OC, I, 503). She does not mean to be hostile to Pierre, but she cannot help being irritated by him. She wonders whether he has ever loved or been loved like Bob and feels somehow humiliated 'parce que Pierre n'a pas de succès féminins, parce qu'il ne plaît pas aux femmes!' (OC, I, 440). While Pierre is giving Paule details of Bob's reputation, Élisabeth does her best not to think of her son 'comme si elle avait eu peur de le haïr':

De quoi se mêlait-il? Qui lui avait permis d'intervenir? Que pouvait-il comprendre à l'amour? L'amour ne le concernait pas; il n'y connaissait rien, issu d'une race étrangère à la passion. (OC, I, 474)

---

5. D. O'Donnell, Maria Cross, London, Chatto and Windus, 1953, pp. 246-47.

Pierre is not a stranger to love, although he is a stranger to the passion in which Élisabeth is to become increasingly involved. He cannot appreciate the sudden burgeoning of his mother's capacity for sexual love that has lain dormant for years, subconsciously germinated and eventually blossomed as a result of her contact with Bob. It is significant that, temporarily at least, mother and son find it easier to converse once Bob has left Viridis. However, as they subsequently become more and more absorbed by a religious vocation on Pierre's part and thoughts of Bob on Élisabeth's, the rift between them grows.

Apart from the fact that there is usually no generation gap between brothers and sisters and husbands and wives, the same problems which can hinder the development of meaningful parent-child relationships also affect siblings and married couples.<sup>6</sup>

No less than parental love, natural fraternal affection can become dangerously possessive. As a young boy Louis Pian is tormented by jealousy when Michèle and Jean become friends. This wounds him as a child and has serious, long-term consequences. On the one hand Louis feels robbed of his only real friend, but he is also afraid of losing his sister's affection of which he stands very much in need. Louis's mother of whom he has fond memories has died. Neither the weak Octave Pian nor the cold Brigitte satisfies the boy's need for love, with the result that Louis's attachment to Michèle and Jean is more obsessive than it might otherwise have been. Thus Mauriac implies that just as parental passion is in

---

6. As I indicated in the Introduction to this thesis (see above, pp. 7-8), although reference to the difficulties which arise in relationships between siblings is appropriate at this point, I have left detailed discussion of conjugal relationships and extramarital love relationships between the sexes to a later stage. They are so peculiarly complex that the major part of Chapter III is devoted to an analysis of them.

danger of becoming excessive when the mother or father is deprived of a fulfilling conjugal relationship, so the absence of parental love may give rise to the possessive adulation of a brother or sister or to a premature sexual attraction to someone outside the family circle. Denis Révolou looks even more to his sister for affection than Louis Pian. Oscar Révolou's suicide makes a marked impression on Denis. He meditates on the meaning of death and its horror. The distressed Madame Révolou eventually turns all her attention to Julien, when her younger son is feeling most desolate. Consequently it is not his mother who is at hand to comfort Denis as he philosophizes about man's mortality but Rose, for whom he already feels considerable affection:

Il sentit autour de ses épaules le bras de Rose, cacha sa figure mouillée contre le cou fragile. Il s'accrochait à cette soeur vivante - vivante et donc vouée à la mort. (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 40)

Throughout Les Chemins de la mer Denis's love of Rose becomes increasingly obsessive. Denis looks to his sister to satisfy not only his need to be loved, but also his need to love. He pours out on her all his frustrated sexual love, and by the end of the novel his jealous attachment to Rose has grown threateningly incestuous.

The same kind of gulf which arises between Pierre and Élisabeth Gornac also separates Joseph and Fabien Dézaymeries. When they are children, Fabien seldom seeks his brother's company: Fabien is attracted by Fanny whilst Joseph, on the other hand, instinctively does all he can to avoid her. Later the gap widens. Similarly, Alain and Laurent Gajac have no tastes in common. Like Fabien, Alain only really considers his brother at all when the latter is on the brink of death. Raymond Courrèges is too self-centred and too preoccupied by his 'affair' with Maria Cross

to care about anyone else, least of all his sister. Madeleine, for her part, has time only for Gaston and her children. Although they live under the same roof, brother and sister are as separated by their mutually exclusive concerns as if they were physically miles apart. Félicité Cazenave's consuming passion for Fernand makes her an arch-enemy of her brother, Jérôme Péloueyre. In the end dissimilar personal interests even come between a brother and sister as close as Denis and Rose Révolou. Until Rose suspects the incestuous nature of her brother's love for her, she responds with a devoted sisterly affection, but this nevertheless takes second place in importance after her passion for Robert Costadot. When Denis is bitterly disappointed by his examination results, Rose talks to him and does her best to show at least a superficial interest, but this is not enough for Denis and Rose knows that 'il aurait fallu lui parler sur un ton plus intime, le consoler "de l'intérieur" . . .' but she does not do so, because 'un autre désir l'occupait' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 153), the desire to read a letter, received two days before, from Robert. Consequently she tries to deceive both Denis and herself and leaves him saying that she feels he would rather be alone! All would not be lost if Denis could make allowances for Rose and try to understand her, but he can think only of himself and his own misery. Neither brother nor sister can relieve the suffering of the other. Having been abandoned by Robert, Rose realizes that despite her great affection for Denis 'elle ne recevrait pas de lui la moindre goutte d'eau', and her grief surrounds her so that 'il ne restait plus à Denis que de se coucher sur le sable et de la regarder souffrir' (OC, V, 139). Thus Mauriac makes the point yet again that a passion experienced for someone outside the family unit

enlarges the natural gulf that already exists between its members and isolates the victim. Denis reminds the jilted Rose that she still has him. Rose only shrugs her shoulders:

. . . comme si la famille pouvait nous secourir quand nous aimons! Aucun secours n'est jamais venu à personne d'un père, d'un frère, d'un fils. Le cercle de notre enfer leur est interdit. (OC, V, 139)

## 2. THE COMMUNICATION BARRIER

One of the symptoms of the shallow, threatened or damaged family relationships described in Mauriac's novels is a breakdown of communication at the most obvious level - namely that of the human tongue. Sometimes such an empty silence has grown up between man and wife, parent and child, brother and sister that there is an almost total absence of conversation within the family. When Claude Favereau leaves the seminary and returns home, we are told that he is not apprehensive about his parents, who hardly talk together, 'n'ayant rien à se dire, séparés, mais unis par leurs racines, comme les chênes de Lur' (La Chair et le Sang, OC, X, 113). Marie Favereau's countenance is described as that of a woman who long ago accepted silence and solitude as her fate. Similarly, the relationship between Tota and Marcel Revaux is so superficial and strained that they are incapable of spending a single evening at home alone together:

Son angoisse disparue, Marcel ne trouvait plus rien en lui qui eût trait à cette femme. Ils ne savaient que se dire l'un à l'autre. (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 77)

In Destins Mauriac points out how sociological factors give rise to certain 'différences d'atmosphère entre les êtres', which in turn can cause or aggravate language difficulties (OC, I, 423). Raymond Courrèges enjoys his trips home in the tram, because he can share a certain sense of communion with his fellow travellers without being obliged to speak to them:

Il se sentait à l'aise parmi ces gens - bien loin de se douter qu'il eût suffi d'une parole pour que tout à coup surgît le désert qui sépare les classes comme il sépare les êtres . . . . (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 41)

This is scarcely apparent in the majority of families Mauriac describes, because few of his characters marry outside their own rigidly defined social class, but the kind of problem which can arise is exemplified in Destins. Bob Lagave is anxious that his father should not meet certain members of his fawning entourage, because 'il redoutait ces arcanes du langage des gens du monde, au milieu desquels un Augustin Lagave eût perdu pied d'abord, puis, très vite, se fût exaspéré' (OC, I, 423). As it happens, his father finds it quite difficult to understand their 'langage d'initiés' (OC, I, 426). At the same time we are told that the very presence of his father automatically reduces Bob Lagave to silence:

. . . l'entrée d'Augustin lui ôtait l'usage de la parole. Assis au bord de sa chaise, il demeurait, le regard absent, comme si M. Lagave, qui aimait à disserter sur les questions de service, d'avancement et de politique, se fût exprimé dans une langue étrangère. (OC, I, 420)

This example highlights the fact that the main cause of the breakdown of verbal communication between Mauriacien protagonists is a basic personality clash or the confrontation of conflicting interests, principles or attitudes. Marie Desqueyroux and Georges Filhot plan to get married, but they are essentially incompatible. The chances of their ever being able to communicate more meaningfully than Claude Favereau's parents or Marcel and Tota Revaux look slim. Thérèse suggests to Georges that, whenever Marie asks what he is thinking about, he always replies, 'A rien, ma chérie', because 'ce serait trop compliqué que de l'introduire dans le monde où il est entré et où une femme n'a pas accès . . .'

(La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 402). Later Georges gives up trying to converse with Marie, who accuses him of considering her an idiot and tells him not to deny it, whereupon he 'n'insistait plus; il en tombait d'accord avec elle: une idiote fermée à ce monde où il souffrait et où elle ne pourrait jamais le suivre' (OC, II, 490).

As if they are mysteriously afraid of communicating on a more profound level some of Mauriac's characters seem determined to indulge in the most superficial kind of conversation which reflects the materialism or parochial narrowness of their thinking. Even during the early part of their marriage Bernard Desqueyroux refuses to view life from the philosophical angle which interests Thérèse. He suffers from hypochondria, and his own health is one of his chief topics of conversation. Lucie Courrèges talks mainly about local scandal, domestic affairs and the health of her family. Julia Dubernet also limits her talking points as much as possible. By interrupting with a comment on the weather or something equally trivial, she cuts short Armand's every attempt to introduce an element of culture into their family discussions:

Quinze ans plus tôt, avant qu'Armand ne fût abruti, c'était ce qu'il appelait 'l'escopette de Julia': elle abattait au vol toute conversation à peine née, avec une sûreté souveraine. (Galigai, OC, XII, 101)

Alain Gajac tells us that for as long as he can remember talk between his mother and himself has been limited to 'des jugements passe-partout, très souvent en patois, car ils servent aussi pour les métayers, pour les domestiques' (Un adolescent d'autrefois, p. 43). In Le Noeud de vipères Louis thinks for a while that Isa has her own special reasons for avoiding him or at least for evading 'toute parole un peu profonde', but he changes his opinion later:

. . . j'ai compris que, tout simplement, cela ne t'intéressait pas. J'étais tellement en dehors de tes préoccupations que tu te dérobaïs, non par terreur, mais par ennui. (OC, III, 350-51)

The relationship between Jean-Louis and Madeleine in Le Mystère Frontenac suggests that even relatively stable marriages can be threatened by communication difficulties arising from the fact that the main preoccupations of two individuals rarely coincide at a given moment in time. Madeleine has her own specifically feminine concerns. Understandably she does not feel as much for her husband's family as Jean-Louis himself. She lets him down one evening by not showing spontaneous interest in José who is uppermost in her husband's thoughts. Jean-Louis, for his part, makes unfair demands on Madeleine's sensitivity, whilst not appreciating her preoccupation with their baby's fever and other domestic questions. Madeleine complains that he neither listens nor replies to her. Nevertheless, it seems probable that perseverance and a minimum of mutual consideration will keep the Frontenac relationship alive. Later, on the evening in question, for example, Madeleine proffers unsolicited advice concerning José - although now Jean-Louis's mind is full of Yves! In the majority of the relationships Mauriac describes the problems are far more serious.

Varying levels of emotional or spiritual sensitivity even make certain vocabulary meaningless to one or other of the speakers. The narrator of Préséances warns his sister that Augustin, whose heart is quite different from the others with which she has trifled in society, is going to suffer if she does not treat him gently. Florence does not appear to understand, so he attempts to express himself in terms that will be meaningful to her:

Elle me regarda si curieusement que je me sentis rougir; alors j'essayai de lui donner le change: certes la souffrance d'Augustin importait peu, mais enfin nous avons besoin de ce garçon . . . (OC, X, 300)

Thérèse Desqueyroux eventually finds it difficult to converse at all with Bernard or his parents. This breakdown of verbal communication is too radical to be attributed to misunderstandings. Words literally fail them:

La mésentente suppose un terrain de rencontre où se heurter; mais Thérèse ne rencontrait jamais Bernard, et moins encore ses beaux-parents; leurs paroles ne l'atteignaient guère; l'idée ne lui venait pas qu'il fût nécessaire d'y répondre. Avaient-ils seulement un vocabulaire commun? Ils donnaient aux mots essentiels un sens différent.  
(Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 235)

Some of Mauriac's characters are too timid, emotional or sensitive to express their feelings in words. Prudent Gornac dare not tell Élisabeth that he loves her. When she wonders why he does not get bored at le Bos, he would like to reply, 'Tu me suffis . . .', but 'ces sortes de gentillesse n'ont pas cours chez les Gornac' (Destins, OC, I, 435-36). His very emotion also prevents him from speaking. Usually the unfeeling Élisabeth, who at this stage has had no personal experience of love, unwittingly brings an abrupt end to Prudent's dilemma:

. . . il souffrait de ce que la nuit, alors qu'une profonde émotion lui défendait toute parole, soudain, s'élevait, dans l'ombre nuptiale, la voix d'Élisabeth:

- Fais-moi penser, demain matin, à te demander ta signature pour le bail Lalanne. (OC, I, 436)

For similar reasons Pierre Gornac's leaving of his mother is a painful wrench:

Quel arrachement, pour un maladroit de fils qui n'a jamais su que l'irriter, qui n'a jamais su lui dire combien il l'aimait! (OC, I, 531)

Before Pierre goes abroad to the mission field, his mother spends three days with him in Marseille, but during this time even words

spoken in vain fail them, and they resign themselves to silence. Like Pierre Gornac Dr. Courrèges suffers badly from an awkward timidity which prevents him from putting his feelings into words. This worsens his relationship with his wife who accepts at face value the misleading coldness and brusqueness of her husband. Dr. Courrèges's problem, however, is most apparent in his relations with his son:

Le clinicien, qui, quelques instants plus tard, parlerait d'abondance, avec autorité, à son service et aux étudiants, depuis des mois cherchait en vain le mot qui atteindrait cet être sorti de lui. Comment se frayer une route jusqu'à ce cœur hérissé de défenses? Quand il se flattait d'avoir trouvé le joint et qu'il adressait à Raymond des paroles longtemps méditées, il ne les reconnaissait pas, et sa voix même le trahissait - malgré lui, ricanante et sèche. Toujours ce fut son martyre de ne rien pouvoir exprimer de ses sentiments. (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 15)

The personality of the interlocutors is not always responsible for their inability to converse meaningfully. In his novels Mauriac often shows the spoken language to be a faulty or inadequate instrument of communication, which is fundamentally incapable of meeting the demands made on it by human beings anxious to express the minutest details of a fine network of facts, feelings and inner promptings. In Bordeaux ou l'adolescence Mauriac suggests that some feelings actually defy verbal description:

Nos sentiments débordent infiniment notre vocabulaire: quels mots correspondent moins souvent au réel qu'amour et que haine? (OC, IV, 171)

Moreover, certain events and experiences have histories which are too complicated to be explained in detail. When Mondoux questions Thérèse about her relationship with Georges Filhot in La Fin de la Nuit, she is at a loss for words:

Ce n'était pas de sa faute si la vérité demeure inexprimable. On ne fait pas tenir en quelques mots l'histoire de deux êtres qui se sont affrontés. Que s'était-il passé réellement entre eux? (OC, II, 448)

Dr. Courrèges would like to confide in his mother but cannot:

Et lui songea quelques instants à ne pas retenir ce cri qui l'étouffait; mais il aurait fallu remonter si loin, reprendre toute la chaîne de ses douleurs jusqu'à la douleur de ce soir . . . Et comment expliquer cette disproportion entre sa souffrance et ce qui l'avait fait naître?  
(Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 44)

Comment expliquer à sa mère, qui guette une confidence, la détresse de cette minute, le renoncement exigé, l'arrachement à ce triste bonheur quotidien d'une conversation avec Maria Cross? Le tout n'est pas de vouloir se confier, ni même d'avoir près de soi une confidente, fût-ce notre mère. Qui de nous possède la science de faire tenir dans quelques paroles notre monde intérieur? Comment détacher de ce fleuve mouvant telle sensation et non telle autre? On ne peut rien dire dès qu'on ne peut tout dire. (OC, II, 45)

In La Pharisienne Brigitte Pian maintains that 'le mal peut être multiforme, invisible, indéchiffrable, et donc inexprimable, à la lettre innommable . . .' (OC, V, 420). Accordingly Thérèse despairs of ever finding the words to explain her motives for trying to poison Bernard.

Clearly people do not always need words to express what they are feeling or even to convey information. Augustin Lagave shows his scorn for his son 'moins dans ses paroles que dans ses silences, lorsqu'il négligeait de répondre à une question de Bob' (Destins, OC, I, 415). Noémi and Jean Péloueyre do not express their feelings for one another in words and yet the poignancy of their relationship lies in the fact that their mutual understanding is no less real for being unspoken. As Amélie Fillon points out, 'chacun lit à livre ouvert dans le cœur de l'autre; et ce drame pitoyable est ennobli par ce double silence'.<sup>7</sup> In Un adolescent d'autrefois Alain Gajac points out that when he returns in the evening his mother senses almost as a dog would that he has been fraternizing with her 'ennemis inconnus':

---

7. A. Fillon, François Mauriac, Paris, Edgar Malfère, 1936, p. 95.

. . . j'avais beau d'abord m'arrêter au lavabo de l'office, me laver la figure et les mains, ma mère m'attirait à elle, me flairait, reconnaissait sur moi une odeur étrangère. Non qu'elle m'en ait jamais rien dit. Je savais qu'elle le savait. (p. 150)

In this instance mother and son are 'atrocement transparents l'un à l'autre' (p. 150). Alain Gajac is not alone in possessing a peculiar faculty for sensing what another person refrains from expressing. Gabriel Gradère for one enjoys the same kind of intuition. In Les Chemins de la mer Mauriac draws attention to the fact that a man and a woman who are sexually attracted to one another do not need words to communicate even if they have only just met:

La jeune fille et Pierrot se souriaient. Les mots ne sont rien. La véritable voix du sang est celle dont le cri jaillit entre deux êtres neufs qui sans s'être jamais vus se reconnaissent, comme ils eussent fait aux premières nuits de la terre . . . . (OC, V, 189)

Mauriac suggests that siblings in particular enjoy this kind of sixth sense. On one occasion Rose does not need to say anything to be reconciled to Denis in Les Chemins de la mer:

Et lui se rendait compte que cette présence de Rose à son chevet signifiait: 'Je te demande pardon . . .' L'un et l'autre trouvaient plus simple de n'échanger aucune parole. (OC, V, 85)

Later Rose tells Denis that there are certain aspects of their fraternal relationship which will always be a mystery even to Robert Costadot:

- . . . Le fiancé le plus aimé . . . et Dieu sait . . . (d'instinct elle s'interrompt.) Autant que nous l'aimions, reprit-elle après un silence, il y a des régions de nous où il ne pénétrera qu'à la longue et peut-être jamais . . .

- Tandis que moi?

- Je sens certaines choses en même temps que toi . . . Nous n'avons pas besoin de paroles. (OC, V, 109)

Jean-Louis Frontenac tells his mother that brothers 'peuvent se deviner, se comprendre jusqu'à un certain point . . . ils ne se confient pas' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 69). Mauriac

enlarges on this elsewhere in the same novel:

. . . il suffit à des frères d'être unis par les racines  
comme deux surgeons d'une même souche, ils n'ont guère  
coutume de s'expliquer: c'est le plus muet des amours.  
(OC, IV, 26)

Consequently the absence of verbal communication between members of a family does not necessarily imply that their relationship is strained. Indeed some Mauriacien characters threaten their personal relationships by talking too much. Lucie Courrèges, for example, is a paragon of tactlessness. She does not learn from her mother-in-law's infinitely more sensitive approach to the doctor and his problems. She misunderstands her husband, because she fails to interpret what he does not say. Lucie persistently attributes her husband's quietness to ill health; Madame Courrèges mère, on the other hand, knowing that her son has a strong constitution, concludes from his silent moods: 'Il n'est pas malade, mais c'est vrai qu'il souffre' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 32). She responds to this suffering just by being there, waiting patiently in case he should want to unburden himself to her.

Although verbal communication may not always be important or even desirable between sensitive individuals who already enjoy a certain rapport or a special kind of intimacy, it is often insufficiently used by people who depend upon it in their efforts to make meaningful contact with one another. It is only to be expected that the spoken language should play a major part in any attempt to bridge the inevitable gap that exists between all human beings, be they husbands, wives, parents, sons, daughters or siblings, since man's instinctive need to be loved and understood automatically gives rise to a fundamental urge to communicate verbally with others. When deprived of the opportunity to do so

men become increasingly susceptible to phobias and depression. In Le Noeud de vipères Louis says that 'l'âme se décourage quand elle ne peut s'exprimer au dehors . . .' (OC, III, 392) and that 'le dialogue est nécessaire à l'être humain' (OC, III, 490). It is this necessity which makes Louis write his journal and prompts the desperate Marcel Revaux, tormented by jealousy, to confide in Hervé de Blénauge:

Peu importait qu'à cette minute, Blénauge fût un ami véritable. Marcel avait besoin de le croire digne de toute confiance. (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 13)

In Les Anges noirs Mauriac points out how 'la vie offre souvent de ces extraordinaires disproportions entre l'âme qui se confie et celle qui recueille la confiance' (OC, III, 260), and he explains this in the following terms:

C'est que nous n'avons pas le choix: à certaines heures, notre douleur sort de nous, s'arrache de nos entrailles et n'importe quels bras se tendent pour recevoir le sombre enfant. (OC, III, 260)

However great man's need for vocal communication might be, all too often Mauriac's characters repress it in themselves or fail to respond to it in those around them. When the Doyen tells Alain Gajac to make Simon talk, he replies:

- Je vous répète qu'il ne me dira rien. D'ailleurs personne ne dit rien à personne. Je me demande s'il y a des milieux où les gens s'expliquent par demandes et réponses comme dans les romans, comme au théâtre . . . . (Un adolescent d'autrefois, p. 43)

He goes on to ask the Doyen whether 'les êtres qui s'aiment . . . se le disent' (p. 43). Louis of Le Noeud de vipères resembles Alain Gajac in the way he asks himself 's'il existe, dans la vie, des amantes et des épouses qui font des "scènes", qui s'expliquent à coeur ouvert, qui trouvent du soulagement à s'expliquer' (OC, III, 350).

Thus one can conclude that the absence of meaningful conversation between Mauriacian protagonists is not always just a result, but may also be a cause of the isolation felt by individuals. Moreover, some of Mauriac's characters refrain from saying certain things deliberately or manipulate words in a malicious way in order to wound or mislead. By prevaricating and failing to warn her family of Gabriel's scheming Mathilde Desbats becomes an accomplice to murder. The narrator of Préséances knows that Florence will hurt Augustin, but he still does not put him on his guard; he closes Chapter III with the words: 'Quelle trahison que le silence!' (OC, X, 300). Elsewhere Mauriac shows that the subtle use of a combination of speech and pregnant silences can be an extremely effective tool for sowing the seed of doubt and fear. Léonie Costadot, in her efforts to play on Robert's emotions, so that he behaves as she wants him to, 'l'aidait parfois d'une interjection ou d'un simple regard à se débarrasser de ce qu'il avait à dire' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 113). By speaking half-truths and unfinished sentences Hervé de Blénauge manages to exacerbate Marcel's inner suffering and encourages him to think the worst. At times he lies blatantly to his wife, but 'même quand il ne mentait pas, il avait l'air de mentir' (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 26).

There are many other occasions when harmful ambiguities and misunderstandings arise and threaten relationships, simply because the spoken language, imperfect agent though it may be, is not used openly and honestly. In Les Chemins de la mer Mauriac maintains that 'la pudeur des sentiments joue dans nos vies un rôle plus redoutable qu'aucun vice' (OC, V, 163), and he gives an example to

illustrate his point: Rose refrains from saying the few vital words of reconciliation that would have saved her relationship with Denis and prevented his ill-advised marriage to Irène:

Ils n'étaient séparés que par une irritation de surface, une rancune, ce que suffit à dissiper une main pressée, un mot de tendresse et de pardon. Rose demeura prisonnière de ce silence que Denis croyait hostile et qui n'était rien que fausse honte, désir enfantin de ne pas faire le premier pas. Ces quelques secondes suffirent pour que de nouveau il s'éloignât d'elle. (OC, V, 163)

At the beginning of L'Agneau Xavier Dartigelongue is anxious that the disputing couple at the station should show some sign of mutual pardon before the train leaves. He believes that 'pour tout sauver à la dernière seconde, il eût suffi d'un sourire, d'un geste de la main, d'un mouvement des lèvres' (OC, XII, 179). For the lack of a word of reconciliation the relationship between Jean and Michèle might have been terminated definitively, if Xavier had not come to the rescue.

The distressing consequences that can be incurred by man's failure to use the human tongue appropriately constitute one of the main themes of Un adolescent d'autrefois. The tragic dénouement of this novel is caused largely by the fact that there is very little verbal communication at a profound level between mother and son. At the same time the relationship between Alain and Marie is jeopardized right from the beginning, because neither is strictly honest with the other. If one does risk the confession of his feelings and motives, it is the other who holds something back. Having been deceived in the past, Alain is subsequently afraid to make the total gift of self that is vital if a mutually enriching love relationship is to be established.

When Isa dies in Le Noeud de vipères Louis has bitter regrets that he is now no longer able to speak to her:

Nous ne pourrions pas recommencer, repartir sur nouveaux frais; elle était morte sans me connaître, sans savoir que je n'étais pas seulement ce monstre, ce bourreau, et qu'il existait un autre homme en moi. (OC, III, 494)

He learns the hard way that couples should not waste any opportunity to converse when they can. Immediately after the ghost of Rodolphe has come between them, Louis does not know where to begin telling Isa how painful his sense of disillusionment is. However, he admits himself that he succumbs to the temptation to say nothing simply because it is the easy option. Isa behaves likewise; she certainly does not struggle to save her marriage. Then a barrier of apathy, distrust and enmity is built up between them, which neither Louis nor Isa has the courage or will to break down, and which is fortified by the passage of time. Pride and selfishness aggravate the dilemma so that a negative silence reigns virtually throughout the forty years of their married life.

### 3. BLOOD-TIES AND LOVE-BONDS

In his treatment of all human relationships Mauriac emphasizes that man suffers from a radical inability to feel completely at one with his fellow man and, as the account given above of the communication problems facing individuals within the family unit indicates, this fundamental dilemma is certainly not alleviated in the context of family relationships, but rather aggravated. The Courrèges home is not the only one where the members of a single family live 'aussi confondus et séparés que les mondes dont est faite la Voie Lactée' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 80). In fact several of the novels illustrate 'la solitude et l'incommunicabilité des êtres que les

liens du sang et le coup de dés du mariage réunissent sous un même toit' (OC, II, iii). The question remains as to what extent Mauriac's portrayal of family relationships suggests that they have any particular significance of their own, and one is naturally led to ask, as Thérèse Desqueyroux does in La Fin de la Nuit, when she is trying to establish that she has no real obligation towards Marie, 'Mais que signifient les liens du sang?' (OC, II, 411). Paul Courrèges wonders whether they have any real significance at all or whether people are simply brought up and socially conditioned to acknowledge family links:

Les animaux, quand leurs petits sont grands, les chassent. Et le plus souvent, d'ailleurs les mâles ne les connaissent pas. Ces sentiments qui survivent à la fonction, c'est une invention des hommes. (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 59)

Exaggeration though this might appear, Mauriac himself seems determined throughout his works to question society's assumption that family relationships are bound by some inviolable law of nature to be loving ones. When Jean de Mirbel asks him whether he likes his brother, Xavier replies, 'Bien sûr! On aime toujours son frère' (L'Agneau, OC, XII, 195). Similarly, Hervé de Blénauge takes it for granted that 'on ne hait pas ses enfants!' but Marcel is sceptical: 'Tu crois cela, toi, que les pères aiment toujours leurs enfants? Mais les mères elles-mêmes . . .' (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 15). On such issues Mauriac is also highly sceptical. In Vie de Jésus Mauriac presents Judas Iscariot as scornful of his companions who shudder when Christ prophesies that in the time of persecution brother will betray brother and the father his child and that children will turn against their parents and send them to their death (Mark 13. 12): 'Pourquoi cette stupeur?' he wonders,

'en observant, du coin de l'oeil, ses camarades, quelle idée se font-ils donc tous de la famille?'. Like Judas Mauriac 'sait depuis longtemps que c'est vrai: qu'il existe des pères et des enfants qui se haïssent' and like Judas 'il aime dans le Christ cette vue simple, ce regard de Dieu sur l'horreur humaine' (OC, VII, 44). Consequently, as Kathleen O'Flaherty points out, Mauriac 'rejects the sentimentalized version of the family', obliging 'people to see, however reluctantly, that, beneath the appearance of a united middle-class family, hatred might lie - it is not divorced from ordinary life'.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, for whatever reasons, the families Mauriac describes seem to be so many domestic battle-fields. In Le Nœud de vipères there is a continuing war in which the father is matched against the joint forces of mother and children. The day-to-day existence of the Lagaves provides endless grounds for conflict so that Bob's home becomes enemy territory: eventually Madame Lagave defects to Bob's side after shaking off the influence of Augustin, who becomes reluctant to converse 'avec sa femme passée à l'ennemi' (Destins, OC, I, 424). In Le Sagouin Paule is repeatedly referred to as 'l'ennemie' or 'l'adversaire'. In the Desbats family the war consists of skirmishes between the Catherine/Symphorien faction on the one hand and Mathilde/Gabriel on the other: Andrès is the pawn between the two parties, until Gabriel becomes common enemy number one, and unanimously 'exclu de la communauté familiale' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 315). Monstrous examples though these may be there is some kind of internal strife in all the families Mauriac depicts, including the Frontenac household. In Le Mystère Frontenac Mauriac maintains that 'il n'existe personne, dans la famille la plus unie, qui n'attende, qui n'espère une lettre, à l'insu des autres' (OC, IV, 39).

---

8. K. O'Flaherty, The Novel in France 1945-1965, Cork University Press, 1973, p. 42.

Although no household is entirely free of this kind of secrecy or of tension and friction of some other sort, Mauriac suggests that families strive to hide their sins, fears and contradictions from society at large and to show a brave, united face to the world outside; they may succeed in deceiving both society and themselves to such an extent that they become erroneously convinced of their own stability, as happy in their complacency as many of their individual members. Thérèse Desqueyroux draws Bernard's attention to the blind hypocrisy that such an attitude can reflect:

- Nos familles me font rire avec leur prudence de taupes! cette horreur des tares apparentes n'a d'égale que leur indifférence à celles, bien plus nombreuses, qui ne sont pas connues . . . . Les maladies les plus redoutables pour la race ne sont-elles pas secrètes par définition? Nos familles n'y songent jamais, elles qui s'entendent si bien, pourtant, à recouvrir, à ensevelir leurs ordures . . . .  
(Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 203)

No great tragedy or scandal blights the Courrèges family. Indeed it is far from depleted: mother, father, son, daughter, son-in-law, grandchildren and grandmother live under the same roof. Viewed by society it would appear to be a relatively successful and stable family. In reality it is a nest of secrecy and friction:

. . . à vivre ainsi pressés les uns contre les autres, les membres d'une même famille ont à la fois le goût de ne pas se confier et celui de surprendre les secrets du voisin . . . . Chacun prétendait connaître à fond tous les autres et demeurer seul indéchiffrable. (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 21)

However, the members of the Courrèges and Basque families ensure that all strife is suppressed to an acceptable level so that a minimum of equilibrium is maintained. When Gaston and Raymond are on the point of fighting each other physically one Sunday evening, the others, who are usually far from being in agreement and bicker generally amongst themselves, unite in an effort to have peace re-established:

L'instinct de conservation inspirait à cet équipage, embarqué pour la vie sur la même galère, le souci de ne laisser s'allumer à bord aucun incendie. (OC, II, 51)

This family as a whole resembles the individual who, blind to the truth about himself, is foolish enough to think that only others are ever struck by lightning:

Dépositaire de tant de secrets honteux, le docteur répétait souvent: 'Nous croyons toujours que le "fait divers" ne nous concerne pas, que l'assassinat, le suicide, la honte, c'est pour les autres, et pourtant . . .' (OC, II, 29)

Ordinary and trouble-free though the family may appear, no one inside or outside it ever realizes how close Raymond comes to taking his own life.

Thus Mauriac's presentation of family life consistently belies the idea that family relationships are naturally or normally more loving than any other personal relationships. Bearing in mind the author's understanding of genuine love,<sup>9</sup> it is only logical that he should emphasize that superficial bonds of natural affection do not automatically create relationships of love in the true Christian sense of the word. Referring to Eugénie and Maurice de Guérin in Mes grands hommes, he maintains:

Il faut toujours en revenir au mot de Lacordaire: 'Il n'y a qu'un amour.' Ce qu'on appelle le lien du sang et qui crée entre frères et sœurs une union souvent étroite, ce n'est pas l'amour, ce très pur amour d'Eugénie pour Maurice, aussi dégagé de toute sexualité qu'un amour peut l'être, mais tout de même un amour selon la chair et le sang. (OC, VIII, 382)

It is also to be expected that the novels should reflect Mauriac's belief, stated categorically in the preface to Trois récits, that 'l'irritation compose l'atmosphère de toute vie commune où Dieu n'est pas' (OC, VI, 126). Accordingly the novels indicate that although parental, filial, fraternal or conjugal affection may

---

9. See above, Chapter I, pp. 26-35.

start with an instinctive rapport arising from a common blood-bond or sexual attraction, it must be catalysed and fed by acts of Christian love; otherwise it may disintegrate quite quickly into 'l'amour qui n'est pas l'amour',<sup>10</sup> because it is in constant danger of being corrupted, even destroyed, by differences of temperament, diverse interests, egoistic tendencies towards possessiveness and spiritual domination, passionate affairs outside the family unit and the pressures of domestic life generally. Such factors aggravate the inevitable communication problems that all human beings have to face and can separate close relatives as easily as they separate non-related people. Certain relationships in Mauriac's fiction exemplify this particularly well.

At first May and Edward Dupont-Gunther seem to have a greater sympathy for one another than the majority of siblings in Mauriac's novels. May clearly respects her brother more than her father against whom they stand united. Their mutual support, however, does not last long. When May is thoroughly depressed by the renewed persecution of Marcel Castagnède, she receives no comfort from Edward who is himself amazed at his inability to feel sorry for her. When she has just been blackmailed by Madame Gonzalès, May again needs her brother, but she soon realizes there is little hope of his coming to her aid. Feeling betrayed by him May decides to shake the dust off her feet as far as Edward is concerned. From then on both brother and sister fail to make the vital acts of love which would have allowed their natural fraternal affection to develop into a genuine love-bond. By the end of La Chair et le Sang May and Edward might as well have never been

---

10. See above, Chapter I, p. 28.

related; in a way Edward's sister has died, although the stranger, May Castagnède, lives on.

There is a significant piece of evidence in Le Mystère Frontenac, which points to the author's belief that a blood-bond in itself has no value in comparison with a true love relationship. Jean-Louis, who on Xavier's death becomes the new head of the family, realizes that Joséfa's lifelong, self-sacrificing devotion has earned her a place amongst the rest of the Frontenacs. The fact that she was only a common-law wife to Xavier is of no import:

Jean-Louis pensait que l'humble Joséfa était entrée dans le mystère Frontenac, qu'elle en faisait partie, que rien ne l'en pourrait plus détacher. Certes, elle avait droit aux photographies, à la lettre du Jour de l'An . . . .  
(OC, IV, 119-20)

In Le Noeud de vipères the prolonged separation of closely related people is shown to erode any sense of family affection which is dependent solely on a blood-tie. A father-son connexion is enough to urge Louis to leave his wealth to Robert, his unknown, illegitimate son, but his main aim in doing so is to take revenge on his family. There is no real bond whatever between Robert and himself, and in the end he is bitterly disillusioned. On the other hand, Luc, because of his love, is much more of a son to Louis than either the hypocritical Hubert or the spineless Robert.

Madame Gajac and her son are not separated physically as Louis and Robert are. However, their failure to communicate meaningfully and their subsequent inability to understand one another keeps them emotionally apart to such an extent that Alain, by his very presence, actually deepens 'le gouffre de solitude dans lequel la pauvre "madame" se serait enfoncée sans les propriétés qui la

maintenaient à la surface, sans les dévotions qui jalonnaient ses journées . . .' (Un adolescent d'autrefois, p. 237). In default of a son Madame Gajac finds an unrelated daughter, and her love for Jeannette Sérís is so genuine 'bien que ni la chair ni le sang n'y fussent engagés' that once again a bond of affection proves to be more significant than a blood-tie:

Oui, je le voyais enfin: une vieille femme avait déversé sur une petite fille toute la tendresse dont personne au long de sa vie ne s'était soucié sinon un mari qui sans doute lui faisait physiquement horreur, sinon moi, mais je lui demeurais inintelligible, d'une autre race, bien que je fusse sorti d'elle. (pp. 236-37)

Thus, in his treatment of family relationships generally, Mauriac stresses that a genuine love-bond is infinitely more important than any common blood cells or conjugal ties per se. At the same time he consistently maintains that even if there is a strong bond of affection between two human beings - whether they are related or not - perfect communion with one another is impossible this side of death. In the words of Augustin Léonard, human beings as Mauriac depicts them always remain 'des mondes séparés autour desquels la passion, le désir ou la tendresse peuvent tourner sans les pénétrer'.<sup>11</sup> In Mauriac's imagery man is not just an island but a planet surrounded by a vacuum which is insuperable except in the realm of the Communion of Saints where there is another order of relationships: 'cette parenté des âmes entre elles, . . . ces alliances mystérieuses dans lesquelles nous sommes tous engagés par les péchés et par la grâce' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 274). Mauriac's conviction that love proves 'thicker than blood' can be explained by his belief in 'ces liens secrets plus tenaces que ceux

---

11. A. Léonard, op. cit., p. 49.

du sang' (Les Chemins de La mer, OC, V, 154). Since the law of Christ not only insists that men love their enemies but also removes all racial and family barriers, in the eyes of the Christian Mauriac, there is essentially only one universal, time-less human family, in which 'd'autres liens unissent les êtres que ceux de la chair' (Le Fleuve de Feu, OC, I, 268). It is only in the context of this mystical family that absolute communion is ever possible. Pierre Gornac, therefore, is at least consoled by his belief that through the Communion of Saints he will finally be able to get to know his mother. Similarly, as Yves Frontenac contemplates 'le visage admirable de Jean-Louis endormi', he meditates on the fact that his own family must be as indestructible as the family of God in which it is incorporated. He also recalls his dormant conviction that the communion which his relatives have tried to achieve in their family relationships on earth will at last be accomplished and perfected in an after-life:

L'impossible union des époux, des frères et des fils, serait consommée avant qu'il fût longtemps, et les derniers pins de Bourideys verraient passer, non plus à leurs pieds, dans l'allée qui va au gros chêne, mais très haut et très loin au-dessus de leurs cimes, le groupe éternellement serré de la mère et de ses cinq enfants. (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 123).

CHAPTER III

THE QUEST FOR HAPPINESS IN LOVE AND MARRIAGE

## 1. MARRIAGE, FAMILY AND SOCIETY

As a result of the obstacles against which Mauriac's individual protagonists come up whilst they interact within their respective family units, attempting consciously or unconsciously to establish loving or at least meaningful relationships with parents, brothers, sisters or spouse, the reader is left with a very negative impression of the average Mauriacien family. He is naturally led to question the root cause of the pessimistic picture the author paints of family life generally and to wonder whether it can be attributed entirely to a psychological 'vicious circle' of love starvation, solitude, frustration and incommunicability. Although this is presented by Mauriac as being, to a certain degree at least, a universal phenomenon, fundamental to man's lot in life, the whole dilemma is undoubtedly aggravated in his novels by socio-economic factors.

Many of the families in the novels have their origin in an arranged marriage, the signing of a finance-based contract, often with little reference to the feelings of the bride or groom, being quite normal in Europe at the turn of the century. Jacques of La Robe prétexte is one of the few Mauriacien characters who seem to understand the Christian law concerning conjugal love and sexual purity:

Cette loi qui pesait sur moi, je la sentais doucement raisonnable. Elle était austère, non inhumaine. Bien loin de m'interdire la volupté, elle savait lui donner une discipline, des limites. Cette loi ne me seyait pas de l'amour non plus que des caresses d'une femme; elle imposait au contraire l'éternité à cet amour et la fécondité à ces caresses. Bien loin qu'elle condamnât l'amour humain, elle l'élevait à la dignité d'un sacrement. (OC, I, 128)

Although they may not acknowledge it, the majority of Mauriac's protagonists, born in the nineteenth century, view marriage as little more than a secular, legal agreement, and the novels as a whole can

be seen as a general indictment of the abuse of matrimony. Cecil Jenkins maintains that 'Mauriac's writings might be seen as one of the major attacks on middle-class marriage mounted in this century'.<sup>1</sup> 'Pourquoi . . . renoncer à un garçon sous prétexte qu'il n'est pas digne d'être épousé?' asks Paule in Destins, and she goes on to say to Élisabeth Gornac, 'Le mariage est une chose, et l'amour en est une autre . . .' (OC, I, 506). Élisabeth, whose memories of her own courting days are anything but romantic, is horrified. However, when one strips the society in which she lives of its hypocrisy and considers its real attitude towards marriage, Paule's statement is understandable and, indeed, logical. In as far as Mauriac's characters do see a connexion between sentiment and sacrament it is usually a question in their minds of marriage breeding love rather than love giving rise to marriage. Madame d'Artailh assures the doubtful Noémi before her wedding that 'le mariage produit l'amour comme un pêcher une pêche . . .' (Le Baiser au Lépreux, OC, I, 168).

According to Mademoiselle Dumoliers in La Robe prétexte Jacques's grandmother was determined to see her daughters married at the age of eighteen and maintained that 'on marie ses filles comme on veut et quand on veut'. Mademoiselle Dumoliers points out that Adila did marry her daughters when they were eighteen and adds, 'mais Dieu sait comme!' (OC, I, 35). It is precisely the how and why of arranged marriages that concern Mauriac. It is not the marriage of convenience per se that is under attack in his novels but rather the motives that lie behind such matchmaking. The parents Mauriac describes are not concerned primarily with seeing their children

---

1. C. Jenkins, op. cit., p. 15.

happily married. In fact they are rarely disinterested and in some cases a union is manipulated, by whatever plotting and scheming is necessary, so that neither dowry nor property leaves their own control. Parents like Bertie Dupont-Gunther in La Chair et Le Sang have no qualms about playing with the emotions of their offspring to secure the desired match. If May's money is to stay in the family she has to marry Marcel Castagnède, whose father used to be Bertie's business associate. Monsieur Dupont-Gunther urges Madame Gonzalès to drive his own daughter to such a state of exasperation that she can no longer stand the sight of anybody in the house. Then he will see to it that Marcel Castagnède turns up 'providentially'.

Whilst encouraging them to marry people whom they may positively detest, some parents prevent their young, on quite superficial, unjustifiable grounds, from marrying partners with whom they are in love. The young Michèle Pian and Jean de Mirbel are separated in La Pharisienne, partly because of their age, partly because of vicious rumours, and partly because of Brigitte's prudish ideas on human love. In Galigai, however, Marie Dubernet and Gilles Salone are initially kept apart simply because Julia is a snob. The Filhots' real reason for trying to stop the marriage between Marie Desqueyroux and their son in fact has nothing to do with Thérèse's reputation: so long as they think the Desqueyroux family a wealthy one, they are prepared to turn a blind eye to Thérèse's past.

The most moving picture that Mauriac gives of the horrors which an enforced marriage can inflict on two human beings is to be found in Le Baiser au lépreux. The motive behind this match is Jérôme Péloueyre's desire to take revenge on his sister and nephew, Félicité and Fernand Cazenave, who invade his house weekly and who

are depending on Jean's never marrying so that the Péloueyre property will come to them. Jérôme first broaches the subject of the marriage to his son in the presence of the Cazenaves, and will brook no opposition. The d'Artiailh's for their part do not hesitate to condemn their daughter to a life of misery because they are financially in need. They take advantage of her submissive nature, quite sure that she will be convinced by the axiom: 'On ne refuse pas le fils Péloueyre!' (OC, I, 168). Their values are so materialistic that they actually congratulate themselves on securing the match. The d'Artiailh's are far from being exceptional parents. Many others callously marry off their children for the sake of money, the accumulation of property or social prestige, without questioning their actions or considering the loveless future to which they are condemning their own flesh and blood.

Madame Plassac in Galigaï does at least have second thoughts about seeing Nicolas married to Madame Agathe, even though she stands to lose a lot when her son breaks off the engagement. 'J'étais attirée, bien sûr, mais je n'avais pas avalé l'hameçon', she says in her defence (OC, XII, 160). Mathilde Desbats actually refers to marriage as a sacrament but she is not averse to abusing it to a certain extent. She encourages the dubious marriage between André and her daughter, knowing full well that 'il la traitait comme une sœur qui ne lui eût pas inspiré une particulière tendresse' and that 'il semblait ne pas la voir, elle faisait partie de la maison, du mobilier; il la prenait avec les propriétés' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 210). She is perturbed, however, by the cynicism of André's attitude, and suggests that he should consider Catherine's feelings:

La pauvre petite a un cœur, elle aussi. Dans mon idée, il allait sans dire que tu serais pour elle un mari attentif et tendre. Il ne s'agit pas de passion, c'est entendu. Mais enfin, n'oublie pas ce que tu lui dois. (OC, III, 213)

Madame de Blénauge mère is the only parent who feels bitter remorse at the thought that her matchmaking is responsible for tragedy and suffering. She relieves her conscience through the sacrament of Confession:

Pas une fois je ne me suis interrogée; pas une fois je n'ai mis en doute qu'il fût digne d'elle. Et pourtant je savais . . . je savais . . . Je souhaitais qu'il se mariât coûte que coûte. Cette étrangère que je lui livrais, jouait son bonheur temporel. à coup sûr, peut-être son éternité. Cette pensée ne m'est pas venue. Elle était extrêmement riche et je m'en réjouissais, n'ayant d'autre souci que de m'assurer des origines de cette fortune. (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 101)

However, the phenomenon of the arranged marriage, planned and executed for the idolatrous love of money, property or position is so prevalent in the bourgeois world Mauriac describes that its evil consequences are generally overlooked. It is accepted as part and parcel of the fabric of society. In the realm of politics it is attacked by neither Right nor Left; the representatives of both wings are agreed on the essential principle: 'la propriété est l'unique bien de ce monde, et rien ne vaut de vivre que de posséder la terre' (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 217-18). Even the established Church does not raise a protest against the abuse of the matrimonial rites. Although he questions his behaviour later, the curé himself, who is described as an 'homme scrupuleux', is largely responsible for the outrageous union of Noëmi d'Artiailh and Jean Péloueyre. According to Jérôme the curé is as determined as he is 'que les Péloueyre fassent souche et que rien d'eux ne risque de passer à tante Félicité ni à Fernand Cazenave', both of whom are decidedly anticlerical (Le Baiser au lépreux, OC, I, 161).

The easy conscience with which many of the characters encourage or force their offspring into a loveless union can be explained by the fact that they simply do not appreciate how much they are threatening their children's happiness, since they themselves have never known the joy of marrying for love. Jean Péloueyre points out to his father how repulsive Noémi will find him, but Jérôme does not even think of protesting: 'comme il ne fut jamais aimé, il n' imagine pas que son fils puisse connaître ce bonheur' (Le Baiser au lépreux, OC, I, 161). The parents and grandparents of such people probably saw no connexion between love and marriage either; they may never have experienced the satisfaction of a mutually loving conjugal relationship, never have been at the giving or receiving end of human love of any kind. This attitude is thus handed down from generation to generation. In Destins we are told that Augustin Lagave, no more than Jean Gornac or his mother before him, 'n'avait eu à compter dans sa vie avec les passions du cœur, - à peine avec celles de la chair' (OC, I, 417).

It is because of this kind of social conditioning that the bride and groom may agree quite readily to a loveless match. Usually the most such partners can hope for is a reasonably tolerable existence under one roof. Their subsequent family life is likely to be fraught with tension. We are told in Le Mal that the unloved Thérèse Dupouy was brought up in 'l'une de ces "bonnes familles" où chaque membre n'atteint à supporter tous les autres que par un miracle de vertu et sur la foi d'une récompense éternelle' (OC, VI, 7). Some couples have such low expectations when they marry that they do not feel consciously deprived of the delights of a mutually loving conjugal relationship which they never envisaged. Félicité Cazenave describes her relationship with her husband as 'cet attachement d'habitude,

ce compagnonnage que la mort avait si tôt rompu, sans que la veuve donnât beaucoup de larmes' (Genitrix, OC, I, 378). So long as they continue to have similar attitudes towards their relationship, it is possible that both husband and wife will consider their loveless union quite satisfactory throughout their married life. However, the outcome of any marriage of convenience is likely to be distressing when either the man or the woman already feels or develops a genuine passion for the other who remains indifferent. Mauriac insists that love sickness is one malady against which there is no form of immunization. Even families which have a long history of loveless marriages remain vulnerable. Genitrix and Destins both provide good examples of how tragedy can occur when a rebellious gene makes its presence felt and the passions are aroused by force of circumstance.

Numa Cazenave enters marriage quite blithely as if it were nothing more than a business transaction to ensure 'outré un accroissement de fortune, la continuité de la possession':

Presque toujours un fils suffisait, un seul, pour que se perpétuât le mince filet de vie charriant jusqu'à la fin du monde le patrimoine sans cesse grossi de dots et d'héritages. (Genitrix, OC, I, 365)

Until Mathilde's death Numa's son does not know what it is to love either. From the age of fifteen he is aware of only two kinds of women: "celles qui veulent vous mettre le grappin" et "celles qui donnent des maladies" (OC, I, 366). Thus Numa follows dutifully in the line of his ancestors, 'les jaloux amants des pins et de la vigne', and Fernand might be expected to do likewise, since 'à aucun moment de la race, une passion n'avait détourné ce cours puissant', and yet it is likely that 'un jour, sur un anneau de la chaîne vivante, une tache de rouille apparaisse et commence de ronger' (OC, I, 365). Fernand who has received the troublesome 'héritage

de flamme' from his mother proves to be this corrosive element:

Comme tous ceux de sa race, il aurait dû mourir sans savoir ce qu'est aimer - comme tous ceux de sa race, comme la plupart des hommes. Le destin jouait ce jeu étrange d'éveiller dans ce vieil homme des eaux enfouies à quelles profondeurs! Et voici que la source bourbeuse se frayait en lui une route lente. Il ne savait pas ce que c'était. (OC, I, 365)

When Jean Gornac marries, his sole concern is that his property should remain eternally in the possession of the Gornac family, and his son, Prudent, 'soumis en tout à son père', scarcely puts up any resistance when his marriage to 'Mlle Élisabeth Lavignasse, de Beautiran' is arranged for him (Destins, OC, I, 433). His new wife is an ideal product of her society. She is dedicated to her husband's material needs and her domestic duties generally. If she had married her father-in-law instead of Prudent she would have been perfectly matched. Jean and Élisabeth both adore 'les pins, la vigne, - la terre, enfin':

Ils communiaient dans ce même amour. Si on leur avait ouvert le cœur, on y eût trouvé inscrits les noms de toutes les fermes, de toutes les métairies dont la possession les tenait en joie, les fortifiait aux jours de traverses et de deuil - empêchait qu'aucun drame atteignît en eux le goût de la vie. (OC, I, 435)

As it is, Élisabeth loses patience with Prudent because he does not have the skill or interest in estate management which Jean and herself share: 'Il aimait ses terres parce que, sans elles, il n'eût pas épousé Élisabeth, mais il en était jaloux' (OC, I, 436).

Unfortunately, since their marriage, the timid Prudent has grown to love Élisabeth to such an extent that her absence when she goes to oversee the vineyards at Viridis drives him to drink, and she is indirectly responsible for his death. Meanwhile the seed of passion remains securely buried within her. She might well have died with it still unfertilized. But for Bob Lagave she would never have known

what it is to love. When she eventually does undergo the experience, it overwhelms her. For a long time, like Fernand Cazenave, she does not realize what is happening to her: 'Je suis malade . . . Mais bien sûr: c'est l'âge, peut-être . . .'

 (OC, I, 452).

Not only do some of Mauriac's characters accept unhesitatingly the matrimonial plans arranged for them even though they do not love their partners, others are the chief instigators of their own ill-starred marriage. Andrès Gradère is quite happy to marry Catherine, although he feels no affection for her. Devoid of Christian scruples regarding sexual purity, he plans to keep Tota as a mistress and to arrange things so that he will be able to go to Bordeaux 'pour tirer une bordée . . .'

 (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 330). No sooner has Julia died than Armand Dubernet is anxious to marry Madame Agathe, not for love but for her name. He also wonders momentarily whether there is any chance he might still have a child, but 'de l'essentiel, il ne doutait plus à cette minute: il allait épouser l'héritière de Belmonte, il posséderait Agathe, Belmonte serait à lui' (Galigaï, OC, XII, 160). Bernard Desqueyroux enters marriage with scarcely a thought in his head, although he is in total agreement with his parents on the financial aspect of the union. He looks on Thérèse in the same way as he considers his half-sister:

Sa demi-sœur Anne lui paraissait trop jeune alors pour qu'il pût lui accorder quelque attention. Songeait-il beaucoup plus à Thérèse? (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 186-87)

Hervé de Blénauge consents to marrying Irène, although he has no love for her. She tells us herself that she was 'ce qu'il pouvait trouver de mieux, du moment que sa mère ne voulait ni d'une Israélite, ni d'une Américaine' (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 88).

Amongst the women characters Florence in Préséances is the most cold and calculating of brides. As a young girl her ambition in life is snobbish and clear-cut. Whatever it may cost she intends to have her family and herself accepted in the high society of the wine magnates who consider themselves in a position to look down on those who deal in timber or are in a profession. Florence is prepared to sell her soul to gain the world of the 'Fils des grandes Maisons' (OC, X, 288), the only world that counts in her narrow, materialistic terms. Similarly Mathilde's marriage in Genitrix is not arranged for her. She actively seeks it out. On her death-bed she questions her motives for pursuing Fernand:

Tu as voulu ton malheur. Rien de tendre ne t'attirait vers ce vieil homme. Un instinct de taupe te faisait chercher partout une issue à ta vie subalterne. C'est le pire des conditions basses qu'elles nous font voir les êtres sous l'aspect de l'utilité et que nous ne cherchons plus que leur valeur d'usage. (OC, I, 339)

Although it is only one of several reasons she suggests for agreeing to marry Bernard, Thérèse herself is not indifferent to his two thousand hectares: 'Elle avait toujours eu la propriété dans le sang' (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 192). Discussing the 'sentiment plus obscur' which prompts Thérèse to marry Bernard, Maurice Maucuer writes in his study of Thérèse Desqueyroux:

Une peur irraisonnée l'a portée vers Bernard. Ce garçon au corps un peu lourd, à l'esprit solide, aux goûts simples, sûr de lui, fort de ses traditions, de sa famille, de ses propriétés, lui a paru l'homme le plus propre à lui assurer une sécurité qui lui manquait.<sup>2</sup>

'Ce qui l'y avait précipitée, n'était-ce pas une panique?' asks Mauriac in the novel itself:

---

2. M. Maucuer, Mauriac Thérèse Desqueyroux, Paris, Hatier, 'Profil d'une œuvre', 1970, p. 48.

Petite fille pratique, enfant ménagère, elle avait hâte d'avoir pris son rang, trouvé sa place définitive; elle voulait être rassurée contre elle ne savait quel péril. Jamais elle ne parut si raisonnable qu'à l'époque de ses fiançailles: elle s'incrustait dans un bloc familial, 'elle se casait'; elle entrait dans un ordre. Elle se sauvait. (OC, II, 192).

On the other hand, Paule de Cernès resembles Mathilde Cazenave in that she marries to escape from a certain 'bloc familial'. For her marriage is a door 'ouverte sur l'inconnu, un point de départ vers elle ne savait quelle vie' (Le Sagouin, OC, XII, 5). Later she bitterly regrets that, although she was not urged to do so by her uncle or aunt, she chose to marry Galéas simply to gain a title - a title, in fact, which she was never to enjoy. She is haunted by 'l'horreur de s'être vendue pour une vanité' (OC, XII, 6), and never forgives herself for agreeing to the consummation of her loveless marriage: 'Cet embrassement à quoi elle avait consenti, voilà à ses yeux l'inexpiable crime' (OC, XII, 67).

Characters like Thérèse Desqueyroux, Mathilde Cazenave and Paule de Cernès are not oblivious to the concept of sexual passion as the young Élisabeth Gornac is. After, if not before, they have made their mistake, they know in their hearts that love, marriage and sex can and ideally should be related. Their reasons for consenting to marry husbands they do not love are by no means as ignoble as those of Florence in Préséances, but they nevertheless have their origin in a base and decadent society which conditions and corrupts its members. J.E. Flower maintains that this society is 'in the final stages of disintegration, and one which, having created its own material values, has through excessive worship and use of them rendered them sterile'.<sup>3</sup> One can certainly agree that

---

3. J.E. Flower, Intention and Achievement: An Essay on the Novels of François Mauriac, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969, p. 64.



the 'microbe de la propriété' (Un adolescent d'autrefois, p. 85) not only contaminates the lives of individual couples, but progressively undermines still further society as a whole. Alain Gajac refers to it as 'ce qui avilit, ce qui dégrade' (p. 86), and Les Anges noirs exemplifies particularly well how it leads to an increasingly degenerate population. Symphorien Desbats is typical in his concern that Catherine should marry André's irrespective of the fact that they are cousins:

. . . il avait cet amour de la propriété qui implique l'horreur des partages et qui est chez nous à l'origine de tant de mariages consanguins. (OC, III, 177)

When Gabriel suggests that his son should marry Mathilde, André is horrified. The plan sounds singularly incestuous, because, as far as he understands, Mathilde has had such a maternal affection for him. Gabriel points out that the marriage would be like so many others - nothing more than an official contract:

- Dans les familles, pour sauver le patrimoine, on est souvent obligé de conclure les unions les plus étranges . . . . Bien entendu, il s'agirait d'un mariage blanc . . . cela va sans dire! Une fois les affaires réglées, tout serait entre vous comme avant . . . . (OC, III, 240)

J.E. Flower also points out how each of Mauriac's bourgeois families can be seen as 'a microscopic exaggeration' of the materialistic, demoralized society from which it took its being, and the values of which it both adopts and perpetuates.<sup>4</sup> The average Mauriacien family pampers its natural egoism and tends, like its individual members, to be inward-looking and self-centred. It shuts itself off from the outside world as much as possible. The Castagnède family in La Chair et le Sang is an extreme example of this:

---

4. J.E. Flower, op. cit., p. 56.

. . . le monde, pour eux, finissait aux cousins issus de germains . . . . Les filles ne se mariaient jamais hors la ville, à peine hors la maison, jamais hors la rue ou le quartier . . . . Il était rare qu'on y priât un étranger à dîner . . . . Personne jamais ne prit, chez les Castagnède, ses habitudes . . . . (OC, X, 196-97)

Mauriac implies that in the bourgeois society he describes loyalty to two families simultaneously is out of the question.

Léonie Costadot tells Robert in Les Chemins de la mer,

Il y a deux sortes de jeunes filles; celles qui quittent la maison sans tourner la tête et qui épousent étroitement l'intérêt de leur mari, et celles qui restent de cœur avec leurs parents, trahissent leur nouvelle famille. (OC, V, 114)

Even though they are living in the same house as the Courrèges family, 'les Basque formaient un îlot de méfiance et de secret' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 14).

On the whole children are not brought up to contribute to the well-being of society outside the family unit. Instead they are encouraged to amass wealth brought in from as many sources as possible but never reinvested for the benefit of anyone outside the family grouping. This excessive self-concern leads to the same kind of spiritual starvation as it does in the individual. The family becomes lifeless and oppressive. Mauriac shows up in several of his novels how the family as an institution can pressurize its members into a stifling conformity that allows for no individuation. Concern for the common good of 'the family' and its reputation often becomes such an obsession that the real welfare or happiness of individual members is neglected. Any kind of innovation, deviation from the norm, or breach of social custom is vigorously opposed. Thérèse refrains from going to a weekday Mass because 'cette démarche eût paru étrange à sa famille et aux gens du bourg, on aurait crié à la conversion' (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 235). Years later she listens to her

daughter discussing the financial situation of the Filhots, and realizes she has simply assumed the opinions of her family entourage. Thérèse remembers how she herself used to do the same thing. Jean Azévédo describes the levelling, stifling effect of the provincial society around him in the following terms:

Regardez . . . cette immense et uniforme surface de gel où toutes les âmes ici sont prises; parfois une crevasse découvre l'eau noire: quelqu'un s'est débattu, a disparu; la croûte se reforme . . . car chacun, ici comme ailleurs, naît avec sa loi propre; ici comme ailleurs, chaque destinée est particulière; et pourtant il faut se soumettre à ce morne destin commun . . . .  
(Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 226)

Paul Courrèges is one of the male characters in Mauriac's novels who feel suffocated by those whom they have a socially acknowledged right to call 'their own'. However, it is usually the children and the wives Mauriac describes who suffer most from the sense of being caught in the family trap. Until the boys have the means to earn a living or leave home, and until the girls have been married off, all the children are dependent upon their parents and answerable to the family. Even as adults their emancipation is rarely absolute. As soon as he realizes Jean de Mirbel knows his family, Xavier Dartigelongue immediately feels labelled and classified 'avec son parentage, ses alliances, à la place exacte qu'il occupait dans la hiérarchie de la ville' (L'Agneau, OC, XII, 188). As an adolescent Raymond Courrèges's 'idée fixe' is to escape, and his rebellion is such that even at the very end of the novel he is never tempted to return home: 'Jamais trop de kilomètres entre la famille et nous, se dit-il, jamais nos proches ne seront assez lointains' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 161). The wives in a world not yet affected by thoughts of liberation have no outlet for their frustrated emotions and no hope of future escape. They are often maltreated, exploited, tyrannized. Madame Forcas of

Ce qui était perdu is a notable example. Most of Mauriac's women characters never question the marital situations in which they find themselves. They accept as the norm the shallow relationships and boredom of their day-to-day existence. They are content to be confined within the strictly defined limits of the family often because it is all they know. Thérèse considers how within two years after her marriage she felt compelled to revolt against the forces suffocating her personality. She surmises that 'd'autres êtres . . . y persévèrent souvent jusqu'à la mort, sauvés par l'accoutumance peut-être, chloroformés par l'habitude, abrutis, endormis contre le sein de la famille maternelle et toute-puissante' (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 253). Imagery comparing the family as an institution to prison is used particularly effectively in Thérèse Desqueyroux. We are told that after the disillusionment of her honeymoon Thérèse 'souhaitait de rentrer à Saint-Clair comme une déportée qui s'ennuie dans un cachot provisoire, est curieuse de connaître l'île où doit se consumer ce qui lui reste de vie' (OC, II, 197). She comes to consider the Desqueyroux family as 'cette cage aux barreaux innombrables et vivants, cette cage tapissée d'oreilles et d'yeux, où, immobile, accroupie, le menton aux genoux, les bras entourant ses jambes, elle attendrait de mourir' (OC, II, 204). If Thérèse escapes a literal prison sentence after her attempted assassination of Bernard, she is none the less punished by her family. She realizes even as she sets off home, having been officially acquitted, that her future freedom is to be nominal only. Paule de Cernès is another female character who despairs of finding an exit from her family cage. She learns all too soon that 'ce qu'on appelle un milieu fermé, l'est à la lettre: y pénétrer semblait difficile,

presque impossible; mais en sortir! . . . ' (Le Sagouin, OC, XII, 5).

In these family 'prisons' heinous crimes are justified by the kind of moral code to which the hypocritical Hubert adheres in

Le Noeud de vipères. He defends the projected committal of Louis by referring to 'les droits sacrés de la famille' (OC, III, 459).

Bernard Desqueyroux is another who reveres the family, and he refuses to allow Thérèse to be flippant in her attitude towards his idol, to which he sacrifices the redeeming human emotions of which he is capable. He actually sequesters Thérèse on the grounds that he is behaving in the interests of the family:

- Je ne cède pas à des considérations personnelles. Moi, je m'efface: la famille compte seule. L'intérêt de la famille a toujours dicté toutes mes décisions. J'ai consenti, pour l'honneur de la famille, à tromper la justice de mon pays. Dieu me jugera. (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 247)

Extreme though they may be, such examples highlight the fact that, whilst the nurturing of a wholesome family spirit may have benign consequences, the quasi-worship of the family per se is indubitably open to abuse.

This cult of the family as an institution in its own right gives rise to the idolatry of offspring, not as vulnerable human beings in need of love, but as bearers of the sacred family name. Consequently a tendency arises to consider the mother as little more than a reproduction machine. Jean Gornac is relatively unconcerned by the death of his wife. Having given birth to two sons, 'l'un, pour garder la terre; l'autre, pour obtenir de l'État sa subsistance' (Destins, OC, I, 410-11), 'elle avait accompli ce qu'il en avait attendu' (OC, I, 410), although one son would have been sufficient 'pourvu qu'il demeure sur la propriété' (OC, I, 411). Only a short time after their marriage Mathilde ceases to mean anything to

Fernand. He shows her no consideration at all until she is carrying his precious hope of Cazenave immortality, and consequently becomes an object of veneration. The pregnant Thérèse Desqueyroux is treated in a similar manner:

Les la Trave vénéraient en moi un vase sacré; le réceptacle de leur progéniture; aucun doute que, le cas échéant, ils m'eussent sacrifiée à cet embryon. Je perdais le sentiment de mon existence individuelle. Je n'étais que le sarment; aux yeux de la famille, le fruit attaché à mes entrailles comptait seul. (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 233)

Whilst the succession of fathers and sons handing down from generation to generation the sacred 'nom de famille' is prized, wives tend to be considered necessary appendages who are sometimes never wholly accepted. In Ce qui était perdu Monsieur Forcas carries this attitude to its logical extreme with the result that the household becomes a battle-ground:

. . . il est de ces hommes pour qui la famille, c'est leur sang: père, mère, frère, soeur. Leurs propres enfants sont dès étrangers parce qu'ils appartiennent à l'étrangère, à l'ennemie. Dans le combat singulier qui dresse les époux l'un contre l'autre, ils prennent presque toujours le parti de la mère. Ainsi les enfants Forcas, dès qu'ils furent en âge de comprendre, firent bloc avec l'ennemie. Et le vieux Forcas, lui, était dans l'autre camp, avec sa soeur . . . . (OC, III, 16)

## 2. PASSIONATE LOVE/HATE RELATIONSHIPS

As the natural communication problems which confront all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or age, are undoubtedly intensified in the family relationships Mauriac describes by the peculiar pressures of the bourgeois society in which they are formed, it is all too tempting to try and explain away the predominantly sombre picture of family life with which Mauriac presents his readers simply by referring to the author's pessimistic attitude towards life and human nature, and by arguing that changes in society, particularly in the modern attitude to marriage, have made such monstrous phenomena

as the Péloueyre, Desbats and de Cernès households things of the past. Indeed a superficial analysis of the conjugal unions at the origin of the families Mauriac describes leads one to suppose that the weakening of class distinctions and the death of the marriage of convenience with its dowry system and inevitable financial incentives should lead automatically to an increase in the number of successful marriages. Closer study of the novels suggests that this conclusion is erroneously based on too facile an argument of cause and effect, for, as Pierre Costadot realizes in Les Chemins de La mer, 'Mammon ne serait qu'un médiocre monstre s'il n'était au service d'un autre plus puissant' (OC, V, 195).

The events recounted in La Fin de La Nuit take place a generation later than those of Thérèse Desqueyroux and serve to highlight the fact that times may change but fundamental human dilemmas do not. From the beginning of La Fin de La Nuit the reader is led to have doubts about the proposed marriage between the ill-matched Marie Desqueyroux and Georges Filhot. Thérèse certainly holds little hope for their future happiness. Apart from the fact that they are undoubtedly still living in a world 'dont l'argent est la substance' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 28), Marie clearly feels more for Georges than he does for her, and even her passion seems to be of a precarious nature. Therefore we are neither convinced nor encouraged when Georges points out to Thérèse how certain sociological attitudes which pampered men's greed and plagued her own youth are now outmoded:

- Nous ne sommes plus comme nos parents dont toute la vie tournait autour de ces problèmes de dots, d'héritages, de testaments. La crise a flanqué tout ça en l'air: ça ne nous intéresse plus. (OC, II, 386)

The supreme obstacle against which Marie Desqueyroux and other Mauriacien characters come up in their partially liberated quest for

conjugal happiness is raised by the very nature of sexual love, which is a law unto itself and cannot be produced or manipulated. An individual cannot choose the people by whom he is loved. Even if his passion is reciprocated the love he inspires may be neither as intense nor as selfless as the love he feels, and he is powerless to alter the level of purity of the love of which he is the object.

Consequently some kind of imbalance tends to poison most of the man/woman relationships Mauriac describes. They are usually presented as minefields of bitterness and suffering, and the whole process of falling in love is invariably shown to be fraught with problems.

Le Désert de l'amour is noteworthy in this respect, for in this novel the reader is presented with a chain of frustrated relationships.

Lucie Courrèges loves her husband, but he cannot return her love.

The doctor loves Maria Cross with a passion that passes the test of time, but she does not even suspect the real nature of his feelings for her until seventeen years later. Raymond's infatuation for Maria develops over the years into a passion which is as strong as his father's and equally hopeless. Maria for her part fails to find any satisfaction in her relationship with Victor Larousselle or Raymond.

If in Préséances Mauriac shows up in a rather clumsy, artificial way the absurdity of trying to manoeuvre human passion, he does so much more naturally and effectively in other works. In

Le Baiser au lépreux Jean Péloueyre and Noémi d'Artiailh are left alone together in the presbytery in a room which is strange to both of them. Meanwhile the curé and Madame d'Artiailh wait outside for the seed of love to germinate miraculously in an afternoon! This 'expérience d'entomologie' (OC, I, 164) is so horrific for Noémi that when her mother does return she rushes into her arms in the deepest

distress 'sans imaginer que cette effusion pût être un acquiescement' (OC, I, 165).

However, although Mauriac states categorically in Le Sagouin that 'on ne peut pas se faire aimer à volonté, on n'est pas libre de plaire', he also makes the point that 'aucune puissance sur la terre ni dans le ciel ne saurait empêcher une femme d'élire un homme et de le choisir pour dieu' (OC, XII, 45). When Rose is desperately trying to prevent Robert Costadot from leaving her, she rapidly calls to mind 'ce que disent les filles averties: "Avec les hommes, il faut . . . Le meilleur moyen de retenir un homme . . ."', and comes to the conclusion that 'il était temps encore de le poursuivre, de le rejoindre dans ce monde triste de ruses et de caresses où les femmes mènent leur jeu' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 120). Similarly male characters such as Daniel Trasis and Raymond Courrèges practise to perfection the art of seduction. In Un adolescent d'autrefois Alain Gajac does not know whether he is really jealous or not, but he affects the sentiment, believing that 'l'on devient amoureux, comme on devient religieux selon Pascal, en inclinant l'automate' (p. 93). There is ample evidence in the novels which suggests that by using their knowledge of human psychology people can arouse passionate emotions either in themselves or in others and that such feelings often resemble love deceptively. Rose certainly evokes pity in Robert as does Madame Agathe in Nicolas Plassac, but genuine love is infinitely more difficult to produce. Determined though she is, Madame Agathe does not achieve her aim of making Nicolas love her by the very strength of her will, and in the end Rose herself has to admit that Robert 'ne peut rien contre cela qu'il ne l''aime plus' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 134).

Mauriac also insists that just as people cannot choose those who love them, they are equally unable to select those with whom they fall in love. His characters frequently become infatuated with people who not only fail to love them in return but also seem to the objective onlooker to be quite unworthy of the lover's passion. Thus the whole question of identity and the integrity of the human personality plays a large part in the problematic sexual relationships Mauriac depicts. In Du côté de chez Proust Mauriac states:

. . . l'être aimé n'est pas un, mais multiple, comment posséder ce qui dure? Un moi, dans l'être aimé, succède indéfiniment à l'autre; autant vouloir immobiliser un fleuve, pour l'êtreindre. (OC, IV, 297)

This is a recurring theme in the novels.

Thérèse Desqueyroux becomes aware of at least two sides of her nature as she joins the ranks of those 'êtres avides' who 'ne souhaitent que connaître, que comprendre, - et . . . "devenir ce qu'ils sont"' (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 225). Before they separate in Paris, Bernard insists that she tells him why she tried to kill him. She replies that she did not want to play an artificial role, 'faire des gestes, prononcer des formules, renier enfin à chaque instant une Thérèse qui . . . ' (OC, II, 280), but then she corrects herself:

- Mais maintenant, Bernard, je sens bien que la Thérèse qui, d'instinct, écrase sa cigarette parce qu'un rien suffit à mettre le feu aux brandes, - la Thérèse qui aimait à compter ses pins elle-même, régler ses gemmes; - la Thérèse qui était fière d'épouser un Desqueyroux, de tenir son rang au sein d'une bonne famille de la lande, contente enfin de se caser, comme on dit, cette Thérèse-là est aussi réelle que l'autre, aussi vivante; non, non: il n'y avait aucune raison de la sacrifier à l'autre. (OC, II, 281)

The haunting question of her own identity remains with Thérèse.

In La Fin de la Nuit she looks in a mirror and contemplates 'sa face inconnue, - non le visage de la vraie Thérèse' (OC, II, 405).

Later she says Thérèse the murderess was 'une Thérèse inconnue' and she asks:

Quel rapport entre la démente de ces lointaines années qui faisait exprès de ne pas compter les gouttes d'arsenic dans le verre de son mari, et la Thérèse de ce soir? Quelle ressemblance? (OC, II, 411-12)

Once more, however, she is too lucid to dupe herself. She knows that in fact there is only one Thérèse, even if there are many sides to her personality, and that she is responsible for her whole self.

In Mauriac's novels generally people are shown to have at their disposal a variety of masks that they consciously or unconsciously select to suit the company in which they find themselves. The fact that every personality has several possible façades means that various people will view a single individual in different ways, for each will tend to see only one aspect of the whole. Georges Filhot remembers Thérèse's telling him 'que les jugements les plus opposés sur une même créature sont justes, que c'est une affaire d'éclairage, qu'aucun éclairage n'est plus révélateur qu'un autre . . .'

(OC, II, 436). Referring to his relationship with Isa, Louis asks, 'Est-il possible, pendant près d'un demi-siècle, de n'observer qu'un seul côté de la créature qui partage notre vie?'

(Le Noeud de vipères, OC, III, 467). He goes on to draw attention to man's 'tendance fatale à simplifier les autres'. Although people who are not at all emotionally involved can have a fixed, one-sided and therefore false idea of another, this phenomenon complicates even more personal relationships where an incipient passion is at stake.

In Le Désert de l'amour Raymond Courrèges and his father do not see Maria Cross in the same light at all, and the doctor finds the particular angle from which she views him an insuperable barrier to his love for her:

. . . que c'est difficile d'introduire un mot plus tendre, une allusion amoureuse dans une causerie avec une femme déférente et qui impose à son médecin un caractère sacré, le revêt d'une paternité spirituelle! (OC, II, 34)

Maria - 'jeune femme respectueuse' - admires the doctor as a noble father-figure. Such is the Dr. Courrèges she knows and will always know. There is nothing left for the doctor to do but accept the fact that 'elle n'était point maîtresse, mais disciple; il n'était pas amant, mais directeur' (OC, II, 36). Later his own son clashes with Maria and has to come to terms with 'les lois de cette chimie':

. . . chaque être à qui nous nous heurtons dégage en nous cette part toujours la même et que le plus souvent nous eussions voulu dissimuler. C'est notre douleur de voir l'être aimé composer sous nos yeux l'image qu'il se fait de nous, abolir nos plus précieuses vertus, mettre en pleine lumière cette faiblesse, ce ridicule, ce vice . . . . (OC, II, 140)

Whilst some people may fall in love with a half-truth, in that they see lucidly and become attracted to only one or two aspects of an individual's character rather than the whole, others see and fall in love with a lie: a totally distorted image, the formation of which is conditioned largely by their own personality, for according to Pascal and Mauriac it is 'nous-mêmes qui nous cherchons dans les autres' and 'nous créons de notre propre substance l'objet de notre passion' (Mes grands hommes, OC, VIII, 334). Thus several of Mauriac's characters subconsciously ignore what they consider to be unattractive in the other person and then modify their image of what is left until it matches exactly what they would really like to see. In Préséances the narrator wonders how Augustin could possibly have fallen in love with Florence. Influenced by his reading at the time, he gives the following explanation:

. . . ce ne fut qu'en l'accablant de ses propres richesses qu'Augustin put aimer cette petite esclave . . . il la rendit dépositaire de ce qu'il portait en lui de féminine faiblesse: c'est toujours nous-mêmes qui aimons nous-mêmes . . . (OC, X, 330)

Maria Cross has a completely false image of Raymond Courrèges, which is governed partly by her grief for her deceased son and partly by her longing for a pure love:

. . . elle voyait en lui un écolier candide et qui se scandalise d'un rien . . . . (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 74)

. . . le fils du docteur! Ce ne pouvait être qu'un collégien très naïf, très pieux. (OC, II, 76)

. . . elle ne discernait pas l'ange de l'impureté, ne savait pas que le printemps est souvent la saison de la boue et que cet adolescent pouvait n'être que souillure. (OC, II, 80)

Raymond for his part has no understanding at all of the complexity of Maria's personality; nor does he appreciate the nature of her feelings for him. To counteract his sense of inadequacy he wants to play the rôle of a Don Juan. He needs a victim and conjures up such an image of Maria Cross that allows him to consider her as suitable 'prey'.

This phenomenon of mistaken identity is particularly striking in La Fin de la Nuit. Although Thérèse is encouraged by signs of jealousy on the part of Georges Filhot, her scepticism reflects her shrewd understanding of human psychology:

Mais que l'enfant fût capable de jalousie, était-ce le signe irrécusable qu'elle était aimée de lui? Et si elle l'était en effet, comment ne pas redouter un de ces mirages que crée l'imagination passionnée des jeunes gens? (OC, II, 410)

Although beauty is shown in the novels to be very much in the eyes of the beholder, Mauriac isolates the question of youth and age as being particularly significant with regard to the development and disappearance of emotional mirages. Louis of Le Nœud de vipères hates young people because he is jealous of them. He is only one of many Mauriacien characters who have a haunting fear of growing old. A number of Mauriac's heroes are also especially attracted by anything youthful and fresh. Madame Courrèges mère concludes that her grandson cannot

be 'un mauvais drôle' because he likes the Basque children and enjoys playing with them. Mauriac points out her error of judgment:

Aimait-il les enfants? Il prenait n'importe quoi de frais, de tiède et de vivant comme une défense contre ceux qu'il appelait les cadavres. (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 14)

Later Raymond becomes obsessed by his sense of time passing:

Comme tous ceux qui confondent bonheur et jeunesse, il avait une conscience sourde, mais toujours en éveil, du temps écoulé: son œil ne cessait de mesurer le gouffre du temps mort . . . (OC, II, 8)

Georges Filhot is also sensitive about his age, and complains that he is not loved for himself but for his youth:

Ma jeunesse . . . cette eau entre mes doigts, ce sable que je ne puis retenir . . . C'est une force apparente, une fausse fraîcheur à quoi s'attachent les quelques êtres qui prétendent m'aimer . . . (La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 426)

However, the youth cult is most noticeable in Destins. We are told that the 'fidèles' who come to pay their respects to the convalescent Bob 'se ressemblaient par un air de jeunesse: jeunes gens, jeunes femmes quadragénaires' (OC, I, 425). They adore in him 'leur jeunesse souillée, agonisante ou déjà morte, - tout ce qu'ils avaient à jamais perdu et dont ils poursuivaient le reflet' (OC, I, 425). Bob himself who 'avait cru en son corps comme en son unique dieu' (OC, I, 413) is disturbed by his attack of pleurisy. As far as his worshippers are concerned he has a presentiment that 'ce n'est pas à lui, dénué de naissance, d'argent, de talent, d'esprit, que s'adressent leurs adorations' (OC, I, 425-26).

Often the impression made at the beginning of a relationship is all-important. If the appearances of the one loved subsequently change significantly and/or suddenly, some lovers are more susceptible to disillusionment than others. When Rose Révolou is forced to go out to work after the ruin of her family and when she becomes more

slovenly in her dress, Robert soon begins to see her as a different person with whom he is not in love. She ceases to be 'cette Rose Révolou dont il avait été le danseur durant toute la saison dernière, et cette année encore . . . avec ce visage absent et radieux, ses toilettes toujours accordées à sa grâce . . .'

(Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 86). Thus sometimes an individual's false image of another remains associated with certain surroundings. At first Alain Gajac cannot think of Marie apart from the bookshop, just as he could not imagine Mademoiselle Martineau except on horseback. At Maltaverne it is as if he is seeing another Marie:

Dans sa robe claire d'été, sous son chapeau de paille, elle était une autre Marie que celle de chez Bard, la jeune fille que je n'avais pas connue, que d'autres avaient connue.  
(Un adolescent d'autrefois, p. 159)

However, a mental image of another is seldom fixed, but develops in the course of time. It is liable to amplification especially during periods of separation. Throughout her journey home after the final hearing Thérèse Desqueyroux tries unwittingly to recreate in her imagination a Bernard capable of at least trying to understand her 'mais du premier coup d'oeil, il lui apparaissait tel qu'il était réellement, celui qui ne s'est jamais mis, fût-ce une fois dans sa vie, à la place d'autrui' (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 245-46). This tendency to fantasize is all the stronger when a frustrated passion is involved. Maria Cross's misguided image of Raymond becomes all the more distorted during the few days when she does not see him and fears she may never see him again. When Raymond visits her she is disappointed by the reality she sees:

Elle l'observait, s'efforçait d'ajuster à son désir, à sa douleur, à sa faim, à son renoncement, ce garçon à la fois fort et efflanqué, ce grand jeune chien. Des mille sentiments surgis en elle à propos de lui, tout ce qui pouvait être sauvé se groupait tant bien que mal autour de ce visage tendu, rougi.  
(Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 111)

However, once a mental image has been nurtured for some time it is often quite resistant to change. In the case of Maria Cross it takes more than the mere sight of Raymond to destroy her mirage. If his clumsy attempt to seduce her had not violently shattered it, Maria's infatuation would not have come to such an abrupt end. As a bad image can be as resilient as a good one, Raymond Courrèges realizes seventeen years later that to Maria he will never again be any different from what he was on the fateful day in the drawing room 'luxe et misère' (OC, II 140). In an effort to suppress her own feelings for Georges Filhot, Thérèse considers how she must have created a false image of him in order to have become attracted to him in the first place:

Elle se représentait Georges Filhot, tel qu'il lui était d'abord apparu: mal rasé, l'œil bigle, le chandail douteux; elle se familiarisait avec cette image d'un garçon vraiment bien ordinaire. Risquer un battement de son cœur malade pour cet être pareil à des milliers d'autres? Ce verre grossissant, ce verre déformant qui si souvent s'était interposé entre elle et les créatures, soudain disparaissait; et elle voyait Georges tel qu'il était réellement (et non tel que le voyaient Marie, Mondoux ou Mme Garcin): un grand garçon efflanqué, très campagnard, assez mal tenu, et qui louchait. Comment avait-elle attaché tant de prix à quelqu'un d'aussi médiocre? (La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 414-15)

Thérèse is quite confident that the lesson she has learnt must be equally applicable to Georges and that she can put an end to his infatuation for her by a mere gesture:

Il lui aurait suffi de rejeter d'un seul geste ses cheveux, de découvrir son front, ses tempes; oui, elle aurait pu, des deux mains, effacer en une seconde cette image menteuse d'elle-même . . . . (OC, II, 405)

In fact Georges takes longer to disillusion than she had expected.

It is significant that his unreal image of her is broken when

Thérèse is not consciously trying to destroy it:

Elle s'était rassise sur la chaise basse et, d'un geste machinal, écartait ses cheveux de son front trop vaste, découvrait ses grandes oreilles pâles, mais cette fois elle ne le faisait pas exprès et c'est pourquoi peut-être Georges la voyait enfin . . . . (OC, II, 434-35)

Thus Mauriac drives home the point that passion resists manipulation. Nevertheless the gesture does have the desired effect. Suddenly Thérèse 'était devenue une autre que celle qui l'avait fasciné dès le premier jour . . .': she had become 'pareille à ce que racontaient les gens d'Argelouse, et il venait de subir ses maléfices' (OC, II, 436). Physical appearances and mental images clearly play an important part not only in the birth of sexual love, but also in its death, although the more intense the passion the greater its resilience and powers of deformation. Of the abandoned Janine in Le Noeud de vipères we are told: 'L'amour communique à cette pauvre femme, si dénuée d'imagination, un étonnant pouvoir de déformer, d'amplifier' (OC, III, 526). It is the very strength of Rose's feelings for Robert which keeps her blind to his true character for so long. Nevertheless it would appear that those who fall in love with a mirage built upon ephemeral impressions must be disillusioned sooner or later. It also seems likely that those who have a less superficial but equally distorted idea of the loved one's personality are bound to have their eyes opened to the truth eventually. Consequently it should be just a question of time before sexual passion dies a natural death, and Mauriac actually says in La Fin de la Nuit that time 'a raison de tout amour' (OC, II, 480). In Ce qui était perdu Alain Forcas wonders how long it will take for Tota to see the light: 'Dans quelques mois, peut-être dans quelques semaines, l'insignifiant garçon drogué sera redevenu pour Tota un insignifiant garçon drogué' (OC, III, 60). In reality the outcome is

not always so simple. Speaking of her relationship with Azévédo, Thérèse Desqueyroux tells Dr. Schwartz in Thérèse chez le docteur that, although the affair is all over, love never dies altogether and despite the fact that she ought to hate Jean he still exercises a spell over her imagination. There is a far more positive explanation for the way some passion comes through the disillusioning moment of truth and continues to survive subsequent rebuffs undiminished. During the early stages of a relationship an apparently superficial passion may be fortified and grow into genuine love which is particularly truth- and time-proof. Mauriac makes this point poetically in Genitrix:

Tel est l'instinct de l'amour qui ne veut pas périr: lorsque se dérobe sous lui la terre, lorsque est détruit son ciel familial, il invente un autre ciel et une autre terre. (OC, I, 369)

When Robert Costadot lets Rose down and she in her turn has to face disillusionment, it does not kill her passion, only the deceptive aspect of her infatuation. Her love has grown so that it reflects more accurately the love the Christian God has for his creatures. Rose finds she loves Robert as a whole person, entirely as he is, irrespective of his failings. In Destins Élisabeth Gornac tries to persuade Paule to take a similar attitude towards Bob when the sordid details of the latter's debauched life are revealed to her by Pierre:

Vous l'aimez comme il est, tel qu'il est. Pourquoi isoler tel défaut, telle tendance mauvaise? . . . . Peut-être suis-je trop indulgente? Mais il me semble, j'imagine, que nous ne devons rien renier de l'être qui nous a pris le cœur. Si Bob n'était pas un pauvre enfant trop mal défendu, il ne serait pas celui que vous chérissez . . . . (OC, I, 477)

Once an individual's passion has matured into unconditional love the unreal image that lies at its origin ceases to have any significance, for as Mauriac repeatedly emphasizes 'ce n'est pas l'amour qui est aveugle, mais le désir' (Journal III, OC, XI, 219); moreover, 'le

véritable amour est lucide; il ne sent pas le besoin d'embellir l'homme pour l'aimer' (Journal I, OC, XI, 54). However, the fact that Paule de la Sesque wants to find Bob, even when all her illusions have been irrevocably shattered by the results of her own enquiries, does not prove that she feels for him a love that is unconditional and pure in accordance with the definition outlined in Chapter I of this thesis.<sup>5</sup>

Several of Mauriac's characters think they love, when in fact they are solely concerned about being loved. When Thérèse Desqueyroux analyses her relationship with Georges Filhot, she concludes that she did not really love him: 'En vérité, j'aimais le sentiment qu'il éprouvait pour moi . . .' (La Fin de La Nuit, OC, II, 414). Other Mauriacien protagonists feel compelled to find some human object - even if it is unworthy - to whom they can give affection and thus satisfy their natural impulse to be 'in love'. They need the person they adore as much if not more than they love him. Thus, when Paule explains to Élisabeth Gornac why she has come back for Bob, she implies that she feels physically incapable of renouncing him. She wants him for her own sake. Similarly the lucid Janine of Le Noeud de vipères, who repeatedly tells Geneviève that Phili is worse than the family could possibly imagine, still nearly dies of grief when he leaves her. She needs his corporal presence however worthless he is, and despite the fact that he does not love her. In Ce qui était perdu Tota has no illusions about William:

- Oui, je sais, je connais sa lâcheté, ses vices, je sais qu'il est drogué . . . Mais que veux-tu! peut-être est-ce tout cela qui m'attire: le désir de le protéger, de le défendre contre lui-même, de le sauver.

Elle mentait sincèrement. (OC, III, 59)

---

5. See above, pp. 26-35.

Mauriac implies that Tota is as much of a 'droguée' as the man she is supposed to love; eventually she would have tired of him and found someone else in the same way as an addict increases the strength or dosage of the drug he takes.

Mauriac's novels suggest that the establishment of mutually satisfying love relationships would be automatically facilitated, at least to a certain degree, if attitudes towards love did not vary so much according to the different backgrounds of the individuals in question. His treatment of his young male heroes infers that if a sensitive boy is deprived of a mother to love or a mother substitute, he may, on reaching adolescence, give to a member of the opposite sex the sort of love he would have showered on the parent he never had. What is more, such an adolescent is likely to expect his girl-friends to give him the kind of maternal, self-sacrificing love of which he was deprived as a child. In L'Agneau Xavier says that the feelings of the neglected Roland for Dominique reflect the nascent man in him:

- Il aime une seule créature, Dominique: un petit d'homme, quoi! qui exige d'avoir quelqu'un à adorer . . . . Et celui-là, en plus, est jaloux . . . (OC, XII, 276)

A girl from a similarly unloving background may have an exaggerated tendency to desire caring, undemanding tenderness from her future lovers. Thérèse is an example of this. She has a craving for the warmth and affection of another human being who will ask nothing of her in return but her company. As her husband and lovers fail to answer this need, she ends up clinging to Anna as she might have done to the mother she never knew.

A boy on whom maternal love has been lavished may also tend to demand the same kind of total self-denial on the part of a mate.

After Blanche's death Yves looks to mistresses to provide him with the motherly affection he has lost:

Cette exigence que l'amour de sa mère n'avait jamais trompée, il la transférait, maintenant, sur des objets qui, jusqu'alors, avaient pu l'occuper, l'inquiéter, et même le faire un peu souffrir, sans toutefois bouleverser sa vie.  
(Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 94)

Alain Gajac also admits in Maltaverne that he has always needed a woman in his life to take the place of his mother. Whatever their history, the fact remains that such vulnerable creatures live in the same world as those who are more cynical by nature, those who have been conditioned to suppress their emotions and those who have done their best to harden their initially hypersensitive hearts in self-defence against the cruelty of others. Consequently for some of Mauriac's characters love is supremely important, whilst for others it means nothing at all. Some even play at being in love.

However, Mauriac insists that love cannot be simulated any more successfully than it can be produced to order. Feeling no love for Bernard, Thérèse Desqueyroux decides to pretend that she loves him. She considers her attempt to convince him a challenge. Whereas she finds it relatively easy to lie through words, she finds it much harder to do so through gesture. She manages to deceive him as long as she does, because he only lusts after her body: he does not love her as a person. Believing that all genuine love, as opposed to lust or idolatry, partakes to a greater or lesser degree of the essence of God, Mauriac presents feigning it as one of the most serious offences man can commit against man, and the novels reveal that the consequences of simulating passion in relationships with human beings more sensitive than Bernard Desqueyroux, for example, can be grave. When Jean-Paul Johanet agrees to be Georges Élie's friend, Mauriac comments:

Ah! s'il avait su tout ce que l'enfant mettait dans ce mot d'amitié! S'il avait su qu'il y avait là tous les besoins d'affection d'un jeune être brutalisé, toutes les faims d'une tendresse chaque jour refoulée! (L'Enfant chargé de chaînes, OC, X, 39)

As they part Georges wants Jean-Paul to confirm that they are bound together in a friendship that only death will end. For a moment Jean-Paul thinks of being honest and disillusioning Georges, but decides not to. Conscious of the lie which he considers heroic, he replies, 'Oui, mon petit, à la vie, à la mort . . .' (OC, X, 39). Later Jean-Paul tires of Georges and drops him. His contempt inflicts an incurable wound in Élie's sensitive heart, with the result that 'la haine était désormais vivante en cette âme étroite qu'un seul amour eût remplie pour la vie' (OC, X, 46). Georges Élie never recovers from the injury caused by a hollow, perfidious friendship. In Le Noeud de vipères the results of affecting love in a more intimate, sexual relationship prove to be just as destructive. The story of Robert Costadot and Rose Révolou reveals how it is far more cruel to sham love than to be blunt about one's feelings. Similarly Nicolas Plassac hurts Madame Agathe all the more by first raising her hopes before jilting her.

However precious and painful it may be for some sensitive souls, others who have never experienced love and therefore do not appreciate what suffering it can entail, or who have been hurt and subsequently grown embittered, have no qualms about treating sexual passion as a light-hearted means to a materialistic end. The narrator of Préséances is frightened by the cold, calculating way Florence plans to use Augustin:

. . . elle me dit que puisque nous étions obligés de subir ce malotru, il importait d'en avoir quelque amusement; elle ajouta qu'elle n'était point fâchée de tâter d'un flirt d'une espèce si rare, et qu'enfin, lorsque Augustin se réveillerait de son enchantement et qu'elle le précipiterait à son néant, ce serait tout de même à lui de dire merci. (OC, X, 299)

In this case Florence's toying with passion proves treacherous, not only on Augustin's account but also her own. Jean Queyries in the same novel belongs, according to the narrator, 'à cette espèce de gens qui confondent amour et ambition' (OC, X, 368). He appears as determined as Florence had been earlier to gain admittance to high society even if he has to achieve his aim by counterfeiting love. Usually, however, the mix-up between love and ambition is less blatant and therefore more insidious. Sometimes people are not even aware that they are making the confusion. This explains why Alain Gajac is anxious that Marie should not know of his wealth lest it affects how she feels about him. In Le Noeud de vipères Louis says Isa and himself pretended not to be interested by the financial implications of their engagement, maintaining that they probably did not realize how much money mattered to them. Later he learns that it is an over-simplification to distinguish between those women who are just greedy for money and those whose love is disinterested: 'Comme si dans la plupart des femmes, l'inclination amoureuse n'allait de pair avec le besoin d'être soutenues, protégées, gâtées!' (OC, III, 402).

Marie Desqueyroux is one of many protagonists who believe that physical separation from the beloved must inevitably threaten their relationship. She tells her mother this emphatically:

Je vous le répète: je suis sûre de Georges, à condition de le voir tous les jours. S'il s'éloigne, je le perds.  
(La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 369)

The very excessiveness of the demands such people make on others poisons the relationships they want to preserve. Referring to the relationship he had with his 'petite institutrice', Louis of Le Noeud de vipères maintains that 'c'est son insatiabilité qui a tout perdu' (OC, III, 403). We are told that Yves Frontenac's love affairs quickly come to nothing 'et d'autant plus sûrement que sa manie le rendait fatigant et insupportable' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 95). The experience of Mauriac's characters invariably shows that those who do not try to possess the object of their passion are more likely to have their love reciprocated in the end. When André Gradère begins to accept Catherine's company after learning that his father is a murderer, at first she is careful not to take advantage of the fact that he needs a woman who understands what is torturing him. She is 'attentive à l'entourer d'une protection constante, mais discrète' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 315). Later, when their eventual marriage is no longer in doubt, she disguises her desire for André less successfully. He is irritated by her presence and by 'cet appétit qu'elle avait de lui et qu'elle savait mal dissimuler' (OC, III, 330). As a possessive mother Félicité Cazenave realizes in the end that absence often does make the heart grow fonder:

Elle commençait de savoir que les absents ont toujours raison:  
ils sont ceux qui ne contrarient pas le travail de l'amour.  
(Genitrix, OC, I, 377)

As a possessive wife Janine of Le Noeud de vipères also learns this lesson the hard way. She makes the mistake of trying to keep Phil physically near her at whatever cost. When he goes off with a mistress who cannot offer him the financial advantages his wife can and whom he does not even love, Janine herself understands his action which to Geneviève is incomprehensible:

J'en étais arrivée à ne plus beaucoup souffrir de n'être pas aimée. Je l'avais; il était à moi; il m'appartenait; je restais maîtresse de l'argent; je lui tenais la dragée haute . . . . Nous pensions qu'il ne mettait rien au-dessus de l'argent. Lui-même le croyait peut-être, et pourtant sa colère, sa honte ont été plus fortes. Car il n'aime pas cette femme qui me l'a pris . . . . Mais elle ne le méprisait pas, elle ne le rabaissait pas. Elle s'est donnée à lui, elle ne l'a pas pris. Moi, je me l'étais offert. (OC, III, 521)

Cases arise when a person who is passionately in love is required to step right out of the beloved's life in order to secure the latter's true welfare. Of the three men in Rose Révolou's life it is Pierre Costadot who loves her the most. That his love for her is truer than Denis's or Robert's is proved not only by the fact that he accepts her for richer or poorer, but also because he is more concerned about her happiness than his own; he is too fond of her to hound her when he knows that she loves his brother. Alain Forcas tells André Gradère that if he really loves Tota he must summon up the courage to let her go back to her husband: 'Vous aimez beaucoup, il faut aimer plus encore: renoncer à elle . . . .' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 259). Referring to André Lafon, Mauriac writes in

La Vie et la Mort d'un Poète:

Il aime, mais n'attend rien de ce qu'il aime: renoncement total, hors celui d'aimer. Au prix de cet abandon, il possède son amour à des profondeurs inaccessibles; il emporte son trésor au fond de l'eau grise d'un songe éternel, et par cet abandonnement, atteint à une parfaite possession. (OC, IV, 370)

With the exception of Jean Péloueyre, who loves Noémi enough to renounce his life in renouncing her, Mauriac's characters find this release of the loved one difficult to understand, and still harder to put into practice. Octavie Tronche at least maintains that she is ready and willing to make such a sacrifice:

Et ce qui me rassure, c'est qu'en vue de votre bien temporel et spirituel, je renoncerais à vous, non sans déchirement bien sûr, mais presque sans lutte, cela je puis l'affirmer. Si égoïste que je sois (et Dieu sait si je le suis!), je vous aime bien trop pour me chercher moi-même. (La Pharissienne, OC, V, 277)

At the other extreme 'amour-passion' that is allowed to become tyrannically demanding or to sink into lust is shown to be extremely harmful to the beloved. The recipient of such passion is considered literally as an object at the beck and call of the lover, who may seek total dominion over his body and/or soul. Janine's attitude to Phili may be obnoxiously possessive, but her grandfather's treatment of his mistress seems to have been still more appalling:

Ce n'était pas assez de la maintenir dans la gêne, presque dans la misère; il fallait qu'elle fût toujours à ma disposition, qu'elle ne vît personne, que je pusse la prendre, la laisser, la retrouver, au hasard de mes caprices, et durant mes rares loisirs. C'était ma chose. Mon goût de posséder, d'user, d'abuser, s'étend aux humains. Il m'aurait fallu des esclaves. (Le Noeud de vipères, OC, III, 403)

Similarly Gabriel Gradère tells Adila how he will consider her once they are married: 'Toute livrée à moi, Adila. Ma chose. Seule. Personne entre toi et moi' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 162).

Throughout her life Thérèse Desqueyroux is at the mercy of people who exploit her and she suffers accordingly. In La Fin de la Nuit Mauriac points out: 'Elle avait toujours servi; elle avait toujours été utilisée' (OC, II, 351). Bernard may not express his attitude towards conjugal love in such brutal terms as Gabriel Gradère, but he nevertheless behaves as if he shares such a view. During the early part of her marriage Bernard tries to mould Thérèse to suit his every taste. He turns at night into a lusting brute and forgets Thérèse's feelings altogether. She senses with horror that she is little more than a toy for his pleasure. Whilst Bernard is quite satisfied with his honeymoon, the experience is repugnant for Thérèse and later she warns her daughter:

Non, l'amour n'est pas forcément le mal . . . mais le mal est si affreux quand un semblant d'amour ne le masque pas! (La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 357)

Thérèse's repulsion in this respect can be explained by the fact that, if love has a rejuvenating, life-giving effect on an individual, lust has an equally killing one on the 'object' possessed. In the words of Jean de Febrègues, 'l'amour donne l'existence, le désir de "possession" la retire'.<sup>6</sup> After his rupture with Isa the resentful Louis has recourse to 'cette débauche affreusement simple, dépouillée de tout ce qui, d'habitude, lui sert d'excuse, réduite à sa pure horreur, sans ombre de sentiment, sans le moindre faux semblant de tendresse' (Le Noeud de vipères, OC, III, 401). Such a crude, animalistic attitude towards sex divorced from sentiment is so unacceptable to the average human that even the most uncaring individuals tend to disguise it by at least an outward show of affection. This can give rise to a misleading confusion between love and lust, and in this respect the dichotomy between the sexes becomes particularly significant. Sweeping generalization though it may be, men, for biological and historical reasons, clearly have a greater tendency than women to consider the establishment of love relationships as a kind of sport. This is reflected in Mauriac's novels and the reader is not extraordinarily shocked by the young doctor who plans to seduce Noémi Péloueyre, although he considers her quite simply as 'gibier féminin' and is described, as he waits to pounce on her, as 'possédant la patience du Landais qui chasse à l'affût' (Le Baiser au lépreux, OC, I, 203, 204). Raymond Courrèges and Daniel Trasis also hunt women as they might go shooting. However, Les Chemins de la mer provides a less extreme example of the way psychological differences between the sexes can complicate

---

6. J. de Febrègues, op. cit., p. 152.

man/woman relationships. On the evening he spends at the Révolou house Robert Costadot grows increasingly disillusioned. He is bored and frustrated at the thought of his being trapped by his commitment to Rose. The physical proximity of Rose's body nevertheless arouses him sexually. Rose is led to believe that he is responding to her love. She fails to bear in mind that whilst she would find it almost impossible to express physically an affection she did not feel, men, owing to their stronger sexual urge, often make gestures which do not correspond to their emotions. It is this kind of misunderstanding which ultimately gives rise to the ill-starred marriage between Alain and Marianne in Mauriac's play Les Mal Aimés. Virelade points out to Élisabeth:

Sûrement, ce n'était pas très grave . . . Quelques baisers, ça ne compte guère, je te l'accorde. Mais l'important, c'est ce qu'ils signifient pour une jeune fille. (OC, IX, 203)

On one occasion Thérèse Desqueyroux tells Georges Filhot: 'L'amour n'est pas le tout de la vie, - pour les hommes surtout . . .'

(La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 427). Mauriac elaborates on this in

L'Éducation des filles:

Alors que presque tous les hommes mettent l'accent dans leur vie, sur l'argent, sur le pouvoir et, les meilleurs, sur la création artistique, sur la méditation, toutes choses qui passent de loin, à leurs yeux, les questions de sentiment, ces questions-là sont les seules qui paraissent importantes à un grand nombre de femmes: l'accessoire pour les uns demeure l'essentiel pour les autres. D'où ces malentendus tragiques dont nous voyons quotidiennement l'épilogue aux faits divers. (OC, VIII, 321)

Throughout his novels Mauriac seems at pains to emphasize that the sadistic and masochistic tendencies of both men and women are rarely more apparent than in their passionate relationships with members of the opposite sex. In Genitrix he states:

Il existe des hommes qui ne sont capables d'aimer que contre quelqu'un. Ce qui les fouette en avant vers une autre, c'est le gémissement de celle qu'ils délaissent. (OC, I, 389)

The trauma that sexual passion can involve is vividly expressed by Thérèse Desqueyroux, when she is talking to Alain Forcas one night in Paris:

On souffre de quelqu'un, on a quelqu'un comme on a un cancer, une tumeur profonde. C'est le mal le plus physique.  
(Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 55)

In La Fin de la Nuit Thérèse uses biblical imagery which is equally evocative:

Nous ne recevons, aux plus beaux moments, que cette goutte d'eau que le Riche, du fond de l'abîme, demandait à Lazare. Oui, et pas même cela! car l'être chéri est presque toujours ce Pauvre, glorifié mais démuné de tout, et qui n'a rien à nous donner, à nous qui sommes à cause de lui dans les flammes . . .  
(OC, II, 428-29)

The world Mauriac depicts is full of characters who, from the point of view of their love relationships with the opposite sex, can consider themselves either in heaven or in hell, amongst the privileged or underprivileged. Usually a person is in one of the two factions and may never change sides throughout his lifetime. Marcel Revaux is consequently surprised when he fears he may be joining the ranks of the suffering unloved:

Il n'est pas habitué à être celui des deux qui souffre, étant né bourreau, comme d'autres naissent victimes.  
(Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 111)

We are told that Pierre Gornac 'fut toujours celui des deux qui aime plus qu'il n'est aimé et qui souffre' (Destins, OC, I, 527). The pain endured by those whose passion for another tends to be unreciprocated can be acute. In Le Désert de l'amour Mauriac sheds light on 'cette insupportable douleur, lorsque l'être adoré . . . se résigne, d'un cœur indifférent (satisfait peut-être) à notre absence éternelle' (OC, II, 54). Through characters such as Yves Frontenac and Marcel Revaux Mauriac explores in depth the pangs of torment that jealousy inflames. In the cases of Jean Péloueyre and Prudent Gornac

marriage proves to be fatal. They are tragic creatures precisely because they feel a love for their wives which the latter are physically unable to reciprocate spontaneously. Mauriac suggests, however, that women are likely to suffer this kind of martyrdom more than men because of their tendency to transfer their capacity for selfless maternal devotion to all the forms of love they give. Typical examples are Élisabeth in Coups de couteaux and Marthe Johanet, to whom Mauriac addresses the last lines of L'Enfant chargé de chaînes:

Non, la vieille peine s'est éloignée. Mais vous savez qu'autour de votre coeur elle rôde et qu'elle y veut rentrer. Vous savez que le bien-aimé demeure malgré tout un enfant chargé de chaînes et qu'il n'est pas encore délivré . . .

Marthe, vous souriez bravement à toutes les trahisons possibles; d'avance, vous les absolvez; votre minutieux amour prévoit, comme sa future vengeance, des redoublements de tendresse - et la sérénité des pardons silencieux. (OC, X, 103)

Those who are loved but cannot reciprocate the passion they arouse do not escape unaffected. Mauriac writes in Le Fleuve de Feu: 'Plus fortement que ceux que nous aimâmes, ceux qui nous ont aimés nous marquent' (OC, I, 228). When Paul Courrèges is late arriving at Maria's for his long-awaited appointment one Sunday, she decides to try and catch the evening tram hoping Raymond will be on it. As she is leaving the doctor arrives and Mauriac observes:

Ah! l'importunité de ces êtres, à qui notre coeur ne s'intéresse pas, et qui nous ont choisis, et que nous n'avons pas choisis! - si extérieurs à nous, dont nous ne désirons rien savoir, dont la mort nous serait aussi indifférente que la vie . . . et pourtant ce sont ceux-là qui remplissent notre existence.  
(Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 65)

On the other hand, the beloved unloving often fail to give the barest minimum of consideration to the feelings of their unhappy worshippers. Marie Desqueyroux, for example, 'ne montrait guère de douceur aux créatures qui l'aimaient et qu'elle n'aimait pas'

(La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 362). In the case of Hervé de Blénauge he seems to have a compulsive need to hurt Irène. He is clearly irritated by her good, loving nature so different from his own. However, instead of expressing his subconscious guilt feelings by punishing himself he uses her as a whipping-boy:

Après six ans de mariage, Irène souffrait, comme au premier jour, de ces appellations tendres, mêlées à des paroles insolentes. (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 3)

In Journal II Mauriac states that 'pour ne plus souffrir, pour ne plus douter d'être aimé, il faudrait devenir l'autre, ne fût-ce que pour quelques secondes' (OC, XI, 163-64). Since this is an impossibility, he concludes:

. . . il n'existe aucune méthode pour connaître l'amour que nous inspirons. A quoi se mesure-t-il sinon aux pleurs que nous faisons couler? (OC, XI, 121)

Such a conviction can have both masochistic and sadistic implications. Consequently Louis Pian knows that unless he is suffering he cannot be in love, and in Un adolescent d'autrefois Alain Gajac says that when he is fond of anyone he needs their suffering for reassurance. Alain wonders whether he is alone in this, but Mauriac shows us in other novels that he is not. Thérèse Desqueyroux, for example, rejoices when she detects signs of torment in Georges Filhot:

Alors l'orage de joie creva qui s'accumulait dans son être depuis trois jours.

O merveille! il souffrait. (La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 409)

Thus the selfishness of the passion that many of Mauriac's characters feel for each other can often be judged by the kind of suffering it involves. Whilst a person who loves in the Christian sense of the word automatically makes himself vulnerable to suffering,<sup>7</sup> he does

---

7. See above, Chapter I, p. 31.

not delight in the pain of the beloved. Yet it is the positive infliction of pain on the one who is supposed to be loved which appears to be an inevitable ingredient in the sexual relationships Mauriac describes.

Since passionate love frequently gets confused with idolatry ambition or lust, it can become so impure and distorted that, like frustrated parental, filial or fraternal affection, it takes on the appearance of hate. In Le Sagouin Mauriac remarks that 'comme on dit "faire l'amour", il faudrait pouvoir dire "faire la haine"' (OC, XII, 27), and in La Pharisienne he refers to the world of passionate relationships as 'ce monde où les coups ont la même signification que les caresses, où les injures sont chargées de plus d'amour que les plus tendres paroles' (OC, V, 272). In the novels as a whole Mauriac repeatedly maintains that in fact passionate hate and love are only two sides of the same coin. The antithesis of love is not hate but indifference. Raymond Courrèges knows 'que la colère, que la haine sont des prolongements de l'amour' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 144). Consequently he is bitterly disappointed when his reference to a certain 'maladresse' of seventeen years earlier does not make Maria Cross lose her temper. Desperate to arouse at least the hatred of his wife, Louis of Le Noeud de vipères does his best to anger Isa by interfering in her religious upbringing of the children, to which she attaches supreme importance. Bob Lagave's desire to take vengeance on Paule is not real hate but frustrated love. It is a sign of his own suffering. In Ce que je crois Mauriac again points out how hate is often a symptom of pain and exasperation. He does so in the chapter appropriately entitled 'Les Frères ennemis'. Here he is not speaking of lovers but

of Christians who hold conflicting political opinions. However, the passage might well be applied to some of the love/hate relationships in Mauriac's fictional works:

. . . nous confondons souvent haine et exaspération. Ce sont deux états bien différents. Nous nous exaspérons les uns les autres, durant toute notre vie, il est vrai, parce que nous ne tenons pas compte de nos raisons mutuelles. Et puis, au soir de la vie, lorsque la poussière des anciens combats est retombée, il arrive que nous rencontrions un adversaire d'autrefois. Alors, nous nous étonnons de ce plaisir à être ensemble, à parler des luttes passées, des amis ou des ennemis du temps de notre jeunesse et qui ne sont plus là. Il semble alors que le Seigneur lui-même nous souffle: 'Vous voyez bien, pauvres enfants, que vous ne vous haïssez pas. Vous ne vous entendiez pas, et c'était à la lettre: vous étiez sourds aux raisons les uns des autres. La haine, la vraie, peut-être ne l'avez-vous jamais ressentie.' (pp. 110-11)

The tragedy of Le Noeud de vipères lies in the fact that Louis and Isa take a lifetime to learn this lesson. They never lose the potential to develop a meaningful, even loving relationship despite their bad start, but they perversely deprive each other of the chance to do so.

An analysis of the love affairs described by Mauriac indicates that relationships between people who are supposed to love each other are often as unloving, if not more so than those between men and women whose sentiments are quite dispassionate. The history of Tota Forcas exemplifies this. She is the offspring of a loveless marriage, and the home in which she is brought up is metaphorically speaking a battle-field. Although Alain hastens the proceedings, she marries Marcel of her own free will, and he 'loves' her, but Tota soon finds herself involved in another war. Only the terrain has shifted. Thus it is not arranged marriages, financial pressures, empty caste rules that poison the conjugal relationships in Mauriac's world, but it is certainly an absence of genuine love

that lies at the heart of the problem. The majority of the characters who are in love in fact love only themselves, even though their passion was aroused by another and even though their suffering is only too real.

### 3. CONJUGAL BLISS - DREAM OR REALITY?

Jean de Fabrègues maintains that 'ayant vécu dans ce XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle "bourgeois" où trop souvent "l'amour" était du côté de la "maîtresse" et "le devoir" du côté de l'épouse, la réaction même de Mauriac est restée marquée par cette atmosphère'.<sup>8</sup> However, one can only speculate on the extent to which this explains the fact that there are virtually no examples at all in the novels of couples who enjoy uninterrupted domestic bliss. The Puybarauds are happily in love, but their married life comes to a tragic end. Unlike the Revaux ménage their union is not undermined from within but by external circumstances embodied in Brigitte Pian. The marriage of Madeleine and Gaston Basque has its roots in a romantic courtship. They appear to enjoy a mutually satisfying relationship for some time, but we learn at the end of Le Désert de l'amour that Gaston has been killed in the war. In Le Nœud de vipères we are told that Monsieur et Madame de Villenave felt for each other 'un amour comme on en voit dans les livres':

Ces Villenave . . . après vingt ans de mariage, s'aimaient d'un amour qui était passé en proverbe. On disait 'unis comme les Villenave'. Ils . . . recevaient peu, se suffisaient l'un à l'autre . . . . (OC, III, 395)

However, even this idyllic marriage is struck by tragedy. Assuming that both partners are spared premature death, Mauriac never leaves his readers with the comfortable feeling that fairy-tale endings

---

8. J. de Fabrègues, op. cit., p. 269.

to love and marriage are probable. Indeed the novels seem designed to drive home the point that there is no guarantee a marriage founded on a mutually passionate relationship will be more successful on a long-term basis than one which had its beginning in a totally or partially loveless union. Mauriac clearly does not believe many people enjoy 'le miracle accompli par le philtre de Brangaine, cette égalité dans l'ardeur, cet équilibre de la passion exactement partagée' (Journal II, OC, XI, 120-21). Even if a couple is fortunate enough to be one of the privileged few, 'qu'est-ce qu'un miracle qui dure toute une vie?' (Les Chemins de La mer, OC, V, 7)? Apart from the fact that 'les sentiments les plus étranges n'étonnent pas dès qu'ils sont devenus habituels' (OC, V, 7), its binding aspect alone is likely to jeopardize a conjugal relationship, even if it does not become strained by other causes of tension inside or outside the immediate family. However desirable they may be, the marriage vows themselves are an intrinsic threat, for, as Robert North points out, it is a 'human truth that a sense of obligation is capable of transforming love into hatred, submissiveness into revolt'<sup>9</sup> - a truth which Mauriac highlights in several of his works. Thérèse Desqueyroux considers 'que les êtres nous deviennent supportables dès que nous sommes sûrs de pouvoir les quitter' (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 276). The corollary of this observation again suggests that the most harmonious of marriages will become vulnerable if either of the partners suffers substantially from a sense of emotional or psychological claustrophobia. Thus many of the novels contain at least an implicit warning against unrealistic

---

9. R.J. North, Introduction to Mauriac's play Le Feu sur la terre, London, Harrap, 1962, p. 44.

expectations and illusions on the subject of conjugal love and married life generally.

In L'Enfant chargé de chaînes Jean-Paul himself considers his duty to marry Marthe as 'la chose du monde la plus ordinaire, la plus simple - la plus banale' (OC, X, 91). At the end of the novel Mauriac makes a point of destroying any hint of an 'and-they-lived-happily-ever-after' mood. Similarly in Le Mal he leaves the reader in no doubt about the fact that if Fabien had married Colombe, the 'rêve charmant' would have become 'une réalité redoutable' (OC, VI, 98). In his most optimistic novel Mauriac presents us with a picture that is anything but idealized of a fairly typical evening in the home of Jean-Louis and Madeleine Frontenac. He focusses the reader's attention on the less attractive, but none the less inevitable, aspects of married life. Xavier Dartigelongue is another character Mauriac uses to convey the message that marriage is not an easy option:

Vie souffrante du couple humain, avec les enfants qu'il faut nourrir et élever, avec de modestes croix dressées à chaque tournant de la journée, pour que vous demeuriez présent, mon Dieu, au sein de ce pauvre bonheur fait de ratages, de privations, de hontes, de deuils, de péchés et qui se perd dans l'angoisse de toutes les morts . . . . (L'Agneau, OC, XII, 239)

Far from seeing and accepting in advance the suffering that family life will inevitably involve, a number of Mauriac's characters have extremely idealized and romantic notions on the subject. Jacques of La Robe prétexte is a case in point and at the end of the novel his attitude is shown up in stark contrast with the over-cynical one of the cold, practical Camille. Dr. Courrèges enters marriage with idyllic expectations and is subsequently disillusioned by everything except his newly born offspring:

Durant des années, cela seul dans le mariage avait paru au docteur exactement conforme à ce qu'il avait rêvé: contre le grand lit conjugal, ce lit étroit où, chaque soir, sa femme et lui regardaient dormir Madeleine, leur enfant premier-né. (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 37-38)

When he attends to Maria after her 'fall', he acknowledges that if he had been in a position to marry her instead of Lucie, she would not have been the Maria Cross she is. The bitter tone of his thoughts reflects the extent not only of his frustration but also his disillusionment:

Elle eût été mère plusieurs fois . . . Tout son corps porterait les traces de ce qui a servi et de ce qui s'use tous les jours à des besognes basses . . . Plus de désir: des habitudes sales . . . (OC, II, 135)

Other characters consider marriage as some kind of miraculous remedy against psychological solitude and self-preoccupation, problems which are inherent in the human condition and therefore cannot be avoided by any superficial stratagems. Through his novels Mauriac points out the danger of seeking marriage as a haven of security or an escape-hatch from life, irrespective of whether one loves one's spouse-to-be or not. Mathilde Cazenave, Thérèse Desqueyroux and Paule de Cernès all regret making this mistake.

However much sympathy we may have for them, we are also encouraged to disapprove of the egoistic way some of Mauriac's characters claim conjugal happiness as a kind of due, as if they had more right to it than any other human being. Catherine Desbats feels she has suffered enough and now deserves her future life with André even if he does not love her: 'Elle avait payé d'avance, c'était son tour de bonheur maintenant!' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 330). In Le Désert de l'amour Mauriac presents the facile quest for total fulfilment in marriage as not only vain but also immature and selfish. He describes Paul Courrèges's imagined separation from his wife in the following terms:

. . . il n'était nécessaire de supprimer personne - mais simplement de rompre avec sa femme, comme il avait vu faire tel de ses confrères, sans aucune autre raison que le morne ennui qu'il éprouvait à vivre auprès d'elle. A cinquante-deux ans, il est temps encore de savourer quelques années d'un bonheur, peut-être empoisonné de remords - mais celui qui n'a rien eu, pourquoi résisterait-il, fût-ce à une ombre de joie? (OC, II, 57-58)

Later Mauriac again shows up the doctor's character mockingly, as he reports the melodramatic speech which is to be made that afternoon to Maria Cross and which is prepared in the course of a consultation:

Je suis un homme, Maria, un pauvre homme de chair comme les autres. On ne peut pas vivre sans bonheur; je le découvre trop tard - mais pas trop tard pour que vous consentiez à me suivre? (OC, II, 63)

Miraculous though it may seem the fact remains that happy marriages do exist and loving conjugal relationships are a reality.

In Journal I Mauriac writes:

. . . l'amour conjugal, qui persiste à travers mille vicissitudes, me paraît être le plus beau des miracles, quoiqu'il en soit le plus commun. (OC, XI, 25)

Even if Mauriac made no reference to the subject in his non-fictional works, it would be wrong to assume on the basis of his novels that he believed successful marital relationships and happy homes to be rare and inexplicable exceptions to the rule. Mauriac does not imply that the only kind of marriages possible are the blighted ones on which he concentrates, and which can be explained to a certain extent on the same sort of grounds as he justifies the plethora of hardened sinners which populate his fiction and the dearth of saints: namely his conviction that without conflict of soul, character or plot a novel will be amorphous. Mauriac never suggests in his novels that family life is doomed to be unhappy. The cynical Louis himself acknowledges in Le Noeud de vipères that other couples 'finissent de vivre après des années de profonde union' (OC, III, 463). Those who are particularly sceptical about the possibility of conjugal happiness are almost

invariably jealous and bitter, because they have been deprived of it. They do not want to acknowledge that it can be achieved.

Yves Frontenac is annoyed by Jean-Louis's decision to yield to the pressures brought to bear upon him and to settle down in the family business with a wife and children. He considers 'son frère aîné comme dans une fosse où il eût été pris à jamais', and yet at the same time he envies Jean-Louis and Madeleine their 'pauvre bonheur' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 56). Although it is not easy, Jean-Louis comes to terms with the harsh realities of married life, and though he dare not would like to advise Yves to abandon his worldly adventures and to consider leading a duller but happier and more secure life with a home, wife and children.

Le Désert de l'amour is another novel in which Mauriac makes the point that, whilst the married state should not be entered into lightly or sought primarily as a refuge from life, families can be sanctuaries of peace in times of need and particularly in later life.

Thérèse Desqueyroux's attitude towards conjugal relationships is significantly ambivalent.. Embittered and frustrated after her disappointing marriage to Bernard she is determined that Anne de la Trave should learn 'que le bonheur n'existe pas' (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 205). In fact Thérèse is not as convinced as she appears to be that any form of conjugal happiness is an impossibility. During the long days she spends alone and confined at Saint-Clair she allows her imagination to run wild:

Elle voit la maison blanche encore, le puits; une pompe grince; des héliotropes arrosés parfument la cour; le dîner sera un repos avant ce bonheur du soir et de la nuit qu'il doit être impossible de regarder en face, tant il dépasse la puissance de notre cœur . . . . (OC, II, 265)

In this way we are told Thérèse 'composait un bonheur, elle

inventait une joie, elle créait de toutes pièces un impossible amour' (OC, II, 263). Similarly, when describing her image of ideal conjugal love to Georges Filhot, Thérèse says that 'il faudrait . . .'

- Que la vie avec la créature que nous avons choisie ou qui nous a choisi, fût une longue sieste au soleil, un repos sans fin, une quiétude animale. Oui . . . avoir cette certitude qu'un être est là, à portée de notre main, accordé, soumis, comblé et que, pas plus que nous-même, il ne désire d'être ailleurs. Il faudrait à l'entour une telle torpeur que la pensée fût engourdie afin de rendre impossible, même en esprit, toute trahison . . . (La Fin de La Nuit, OC, II, 402)

However, when Georges reminds her of her words later Thérèse admits she was only fantasizing:

- C'étaient des paroles en l'air, mon pauvre enfant, de ces choses que l'on dit pour remplir les silences. Vous voyez bien qu'elles ne correspondent à rien de réel. (OC, II, 427)

On the other hand we are told in the same novel that Thérèse 'rêvait d'une vie commune à trois':

. . . il ne s'agissait pas d'un mirage: ce bonheur était possible; c'était ce bonheur et non un autre qu'il fallait atteindre, le seul qui fût à portée de sa main. (OC, II, 414)

This oscillation between realism and optimism, which is so apparent in Thérèse's attitude towards conjugal life, can be traced throughout Mauriac's works as a whole and reflects a conviction which he sums up, in Sainte Marguerite de Cortone, in the following terms:

Et pourtant, cette opposition entre la croix et la vie 'simple et normale', elle n'existe que dans notre convoitise, elle n'apparaît pas dans le réel. La croix s'oppose à la vie voluptueuse, conquérante, telle que nous la rêvons, telle que nous croyons la goûter à certaines heures, - mais la croix ne s'oppose pas à la vie telle qu'elle est. (OC, VII, 395)

Thus one can conclude that in Mauriac's terms there is such a thing as conjugal happiness, however much characters like Yves Frontenac may mock it and however difficult, indeed painful, it may be to achieve. It is the secret of this happiness which remains

to be investigated, and which so many of Mauriac's characters struggle in vain to find.

Mauriac's novels certainly do not indicate any easy solution to the problems posed by the human condition. Throughout his works as a whole Mauriac stresses that suffering is inevitable, whether man chooses to try and give it meaning or not. However, to the reader asking whether there is any alternative to the pessimistic way of life in which many of his characters are caught, there is an affirmative answer, which is expressed more or less explicitly in the substance of the novels themselves.

Most of the passionate or dispassionate family relationships Mauriac describes involve very little true affection, as the real object of the so-called love is almost exclusively self. On the other hand the most successful relationships he depicts are those where selfless love is exchanged. The best examples are undoubtedly to be found in Le Mystère Frontenac. Through this novel Mauriac implies that whilst exclusive and primarily selfish love relationships only aggravate man's haunting sense of solitude and isolation, the sharing of Christian love at least helps to bridge the inevitable gap that separates human beings. The different interests, occupations and home environments of Jean-Louis and Yves do not radically affect the quality of their relationship when they leave their childhood behind. Yves does not tell his brother of his affairs in Paris, but their fraternal sense of communion is too strong to be permanently damaged by them. Whilst Mauriac insists that members of a family cannot relieve one of their number of the suffering caused by a passionate relationship with someone outside the unit, he never denies that they can offer crucial support in times of crisis, and in

Le Mystère Frontenac he suggests that through the medium of true love a certain degree of empathy is made possible. This explains why neither Jean-Louis nor Blanche is reassured by the calmness of José when he stands in front of them 'impénétrable et ne manifestant rien' (OC, IV, 70). Blanche has never experienced 'cette douleur d'amour' (OC, IV, 71); for Jean-Louis too it is 'la passion inconnue . . . ' (OC, IV, 73); and yet both of them sense José's anguish:

Mais la mère et le frère étaient avertis, ils communiquaient avec cette souffrance, ils avaient part physiquement à ce désespoir . . . . (OC, IV, 71)

In many ways Blanche and particularly Xavier 'emmuré dans son matérialisme, dans son déterminisme, prisonnier d'un univers infiniment plus borné que celui d'Aristote' (OC, IV, 10) are typical products of their society and sister and brother to Mauriac's other protagonists of the same generation.<sup>10</sup> However, the priorities of the Frontenacs are different from those of their grasping contemporaries. Sometimes this difference is only slight but none the less crucial; we are told by Xavier that 'chez les Frontenac, on n'a jamais fait intervenir la question d'argent lorsqu'il s'agissait d'un devoir de famille' (OC, IV, 11). Money, property, family prestige are important but take second place when the future happiness of the children is at stake. Jean-Louis may seem an exception in this respect, but Xavier and Blanche insist that he takes on the business because otherwise the entire family would be jeopardized: having made their sacrifices they expect their successors to make some too. In the Frontenac family help is given when needed and without hesitation, however hopeless or undeserving the cause. So tante Félicia is taken

---

10. See also below, Chapter V, p. 248.

care of and José is rescued from his debts, whilst being guided in other practical ways through his crisis. Jean-Louis loses an important contract when he goes off to find Yves in Paris. He hesitates at first but only because 'ce n'était pas seulement son argent qu'il jouait, mais celui de la famille' (OC, IV, 111). What is really significant about the Frontenacs is not the inviolable law of mutual loyalty, but the spirit of love with which the support is given. There are many other families in Mauriac's novels where individual members are defended against the outside world, but the motive behind this protection is often fundamentally selfish. However much Xavier may think otherwise, the secret of the Frontenac magic lies in the mystery of unselfish family love and not in the sacredness of the race. The Desqueyroux, for example, consider their lineage as no less sacrosanct than Xavier considers his, but there is no redeeming 'mystère' attached to the Desqueyroux family. Drained of the selfless love of Blanche, Xavier and Jean-Louis, the Frontenac household would have joined the ranks of the Dubernets, Cazenaves and Dupont-Gunthers, and there would have been no magical charm at all.

Though they may not do so in such a positive manner, Mauriac's other novels also indicate that the way to an improved world lies in man's learning the art of true Christian love,<sup>11</sup> rather than in becoming expert in the cut and thrust of 'l'amour inversé'.<sup>12</sup>

The question remains as to where and how people learn to love others in a disinterested way, and so increase their chances of subsequently finding, as a by-product of this lesson, a relative happiness through the enjoyment of meaningful family relationships.

---

11. See above, Chapter I, pp. 26-35.

12. J. de Fabrègues, op. cit., p. 88.

Vicious circle though it may seem, the answer that Mauriac would give to the question 'where' is in the family and to the question 'how', through personal relationships. For the Christian Mauriac the family is first and foremost the place where a human being learns either to discover God's infinite love for him and to love others in response to that love, or to love others selflessly and to find Christ, Love Incarnate, in so doing. It is in these terms that the family is considered in the following chapter as being, potentially at least, the school par excellence of Christian love.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCHOOL OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

1. INTERDEPENDENCE AND THE DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN

Mauriac stresses that human beings are mutually dependent despite their feeling of insularity, and cannot help affecting the lives of those with whom they come into contact. They may be planets, but even stars interact in accordance with certain immutable astronomic laws. At the end of Le Fleuve de Feu Gisèle considers re-entering Daniel Trasis's life, but abandons the idea:

Ce n'était guère plus en son pouvoir que de jeter hors de sa propre vie Lucile ou Marie. Quel être, quel monde échappe à sa constellation? (OC, I, 294)

Man's inability to escape the consequences of his simply existing haunts a number of Mauriacien characters. Thérèse Desqueyroux despairs of ever being able to shake off her maternal obligations to Marie. She again considers suicide in an attempt to get out of her daughter's life, but concludes that even this would be no solution:

. . . l'ombre de Thérèse se serait tout de même étendue sur ce pauvre destin de Marie. Qui exige cette affreuse communion? 'Morte, je ne t'empoisonnerais pas moins . . . .'  
(La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 377)

Similarly Raymond Courrèges is amazed at the thought that a human being can involuntarily exert as much influence on the destiny of another as Maria Cross has done on him:

Il n'avait jamais songé à ces vertus qui sortent de nous, travaillent souvent à notre insu et à de grandes distances, d'autres cœurs. (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 163)

A similar theme is central to Destins:

Nous croyons qu'un être a disparu de notre vie; nous scellons sur sa mémoire une pierre sans épitaphe; nous le livrons à l'oubli; nous rentrons, le cœur délivré, dans notre existence d'avant sa venue: tout est comme s'il n'avait pas été. Mais il ne dépend de nous d'effacer aucune trace. Les empreintes de l'homme sur l'homme sont éternelles et aucun destin n'a jamais traversé impunément le nôtre.  
(OC, I, 505)

When he looks back on his past, Raymond Courrèges cannot possibly assess how many destinies he has influenced in the course of his life:

. . . que de créatures à qui son approche fut fatale!  
Encore ne sait-il pas combien d'existences il a orientées,  
il a désorientées; il ignore qu'à cause de lui telle femme  
a tué un germe dans son sein, qu'une jeune fille est  
morte, que ce camarade est entré au séminaire, qu'indéfini-  
ment chacun de ces drames en a suscité d'autres.  
(Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 163)

A concrete example of this kind of chain reaction is to be found in La Pharisienne and L'Agneau where an isolated incident is shown to have far-reaching consequences in more than one destiny. A single night spent by la comtesse de Mirbel in the company of her lover Raoul, poisons her son's life and consequently Michèle's. It would be an exaggeration to hold Jean's mother responsible for Xavier Dartigelongue's death, but the connexion between the two destinies is clearly traceable, and in the author's note at the beginning of L'Agneau we are told that although the novel is independent of any other the roots of the short-lived crisis described in it 's'enfoncent profondément ailleurs' (OC, XII, 173).

Whilst it is obvious that a close, lasting relationship does not necessarily have more impact on those involved than a short, less intimate one, the members of a family living in proximity for a long period of time inevitably make a marked impression on one another. Moreover, Mauriac insists that those who love us, even misguidedly, with a parental, filial, fraternal or conjugal affection, play a particularly important part in moulding our personalities:

Nous avons tous été pétris et repétris par ceux qui nous ont aimés et, pour peu qu'ils aient été tenaces, nous sommes leur ouvrage, - ouvrage que d'ailleurs ils ne reconnaissent pas, et qui n'est jamais celui qu'ils avaient rêvé.  
(Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 49)

From the point of view of their search for God, however half-heartedly they may believe in him, the moral obligations of many of Mauriac's characters take on added significance. 'C'est un fait de la vie chrétienne que cette interdépendance des destins', writes Mauriac in the preface to Volume XII of his complete works (p. xv). Brigitte Pian makes the same point in La Pharissienne when she says, 'Nous sommes chargés de toutes les âmes que Dieu a mises sur notre route' and goes on to remind her stepchildren of God's question to Cain, 'Qu'as-tu fait de ton frère?' (OC, V, 384).

Xavier Dartigelongue is particularly aware of how much men will have to answer for on the Day of Judgment:

Toutes ces relations personnelles d'homme à femme, d'homme à homme, dont chacune sera jugée à part! La question: 'Qu'as-tu fait de ton frère?' qui sera posée autant de fois qu'au cours de notre existence nous aurons régné sur quelqu'un, que nous aurons eu pouvoir sur un cœur, sur un corps, que nous aurons usé et abusé de ce corps . . . (L'Agneau, OC, XII, 298)

The 'brother' concerned can be anyone with whom the individual comes into contact. Rose Révolou asks herself the crucial question with reference to her blood-brother, but she is aware that it is equally applicable as far as Robert is concerned. In La Chair et le Sang May's spiritual director has to remind her particularly of her responsibilities towards Edward, although in many ways Claude has proved to be a better brother to her.

In Mauriac's terms the duty to love others selflessly as Christ did on earth embraces every obligation an individual has in his relations with his neighbour, either within or outside the family. Attempting to be virtuous by simply avoiding sins of commission is unacceptable. By failing to love relations, friends or enemies, positively and practically, an individual can hinder their search for God. Those who choose to ignore the law of love or

deliberately break it become or create obstacles which can keep others at least temporarily from an awareness of divine love. Human beings can fail each other in this respect to varying degrees and in different ways, but Mauriac is ever at pains to stress that any infraction of the law of love, however slight it may be, is none the less an offence that can cloud man's vision of the Truth. In the novels, therefore, the smallest failings are often shown to have, comparatively speaking, more serious repercussions than scandalous crimes. However wicked the world may consider Thérèse Desqueyroux for attempting to assassinate Bernard, in her own eyes to fail to do her utmost to save Marie's chance of future happiness would be a far worse transgression:

Ai-je envie de tuer son bonheur? Ce serait pire que ce que j'ai accompli autrefois. J'avais des circonstances atténuantes. Enterrée vive, je soulevais une pierre qui m'étouffait. Mais maintenant, quel est ce fond de mon être sur quoi toujours je retombe? (La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 393)

Georges Filhot in the same novel is guilt-ridden because one day he was unkind enough to ignore a friend who irritated him. In the eyes of the world his offence would appear minor, but Thérèse realizes that by behaving as he did Georges risked wounding his friend's soul as gravely as a weapon might have hurt him physically. Sometimes Mauriac's characters offend others unwittingly. After describing the way Jean-Louis jokingly snatches the young Yves's poems away from him, Mauriac points out: 'Ce que nous faisons aux autres, nous ne le mesurons jamais' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 23). In this instance Jean-Louis is only teasing; being of a different temperament he has no idea of the torture he is inflicting on his extremely sensitive brother. People may consequently never realize the gravity of their offences against others since they may never

actually see the results. Mauriac points out how the sin Léonie Costadot commits against Rose is an exception in this respect:

Toutes nos actions n'ont pas un visage. Il est rare que nos crimes nous apparaissent sous l'aspect d'une enfant blessée à mort. (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 126)

Whilst Mauriac insists that even small transgressions can often have very detrimental repercussions, he also stresses that the slightest 'mouvement de charité' can have equally beneficial consequences. Moreover, as anyone who shows true love to his neighbour automatically bears witness to the God of Love, whether he intends to set an example or not, Mauriac indicates that people can not only hinder but also help each other unwittingly in their 'vocation de sainteté'.

The principal way in which Mauriac's characters aid each other in their conscious or unconscious search for God is by obeying the law of love. Some, however, assist their relatives in obscure ways or even in spite of themselves. Occasionally circumstances arise over which they have no control but which allow them to become instruments of good. For the believer such circumstances are providential; for the unbeliever they are opportune, but none the less chance, occurrences. A good example of this is to be found in Thérèse Desqueyroux. Contemplating suicide for the first time, Thérèse hesitates because she is not absolutely sure 'qu'il n'y ait personne' (OC, II, 256). 'S'il existe, cet Être', she begins, but then in a flash she recalls her parish priest celebrating Mass one Corpus Christi and starts again, offering up a prayer that paradoxically is vibrating with faith:

. . . qu'il détourne la main criminelle avant que ce ne soit trop tard; - et si c'est sa volonté qu'une pauvre âme aveugle franchisse le passage, puisse-t-Il, du moins, accueillir avec amour ce monstre, sa créature. (OC, II, 256)

Immediately afterwards Balionte brings the news that tante Clara is dead. Thérèse cannot accept that this is anything but a coincidence: 'Si on lui parlait d'une volonté particulière, elle hausserait les épaules' (OC, II, 257). The fact remains, however, that the death of tante Clara is instrumental in saving Thérèse from suicide and could well be considered to lead her, if only subconsciously and fractionally, closer to God. It is both paradoxical and fitting that tante Clara should play such a providential role through her death. She is the only person who ever really cares about Thérèse's welfare, and, as Maurice Maucuer points out, although she is at war 'contre l'Être infini qui avait permis qu'elle fût sourde et laide' (OC, II, 217), she is 'plus proche de Dieu, plus croyante que ces catholiques dont le cœur est sec'.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the novels spiritual counselling is shown to be one of the least successful forms of mutual service, especially if it is not backed up by example. Those who give advice or evangelize too readily often fail to take into account the fact that people learn not so much from what they are told but from what they experience. As Mauriac observes in Dieu et Mammon, 'Ce qui a convaincu le chrétien ne vaut, le plus souvent, que pour lui seul' (OC, VII, 327). Writing of the over-zealous Christian convert who is anxious to share his joy with others, Mauriac claims:

Qu'il lui faut de temps pour s'apercevoir que, s'il peut beaucoup pour les autres, c'est dans une mesure qui lui demeure inconnue! (Souffrances et Bonheur du chrétien, OC, VII, 259)

Those who preach to others are also inclined to overlook certain basic psychological traits of human nature and forget that people

---

1. M. Maucuer, op. cit., p. 63.

have a perverse tendency to reject rather than to accept good advice. Madeleine Frontenac says that Jean-Louis is obsessed by the idea of changing the character, situation or ideas of other people. Then he wonders himself whether he is not in danger of reinforcing the very tendencies he would discourage:

. . . quand je crois les retenir, ils concentrent leurs forces pour se précipiter dans leur direction, à l'opposé de ce que j'aurais voulu . . . (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 80)

At the same time it is to a certain extent illogical or symptomatic of a lack of faith for a believer to be obsessively anxious about the behaviour of his neighbour. If the Christian believes that he is loved infinitely by an all-powerful God, whose very name is Love, he must also accept that every other person enjoys the same care. Alain Gajac makes this point to his mother when she implies that he should exert more influence on Simon Duberc. Jean-Louis Frontenac worries excessively about his family, particularly José and Yves. However, he has to admit his own powerlessness to change the character or destiny of others, and realizes that 'ses deux frères feraient, ici-bas, ce pour quoi ils étaient venus, et tous les détours les ramèneraient infailliblement au point où on les attendait, où Quelqu'un les épiait . . .' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 80). Moreover, when an individual has a tendency to hold forth to others there is a danger that he will succumb to the temptation of spiritual pride and attempt to vie with God. He may then try to do more than influence by his powers of persuasion: he may take active steps to orientate the destiny of another individual without the latter's consent or co-operation. Whilst insisting that everyone who considers himself to be a Christian has an obligation to be as genuinely concerned about his neighbour's physical and spiritual welfare as his

own and to love others actively rather than purely emotionally, Mauriac repeatedly points out the risk the most well-intentioned person runs when he makes a positive move to interfere in the direction another individual's life is taking. Joseph Majault maintains that Brigitte Pian, 'si fausse que soit la préoccupation qui l'anime, fonde sa cruauté sur une raison qu'elle juge, à ses yeux, valable'.<sup>2</sup> However, although she may believe herself to be sincere and although it would be incorrect to label her simply as a malicious tyrant, the fact remains that this 'pharisienne' ruins the lives of all those around her. Similarly, despite his scrupulous soul-searching, Pierre Gornac is largely responsible for the tragedy of Destins. The abbé Calou would no doubt have warned him against 'cette interprétation téméraire du vouloir divin dont abusent trop de personnes pieuses' (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 333). Alain Forcas is another who falls into the trap. Anxious to see her married rather than single and vulnerable, Alain advises Tota to take Marcel Revaux as her husband. Although he knows nothing about him except his 'poèmes de guerre' (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 31), Alain credulously believes that Marcel's being at Cauterets is providential and that he will prove to be Tota's saviour. Later he has to acknowledge that he was regrettably mistaken and acted 'comme un superstitieux' (OC, III, 53).

Some of the most acceptable spiritual guidance that is to be found in Mauriac's novels is given by the clergy who have a special vocation for it. However, even the consecrated, experienced priests learn that they cannot be too cautious when they take active steps

---

2. J. Majault, Mauriac et l'art du roman, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1946, p. 178.

to direct the destiny of their flock. When their marriage turns tragic the parish priest of Jean and Noémi Péloueyre wonders how much of the blame must lie with him; had he been 'l'instrument docile de Dieu ou le pauvre curé de campagne s'était-il substitué à l'Être infini?' (Le Baiser au lépreux, OC, I, 203)? Referring to their attempt to encourage Simon Duberc's vocation to the priesthood, the Doyen points out to Alain Gajac:

Nous ne disposons pas de la vie d'un autre, fût-ce pour la donner à Dieu, surtout s'il dépend matériellement de nous.  
(Un adolescent d'autrefois, p. 69)

Even the wise abbé Calou makes errors of judgment, attentive though he is 'à ces contre-coups imprévisibles, à ces prolongements inconnus de nos actes dès que nous intervenons, fût-ce avec les meilleures intentions, dans la destinée d'un être' (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 391). He concludes that whilst the duty of every Christian is to announce the Good News, 'ce ne saurait être de transformer le prochain selon notre mode ni d'après nos vues particulières' (OC, V, 414). Having learnt from experience he also warns Louis about the trap of impure motives, those 'intérêts inavoués' and 'secrètes convoitises dont nous n'avons d'ailleurs qu'une conscience sourde' (OC, V, 415). It is noteworthy that the Mauriacien characters - lay or clerical - who offend most in this respect do so largely because they are in fact side-tracking the fundamental law of Christianity and complicating what is essentially a very simple message. Commenting on Pierre Gornac, for example, Amélie Fillon writes:

Privé le plus souvent de père, élevé par une mère dévote, il a reçu dès l'enfance la formation catholique, il n'en ignore pas moins l'essence du Christianisme qui est amour, douceur et compassion.<sup>3</sup>

---

3. A. Fillon, op. cit., p. 244.

Consequently the novels also emphasize that there can be no question of taking a laissez-faire attitude in one's dealings with others, since God works through man's co-operation with his divine will. The Christian should, in the light of his common sense, take simple, logical steps to obey the principal Commandment to love, whilst having enough faith to hold back if unsure, or if his opinion regarding the right course of action differs markedly from another's. The obligation to love cannot be shelved, but sometimes this duty may be fulfilled best by taking no action at all; on occasions some kind of positive intervention is undoubtedly necessary, indeed vital. Thus Jean-Louis concludes:

Quelle folie d'avoir cru que le résultat apparent de nos efforts importe tant soit peu . . . Ce qui compte, c'est ce pauvre effort lui-même pour maintenir la barre, pour la redresser, surtout pour la redresser . . . Et les fruits inconnus, imprévisibles, inimaginables de nos actes se révéleront un jour dans la lumière, ces fruits de rebut, ramassés par terre, que nous n'osions pas offrir . . . (OC, IV, 81)

Prayer is one way in which some of Mauriac's characters hope to help their relatives find God. It is considered a meaningless waste of time by those who have no faith. For believers, however, it is all-powerful. Once Robert Costadot has abandoned her, prayer is the only way Rose has of loving him. Mauriac would certainly suggest it as a possible answer to Élisabeth Gornac's rhetorical question in Destins: 'Comment sauver les gens malgré eux?' (OC, I, 502). Even the worldly Tota concedes that her brother may be able to affect her life through his prayers, so she perversely tries to flee their influence:

Elle s'enfoncerait de nouveau dans ces ténèbres où elle se croyait hors de portée, à l'abri de tout ce qu'un être comme Alain peut inventer pour agir sur une créature, pour l'envelopper d'un immense réseau de prière . . . .  
(Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 232-33)

When Pierre Gornac realizes that he has been fortifying the ranks of 'les maladroits' who 'desservent la cause qu'ils voudraient défendre et ne savent que la rendre haïssable' (Destins, OC, I, 505), he decides that in future he will avoid causing harm by serving others through a life of prayer. After Bob's death he promises that 'jusqu'à son dernier souffle, dans toutes ses communions et ses prières, le salut du petit Lagave aurait la première place entre toutes ses intentions' (OC, I, 512).

In La Pharisienne Mauriac suggests that prayer should not be considered simply as an easy option, which excuses the individual from making any other acts of love. After their confrontation over the Voyods, the abbé Calou does not stop loving Jean, who remains constantly in his thoughts and prayers. However, Jean knows nothing of this and having no faith himself would not appreciate it if he did. Consequently, although he has not been abandoned by the priest, he feels rejected and the sense that no one cares about him drives him further into despair and sin. The same point is made in Les Chemins de La mer. After leaving Denis emotionally wounded in the garden and going off to read her letter from Robert, Rose begins to pray:

Mais les délices mêlées de larmes de cet agenouillement étaient traversées par l'inquiétude qui lui venait de Denis. Elle n'aurait pas dû laisser son petit frère, ce soir. C'était une nature blessée; Pierre Costadot disait qu'il y avait en Denis une vocation de souffrance. C'est trahir Dieu, pensa-t-elle, en se levant tout à coup, que de négliger son frère sous prétexte de prier . . . (OC, V, 154)

Prayer is not the only mystical way some of Mauriac's characters hope to be of service to their loved ones. Those who believe in the power of prayer also believe in atonement and the redeeming power of suffering, in 'ce régime d'échanges, de compensations, de

réversibilités où la Grâce fait vivre ceux qui croient' (OC, V, 407). The abbé Calou tells Louis Pian that if one can do nothing else 'on peut toujours souffrir pour les autres' (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 377). However, as Mauriac points out in Souffrances et Bonheur du chrétien, this suffering must be accepted by the Christian 'en imitation de son Dieu crucifié, en union avec lui' (OC, VII, 244) and offered up in a spirit of pure love.

## 2. THE HUMAN REFLECTION OF DIVINE LOVE

Mauriac maintains in his works that the human soul is not only immortal but also ageless and fundamentally immutable, so that men die with essentially the same soul as they had as children. This point is made in La Fin de la Nuit:

C'était un secret que connaissait Thérèse: sous la couche épaisse de nos actes, notre âme d'enfant demeure, inchangée; l'âme échappe au temps. (OC, II, 381)

Some of Mauriac's characters may think that life, sin and suffering have changed their inner selves, but at heart, he insists, they are basically the same. The belief that man always remains a child in his soul is significant, for, as Mauriac stresses in several of his works, it is having the qualities of a child which gives the key to the Kingdom of Heaven. In Journal d'un homme de trente ans Mauriac writes:

Cette part en nous d'inaliénable, cette part vierge qui demeure à Dieu en dépit de toutes les souillures, qu'elle soit notre refuge, notre salut, notre force . . . (OC, IV, 236)

However, just as there are two kinds of 'solitude mauriacienne' to which Nelly Cormeau refers as 'solitude choisie' and 'solitude subie',<sup>4</sup> there is also a desirable kind of childlike quality and an undesirable, egoistic childishness. The latter poisons the lives of several of

---

4. N. Cormeau, op. cit., p. 233.

Mauriac's heroes and can often be attributed to their love-deprived youth or poor parental guidance.<sup>5</sup>

Since life should involve the constant exchange of love between the Creator and his creatures, it is clearly desirable that by the time a child reaches adolescence he should be exercising his capacity to love others as distinct from self. However, the fact that the law of love calls for men to love others as themselves presupposes they must first accept themselves as lovable, despite all their faults and imperfections. If a child is not accepted by his parents, it is unlikely that he will have a healthy and balanced awareness either of his own value or other people's. The vital parental affection which is so often lacking in the families Mauriac depicts is necessary precisely because it helps the young to move on to the all-important stage of loving others. Several of his heroes remain basically egocentric because, starved of parental love, they turn inwards upon themselves and supply their own need for affection by excessive and crippling self-preoccupation. Like Jean-Paul Johanet and Thérèse Desqueyroux they dwell morbidly on themselves and their solitude.<sup>6</sup> Lacking the drive to give love selflessly they never find the key to the mystery of love. In Sainte Marguerite de Cortone Mauriac pin-points another danger: 'Les adolescents méprisés dans leur famille deviennent dangereusement sensibles à l'amour qu'ils inspirent au dehors' (OC, VII, 343). Bob Lagave is a typical example of such an adolescent.<sup>7</sup>

---

5. This subject is considered in detail in Chapter II. See above, pp. 37-53.

6. See above, Chapter II, pp. 44-45.

7. See above, Chapter II, p. 40.

Even when an individual has received abundant supplies of affection as a child, his desire for love will certainly not die with adulthood. It is to be hoped, however, that such a person's capacity to love others rather than himself will be exercised increasingly throughout life. Once Louis's spiritual rebirth has begun he analyses his past failings and writes with regret: 'Ceux que je devais aimer sont morts; morts ceux qui auraient pu m'aimer' (Le Noeud de vipères, OC, III, 512). The order in which he puts these two statements is significantly indicative of his maturity. If love received is wasted, stored or expended wholly on self instead of being given back to others, an individual will become as spiritually parched as if he had never received any love. Consequently parents do not help their children when they spoil them or fail to encourage them to grow out of the self-centred, narcissistic world in which infants are naturally cocooned. Several of Mauriac's characters have been so over-protected or possessed by their parents that they fail to mature into independent human beings. Alain Gajac and Fernand Cazenave are notable cases in point.<sup>8</sup> They have no faith in themselves and have relied so much on parental adulation that they have not exercised their own capacity to love others outside the family orbit. Consequently, as a primary obstacle in the way of Mauriacien protagonists striving to find 'le chemin de la vraie vie'; Roger Bichelberger isolates 'le personnage de la mère qui, non contente d'enfanter et d'éduquer, en viendra à étouffer toutes les aspirations de l'enfant, du jeune homme sensible qui ne saura manquer de se révolter'.<sup>9</sup>

---

8. See above, Chapter II, pp. 47-49.

9. R. Bichelberger, Rencontre avec . . . Mauriac, Paris, Éditions de l'École, 1973, p. 58.

Thus, for a variety of reasons, the majority of Mauriac's heroes are slow to mature into adulthood. Some never fully realize that 'le temps d'être aimé n'est plus' and that 'le temps d'aimer' is upon them (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 149), so they remain frustrated, for it is the selfless exercise of man's capacity to love which provides the key to the satisfaction of man's need to be loved. On the other hand Jean-Louis Frontenac, for example, illustrates the fact that a child brought up by judicious parents who love their offspring whole-heartedly and selflessly has a greater chance of maturing both emotionally and psychologically so that he is capable of loving others and finding fulfilment in his human relationships.

Moreover, unselfish parental love is beneficial on yet another account. Although a child should learn to love others and to find God in them at as early an age as possible, the Christian is called ideally to love his neighbour in response to the love God has shown, and continues to show, him. However, this love, as revealed in the New Testament, is so infinite, so unconditional, so gratuitous, so embracing that man finds it difficult to understand let alone accept, appreciate and enjoy. His nature is such that he believes in bargaining for everything: he suspects anything that is offered freely. Thus Thérèse Dézaymeries is typical of many Christians who consciously or unconsciously believe that somehow they can earn God's love, that they have to buy their redemption from God, as if the price had not already been paid. She is one of several Mauriacien characters who do not seem to realize that rather than having to work for their salvation, they have only to work it out in co-operation with God. Thus Fabien feels safe in the knowledge that his mother is doing all she can to secure him a place in Heaven:

Ni l'enfer ne troublait Fabien, ni le purgatoire,  
parce qu'aucune indulgence n'était négligée et qu'avec  
méthode il puisait dans le trésor de l'Église.  
(Le Mal, OC, VI, 4)

Élisabeth Gornac is not the only 'practising' Catholic in Mauriac's novels who considers her religion 'une police d'assurance contre l'enfer' (Destins, OC, I, 520). Brigitte Pian 'qui progressait dans la vie spirituelle comme elle eût fait dans l'étude d'une langue étrangère' (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 367) views her faith as a kind of examination she has to pass in order to please God. More often than not she fails to recognize honestly that any good marks she does achieve are due to God working in her. She thinks constantly in terms of her 'devoir' apparently oblivious to the fact that the words 'law' and 'duty', as she understands them, have no place in a Christian's vocabulary since 'il n'y a plus de droit littéral, quand l'amour règne' (Vie de Jésus, OC, VII, 111).

In his letter to Jean Cocteau published in the Figaro Littéraire of 29 December 1951 Mauriac sums up his faith:

Car nous sommes aimés. Voilà le fond de tout . . . .  
Le christianisme tient tout entier dans cette incroyable  
nouvelle que la créature est aimée de son Créateur et, ce  
qui est plus étonnant encore, qu'elle aussi, toute misérable  
qu'elle est, se trouve capable d'aimer son Créateur.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, accepting this relatively simple creed as an intellectual fact is quite different from believing it in the heart. The problem consequently remains as to how the whole ego comes to appreciate and respond to the infinite love of God. As Mauriac remarks in Blaise Pascal et sa soeur Jacqueline, 'Qu'il y a loin de la connaissance de Dieu à l'aimer!' (OC, VIII, 209).

---

10. Cited by P.-H. Simon, op. cit., p. 174.

When talking to the sceptical curé of Baluzac, Xavier Dartigelongue says that 'on ne peut pas aimer une idée' (L'Agneau, OC, XII, 296), and towards the end of Les Anges noirs Gabriel writes to Alain Forcas, 'Et que signifie: aimer Dieu? Un mouvement affectif à l'égard d'une entité? c'est impensable. Aimer est un acte charnel' (OC, III, 318). This fundamental incapacity on the part of man to love a shapeless abstraction is only partly overcome for the Christian by the Incarnation, and throughout the history of Christianity a knowledge of human love has been considered a stepping-stone to an understanding of God and to a positive response to him. Discussing the spiritual life of the Christian, Cardinal Basil Hume writes:

Our response, our attitude, depends on our realisation of God's attitude towards us. If I experience love or have experienced it, this is the means whereby I can explore the mystery of God's love. Not that I must have a love for God similar to that which I experience for others, but experience itself shows me what I mean to God. And the fact of living in that thought, dwelling in that thought, will reveal secrets and increase in us the realisation of the depth, strength, and warmth of his love.<sup>11</sup>

Mauriac makes the same point in Nouveaux Mémoires intérieurs when he states that 'tout amour, et même le pur amour fénelonien, n'est pas concevable sans ce cœur de chair qui bat depuis tant d'années' (p. 123). Indeed, in as far as it is the heart 'qui, en nous, conçoit les premiers principes' (Blaise Pascal et sa sœur Jacqueline, OC, VIII, 208), one would scarcely expect an individual's intellectual acceptance of the concept of God to develop into a truly living faith unless he had first experienced a reflection of God's love in human form. Thus, although one has to concede that, in the words of Jean de Fabrègues, 'l'unique amour peut être entendu par ceux-là

---

11. Cardinal B. Hume, Searching for God, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1977, p. 130.

aussi qui n'ont pas été humainement aimés',<sup>12</sup> the experience of love received within the family is bound to play a crucial role in the spiritual development of a child, and this truth is highlighted in several of Mauriac's novels. For example, one cannot help but wonder how meaningful the words, 'Dieu est l'amour', could be for Guillou de Cernès, when, open and eager to learn, he goes with his father to the cemetery, sees the Church and begins to think of God:

Il savait que 'le bon Dieu n'y était pas', que M. le curé ne voulait pas y laisser le bon Dieu par crainte des sacrilèges. Le bon Dieu n'était pas non plus dans la chapelle du château où Fraulein entassait des balais, des caisses, des chaises brisées. Où résidait-il, le Dieu de ce monde cruel? Où donc avait-il laissé une trace? (Le Sagouin, OC, XII, 44)

If the experience of love received can be regarded as a kind of sacramental introduction to the love of God, it is significant that in normal circumstances the first humans with whom a baby comes into contact and subsequently develops a relationship are his parents, for, as Mauriac frequently emphasizes, of all the forms of love that there are, it is parental love which is spontaneously the most altruistic and best reflects the love of God. As a parent has the potential to be such a powerful ambassador, it is clearly desirable that he should express his love in a practical, meaningful way so that his child subconsciously sees in him a faithful image of God the Father. If a parent sacrifices himself for the real welfare of his offspring he is likely to be a useful instrument in the latter's subsequent search for a true Christian faith without even realizing it. Standing very much 'in loco patris' as far as his nieces and nephews are concerned, Xavier Frontenac provides a good example of such an

---

12. J. de Fabrègues, op. cit., p. 160.

attitude; he loves them unconditionally just because they are Frontenacs:

Les qualités particulières de ses neveux ne comptaient pas pour lui: Jean-Louis, au lieu d'être un écolier éblouissant d'intelligence et de vie, eût-il été une petite brute, son oncle ne l'en aurait pas moins aimé; ce qui leur donnait, à ses yeux, un prix inestimable ne dépendait pas d'eux.  
(Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 5)

Although he would not even consider the subject himself, the love Xavier has for his nieces and nephews is similar to the love of God who loves his creatures not because they are good but simply because he created them. Despite the fact that Xavier is indifferent to religion and 'n'aurait pas voulu croire que ce qu'il éprouvait était d'ordre mystique' (OC, IV, 5), he loves the Frontenac children with the all-important spirit of self-forgetfulness, and shows his love in actions.

With regard to any possible distinction between maternal and paternal affection, the fact that they may be expressed in different ways does not imply that they differ in importance, since 'il n'y a qu'un seul amour'. Alain Gajac, Fabien Dézaymeries and Jacques of La Robe prétexte are examples of Mauriacien heroes who are shown to suffer from the absence of paternal love and guidance. However, during infancy at least, any religious influence in the home is most likely to be exercised by the mother, and according to Mauriac the maternity which constitutes a woman's prime function in life is twofold:

. . . c'est de créer des hommes, de les porter, de les nourrir, de les élever au sens profond du mot, et, après les avoir enfantés à la vie de la chair, de les enfanter à la vie de l'esprit. (L'Éducation des filles, OC, VIII, 319)

On several occasions Mauriac claims that mothers/wives are naturally endowed with a particularly marked propensity for self-giving, and

in Journal I he states that 'rien ne ressemble davantage au mystère du ciel que cet amour de la femme pour les hommes qu'elle a portés' (OC, XI, 102).

Mauriac's tendency to point more to the benefits of maternal rather than paternal love can be explained to a large extent by the fact that he lost his own father before he was two years of age, and was particularly devoted to his mother. The absence of his father made this attachment even more exclusive and Madame Mauriac's influence all the greater. In Commencements d'une vie Mauriac writes:

Tout ce qui touchait à elle prenait à mes yeux un caractère sacré et avait part à sa perfection, jusqu'aux domestiques, aux objets. (OC, IV, 139)

In La Rencontre avec Barrès Mauriac refers to the way Jean de la Ville de Mirmont's mother was a stepping-stone to faith for her son:

. . . sa mère existait. C'était donc que la beauté, que la vertu, que l'amour existaient. Jean croyait en Dieu parce que sa mère priait Dieu. (OC, IV, 195)

As far as the novels are concerned this tendency to regard the mother as an embodiment of the concept of God is particularly noticeable in Le Mystère Frontenac, where Blanche stands very much 'in loco Dei'. For Yves 'maman, oncle Xavier, demeuraient sacrés' (OC, IV, 49). Mauriac's devotion to his mother is also mirrored in La Robe prétexte. Having been abandoned by his father, Jacques is only six when his mother dies. He cannot remember her features, which are just a blur to him, but he retains certain memories of her which stay with him as he grows up. He recalls how thoroughly miserable and afraid he was when his mother left him at school on the first day. When she picks him up later on, she appears to him as nothing less than a saviour:

Dans aucun autre moment de ma vie, je n'ai connu ce sentiment frénétique de délivrance et de joie. Je me lève, je cours, elle me prend dans ses bras. Je suis sauvé. (OC, I, 9)

Similarly, when Jacques is given a photograph of his mother as an Easter present, he exclaims to Camille, 'C'est un portrait venu du ciel . . . .' (OC, I, 9).

### 3. DISTORTED CHRISTIANITY AND THE IMPOSTER IMAGE OF GOD

In several works Mauriac suggests that however well or badly a parent loves his children he may well have more influence on them than anyone else ever has. In Sainte Marguerite de Cortone he reminds the reader of the natural tendency offspring have to revere their parents:

Rappelle-toi: notre mère avait toujours raison, elle ne pouvait pas se tromper, il n'était pas besoin qu'elle fût une sainte pour participer à l'infailibilité divine. (OC, VII, 358)

In Le Jeune homme Mauriac again draws attention to the way young children consider their parents as 'demi-dieux pleins de perfections', but then comes adolescence and 'le père se mue en un despote blessant; la mère n'est qu'une pauvre femme' (OC, IV, 415). Some people carry this parent-worship to extremes, throughout adolescence and even adulthood. They idolize either father or mother as a model of perfection. When such a parent proves to be quite unworthy of this idolatrous filial passion and a mere human prone to sin like all other mortals, the results can be dire.

Andrès Gradère has an idealized image of his father whom he hero-worships. He hates to hear Mathilde speak ill of him. He imagines his 'vie d'amour, de bonheur' and approves of his spending his money on 'des fêtes inimaginables' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 303) instead of accumulating wealth like Symphorien Desbats. Andrès trusts Gabriel, convinced that the latter will repay him a hundredfold

for anything he does to help him. More important still, he believes his father loves him selflessly 'pas égoïstement, comme Tamati' and will help him to be loved by others: 'Je comptais sur lui, sur ses leçons, pour être aimé, moi, triste insecte' (OC, III, 303). Then he begins to see Gabriel as he really is. For a while André refuses to acknowledge the evidence: certain allusions, Symphorien's insults, and public opinion in Liogeats. Then suddenly his eyes are opened to the truth:

Oui, tout à coup, j'ai vu, j'ai entendu cet homme que je ne connaissais pas, à l'existence duquel je ne croyais pas. Soudain, il m'apparaissait tel que tu le vois, que vous le voyez tous, ici . . . . (OC, III, 303)

When self-deception is no longer possible and André is obliged to suspect his father of murder, the blow almost drives him to suicide. For a long time Jean de Mirbel would rather deceive himself than have to acknowledge his mother 'pût avoir part à ce qu'il connaissait ou pressentait des passions et des crimes humains' (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 312). Eventually he meets with evidence so overwhelming that he is no longer able to suppress the truth and his goddess is shattered. The effect this disillusionment has on him is extremely noxious; it causes immediate pain and sexual problems in later life.

There is also evidence in the novels of the way offspring who may not worship their parents as false gods still have a general tendency to judge them as if they should be models of virtue. Marie Desqueyroux says she considers it absurd 'que des enfants s'érigent en juges de ceux qui les ont mis au monde, scrutent leur vie sentimentale, s'indignent ou se désespèrent à propos de ce qu'ils y découvrent . . . .' (La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 368). Jacques of La Robe prétexte admits his guilt in this respect, when he recalls seeing his grandmother during dinner on All Saints Day as 'une idole

un peu acariâtre et goulue' forgetting 'sa charité, sa foi, ses deuils innombrables, toute une vie sans amour qui avait marqué de mille plis amers ce vieux visage souffrant' (OC, I, 49). Rightly or wrongly Paule de la Sesque justifies her impromptu engagement to Bob which she knows will be a blow to her parents by referring in a critical tone to the example they have set her, and she asks Élisabeth, 'Mais eux-mêmes ont-ils jamais pensé à autre chose dans la vie qu'à leur plaisir?' (Destins, OC, I, 455). The poet Nicolas Plassac has a romantic and quite false image of his mother, and he dreads the occasions when he finds it impossible to blind himself to her vulgarity and materialism. Even Thérèse Desqueyroux, who is too realistic and perceptive to have any real or lasting illusions in this respect, feels the need to attribute some kind of nobility to her unworthy father, at least in his absence:

Le seul homme supérieur qu'elle crût connaître, c'était son père. Elle s'efforçait de prêter quelque grandeur à ce radical entêté, méfiant, qui jouait sur plusieurs tableaux . . . .  
(Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 216)

Raymond Courrèges has a fixed image of his father which was formed when he was a child but which stays with him long after he has lost his innocence. When they are both discussing Maria Cross in the garden, Raymond begins to suspect that she may be more than just another patient to his father, but he cannot entertain the thought for longer than a second:

Lui non plus ne pouvait introduire l'amour dans l'image qu'il se faisait de ce père, exaspérant certes, mais entre ciel et terre, et toujours tel qu'il apparaissait à ses yeux d'enfant: sans passions, sans péché, inaccessible au mal, incorruptible, au-dessus de tous les autres hommes. (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 88)

This kind of attitude on the part of children vis-à-vis their parents highlights the fact that the latter are in a powerful and

privileged position as potential evangelists. Whether they exploit, waste or abuse this advantage they are almost sure to influence the spiritual destiny of their offspring for better or worse. Bearing in mind that because of 'la loi de contradiction' children are inclined, especially during adolescence, to be rebellious rather than imitative, Mauriac insists that parents are constantly setting examples and 'dans bien des cas, c'est, par un juste retour, la loi d'imitation qui finit par l'emporter sur l'autre' (L'Éducation des filles, OC, VIII, 325). How parents live up, or fail to live up, to the moral code they profess is infinitely more important than what they say:

A vrai dire, filles ou garçons, ce ne sont pas les préceptes que nous leur donnons qui risquent d'impressionner beaucoup nos enfants. Ce qui compte, ce n'est pas ce que nous leur disons de temps en temps et avec solennité, mais c'est ce que nous faisons. Nous élevons nos enfants sans le savoir et en vivant. Nous avons dans nos maisons ces appareils enregistreurs qui ne laissent rien perdre. Ce qu'ils retiennent de l'ensemble de notre vie, c'est cela qui a le plus de pouvoir sur eux. Nos velléités de système, de programme comptent pour bien peu, à côté de la puissance de l'exemple. (OC, VIII, 322)

The higher their moral aspirations are, the more likely parents are to fall short of them, and in this respect parents are to a certain extent bound to fail. However, the Catholic parents Mauriac describes often do not even try to set good examples to their young. They respond badly to the law of love in their relations with others both inside and outside the immediate family. Paradoxically some fail in this respect because they are so passionately concerned about their children's interests. Addressing Isa in his journal, Louis writes:

A cette époque, ton amour pour tes enfants t'accaparait tout entière; ils dévoraient tes réserves de bonté, de sacrifice. Ils t'empêchaient de voir les autres hommes. Ce n'était pas seulement de moi qu'ils t'avaient détournée, mais du reste du monde. (Le Noeud de vipères, OC, III, 412)

In Les Chemins de la mer Léonie Costadot behaves savagely towards Lucienne Révolou. She defends herself later on the grounds that her

motives were disinterested, but, however sincere she may be, she wounds Lucienne no less cruelly because she does so on behalf of her sons. Georges Filhot appreciates the difference between Thérèse and other mothers 'pour lesquelles tout ce qui concerne leurs enfants a une importance démesurée' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 197). As spokeswoman for Marie, Thérèse keeps a sense of objectivity:

Il se réjouit de ce que Thérèse s'exprimait d'un ton aussi détaché: en vérité, ce n'était pas une mère comme une autre. Elle comprenait tout. (La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 400-401)

Even Blanche Frontenac has to summon up all her inner strength to encourage Xavier to marry Joséfa, since this union would inevitably deprive her children of some of the family fortune.

Most of the parents Mauriac depicts behave in such a way that they inculcate into their children their own materialistic moral code, which is then handed down again to subsequent generations. Thus we are told that Léonie Costadot 'avait pris la suite de ses parents sans avoir eu à en discuter les règles, pas plus qu'eux-mêmes ne l'avaient fait' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 44). Some of these parents are anticlerical atheists or agnostics. Others are far more harmful and certainly more reprehensible, because they claim to be Christians whilst propagating their idolatrous cult of wealth. The 'God' to whom they pay lip-service is a caricature of a petty and temperamental earthly judge, whom they attempt to deceive or bribe. Julia Dubernet is one of several who believe in an amorphous 'God' whose very existence is largely irrelevant. When asked whether Julia has a faith, Madame Agathe says in her reply: 'Ah! elle est bien tranquille du côté de Dieu. Mais s'il n'existait pas, ça ne l'étonnerait pas autrement' (Galigai, OC, XII, 122). Parents like Julia foster attitudes like those of Élisabeth Gornac

and Janine in Le Noeud de vipères, whose faith is so removed from reality that it does not seem to have any connexion at all with everyday life, let alone help them in times of trouble. They appear to accept this as normal and never ask the question Mauriac poses in Le Mal: 'qu'est-ce que la foi si elle n'est pas vécue?' (OC, VI, 104). The essential mystery of the Resurrection does nothing to assuage Élisabeth's grief when Bob Lagave is killed, and when Louis asks Janine, who is another product of a vain Christian upbringing, if her faith offers her any solace after Phili has abandoned her, she cannot even see what her religion could possibly have to do with her relationship with her husband:

Tout ça n'avait rien à voir ensemble . . . , elle n'aimait pas à mêler la religion avec ces choses-là. Elle était pratiquante, mais justement elle avait horreur de ces rapprochements malsains. (Le Noeud de vipères, OC, III, 528)

In many of his novels Mauriac shows up the shallow insincerity of nominal Christian parents who, instead of introducing their offspring to a personal and meaningful relationship with Christ, reduce Catholicism to nothing but an empty 'ensemble de formules et de rites' (Les Maisons fugitives, OC, IV, 327), with the result that André Gradère is just one more typical First Communicant: 'un de ces innombrables enfants qui font "leur communion" parce que c'est l'usage, et qui n'y pensent plus jamais'; such children subsequently grow up to consider Christianity as 'le seul système connu pour régler honnêtement les cérémonies nuptiales et funèbres' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 258). Although at one stage Janine of Le Noeud de vipères tells Louis that she fulfils her obligations as a Catholic in the same tone of voice as she might say she pays all her social security contributions, after Louis's death she realizes the extent of her parents' failure to bring her up like other Christians with whom she

now has fellowship and whose principles are not divorced from their life, who at least attempt to bridge the gap between what they do and what they believe, 'qui peuvent avoir leurs défauts, leurs faiblesses, mais qui agissent selon leur foi, qui se meuvent en pleine grâce' (OC, III, 535).

Mauriac could hardly be a more sympathetic writer towards his characters and yet, as was stated in Chapter I of this thesis,<sup>13</sup> he is uncompromising in his dislike and disapproval of self-satisfaction and smugness, especially amongst Christians who come to terms with their repeated infringements of the law of love by gerrymandering with facile distinctions between those sins which they consider 'matière à confession' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 210) and those which are not. Mathilde Desbats is particularly guilty in this respect and it takes her a long time to accept the fact that she is an accomplice to murder! Throughout his works as a whole Mauriac repeatedly emphasizes that every Christian should have a concept of right and wrong which is quite different from that of the 'world', since Christ came to question the accepted values of society and to raise standards of morality indisputably, so that now nothing less than perfection is acceptable. In Journal du temps de l'occupation, for example, Mauriac writes:

Il est clair que la justice de Dieu se moque de notre justice, que les lois du royaume de Dieu se moquent de celles des fils d'Adam. (OC, XI, 340)

However, many of the quite ardent Catholics in the novels evade the teachings of Christ to such an extent that they are themselves, and encourage their offspring to be, as self-satisfied as the rest of

---

13. See above, p. 21.

society. Alain Gajac is particularly critical of his mother and her fellow catechists:

J'ai commencé dès ma douzième année à me faire une certaine idée que Donzac, l'année dernière et cette année, m'a rendue claire, c'est qu'à leur insu, les chrétiens qui nous ont élevés prennent en tout le contre-pied de l'Évangile, et que de chaque béatitude du Sermon sur la Montagne, ils ont fait une malédiction: qu'ils ne sont pas doux, qu'ils ne sont pas seulement injustes mais qu'ils exècrent la justice. (Un adolescent d'autrefois, p. 19)

Thus the devout Isa of Le Noeud de vipères is one of many who argue that the Christian does not have to take the Gospels 'au pied de la lettre' (OC, III, 411), and in so doing excuses a blatant lack of charity in several areas of her life. Isa is desperate to keep her children from Louis's influence, determined that they will have their religious education at whatever cost. Louis acknowledges that there was no sacrifice to which she would not have consented 'pour que demeurât intact, dans ces petits, le dépôt du dogme, cet ensemble d'habitudes, de formules, - cette folie' (OC, III, 406). However, any Christian witness Isa bears in her family is worthless, because she does not practise what she preaches. One of the most important ways she fails as a Christian parent is by accepting, albeit unwillingly, a spirit of enmity in her home, when her first priority should be to establish a reconciliation with Louis and not to rest until she has done everything in her power to achieve this. In fact she remains passive and quickly gives up trying to forgive, understand or even communicate with her husband.

In Mémoires intérieurs Mauriac says how difficult he finds it to accept that Christians should be so inclined to judge others when forgiveness and reconciliation are at the heart of their faith:

Quel mystère! Les hommes rejettent de l'Évangile ce qui, précisément, constitue la bonne nouvelle et qui devrait être le cœur du cœur de l'espérance humaine: ce pardon indéfiniment renouvelé, cette rémission des péchés attestée chaque fois que le Christ voit une créature à ses pieds: 'Tes péchés te sont remis.' (p. 174)

Many of the parents Mauriac describes prove to be stumbling blocks to those whose lives they affect, not only because they fail to live up to the Christian moral code but because they judge unmercifully those who fail along with them. Mauriac shows in his novels that people who sit in judgment on others almost invariably misjudge them irrationally. Sometimes they categorize their victim on the strength of one particular action. Élisabeth Gornac points out the error of doing this when she recalls how the whole of Viridis judged its otherwise ideal parish priest as a hypocrite because of an isolated 'assez scabreuse histoire' (Destins, OC, I, 479). Élisabeth realizes that in fact the priest had not deceived them at all; he was indeed good, kind and selfless: 'Seulement, il avait été capable aussi d'une action mauvaise . . . .' (OC, I, 479). Others make the mistake of judging a person wrongly by appraising his whole personality on the basis of a single characteristic. Louis of Le Noeud de vipères acknowledges his guilt in this respect:

La stupidité de Robert était ce qui m'apparaissait de lui, et je m'en tenais à cette apparence. Jamais l'aspect des autres ne s'offrit à moi comme ce qu'il faut crever, comme ce qu'il faut traverser pour les atteindre. (OC, III, 512)

Finally Mauriac insists that even if it were possible to make fair, accurate judgments, no man would have the right to do so. Only a Christian who has fulfilled to perfection his duty to love can say that he is not a sinner: such a person does not exist, so, as the abbé Ardouin tells Hubert, each individual has the right to hate only one of Christ's executioners: himself 'et pas un autre . . . .' (OC, III, 424).

Indeed throughout his novels Mauriac suggests that every Christian parent should teach his child to exercise on himself his natural tendency to judge others, for the simple reason that a person is unlikely to become less of a sinner unless he first acknowledges that

he is a sinner. To a certain extent Mauriac actually makes allowances for the atheistic Félicité Cazenave on these grounds. She has no qualms about her treatment of Fernand, because she does not see it as the objective onlooker does. She literally does not know what she is doing:

N'ayant jamais pratiqué l'examen de conscience, elle n'avait jamais souffert de ce honteux enivrement qu'elle éprouva à se sentir libre, seule avec l'unique objet de sa passion que d'abord elle retira du collège où son père avait exigé qu'il fût interné. (Genitrix, OC, I, 379)

Mauriac does not advocate regular use of the 'examen de conscience' because it is a healthy spiritual exercise in itself. For a long time Louis of Le Noeud de vipères is penetratingly lucid but fails to progress spiritually, because he simply gets used to the ugly picture he has of himself. He realizes in the end that his worst sin was not his avarice or hate but his refusal to do anything about them:

Je sentais, je voyais, je touchais mon crime. Il ne tenait pas tout entier dans ce hideux nid de vipères: haine de mes enfants, désir de vengeance, amour de l'argent; mais dans mon refus de chercher au delà de ces vipères emmêlées. (OC, III, 512)

Thus, in Mauriac's terms self-knowledge must be considered a means, not an end. Its purpose is defeated unless it leads an individual to open his heart to others in a state of self-forgetfulness, 'cette défaite dernière sans laquelle il n'est pas de vraie sainteté' (Blaise Pascal et sa soeur Jacqueline, OC, VIII, 259). Mauriac's novels contain an implicit warning to parents not to encourage their offspring to dwell masochistically on their failings and weaknesses so that they become as morbidly self-preoccupied as Jean-Paul Johanet or Edward Dupont-Gunther who lack the 'simplicité' and 'abandon' which would have helped them to lose themselves in loving others (La Chair et le Sang, OC, X, 159). There is another way in which too

much introspection can prove as spiritually harmful as self-complacency. There is a danger that the child brought up to be excessively self-analytical will grow hopelessly pessimistic about his own human nature. In his articles and essays Mauriac persistently urges people not to lose faith in man whatever their other religious leanings may be. In Journal du temps de l'occupation he writes:

. . . il ne faut pas perdre notre foi en l'homme. Ce ne serait pas la moindre de nos banqueroutes que celle qui détruirait en nous cette espérance que la créature humaine est capable d'être éclairée, entraînée à se dépasser dans le bien . . . .

Le mépris de l'homme sert de fondement à toutes les doctrines de mort . . . . Nier que les êtres puissent devenir meilleurs - c'est nier la Rédemption. (OC, XI, 352)

Further on in the same work we are told: 'l'enfer, c'est le désespoir éternel' (OC, XI, 355). In Le Noeud de vipères Louis states:

. . . c'est lorsque je me sens le plus lucide, que la tentation chrétienne me tourmente. Je ne puis plus nier qu'une route existe en moi qui pourrait mener à ton Dieu. (OC, III, 443)

He then says that if he could consider himself a more attractive person the 'Christian temptation' would be less strong. He also makes the point, however, that if he despised himself enough 'sans arrière-pensée' he would abandon the analysis of his soul and conscience as a fruitless task. In L'Éducation des filles Mauriac says that if parents do nothing else but assure their offspring that they have the freedom to progress spiritually they will have helped them considerably in their search for God:

Aussi lourde que soit l'hérédité d'un enfant, aussi redoutables que soient les passions dont il apportait le germe en naissant, nous avons fait pour lui tout le possible si nous avons réussi à le persuader, selon la saison, qu'une seule chose compte en ce monde: c'est de se perfectionner, c'est le perfectionnement intérieur. (OC, VIII, 324)<sup>14</sup>

---

14. For further comment on Mauriac's attitude to the question of free will see Chapter I, p. 22, below p. 211, Chapter V, pp. 246-56 and Conclusion, p. 269.

Thus Paul Courrèges gives Raymond extremely sound advice when he tells his son that to be over-pessimistic about human nature is as naive as being too optimistic: 'Ne croire qu'au mal, c'est ne pas connaître les hommes' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 88). On the other hand, parents who give such advice whilst also teaching their children the importance of the axiom 'Know thyself' do their offspring an even greater service. It is by giving her such wise counsel, as well as loving her unconditionally, that Louis puts his granddaughter well on the road he has taken himself. In conclusion one can say that, although it is only the first stage in the long process of learning how to love effectively, self-knowledge is a vital one since 'il n'est pas d'autre route, pour apprendre à aimer autrui, que la connaissance de soi-même, que ce regard sans illusion qui, à travers nous-mêmes, atteint toute l'humanité misérable' (Journal I, OC, XI, 34).<sup>15</sup>

Some of the parents Mauriac describes do not hide their idolatry of Mammon in a pharisaical cloak of hypocrisy but are none the less spokesmen of a caricature of the God of Love, which they encourage their offspring to fear rather than to adore with total confidence.<sup>16</sup> Alain Forcas is only one of several Mauriacien characters suffering from scruples which reveal a crippling anxiety instead of a well nurtured trust in a loving paternal deity. In Le Mal we are told that Fabien 'faisait exprès d'avaler une herbe avant la messe ou une gorgée d'eau en se lavant les dents, - prétexte à ne pas communier, tant il redoutait le sacrilège' (OC, VI, 5). The scandalous damage

---

15. For further comment on the importance attributed by Mauriac to lucid self-knowledge see below, pp. 201, 212, 257 and 268.

16. For comment on the extent to which Mauriac himself was subjected to this kind of religious upbringing see above, Chapter I, pp. 17-18.

caused by parents who encourage this kind of 'attention aux vétilles' is highlighted in Les Maisons fugitives:

. . . honteuse misère des scrupules, mal si répandu parmi les fidèles qu'il devrait inquiéter l'Église enseignante, non sur la vérité de ce qu'elle enseigne, mais sur l'image de Dieu que les théologiens de tous les temps ont créée à leur ressemblance et imposée à des générations de chrétiens torturés. (OC, IV, 329)

In the same work Mauriac also points to the fact that people who are the victims of this kind of upbringing are often so preoccupied with peccadilloes that they fail to see their real offences against the law of love.

Mauriac certainly does not advocate a lax discipline in the bringing up of children. Christian parents have a duty to see that high standards of moral behaviour are maintained in every sphere of life. They have too great a responsibility in this respect to be indulgent and thus encourage sin. In Journal d'un homme de trente ans Mauriac writes:

Une mère, même chrétienne, qui sourit au récit d'une faiblesse de jeune homme ne se doute pas que ce sourire stupéfie son enfant et le décide à choisir de pécher. (OC, IV, 262)

At the same time Mauriac maintains that the Christian faith must be shown and seen to be a positive, life-giving religion of love, not a negative, life-denying set of rules where the accent is put 'sur la restriction, sur la défense, sur l'interdit' (Les Maisons fugitives, OC, IV, 329). He implies that if a child accepts the discipline of Christianity as an end in itself out of fear, he will soon cease to respect it. Defending his faith in Journal I Mauriac writes:

Non, ce n'est pas une discipline toute nue dont nous avons besoin, c'est d'un amour. Si ce joug n'était celui de l'amour, qui le supporterait? (OC, XI, 78)

To a certain extent the history of Fabien Dézaymeries illustrates this point. When he reveals some envy of Joseph who is living on the

'montagne sainte' of Issy-les-Moulineaux, Thérèse admires Fabien and thinks it a virtue that he should experience such a feeling despite all the attractions of Parisian life. She is quite unaware of the true state of his soul: 'Un directeur y eût discerné la dernière grimace d'une volonté absurdement tendue et non pénétrée d'amour' (Le Mal, OC, VI, 16). Nevertheless, during the two years after Fanny is sent away, Fabien remains apparently unaffected by her influence:

Il s'abandonnait à un pieux mécanisme sans que sa sensibilité s'y intéressât. Enfant soumis, Fabien suivait la route d'avance tracée. (OC, VI, 27)

Thérèse is again ignorant of the fact that 'aucun amour ne vivifiait cette âme soumise' (OC, VI, 27). Predictably Fabien's negative kind of self-discipline ceases in the end to count for anything.

The God to whom the mature Mauriac ultimately gave his allegiance is the God of Love and Life who 'devait dire à François de Sales torturé de scrupules: "Je ne m'appelle pas celui qui damne, mon nom est Jésus . . ."' (Vie de Jésus, OC, VII, 86). This is certainly not the God devout Christians such as Brigitte Pian and Thérèse Dézaymeries worship. The deity to whom they introduce their dependants is an exacting taskmaster and killjoy who puts men on trial and maliciously spies on them in an effort to catch them red-handed, whenever he can. Élisabeth Gornac's typical education was in the hands of people who believed 'une jeune fille ne doit jamais rester seule' (Destins, OC, I, 459). Referring to his own over-solicitous educators, Mauriac asks in Le Baillon dénoué, 'Cette terreur de la contagion ne témoignait-elle pas d'un certain manque de foi dans la force de nos principes, dans l'efficacité de la Grâce?' (OC, XI, 442). Apart from the fact that it reveals a lack

of faith on the part of catechists, Mauriac shows in the novels that this kind of attitude produces dehumanized, and therefore less Christian, Christians and impedes considerably those who are searching for the true God of Love.

For a long time Thérèse Dézaymeries excuses the faults of Fanny Barrett, whose 'défaut de sens religieux' does not fail to frighten Fabien himself (Le Mal, OC, VI, 9). She actually shuts her eyes to 'ce qui, chez une autre, lui aurait paru abominable!' (OC, VI, 8). She finds her young friend particularly appealing because, without realizing it, she herself is and has been badly deprived of human love; she is attached 'à cette jeune femme comme à son unique part de tendresse en ce monde' (OC, VI, 8-9). Fabien is already sixteen when Thérèse's spiritual director warns her of the risk she has been running:

Elle avait, disait-il, enfermé le loup dans la bergerie. Ses soins autour d'une jeune âme étaient perdus, le Malin l'ayant à loisir ensemencée. (OC, VI, 11)

It is ironic that in sending Fabien to Paris Thérèse considers she is satisfying her own 'passion du sacrifice' (OC, VI, 13) for the sake of her son. For the young, passionate and virile Fabien, brought up in an over-protected environment, Paris is bound to be a den of iniquity! He is in fact so unused to society that when he finds himself alone in the capital he actually puts up his own shutters against love and friendship:

Distant, l'adolescent janséniste se défendait, à l'école, de l'abandon, de la familiarité, opposait la froideur des Dézaymeries à toutes les avances. (OC, VI, 15-16)

Eventually Thérèse considers opening her house to society, but it is too late. The quarantine in which she kept her young sons has already had its harmful influence on Fabien, whose natural temperament

is quite different from that of the more devout Joseph, and the subsequent events in Venice and Paris take their natural course. This situation arises largely because Thérèse has such a distorted idea of God and his Love. She believes that Christian virtue requires an individual to segregate himself from others for fear of contamination. Nothing, maintains Mauriac in Le Cahier noir, could be further from the truth:

Même les chrétiens, ce n'est pas ce détachement-là qui leur est proposé. Le Dieu qu'ils servent, ce Dieu qui leur a donné un cœur capable de le connaître et de l'aimer, s'est si peu détourné de la sanglante histoire des hommes qu'il s'y est engouffré: 'Et le Verbe s'est fait chair et il a habité parmi nous.' De sorte que bien loin qu'ils aient le droit de fuir les hommes en Dieu, il leur est enjoint de retrouver Dieu dans les hommes. (OC, XI, 366)

This was written in a political context, but the point is valid as far as human life generally is concerned and Mauriac argues it in various other works. In Mes grands hommes he maintains that 'ce dont le Christ d'abord nous délivre, c'est de l'indifférence à l'égard du prochain' (OC, VIII, 342) and in Pèlerins de Lourdes he writes:

'Dans la mesure où nous nous orientons vers Dieu, nous nous enracinons plus profondément dans la vie' (OC, VII, 494). In this way Mauriac emphasizes that loving God first and foremost automatically means loving men more - and loving men more does not always involve renouncing them. Michael Moloney indicates how this point is made through the medium of fiction in the history of Brigitte Pian: as soon as her relationship with the God of Love improves at the end of La Pharisienne, 'she finds place in her life and accords a place in the life of others to the passion of love which she had before so wholly rejected'.<sup>17</sup>

---

17. M.F. Moloney, op. cit., p. 89.

There are still more ways in which, for all her good intentions, Thérèse Dézaymeries's intransigent, legalistic attitude towards her religion impoverishes her own life and puts another boulder in Fabien's path. When Fanny visits the Dézaymeries with the news that she has nearly died from drug abuse, has had a divorce and remarried, Thérèse fails the God whom she thinks she is serving. Fabien shows only timidity, but is undoubtedly affected by Fanny's parting words: 'Je la hais, votre religion qui nous sépare! . . . S'il existait, je haïrais Celui qui nous sépare' (Le Mal, OC, VI, 23). Later Fanny herself reminds Fabien of the time Thérèse threw her out of the house:

- Ta pauvre mère, tu sais que je l'aimais; elle m'a chassée; mais si elle m'ouvrait seulement les bras . . . Tout de même, chéri, vois son existence: ce refus devant la vie . . .

- Qu'est-ce que tu appelles vie?

- C'est l'amour, mon amour. Moi, au moins, je n'ai cherché que lui et je l'ai trouvé . . . . (OC, VI, 57)

To appreciate the irony of this conversation one clearly has to be aware of the double significance of the words 'amour' and 'vie'. For Fanny 'la vie' means the pleasures of the world which are rarely innocent, 'l'amour' means an indefinite number of sexual affairs. In Christian terminology the words have other connotations. The fact remains, however, that Thérèse's lack of charity does not help the cause for which she stands. It is no doubt the memory of his mother's inflexibility over such matters that leads Fabien to start deceiving her. He believes she would only consent to his marrying the illegitimate Colombe if he presented the idea to her as an obligation and not as a pleasure. Instead of conveying to her son in meaningful terms the message that Christ came to bring life in all its fullness, Thérèse shows herself at times to be pharisaically

life-denying, and in this respect she is a fictional sister to Brigitte Pian.

When Xavier is talking to Dominique at the beginning of L'Agneau, he points out that God is very close, although she may think him far away. Her response is significant: 'Dieu? C'est Brigitte Pian!'. She then laughs and challenges him to contradict her. Xavier, however, laughs too, replying, 'Ce Dieu-là, vous avez raison de ne pas croire en lui: il n'existe pas' (OC, XII, 217). As the high priestess of a 'God' who does not exist, Brigitte exerts a pernicious influence on the emotional and spiritual lives of her stepchildren. She clings stubbornly to Pascal's misguided opinion that the vocation to the priesthood or religious orders generally is infinitely more valuable in God's eyes than the vocation to matrimony and family life, refusing to accept that it is clearly God's will that the majority of his creatures should learn to find a deep union with him 'through the perfect flowering of natural human love in marriage'.<sup>18</sup> In taking this attitude she sets her stepchildren a perfect example of how to fight the God of Love. She is so occupied by her sense of duty that she is blind to the real needs of Michèle whose character is such that she is particularly liable to feel sexually attracted to a boy at an early age. Unlike the truly Christian Puybarauds Brigitte refuses to accept that 'le plus beau des mystères de Dieu, en dépit du péché originel, est la naissance d'un petit enfant' (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 277). Her perverse prudishness on such points has a marked effect on Louis, although Brigitte never usurps the place his deceased mother keeps in his heart. As an impressionable child, however, he is influenced, if

---

18. H. Hurnard, Hinds' Feet on High Places, London, The Olive Press, 1979, p. 6.

only subconsciously, by her domineering personality. He inherits Brigitte's opinion regarding the Puybarauds, but his own words reveal the absurdity of a philosophy which would lead ultimately to the extinction of the human race:

J'ai peu changé sur ce point: je crois que tout le malheur des hommes vient de ne pouvoir demeurer chastes et qu'une humanité chaste ignorerait la plupart des maux dont nous sommes accablés . . . . (OC, V, 352)

It is significant that although his stepmother is as rigidly uncompromising on the question of sexual morality as la comtesse de Mirbel appears to be flexible, Louis Pian ends up with an attitude towards conjugal love that is almost as jaundiced as that of Jean de Mirbel. Brigitte's pharisaical hypocrisy is all the more striking and detrimental to the cause of Christianity because she pontificates about love although she has no experience of it whatsoever until Dr. Gellis enters her life, and she certainly does not know the meaning of divine love. She tells the Puybarauds:

Il y a une limite, même à la vertu; je dois me garder contre toute faiblesse, et si charitable que j'aie pu être à votre égard, je ne prétends point pousser la bonté jusqu'à la sottise . . . . (OC, V, 362)

She does not seem to know that the love of the true Christian God is boundless, since her imposter is characterized by a 'rigueur infinie' (OC, V, 368). It is hardly surprising therefore that Michèle, who professes to be 'une bonne catholique' (L'Agneau, OC, XII, 225), cannot understand Xavier's enthusiastic, passionate faith, as she grew up unloved and oppressed by someone who is considered to be an ideal disciple of Christ and yet does not understand what charity is. In La Pharisienne Michèle tells Louis how frightened she is of this paragon of virtue because 'elle déteste tellement qu'on soit heureux!' (OC, V, 289).

In various novels Mauriac points out that a religious upbringing which confuses virtue and ignorance is damaging, not only because it gives a distorted image of God, but also because it prevents the young from maturing into self-disciplined adults and can positively encourage rather than discourage sin. Jacques of La Robe prétexte is constantly in the company of women, and like Fabien in Le Mal he clearly suffers from the absence of a masculine influence in his life. He is kept in an unhealthy ignorance. He looks one evening at an illustration in the 'Pèlerin', and notices that 'un crucifix avec un brin de rameau ornaît la muraille', but 'on ne voyait pas le lit' (OC, I, 17). The absence of the bed in this particular picture is pointedly unnatural. Similarly Jacques's grandmother lowers her voice when she wants to discuss anything remotely scandalous with his aunt or Mademoiselle Dumoliers, which naturally makes the young boy listen all the harder. The danger of keeping him in such ignorance is revealed when his dissolute uncle comes home unexpectedly and describes in lyrical tones the joys of casino life and the facile and insipid existence on which he is thriving. It is a shabby monologue but through it Jacques catches a glimpse of 'un art, une littérature, une philosophie de la vie glorifiant la chair et toutes les délices inconnues, si attirantes qu'on lui avait défendu d'arrêter sur elles ses pensées' (OC, I, 49). The abbé arranges for Jean to walk home with him that night so that he can make sure his uncle's words have not made a serious impact on the boy. The abbé's advice is sound but so abstract that Jacques does not understand it:

Nous cherchons une satisfaction infinie, de tout notre cœur et de tout notre esprit. Prenons garde que les sens n'usurpent les droits de l'esprit et du cœur et ne réclament, eux aussi, une satisfaction infinie . . . (OC, I, 56)

Although they do not mean much to him, Jacques drinks in the abbé's words thirstily as he had done those of his uncle. He does not try to bring into harmony 'ces symphonies inconnues' (OC, I, 56), and yet it is precisely a correct understanding and balanced assimilation of the demands of the heart and soul on the one hand and those of the senses on the other that Jacques needs to ensure the healthy development of his whole personality. It is because of his over-protected upbringing that Jacques's moral code fails to become a fully integrated aspect of his personality. Consequently, when Liette offers herself wholly and unhesitatingly to him, he refuses to compromise principles which hardly seem to be his own, and we are told that the next day 'au réveil aucune métaphysique ne l''embarrassait' (OC, I, 127). The implication is that but for the death of his grandmother he might well have left the strait and narrow road to God without putting up a struggle. Although he returns for his grandmother's funeral, Jacques does not really know to what extent he is master of his passions, having been saved as much by force of circumstance as by the self-application of a personal moral code.

Thérèse Dézaymeries literally hides the real world from Fabien in her efforts to safeguard his virtue, forgetting 'qu'un autre avait eu part à la naissance de cet enfant pur mais enclin au rêve, dédaigneux de l'action et cependant bâti pour une rude dépense physique et qui s'exerçait à vivre dans l'ignorance de son corps à peine épanoui' (OC, VI, 6). Throughout the novel Mauriac makes it clear that by keeping her son in such extreme ignorance and blind to his own virility Thérèse actually drives Fabien to a life of vice rather than virtue, because his artificially suppressed senses

eventually refuse to be cheated any longer. Once the inevitable rebellion has occurred an existence free from sin seems an impossibility to him, until he has had 'à propos d'une enfant' the revelation Thérèse herself should have given him 'd'une volupté sanctifiée et de ces caresses dont les anges de l'ombre ne détournent pas leurs faces' (OC, VI, 105-106).

In Le Fleuve de Feu Madame de Villeron is an older friend from Gisèle's convent school, but she becomes a substitute for the deceased Madame de Plailly. As her 'petite mère' Lucile shows a genuine concern for Gisèle and eventually brings up the latter's illegitimate daughter for her. However, she also makes the same kind of mistakes as Thérèse Dézaymeries, failing to realize that to christianize is to humanize. As her own appreciation of the meaning of the Incarnation is misconceived, she propagates a distorted image of Christ. Thus, whilst some of the mothers in Mauriac's novels are preoccupied with the physical needs of their children,<sup>19</sup> Lucille de Villeron is another example of the opposite tendency to view a person as pure soul rather than as an entity in which flesh and spirit are intricately united. In so doing she does a disservice to the very soul she would save. When Gisèle reaches fifteen she is pious and totally innocent, as are her games with the local boys of the village. However, Madame de Villeron illustrates the proverb that 'evil is where evil thinks' and takes fright. Instead of encouraging Gisèle to develop in a balanced and mature way into womanhood she strives to channel her natural energies and ardour 'vers la spiritualité' (OC, I, 281). Despite her fleeting, romantic dreams of entering Carmel in the footsteps of Thérèse Martin - dreams which hundreds of girls of Gisèle's age and temperament have -

---

19. See above, Chapter II, p. 47.

Mademoiselle de Plailly has no real vocation to the religious life. Thus it is almost inevitable that Gisèle's thirst for human love and suppressed, unschooled senses should eventually take control in much the same way as Fabien's do.

Once an adolescent or adult finds himself away from home, the memory of a parent or close member of the family can act as a conscience. When Jacques is tempted in La Robe prétexte he remembers Camille in her school uniform and the shadowy form of his mother. These memories carry within themselves a summary of his faith so that 'à l'instant de la chute, tous les dogmes, tous les commandements de Dieu étaient soudain promulgués au fond de son être par une voix intérieure' (OC, I, 127-28). The more thoughts of others acting as a conscience are associated with Christians who have loved the individual unconditionally and who trust in the providential care of a loving God, the better, for the actual presence or mental image of an oppressive, fearful Christian relative is likely to drive the individual into rather than out of sin. Thus, even if Thérèse Dézaymeries were not misguided in other ways, she is an example of a mother who by simply showing her determination to have her son stay in touch with God actually runs the risk of making him flee Christ. In Dieu et Mammon Mauriac writes:

Si nous voulons comprendre Rimbaud, il faut bien connaître sa mère terrible, 'la mère Rimb'. Chrétienne, elle a voulu que ses enfants fussent chrétiens, avec une volonté de fer. (OC, VII, 297)

The spiritual itineraries of Arthur Rimbaud and Fabien Dézaymeries are different, but their respective mothers certainly have something in common. When she is aware of the troubled state of Fabien's spiritual life, Thérèse puts pressure on him to take communion and even reminds him by letter of his Easter duties. Nothing could be

better designed to keep her son from both home and sacraments. Similarly Lucile de Villeron feels she cannot leave Gisèle at all, convinced that left to herself she is bound to fall into sin. In fact it is through having this kind of attitude that Lucile unwittingly urges Gisèle to take a negative rather than a positive course of action as far as her spiritual life is concerned. Eventually Gisèle points out to Lucile what actually happened at Argeles with Daniel:

Avant ta venue, je lui ai tenu tête. Je le suppliais de partir . . . . Mais dès que tu as été là . . . c'est horrible à dire . . . J'étais jalouse: même un garçon comme celui-là, tu avais l'air de le dominer; ça m'exaspérait, tu comprends? Et puis surtout de te sentir à ce point maîtresse de ma vie, j'étais comme folle. (Le Fleuve de Feu, OC, I, 308)

This argument does not excuse Gisèle who remains responsible for her actions, but it is significant that with regard to her subsequent decision to stay away from Daniel, Gisèle tells Lucile, 'Tes prières m'ont sauvée plus sûrement que n'eût fait ta présence' (OC, I, 307).

In his novels Mauriac also warns parents against appealing too much to the senses and sentiments of their children, with regard to their religious upbringing. Mauriac believed that an individual's religion should pervade all his faculties, cognitive and emotive.

In La Pierre d'achoppement he writes:

. . . nul moins que moi n'incline à mêler sinon la raison, du moins le raisonnement aux choses de la Foi . . . on ne saurait être moins théologien que je ne le suis, ni plus persuadé de ce que dit Kierkegaard que Dieu n'est pas quelqu'un de qui on parle, mais quelqu'un à qui l'on parle. (pp. 103-104)

Mauriac goes on, however, to subscribe to Newman's conviction that 'la prétendue religion du cœur sans orthodoxie ni doctrine n'est que la chaleur d'un cadavre, réelle un moment mais vouée à disparaître' (p. 104). If Mauriac thought a totally intellectual kind of faith somewhat sterile, he also considered a wholly

emotional one just as unsatisfactory. When the narrator of Préséances reads the letter Augustin's father wrote to Madame Etinger, he detects 'une téméraire foi aux inspirations, à la révélation intérieure, à ce qui s'appelle expérience religieuse' (OC, X, 378), and in Un adolescent d'autrefois Alain warns Simon 'contre l'illusion qu'il existe des méthodes assurées pour atteindre Dieu sensiblement' (p. 154). Thus parents and other catechists who have too great a tendency to arouse religious fervour in their pupils do the latter no service, for if a child's faith is dependent mainly on feelings it will be highly vulnerable during periods of coldness and emotional depression. This is illustrated in Le Fleuve de Feu. We know little about Daniel's grand-uncle Louprat except that, as well as worshipping his pines, he 'croyait en Dieu et haïssait les prêtres' (OC, I, 220). In fact he is a corrupting influence and, as far as the benefits of a wholesome religious education are concerned, Daniel clearly begins his life at a considerable disadvantage. Nevertheless, it is significant that it is Daniel's disappointment at not feeling anything at his First Communion which plays an important role in turning him away from Christ:

Les facéties de l'oncle Louprat d'après la Bible comique de Léo Taxil, et les chansons de Béranger touchant les curés et leurs servantes, l'avaient détourné de la religion moins sans doute que sa stupeur, au jour de sa première communion, de n'avoir éprouvé rien que le vertige du jeûne. (OC, I, 228)

Writing on the subject of First Communions Mauriac states in

Journal I:

Il n'est jamais trop tôt pour apprendre au chrétien que la religion ne consiste pas à s'émouvoir, mais qu'elle tient toute dans la possession d'un Dieu caché. (OC, XI, 48)

Those charged with the religious education of the young, who

attach too much importance to emotional religious experiences, run yet another risk to which Gabriel refers cryptically in Les Anges noirs when he writes to Alain Forcas:

. . . il me semble qu'on est encore trop indulgent, chez vous, pour la dévotion sensible. C'est peu de dire qu'elle ne prouve rien: dans certains cas, chez certains êtres, elle est le signe du pire. (OC, III, 148)

Mauriac clarifies this suggestion in La Vie et la Mort d'un Poète:

Rien de si périlleux que la sensibilité dans la Foi, sans l'intelligence dans la Foi. Le cœur déçu du côté du ciel, d'autres aliments proches de lui sollicitent sa flamme, surtout, s'il est marqué du signe poétique; mille faux paradis l'appellent avec des parfums et des chants. (OC, IV, 375-76)

This danger is shown up particularly well in Le Mal. Mauriac admits in his preface to this novel that he was dissatisfied with it and at one stage agreed to having only the best chapters published in a collection entitled Fabien. His comment on the chapters selected for the latter publication is interesting:

Ils offrent beaucoup d'intérêt, il me semble, pour les éducateurs catholiques. Ils les rendraient attentifs à ce qu'il y a de déformant dans certaines méthodes d'ascèse appliquées à l'enfance, surtout lorsqu'il s'agit, comme c'était mon cas, d'un garçon trop sensible, merveilleusement armé pour transmuier en délices les tourments, les scrupules, les effusions de la piété sensible. (OC, VI, i)

Thérèse Dézaymeries takes the young Fabien with her to the cathedral every afternoon for a Holy Hour. The child is bored and has nothing to do but contemplate his surroundings and try to find in them a source of pleasure. The direction of his imagination as revealed on the first page of the novel is significant in the light of his later life:

L'enfant feignait de croire que sa main droite fût une femme qu'il chargeait de colliers; et ses colliers étaient un chapelet. (OC, VI, 3)

According to Mauriac a certain kind of religiosity when carried to extremes can have a generally debilitating effect on Christians,

whose faith should in fact develop strength rather than weakness of character. In Mémoires intérieurs he writes:

Telle est notre vocation de chrétien: le contraire d'une fuite, d'une dérobade - un corps à corps, ou plutôt un esprit à esprit. (p. 212)

Parents who allow their children to consider Christianity simply as a source of sweet consolation encourage moral cowardice. Commenting in Les Maisons fugitives on the 'dévotés' of his youth 'qui étaient faites pour le don héroïque', Mauriac writes:

Si je me représente la religion telle qu'enfant je l'ai observée autour de moi, il me semble qu'il y avait chez certaines femmes de ma famille un principe de force, de grandeur, de violence, dont leur religion ne bénéficiait pas, comme elle l'aurait dû, qu'elle combattait au contraire au lieu de s'en nourrir et de le tourner en sainteté. (OC, IV, 329)

Jean Péloueyre is a typical product of this kind of religious conditioning that weakens rather than strengthens the faithful. For a long time he seeks in Christianity not a challenge but a refuge, until he suddenly realizes that the practice of his religion has hitherto meant little more for him than 'une nuit consolatrice'

(Le Baiser au lépreux, OC, I, 152). His devotion to the Virgin, his frequenting of the sacraments and his prayers 'au troupeau des vieilles filles et des servantes' (OC, I, 152) would have been admirable, even heroic, in Mauriac's terms if he had turned to them out of love of Christ rather than simply as an escape route from the real world and in an effort to avoid his own personal cross. Having made his discovery Jean reacts vehemently against the way his father's religion provides him with a subterfuge 'pour parer du nom de sagesse son renoncement à toute conquête' (OC, I, 154). Driven to rebel against such an attitude Jean is tempted for a while to turn his back on his faith and to base his moral code on Nietzsche's philosophy. In the end, however, it is a Christian act of self-renunciation which

enables Jean to become a true hero and attain perfect freedom, but when he lays down his life for Noémi, his priest observes he is quite a different character from the weakling we see at the beginning of the novel.

The question remains as to what extent Mauriac suggests in his novels that no religious education at all is preferable to the inadequate or even harmful 'Christian' upbringing the majority of his characters receive. It is largely thanks to her rather skeletal faith that Mathilde Desbats finds herself able to pick up the pieces when crime and tragedy strike her home. In response to her conscience exercised from an early age, Mathilde goes to Confession memorizing what she intends to say and resolved as usual to present the facts 'sous le meilleur jour, en ce qui la concerne' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 313). Despite the fact that her attitude leaves something to be desired, from this point on Alain Forcas becomes instrumental in her salvation and she is able to start again with a new sense of direction. Similarly Rose Costadot's upbringing has given her a faith lacking in breadth and vitality, but she too differs from Élisabeth Gornac and Janine in Le Noeud de vipères, because when tragedy strikes her she begins to pray, 'bien qu'elle n'eût jamais été pieuse et qu'elle se fût toujours montrée assez indifférente à cette religion toute formelle de sa mère, la seule qu'elle connût' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 154). When she does enter into a relationship with Christ and her prayer at last becomes something meaningful, she finds at her fingertips a system of beliefs, a theological frame of reference in which to locate her newly found faith. This is an advantage Thérèse Desqueyroux never enjoys, and there are strong suggestions in both the novels concerned with

her that not only is she hungry for a faith but that she would have benefited from a basis on which to build one. Her reference to the story of Lazarus and the rich man in La Fin de la Nuit suggests that she has a cultural knowledge of the Bible. Nevertheless, brought up by an atheistic father and educated at a secular lycée, she envies Anne de la Trave certain aspects of her convent education. When she returns to Bernard after the hearing she is unwittingly crying out, not only for her husband's pardon, but also for the psychological healing that the Sacrament of Confession could give her. When she is hemmed in at church by pillars and hostile relations, she is intrigued by what is going on in the open space around the altar, but the whole ceremony is meaningless, not only because it is conducted in Latin but because she was never initiated into the mystery of the Mass as a child. When she thinks she has been poisoned by Marie, Thérèse lies back, resigned to her fate, with her arms outstretched and her feet crossed in a crucifix position, as if she is offering her death to God. In fact she is only imitating the Christ on the plaster crucifix by her bed, but the implication is that if she had been introduced to the idea of her actually being an 'alter Christus', capable of offering up her sufferings in union with the supreme Passion of God Incarnate, she might have come to enjoy the consolation of really believing her pain was not meaningless, could be fruitful and would have an end.

Mauriac himself appreciated the Christian education he received as a child despite its failings and although in some ways he would like to have been a convert to the faith. Having pointed out the kind of suffering caused by the Catholic educators of his day, he writes in Les Maisons fugitives, 'Qu'importe cela, si "tout est vrai",

comme disait Rimbaud sur son lit de mort!' and he concludes that 'en dépit de ces déformations, la Vérité [Tui] aura été transmise' (OC, IV, 329, 330). The same comment could well be made with regard to Jacques of La Robe prétexte who by the time he leaves adolescence has been given, by his devout, solicitous grandmother, a Christian faith which he is unlikely ever to throw off completely. Although he has to come to terms with its laws and make them more his own, Jacques does in fact acknowledge the Christian moral code to be 'doucement raisonnable' (OC, I, 128).

Although she also causes Fabien to stumble through his spiritual life, Thérèse Dézaymeries can be considered an instrument of divine grace. Though misguided, her will and intentions are good. She sows in Fabien the seed of the Christian religion and does her best to help it germinate and bear fruit. In fact Fabien never loses his awareness of the perpetual presence of God within the human soul, even if he tries to forget it, filing it in the furthest recesses of his mind. When he experiences 'une solitude intérieure, ou plutôt une impression d'abandon', Mauriac points out that this is still a form of faith, 'car on ne peut être délaissé que par quelqu'un' (Le Mal, OC, VI, 29). Even the 'volupté, qui détourne tant d'autres coeurs, restituait au sien une sensibilité mystique' so that 'au-dedans de lui mais à des distances infinies, il percevait la présence de l'Être qu'il avait trahi' (OC, VI, 44). Eventually Fabien openly acknowledges that Thérèse is essentially right in her attitude, although he concedes that perhaps 'touchée de jansénisme, sa mère, d'un gauchissement léger, avait-elle déformé la doctrine':

Pendant des années (et c'était le secret de sa taciturnité) il avait, à son insu, tenu rigueur à sa mère de cette austérité inflexible. Il l'avait accusée de calomnier le monde, d'enténébrer la vie. Mais il connaissait, maintenant, que la lèpre est dans le monde et que la mort est dans la vie. (OC, VI, 49)

Moreover, Thérèse does not only set her son an example of uncompromising pharisaism. When Fanny says his mother looks like an old maid and speaks of her 'visage si dur' (OC, VI, 57), Fabien recalls the expression his mother has on her face on certain days after Mass or when she has come back from tending cancer victims in hospital. He tells Fanny:

Je te jure qu'il était baigné alors de lumière, ce visage!  
C'est peut-être même la seule figure où j'aie jamais vu la  
joie . . . (OC, VI, 58)

Thérèse Dézaymeries is thus one of many characters in the treatment of which Mauriac applies the lesson of the young curé of Viridis:<sup>20</sup> sometimes she is pharisaical; sometimes she is genuinely charitable. Although it could lay him open to the accusation of inconsistency, this is in fact a measure of Mauriac's understanding of human nature, for in reality people clearly oscillate constantly between being obstacles to and instruments of the forces of good. When all appears lost and Fabien is at death's door, Thérèse offers the comfort of her maternal presence and is at hand to supervise Fabien's rebirth into a life of sacramental grace. It is significant that when he recovers she is trusting enough to give him a letter from Fanny - a letter she might well have destroyed as she had done the card and flowers received when he was ill.

#### 4. NON-PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Although the role played by parents as potential ambassadors for God is of supreme importance, they are not the only teachers in the school of Christian love. The responsibility of the young regarding the souls of their parents is best expressed by Janine in Le Noeud de vipères, when she writes in her letter to Hubert:

---

20. See above, p. 175.

Ne croyez-vous pas que votre père eût été un autre homme si nous-mêmes avions été différents? . . . . Mais ce fut notre malheur à tous qu'il nous ait pris pour des chrétiens exemplaires . . . (OC, III, 535)

In this respect filial affection can be particularly important where conjugal love is lacking. Whilst Hubert's nauseating hypocrisy is in danger of turning Louis of Le Noeud de vipères away from Christianity, a child as young as Marie, who lives only a short time, plays a major role in his spiritual regeneration. When she returns from Mass she is anxious to see if her prayers have already been answered. She does not realize that just by giving him undemanding affection, she is keeping alive the inner flame of his soul. Although he is sceptical enough to wonder whether she is not in fact delirious, Louis is moved by the way Marie dies offering up her suffering on his behalf. Luc, as Louis's substitute son, is also an instrument in his salvation. Luc's spontaneity, joy and generosity remind his uncle of Marie. The absence of fear on Luc's part is also significant and like Marie he helps to keep Louis from utter cynicism and despair. Luc does not treat his uncle in his accustomed cheerful manner because he hopes to get something in return. By refusing the gift of gold when he goes off to war Luc unwittingly restores Louis's faith in human nature. In his journal Louis draws attention to the way both Marie and Luc help to repair the damage done by Isa's deception:

Tu vois pourtant qu'il existe en moi une touche secrète, celle qu'éveillait Marie, rien qu'en se blottissant dans mes bras, et aussi le petit Luc, le dimanche, lorsque au retour de la messe, il s'asseyait sur le banc devant la maison, et regardait la prairie. (OC, III, 443)

If Marie Desqueyroux had gone to find her mother in Paris out of love for her rather than for selfish reasons and given her some of the sincere kind of affection that Marie and Luc radiate in Le Noeud de vipères, we might have seen Thérèse reborn in

La Fin de La Nuit as Louis is. Instead Marie confirms her mother's cynicism and convinces her that disinterested love does not exist. However, Marie does do Thérèse some service in the course of her life. At the end of Le Désert de L'amour Dr. Courrèges tells his son 'comme il fait bon vivre au plus épais d'une famille . . .':

On porte sur soi les mille soucis des autres; ces mille piqûres affirent le sang à la peau, tu comprends? Elles nous détournent de notre plaie secrète, de notre profonde plaie intérieure . . . . (OC, II, 159)

Marie Desqueyroux is at times a distraction for Thérèse and takes her mind off her own 'profonde plaie intérieure'. When she is on the brink of committing suicide the first time, Thérèse's attention is diverted fleetingly from her own distress by the sight of her sleeping baby and the thought of the latter's future suffering. Thérèse herself is surprised by her tears of compassion which reveal that her capacity to love another is not dead, that like Louis she carries within herself 'une touche secrète' capable of being aroused. Usually, however, Thérèse exercises her self-pity primarily on her own ego. We are told she did not hate Bernard 'mais quel désir d'être seule pour penser à sa souffrance, pour chercher l'endroit où elle souffrait!' (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 201). Later, when the Mano fire breaks out, she is not at all concerned; she is 'indifférente, étrangère à cette agitation, désintéressée de ce drame, comme de tout drame autre que le sien' (OC, II, 238). She is aware of her self-centredness and acknowledges her ingratitude to tante Clara. Anne de La Trave cannot understand why Thérèse is so uninterested in her own child when she has not seen her for some time. Thérèse thinks to herself:

Cela m'amuserait quelques secondes, peut-être, de l'entendre, mais tout de suite elle m'ennuierait, je serais impatiente de me retrouver seule avec moi-même . . . (OC, II, 272)

However much she may want to be on her own, solitude is the worst possible cure for Thérèse's particular malady, and throughout La Fin de la Nuit Marie provides her mother with an opportunity to stop thinking of herself and to occupy her mental and emotional faculties caring for someone else. She unwittingly supplies Thérèse with the challenge she needs to prove she is capable of fighting the forces of evil that seem close to overwhelming her. When Thérèse is terrified by her persecution phobia, Marie shows her mother concern and tenderness, but even at this stage she helps Thérèse best in an inverted kind of way:

Marie, d'un seul coup, s'était abandonnée aux larmes et par là, à son insu, secourait sa mère, la détournait de sa propre angoisse. Et c'était la malade qui, maintenant, se faisait secourable: 'Va! va! pleure . . .', répétait-elle; et elle berçait Marie contre son épaule d'un geste de mère qu'elle n'avait peut-être jamais eu lorsque c'était une petite enfant. (OC, II, 476)

In Destins neither Pierre's love for her nor his spiritual counselling benefits Élisabeth Gornac. In fact his interference in other people's lives and his inopportune sermons have the same effect on her as Brigitte Pian has on her stepchildren. In Le Désert de l'amour, however, Maria Cross's stepson becomes a kind of spiritual director for her, 'à la fois un ami, un maître' (OC, II, 146). It is because of Bertrand's Christian influence that she marries his father and attains some peace of mind. She tells Raymond she could not express how much she owes Bertrand.

In Les Chemins de la mer Mauriac maintains that those who encourage others to have illusions about themselves, to play a role or to live up to a false image are more harmful than those who have a tendency to do anything but flatter:

Les êtres qui nous déforment en nous rabaissant, ce ne sont pas ceux-là nos ennemis, mais ceux qui nous recréent selon l'exigence de l'amour que nous leur inspirons. (OC, V, 52)

This observation on human nature can be associated with the supreme importance Mauriac attaches to lucid self-knowledge,<sup>21</sup> and he insists that parents are not the only people who can help to cultivate this redeeming quality in others. In his 'Bref plaidoyer pour André Gide' in Mes grands hommes we are told that 'tout homme qui nous éclaire sur nous-mêmes prépare en nous les voies de la Grâce' (OC, VIII, 425). It is in this respect that Robert and Pierrot Costadot serve Léonie's good, simply by arousing her conscience and making her question her motives for treating Lucienne Révolou as she does. Robert points out to Pierrot how they have disturbed Léonie's peace of mind by their rather ungrateful reception of what she has done for them, so that 'elle n'a plus confiance dans l'échelle des valeurs qui lui avaient servi jusqu'à présent' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 49).

Sometimes fraternal affection can fulfil the role of parental love in an effective way. When José is going through his emotional crisis, it is Jean-Louis and not Blanche who brings him to express his grief in a cathartic flood of tears:

C'est qu'à la tendresse de sa mère, José était accoutumé et il n'y réagissait plus. Mais il n'était jamais arrivé à Jean-Louis de se montrer tendre avec lui.  
(Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 71)

Jean-Louis certainly plays an important part in the emotional and spiritual life of Yves. For all that Blanche may be a loving mother, the poetic, sensitive nature of her youngest son is to a large extent beyond her understanding. Jean-Louis is not separated from Yves by a difference in sex or a generation gap and they can appreciate

---

21. See above, p. 178 and below, pp. 212, 257 and 268.

each other's philosophical and literary interests. Although he could easily have allowed himself to become preoccupied with his own disappointments and domestic concerns, Jean-Louis takes an interest in Yves when the latter is most vulnerable. By showing care and concern in a practical way Jean-Louis bears witness to the God of Love as Blanche does:

La bonté de Jean-Louis contrebalançait, aux yeux d'Yves, la férocité du monde. Il croyait à la bonté, à cause de sa mère et de Jean-Louis. (OC, IV, 86)

Although Yves does not take a very large overdose of drugs, Jean-Louis certainly keeps him from drifting into an abyss of despair when he goes to find him in Paris, and he restores his brother's semi-dormant faith in the Frontenac mystery.

As there is virtually no rapport at all between siblings such as the Gajac or Dézaymeries boys, they cannot be said to help or hinder each other very much in their search for God. However, Joseph does set Fabien an example of saintliness: the contemplation of his dying brother leaves him with an image of Joseph as 'le petit séminariste dévoré d'amour et plus chaste qu'une jeune fille, l'enfant le moins aimé qui ne s'était jamais plaint qu'à Dieu' (Le Mal, OC, VI, 19). That the example of a sibling can be a significant factor in orientating a person's conscience is shown up in Les Chemins de la mer by the fact that the weak, ignoble side of Robert is relieved when Pierrot makes up his mind to leave home indefinitely:

Mais c'était très bien ainsi, disait la voix au-dedans de lui: cet autre témoin s'éloignait, ce témoin trop tendre et trop exigeant, ce juge incorruptible. (OC, V, 143)

Rose Révolou does her best to respond to the emotional and spiritual needs of Denis in as far as she sees them, but often fails because she is totally absorbed by her love for Robert. Later this

blinds her to Denis's excessive, harmful attachment to her. When she does realize what danger they are in, she takes the best possible course of action for both of them by leaving. May Dupont-Gunther, on the other hand, believes that Edward has been a positive obstacle in her spiritual life, by failing to fulfil his fraternal obligations. She excuses her bitterness towards him in the following terms:

Tout mal m'est venu de lui, et cette ivraie que j'arrache et qui toujours repousse et, dans mon cœur, foisonne, je sais que L'ont semée ses mains débiles. (La Chair et le Sang, OC, X, 243)

However, Edward eventually needs a sister as much as she once needed him, and through her lack of Christian charity she fails to live up to her faith - Protestant or Catholic. It is tragic that she cannot give him the spark of love and life he needs to want to go over to 'le camp de ceux qui veulent vivre' (OC, X, 205). Florence and her brother in Préséances are as little help to each other spiritually as May and Edward. Florence certainly does not help her younger brother, for she remains a basically carnal creature indifferent to the things of the spirit. The narrator wishes Florence were more like Jacqueline Pascal, for then she might have led him to God. Unlike Augustin, 'libre de tout lien; prisonnier de nulle caste, d'aucune famille' (OC, X, 292), both brother and sister are caught in the web of provincial bourgeois society. The narrator is more conscious of the value of love than Florence, but she has by far the more domineering personality. Without Augustin, who is an instrument of divine grace in both their lives, the narrator is powerless to help his sister. He has to watch Florence 'se consumer lentement, parce que les lièges de conventions imbéciles autour d'elle ne flottaient plus' (OC, X, 332). The narrator cannot bear any more than Florence the spiritual freedom

of which Augustin has made him aware, so he wastes what he learns and silences his inner voice. Referring to the love of God, he writes,

Je ne veux pas de cet amour. Je ne chargerai pas de ce tragique mon destin. L'ange vainement me sollicite, je lui refuserai le combat . . . (OC, X, 336)

However, by choosing spiritual slavery and the old formulæ for himself he also chooses them for Florence, and he actually encourages her to try and rediscover some kind of meaning for life in the narrow world of materialism. The flame of faith is never bright enough for Florence to take a light from it. Like Maria Cross, for example, she gropes in the dark for a Saviour, and her brother is of no help to her:

- Rien ne nous lave, rien, rien.

Sans doute, à son insu, espérait-elle de moi une protestation, elle dit encore:

- Il n'est plus donné à personne de remettre les péchés.

Elle se tut dans l'attente d'une parole que je ne prononçai pas. Il est de ces instants où, devant un être mourant de soif, nous savons quelle eau vive il faudrait approcher de ses lèvres, mais dans quel vase la puiserions-nous? et surtout nous nous sommes trop éloignés du puits où dort l'eau toute pure; nous n'en connaissons plus la route et, nous serait-elle connue, elle est trop longue, elle monte trop pour ceux qu'a perclus l'asservissement au monde. C'est pourquoi je gardais le silence. (OC, X, 387-88)

At this stage the narrator resembles Rose Costadot at the very end of Les Chemins de la mer, when she realizes that 'elle s'était éloignée infiniment du chemin entrevu trois années plus tôt' (OC, V, 217). To be of any help to her brothers in Christ Rose has first to find this road again. However, whereas Rose has the will to do something about the lesson she has learnt, the narrator of Préséances does not. In his weakness the best he can do now is to try and forestall Florence's utter ruin in society. Well-intentioned though he may be, his outlandish plans to resurrect Augustin are doomed to fail. The narrator is one of those who want the Resurrection without the Cross, the victory without the struggle. Having fled the challenge with which Augustin presented

him as an adolescent, he is inevitably incapable of having an uplifting influence on his sister.

Although the last section of this chapter is devoted to a detailed examination of the special metaphysical role love between the sexes plays in advancing or impeding the individual's search for God, miscellaneous general ways in which the husbands, wives and lovers in the novels act as obstacles to or instruments of divine grace are considered at this point as they highlight a recurring pattern of principles already noted in the way the parents Mauriac describes help or hinder their offspring - or vice versa - and siblings each other on their spiritual journey through life. Thus, those who love a husband, wife or lover unconditionally and cherish him for his or her own sake are shown to reflect God's love just as the caring, selfless parent does. The abbé Calou tries to convince Jean de Mirbel that Michèle is prepared to give him the kind of love that always carries forgiveness within itself: 'Michèle t'aime pour ce que tu es, comme Dieu t'aime tel qu'il t'a fait' (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 339). However, of all Mauriac's characters it is Marthe in L'Enfant chargé de chaînes who appears to be the most capable of spontaneously selfless, undemanding conjugal love:

Son rêve est humble cependant. Elle ne veut que se dévouer, se donner tout entière, servir sans autre salaire que pouvoir servir encore . . . Elle ne demande pas d'être aimée: ce serait trop de joie - un excès de joie qui la tuerait, songe-t-elle . . . (OC, X, 36)

Such is Marthe's dream before her engagement, and at the end of the novel we are told that she marries with no illusions: she sees and forgives in advance all Jean-Paul's future offences against her.

In the one or two genuinely Christian marriages Mauriac describes the husbands and wives appear to help each other in their search for

God through the strength of the special sacramental bond joining them. The Puybaraud and Péloueyre couples are cases in point. It is because of André's and to make an act of reparation that Adila marries Gabriel Gradère. He maintains that she 'entraîne dans le mariage comme elle se fût jetée à la mer' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 162). However, once married, Adila considers herself bound to Gabriel still more closely by a tie as indissoluble as that uniting Christ to his spouse the Church. She offers up her suffering and death for Gabriel's redemption. The fact that Gabriel is so fascinated by the mystery of 'ce rachat par la souffrance' (OC, III, 175) suggests that he has more faith in it than he would like to admit. If we are to believe that he wept over Adila's death, we can only assume that he was touched by her expressing her saintliness on his behalf. Moreover, it is because of her 'bonne mort' that he continues to think about her 'comme à quelqu'un de vivant et qui n'est pas sorti de sa vie' (OC, III, 175), and in this respect Adila certainly does help Gabriel both through and beyond her death. Obsessed, sometimes to the point of paranoia, by the belief that he is possessed and pursued by demonic forces, Gabriel is comforted by the memory of Adila, and the sense he has of her being a spiritual reality in his life is revealed by the fact that in her bedroom he never feels hounded by the powers of darkness and by the way he clutches and smells her old red cape, 'accroché des deux mains à cette épave' (OC, III, 201). There are few other Mauriacien marriages where the sacramental aspect of matrimony is taken so seriously.

Although the monotonous routine of a stereotyped and oppressive home-life is in danger of anaesthetizing the individual so that he is no longer aware of the wholesome 'inquiétude' which according to

Mauriac is at the origin of every genuine conversion, certain conjugal or extramarital relationships, where either the man or the woman sets an example to the other, are also shown to be spiritually uplifting.

Robert Costadot fears that if he married Rose she would become a kind of conscience for him. He has to admit to himself that his real reason for abandoning Rose was his 'appétit d'avilissement qui redoutait d'être dominé, contenu par la présence perpétuelle . . . d'un être aussi pur que Rose' (Les Chemins de La mer, OC, V, 142). His basest instincts kept warning and tempting him:

Avec cette enfant trop sublime à tes côtés, c'est fini de nous abandonner à nos délices, - ou nous n'y céderons qu'en nous cachant, dans la gêne et dans la honte. Nous n'échapperons pas à la grâce qu'elle épandra sur ta vie; tu seras condamné au sacrifice, à la pauvreté, aux gestes généreux . . .  
(OC, V, 142-43)

It is through her relationship with Claude Favereau that May Dupont-Gunther begins to reassess her faith. Although, as May Castagnède she fails to live up to the essential message of Christianity in some of her attitudes, she herself is convinced that Claude has been a vehicle of divine grace for her:

Certitude que toute grâce par lui m'est venue. Bien que je l'aie connu en proie à la tentation, esclave de sa jeunesse. Sans doute portait-il en lui infiniment plus que lui-même. Obsédé par son désir triste, asservi à la chair et au sang, il a cru me communiquer sa fièvre, et, à son insu, m'a donné Dieu. De sa seule présence la grâce émanait, comme d'une lampe la lumière. A travers son charnel désir, elle s'épandait et, tout de même, je l'ai reçue. (La Chair et Le Sang, OC, X, 215)

If Mauriac presents Claude as helping May in a rather obscure, supernatural way, there is nothing unnatural about the manner in which Isa affects Louis's faith in Le Noeud de vipères. The entire treatment of their relationship reveals particularly well how a Christian spouse has great potential as a witness and force for good in the life of a

partner who is struggling to find a faith. Should such a husband or wife, however, fail to use this potential, the outcome as far as the agnostic or atheistic partner is concerned is likely to be correspondingly negative. Louis tells us that when he first accompanied Isa to Mass the ceremony had no metaphysical significance for him whatsoever, but he goes on to say:

Comme parfois tu me regardais à la dérobée, le souvenir de ces messes demeure lié à cette merveilleuse découverte que je faisais: être capable d'intéresser, de plaire, d'émouvoir.  
(OC, III, 368)

Isa and her religion soon become intricately connected in Louis's mind; he is attracted to the latter because of his love for the former:

Car notre premier amour m'avait rendu sensible à l'atmosphère de foi et d'adoration qui baignait ta vie. Je t'aimais et j'aimais les éléments spirituels de ton être. Je m'attendrissais quand tu t'agenouillais dans ta longue chemise d'écolière . . .  
(OC, III, 377)

As Louis's personality blossoms in the belief that Isa loves him and as his love for her grows, so does his openness to faith, until he is on the brink of spiritual rebirth:

J'eus soudain la sensation aiguë, la certitude presque physique qu'il existait un autre monde, une réalité dont nous ne connaissions que l'ombre . . . (OC, III, 371)

Thus Isa sows a seed of faith in Louis which never actually dies but lies dormant for years.

Ce ne fut qu'un instant, - et qui, au long de ma triste vie, se renouvela à de très rares intervalles. Mais sa singularité même lui donne à mes yeux une valeur accrue. Et c'est pourquoi, plus tard, dans le long débat religieux qui nous a déchirés, il me fallut écartier un tel souvenir . . . (OC, III, 371-72)

However, Isa is largely responsible for the fact that he should even try to suppress the memory of this moment of truth. He comes to accuse her of jeopardizing his eternal salvation through her insensitivity in her relations with him, particularly on the night when she disabuses him: Jean de Fabrègues explains the way Louis

hardens his heart towards Christianity in the following terms: 'Dieu lui est apparu comme le Dieu de la femme qui ne l'a pas aimé, c'est ce Dieu-là qu'il a refusé'.<sup>22</sup> Isa does make a move towards a reconciliation shortly before her death, but her failure to do so years earlier is far more reprehensible than Louis's refusal to make the first vital, mutually awaited act of pardon, because she professes to be a disciple of Christ. As Louis's relationship with Isa becomes more and more sour so does his opposition to her religion, and he is on the look-out for this kind of inconsistency:

Naguère, l'irréligion n'avait été pour moi qu'une forme vide où j'avais coulé mes humiliations de petit paysan enrichi, méprisé par ses camarades bourgeois; je l'emplissais maintenant de ma déception amoureuse et d'une rancune presque infinie.  
(OC, III, 406)

Isa gives Louis plenty of ammunition to use against her Church. He notices when Marie dies that he seems to have more faith in the Resurrection than she does, and he observes the absence of true charity in her dealings with other people. Thanks to the examples of the abbé Ardouin, Marie, Luc and the 'petite modiste' at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Louis has to acknowledge that Isa's religion 'à la Pharisienne' is an extremely distorted, if widespread, form of Catholicism, and often so polluted as to be unworthy of the epithet Christian.<sup>23</sup>

Louis is not the only character who marries into a family of practising Catholics who do not find their religion joyful, and put others off investigating it by failing to live the sort of lives that would reflect the implications of their faith. Madame de Blénauge mère is the living Gospel her daughter-in-law reads regularly, and one day

---

22. J. de Fabrègues, op. cit., p. 182.

23. See above, pp. 171-74.

Irène says, 'Le catholicisme, c'est ma belle-mère . . .'

(Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 100). Rightly or wrongly Irène dislikes simultaneously her mother-in-law and her mother-in-law's religion. In her sincere, redeeming confession Madame de Blénauge mère acknowledges how she has been a major stumbling block in Irène's search for God:

Mon Père, vous qui sauvez tant d'âmes, qui avez cet immense bonheur, pouvez-vous concevoir ce qu'il y a d'horrible à se dire: par ma seule présence, je calomnie, je ridiculise, je bafoue Celui que j'aime? Je Le rends haïssable. J'éloigne de Lui une pauvre enfant que sans moi, peut-être, Il eût attirée. Je suis la caricature de ce qu'il y a de plus saint au monde.  
(OC, III, 100)

The development of a faith in Thérèse Desqueyroux is also impeded by 'cet accaparement du Christ par ceux qui ne sont pas de son esprit' (OC, III, iv), although, unlike Madame de Blénauge mère, Bernard and his parents are hardly concerned whether or not they diminish the figure of Christ in the sight of Thérèse because they do not love him themselves. They fulfil their religious obligations because it is the thing to do. Bernard is typical of many of the hypocrites in the novels whose lives revolve round wealth, property and worldly pleasures. His faith is an empty insignificant appendage, and it is as such that he presents it to his wife. As Balion drives her home from Saint-Clair station, Thérèse hopes desperately that Bernard will consider forgiving her:

Ah! le seul geste possible, Bernard ne le fera pas. S'il ouvrait les bras pourtant, sans rien demander! Si elle pouvait appuyer sa tête sur une poitrine humaine, si elle pouvait pleurer contre un corps vivant! (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 244)

Even later in Paris we are told that if he had been prepared to forgive her he would have saved the marriage. In the eyes of the Desqueyroux family such an idea would seem preposterous in view of the fact that Thérèse actually tried to murder Bernard, but the Christian

Madame de Blénauge mère saves her relationship with her son, after he has driven his wife to her death, by offering him the kind of unconditional, reconciling love she has just received from her priest through the sacrament of Confession. There are other ways in which Bernard fights the Christ, faith in whom he professes every Sunday. Although he is a Catholic and supposed to believe that Christ is really present - body, blood, soul and divinity - in the Eucharist, he actually stops Thérèse from going to Mass. Throughout her history Thérèse is shown to be literally a 'mouvement de charité' away from the Truth. If Bernard had made such a move to love and understand her genuinely for her own sake, he would almost certainly have clarified her vision. An act of love on his part or his parents' and the jigsaw puzzle of the Mass, her craving for absolution, the mystery of the curé's vocation, her need for inner strength, her longing for consolation, her sense of being crucified, in fact all the pieces would have fallen into place. Instead of making a redeeming act of genuine charity, Bernard and his family commit one of the worst crimes in Mauriac's eyes: they progressively undermine Thérèse's faith in man and his potential for good.<sup>24</sup> When she gets back home after the final court hearing she wonders how she could ever have believed 'qu'il existait un endroit du monde où elle aurait pu s'épanouir au milieu d'êtres qui l'eussent comprise, peut-être admirée, aimée!' (OC, II, 244). It is no tyrant husband who is shown to have such a negative effect on another human soul. In the eyes of the world Bernard could have behaved more harshly towards Thérèse without being considered unreasonable. Nevertheless she is hindered in her search for God by a 'decent', 'practising' Catholic'!

---

24. See above, pp. 22 and 177 and below, pp. 246-56 and 269.

In Le Nœud de vipères Louis maintains that if a woman had really loved him, she would have helped him to live not only a more successful, but also a nobler, life:

Une femme qui m'eût aimé aurait chéri ma gloire. Elle m'aurait appris que l'art de vivre consiste à sacrifier une passion basse à une passion plus haute. (OC, III, 399)

If Hervé de Blénauge had been more responsive, Irène could have helped him particularly well in this respect. Although he fails to sacrifice his worse to his better self, it is thanks to his wife that Hervé is never allowed to feel spiritually numb or comfortably self-satisfied for long: 'Jusqu'à la mort, ce serait le plaisir d'Irène de le mettre en contradiction avec lui-même' (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 6). Without despising him she helps him to remain lucid and aware of his sin. He acknowledges this himself as he watches by her corpse:

Elle devinait toujours mes pensées les plus basses; elle me les révélait à moi-même. Elle ne peut plus savoir ce que j'éprouve. (OC, III, 98)

Paradoxically, however, his feelings are such as he contemplates her body that she appears to help him still more through her death, for suddenly he sees himself just as he is. The picture is neither pretty nor flattering, but it is not excessively pessimistic either. He considers himself with the eyes of an objective, constructive critic. Thus, although he may fail to use the grace of which she is the instrument, Irène helps Hervé to acquire the all-important prerequisite for spiritual progress: self-knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Thérèse Desqueyroux plays a similar role in her husband's life. Her attempted assassination of Bernard is clearly a crime of the gravest kind, and yet she can be

---

25. See above, pp. 178 and 201 and below, pp. 257 and 268.

said to do him a service in that she shakes him, however temporarily, from an apathy and indifference that are harmful for his soul. As they part in Paris Bernard finally asks Thérèse why she tried to murder him. She realizes that at last he has come to question something:

Elle avait, à son insu, troublé Bernard. Elle l'avait compliqué; et voici qu'il l'interrogeait comme quelqu'un qui ne voit pas clair, qui hésite. Moins simple . . . donc, moins implacable. (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 277)

As was noted earlier, Marie Desqueyroux unwittingly helps her mother by diverting her attention from self outwards.<sup>26</sup> Marthe of L'Enfant chargé de chaînes is an instrument of divine grace in the life of Jean-Paul for a similar reason. She provides him not only with an example of selfless devotion but also with an opportunity to escape from his own self-preoccupation, and to love God in her. Noémi serves the same purpose in Jean Péloueyre's life. Michael Moloney points out how Jean's 'compassion for Noémie transcends his self-pity', so that finally 'in the crisis of his suffering he escapes himself'.<sup>27</sup>

However spiritually beneficial conjugal love may be, Mauriac presents the belief that marriage can provide an easy escape from sin as misguided. The abbé Calou is anxious that Michèle and Jean should marry. He feels that Michèle will be Jean's salvation by turning him away from a life of promiscuity. Alain Forcas has similar hopes for Tota's marriage to Marcel Revaux. Mauriac indicates in La Pharisienne that such an attitude is erroneous:

Or s'il est vrai que beaucoup de garçons peuvent demeurer fidèles à une jeune fille aimée, beaucoup d'autres, comme était Mirbel, n'établissent aucun rapport entre l'amour qu'ils ont au cœur et des passades sensuelles. (OC, V, 394)

---

26. See above, p. 199.

27. M.F. Moloney, op. cit., p. 36.

Moreover, Mauriac presents sexual intercourse as no more acceptable within marriage than outside if the sacrament designed to sanctify sexual love is used, as it is by characters like Bernard Desqueyroux, as a cover-up for lust. Alain Gajac sums up this question when speaking with Simon Duberc:

- Le problème posé par la chair, par la cohabitation de l'âme, capable de Dieu, et de l'instinct le plus bestial, ce n'est pas le mariage en tout cas qui l'a jamais résolu.  
(Un adolescent d'autrefois, p. 59)

Thus, once again Mauriac makes the point that no one can achieve the salvation, spiritual enlightenment or protection from temptation of someone else, or himself, through any infallible system based on a simple cause and effect methodology, however noble or holy it might be, since divine grace, as Silvestre de Sacy points out, 'est étrangère à tout ascendant humain, au point que parfois la seule présence de l'être qui l'apporte eût suffi à en détruire l'effet'.<sup>28</sup>

It is consequently appropriate to conclude this section of Chapter IV by reiterating the conviction to which Mauriac gives expression throughout the novels, that those who would be effective teachers in the school of Christian love must take up the challenge of Christianity for their own part, concentrating first and foremost on living a life of love themselves, and so, as the Mauriacien planets they are, shine like stars reflecting God onto those around them.

##### 5. THROUGH THE HUMAN TO THE DIVINE LOVE AFFAIR

Mauriac follows closely in the footsteps of his spiritual master, Pascal, in his conviction that there exists 'entre le cœur de l'homme et les dogmes chrétiens, une étonnante conformité' (Le Roman, OC, VIII, 282). It is largely because of this belief that he insists

---

28. S. Silvestre de Sacy, op. cit., p. 74.

love relationships between the sexes can be amongst the most spiritually enlightening of human experiences. Mauriac never ceases to emphasize that the Christian religion consists entirely in man's loving and being loved: Alain Gajac tells his mother in Maltaverne that 'croire, c'est croire que nous sommes aimés' (p. 46) and the closing words of Ce que je crois are: 'Croire, c'est aimer' (p. 188). At the same time, as Eva Kushner observes, he uses his literary exploration of the human heart, the study of which he states should be the prime function of every novelist, as 'une manière privilégiée d'expliquer (et de s'expliquer à lui-même) en quoi le réel est appel vers l'Amour'.<sup>29</sup> Thus he implies throughout his novels that if the Christian's vocation can be summed up by the word 'love', this raison d'être is reflected by the deepest needs of human nature.

For Mauriac, as a practising Catholic, love was the principle of divine life in his innermost being: in Eucharistic form it was literally the food of his soul, and in his attempt to highlight the essential correspondence between 'la Révélation et la nature de l'homme' (Du côté de chez Proust, OC, IV, 300) he suggests in his works that man, as a thinking, feeling creature, needs love of some kind as urgently as his body needs the elements. At the beginning of Thérèse Desqueyroux, once Mauriac has made it clear that she is to receive no affection from her father, Thérèse's thoughts go first to her maternal grandmother and then to her own daughter, whom she will see when she gets home, as if she is subconsciously clutching for even the vaguest memory, the slightest hope, of human warmth:

. . . alors la jeune femme entendra, dans les ténèbres, ce sommeil d'enfant; elle se penchera, et ses lèvres chercheront comme de l'eau, cette vie endormie. (OC, II, 174)

---

29. E. Kushner, op. cit., p. 26.

However, it is to describe those who are seeking fulfilment in a sexual relationship that Mauriac repeatedly uses the image of someone thirsting for water. Thérèse Desqueyroux considers the few days during which she hopes Georges Filhot may be in love with her as a 'goutte d'eau' (La Fin de La Nuit, OC, II, 469). Her daughter savours every moment she spends in Georges's presence 'comme elle aurait bu en prévision de sa soif!' (OC, II, 397). Louis meditates on how a voice ought to warn us when we meet with the happiness of reciprocated love to take advantage of it as of a spring the waters of which may have to last us a lifetime. Fernand Cazenave considers his loveless life as a 'désert morne', and he wonders how he managed to cross so much sand 'sans mourir de soif' (Genitrix, OC, I, 368). The metaphysical implications of this imagery are obvious, since water is commonly accepted as one of the symbols used in Christianity for God's life-giving grace; thus Madame de Villeron teaches Gisèle de Plailly that 'L'Évangile est en partie l'histoire de soifs détournées des sources mortelles et qui trouvent l'eau vive' (Le Fleuve de Feu, OC, I, 292). Fire is another vital element that Mauriac uses in his imagery for a dual purpose. In Christian symbolism a light such as a candle flame has always been considered as a sign of the inner life of the soul or of Christ as the Light of the world. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit revealed itself in tongues of fire, and in Dieu et Mammon Mauriac speaks of 'le contre-feu de la Grâce "car notre Dieu, écrit saint Paul aux Hébreux, est aussi un feu dévorant"' (OC, VII, 322). A flame in Mauriac's metaphorical code is representative of love or the capacity to love, so, referring to her relationship with Augustin, the narrator of Préséances warns Florence, 'méfie-toi de ce feu que tu allumes' (OC, X, 300) and

Denis Révolou, we are told, 'ne courait vers aucun but qui pût enflammer son coeur' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 159). When the flame which burns perpetually like a pilot-light in the human heart is fanned and love is aroused by another individual, it may grow into an 'incendie' or, in other words, an excessive passion.

Mauriac's descriptions of the intense summer heat that consumes the Landes, giving rise to destructive forest fires, set the emotional scene vividly, the highly charged atmosphere being relieved at times by showers falling in the area or a neighbouring district and reminding the reader that the cool, refreshing waters of divine grace are at hand.

Whilst perpetually reinforcing his metaphysical imagery, Mauriac stresses that love is a spiritual element as necessary to the inner life of the individual as fire and water are to his physical existence. That love is a crucial life-force is reflected in the novels in the various relationships described. However, although the young are shown to be particularly vulnerable victims of love deprivation and although the importance of parental, filial or fraternal affection should not be underestimated, childhood and adolescence are presented quite naturally as an apprenticeship in preparation for the supremely important man/woman relationship of later life. It is the opportunity for this that Louis of Le Noeud de vipères guards so jealously against the interference of his mother, and indeed the love he believes Isa feels for him proves to have a very special, rejuvenating effect:

Dans une détente délicieuse, je m'épanouissais. Je me rappelle ce dégel de tout mon être sous ton regard, ces émotions jaillissantes, ces sources délivrées. (OC, III, 369)

Never being loved at all is shown to be as destructive as arousing passion in another can be beneficial. Louis is struck by terror when he realizes that he has been deceived by Isa. He now feels

condemned to a living death. Louis's incurable wound is not caused simply by his jealousy of Rodolphe. It is far more profound. Louis suffers because his very ability to be loved for his own sake suddenly comes into question. Louis is not the only character Mauriac uses to stress that an individual's psychological health can be seriously affected by his relationships with the opposite sex. After Gabriel Gradère marries Adila instead of her, Mathilde becomes bitter and cynical, to such an extent that in later life Gabriel notices 'tout est mort en elle, jusqu'à l'amertume' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 225), and Mathilde herself realizes that 'depuis vingt ans, elle vivait à son insu dans le désespoir' (OC, III, 218). After they have agreed upon the wording of the letter to be sent to Anne breaking off her affair, Thérèse Desqueyroux and Jean Azévédo consider the matter closed, not suspecting that she might put up a struggle, but Mauriac makes a point of adding, 'comme si un être cédait à des raisons, à des raisonnements lorsqu'il s'agit de sa vie même!'

(Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 229). In Le Désert de l'amour Mauriac writes of the beloved 'dont l'approche est nécessaire à notre vie, même physique' (OC, II, 54). Such comments would sound platitudinous, if the author did not describe so vividly the pains of love, and stress that unreciprocated passion can literally kill. Mauriac depicts several victims who are driven to their death by a loveless existence, and they cannot be said to be all of like temperament: Edward Dupont-Gunther, Prudent Gornac and Irène de Blénauge, for example, have little in common as far as their life styles are concerned. Others suffering from love starvation continue to exist physically, but they do so by yielding to indifference, by scratching at their wounds or by drugging themselves with a pitiable sense

of the hopelessness of their situation. Even if they do not succeed in committing it, they contemplate suicide with varying degrees of seriousness. Even Marcel Revaux thinks of following Irène's example: 'Pourquoi vivre, s'il n'est plus aimé?' (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 97). Thus love, insists Mauriac, sustains life; but love in its purest form is also a synonym for God. The subsequent deduction scarcely needs to be made. Man's desperate thirst to be loved, to know that he is loved, to be totally accepted by the beloved, to know that he is lovable, reflects his innate desire to be loved infinitely and unconditionally by God. In this respect the longing Mauriac's characters have for someone in their lives who has suffered or is suffering on their account can be viewed in a way which makes it seem less callously sadistic. In Mauriac's metaphysical terms it reveals man's deep need to know that he is truly loved, the suffering involved being only the proof. On the first day of his forty loveless years Louis of Le Noeud de vipères considers himself with self-pity as 'l'homme qu'on n'avait pas aimé, celui pour qui personne au monde n'avait souffert' (OC, III, 386). Here Louis is made to imply unwittingly that men thirst constantly for the immaculate love of Christ who loved men enough to suffer the supreme Passion for them.

Mauriac insists, however, that man yearns not only to be loved but also to love. Thus one of his most tragic creatures is Mathilde Cazenave who dies cruelly abandoned and doubly deprived:

Elle n'avait aimé personne. Elle n'avait pas été aimée. Ce corps allait être consumé dans la mort et il ne l'avait pas été dans l'amour. L'anéantissement des caresses ne l'avait pas préparé à la dissolution éternelle. Cette chair finissait sans avoir connu son propre secret. (Genitrix, OC, I, 340)

In Le Jeune homme Mauriac writes:

'Je n'aime personne; je n'ai jamais aimé personne; j'ignore ce qu'est aimer . . .'. Que de fois recueillîmes-nous de tels aveux! Pour les médiocres, c'est tout bénéfique: leur cœur ne risque pas de déranger leur jeu. Mais d'autres meurent de cette aridité. (OC, IV, 439)

Accordingly Mauriac's young heroes, particularly in the early novels, dread that they may be incapable of loving or never have the opportunity to find out whether they are. In a moment of panic Jacques of La Robe prétexte thinks fearfully, 'O Dieu! Dieu! étais-je incapable d'aimer? Ne serais-je jamais aimé?' (OC, I, 137).

Leaving aside the background cohort of vulgar, smug and indifferent, there are very few Mauriacien protagonists who do not come to the implicit or explicit conclusion that to be loved and to love is man's prime purpose on earth. Mauriac presents this kind of aspiration as being too strong and profound to be explained by man's animalistic urge to find a mate and procreate the species. Instead he suggests that it is an indication of every human being's call to be loved by and to love God. Edward Dupont-Gunther tells his sister that 'il existe au monde une seule chose qui vaille la peine de vivre; c'est d'aimer infiniment l'être qui nous aime infiniment' (La Chair et le Sang, OC, X, 171). Although he means the words in a different sense, this is in fact a succinct, accurate summary of the committed Christian's attitude to life. Tragically Edward does not realize, either that it is a divine vocation, or how he should go about achieving his goal.

In Le Nœud de vipères Louis considers it extraordinary 'comme on divorce peu!' (OC, III, 349). Mauriac himself points out in his preface to Trois récits that one might have expected the 'roman du mariage' to disappear as society's attitude to divorce evolved, but that in fact this has not happened:

Même dans l'horreur d'une mutuelle torture, qu'il est difficile à deux êtres de se séparer! Certes, en dépit du divorce, de l'indifférence en matière de religion, des liens demeurent: les enfants, l'attachement de la femme à sa position, ou de l'homme à son confort (lorsque c'est elle qui a la fortune, comme on dit), la crainte de l'aventure, un commencement d'impuissance ou d'indifférence à l'amour. Mais ces obstacles écartés, souvent l'union misérable survit à toutes les haines: tel est le mystère de l'unité dans une seule chair. (OC, VI, 126)

Mauriac then asks, 'Quelle est cette force dans l'homme qui l'emporte sur toutes les raisons de se délivrer?' (OC, VI, 126). He answers this question, and in so doing explains why the 'roman du mariage' has not disappeared but simply become the 'roman du couple', in the following terms:

La liberté dans l'amour n'est donc pas notre plus profond désir. L'instinct de la créature est de s'attacher à un seul être, de se confondre dans un seul être. (OC, VI, 126-27)

According to Mauriac this longing for a permanent sense of oneness with a member of the opposite sex, 'ce besoin de s'accroître, ce désir de se prolonger dans autrui qu'est l'amour' (Le Jeune homme, OC, IV, 432), reflects every man's vocation to be united eternally with God: 'Nous nous attachons désespérément à ce simulacre d'amour unique, parce que nous sommes créés pour l'unique amour' (Trois récits, OC, VI, 127). Although they may not always accept the fact, Mauriac insists that love plays an important role in the lives of most people:

Otez d'une vie les passions de l'amour ou celles de la sainteté, vous serez effrayé du peu qui reste. Il suffirait de dire: 'Otez l'amour . . .' Qu'il s'agisse de Dieu ou des créatures . . . (Journal II, OC, XI, 180)

Thus love of one kind or another constitutes the substance of human life generally, but according to the Christian it is the love of God that should contain all other loves, since man is made essentially for communion with him. This is achieved through the abandonment of self-sufficiency and the total invasion of the individual's

personality by that of Christ. Thus Mauriac stresses that Christian discipleship must involve a personal, enriching and life-giving relationship with 'une personne dont le nom aurait pu ne pas être Dieu' (Les Chemins de La mer, OC, V, 165). On more than one occasion Mauriac quotes Jacques Rivière on this subject to emphasize that the Christian religion is and should be regarded as a tremendous love affair - the love relationship par excellence:

Aucune autre religion, a écrit notre ami, n'a fait intervenir entre le fidèle et son Dieu, l'amour, avec ses dérangements énormes, sa logique extravagante, tous les troubles qu'il introduit dans les âmes. (Du côté de chez Proust, OC, IV, 305)

Mauriac insists on the importance of all human love, even if it is polluted, for, in the words of Michael Moloney, the 'waters of the spring may be muddied, but their source is pure'.<sup>30</sup> However, it is the relationship with Christ which is infinitely superior to any other and from which all other relationships should proceed. Through the medium of his fiction Mauriac suggests that on this point people are in constant danger of getting their priorities wrong. In their confusion they attribute heavenly qualities to human love relationships, the most idyllic of which can never come up to their unrealistic expectations, either within or outside marriage.

In the novels the delights of human passion are shown to be real but fleeting. In Un adolescent d'autrefois Alain Gajac concludes from his experience with Marie: 'Il n'y a pas de mensonge dans le bonheur que deux êtres se donnent' (p. 161); but he never again shares the same joy and sense of communion with her as they enjoyed during the night at Maltaverne. Mauriac impresses upon his readers that however mutually satisfying and fulfilling a sexual relationship is, the bliss it affords is bound to be short-lived. This conviction is no

---

30. M.F. Moloney, op. cit., p. 82.

indictment of human love, for in Christian terms it is inevitably true of any ecstatic experience. As a Catholic Mauriac maintains that the Kingdom of God is at hand, within each person and can be enjoyed now on earth, but the lasting joys of Heaven are reserved for an after-life, and man will not find perfect peace, total self-realization or absolute communion with God this side of death. Consequently the intense pleasure that two lovers may share at the climax of their relationship is destined to be no more ephemeral than the moments of spiritual levitation enjoyed by mystics. The Christian's love relationship with God is as subject to vicissitudes and limitations as any relationship between two human beings. In Journal II Mauriac writes:

. . . dans les rapports de l'homme avec Dieu: l'âme religieuse a connu des minutes d'illumination et de Grâce et il arrive qu'elle doive s'en nourrir pendant tout le reste de sa vie, au milieu de la sécheresse et dans les ténèbres. (OC, XI, 193)

In his writings on Blaise Pascal Mauriac points out how a single night during which he felt ecstatically close to God fed the whole of the mathematician's subsequent spiritual life and gave rise to treatises which have influenced Christians ever since. In the same way Mauriac implies that Gilles Salome and Marie Dubernet may have to nurture their relationship throughout their married life with memories of an isolated evening when their mutual sense of happiness and communion was particularly intense. However, whilst the saints may consider it normal that their experiences of spiritual ecstasy should be interrupted by the long, dark nights of the soul, and whilst they may concede that total, lasting communion with Christ cannot be experienced on earth, the majority of the men and women in Mauriac's novels are far more exigent and make infinite demands on human love. Mauriac stresses the importance of sexual purity

throughout his life, although, as Eva Kushner points out, for the older Mauriac 'elle est relation avec Dieu plutôt que paramètre'.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless he states categorically in Ce que je crois of 1962 that sexual purity is 'la condition d'un plus haut amour - d'une possession qui l'emporte sur toutes les possessions: celle de Dieu' (p. 77). If this condition is fulfilled a man and a woman in love 'devant Dieu sont face à face deux longues flammes claires qui se confondent pour brûler plus haut' (Le Mal, OC, VI, 66). However, Mauriac consistently maintains: 'Les passions ne sont belles que retenues' (Journal d'un homme de trente ans, OC, IV, 264). This point is also made in La Vie et la Mort d'un Poète: 'Les passions ne sont belles qu'enchaînées. Il faut que la vertu soit une maîtrise' (OC, IV, 395). Mauriac insists that, like the vital elements fire and water which he uses in his descriptive imagery, passion of any kind can quickly get out of control and become ugly, since unchecked natural inclinations, even when they are disguised by the embellishing and deceptive title of passionate love, are none the less in danger of leading human beings into the sordid slavery of moral degeneration. The fact that the pleasures of love 'ne durent qu'un moment' aggravates man's tendency to exaggerate its value. Material circumstances, social pressures, the thought of death lurking even in the distant background threaten the ephemeral joys of sexual love, making them seem all the more precious and lovers all the more reluctant to relinquish their passion, with the result that this may not only be polluted to an unacceptable degree by egoism or sexual impurity, but be worshipped with such an excessive intensity as a supreme good in itself that it actually vies with God:

---

31. E. Kushner, op. cit., p. 48.

Le Fils de l'homme sait que par la pureté nous allons à lui et qu'il n'existe pas d'autre route, et que la chair recèle une possibilité de délices, une exigence qui, se fortifiant de l'assouvissement, donne à la créature l'illusion d'un plaisir infini, - que la chair est sa rivale enfin. (Vie de Jésus, OC, VII, 109)

On occasions Mauriac describes God as being exceedingly demanding.

In Souffrances du pécheur he claims:

Le Dieu des chrétiens ne veut pas être aimé, il veut être seul aimé. Il ne souffre pas que nous détournions de Lui un seul soupir, tout autre amour étant une idolâtrie. (OC, VII, 230)

It is true that he subsequently retracted much of what he had written in Souffrances du pécheur, and many examples could be cited of Mauriac's correcting his tendency to present God as jealous and exigent. However, throughout his works Mauriac gives the impression that extra-marital affairs and adultery are reprehensible in Christian terms, not only because they constitute an offence against the law of sexual purity and are explicitly forbidden, but also because they invariably involve an excessive passion the very intensity of which leaves no room for God. Similarly possessive parental or conjugal love which is in no way irregular in official terms can be sinful if the passion aroused so absorbs the lovers that they no longer care about God. Thus in Journal d'un homme de trente ans Mauriac offers the following advice:

Ne chargeons l'amour humain que de ce qu'il est susceptible de porter: il est trop faible pour cette aspiration infinie dont nous avons frustré Dieu. (OC, IV, 241)

In the novels it is the abbé Calou who best sums up the implications of this moral code:

Pour juger de ce que valent nos rapports avec Dieu, il n'est rien de plus révélateur que la nature de nos inclinations pour les êtres, pour un être en particulier. S'il est la source de toute notre joie et de toute notre souffrance, si notre paix dépend de lui seul, la cause est entendue: nous sommes aussi éloignés de Dieu qu'on peut l'être sans crime. Non que l'amour de Dieu nous condamne au dessèchement, mais il nous oblige à vouer aux créatures un amour qui ne soit pas à lui-même sa propre fin, ce pur amour . . . . (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 379)

In Galigaï Gilles is seen as 'cette créature éphémère' who hides God from Nicolas (OC, XII, 124). Mauriac clarifies this in the 'Postface':

Et pourtant ce 'quelqu'un' qu'attend Nicolas Plassac à l'endroit où la route traverse le Leyrot, c'est Dieu. Il fallait d'abord que fût abattue l'idole: Gilles Salone . . . . (OC, XII, 166)

In this instance it is a friendship between two men which is in question, but the point Mauriac makes here is just as applicable to many of the man/woman relationships he describes elsewhere, for all Christians have a vocation to love God first. Many of Mauriac's heroes break the supreme commandment by loving another human being with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. Even Emmanuèle, the Christian heroine of the play Asmodée, is worried that she may fall into this sin, although her priest tells her 'que les époux s'aiment en Dieu' (OC, IX, 117). In Mes grands hommes Mauriac pin-points the seriousness of idolatry of any kind, as far as man's search for God is concerned:

Irréparable, sur le plan surnaturel (à moins d'un miracle) me semble justement cette usurpation, ce remplacement de Dieu par une idole. Dieu peut toujours venir combler sa place demeurée vide en nous; mais que fera-t-il si elle est déjà occupée tout entière, si elle est délibérément et jalousement réservée à Mammon, ou à Vénus, ou à Apollon et aux Muses? (OC, VIII, 408)

In Le Mal Fabien points out this danger to Cyrus Bargues, saying that 'la chair a été créée si sensible aux caresses qu'elle s'y satisfait d'une apparence d'infini' (OC, VI, 71).

Just as the sadistic desire of characters like Louis of Le Noeud de vipères to witness others suffering on their behalf can be given a metaphysical explanation,<sup>32</sup> so can the cruelty of the beloved unloving towards their idolaters. It is not only an

---

32. See above, p. 219.

'être aimé sans mesure' who 'nous frustre d'un plus haut destin' but also someone 'subi sans mesure' (Bordeaux ou l'adolescence, OC, IV, 172). Consequently, 'cette irritation que tout être éprouve à se sentir l'objet d'une passion inclassable et démesurée' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 7) can be explained, according to the abbé Calou by the fact that even 'l'âme la moins chrétienne exige de nous que nous ne l'aimions que pour Dieu, pour ce Dieu en qui elle ne croit pas' (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 394).

However strong sexual desire may be, however much it may deceive an individual into thinking that it will be satisfied by the total, sensual possession of another, Mauriac insists that it is invariably disappointed - except in the case of hardened and indifferent lechers, who have no aspirations to be frustrated - since it urges men to crave the body of another when in fact they are seeking infinitely more. In Insomnie Mauriac states that 'la volupté n'est qu'une parodie, qu'un faux semblant; elle est cette frange de chair que laisse entre nos mains l'être qui nous échappe' (OC, VI, 250). Leaving on one side characters such as Claude Favereau and Brigitte Pian who have excessively prudish ideas on sexual love, those of Mauriac's heroes who have the most clear-sighted aspirations regarding true love are also those who are the most disgusted by the thought of sexual pleasure as a goal in itself. Subconsciously at least they refuse to accept the attitude of Fanny Barrett in Le Mal 'qu'il faut s'aimer sans complications, sans drames, et sans toute cette métaphysique . . . ' (OC, VI, 87). Few of Mauriac's characters have facile motives for confusing love and lust. Much as they might like to, they never quite manage to convince themselves, like Maria Cross's friend, Gaby Dubois, that 'il n'y a que ça de bon au contraire, que ça qui ne soit pas décevant . . . ' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 120-21).

It is significant that when he is with Madeleine at Léojets Jean-Louis Frontenac experiences 'une joie non terrestre' and that 'aucune caresse n'eût ajouté à cette joie . . . Elle l'eût peut-être détruite, image déformée de leur amour' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 29). Similarly, during the happy courting days of Marie Dubernet and Gilles Salone their sense of spiritual communion is said to be particularly strong one evening when they actually agree to separate themselves physically by putting the river Leyrot between them! The passion of the majority of Mauriac's lovers, however, is neither so pure nor so deep, and they struggle in vain to escape their inner solitude and to feel at one with each other. Consequently they make physical contact as much as possible, unconsciously hoping thereby to bridge the abyss between them and to achieve at least a semblance of communion. In La Fin de la Nuit Thérèse is tempted for a while to force Marie to face the facts and to measure the distance 'qui sépare une future commère d'Argelouse d'un garçon plein de curiosité et d'angoisse' (OC, II, 394). That evening she senses that the bodies of Georges and Marie 'ont pitié des cœurs séparés, ils franchissent l'abîme; ils se joignent au-dessus de l'abîme pour le masquer, pour le recouvrir' (OC, II, 395). Sometimes a person whose love for another is not reciprocated at all will try and console himself by at least making physical contact with the body of the beloved. Catherine Desbats knows that André feels nothing for her. He is just a 'cadavre':

Mais elle se satisfaisait de ce cadavre. Elle tenait dans ses bras cet absent bien-aimé. C'est mieux que rien, le corps.  
(Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 331)

Raymond Courrèges's life of debauchery has its roots largely in his adolescence. His resolution never to be a weakling as he thinks his father is and his determination to remain 'indifférent à ce que

le corps ne peut pas posséder' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 89) reflect his vulnerability: afraid of being hurt by life he thinks his best means of defence is attack. Later, his 'amour-propre' having been mortally wounded by the humiliation of his abortive attempt to seduce Maria Cross, he cries out for vengeance, which in her absence he mercilessly takes on all of her sex. Consequently Mauriac points out that, although he was no doubt born with his hunting instinct, 'sans Maria, il l'eût adouci de quelque faiblesse' (OC, II, 118). Throughout his twenties we are told he despises everything which does not appear to him as an object to be possessed 'et, enfant goulû, il aurait pu dire: "Je n'aime que ce qui se dévore."' (OC, II, 4). However, Raymond's immortal yearning for Maria Cross is a redeeming feature which, although he would never admit it, signifies in Mauriacien terms, his thirst for God. The fact that even the materialistic Victor Larousselle, at fifty years of age, 'se découvre capable de souffrir à cause d'une femme dont il a pourtant conquis le corps' (OC, II, 46) suggests that, even if Raymond's seduction had been successful, he would not have been satisfied by corporal possession of Maria, but we are left in no doubt that if he had been, another inaccessible Maria Cross would have turned up.

It is like a drowning man clutching for a straw that Edward Dupont-Gunther persists in seeking fulfilment in the most distorted travesty of love. We are told he clings to Édith for example, 'comme au garde-fou un malade sujet à des vertiges' (La Chair et le Sang, OC, X, 236). Although she does not sink into a consistent life of sin, Gisèle de Plailly is also starved of affection and does not know where to turn for love. Lacking direction and afraid of never being satisfied, her senses seek in a passing soldier a

simulacrum of the love that would bring her true contentment:

Le destin ne lui ayant donné que ce visage, l'affamée s'en était saisie. Nous aimons qui nous pouvons. Comme un enfant sans jouet se fait, avec des chiffons, une poupée, c'est l'ingéniosité du cœur qu'il crée un amour avec les plus pauvres dons du destin. (Le Fleuve de Feu, OC, I, 290)

Bob Lagave's need and loving veneration of Paule show that he finds only limited satisfaction in his licentious way of life. Similarly Daniel Trasis's 'étrange soif de limpidité' and his 'vertige devant tout être intact' (OC, I, 222) suggest that he is seeking in his endless 'chasse à la femme' something much more spiritual than mere carnal pleasure. According to Michel Suffran, this 'désir luciférien de s'approprier l'existence intacte d'un autre, de faire sa pâture d'une pureté supposée cache mal, chez ces âmes gangrenées, une atroce exigence d'absolution'.<sup>33</sup>

Mauriac believed that only Love Incarnate can satisfy man's infinite craving for love, but the majority of his characters do not share his conviction. They continue to seek from love relationships some sense of fulfilment which they cannot define, since they have never experienced it, and which seems doomed to remain forever beyond their grasp. They do not realize what they want or need. Louis comes to acknowledge the truth of Saint Teresa of Avila's observation 'que nous ne nous entendons pas nous-mêmes et que nous ne savons pas ce que nous voulons, et que nous nous éloignons infiniment de ce que nous désirons' (Le Noeud de vipères, OC, III, 343). Thus several of Mauriac's characters, in default of Christ's love, come to half-accept limited satisfaction in diluted, impure forms of love. Tired of Marcel, Tota intends to pursue happiness through one affair after another without suspecting that she may be searching in quite the

---

33. M. Suffran, op. cit., p. 144.

wrong direction. Her brother is convinced that she is one of millions who 'parlent de bonheur' but 'ne savent pas ce que c'est' (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 59). People like Tota do not give preference to seeking a love relationship with Christ because they cannot begin to imagine the reward it would bring them. In La Pharisienne Mauriac speaks of 'cette délectation de l'amour divin dont ceux qui le ressentent ont peine à imaginer que le plus grand nombre y demeure insensible, au point de ne pouvoir s'en faire aucune idée' (OC, V, 393). Mauriac has every sympathy for his misguided heroes, for, like Pascal, he insists that whatever an individual's faith he 'ne quitte les plaisirs que pour d'autres plus grands' (Blaise Pascal et sa soeur Jacqueline, OC, VIII, 232). In Ce que je crois he expresses his understanding of unbelievers whose love relationships with their fellow human beings constitute their one and only 'pearl of great price':

Je méprise si peu ce que les hommes appellent amour que je ne vois rien ni personne qui mérite qu'on le lui sacrifie, sinon l'amour lui-même, l'amour vivant, cet Amour qui est le vrai nom de Dieu: 'Dieu est amour.' (p. 78)

In the novels, however, there are committed Christians too, who think they know and love God but still choose second best by satisfying their own desire rather than God's revealed will. Such protagonists refuse to acknowledge what they know in their hearts they need. They have a faith but they opt to ignore it rather than follow it to its logical conclusion and give up their passion in as far as it is sinful. Like Yves in Le Mystère Frontenac they try to leave their religion on one side or to put off answering its demands until another day. Again Mauriac understands the plight of such Christians. He appreciates that, although there are in a way fewer communication problems in man's relationship with an immanent God than in his affairs

with other human beings, he is naturally reluctant to give up a beloved he can apprehend sensually for 'un Être que les yeux ne voient pas, que les mains ne touchent pas' (Souffrances et Bonheur du chrétien, OC, VII, 244). This accounts for why an 'âme éprise de Dieu' may cherish 'plus ardemment les souillures' (Le Fleuve de Feu, OC, I, 217). Yves Frontenac, we are told, 'entraîne dans tout amour avec cette curiosité fatale d'en toucher la limite; et, chaque fois, avec l'espérance obscure de ne l'atteindre jamais' but 'c'était presque dès les premiers pas qu'il la touchait' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 95). He is in fact so well aware of how foolish it is to seek the infinite in the finite that he 'n'avait de cesse qu'il n'eût démontré à ses amis que leur amour n'était qu'une apparence' (OC, IV, 95).

Although Mauriac never denies that it is extremely difficult to achieve in practice, even for those who acknowledge the existence of God intellectually, his novels certainly indicate that if an individual gives priority to his love relationship with Christ, his relations with his fellow men have the best chance of being satisfying and meaningful.

Jean-Louis Frontenac cannot understand why 'tant d'êtres charmants et jeunes' like his brother 'n'éprouvent l'amour que dans la souffrance' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 120). Jean-Louis escapes this torment, and not because he is one of 'ces saintes gens que nous admirons naïvement de renoncer non à ce qu'ils aiment, mais à ce que nous aimons' (Destins, OC, I, 419); he knows very well what it means to be tempted. Although Jean-Louis's solution involves self-denial and therefore an element of unavoidable suffering, he avoids the kind of anguish Yves and so many others suffer because he puts God first:

Pour eux, l'amour est une imagination torturante. Mais à Jean-Louis, il apparaissait comme la chose la plus simple, la plus aisée . . . Ah! s'il n'avait préféré Dieu!  
(Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 120-21)

In the novels lovers who share a common relationship with Christ are shown to be united by a special bond. A comment made by Maria Cross in Le Désert de l'amour is relevant in this respect: 'Peut-être n'existe-t-il pas d'abîme entre les êtres, qu'un excès d'amour ne comble . . . Quel amour?' (OC, II, 120). In Mauriac's terms only God's love is capable of bridging the gulf separating human 'planets'. Short-lived and ill-starred though it is, one of the most successful relationships in Mauriac's novels is the Puybaraud marriage where there is a ménage à trois with Christ as the third partner. Similarly, Jean and Noémi Péloueyre achieve some sense of communion by praying together:

Ils décidèrent de réciter ensemble leur prière: ennemis dans la chair, ils s'unissaient dans cette imploration du soir; leurs voix au moins pouvaient se confondre; côte à côte et séparés, ils se rejoignaient dans l'infini.  
(Le Baiser au lépreux, OC, I, 177)

Moreover, Noémi Péloueyre who puts God first and shows her love of him by doing her utmost to honour her marriage vows finally comes to see a beauty in Jean which she would probably not have found in any other husband, however handsome or heroic in worldly terms. Jean, on the other hand, through selflessly loving Noémi and God in her, at last enjoys the love and admiration of a beautiful woman, something which, not long before, he would have considered a ludicrous impossibility.

Once Louis has touched on the 'secret d'amour' his aspirations regarding human love are met as a matter of course. After his conversion his heart is so overflowing with love that it is the most natural thing in the world for him to love Janine. He has no blind,

selfish passion for her. He sees all the facets of her personality as lucidly as he sees his own, but he loves her as she is, unconditionally and in a quite disinterested way. Thus Mauriac implies that whoever loves God above all else, in spirit and in truth, is inevitably led to love others in the same way. At the end of Le Noeud de vipères we see Louis actually experiencing 'la grande joie de ce réveil . . . de connaître par Dieu les créatures, et non Dieu par les créatures' (words of Saint John of the Cross, cited in Sainte Marguerite de Cortone, OC, VII, 426). As he experiences this great joy Louis simultaneously sets his grand-daughter on her own road to Damascus.

Although they may never undergo a conversion as dramatic or complete as that of Louis in Le Noeud de vipères, several of Mauriac's characters come to realize through their experiences that human passion and the most intense sexual pleasure will never bring them the deep, lasting satisfaction they crave. Some are more successful than others at deducing from this negative a positive conclusion. It is when Edward Dupont-Gunther discovers once and for all that the kind of search upon which he has embarked is doomed to fail that he finally yields to the temptation of suicide. By the end of La Fin de la Nuit if nothing else Thérèse Desqueyroux has learnt that the men in her life have only been pretexts for her heart-sensually apprehensible objects on which she has been able to exercise her call to love whilst hoping against hope that she might be loved by them. The inaccessibility of Maria Cross finally brings Raymond Courrèges to the point where he asks himself, 'Qu'y a-t-il au fond d'une vie vertueuse? Quelles échappatoires? Que peut Dieu?' (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 163), but his attitude is one of scepticism. He is alone, dissatisfied and suffering with little hope of finding an escape

from his torment and unable to help himself. However, in Mauriacien terms such a state of mind is infinitely superior to one of hardened indifference, and 'puisque ce que Dieu aime par-dessus tout, si nous en croyons le Psalmiste, c'est un coeur brisé' (OC, IX, x), one can say that Maria Cross proves to be a significant vehicle of divine grace in his spiritual life. At the end of the novel Mauriac points out that like his father he must now wait for his eyes to be opened:

Il faudrait qu'avant la mort du père et du fils se révèle à eux enfin Celui qui à leur insu appelle, attire, du plus profond de leur être, cette marée brûlante. (Le Désert de l'amour, OC, II, 164)

Maria herself comes still closer to the truth as she makes her way across 'le désert de l'amour'. She shows she has no illusions about the magic of sexual intercourse when she tells the doctor that 'nous empruntons la seule route possible, mais qui n'a pas été frayée vers ce que nous cherchons . . . ' (OC, II, 133). On the same night when she is suffering from shock she also penetrates the mystery of love's essential unity:

Je comprends ce que je ne comprenais pas; ces êtres que nous croyons aimer . . . ces amours misérablement finies . . . je connais la vérité maintenant . . . Non pas des amours, mais un seul amour en nous; - et nous ramassons au hasard des rencontres, au hasard des yeux et des bouches, ce qui pourrait y correspondre peut-être. (OC, II, 133)

She unwittingly gives a definition of Christ when she dreams of an 'être que nous pourrions atteindre, posséder - mais non dans la chair . . . par qui nous serions possédés' (OC, II, 135). Maria is brought to this point largely by her abortive 'affair' with Raymond; he sows the seed which Bertrand helps to germinate later.

It is through her dissatisfying relationship with her husband that Irène de Blénauge finally tastes the sweetness of the perfect love affair. Conscious of the vast depths of love she contains

within her, she is unable to accept that she is to find no outlet for it but Hervé, that a finite creature is destined to be the one and only goal of 'cet immense soulèvement d'un cœur', of 'cette puissance formidable d'amour':

Son délire conscient lui montrait, comme des objets, son amour et l'objet de son amour: une mer immense, étincelante sous le ciel, dont les millions de vagues enserrant, battent ce petit être indifférent, ce rocher minuscule: Hervé. Ce qu'elle a pu faire tenir, dans ce joli visage fripé et sournois. (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 88)

As she slips into death she discovers God, but the die is cast and there is now no time for her to enjoy him on earth. Nevertheless 'elle connaissait, elle voyait, elle appelait enfin cet amour par son nom, qui est au-dessus de tout nom' (OC, III, 91). Rose Révolou does not have to wait till she is at death's door to find that 'Dieu est de l'autre côté des corps . . . de l'autre côté des êtres' (Passage du Malin, OC, IX, 274). As Robert Costadot falls out of love with her, she falls into a relationship with Christ. By abandoning her, Robert unwittingly introduces Rose 'sinon à la vie dévote, du moins à une sorte de familiarité avec un être qui existait pour elle maintenant, à qui elle avait affaire, elle, Rose Révolou, qu'avait trahie Robert Costadot' (Les Chemins de la mer, OC, V, 154).

Mauriac insists that even if human love relationships do not prove to be instruments of divine grace in such an obvious way, they are always highly charged with metaphysical significance. It is 'à cause de ce qui subsiste de religion dans la plus charnelle passion' (Souffrances et Bonheur du chrétien, OC, VII, 246) that the abbé Calou maintiens, 'Il ne faut pas intervenir comme un aveugle et comme un sourd entre deux êtres qui s'aiment, fût-ce dans le mal' (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 424). Similarly, in La Fin de la Nuit Mauriac writes: 'C'est toujours le mystère d'une âme que la passion, même

coupable, nous découvrent' (OC, II, 425), and as he points out in Réponse à Paul Claudel à l'Académie française 'la connaissance d'une âme ne va pas sans quelque connaissance de Dieu' (OC, VIII, 469).

Destins is one of the novels in which Mauriac makes the point that love between the sexes can be not only a 'divertissement' in the Pascalian sense of the word but also the very opposite of a distraction, in that it can draw people's attention to an inner sense of anguish and restlessness, that only God will appease. Some time before her feelings for him come to a head Élisabeth Gornac's observation of Bob and Paule helps her to sense that 'pour éphémère que soit tout amour . . . il est une évasion hors du temps' (OC, I, 451). For however short a period Élisabeth experiences the vertigo of finding herself 'out of time', and this has repercussions in her spiritual life. Simply by arousing passion in Élisabeth, Bob unwittingly leads her to question, at least temporarily, her crippling and obsessive attachment to the things of the world. We are told that until she begins to fall in love with Bob, Élisabeth 'n'avait jamais vu de près aucun visage; elle n'avait jamais été attentive, jusqu'à ce jour, à des yeux vivants' (OC, I, 453). Eventually the beneficial consequences of her relations with Bob appear to be short-lived. At the very end of the novel we are told that 'Élisabeth Gornac redevenait un de ces morts qu'entraîne le courant de la vie' (OC, I, 535).

Mathilde Cazenave's death has the same kind of effect on Fernand as Élisabeth's contact with Bob has on her. It is as if Fernand is mysteriously sharing in a post-death resurrection. The realization that he has lost irrevocably an opportunity to love and be loved opens his eyes to an emotional and spiritual dimension in his life of which he had hitherto been unaware. His soul is shaken out of the arid indifference in which it had been fossilized, but once again,

as Michael Moloney points out, 'neither mysteries nor miracles are permanently germane to the world of the Fernands', and, like Élisabeth Gornac, when 'love's impact has been softened by time, Fernand slips back into his true self'.<sup>34</sup>

Sometimes a love affair can be beneficial for no other reason than that it shakes people out of their complacency by causing them suffering. In Préséances Augustin wonders whether this is not his sole raison d'être with regard to Florence. It is as a result of Augustin's influence that the pleasures of a materialistic social world cease to be of interest to Florence and that she becomes aware of a gap in her life. She remains so hard and insensitive that she will not consider the idea of her being in love with him, but at least 'elle vénèrait ce thaumaturge qui avait délié les bandelettes dont elle était pressée, ouvert ses yeux désormais indifférents aux grimaces du monde' (OC, X, 329). Similarly Andrès Gradère's frustrated passion for Tota - together with his wounded love for his father - shakes him, for a while at least, out of his apathy, so that for the first time since they have lived in the same house Catherine hears him make a judgment on life: 'Tout est trop horrible, tu ne trouves pas?' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 300). Whilst Isa might have helped Louis of Le Noeud de vipères a lot more if she had loved him, the suffering he endures when he is disillusioned also serves. The day after he learns the truth about her feelings he suspects for a minute that his pain may not be entirely without meaning, 'que les événements, surtout dans l'ordre du cœur, sont peut-être des messagers dont il faut interpréter le secret . . .' (OC, III, 386). It is his inconsolable suffering which helps Louis to grow more and more

---

34. M.F. Moloney, op. cit., p. 42.

detached from everything with which he tries to cheat his need for true love. Eventually his pride and self-sufficiency have been so undermined by his pain that he is genuinely open to God.

Some time after his wife's death Fernand Cazenave asks, 'quoi de plus remplaçable qu'une Mathilde?' (Genitrix, OC, I, 368). Mauriac's answer to this question is implied in his writings as a whole: the possibility of loving or being loved is too precious to be taken for granted, and the experience of reciprocated love is a rarity to be treasured, for it can never be summoned at an individual's beck and call. Whilst some of Mauriac's characters are not lucky enough to experience what it is to be loved by another human being and some never have anyone particular in their lives to love, others try consciously or subconsciously to remain indifferent to love or to put it out of their existence. Some do this because, in Robert North's words, they confuse 'purity with fleshlessness'.<sup>35</sup> In their eyes 'rien n'a droit au nom d'amour, que l'adultère des gens du monde' (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 388). Why others should attempt to quench the flame of love or to ignore its presence can be explained to a certain extent by the fact that 'passion signifie souffrance' (Souffrances et Bonheur du chrétien, OC, VII, 233). To avoid the suffering that love almost invariably involves, people are conditioned or train themselves to become indifferent, until practice makes perfect, and in Mauriacien terms they succeed in becoming virtually soulless. Raymond Courrèges for one is not prepared to sacrifice or to make himself vulnerable to the pain that love can bring. We are told at the beginning of Le Désert de l'amour that he 'n'acceptait jamais de souffrir à cause

---

35. R.J. North, op. cit., p. 43.

d'un autre, maîtresse ou camarade' (OC, II, 6). 'Rien n'est vraiment grave pour les êtres incapables d'aimer', writes Mauriac in Thérèse Desqueyroux (OC, II, 249), but if nothing is really serious or painful for such people, nothing is ever a source of real happiness: when men refuse the suffering of the Cross, they automatically refuse the joy of the Resurrection. According to Mauriac, once a person has truly experienced love, his capacity to love is unlikely to be deadened. Once the flame of love has been fanned into a healthy fire, burned brightly or even excessively, there is little chance that it will ever be quenched completely. The narrator of Préséances deceives himself when he thinks the whole story will end in Augustin's disappearance: 'comme si une histoire était jamais finie! La cendre a seulement recouvert nos cœurs et le feu a couvé sous les années' (OC, X, 339). Similarly, after he has been disillusioned by Isa, Louis of Le Noeud de vipères does everything he can to try and kill love within himself, but fortunately he never wholly succeeds. Man's salvation lies in the indestructible quality of his potential to love and be loved, and 'mieux vaut brûler que ne rien sentir' (Insomnie, OC, VI, 233), for, if a man ever really loses his capacity to love, his soul is in jeopardy. The terms in which Mauriac describes Brigitte Pian's opening up to human love are significant in this respect:

. . . l'amour humain ne s'était pas levé trop tard sur l'aride destin de la Pharisienne . . . le 'sépulcre blanchi' avait été descellé enfin et ouvert. (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 442)

Yves Frontenac may be wrong to ignore his religious vocation and subsequently to go astray, but there is still a noble, redeeming quality in his life:

Pourtant, aucun de ses gestes qui n'ait été le signe de l'imploration; pas un de ses cris qui n'ait été poussé vers quelqu'un. (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 122)

In Dieu et Mammon Mauriac maintains:

Ce qui déshonore l'homme, ce n'est presque jamais son amour, fût-il le plus charnel, mais ce par quoi il le remplace.  
(OC, VII, 328)

Consequently it is far better that men should erroneously give to finite creatures the love that should be going through these to an Infinite Being than that they should opt out by committing suicide, or by taking refuge in drugs or alcoholic stupor, or by wasting affection on material things. If people must commit idolatry, may they worship Venus rather than Mammon! Although those with an excessively passionate, fiery temperament tend to be led very easily into sin, Mauriac insists that men will not go badly wrong so long as they do not join the heartless ranks of the vulgar, complacent or base. Commenting on Mozart's Don Giovanni in Journal II, Mauriac writes:

Don Juan est bien damné d'avance parce qu'il est incapable d'amour. S'il avait aimé d'amour ses victimes, il aurait pu tout à coup aimer Dieu comme il avait aimé ses maîtresses. Mais seuls les corps l'intéressent. L'amour divin ne se substitue pas à la passion de la chair; il fait battre des cœurs qui ont battu et souffert pour la créature . . .  
(OC, XI, 141)

## 6. SUMMARY

Apart from the providential and mystical channels through which Mauriac's characters assist each other, wittingly or unwittingly, to find the God who is according to their literary creator the source of all true love, the principal way in which they help is by obeying the law of love, any infraction of which, on the other hand, is likely to exert a harmful, negative influence. The most superficially obvious form of spiritual help, namely preaching or counselling, is presented in the novels as minimally successful if not undesirable in as far as it may be a cloak disguising spiritual pride or psychological

manipulation and have the opposite effect from the one intended. Although, as was pointed out at the beginning of the chapter, all human beings are interdependent and cannot avoid their mutual responsibilities as potential vehicles of or obstacles to divine grace, parents in particular are shown to play a major role in this respect, primarily through the acts of genuine love they make or fail to make, thereby reflecting or hiding divine love, through the example they set either of true virtue or complacent hypocrisy and through the kind of Christian upbringing they foster on behalf of their children, for although this is in the hands of priests and teachers as well as in those of parents, the latter are largely responsible for it. Their influence in this respect - especially the mother's - is presented by Mauriac as considerable. If parents have an insincere, self-satisfied, pharisaical, fatalistic, life-denying, fearful, dehumanized, over-emotional, sentimental or even sensuous approach to Christianity, they will damage or impede their children's spiritual development - although the evidence of the novels suggests that even an inadequate, unbalanced Christian education is preferable to a total absence of religious instruction in the formative years.

Whatever their limitations, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives - and lovers - also play their part as significant instruments of or obstacles to divine grace. Above all, the intrinsic, theological implications of human passion in love relationships between men and women, whether or not they are married, are shown to fulfil a particularly important function; the central place given to this in Mauriac's thinking can be attributed to the parallel the author makes between man's desire to be loved by, and to love, a member of the opposite sex and his deep-seated spiritual vocation to be loved by,

and to love, God. The individual may not be conscious of the latter calling and need only the guidance of the former experience for his spiritual awareness to be aroused. However, Mauriac also presents sexual love as having a negative effect on the spiritual life of an individual who, prizing it excessively as an end in itself, is so distracted by it that he remains unaware of the love of God that lies beyond and is consequently led to commit the sins of idolatry, sexual impurity or crude lust. In the novels Mauriac suggests that it is an understandable error for people to expect too much from love relationships with members of the opposite sex but it is one that should be avoided since he maintains that human relationships will be as satisfying as possible only if the love affair with God is given priority. At the same time Mauriac indicates that the disillusionment which ultimately strikes all but the most hardened lechers when they realize they have been seeking a heavenly, infinite satisfaction in an earthly, finite one may in itself lead to questioning and spiritual progress. Since the very frustration and anguish engendered by desire can have such an enlightening, if not uplifting, spiritual effect, Mauriac stresses that men should never harden their hearts so that they are incapable of falling in love, even if this experience does lead them astray or involve a considerable degree of emotional trauma: to succeed in deadening this capacity would be to deal a crippling blow to the soul.

CHAPTER V

THE FREEDOM AND POWER TO LOVE

Throughout his works Mauriac stresses that the development of character, which is itself dependent on the mysterious interaction of the forces of heredity and environment, and the subsequent channelling of a destiny do not allow of any methodical analysis based on simple cause and effect evaluation. The quotation from Baudelaire cited at the beginning of Thérèse Desqueyroux indicates that only God can tell why men's lives develop as they do:

Seigneur, ayez pitié, ayez pitié des fous et des folles!  
O Créateur! peut-il exister des monstres aux yeux de Celui-là  
seul qui sait pourquoi ils existent, comment ils se sont faits,  
et comment ils auraient pu ne pas se faire . . . (OC, II, 167)

In this respect it is a hopeless task to try to assess to what extent people, places, events, books, indeed experiences of any kind have been instruments of or obstacles to divine grace in the life of a unique individual whose natural, inherited temperament is entirely his own. In Les Maisons fugitives Mauriac says that it is impossible to imagine what sort of a person he would have been in his fifties if at the age of eighteen months he had lost his Catholic mother instead of his atheistic father. He suggests that such speculation is quite fruitless:

Je ne le connaîtrai jamais: les possibles n'existent pas dans la pensée de Dieu. J'ai cru parfois réussir à séparer en moi les éléments hérités des éléments acquis. Mais c'est un leurre: il ne s'en trouve aucun à l'état pur; ils ont réagi les uns sur les autres, se sont fortifiés en s'opposant. (OC, IV, 322)

Further on in the same work Mauriac makes this point again when he maintains that 'il demeure impossible de discerner dans l'homme que nous sommes la part de l'éducation et celle de la nature' (OC, IV, 329).

Certain critics have suggested that in his fiction Mauriac does not simply acknowledge the important role played by heredity in the formation of character and in the subsequent working out of a human life, but gives his protagonists inherited characteristics which put

some at a distinct advantage over other unfortunates who could be considered predestined for evil. Pol Vandromme, for example, has accused Mauriac of allowing his characters to escape the struggle against sin by making all kinds of excuses for themselves. Without doubt it is 'facile de prétendre que l'on est victime de la fatalité, qu'on ne se dépouille pas de son tempérament, qu'on est lié à lui à jamais', and it is certainly true that 'cela dispense de se battre contre soi-même et de se vaincre',<sup>1</sup> but in fact Mauriac neither condones nor encourages such an attitude. Gabriel Gradère says that he feels 'le besoin de chercher un responsable parmi ses ascendants' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 146), but, apart from the fact that good qualities are inherited as well as bad, Mauriac insists that nobody can evade the responsibility given him by his essential freedom as a human being. Reference to an unfortunate past or to the genetic history of immediate or distant relatives is no excuse.

Whilst not overlooking the importance of inherited characteristics nor diminishing the mutual responsibilities members of a family share regarding the spiritual welfare of one and all, Mauriac emphasizes in a variety of ways in his novels that every individual is free to take whichever side he prefers in the moral battle of life and to decide which of the two protagonists in the conflict - GOOD or (D)EVIL<sup>2</sup> - he wishes to support. Superficial loyalties may change with the vicissitudes of fortune and the often thwarted struggle against sin, but when all has been said and done the fundamental choice made by an individual in the way he has lived will be known by God and be wholly assessable by him alone. Mauriac's conviction that despite his omnipotence the Creator respects and safeguards man's freedom to make this

---

1. P. Vandromme, La Politique littéraire de François Mauriac, Paris, Collection Etheel, 1957, p. 29.

2. See above, Chapter I, p. 16.

essential choice is reflected in the novels. However much potential for good family relationships may be shown to have in helping an individual to find God, they are presented as only one of many possible tools through which the gift of faith may be bestowed. What is more, however much they are shown to hinder the Mauriacien protagonist in this respect, they never prove an insurmountable barrier or damning obstacle. Mauriac stresses emphatically that the only fundamental obstacle to divine grace in a person's life is that particular individual's own will, which God always respects. It is this alone which puts up a positive barrier between God and man.

Firstly, no society, however sick, can be blamed for man's failure to accept God's invitation to love. Le Mystère Frontenac bears witness to the fact that the noxious influences of a hypocritical society which worships Mammon and suffers from the property disease can be resisted. An individual family is not automatically obliged to submit to such corruption, even if it is required to comply partially with certain social norms. Amélie Fillon quite rightly questions an over-simplistic interpretation of the antithesis - indicated by Mauriac himself (OC, IV, ii) - between Le Noeud de vipères and Le Mystère Frontenac, 'antithèse qui d'emblée a été admise au point de faire considérer ces deux œuvres comme le pôle et l'équateur du climat familial'.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, with regard to Le Mystère Frontenac, J.E. Flower asks sceptically, 'In spite of his efforts is Mauriac's portrait of a bourgeois family in this novel - albeit a transposition of his own - essentially different from his traditional one, and, more importantly, does he really succeed in convincing us?'<sup>4</sup> - but in fact Mauriac would

---

3. A. Fillon, op. cit., p. 195.

4. J.E. Flower, op. cit., p. 82.

have failed as a truthful and realistic writer if he had been successful in this respect, and the redeeming qualities of the Frontenac family have value precisely because its members are subject to the same socio-economic pressures that besiege other Mauriacien households and because, to a certain extent, they succumb to these pressures.<sup>5</sup>

Financial negotiations play a large part in family affairs. Disputes and misunderstandings often disturb the harmony of the home. There is the usual cult of the family as a sort of idol to which its members feel obliged to make the necessary sacrifices. This is particularly true of Xavier who justifies his uncharitable treatment of his mistress because his code of life insists that the Frontenac family must come first. He is also typical of his contemporaries in his reluctance to accept Blanche into the family on an equal footing. Both Blanche and Xavier stoop to a form of moral blackmail to make Jean-Louis relinquish his hopes of an academic career and eventually bribe him by offering marriage to Madeleine Cazavieilh as bait. Blanche is neglected in her old age in much the same way as any other Mauriacien mother. In spite of such evidence, however, the Frontenacs are different from the majority of the families Mauriac describes; there is a 'mystère', to which the world, represented by Dussol and the Parisian society in which Yves mixes, is deaf and blind, but the secret certainly does not lie in any magical immunity against the social evils of the day. As indicated in Chapter III,<sup>6</sup> it lies rather in the mystery of unselfish love. In the words of André Séailles:

---

5. See also above, Chapter III, p. 143.

6. See above, p. 144.

Ce qui compte dans le tableau du mystère familial est donc l'atmosphère d'affection mutuelle, éclairée par le rayon de la poésie et de la religion. La famille chez Mauriac échappe ainsi aux déterminismes biologiques, économiques ou sociaux où certains voudraient l'enfermer.

In Mauriac's other novels too there is much to support the view that however oppressive family institutions may be they are powerless to imprison the human spirit. In Destins Pierre wonders for a moment whether his mother's education and social customs had made her a stereotyped version of all the other bored and apathetic women of her day. He has to conclude that 'le milieu le plus étouffant n'étouffe pas tout dans un cœur' (OC, I, 521). Raymond Courrèges does not achieve true freedom by fleeing from his home, whilst his father acquires some peace when he stops fantasizing and resigns himself realistically to his situation. Similarly Thérèse Desqueyroux, no less than Jean-Paul Johanet, carries her chains with her. Abandoned at Saint-Clair she feels exhilarated at the mere thought of her ever being set free alone in Paris, but in the course of time the reader learns that the Desqueyroux household is not her real cage, just as the loneliness of Argelouse is not the cause of her inner solitude. At the beginning of La Fin de la Nuit we see that Thérèse only changed prisons when she came to Paris. She regards Anna as 'une domestique qu'elle gardait comme un morceau de pain bis dans sa prison, n'ayant pas le choix entre cette fille et une autre créature humaine' (OC, II, 334). After sending a telegram to Bernard she cannot bear the thought of returning to the rue du Bac to feel 'la pesée de ces murs, de ces plafonds que sa souffrance avait comme saturés' (OC, II, 371-72). Thérèse's one and only prison in point of

---

7. A. Séailles, Mauriac, Paris, Bordas, 'Présence littéraire', 1972, p. 210.

fact is her own self. Both before and after the death of Jean Péloueyre Noémi's future seems as blank and hopeless in many ways as that of Thérèse after her marriage, or after the court hearing. As far as her family is concerned Noémi finds herself in just as much of a prison as Thérèse, and her custodian, Jérôme Péloueyre, could scarcely be more exacting. On top of this Noémi feels bound by the sacramental bond of marriage in a way which is foreign to the unbelieving Thérèse. Noémi differs from Thérèse because she views her fate as an heroic challenge. Thérèse's school-teachers report that she wanted only one reward from life, 'cette joie de réaliser en elle un type d'humanité supérieure' (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 183). By the end of Le Baiser au lépreux Noémi has taken a major step to achieving such a goal without revolting against her family, without ever leaving her native village. Thérèse herself maintains that if Bernard had offered her a real chance of a reconciliation as they parted in Paris, she would almost certainly have gone back with him to embark on a new but different life of adventure:

. . . elle imaginait un retour au pays secret et triste, - toute une vie de méditation, de perfectionnement, dans le silence d'Argelouse: l'aventure intérieure, la recherche de Dieu . . . (Thérèse Desqueyroux, OC, II, 278)

This would not have entailed an attitude of lifeless resignation to the humdrum existence of a stifling family but an acceptance and subsequent transformation of her lot from within. One might argue that Thérèse's natural temperament and her upbringing had locked her in the prison of self in the first place, and that she was neither made nor given the opportunity for Noémi's vocation. The fact remains, however, that according to her literary creator, on the Day of Judgment Thérèse would still have to account for the ways in which she had failed to make the best of the materials life offered her, even

if any attenuating circumstances she might have in human terms would automatically be taken into consideration.

One can only repeat that according to Mauriac the most underprivileged person may, to a certain extent, opt for or against the law of love, in other words, say yes or no to God. To refuse to respond is a choice in itself. The acts of love made will vary according to the individual and his circumstances. From those to whom much has been given, either in the form of sacramental grace or, for example, a loving background and balanced moral upbringing, much will be demanded. As Isa says in Le Nœud de vipères, 'il n'est exigé de chacun que ce qu'il peut donner' (OC, III, 437). If one takes Thérèse Desqueyroux as an example, she is asked 'seulement de ne pas se résigner à la nuit' (Préface supprimée de La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 538). Mauriac's fiction as a whole reflects the author's belief that, although an individual may have little control over certain aspects of his temperament, or over his material circumstances, or over many of the people with whom he is forced into contact, he is in full control of his own response to all such factors: if they are negative influences, he may choose to wallow in self-pity and thus increase their scope for generating evil and destruction; if positive, he may waste their potential for being instruments of good. Noémi Péloueyre and Thérèse Desqueyroux are only two of a number of characters in the novels whose lives give expression to Mauriac's conviction that it is an individual's own will alone that can put up any critical barrier to divine grace. Jean Péloueyre grows up accepting himself as an ugly weakling but dies a hero and a saint. Xavier Dartigelongue's spiritual journey is not handicapped by his background either, although his parents and brother spend their time

trying to convince him he is 'dingue' and a 'pauvre type' who will get nowhere (L'Agneau, OC, XII, 187). Alain Forcas comes from a home ruled by a tyrannical, atheistic and utterly selfish father. He does not even know whether he has been baptized or not, and yet he responds readily to his vocation to the priesthood. On the other hand Yves Frontenac enjoys many material, emotional and spiritual advantages from birth but fails to answer positively when God calls him and drifts instead into a life of sin. Despite their scandalously sordid and evil pasts Gabriel Gradère and Louis of Le Noeud de vipères eventually taste the very sweetness of Heaven on earth. To take a last example, the agnostic Irène de Blénauge is the product of a broken home. Unloved, childless, lonely and tragically confined to her bed, she can find no outlet for her overwhelming capacity to love and would appear to be at a considerable disadvantage. The fact remains, however, that she is one of Mauriac's noblest characters and fictional proof of his statement that 'l'amour est une flamme, mais une flamme qui crée ce qui la nourrit, et qui le créerait dans la pire solitude' (La Vie de Jean Racine, OC, VIII, 85).

Thus Mauriac insists that however paradoxical it may seem in theory, man does enjoy freedom of will in practice and is forever accountable before God, because unless insane he is always master of his inner self:

Ainsi en est-il de chacun: c'est à l'intérieur que nous demeurons libres et que se joue le seul drame qu'il nous appartienne de dénouer. Qui put jamais se croire maître de l'univers? Mais le dernier des hommes reste, jusqu'à la mort, le maître de son âme. (Journal I, OC, XI, 65)<sup>8</sup>

---

8. See also above, pp. 22, 177 and 211, and below, p. 269.

In other words, the individual's freedom to modify the physical circumstances of his life may be limited, but he always remains quite free to alter the progress or direction of his spiritual pilgrimage. For the Catholic Mauriac this is the only freedom - the kind upon which depends the destiny of man's immortal soul - that is of any really lasting consequence. A survey of Mauriac's novels undoubtedly impresses upon the reader how detrimental an unloving, misguided upbringing can be. The author never questions the benefits of a secure home-life, a suitably balanced religious education and genuine acts of Christian witness on the part of family members. He is also caustic in his criticism of the worldly attitudes of a materialistic society which hampers the individual in his vocation to love and find love. He nevertheless concludes that, privileged or underprivileged, with 'les éléments que nous fournit le destin, il s'agit de construire notre vie' (Le Jeune homme, OC, IV, 447). In fact Mauriac never ceases to maintain that 'nous ne sommes pas: nous nous créons' (Le Jeune homme, OC, IV, 447). In the quotation from Baudelaire referred to above (p. 245) the reader's attention is drawn by the use of italics to the fact that the 'monstres' in question 'se sont faits'. So long as the individual respects his freedom and its concomitant responsibilities, Mauriac affirms that there is certainly never any question of his soul's being irrevocably handicapped by physical setbacks in whatever disguise these may be - the aftermath of parental neglect, the pressures of a materialistic world, inherent temptations of the flesh, or sexual complexes nurtured by a superstitious understanding of Christianity. 'Ce qui nous arrive, douleur ou joie, risque de nous entraîner hors de la voie étroite', he writes in Journal II, 'mais tout aussi peut tourner à l'Amour' (OC, XI, 149). Similarly, in his preface to Trois récits Mauriac

states that for 'cette auto-création, tout sert à l'homme, qu'il travaille en union avec la Grâce ou dans l'ignorance de la Grâce', and the latter, we are told, 'détruit bien moins qu'elle n'utilise les obstacles qu'elle rencontre dans une âme' (OC, VI, 120, 121).

At the same time Mauriac emphasizes throughout his works that man's freedom to find, love and enjoy God forever will be a real freedom only if he genuinely acknowledges that there is evil in the world, in himself and in others, for only then will he be able to contend with it. Alain Forcas summarizes the consequences of original sin and the devil's role in the following terms:

. . . depuis la Chute, l'héritage des ascendants suffit à chaque génération pour qu'elle se perde: cette folie obscure qui, du fond de la race, vient s'engouffrer dans le dernier vivant, les vices jugulés par les uns ou triomphants dans les autres, qui s'épanouissent dans les arrière-neveux . . . . Et voici qu'un être invisible a reçu le pouvoir de brasser cette matière affreuse - un ange! (et la plupart des hommes ignorent même qu'il existe . . .) Il ne brasse pas seulement tout l'immonde de ces pauvres coeurs, il utilise aussi leur désir de tendresse, leur passion de se donner . . .  
(Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 272)

In the light of such a résumé of the human condition the chances of a victory for the good in man seem small, and Mauriac insists that in fact human beings would certainly meet with defeat in their battle against evil if they did not have God's divine power at their disposal. He stresses that whilst for man alone nothing is possible, 'tout est possible à Dieu' or in other words: 'Tout est possible à l'amour; l'amour déjoue la logique des docteurs' (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 274). Happily God's love is readily available for use by every single human being. Indeed, according to the Christian every movement of true love is bound to have its origin in God. In Ce que je crois Mauriac quotes Pascal as an authority on this subject:

'De tous les corps et esprits, on n'en saurait tirer un mouvement de vraie charité; cela est impossible, et d'un ordre surnaturel.' (p. 38)

Alain Forcas recalls what he was taught on these lines at the seminary:

Personne n'a de soi-même que le mensonge et le péché, c'est un don de Dieu que d'aimer Dieu et son amour nous récompense de ce que son amour nous a donné. (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 273)

Consequently, as Augustin Léonard points out, when Mauriac portrays innocent and loving creatures, such as Marie and Luc in

Le Nœud de vipères, 'la beauté morale de ces êtres sans tache prend

la forme d'un don reçu bien plus que celle d'une conquête et d'un effort personnel'.<sup>9</sup> Similarly it is not gritting her teeth and

straining her natural will-power to breaking point that help

Blanche Frontenac to attain greater self-control with Xavier:

Du moins avait-elle obtenu, par une grâce qu'elle sentait toute gratuite, de ne plus s'irriter, de lui chercher moins souvent querelle. (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 15)

Hervé imagines Irène speaking to him from the other side of death:

Je te vois à présent, ô malheureux, tel que, livré à tes seules forces, tu ne peux pas ne pas être . . .  
(Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 98-99)

Thérèse Desqueyroux learns from experience that of herself she can do nothing. As soon as she feels strong in her own will-power she falls:

Je grimpe, je grimpe, je grimpe . . . et puis je glisse d'un seul coup et me retrouve dans cette volonté mauvaise et glacée: mon être même, lorsque je ne tente aucun effort, - ce sur quoi je retombe quand je retombe sur moi-même.  
(La Fin de la Nuit, OC, II, 393)

The fact that according to Christian doctrine man wittingly or unwittingly uses a supernatural power to do good does not mean that man's free will is meaningless. In La Fin de la Nuit the more

---

9. A. Léonard, op. cit., p. 76.

Thérèse's will is genuinely directed away from herself towards the welfare of Marie, the more strength she finds within herself to do the right thing. On a more negative note Mauriac points out that those who try to justify their sins by saying that they did not want to fall but could not resist the temptation are only deceiving themselves. He maintains that there are degrees of wanting and willing and that people often give into temptation because their desire to resist is not as strong as their desire to yield: 'C'est vrai qu'avant toute tentation de rechute, existe une tentation primordiale, celle de n'être pas secouru' (Journal d'un homme de trente ans, OC, IV, 254). Even if at times inherited traits of character and circumstances work against the will of an individual, Mauriac insists that the supply of grace at hand is always equal to the temptation. Although Mathilde's role as a double agent in the Desbats/Gradère struggle shows how an initial fault can set off a sequence of events over which the original culprit has no control, her freedom to react to these events as she chooses remains unimpaired.

This entire question can be viewed from another angle which also shows up the importance of man's free will. Gabriel Gradère is mistaken in his belief that the movements of grace he experiences are 'impulsions' against which he cannot defend himself (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 160). Similarly it is only a subjective illusion which makes Jacques of La Robe prétexte think that he does not have 'comme les autres hommes la liberté de pécher' (OC, I, 127). Man's freedom to resist grace is exemplified by Yves Frontenac who chooses to struggle against 'cette force intérieure qui le poussait à courir embrasser sa mère' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 83).

As God's power to love, the slightest movement of which can break even a chain reaction of evil, is a totally gratuitous gift that cannot

be earned or manipulated, the more a person is humble and therefore open enough to receive it, the better. This explains why Mauriac insists as strongly as he does on the importance of lucid self-knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Whilst an individual is self-satisfied he is closed to divine grace, for he is simply saying that he does not need it. Once Louis of Le Nœud de vipères finally understands what he has to do he also acknowledges that he is powerless to do it. This very realization is his salvation. It is this sense of helplessness - not hopelessness - which gives him the key to his dilemma. When he discovers that to love is impossible without some kind of help, he has already taken the first step in learning how to love.

Même les meilleurs n'apprennent pas seuls à aimer: pour passer outre aux ridicules, aux vices et surtout à la bêtise des êtres, il faut détenir un secret d'amour que le monde ne connaît plus. (OC, III, 516)

In the words of Augustin Léonard:

Pour toute l'humanité mauriacienne: pécheurs, pharisiens, médiocres: le seul remède est toujours la conscience de leur misère intérieure, leur impuissance au bien, afin qu'à travers la défaite des forces humaines, ils puissent, selon l'admirable expression de Pascal, 'tendre les bras au Libérateur'.

Madame de Blénauge mère points out to Hervé that to recognize the ugly side of one's nature as ugly, to know that 'la boue est la boue' is one of the greatest graces for the 'lépreux qui voit son ulcère, comment ne souhaiterait-il d'être guéri?' (Ce qui était perdu, OC, III, 121). Indeed, the whole of Mauriac's works can be viewed as a hymn to the first Beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount, for he emphatically maintains that it provides the key to the love that sustains life not only on earth, but through and beyond death. A man

---

10. See also above, pp. 178, 201 and 212 and below, p. 268.

11. A. Léonard, op. cit., p. 81.

has only to be stripped of all self-sufficiency and to want to be helped for divine grace to transform his destiny, however lurid his past. Gabriel Gradère points out to Alain Forcas:

Tant qu'un être n'est pas désespéré . . . tous les crimes ne mettent entre lui et Dieu que l'espace d'une parole, d'un soupir. (Les Anges noirs, OC, III, 154).

Once the plea has been made by word or sigh love does the rest:

'Un seul mouvement de pur amour, et toute une vie criminelle est anéantie' (Vie de Jésus, OC, VII, 148). No technical knowledge of 'ce que le chrétien appelle la Grâce' is required, for as Mauriac goes on to ask in Mes grands hommes, 'qu'importe le nom?' (OC, VIII, 421). Similarly, the fact that 'l'amour ne fleurit que dans le Christ' (Le Jeudi-Saint, OC, VII, 183) does not mean that the unbeliever who wants to establish loving family relationships and find fulfilment in human love but has yet to see through the eyes of faith that God is Love is Christ, is handicapped, since love can grow and bear fruit in the hearts of men who do not know its source. In his Discours de réception à l'Académie française Mauriac maintains that 'ce même amour que beaucoup ne confessent que des lèvres, embrase réellement le cœur de certains hommes qui pourtant le nient ou qui ne connaissent pas son véritable nom' (OC, VIII, 450), and in Vie de Jésus Mauriac points out that 'il ne dépend de personne, parmi ceux qui ont la charité dans le cœur, de ne pas servir le Christ' (OC, VII, 126).

One can conclude, therefore, that all the characters in Mauriac's world enjoy both the freedom and the power to love - or not to love - whatever vehicles of or obstacles to divine grace they may meet in the course of their spiritual pilgrimage through life.

CONCLUSION

If one considers the first of the two central themes examined in this thesis,<sup>1</sup> namely the extent to which the family relationships described in Mauriac's novels can be regarded as channels of love in accordance with the New Testament interpretation of that word,<sup>2</sup> a number of conclusions can be drawn.

The fundamental imbalance that exists in the majority of the families Mauriac describes, and which arises from the fact that they are short of either the husband or the wife, automatically threatens the establishment of a cycle of loving family relationships. The suffering experienced by the young members of such depleted families is shown up clearly. However, Mauriac's novels also suggest that parents in families which may or may not be at such a disadvantage often behave towards their children in the most unloving, if not cruel, manner through jealousy, frustration at their own emotional suffering engendered by their love-starved existence, or simply through selfishness and apathy. Maltreated offspring are shown to have a greater tendency to become unloving parents, so that a vicious circle of love deprivation is set in motion. Through the medium of certain characters Mauriac illustrates how the very absence of parental attention - either positive or negative - can be detrimental to the emotional life of a child. This may be due to a casual, heartless neglect or parents may feel a genuine affection and concern for their children but fail to express these in terms that are practical and meaningful to the latter. Such cases highlight the truth that it does not suffice for a child to be loved unless he also knows himself

---

1. See above, Introduction, p. 3.

2. See above, Chapter I, pp. 26-35.

to be loved and benefits from that love in real terms. Mauriac's novels also indicate that the most intense parental passion may not be love at all according to the Christian definition of the word. Mauriac suggests in the novels that this deceptive, malignant form of parental attachment has its roots in an absence or a breakdown of a loving conjugal relationship, revealing yet again how a vicious circle of love starvation can be self-sustaining, not only through childhood and adolescence but also in adult life. Whether through open hostility, indifference, or a distorted understanding of what true love is and how best to express it, the parents Mauriac depicts tend to fail their offspring. Since parents with a passion for their young as consuming as Félicité Cazenave's for Fernand do not in fact love their children at all but rather themselves, and since even the few well-meaning parents portrayed are often so misguided in the way they express their love towards their offspring that the latter do not benefit from it, one can justifiably maintain that in the vast majority of the parent-child relationships Mauriac describes there is an almost total absence of genuine parental love.

The parents in Mauriac's families fare little better as far as their enjoyment of filial love is concerned. The offspring of many of the parents described by Mauriac react predictably to the lack of genuine love shown to them. Some hate or think they hate their parents. Others are simply ungrateful, and fail to reciprocate the affection which they are given. The perversity of human nature accounts for the way several of the sons and daughters in the novels appear to be indifferent or even hostile to their parents, with the result that some realize in later life how much they did in fact love their mother and/or father or at least how much they had to be grateful for.

The establishment of close, let alone loving, family relationships appears to be hampered, according to Mauriac's presentation of them, by a number of general factors which affect husbands and wives and siblings as well as parents and offspring. These can be summarized as follows: the tendency to take those with whom we live for granted and to know only a part of them, the very intimacy of the relationships, the physical proximity in which family members carry out the routine actions of their day-to-day existence, the inability to attain mutual understanding as a result of a generation gap, temperament variations, personality clashes or differences of sex, the experience of an all-consuming passion for a particular member of the family unit or for someone outside its circle, and finally the failure through laziness, indifference or malice to use the human tongue as a constructive means of communication, inadequate instrument though it is - a failure which hinders the growth of mutually satisfying relationships and is simultaneously symptomatic of their breakdown.

In conclusion one can say that if, in Mauriacian terms, human relationships are the veins and arteries which carry the love that is vital to the individual's emotional life, the family relationships in Mauriac's novels can only rarely be considered as channels of love. Usually any natural parental, filial, fraternal or conjugal affection stagnates in selfishness, causing damaging blockages in the life-supplying ducts. Thus, Mauriac emphasizes unremittingly that family relationships are not naturally loving ones: genuinely loving family relationships are not born but have to be made. According to Mauriac, if natural family affection is to mature into true conjugal, parental, filial or fraternal love it must be nurtured by acts of Christian love. He insists throughout his novels that this rule applies in all personal

relationships, and that families enjoy no special protection against the corruption that can attack, undermine or possibly destroy incipient or superficial feelings of affection between individuals. Although Mauriac makes the point that a family relationship may actually be as cold and loveless or even hostile as one between newly met strangers, whilst a bond of genuine love can exist between quite unrelated people, he maintains unequivocally that total communion between related or unrelated individuals, and therefore perfectly attuned, loving family relationships, are not possible this side of death but can only be enjoyed in an after-life.

Whilst the reader may be perturbed by Mauriac's portrayal of relationships between parents and their children or between siblings as generally deficient in love, he is less startled by such a presentation of conjugal relationships, as the absence of love in the latter can be accounted for largely by the marriages of convenience that were the accepted social custom at the turn of the nineteenth century - the period during which the action of most of the novels takes place and when matches were made on calculated, economic grounds rather than on emotional ones. However, whilst not underestimating the corrupting influence of the materialistic, bourgeois world in which his characters live, Mauriac leaves the reader with no comfortable feeling that the families he describes would have been havens of affection and peace if they had only been formed half a century later. The fundamental problem besetting Mauriacien characters in their quest for a fulfilling relationship with a member of the opposite sex is shown by their creator to arise from the fact that human passion is not only a law unto itself, refusing to be conjured up or manipulated, but also inclined to be so impure as to be unworthy of the designation of love. Consequently,

even in their relationships with partners they are supposed to love, most of Mauriac's protagonists confuse their desire to be loved with their need to love, become increasingly disorientated and end up loving only themselves. Throughout his novels Mauriac illustrates how treacherous and painful the process of falling in love can be and maintains not only that true mutual love, equally balanced on the part of male and female, is indeed a 'rare and many splendoured thing', but also that intensity of feeling is no indication of love and that sexual passion is in just as great danger as any other kind of degenerating into hate or a travesty of love - in this case a hybrid attachment infused with self-centredness, human idolatry or lust.

Whilst Mauriac does not deny that domestic, conjugal happiness can be achieved, he stresses that, despite the illusions of a number of his characters, it is a very 'pauvre bonheur' (Le Mystère Frontenac, OC, IV, 56) - neither facile nor idyllic and only to be enjoyed at a price. According to Mauriac, to attain this happiness one must master the art of Christian love. Consideration of how this learning process takes place leads naturally into the second main theme of this thesis: the exploration of various ways in which the members of the families Mauriac describes help or hinder each other in their conscious or unconscious search for the Christian God of Love.

There are certainly many varied ways in which Mauriac's characters prove to be vehicles of or obstacles to divine grace. Some of these ways are more mystical than others; most of them are dictated by practicalities pertaining to the day-to-day circumstances of the people in question. No set pattern emerges from an analysis of the spiritual aids and impediments with which the heroes meet on their journey through life; indeed there appear to be as many roads to God

as there are human destinies. Two generalizations, however, can be made: love, or the lack of it, is always a central factor, and the family of the individual whose salvation is at stake almost invariably plays a significant role, for better or worse. However oppressive it is in danger of becoming, each family unit remains of paramount importance in Mauriac's eyes, because it is in the family that a child first comes into contact with human beings who, whether or not they turn it to good advantage, have the potential to introduce him to Christ and to encourage him to exercise his untrammelled capacity for learning to penetrate the mystery of love.

Without doubt the principal way in which the majority of Mauriac's characters are shown to hinder each other in their search for the Christian God of Love is by withholding from their relatives an adequate supply of genuine love expressed in practical and meaningful terms. Although parents play a particularly important role in this respect, other family members cannot shirk their duty. Many Mauriacien protagonists obstruct the spiritual progress of their offspring and other relatives by failing to set examples of genuine Christian virtue and faith in an all-loving deity. Parents also bear special responsibility for impeding the Christian development of their children by inflicting on them an atheistic, materialistic upbringing devoid of any spirituality or a so-called Christian education that breeds a hypocritical pharisaism or apathetic self-complacency, encourages excessive introspection and negative thinking, inculcates anxiety, depression, even despair, confuses sexual purity with ignorance, appeals merely to the senses and attaches too much importance to emotional religious experiences, or generally debilitates instead of strengthening character. However, in spite of the way nominal or

ardent Christians are shown to put obstacles in the way of their children's search for God, the evidence of the novels suggests that some religious education, even if it is badly taught, is as good as, if not better than, none.

Whilst stressing the importance of fraternal, filial and especially parental love in the context of an individual's conscious or unconscious search for God, Mauriac's novels all indicate that love between the sexes can be equally, if not more, influential. Husbands, wives and lovers are presented as being as capable as parents, offspring and siblings of acting as potential evangelists, although, however beneficial conjugal relationships may sometimes prove to be in this respect, marriage per se is shown to provide no intrinsic immunity against sin. What is more, Mauriac emphasizes the metaphysical implications of human passion which he maintains is highly significant, because man's innate, compelling desire to be loved by, and to love, another can lead him to his eternal vocation to enter into a deep, lasting love relationship with God. Consequently, irrespective of the families into which they were born, several Mauriacien protagonists are shown to progress in later life through the human to the divine love affair. Indeed, Mauriac insists that the potential of human passion as an instrument of divine grace is such that even if their love is far more impure than pure, even if their relationships involve considerable torment, people should never try to submerge their capacity to love and be loved. It is far better that they should try in vain to build channels of love than not to try at all, staying virtuously on the side-lines and attempting to be irreprehensible by omission.

Mauriac never denies that human passion can be a distraction in the Pascalian sense of that word. It can take people's minds off their inner 'angoisse' or 'inquiétude' which might otherwise urge them on to search for fulfilment in God. It can mislead them by giving them a false satisfaction so that they do not pursue their quest as far as the very source of love which would give them their heart's desire. At the same time, however, there is always the other possibility that it may guide them in the right direction by leaving them with a sense of dissatisfaction so that they do continue their search.

In Thérèse à l'hôtel Thérèse Desqueyroux decides that her heart is at one and the same time a curse and a salvation - a curse because it gets her into trouble and a salvation because it always keeps her from seeking a purely physical satisfaction. Similarly it is possible to come to the general conclusion that the kind of relationships into which hearts like Thérèse's are led can be both a hindrance and a help in man's search for God - a hindrance in that they can be misleading and hide the Truth, a help in that they may save an individual from a sterile satisfaction, for whilst people continue to seek their heart's desire through human love rather than through material possessions, they can never be irrevocably lost; their very dissatisfaction and persistent search are their saving grace.

In conclusion one can say that in Mauriac's novels God is shown to use people as instruments of his grace in the lives of others. The human tools he employs may not even be aware that they are being used. Mauriac implies that in as much as people can do anything positive to help others in their quest for Love/God, they must search for him themselves and practise the law of love first and foremost in their own lives. In as far as Mauriac's novels are didactic, one

of the lessons they teach most emphatically is that the greatest care should be taken when attempting, even for the very best of reasons, to orientate the destiny of others without their co-operation. For, although every Christian has a duty to take an interest in the welfare of others, he constantly runs the risk of expressing this concern in a harmful way. He may misguidedly believe that he is loving his neighbour selflessly when he is only pampering his own sense of pride, satisfying his need to be needed or fulfilling his unconscious ambition to control or dominate another. Individuals will prove to be instruments of or obstacles to divine grace in as far as they love or fail to love: the purer their love, the greater their service to others. By selflessly loving everyone with whom they come into contact, people automatically reflect divine love onto their relatives, but to achieve this Mauriac suggests that they should counteract their natural tendency to attach too much importance of the wrong kind to human relationships and to demand too much from them. The counsel Mauriac implies in his novels finds direct expression in the words of the abbé Calou: 'Le bon Dieu, d'abord et toujours' (La Pharisienne, OC, V, 321). He recommends that the individual should seek the Kingdom of God first, for then all other things will be added unto him. With regard to those who may not even realize there is a Kingdom of God to be sought but are nevertheless struggling to establish fulfilling and loving relationships, Mauriac's watchword is always the same: 'la sainteté est, avant tout, lucidité' (René Bazin, OC, VIII, 482): a man's saintliness is proportionate to his self-knowledge, the saint being first and foremost someone who, in all sincerity, acknowledges himself to be in need of help, even if he does not understand from where this assistance is to come.

Mauriac insists that there are no obstacles, visible or invisible, which will stop men who really want to reach God from finding him, one way or another:

. . . si étouffant que soit le cachot où sa passion enferme une créature, elle détient toujours une clef pour en ouvrir la porte, et pour s'évader soit du côté de Dieu, soit du côté des hommes qui est une autre voie pour rejoindre Dieu: la charité est cette clef. (OC, IX, xii)

Finally, therefore, in answer to the question mooted in the last lines of the Introduction to this thesis, the reader is not obliged to 'conclude that the deprivation of parental love, or the overwhelming pressures and contaminating influence of a materialistic and hypocritical society, or the absence of any Christian education during childhood, or the noxious effects of an unbalanced and unwholesome religious training, put the characters at such a disadvantage that their search for the God of Love is necessarily thwarted, except in a handful of arbitrary cases, and that family relationships which can be regarded as channels of love are bound to be mysteriously abnormal'.<sup>3</sup> However much a Mauriacien character may be helped or hindered in his 'vocation de sainteté', the only serious obstacle that separates him from God is his own stubbornness of will, his own self-sufficiency. In Mauriac's terms every single person is simultaneously a sinner and a potential saint. This is reflected in the lives of his characters, none of whom has any essential advantage in the spiritual pilgrimage of life. Far from being predestined for salvation or damnation by genetic forces or environmental circumstances they highlight Mauriac's conviction that man is free to love and that the power to love, like the Good News itself, is for all men of good will.

---

3. See above, Introduction, p. 12.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. MAURIAC

A. Collected Works

Oeuvres complètes de François Mauriac, Paris (Grasset, chez Fayard)  
1950-56, 12 volumes.

Volume I 1950

La Robe prétexte - Le Baiser au lépreux - Le Fleuve de Feu -  
Genitrix - Destins.

Volume II 1950

Le Désert de l'amour - Thérèse Desqueyroux - Thérèse chez le docteur -  
Thérèse à l'hôtel - La Fin de la Nuit - Conscience, instinct divin -  
L'Affaire Favre-Bulle.

Volume III 1951

Ce qui était perdu - Les Anges noirs - Le Noeud de vipères.

Volume IV 1951

Le Mystère Frontenac - Commencements d'une vie -  
Bordeaux ou l'adolescence - La Rencontre avec Barrès -  
Journal d'un homme de trente ans - Du côté de chez Proust -  
Les Maisons fugitives - Hiver - La Vie et la Mort d'un Poète -  
Le Jeune homme - La Province.

Volume V 1951

Les Chemins de la mer - La Pharisienne.

Volume VI 1951

Le Mal - Trois récits - Plongées - Le dernier chapitre du  
Baiser au lépreux - Les Mains jointes - L'Adieu à l'adolescence -  
Le Disparu - Orages - Le Sang d'Atys - Endymion.

Volume VII 1951

Vie de Jésus - Le Jeudi-Saint - Présence du Christ -  
Souffrances et Bonheur du chrétien - Dieu et Mammon -  
Sainte Marguerite de Cortone - Divagations sur Saint-Sulpice -  
Pèlerins de Lourdes.

Volume VIII 1952

Petits essais de psychologie religieuse - La Vie de Jean Racine -  
Blaise Pascal et sa soeur Jacqueline - Le Roman -  
Le Romancier et ses personnages - Mes grands hommes -  
Discours de réception à l'Académie française -  
Réponse à Paul Claudel à l'Académie française - René Bazin.

Volume IX 1952

Asmodée - Les Mal Aimés - Passage du Malin - Le Feu sur la terre.

Volume X 1952

L'Enfant chargé de chaînes - La Chair et le Sang - Préséances -  
Le Visiteur nocturne - Le Drôle.

Volume XI 1952

Journal I, II, III - Journal du temps de l'occupation -  
Le Cahier noir - Le Baillon dénoué.

Volume XII 1956

Le Sagouin - Galigaï - L'Agneau - Le Pain vivant.

B. Principal works of Mauriac not included in the Oeuvres complètes

Les Beaux esprits de ce temps, Paris, Champion, 1926.

Proust, Paris, Lesage, 1926.

La Rencontre avec Pascal, followed by L'isolement de Barrès, Paris,  
Les Cahiers libres, 1926.

Le Tourment de Jacques Rivière, Strasbourg, La Nuée bleue, 1926.

Dramaturges, Paris, Librairie de France, 1928.

Mes plus lointains souvenirs, Paris, Hazan, 1929.

La Nuit du bourreau de soi-même, Paris, Flammarion, 1929.

Ne pas se renier, Alger-Tunis, Fontaine, 1944.

Pages de Journal, Monaco, Éditions du Rocher, 1945.

Journal IV, Paris, Flammarion, 1950.

Terres franciscaines, Paris, Plon, 1950.

La Pierre d'achoppement, Monaco, Éditions du Rocher, 1951.

Lettres ouvertes, Monaco, Éditions du Rocher, 1952.

La Mort d'André Gide, Paris, Estienne, 1952.

Journal V, Paris, Flammarion, 1953.

Paroles catholiques, Paris, Plon, 1954.

Bloc-Notes 1952-1957, Paris, Flammarion, 1958.

Le Fils de l'Homme, Paris, Grasset, 1958.

Le Nouveau Bloc-Notes 1958-1960, Paris, Flammarion, 1961.

Ce que je crois, Paris, Grasset, 1962.

De Gaulle, Paris, Grasset, 1964.

D'autres et moi, Paris, Grasset, 1966.

Mémoires politiques, Paris, Grasset, 1967.

Le Nouveau Bloc-Notes 1961-1964, Paris, Flammarion, 1968.

Un adolescent d'autrefois, Paris, Flammarion, 1969.

Le Nouveau Bloc-Notes 1965-1967, Paris, Flammarion, 1970.

Le Dernier Bloc-Notes 1968-1970, Paris, Flammarion, 1971.

Maltaverne, Paris, Flammarion, 1972.

Mémoires intérieurs, Paris, Livre de Poche, 3<sup>e</sup> trimestre 1973.

Nouveaux Mémoires intérieurs, Paris, Flammarion, Collection Folio,  
2<sup>e</sup> trimestre 1974.

## II. CRITICAL WORKS

This section of the Bibliography is select in so far as it lists only those works which have been of particular use and interest during the preparation of the final draft of this thesis.

Bichelberger, R., Rencontre avec . . . Mauriac, Paris, Éditions de  
L'École, 1973.

Bondy, F., 'Mauriac, between Province and Paris', Encounter, 55,  
no. 5, November 1980.

Cormeau, N., L'Art de François Mauriac, Paris, Grasset, 1951.

Croc, P., Destins de François Mauriac, Paris, Classiques Hachette, 1972.

Demeure, F., 'Pathologie des Héros de Mauriac', Le Courrier d'Épidaure,  
April 1937.

Fabrègues, J. de, Mauriac, Paris, Plon, 1971.

Fillon, A., François Mauriac, Paris, Edgar Malfère, 1936.

- Flower, J.E., Les Anges noirs de François Mauriac, Paris, Archives des lettres modernes, 'Études de critique et d'histoire littéraire', 1969.
- Flower, J.E., Intention and Achievement: An Essay on the Novels of François Mauriac, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969.
- Fourcade, J., 'Contrechant sur l'oeuvre de Mauriac', Revue Hebdomadaire, 26 June 1937.
- Jarrett-Kerr, M., François Mauriac, Cambridge, Bowes and Bowes, 'Studies in Modern European Literature and Thought', 1954.
- Jenkins, C., Mauriac, Edinburgh and London, Oliver and Boyd, 'Writers and Critics', 1965.
- Kushner, E., Mauriac, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 'Les Écrivains devant Dieu', 1972.
- Lacouture, J., François Mauriac, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1980.
- Léonard, A., François Mauriac ou la psychologie du pécheur, Liège and Paris, La Pensée Catholique and Office Général du Livre, 1951.
- Majault, J., Mauriac et l'art du roman, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1946.
- Maucuer, M., Mauriac Thérèse Desqueyroux, Paris, Hatier, 'Profil d'une oeuvre', 1970.
- Maulnier, T., 'Paganisme et Jansénisme de François Mauriac', Figaro Littéraire, 28 April 1951.
- Mein, M., 'François Mauriac and Jansenism', Modern Language Review, 58 (1963), 516-23.
- Moloney, M.F., François Mauriac: A Critical Study, Denver, Alan Swallow, 1958.
- North, R.J., Introduction to Mauriac's play Le Feu sur la terre, London, Harrap, 1962.

- O'Donnell, D., Maria Cross, London, Chatto and Windus, 1953.
- O'Flaherty, K., The Novel in France 1945-1965, Cork University Press, 1973.
- Parry, M., 'The Theme of Silence in the Writings of François Mauriac', Modern Language Review, 71 (1976), 788-800.
- Robichon, J., François Mauriac, Paris, Éditions Universitaires, 'Classiques du XX<sup>e</sup> Siecle', 1953.
- Sartre, J.-P., 'M. François Mauriac et la liberté', Nouvelle Revue Française, 1 February 1939.
- Scott, M., Mauriac the politics of a novelist, Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1980.
- Séailles, A., Mauriac, Paris, Bordas, 'Présence littéraire', 1972.
- Shillony, H., Le roman contradictoire une lecture du Noeud de vipères de Mauriac, Paris, Archives des lettres modernes, 'Études de critique et d'histoire littéraire', 1978.
- Silvestre de Sacy, S., L'Oeuvre de François Mauriac, Paris, Paul Hartmann, 1927.
- Simon, P.-H., Mauriac, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 'Écrivains de toujours', 1974.
- Smith, M.A., François Mauriac, New York, Twayne Publishers, Inc., Twayne's World Authors Series, 1970.
- Suffran, M., François Mauriac, Paris, Éditions Seghers, 'Écrivains d'hier et d'aujourd'hui', 1973.
- Vandromme, P., La Politique littéraire de François Mauriac, Paris, Collection Etheel, 1957.

Wildgen, K.E., 'Dieu et Maman: Women in the Novels of  
François Mauriac', Renascence, 26 (1975), 15-22.

III. INCIDENTAL SOURCES CITED IN THE REFERENCES

Hume, Cardinal B., Searching for God, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1977.

Hurnard, H., Hinds' Feet on High Places, London, The Olive Press, 1979.

Powell, J., Why Am I Afraid to Love?, London, Fontana/Collins, 1977.

