FRANCOIS MAURIAC,

LITERARY CRITIC
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LITERARY CRITIC

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University
May 1965
MASTER OF ARTS (1965)  
(French)  

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE:  François Mauriac, Literary Critic

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SUPERVISOR:  Dr. A. W. Patrick

NUMBER OF PAGES:  iv, 83.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

An attempt to determine by what standards François Mauriac evaluates a piece of literature and to discover what these judgments reveal about Mauriac himself.
The author expresses sincere thanks to Professor A. W. Patrick for his interest and direction and to Mr. O. R. Morgan for his corrections and helpful suggestions.

M. T. H.
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La Révérende Mère Marie-Louise
Convent St Joseph
22A 153, Hamilton, Ontario
USA

Chère Mère, j'écris pour vous dire que je suis si déçue par les récents événements actuels que je n'ai pu pas écrire. Je vous envoie une lettre pour vous dire ce que je pense de récente événements actuels.

Veuillez trouver ci-dessous une lettre de remerciement pour votre générosité et votre soutien. Je vous envoie également une copie de la lettre que je vous ai envoyée.

Cordialement,

Francois MANUEAU
INTRODUCTION

In the numerous commentaries on the writings of François Mauriac, very little attention has been given to his rôle as literary critic. Amélie Fillon devoted a chapter of her book *François Mauriac* to this subject. She finds that Mauriac is a born critic with the special talent needed to probe into meanings and to observe the most insignificant details. She says: "Le sens critique proprement dit, c'est-à-dire ce flair qui dépiste l'intention et perçoit les moindres détails des apparences, est inné chez Mauriac; il est de plus terrible et sans merci." She feels, however, that this talent has been deliberately restricted by his determination to judge only in the light of Catholic doctrine, for, she says: "En fait sa volonté constante de se placer au strict point de vue catholique le limite en quelque mesure et à pu nuire à la variété des ouvrages de critique." Amélie Fillon's analysis, however, does not go beyond 1934. For this reason the present investigation of his critical work is undertaken in the hope of bringing it up to date.

Mauriac has said of his fellow writers: "Leur oeuvre ne

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vaut que dans la mesure où elle appréhende l'homme vivant tout entier." Let us, therefore, first examine his use of this criterion in his evaluation of their work. Secondly, since the national pride of the French makes them a race extremely conscious of their traditions, we shall investigate Mauriac's conception of what distinguishes French literature from that of "foreign" countries. Then, since Mauriac is still quite active as a journalist, still very much interested in the political and literary life of his country, still contributing each week his Bloc-Notes to Le Figaro littéraire, we shall, no doubt, be able to form a synthesis of his views on modern literary trends and perhaps trace these back to roots in the literary movements of the past. But Mauriac is primarily a novelist, so we shall look for his standards for judging the art of the novel. Lastly, we shall ask the question, "To what extent has his personal experience formed his attitudes?"

In a letter which he wrote to me in 1963, François Mauriac says: "C'est surtout ce que je révèle de moi-même à mon insu dans mon œuvre romanesque que vous devez étudier. Ce qu'un auteur dit directement sur lui a peu de valeur et renseigne très peu." Do his critical works, too, tell us something about himself? We shall keep this question in mind as we pursue this study.

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I

THE PROPER STUDY OF MANKIND IS MAN

Writing in 1945 of his adolescent years, Mauriac says: "Mon coeur nourrissait en secret une curiosité insatiable de celui des autres."¹ The novels and plays which he has written are the fruit of the zeal with which he strove to satisfy that curiosity. In 1952 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for "l'analyse pénétrante de l'âme et l'intensité artistique avec laquelle il a interprété dans la forme du roman la vie humaine." This study, too, developed his standard for judging the merits of other authors. He submits the works of Racine, Pascal, Shakespeare, Proust, Barrès, Bazin, Flaubert, Molière and many others, each, in turn, to the following tests: "Does the work show that the author seems to possess a profound understanding of the human heart? Does he portray the whole man, or does he highlight one aspect to the detriment of others? Is the picture he paints, worse still, simply a caricature of man?" Furthermore, according to Mauriac, not only will the author enrich us with the product of his study of other men, but usually will open the door of his own heart and permit us to share its secrets too. Indeed, we might say that this self-

¹François Mauriac, Rencontre avec Barrès, 1945, Œuvres complètes, IV, 187.
portraiture is demanded by Mauriac, for, he says in *Dieu et Mammon*: "Ecrire, c'est se livrer." In *Le Romancier et ses Personnages* we find: "Que de fois, en lisant certains livres, ou en suivant le développement d'une œuvre, on aurait envie de crier à l'auteur: 'Abandonnez-vous, sacrifiez-vous, ne calculez pas, ne vous ménagez pas, ne pensez ni au public, ni à l'argent, ni aux honneurs.'"

In his critical writings Mauriac sometimes speaks as an author; at other times, he shifts his position to examine the work from the point of view of the reader. He writes: "Hommes, nous cherchons dans un roman d'autres hommes"; again we find: "Le peu que nous savons de nous-mêmes, c'est parfois le personnage d'un livre qui nous le suggère à voix basse"; and yet again: "Pour l'homme mûrissant déjà engagé dans la réalisation d'une œuvre, lire les romans des autres, c'est une manière de faire le point, c'est se confronter." To "bring oneself into focus", one needs that precious gift, so dear to Mauriac, which he recommends to all, "la lucidité". "La seule chose que je haïsse au monde et que j'ai

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peine à supporter dans une créature humaine, ... est la complaisance et la satisfaction," Mauriac has written; for him "la complaisance et la satisfaction" imply lack of knowledge of one's true self. Therefore he notes, as one of the important contributions of the dramatist, the novelist and the moralist, the compulsion they impose upon us to make an honest appraisal of ourselves: "Combien peu d'hommes auraient le courage de se regarder en face si les dramaturges, les romanciers, les moralistes ne les y obligaient ! Il faut que quelqu'un nous impose cette confrontation avec nous-mêmes." 8

In Dieu et Mammon we find: "Il y a une certitude: il n'existe pas d'œuvre romanesque qui vaille en dehors de la soumission absolue à son objet qui est le cœur humain. Il faut avancer dans la connaissance de l'homme, se pencher sur tous les abîmes rencontrés sans céder au vertige, ni au dégoût, ni à l'horreur." 9 Who, then, in the eyes of François Mauriac, has passed this test? He has stated: "Mais justement personne avant Pascal et personne après lui n'a pu dessiner en quelques traits simples et éternels cette carte en relief de l'homme, avec ses sommets et avec ses creux." 10

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7 Le Romancier et ses Personnages, VIII, 300.
8 François Mauriac, Discours de Réception à l'Académie, 1933, Oeuvres complètes, VIII, 441.
9 Dieu et Mammon, p. 142.
10 François Mauriac, Mes Grands Hommes, 1926, Oeuvres complètes, VIII, pp. 336, 337.
In paying tribute to Shakespeare for his insight into human nature he says that that great English playwright could write again to-day (1937) his Julius Caesar, simply changing the name of his hero to Hitler, Mussolini or Stalin, for, he says: "C'est la même pâte humaine que de siècle en siècle vous pétrissez."\(^{11}\) Of Racine he says: "Sa gloire est fondée sur le coeur qui ne change pas."\(^ {12}\)

We expect François Mauriac, as a Catholic, to consider complete only that picture of man which portrays a creature composed of both soul and body. It is not surprising, therefore, to find him censuring Marcel Proust for a lack of moral perspective in his work which impoverishes the humanity he has created and restricts his universe: "Du seul point de vue littéraire", he says, "c'est la faiblesse de cette œuvre et sa limite; la conscience humaine en est absente. Aucun des êtres qui la peuplent ne connaît l'inquiétude morale, ni le scrupule, ni le remords, ni ne désire la perfection."\(^ {13}\) Bazin, on the other hand, he says, is more "naturalist" even than Flaubert, Maupassant or Zola because he has penetrated beyond the surface to depict the action of Grace in the world: "Pour lui, le drame de la créature n'a pas tenu tout entier dans le conflit des instincts."\(^ {14}\)

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However, Mauriac does not accept every piece of literature simply because it is Catholic or because it takes into account the spiritual as well as the material. Neither does he refuse to recognize the soul of man even when, as in the works of Colette, he has first to shovel off many layers of mud in order to find it. "Mme Colette", he says, "travaille à même la boue. Elle met son plaisir à nous jeter au plus épais de la lie du monde, ... à travers ce comble d'infamie elle atteint l'âme. ... Il n'échappe à chacun de ses misérables que 'le cri du coeur'. A chaque parole nous les voyons jusqu'au fond."15 On the other hand, many lives of the saints, Mauriac says, become, in the hands of the novelist, portraits of sublime, angelic, inhuman creatures. He advises the novelists to: "s'attacher à mettre en lumière ce que la sainteté laisse subsister de misérablement humain dans une créature humaine et qui est le domaine propre du romancier."16

But, within this domain, are there no regions labelled "out-of-bounds" for the novelist? "Se pencher sur tous les abîmes", Mauriac has exhorted in *Dieu et Mammon*, and in *Le Roman* we find: "La préoccupation d'être humain, le désir de ne rien laisser échapper de toutes les réalités de l'homme, voilà je crois les sentiments qui nous dominent tous, ainés et cadets."17 Proust, he says,

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16 *Dieu et Mammon*, pp. 316, 317.

teaches that it is only by invading the most intimate privacy of the human heart that one can attain the whole man, that one must reach out and make contact with that very secret life which exists beyond the social or family life of a man, beyond the sensible gestures which are determined by his milieu, his profession, his ideas and his beliefs. Mauriac admits that it is not a question of studying only exceptional and morbid cases, monsters and abnormalities, which is the field of the psychologist. The novelist should be concerned only with highlighting what distinguishes one individual from another, what is distinct and particular in each; nevertheless, Mauriac warns us of the danger of this undertaking. In seeking to know about the human being only what is his very own, only what is not imposed from without, he believes that we run the risk of working only with inconsistencies and distortions. It is possible that the very unity of the human person may be compromised and decomposed. For, indeed, our ideas, our opinions, our beliefs are not less a part of us for having been received from outside of us:

Though reproaching Proust, thus, for probing too deeply into the inner secrets of the individual, and later on accusing him of

18 Le Roman, p. 279.
writing "une œuvre littéraire . . . dont l'analyse pulvérise, détruit la personne humaine," Mauriac commends him for taking us further than have any of his predecessors into that secret part of society over which the legislator has no control. He has uncovered for us what is continually festering and putrefying under the iron yoke which tyranny imposes on the masses as well as under the harness of usage and protocol. In so doing, far from deserving, as some suggest, condemnation for indifference to the social problem, Proust has won, in the eyes of Mauriac, a place among "les plus efficaces révolutionnaires . . . ceux qui nous font avancer dans la connaissance de l'homme réel, qui nous rendent attentifs aux remous que crée, dans un même être, le conflit des passions et des vices avec les exigences sociales."  

With this same yard-stick, "la connaissance de l'homme", Mauriac measures the value of two other writers whose chief concern was not purely literary: Brieux, "l'apôtre social", and Barrès, the nationalist. In Le Roman Mauriac had remarked that, as a reaction against the unhappy effects of such writing previous to World War I, "nous sommes affligés aujourd'hui d'une incapacité redoutable pour enrôler notre art au service d'une cause, aussi sublime fût-elle; nous ne concevons plus une littérature romanesque détournée de sa fin propre qui est la connaissance de l'homme."  

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20 Journal II, p. 152.  
21 Le Roman, p. 271.
Five years later, in his speech before the French Academy, he examines the literary value of such preoccupations in the works of Brieux. Can one, he asks, arbitrarily impose an artificial arrangement on reality without distorting the human personality one is trying to portray? Mauriac charges Brieux with having done so in some of his works. Mélanges d'Artistes, he says, gives the impression that all poets abandon their wives, leave their children to die of hunger and seek their inspiration in absinth. Brieux, the philanthropist, puts the accent not on the interior reform of man, but on the amelioration of laws. He studies not a heart, but a question:

Mais cet apôtre, cet apôtre malgré tout chrétien, qui se manifeste, dès l'enfance, dans Brieux, se heurte en lui à un auteur dramatique... Le dramaturge que Brieux portait en lui résista soudement à un tel parti pris d'être utile et de servir, et il semble bien qu'il dut à cette résistance d'avoir écrit ses meilleurs ouvrages.

Le dramaturge, à chaque instant, prend d'admirables revanches. Dans les limites que lui impose l'apôtre, en dépit des consignes qu'il en reçoit, il s'arrange presque toujours pour rejoindre la vie; il accepte de son tyran des personnages abstraits, fabriqués de toutes pièces pour l'illustration d'une thèse, et il arrive, bien des fois, à leur donner un cœur de sang et de chair.

D'ailleurs, cet apôtre social et cet auteur dramatique qui sont aux prises dans Brieux, se mettraient aisément d'accord, me semble-t-il, sur le but à atteindre, qui est d'être utile aux hommes.

Il [Brieux] ne serait pas le grand dramaturge que nous admirons s'il n'avait eu d'abord le respect de l'unité humaine.

Reconnaissons-le: théâtre social, théâtre d'amour, cela n'existe pas; ce qui existe, c'est le drame humain. 22

22 Discours de réception à l'Académie, pp. 438-442.
Barrès, the nationalist, presents a different problem. Mauriac, at first, doubts that the struggle to obtain a fuller knowledge of man is compatible with a life like that of Barrès, devoted to politics. After a day in parliament, he asks, a day lived in the thick of mankind, can one, in the evening, shake oneself free of one's hatreds and party prejudices? Answering his own question, Mauriac concludes:

Ces généreuses haines, ce seront-elles, au contraire, qui, sur ce plan, le serviront le mieux. Leurs Figures est sans aucun doute un livre éternel: pourtant, si nous admirons cette peinture féroce, elle nous déçoit aussi, dans la mesure où c'est la connaissance de l'homme qui nous importe, et non sa grimace, fût-elle pathétique. 23

Later, in his Mémoires intérieurs, he is much more caustic in his criticism of Barrès: "Tout est vrai de l'homme, sauf précisément ce qu'écrit Barrès." 24 Barrès had written in his Cahiers, in 1897, a resolution to treat human beings, in the battle of politics, as though they were basically ignoble and capable of the worst excesses. Mauriac considers this a declaration of contempt for the human race.

Mauriac summarizes these remarks by asking and answering another question:

Dans cette génération, où le talent littéraire abonde, il n'est personne qui détienne le pouvoir barrésien de changer d'étoile, de passer de l'art à la politique; de faire servir

23 Mes Grands Hommes, pp. 418-419.
24 Mémoires intérieures, p. 128.
l'un à l'autre. Mais même en laissant de côté la politique, en existe-t-il beaucoup qui croient encore qu'un écrivain puisse servir?

It does not surprise us to hear the answer: "C'est encore servir la France que de la maintenir au premier rang des nations qui connaissent le mieux l'homme—à qui n'est étranger aucun des conflits de l'être humain."25 The novelist, too, is the person most capable of revealing the pulsations of the heart of his country to other nations, something which the best documented historical work cannot possibly do. For, Mauriac writes, "il n'y a que le témoignage des romanciers qui compte. Tous les voyageurs nous ont déçus: ils n'ont rien vu ou, plutôt, ils n'ont fait que voir; ils nous rapportent des apparences; ils n'ont rien connu du dedans."26

Many writers have won Mauriac's approval for their understanding of and sympathy for mankind: Loti, [qui] a éclairé pour nous les ténèbres de ces coeurs sauvages";27 Duhamel, whose sympathy for others is so great that he seems to experience their sufferings himself;28 Du Bos, who, though first drawn towards other men through curiosity, later sought them through love.29

25 Mes Grands Hommes, p. 419.
26 Journal II, p. 151.
27 Mes Grands Hommes, p. 414.
On the other hand, others have brought upon themselves severe denunciation for their treatment of the human person. Comparing Molière and Pascal, Mauriac says:

C'est lui [Molière] et non Pascal, qui bafoue l'homme et qui calomnie la vie. On bien, comme dans presque toutes ses comédies, il supprime la grandeur, et ne montre que la misère et la bassesse; ou, comme dans Le Misanthrope, il livre la grandeur humiliée à la moquerie du monde. Tout ce que, dans l'homme, Molière divise et dissocie, le bon sens chrétien de Pascal en refait la synthèse.

Though relaxing his earlier severity towards Flaubert in a preface written for Henri Guillemin's book Flaubert devant la Vie et devant Dieu, in 1939, Mauriac, in his own study of this novelist published in 1930, claimed that, although art, Flaubert's idol, obliged him to observe life, to represent reality, or what he conceived as reality, he did this only by halves:

Un défaut de son esprit l'obligeait à ne voir des êtres que l'apparence. Ce qui existait pour lui, c'était cet ensemble de prétentions, de tics, de manies, c'était une attitude qui, chez un homme d'abord, nous frappe.

le verre déformant à travers lequel il regardait l'homme et le monde, eût fait grimacer à ses yeux le curé d'Ars, comme le reste de la création.

30 Mes Grands Hommes, pp. 342-343.
31 Dramaturges, p. 6.
L'alchimiste de Croisset est mort victime des expériences qu'il tentait sur la créature humaine: il éliminait l'âme du composé humain, pour obtenir de la bêtise à l'état pur: elle l'a asphyxié. Pauvre Flaubert qui disait: 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi...!' Savait-il que Bouvard et Pécuchet lui ressemblaient comme des frères? Mais oui! Et il l'avoue: 'Est-ce le commencement du ramollissement?' 32

Although such a reaction of the artist's creation upon himself is quite rare, the reverse is very frequent. In fact Mauriac remarks in La Vie de Racine that an author who sets out simply to observe men will never get beyond the caricature. In order to make our characters live we must capture them in their joys and sufferings, and where are these joys and sufferings, if not within ourselves? Contrary to the opinion of Louis Racine, son of the great tragedian, Mauriac states that a man who could give such a vivid picture of the passions as did Jean Racine must have experienced them himself. 33

However, not only Racine, but many others too, according to Mauriac, manifest themselves in their works. In defending Montaigne, Valéry and Proust against critics who impute to the first the crime of having no other purpose in writing than his own pleasure, who quarrel with Valéry for professing to be interested only in the technique of his art, and who despise Proust for having no other ambition than to observe himself in the process of thinking or speaking, he says:

32 Mes Grands Hommes, pp. 401-409.
33 François Mauriac, La Vie de Racine, 1928, Oeuvres complètes, VIII, 84.
Mais que nous importe le mobile qui pousse un homme à faire son œuvre? L'œuvre seule, et non le mobile, relève de notre jugement.

Parmi les grandes œuvres éternellement vivantes et agissantes, combien sont nées d'un drame personnel, inconnu, sans aucun lien avec les préoccupations contemporaines! 34

Nevertheless, Mauriac is rather dubious of the value of the works of many of those who deliberately set about to manifest themselves to us. Even the most intimate journals which a great man leaves behind, he says, far from enlightening his biographer, often delude him, just as the writer first duped himself. He may have been convinced that he sought self-revelation whereas he was actually striving to make an impression on future generations. Though insisting on a genuine portrait of man which proceeds from a rigorous self-appraisal on the part of the author, Mauriac, at the same time, frankly admits that he does not think such a portrait possible.35

Mauriac does not trust even himself, for, beginning his own autobiography, he says in his work Commencements d'une Vie:

"Il [un auteur qui écrit ses souvenirs] compose, après coup, ce qui n'était pas composé et ménage la lumière selon l'effet à produire: ainsi des régions immenses de sa vie se trouvent plongées dans les ténèbres et il éclaire ce qui en lui prête à de beaux développements."

He goes on to give proof of this for he confesses that, on re-reading the first chapter of his memoirs which he had written years before,

34 Journal III, 1940, Oeuvres complètes, XI, 227-228.
35 La Vie de Racine, p. 58.
he asks himself if that child whom he sees described on those pages is really himself. Although, at the time, sincere, he marvels now at the audacity with which he put the accent on the solitude and sadness of his childhood whereas he had had many friends and enjoyed their company. He admits then, in his later years, that he had been influenced by Barrès's *L'homme libre*, where that author advised that the first requisite for a writer was the enjoyment of his own suffering. Therefore, he had concluded: "il faut commencer par souffrir" and he admits now: "je me souviens que je faisais flèche de tout bois."36

Those who have had the courage to unmask themselves, who have even gone to the point of covering themselves with mud, might very well, thinks Mauriac, be seeking applause for their daring, perhaps for their humility.37 Furthermore, although sincerity towards oneself is the virtue of this generation, the biographers of to-day, in Mauriac's opinion, will find in the memoirs they study only a reflection of the confusion which reigns in the life of modern man. Therefore, when this man sets out to "tell all" he actually "tells nothing".38

Gide, "un cas de sincérité terrible", Rousseau and Chateaubriand underlined the worst in themselves to make themselves

38 *La Vie de Racine*, p. 58.
invulnerable, to leave nothing behind for the literary excavator to ferret out. Gide is accused by Mauriac of seeking his own glory. For what other reason, Mauriac asks, would he have become so furious when his wife burned his letters if he had not intended them for future generations? Mauriac insists:

André Gide n'a rien à nous découvrir qu'André Gide.
... ses lettres s'adressaient, à travers elle, au public futur et achevaient le portrait dont la composition fut le seul but, le seul souci, le seul intérêt d'André Gide (et peut-être de chacun de nous dont le métier est d'écrire et de nous livrer).

Rousseau, too, as we have already pointed out, revealed the worst in himself. In Mes Grands Hommes, Mauriac quotes a letter Rousseau wrote to his friend Altuna:

Je tire un favorable augure des épreuves amères qu'il plait à Dieu de m'envoyer. J'ai tant mérité de châtiments que je n'ai pas le droit de me plaindre de ceux-ci;

but Mauriac remarks:

Ce n'est pas là sa vraie pensée.
... Rousseau a toujours menti; et l'époque moderne repose toute sur le mensonge de Rousseau,—ce mensonge essentiel: la transmutation du plomb vil en or pur, du mal en bien.

Baudelaire, on the other hand, says Mauriac, returns constantly to

39 Histoires intérieures, p. 84.
41 Histoires intérieures, pp. 107, 175.
42 Mes Grands Hommes, p. 358.
his sin, but, at least recognizes it as sin.\textsuperscript{43} It would seem then, that it is what the writer reveals of himself without knowing it which shows us the real man. However, over a quarter of a century later, in his last memoirs, Mauriac concludes that this "furie de se peindre jusque dans ses plus secrètes verrues qui est parmi nous une séquelle du romantisme" has reached "son dernier état 'post-gidien'.\textsuperscript{44} Nevertheless, Mauriac does not hesitate to compliment Benjamin Constant for his "lucidité": "Et nous qui l'aimons, pour sa lucidité même et d'autant plus qu'il s'est regardé avec cette passion d'y voir clair et de ne rien dire de lui-même que ce qu'il découvrait, ce témoignage irrécusable nous désarme devant ceux qui le haïssent."\textsuperscript{45} Of Raymond Radiguet, Mauriac says:

Aucun adolescent, avant Radiguet, ne nous avait livré le secret de son adolescence; nous en étions réduits à nos souvenirs qui sont des photographies truquées. Dans le Diable au corps, Radiguet nous livrait de son printemps une image sans retouche. À ce défaut de retouche, son œuvre devait de paraître choquante, parce que rien ne ressemble plus au cynisme que la clairvoyance.

Radiguet nous montre, à travers du cristal, les rouages de ces coeurs tout occupés de se tromper eux-mêmes. "Voilà ce qu'ils croient découvrir en eux...Voilà ce qui s'y passe réellement..." semble-t-il nous dire. \textsuperscript{46}

But, looking back over his own long literary career,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43}François Mauriac, \textit{Petits essais de psychologie religieuse}, 1920, \textit{Oeuvres complètes}, VIII, 27.
\item \textsuperscript{44}Mémoires intérieurs, p. 103.
\item \textsuperscript{45}Ibid, p. 78.
\item \textsuperscript{46}Mes Grands Hommes, pp. 426-428.
\end{itemize}
Mauriac reflects upon those writers "qui ont choisi de se taire":

Non seulement ils se taisent, mais ils renient (surtout Rimbaud) ce qu'ils ont écrit, comme si cette part d'eux-mêmes, leur oeuvre, les avait trahis et comme si, en la reniant, ils espéraient retrouver l'intégrité de leur être et restaurer leur moi dans son unité... Peut-être Arthur Rimbaud, quand il entre dans le silence, part-il à la recherche de cette part de lui-même qu'il en avait arrachée, qu'il avait jetée en pâture à notre génération. 47

Nevertheless, however true this may be, Mauriac does not subsequently retract anything from the statement he made in 1929 in Dieu et Maman: "Leur oeuvre ne vaut que dans la mesure où elle appréhende l'homme vivant tout entier". "L'homme vivant" for him is not just a "corpus" which can be dissected in a laboratory, but a creature composed of body and soul, conscious of his eternal destiny. Human nature has its universal qualities as shown in the works of Pascal, Shakespeare and Proust, but each man is also an individual and it is the role of the novelist to focus attention on the characteristics which distinguish one man from another. However, exterior influences also help to form the individual's personality. An attempt to exclude any consideration of these in the formation of a character results, in his opinion, in the pulverizing of that personality.

Furthermore, one must not exaggerate the good nor concentrate solely upon the bad in man, painting him either as an angel or as a demon. For Mauriac, man is a noble creature, a potential saint,

47 Mémoires intérieurs, pp. 105-106.
struggling within himself with much which is pitifully human. Those
writers who sympathize with man in his misery win his warm approval.
However, in his insistence upon a true picture of man resulting
from an honest appraisal of his faults and virtues, Mauriac betrays
a scrupulous nature obsessed with the ever-present danger of self-
deception. Though, at first, we might object to the accusations
of hypocrisy he makes against other writers, we are inclined to
excuse him when we find him turning the spotlight also upon himself.

Though Mauriac finds that literature in the service of a
cause, whether political or social, results in an artificial picture
of man, one prejudiced in favour of the purpose the author has in
writing, he does, however, admit that the novelist can serve his
country by making it live in the minds of those who might otherwise
have known it only through the very impersonal figures in columns
of statistics. He points, too, with pride, to his beloved France
as the foremost among those countries which have given us writers
who possess the capacity for the penetrating analysis of man.
French writers, he has said, can best serve France by maintaining
her position in "le premier rang des nations qui connaissent le
mieux l'homme".48 But this is not the only characteristic revealed
by the "famille française". We shall now examine the various traits
which, in Mauriac's eyes, make French literature unique.

48 Mes Grands Hommes, p. 419.
THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER OF FRENCH LITERATURE

One does not have to read many of Mauriac's critical works to feel the warmth of his affection for "La France", to find evidence of his keen sense of belonging to a family with traditions which must be upheld and transmitted to the writers of the future.

During the period after the war, the existentialists and the devotees of the philosophy of the absurd invaded the field of literature. Mauriac accuses these of attacking "l'arbre français à la racine." "Une philosophie," he says, "qui nie qu'il n'y ait rien de permanent dans l'homme, qui enseigne que l'homme n'est que ce qu'il fait, quel poison pour les héritiers de Pascal, de la Rochefoucauld, de la Bruyère, de Joubert."¹

Sometimes, however, he charges the family with responsibility for the type of writer to which it has given birth. In his Journal du Temps de l'Occupation we find:

Un pays a les écrivains qu'il mérite; ce sont des témoins qui ne le trompent pas et qui lui donnent à chaque instant, l'exacte température de son génie. Quelle étrange lubie, au lendemain de notre défaite, que de nous en prendre aux poètes, aux philosophes, aux artistes, à tous ceux dont l'existence seule devrait nous aider à ne pas perdre cœur !

Le jour où nous serons las de battre notre coule sur la

¹Mes Grands Hommes, p. 421.
poitrine de la France, peut-être nous repentirons-nous d'avoir persuadé le reste du monde que nous sommes un peuple de politiciens combinards et de buveurs d'apéritifs. Nous nous rappellerons alors cette magnifique chaîne qui, de Barrès, de Péguy, de Bergson, de Maurras, de Claudel, de Proust, de Jammes et de Gide, aboutit à Montherlant, à Malraux, à Giono, en passant par la génération de ceux qui ont aujourd'hui cinquante ans.

le fleuve français coule toujours.

When their motherland becomes "La Mère humiliée", Mauriac encourages his compatriots with the reminder that, although France, in this summer of 1940, has suffered an ignominious defeat, everything has not been destroyed. Her wealth of culture cannot be taken from her. "Montaigne est toujours là, et Blaise Pascal et Jean Racine. Paul Valéry respire en ce moment."3

Truly the blood of Montaigne flows in the veins of the author of La Pharisiennne, "le sang qui ne laisse pas à ses fils le pouvoir de se créer des illusions consolantes... les Bordelais ne se trompent guère plus sur les autres ni sur eux-mêmes que sur ce vin dont ils devinent après un seul reniflement et deux ou trois claptements, l'âge, la provenance et le mérite exact."4 In Mauriac's eyes, the most precious heritage of French literary genius is its "lucidité", in its keen discernment of the nature of man, his heart, his mind and his desires, a knowledge rendered more exact because it begins


3Ibid, p. 315.

with knowledge of self. The French mind is constantly turning inwards, busy with self analysis. Mauriac acknowledges the debt owed by his French family to its illustrious ancestor Montaigne. Speaking of Proust he says: "Il l'a enrichie [sa douleur] de méditations sans prix sur l'insomnie, sur la fièvre, sur les songes, sur le sommeil, sur l'approche de la mort, sur l'agonie (et par là cet héritier de Stendhal, de Flaubert et de Balzac plonge ses racines jusqu'à Montaigne)".  

Although Mauriac believes that Montaigne, as a humanist, is surpassed by Pascal, whom he considers the only humanist worthy of the name because he is "le seul qui ne renie rien de l'homme; il traverse tout l'homme pour atteindre Dieu", Pascal, too, he says "rejoint Montaigne, sur les routes intérieures où il nous conduit: grandeur, pensée, misère, coutume, imagination, divertissement...."  

We find many other examples of this effort made by Mauriac to find a common bond which unites writers otherwise quite different in philosophy, style, and background, this "air de famille" binding together groups which are otherwise quite heterogeneous. Speaking in 1924 of the young writers of the day, he says:  

Considérez d'abord à qui, chez les vivants et chez les morts, va le cœur de cette jeunesse: à des écrivains aussi différents que Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Claudel, Gide, Jammes, Proust, Valéry...différents certes mais dont nous frappe d'abord ce trait commun: ils n'ont pas fait carrière. Des  

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5 Du Côté de Chez Proust, p. 293.  
6 François Mauriac, Blaise Pascal et sa soeur Jacqueline, 1931, Oeuvres complètes, VIII, 258.
abîmes les séparent et pourtant ils détiennent ensemble ce qui s'appelle un air de famille. Aucun d'eux n'a mis au-dessus de tout la réussite matérielle. Un sentiment tragique de la vie les possède.... Les jeunes gens dont je parle trouvent chez les 'poètes maudits' une leçon plus adaptée à leur angoisse.... que l'expérience du bonheur est vaine. 7

Speaking of these same 'poètes maudits' in his Journal I, written in 1934, he says:

Ils sont bien des "phares", ainsi que Baudelaire les appelle, immobiles sur leur rocher, incapables en apparence de se sauver eux-mêmes, ils brûlent dans les ténèbres, mais notre route est inondée de leur lumière.

Aussi éloignés qu'ils paraissent les uns des autres, ces inspirés bien-aimés gardent entre eux un air de parenté. 8

Mauriac sees a deep fraternity between Nerval, Rimbaud and Guérin, three inspired beings who never knew each other in this world, but whose common madness took the form of thinking that they could at once recreate and flee from it.

Mauriac is constantly making comparisons between different members of his "famille française": "Il y a dans le lyrisme de Baudelaire une réplique au lyrisme de Pascal mais dans ces ténèbres impénétrables, où Baudelaire est un errant du péché originel, un amour le guide, qu'ignorait Pascal: la Beauté". 9 Balzac and Proust, he says, are the only novelists to whose books he can return again and again, opening the book at any page to share the adventures of

7. La Vie et la Mort d'un Poète, p. 402.
the characters without having to start over again from the beginning. The humanity of Proust's novels, however, is unlike that of Balzac's, for, he says: "Proust ne l'a pas observée sur le vif; il l'a retrouvée enfouie au-dedans de lui-même bien des années après, embellie, transfigurée, grâce à la chimie du souvenir". Comparing Bazin and Proust, he says:

Bazin, peintre du paysage, peint l'objet tel qu'il est. Il échappe à notre manie de ne rien voir du monde qu'en nous-mêmes. Chez lui, c'est l'être humain qui est le prolongement du paysage. Chez un Proust, au contraire, les haies d'aubépines, les pommiers en fleurs... prolongent des émotions, des passions, des souffrances.

But what, in Mauriac's opinion, is the most striking characteristic of French literature? He speaks of a certain attraction for a literature which probes the intimate secrets of the human heart, where each heart is considered as a universe different from all others, an attraction which, like a magnetic pull, is drawing French writers further and further away from all oratorical and polemical writing which favours one ideology or another.

Also, the persistent search for happiness, though it is a pursuit common to all people, is particularly characteristic of the French, and, in Mauriac's eyes is exemplified by Stendhal.

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10 Mémoires intérieures, p. 61.
12 René Bazin, p. 481.
13 Le Roman, p. 272.
Mauriac thinks that the French, though singularly blessed, are foremost in their demands for more blessings. He feels, too, that there is a definite relation between the past history of a nation, the price it has paid in blood for its glory, and the preference shown by its people for leisure and repose. Stendhal, therefore, is typically French because he is torn between the passion for adventure, excitement and danger and his taste for solitude and recollection, for, according to Mauriac, his true vocation is to study the human heart and to deepen more and more his understanding of the motives of men's actions.\(^\text{14}\)

Writing in his *Journal III*, 1940, Mauriac chooses Racine as the one author so typically French that he is practically unintelligible to other nations: "Il règne sur ces confins du coeur et de la raison où ne pénètre aucun esprit qui n'appartienne à notre famille.\(^\text{15}\) To love Racine and to be able to recite some of his lines with comprehension is, in Mauriac's opinion, the best proof that one understands the French mentality. However, later, in his *Mémoires intérieurs*, he seems to have completely reversed his opinion. He says: "Je nie que Racine soit leur poète \(\underline{\text{les Français}}\) et qu'ils s'y reconnaissent.\(^\text{16}\) Perhaps he changed his mind when

\(^{14}\) *Journal du temps de l'Occupation*, p. 327.

\(^{15}\) *Journal III*, p. 296.

\(^{16}\) *Mémoires intérieurs*, pp. 163-164.
he saw how readily the French people could be turned away from
Racine by poor interpreters of his plays. Mauriac refers somewhat
vaguely to a kind of conspiracy during the first few days of 1958
when, in many performances, Racine’s plays were presented in such a
way as to give the impression that they were being deliberately muti-
lated. Would real friends of this great author not have been able to
separate the wheat from the chaff and denounce those interpretations
which were not truly "racinien"?

Other writers, too, are judged in the light of their claim
to be truly French. Mauriac congratulates Gide for his special
service to France in writing French better than anyone else in the
world. Claudel, however, has produced a drama which, says
Mauriac, "ne se relie pas à l’ensemble du système français, …
Ni Eschyle, … ni Shakespeare n’expliquent le drame claudélien
dont l’unique source visible demeure l’Ecriture, la parole de Dieu.
Et pourtant il pousse de profondes racines dans l’histoire de
France." Mauriac finds two recurring themes running through French
fiction, a product, no doubt, of special characteristics of French
society and temperament and of the two distinct groups into which
French writers are divided, namely, the artists of the city and

17 *Mes Grands Hommes*, p. 423.
18 François Mauriac, *Réponse À Paul Claudel*, 1947,
those of the provinces. Speaking of these two groups, he says:

Lamartine, et combien d'autres poètes connus et inconnus, dont, vivants, le destin aura été lié à un endroit du monde, comme le sont leurs ossements à ces quelques pieds de terre où ils attendent la résurrection. Ils constituent une espèce, une famille d'artistes très différente de celle que Paris inspire.

L'art des villes et l'art des champs, surtout depuis Baudelaire, c'est une ligne de partage. 19

This cleavage provides us with the first of the themes of which we have spoken, namely, the craving of the young provincial which, so he thinks, only Paris can satisfy. In Balzac's novel Père Goriot this theme combines with the second, namely, the determination in the ageing man who can no longer be an object of love, to use the desires of the young, ambitious men to get power over them and so squeeze some last few drops from life. 20

Wallace Fowlie, in his introduction to A Guide to Contemporary French Literature says: "There are two subjects which we associate especially with French writings. First, the logic of an analysis or an inquisition which may be called the Cartesian influence; and secondly, the problem of man's happiness or salvation, which may be called the Pascalian influence." 21 Mauriac, too, has indicated these characteristics in choosing the works of Racine as a synthesis of the principles of French literary art because, "il règne sur ces

20. Ibid, p. 149.
confins du coeur et de la raison." The problem of the human heart is the constant object of Mauriac's searchings in any literary work, as we have seen. He shows quite clearly the Cartesian influence felt in French literature by contrasting the works of French authors with those of other countries who do not possess it.

He writes:

Les Anglo-Saxons et les Russes créent aisément ces mondes romanesques où nous aimons entrer à leur suite et nous perdre, et dont nous subissons d'autant mieux l'enchantement que nous sentons moins capables de les imiter. Leur instinct profond va dans le sens de la vie; ils se laissent porter par elle; ils épousent sa secrète loi sans aucun souci d'ordre extérieur et de logique formelle. Mais qu'un garçon français volontaire et raisonneur, fils de Descartes, se mêle de construire un vaste univers romanesque, selon une méthode qu'il sait être infaillible, nous assistons à une expérience passionnante, et dont l'issue ne laisse pas de nous donner quelque inquiétude.

Mauriac cites the two principles of Descartes:

diviser chacune des difficultés en autant de parcelles qu'il se peut et qu'il est requis pour le mieux résoudre... faire partout des dénombrements si entiers et des revues si générales que je fusse assuré de ne rien omettre.

However, he realizes that when these two principles are rigorously applied to French literature, the style of the true son of France is restrained and shackled. Describing such a writer, he says: "Il s'arrête tous les quatre volumes, numérote ses personnages, mesure le chemin parcouru, fait une risette au public, n'en revient pas d'avoir suivi si loin..." 22

22Journal I, pp. 93-94.
Contrasting two great Russian and French novelists, Mauriac says: "Un héros de Balzac est toujours cohérent, il n’est aucun de ses actes qui ne puisse être expliqué par sa passion dominante". But he says that the great genius of Dostoievsky is dedicated to "ne pas débrouiller cet écheveau qu’est une créature humaine... il est le romancier le plus différent de Balzac... et de toute sa postérité". Answering the objection proferred that Dostoievsky is depicting Russians and that inconsistencies and contradictions are peculiar to the Russian temperament, he maintains that no Frenchman, no matter whom he is describing, would use such methods. He writes:

Nous avons un tel goût de juger notre prochain, en dépit de la défense évangélique, que là est sans doute une des raisons qui fait le succès du genre romanesque: il nous propose des hommes et des femmes sur la valeur desquels nous sommes sûrs de ne pas nous tromper; le lecteur, même lettré, aussi bien que le cocher de fiacre, souhaite obscurément de hait le traitre et d’adorer la jeune orpheline... En chaque circonstance de notre vie, nous nous appliquons à ressentir ce qu’il est logique et convenable que nous ressentions; nous nous imposons cette même règle que le romancier français impose à ses créatures.

Finally, because the French novel has, for this reason, been somewhat impoverished in the past, Mauriac suggests that the aim should be to:

l’enrichir grâce à l’apport des maîtres étrangers, ... laisser à nos héros l’illogisme, l’indétermination, la complexité des êtres vivants; et tout de même de continuer à construire, à ordonner selon le génie de notre race, de demeurer enfin des écrivains d’ordre et de clarté. 23

23 Le Roman, pp. 274-276.
Comparing French and English drama Mauriac says:

Conte d'hiver, dont la lecture nous enchante, à la scène déconcertera toujours un Français. La notice du programme appelle notre attention sur l'unité tout intérieure de l'œuvre; confessions qu'elle nous échappe et que ce conte nous semble fait de deux pièces juxtaposées. . . . Nous sommes tout de même les descendants de ce traducteur de Pope qui, en 1738, après avoir déclaré dans sa préface, 'Quelques belles que soient les choses, nous y voulons absolument de l'ordre...' ajoutait avec candeur: 'Je me suis donc trouvé dans la nécessité de diviser le poème de M. Pope en quatre chants, de rapprocher des idées trop éloignées, et de recoudre certains morceaux qui paraissaient détachés de leur tout....' 24

Mauriac indicates another French trait in reviewing the Russian play Uncle Vania in 1921: "A toute pièce russe, un spectateur français d'abord résiste. Une longue accoutumance nous incline à rechercher au théâtre de quoi nous divertir, "une heure d'oubli". Les Russes, et surtout Tchekov nous obligent à voir notre misère... Un art non pas réaliste comme nous l'entendons en France; mais un art humain, et cela dit tout." 25

Studying the novels of Graham Greene, Mauriac begins to reflect upon another, namely the Catholic, tradition in French literature. He remarks in a preface to the French translation of The Power and the Glory that he feels like a wanderer in a strange country as he makes his way through the novel of an English Catholic novelist. There he finds no great theological disputes, no "lining up" with this or that school of thought, such as has characterized

24 Dramaturges, p. 155.
25 Ibid, p. 11.
so many of the French writings of the last four centuries. A French Catholic, says Mauriac, has taken sides in all the debates which have torn the Gallican Church in the course of the centuries....Port Royal against the Jesuits, Bossuet against Fénelon, the controversies of Lamennais and Lacordaire, but in the works of Graham Greene "aucun parti pris ne trouble sa vision. Aucun courant d'idées ne le détoure de cette découverte, le royaume de la nature et de la Grâce." 26

Such then, is the picture which François Mauriac paints of his French literary family, a family whose traditions are firmly rooted in the past and whose sons take pride in the achievements of all, even of those with whom they disagree on many points. The sense of dedication to an ideal is the driving force behind the prodigious activity of many writers. French literature is essentially a literature of the heart, but the influence of Descartes establishes an equilibrium between the illogicality of the movements of the heart and the logicality of the intellect. At times, however, the latter cramps the style of the French novelist who wishes to portray real life and not just a series of snapshots of scenes in any one particular life. The Frenchman's craving for activity, particularly his feverish pursuit of happiness, is counterbalanced by his love of meditation which often takes the form of scrutinizing

self-analysis. His search for happiness often ends in the conclusion that all is vanity, which gives to French literature its "sentiment tragique". Further contrasts appear in the art of Paris as compared with that of the provinces and, finally, in the theological debates to which many great French works have been devoted throughout the centuries.

Now we shall examine Mauriac's study of French literature as a series of various literary movements and a manifestation of various trends of thought.
III

FRENCH LITERARY MOVEMENTS

In his critical writings Mauriac has given considerable attention to the three great literary movements, Classicism, Romanticism and Naturalism. In his own novels he has tried to find a proper balance between "le pôle de l'art" and "le pôle de la vie", between "l'illlogic, l'indétermination, la complexité des êtres vivants" and "l'ordre, la clarté, le génie de notre race". One must agree with Pierre-Henri Simon that, in resolving this delicate problem: "il penche du côté classique". In his reflections on the work of Racine, however, Mauriac says:

Ce qui appartient à Racine, c'est la continuité rigoureuse, non d'un discours comme dans Corneille—mais d'une passion pensée, exprimée, clarifiée, mise au net, par un petit nombre de mots très ordinaires, qui composent une musique. Musique sans dissonance ni accord appuyé—suggéster certes, mais qui interdit le rêve, lié qu'elle est à une réalité d'ailleurs atroce. Aucune échappée, comme dans Shakespeare, aucun regard à l'étoile, jamais le moindre répit pour se détourner de l'horreur présente et pour méditer calmement sur le destin des autres hommes. Nous sommes enfermés dans la cage, entre les barreaux de vers tous pareils, face à des passions mues qui

se regardent et qui se décrivent, et qui se raconte avec une
lucidité que leur fureur ne limite ni n'altère.
Rien qui plaise moins aux Français. 2

How, then, does Mauriac view the first great reaction against what
he seems to consider a classical "strait jacket" which had been
stifling French literature during the seventeenth century?

Romanticism, to Mauriac, is a literature over which hangs a
heavy weight of gloom. He points out that the generation for whom
Daniel Defoe wrote Moll Flanders was willing to accept the responsi-
bility of its actions without either boasting of its guilt or unduly
exaggerating it, and was ready to pay the price for its crime when
the time came to do so. He says of Moll Flanders:

Elle garde, dans le comble de la perversité et du libertinage,
un certain ton de bonne compagnie, qui est celui de l'époque,
et qui nous ferait croire que la vulgarité est née avec le faux
dans les sentiments, c'est-à-dire avec le Romantisme.

Le cri de Michelet sur "cet affreux supplice qu'est la vieillesse"
Moll Flanders le trouverait bien ridicule. 3

Mauriac argues that neither old age nor solitude was considered
"une angoisse" before the time of Rousseau and the Romantics. Defoe
treats of solitude in Moll Flanders as a necessity for his heroine.
She chooses it herself because she knows the danger of having
accomplices. The romantic hero, on the other hand, he says, looks
upon solitude as a desert where he can bury himself: "le seul

2 Mémoires intérieurs, pp. 162-163.
3 Ibid, pp. 234-235.
Furthermore, Mauriac sees in Romanticism only a confusion which betrays an interior disorder in the poet himself, and this interior disorder, he equates with sin. He says:

Il existe un rapport certain entre la discipline intérieure et la perfection poétique et ce que beaucoup haïssent sous le nom de romantisme, c'est le péché: le péché se trahit dans l'enflure, dans l'égarement, dans le désordre des images, dans le mépris du verbe, dans l'abus des épithètes. Le romantisme est le péché qui s'ignore. Charles Baudelaire domine son siècle parce que, chez lui, le péché se connaît. 5

Mauriac emphasizes this disorder which he sees in the writings of the Romantics, by contrasting the works of Baudelaire with those of Musset, who represents "la jeunesse du Romantisme". He refers to a letter which Baudelaire wrote to Armand Fraisse in which the former shows his contemptuous attitude towards Musset, describing his poetry as a muddy torrent of faults of grammar and of prosody, and the poet himself as incapable of understanding the labour necessary to convert a dream into a literary work of art. On the other hand, Mauriac describes the poetry of Baudelaire as the nearest approach to prose ever attempted by a poet, a poetry in which he describes an object most precisely, choosing words which make it so vivid that we feel we have to touch it. 6

4 Mémoires intérieurs, pp. 234-235.
5 La vie et la mort d'un poète, p. 369.
6 Mémoires intérieurs, p. 48.
Commenting upon Baudelaire's letter, Mauriac says:

Jamais génie ne fut plus lucide que celui de Baudelaire. Jamais la poésie ne se confondit aussi étroitement avec la critique. Jamais l'inspiration ne fut liée à une vue plus nette, dégagée de toute complaisance à l'égard de ce que le poète avait résolu de détruire et qu'il a en effet détruit. ... Si la technique avait pris le pas sur l'inspiration, il n'y aurait pas de quoi se vanter. Mais la rigueur a vaincu le va-comme-je-te pousse. Et, en gros, il est apparu qu'un poète n'avait rien à perdre à être intelligent. 7

But, before proceeding further, we might go back and question Mauriac's meaning in his statement: "Le Romantisme est le péché qui s'ignore", because later, in Dieu et Mammon we find: "Les romantiques furent bien moins que ne le sont nos contemporains, les fils et les héritiers de Rousseau. Enfants corrompus de Christ, les romantiques tenaient fortement à l'antique distinction du bien et du mal, même quand ils divinisèrent le mal et qu'ils jouaient les anges déchus". 8 Could Mauriac mean, then, that the Romantic movement was a symbol of sin which is not acknowledged as such, but that the Romantics themselves realised the difference between good and evil? Is he drawing a parallel between the romantic movement in the history of literature and sin in the moral order, or does he mean, rather, that the Romantics recognised sin in the world but denied the possibility of its presence in their own lives, "...ils divinisèrent le mal"?

Another apparent discrepancy appears in Mes Grands Hommes. Here we find: "Tout le romantisme, fidèle à la lettre de Jean-

7 Mémoires intérieurs, pp. 54-55.
8 Dieu et Mammon, p. 281.
Jacques, continuait de croire à la vertu. Mauriac, as we have just noted, had said previously: "Les Romantiques furent bien moins que ne le sont nos contemporains, les fils et les héritiers de Rousseau", because "ils tenaient fortement à l'antique distinction du bien et du mal." Is Mauriac making a distinction between "le Romantisme" as a movement and "les Romantiques" as individuals?

Returning to Musset, we find that Mauriac has assigned him the role of the "adolescent's poet". He sees him as the favourite of those who are passing through that extremely self-centred phase of life, "la première adolescence". He writes:

L'asservissement à la famille, à des devoirs, à l'enfant que l'on est toujours pour sa mère et pour ses maîtres devient un joug insupportable; l'éveil du sang et des songes nous condamne à la perpétuelle création d'un monde pressenti, nécessaire à notre évasion, et dont rien ne nous est connu. Univers chimérique qui trouve de la consistance dans le vague et dans le faux de Musset. ... Baudelaire nous répugne à cet âge, parce que sa poésie et la réalité se confondent; son inspiration jaillit au cœur du réel qu'un jeune être repousse; quand il l'affrontera et qu'il s'y conformera, il sera devenu un homme. Si le poète survit en lui à l'adolescent, voici l'heure d'ouvrir Les Fleurs du mal.

Mauriac considers this "esprit d'évasion" one of the principal traits of French Romanticism. He says: "Echapper au réel apparent pour atteindre une réalité plus secrète et plus vraie, telle était la confuse aspiration romantique," and he traces this thread through French literature from the Romantics to the Surrealists who were motivated by a spirit of resentment and rebellion against the

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9 *Mes Grands Hommes*, p. 360.

10 *Mémoires intérieurs*, pp. 57-58.
horrors of the First World War. However, he considers it "une évasion manquée" for, he says: "le gros de la troupe [du romantisme] finit toujours par regagner les pâturages connus de la vie telle qu'elle apparaît et des hommes tels qu'ils semblent être." However, this striving to escape did succeed, according to Mauriac, with Nerval, Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe, Mallarmé, Lautréamont and Rimbaud. Baudelaire, he says: "pour élargir l'univers où il étouffe, crée des correspondances... Il prolonge, de la splendeur imaginée d'une vie antérieure, sa vie apparente." To some it is death which is the open door offering a means of escape. Of Mme de Noailles, Mauriac says: "Dès sa jeunesse, ce bel aigle avait regardé la mort en face. Pareille aux grands romantiques elle n'en a jamais détourné les yeux." With Baudelaire too, death is the gateway to perfect liberty. Mauriac says:

Le dernier poème des Fleurs du mal, le Voyage, exprime avec une magnificence sans égale ce besoin du cœur humain d'échapper au fini. C'est d'abord le départ terrestre que chante le poète, ce désir... de détruire le souvenir... mais le monde est trop petit... Il lève l'ancre à jamais, il se confie à la mort pour qu'elle le conduise à Dieu.

But, when judged simply in the light of a refusal to face reality, this "esprit d'évasion" is extremely repugnant to Mauriac. We

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11 Mémoires intérieurs, pp. 242-243.
12 Petits essais psychologiques, p. 27.
13 Journal I, p. 37.
14 Petits essais psychologiques, p. 25.
find in *Mémoires intérieures*: "Il le romantique préfère ce qui n'est pas à ce qui est: voilà le péché mortel du romantisme."\(^{15}\) Elsewhere he says: "Ma répulsion à l'égard de tout ce qui est onirique en littérature m'aura fait avancer à contre-courant du surréalisme."\(^{16}\)

Mauriac makes some interesting comments on the different attitudes of these Romantics towards Nature or the whole exterior world from which they have been trying to flee. Although, according to Zola, Romanticism descended from Rousseau, Mauriac feels that there is nothing more remote from the vague, sweet musings of the Cinquième Rêverie than the proud Romantic defiantly challenging Cybéle. The Romantic, says Mauriac, treats nature as a living person against whom he struggles, heaping upon it reproaches and even insults.\(^{17}\)

On the other hand, says Mauriac, Maurice de Guérin has opened our eyes to the beauty of the world, not to its exterior beauty, but to what he calls the mute passions of the earth. The trees, tormented by the west wind, become conscious of themselves in us and, likewise in us and through us, come to know God.\(^{18}\) However, Mauriac observes further that, although the disappointment and irritation experienced by the Romantics in the presence of Nature

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\(^{15}\) *Mémoires intérieures*, p. 38.

\(^{16}\) *Ibid*, p. 34.

\(^{17}\) *Mes Grands Hommes*, p. 369.

\(^{18}\) *Journal I*, p. 89.
has almost always thrown them back upon God, this same Nature has
had a different effect upon Maurice de Guérin. The fascination
of the created world has not only drawn him away from creatures
but also from the Creator, too. 19 Far from experiencing the horror
of the Romantics in the presence of a Nature which, to them, appears
so blind and deaf, he, on the contrary, has made it his god. 20

When Mauriac approaches the subject of Naturalism, however,
he is so completely carried away by feelings of contempt for its
philosophy that he seems to have overlooked completely its literary
achievements. He seems to look upon the Naturalists as a group of
literary biologists treating the human person as one dissects the
body of an animal in a laboratory. However, if he could feel that
this study of man were really quite objective as, for instance,
that of the entomologist studying his insect, he might find the
naturalist novel more palatable. Instead, he says that the Naturalist
detests the human being: "Il exècre la bête humaine". 21 Furthermore,
he says that Balzac's universe, in comparison with that of his
'miséreble satellites'; Zola, for example, appears radiant with spiritu-
ality. 22 Loti, he feels, is justified in his hatred of Naturalism,

20 Mes Grands Hommes, p. 369.
21 Ibid, p. 410.
22 Ibid, p. 393.
of the work of a Zola, a Maupassant, who calumniate the peasant and
the worker. 23

Yet, Mauriac admits, there seems to be a very strong tendency
towards Naturalism in the French literary temperament, a pull which,
in his opinion, French writers have constantly had to resist.
He says:

Presque tous, en France, nous n'avons cessé de ruminer dans le
pâturage naturaliste. Une histoire de la littérature contempo­
raine pourrait se ramener aux tentatives d'évasion hors de ce
morne enclos où les descendants de Balzac, de Flaubert, de
Zola, broutent la même herbe depuis cent ans. Et pas seulement
eux . . . car il existe un naturalisme psychologique, prisonnier
de ce qui est, plus lié peut-être à ce qui relève de l'observa­
tion et de l'analyse que le naturalisme voué à l'apparence
des choses. 24

Mauriac agrees with the Naturalist that truth is visible
in the most insignificant of faces, that the breeze which moves the
leaves knows the secret of the world, but he charges him with
denying that there is a secret, that is, something else which is
invisible. This secret, he says, is spirit and life for us. He
feels that the naturalist novel has died of this negation. 25

Reviewing briefly Mauriac's remarks on French literary
movements we find that most of his observations are in the negative
vein, pointing out only those aspects of which he disapproves. He
passes very quickly over the chief weakness of classical literature,

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namely, the fetters with which it binds the writer and limits the development of his inspirations. The Romantics, however, receive much more attention. It would seem that Mauriac has been taking special delight in pricking them with the bodkin of his censure. He summarizes their faults at length in the picture of a self-centred, self-pitying adolescent who cherishes his solitary gloom and misery and moans over the inevitability of old age while his present life is spent in disorder and sin. But Mauriac is truly "mauriacien" when he labels as "the mortal sin of the Romantics", "l'esprit d'évasion". Such a refusal to face reality could draw nothing but contempt from the author of La Pharisienne and of the many courageous denunciations of the Machiavellis of his day. However, Mauriac cannot find anything of value in the works of the Naturalists and deems them worthy of nothing but severe denunciation.

But Mauriac's interest in the works of other authors is not confined to the writers of the past. He has followed the different trends right up to the works of the younger generation of writers. He is especially interested in the influence of Freud on French literature, and particularly the erotic tendency which has resulted from such preoccupation with the subconscious. He has also made an interesting study of the psychological effects of the two World Wars on the people of France, as shown in their writings. Let us now examine these modern trends as seen by Mauriac.
Mauriac has been accused of being far too preoccupied with the question of sex; although in self-defense he insists that the novelist must portray life, he admits, nevertheless, that he has been constantly torn between two poles. I shall devote a chapter to this "déchirement de l'âme" and his search for evidence of it in the works of his contemporaries. In the meantime, however, it might be interesting to examine his reaction to this overemphasis of "la chair" by others. In 1924 Mauriac comments upon a statement made by Gide that a writer ought to be unaware of his limits and ought to discover himself only as he writes. Mauriac cannot understand why Gide does not realize that, even apart from the question of morality, and looking at the matter only from the point of view of art, such a policy can produce only an erotic type of literature. It is the flesh, he says, which profits by ignorance of oneself.\(^1\) Mauriac, on the other hand, has always insisted upon self-knowledge. It is his portrayal of the whole man, body and soul, which raises his creatures above the level of mere carnal monsters. Though many, as we have said, have condemned him for his predilection for

\(^1\)La Vie et la mort d'un poète, p. 403.
sinful characters, all have to admit that sin is portrayed by him as sin and the sinner as an intelligent creature conscious of his worth as a child of God, even when he is deliberately violating His law.

In his *Journal I*, no doubt with tongue in cheek, Mauriac commends the generation of 1934 for its logic. After all, he says, if they no longer believe in original sin, if human nature has not been wounded, why not speak openly of what pertains to the flesh? Freud has taught us that the sexual life of an individual contains the secret of his destiny. If this is so, Mauriac concludes, it would seem that there is no reason why one should not follow the path opened out to us by Proust or Gide.2

In 1954 he asks if, all things considered, the novel will not, in the end, perish because of this preoccupation with sex.3 Later, in his *Mémoires intérieurs* he asks whether or not Freud has enriched the novel. Were those which preceded *À la recherche du temps perdu*, he asks, superficial in comparison with those which followed it? His conclusion is that the sexual obsession has struck at the roots of the novel, since it tends to break down those barriers which, within the man himself or exteriorly, in society or in the bosom of the family, are set up against that passion.4

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2 *Journal I*, pp. 73-75.
3 *Le Floc-Notes*, p. 79.
Mauriac speaks here as a man of seventy-four who had written his last novel three years before. Does he, then, somewhat regretfully perhaps, include his own writings, too? At any rate, it would seem that he has not changed the opinion which he expressed thus in 1949:

"Notre littérature s'égare sur le chemin mort de l'érotisme et de l'abjection qui ne mène nulle part, si ce n'est aux cris inarticulés de la démence." 5

Now let us consider the second theme which Mauriac traces in modern literature, the psychological effect of the two great wars upon the people of France and the consequent changes in French literature throughout those critical years from 1914 to the present time. As early as 1924 we find Mauriac saying that the art of Paul Morand and his contemporaries expresses very faithfully the confusion of the world after prolonged havoc and butchery. The young novelists, he says, create beings whose essential trait is incoordination because they are no longer supported by religious, family or cultural standards. He speaks, too, of that strange "mal du siècle" known, in its most virulent form, as Dada. 6 He has already noted, in Journal d'un Homme de Trente Ans in 1922, the first appearance of what he calls "ces attachés et ces assis des bars surréalistes".

L. Cazamian describes the surrealist movement as a social and philo-

5 _Mes Grands Hommes_, p. 422.

6 _La Vie et la mort d'un poète_, pp. 402-405.
sophical insurrection springing directly from the war and from the shock to the thinking mind of the cruelties and horrors let loose upon the world. "Dada" was the initial form of the crusade—an expression of disdain and hatred of the normal efforts of intelligence.7

By 1928, Mauriac observes that this movement has developed into a real contempt for the hypocrisy of the past, a willingness to overthrow all existing institutions, if necessary, in order to acquire a formidable sincerity. He says that the youth of the day, in their striving for this absolute sincerity, refuse to align themselves with any religion which they cannot accept wholeheartedly, or with any standard of morality demanded by such a religion, nor with a code of social ethics based on such a standard of morality. If it should happen, however, he says, that one day they should be converted, this conversion will be a complete transformation and they will give themselves body and soul to this new faith.

But, as long as they remain strangers to such a faith, this negation, too, is absolute. There is no barrier which can restrain their passions. A novel such as Fromentin's *Dominique* is practically incomprehensible to a young man of 1927.8 But, Mauriac adds, we must give credit to the young novelists of to-day for the ability to

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8 *Le Roman*, pp. 264-265.
paint reality without sacrificing art. In 1933, looking back with a touch of bitterness to the indifference shown by those whom he calls "post-war barbarians" towards Anna de Noailles, Mauriac says: "C'était l'époque où, après un long temps d'incubation, le virus de Rimbaud se manifestait dans la poésie française, l'époque où, dans la lignée de Stéphane Mallarmé, se manifestait un poète attentif à la valeur et au poids de chaque mot, ennemi de toute facilité."

Furthermore, the literature of this period would travel further and further from the pre-war works of Paul Bourget which, he says, have yielded their fruit in the great hecatomb of 1914. The post-war generation has reacted with a great revulsion for any attempt to enrol literary art in the service of a cause, no matter how lofty it might be. In reacting against the works of Bourget, says Mauriac, the young generation is condemning, in particular, the philosophy of Taine with its generalities, its unproved affirmations, its famous race theory with no concern for the individual.

The young men of the nineteen-twenties have become, in Mauriac's eyes, "les païens d'aujourd'hui". In Dieu et Mammon, written in 1929, we find: "'l'homme en général' des classiques

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9Le Roman, pp. 264-265.
10Journal I, p. 40.
11Le Roman, pp. 271-272.
ne peut plus guère servir aux païens d'aujourd'hui." Mauriac does not believe that this age can rightly be called Christian, for, he says: "Il l'homme des classiques valait pour des siècles chrétiens où l'accord de tous se faisait sur la loi morale."¹²

But, however valiant the attempt of the post-war generation to begin afresh, Mauriac observes that, by 1931, even devout people had yielded to despair. He remarks that man, by his nature, has always been inclined toward evil, but what is peculiar to modern man is the taste for suffering, for suffering without any consolation. He loves his suffering. A writer who pours balm on wounded souls, who offers light to the blind, is judged inferior to one who makes us slaves of our misery and teaches us to mistrust the virtue of hope.¹³

In his speech before the Académie Française in 1934, Mauriac observes that this despair is finding tangible expression in the horror portrayed in motion pictures but, in spite of the fact that he has been labelled "pessimist", he finds a ray of hope where most people would see only the bleakest prospects: "Messieurs," he says, "il nous reste l'espérance que le mauvais cinéma, héritier du mauvais théâtre, ira si loin dans l'horreur qu'il finira par ramener le public au vrai drame et à la vraie comédie."¹⁴

¹² *Dieu et Mammon*, p. 280.

¹³ *René Bazin*, p. 485.

¹⁴ *Discours de réception à l'Académie*, pp. 443-444.
But, reflecting in his *Journal V* on the impact upon the literature of the day of the butchery of the Second World War, Mauriac says:

Il [Shakespeare] lui apporte [à notre temps] cette conscience, ce pouvoir de 'réflexion' . . . que devant tant d'horreur on dirait que nous avons perdu. Les écrivains vivants ne sont pas à l'échelle de notre histoire quotidienne, et sans doute ne peuvent-ils pas l'être. . . . Comment pourrions-nous peindre cette horreur dans quoi nous baignons encore?

Le roman meurt de ce contraste entre la psychologie des époques paisibles, qui est sa matière traditionnelle, et cette soudaine apparition . . . de l'homme des cavernes que nous sommes restés. Toute une superstructure de sentiments chrétiens, de passions chevaleresques a été détruits. . . . La fiction a perdu son objet.

It is at this point that Mauriac points out the influence on literature of the Marxists who are dedicated to changing the world, to producing an atmosphere hardly favourable to artists whose vocation is to understand and interpret the world.15

At the beginning of this study we saw that Mauriac considers the study of man to be the "raison d'être" of literature. It is not surprising, then, to find that he sees in the destruction of all that raises a man above the level of the beast, "une littérature proche à sa fin". Existential philosophy has lent a hand in this annihilation, with the denial of anything permanent in man. If, as Sartre teaches, man is only an imposture, then, Mauriac says: "il est vrai que le roman dit psychologique aura, jusqu'aujourd'hui, vécu d'un mensonge et qu'il ne reste plus aux romanciers qu' à

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15 *Journal V*, pp. 113-114.
devenir des peintres de néant". 16

Developing further his study of this "race to nothingness", Mauriac points out that his refusal to join his literary colleagues is not simply a matter of a difference of opinion over literary forms and techniques, but that he holds himself aloof from them on philosophical grounds. He explains that this philosophy strikes at the very roots of all that gives meaning to life. Where it finds nothing, Mauriac finds man, and God, of whom man is the witness. He says: "J'appartiens à une génération qui a cru à l'homme et à Celui dont l'homme est le témoin irréusable". 17

Mauriac then warns of the inevitable results of the application of such a philosophy. It ends in silence with Rimbaud, in the blank page with Mallarmé, in an inarticulate cry with Artaud. If they are not insane like Artaud, in a certain sense like Kafka, the majority of our writers mimic madness in imitation of Beckett and Bataille or in seeking, like Michaux, its substitute in drugs.

However, even at this point, Mauriac is not willing to accept defeat. He reassures us with the thought that man will reassert himself again in art and will find himself there. The day will come, he says, and perhaps it has already arrived, when the human person will be recreated, where a literary work will find

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16 Mémoires intérieurs, p. 53.
17 Ibid, p. 65.
its fulfilment in a face, in a look and in what that look and that face express.\textsuperscript{18}

Is Mauriac, perhaps, looking into his own soul and drawing this confidence from his own personal victory—"une âme déchirée" which has found itself and has acquired peace? "Peace with itself" is his wish for this strife-torn world, and he sums up his chronological review of the universal struggle of the past fifty years with the words: "C'est que ce qui marque les temps forts et les temps faibles d'une destinée, c'est l'accord ou le désaccord avec soi-même".\textsuperscript{19}

What, then, has Mauriac said about these two modern trends in French literature which we set out to study in this chapter? He has dealt with the question of erotic literature with great indecision, no doubt because he realizes that he himself is now standing before the judgment seat. He has weighed this problem many times in his own life, undecided as to where to draw the line between the exigencies of art and the constraints of his conscience, but he finally decides that preoccupation with sex can become a literary disease leading even to madness.

Mauriac traces the psychological effects of the wars through a period of disorder following the first "longue tuerie". This confusion, he finds, developed into an expression of contempt for

\textsuperscript{18} Mémoires intérieurs, p. 214.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. 216.
a society which was responsible for so much bloodshed, and resulted in a determination to wipe out all previous hypocrisy in society as well as in literature. The new aim was to achieve absolute sincerity. The art of writing was to be developed even to the point of scrupulosity. The new generation, revolting against the type of literature which promoted the war, would now concern itself with the real purpose of literature, "la connaissance de l'homme". As the years pass Mauriac sees the race towards "nothingness" gathering momentum. Horror after horror is presented on the screen as, previously, on the stage. The Existentialists deny that there is anything permanent in man, and, because this philosophy is based on a denial of the existence of God, it leaves man with that "nothingness" which leads to despair.

This study of Mauriac's critical work has been, for the most part, an evaluation of the philosophy of writers and literary movements rather than an assessment of their literary merit. Let us see now what are Mauriac's standards of judgment from the purely literary point of view.
Since Mauriac's chief literary interest is the novel, it would be fitting to examine precisely what he expects to find there. In two of his works, Le Roman and Le Romancier et ses personnages, he gives very definite standards by which he judges this type of literature. For him a novel must present life, not just a series of snapshots taken of scenes throughout the life of any number of individuals. The novelist must depict living individuals with hopes, disappointments, joys, sorrows and sufferings. Each individual must be presented as a creature in whom exists, in varying degrees, all the passions. No person is simply an "honest" person. Honesty, perhaps, predominates in him, but it is intermingled with other virtues and overshadowed by vices, too. Each individual is influenced by the society in which he lives. He exercises his virtues on his fellow-man or exploits him with his vices. His affections and feelings are modified from day to day, from hour to hour, by his contacts with others.

Such diversity in human nature, Mauriac says, cannot be simplified without giving a false picture of the human being. Commenting on a passage from Balzac's Le Muse du département, where Lousteau and Brianchon compare the novels written during the Empire with
those of their own day, pointing out that the latter paint characters and portray the human heart, Mauriac observes:

Lousteau, aujourd'hui (car il est éternel), sait que les vrais romanciers ne dessinent plus de caractères, parce qu'il n'existe nulle part de caractères, sinon dans l'idée que nous nous en formons. . . . La réalité ne nous montrant rien qui ressemble au cœur humain tel que les auteurs de tragédie et les romanciers psychologues l'ont fabriqué pour satisfaire aux exigences de leur profession.

Il est naïf de prétendre établir, comme faisait Bourget, 'des planches d'anatomie morale'. . . . Les passions du cœur n'existent à l'état pur que dans les tragédies classiques et dans les romans du type d'Adolphe, qui sont des épures et des diagrammes. 1

But, we may ask, how can one present in a novel a thing so complex as the human heart? How can such intense life be portrayed on the inanimate pages of a book? What happens to it when one tries to imprison it in the dead black letters of the printed page? This, too, is Mauriac's greatest problem as a novelist, for, he says:

D'une part, il [Le roman] a la prétention d'être la science de l'homme, monde fourmillant qui dure et qui s'écoule... et il ne sait qu'isoler de ce fourmilllement et que fixer sous sa lentille une passion, une vertu, un vice qu'il amplifie démesurément. . . . D'autre part, le roman a la prétention de nous peindre la vie sociale, et il n'atteint jamais que des individus après avoir coupé la plupart des racines qui les rattachent au groupe. En un mot, dans l'individu, le romancier isole et immobilise une passion, et dans le groupe il isole et immobilise un individu. Et, ce faisant, on peut dire que ce peintre de la vie exprime le contraire de ce qu'est la vie: l'art du romancier est une faillite. 2

Mauriac has studied the works of three novelists in parti-

1 Mémoires intérieurs, pp. 60-66.

2 Le Romancier et ses personnages, pp. 295-296.
cular, Balzac, Graham Greene and Proust, to learn how they have grappled with this dilemma. Of Balzac, Mauriac says:

On dit qu'il a point une société: au vrai, il a juxtaposé, avec une admirable puissance, des échantillons nombreux de toutes les classes sociales sous la Restauration et sous la monarchie de Juillet, mais chacun de ses types est aussi autonome qu'une étoile l'est de l'autre. Ils ne sont reliés l'un à l'autre que par le fil témé de l'intrigue ou que par le lien d'une passion misérablement simplifiée.

Mauriac dismisses Graham Greene with a flourish of the hand as having produced nothing worthwhile from the purely literary point of view, although he admires his work as a great contribution to Christian thought. He says:

Je l'ai aimée l'oeuvre de Graham Greene pour des raisons qui ne tiennent pas à l'art du romancier. Dans Greene, c'est le chrétien, c'est le catholique qui me touche, non le technicien pourtant admirable d'un art que j'ai moi-même pratiqué. . . . Cette atmosphère de police et de crime, ces bas-fonds où une faune s'entredévore, où le gibier est traqué, mais où chacun tour à tour, devient chasseur, . . . c'est une transposition cinématographique de la vie qui me toucherait peu si elle n'était en prise directe avec l'éternité.

In the opinion of Mauriac, it is Marcel Proust who has best dealt with the problem: "peindre les êtres sans les immobiliser et sans les diviser". However, Mauriac is inclined to believe that the writers of the thirties, on the other hand, have been a little too ambitious in this respect. He reminds them that the art

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3 Le Romancier et ses personnages, p. 296.

of the novel is, above all, a transposition of reality and not a reproduction of it. He is convinced that the more one tries to preserve all the complexity of reality the more artificial the work becomes. He believes there is nothing more unnatural and more arbitrary than the association of ideas in the interior monologue used by Joyce. Mauriac suggests, however, that the most animated characters are, perhaps, those which are the most hazy, the least precise. Having no life of their own to sustain them, they borrow life from the reader who, with his own anxieties and passions, penetrates and gives substance to these shadows.

Nevertheless, when considering the same problem later, in 1959, though at this point he is prepared to admit that the new writers, seeking to break the fetters of the written word, have shown greater apprehension of reality, Mauriac wonders if the very effort to capture this elusive reality permits it to escape. He seems convinced, too, that a novel will not endure in the memory and the hearts of future generations if its characters lack the solidity and precision of their counterparts in the psychological novel.

Mauriac observes too, that the recounting of his thoughts and feelings by the hero, either directly or through another person,
gives an artificial tone to the novel. He points out that, in
the most troubled lives, words count for very little. The drama of
real life develops almost always in silence. The deepest thoughts
are very seldom expressed. In real life Tristan and Yseult speak of
the weather, of the woman they met that morning, and Yseult is con-
cerned about the coffee, wondering if it is strong enough for Tristan.
A novel which is really true to life would consist only of "points
de suspension". Of all the passions, he says, love, which is the
subject of almost all our books, seems to us to be that which is
expressed the least. 8 We have, therefore, to-day, what might be
called a movement for the annihilation of language.

We have been dealing, up to this point, with devices used by
the novelist to present life, an absolute requisite, according to
Mauriac, in any novel, but there is another aspect with which he deals
at length, namely, the relationship between the author and his work.
Though, as we have noted, the intensity of life possessed by the char-
acters of a novel varies considerably from author to author,
Mauriac says that, in any case, these living creatures are born of
a mysterious union between the artist and reality. 9 Criticizing
some books written in 1936, he says that they lack the essential,
"la nécessité". He claims: "Leurs auteurs ne les portaient pas en

eux comme un fardeau dont il faut à tout prix se délivrer."\textsuperscript{10}

Moreover he says that, for a long time, he felt that our books deliver us of all that we have been repressing, desire, anger, malice; that, in other words, the characters in our novels are the scapegoats which we burden with the sins we have not committed, or the deities which we charge with accomplishing the feats we have not the courage to perform. However, reflecting upon this hypothesis, he realizes its serious implications for, if this were true, he says, we would be virtuous or criminal by proxy, and the greatest advantage of the career of the novelist would be that it relieves him of the necessity of living.\textsuperscript{11}

Nevertheless, Mauriac does point out evidence of this effort towards "self-deliverance" in his own writings as well as in those of others. In \textit{Commencements d'une vie}, describing his days at Grand Lebrun, he says: "Très tôt m'a tenu le besoin d'écrire, de me délivrer par l'écriture."\textsuperscript{12}

Balzac, according to Mauriac, exercises his passion for domination through Vautrin, who, though at the outset only a secondary character, an abstract representation of an idea, grows as the story unfolds, as he is fed with all of Balzac's own suppressed ambitions, with his craving for power and domination. From chapter

\textsuperscript{10}Journal II, p. 166.

\textsuperscript{11}Le Romancier et ses personnages, p. 293.

\textsuperscript{12}Commencements d'une vie, p. 145.
to chapter his vitality increases until, finally, he begins to live as the very person Balzac himself would like to be.  

Of Gide, Mauriac says: "Ce sont, non des disciples vivants mais des fils de son génie qu'il charge d'accomplir les gestes dangereux ou défendus." Flaubert, too, in Mauriac's opinion, though he had determined never to do so, finally succumbed to this temptation to satisfy an inner craving through his writing. His hunger for the attentions of Mme Arnoux are satisfied when he portrays her as Mme Schlésinger, a mature woman, a mistress and a mother, who shields and comforts him in the person of Frédéric.

Is Mauriac, however, justified in drawing these conclusions about others, Balzac, Gide and Flaubert, just because he has found that writing is an outlet for his own bottled-up drives? When he comes to a study of Defoe he does hesitate before pronouncing judgment, and he asks himself: "Is Moll Flanders Daniel Defoe?" If this is so, he continues, Moll Flanders is truly a masterpiece, for nowhere does the heroine react to any situation as a man would do, at no time does she speak as a man would speak. If, therefore, Defoe is really acting through Moll, his ability to conceal himself is without parallel in the history of the novel, and it is this talent which

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13 Mes Grands Hommes, p. 392.
stamps Defoe as a genius. 16

For the same reason Mauriac considers Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* a masterpiece. He says:

Peut-être est-ce précisément la réussite du génie que rien de ce drame personnel ne se trahisse au dehors. Le mot fameux de Flaubert, 'Mme Bovary, c'est moi-même' est très compréhensible, — il faut seulement prendre le temps d'y réfléchir, tant à première vue l'auteur d'un pareil livre y paraît être peu mûr. C'est que *Madame Bovary* est un chef-d'oeuvre. 17

Mauriac declares again, in *Mémoires intérieurs*, that a novel never becomes a masterpiece unless the fiction is so transmuted into reality that it compels us to forget the dream from which it was born. 18

Nevertheless, he remarks that the very presence of Balzac in his novels gives a "homey" atmosphere to the book. He feels that he can drop in "at any page" as one enters the home of a friend without knocking on the front door. Here is his rather amusing description of Balzac's work: "L'énorme bonhomme avec ses grosses idées et ses grâces d'éléphant s'interpose partout entre nous et ce qu'il prétend nous montrer et nous commenter au lieu de nous le faire voir, sentir, dans une discontinuité qui romprait avec la logique d'une narration bien construite." 19

However, when we come to a study of the novel of recent

16 *Mémoires intérieurs*, p. 233.
17 *Le Romancier et ses personnages*, p. 303.
18 *Mémoires intérieurs*, p. 206.
years, we find that it is particularly on this point, namely the presence or absence of the author in his work, that the new diverges from the old. Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor have set as their literary goal the destruction of what they call "editorial omniscience", that is, all deliberate intrusion of the author in his work. Needless to say, such a project can win nothing but disapproval from Mauriac, whose own novels are so extremely "faulty" in this respect that he has been positively condemned by Sartre, who even goes so far as to refuse to consider him a novelist because of the arbitrary manner in which he handles the destinies of his characters.  

Furthermore, the modern novelists are interested only in objects. Mauriac says that Robbe-Grillet's idea of the novel of the future could very likely be based on a poem of Francis Ponge entitled Le Cageot. He describes the new novel thus:

C'est le roman où les objets seront là, avant d'être quelque chose, où les choses perdront leur cœur romantique et l'univers sa fausse profondeur, où il n'existera plus pour le romancier qu'en surface, où l'adjectif optique, descriptif, remplacera toutes les fausses beautés du vieux style.  

Because Robbe-Grillet professes to reject everything born of the living mind and heart, Mauriac considers him the sworn enemy of the psychological novel, but he argues that it is ridiculous to think

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20 Simon, p. 50.

21 Mémoires intérieurs, p. 207.
that any work of art, no matter how concrete the subject it portrays, could exist without having first been brought to life in a human mind. The apples painted by Cézanne were first conceived in the mind of the artist as was the kitchen chair in the mind of Van Gogh. In every work of art there is always someone speaking to someone through the medium of sounds, colours or words ... somebody talking about himself to somebody else. Mauriac does give credit to the new novelists, however, for having cleared away many of the barnacles which burdened the psychological novel, but he objects strongly to Robbe-Grillet's determination not to probe beneath the surface of things. He protests: "Sa technique de la surface et sa haine de la profondeur, j'ai grand-peine à y déceler un enrichissement." Mauriac stresses the affinity which exists between the novels of the new school, particularly Le Modification of Michel Butor, and the technique used by Valéry, namely: "le parti pris de ne rien voir que le mur". He says: "Cette rigueur de Valéry—elle-même procédant de Mallarmé—a nourri cet art sourcilleux (si j'ose dire) de nos sévères cadets." Like Valéry, they reject all inspiration. Everything must be carefully planned and studied in advance. Mauriac is careful to note, however, that there is a sharp line of

22 Mémoires intérieurs, pp. 208-209.
23 Ibid, p. 209.
demarcation between their works and those of the Naturalists. He continues: "Zola cherche des effets: il déforme et noircit. Il truque le réel. Les romanciers d'aujourd'hui ne voient que ce qu'ils voient." Mauriac then summarizes the characteristics of the style of the new novelists thus: "Nos techniciens du nouveau roman, et justement parce qu'ils sont férus de technique, on ne saurait être plus concerté qu'eux; le parti pris de ne pas dépasser l'objet et de l'exprimer tel qu'il est postule chez eux un vocabulaire rigoureux, un style sans bavure." However, although these writers can produce marvels of chiselled and incorruptible beauty, they are frigid. Mauriac prefers the warmth diffused by the human heart as it appears in the psychological novel.

It is with great satisfaction, then, that he reads Le Dîner en Ville by Claude Mauriac and Le Planétarium by Nathalie Sarraute. Mauriac decides that these two books, though so different, both symbolise a renewal, or as he prefers it, a perpetuation of the psychological novel. Once more in the familiar field of psychology he feels he is no longer suffocating as he was in the dense, solid universe of Robbe-Grillet. Nevertheless, though he admits in Le Bloc-notes that each of these two young writers has produced a real work of art, he insists that the characters portrayed there are nothing more than a whirlpool of impulses which eventually destroy one another. He still believes that the old novelists possessed a

24 Mémories intérieures, pp. 221-222.
truer knowledge of man. This young generation, he thinks, is running after shadows. With its "discontinuité de désirs" it is producing only "polyphers de sensations" which will not endure because they lack solidity.25

We have said nothing up to this point about a very important problem which can hardly be set aside when discussing Mauriac's theories about the art of the novel. With Mauriac, this problem, that of "le romancier catholique" would seem to merit special attention and we have decided to deal with it separately in the following chapter on the "Personality of the Critic."

By way of summary then, what can we say are Mauriac's standards by which he judges a novel? First of all, he demands life, if it is possible to make creatures sparkle with animation on the dull, lifeless pages of a book. Commenting upon the devices used by different authors to infuse life into their characters, he finds some of them very artificial and concludes that perhaps it is only in the mind of the reader that the characters begin to live. The reader takes the "suggestion" of a character as he finds it in the story and feeds it with his own ideas, emotions, experiences until it comes to life for him as the person he wishes the character to be.

Not only does Mauriac see an indispensable union between the novel and the reader, but also he identifies the author with his work.

25Le Bloc-notes, II, 207.
To many a writer the novel is a means of delivering himself of cer-
tain bottled-up drives which he projects into his story. Yet, in
order to produce a masterpiece, he must do this without making it
apparent to others that he is doing so. The fiction must be so trans-
muted into reality that it compels us to forget the psychosis from
which it was born.

Mauriac's study of the novel began with those of Balzac and
is brought right up to date with an examination of the "new school",
"l'école du regard", and particularly of the group known as "chosistes",
led by Robbe-Grillet. Mauriac finds the modern novel distasteful
because it seems to him that it deliberately excludes everything born
of the living mind and heart. Although he does congratulate the
modern novelist for his rejection of the mediocre and superficial
type of literature of some former authors, he cannot become enthusi-
astic about its successor which skims the surface and refuses to probe
beneath, which is preoccupied solely with lifeless objects, beautiful
but frigid. Even those modern novels which might be considered psycho-
logical do not satisfy him for he feels that they lack the solidity
which is necessary if they are to endure.

Now let us turn our attention finally to a topic to which we
have already referred in a previous chapter namely, Mauriac's
"déchirement de l'âme", and the extent to which his critical works
are influenced by how own personal experience.
VI

THE PERSONALITY OF THE CRITIC

We have suggested that Mauriac has projected his own personal problems into his literary criticism. What, then, are these problems? Or rather, what is this problem, since all his difficulties seem to resolve themselves into a single issue, which he has made the subject of all his novels, namely, the conflict between the demands of the flesh and the aspirations of his soul. His was a heart torn asunder by the magnetic pull of the love of God and the opposing force, the love of the world. Pierre-Henri Simon says that Mauriac is conscious of this division in his allegiance because he sees an antagonism between "le Dieu crucifié, abondant en grâces et en paix", and "Pan, Cybèle, les dieux de la nature charnelle abondante en biens et en ivresses". As long as these two loves pull Mauriac in opposite directions, he is in torment, "son âme déchirée." It is only when he can see the beauty of this world as a reflection of the beauty of God, and creatures of this world as physical manifestations of the goodness of God, that he is able to unite these two loves and learn to love God in His creatures.

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1Simon, p. 72.
This struggle in Mauriac was rendered excessively severe by a faulty education in childhood. He was convinced that everything pertaining to the flesh was evil. For him, Christianity does not make any allowances for the flesh, it suppresses it. Nevertheless, he finds within himself these carnal appetites and, realizing that they have been planted there by God, he cries out in protest against this cruelty. We do not have, Mauriac says, one soul with which to adore and another with which to love. One cannot serve two masters nor can one love two beings. He declares that one must admit the unreasonableness of the demands of Christianity. It is impossible, he asserts, for a man to love the creature without making it his god. It does, indeed, usurp the place of God. ²

In his childhood Mauriac was shielded from temptations and fed by a religion of the senses in which spiritual well-being was heightened by the exhilarating effects of flowers and incense. He was therefore ill-prepared for the crisis of adolescence, when the sexual appetite begins to assert itself, which forced him to prove his fidelity by an act of the will rather than by effusive emotions. Gradually, however, he resolves this problem as he learns to direct these prodigal emotions towards a personal Christ, in whose love he grows little by little. Simon remarks: "Ce grand homme riche a rencontré le Christ et, quoiqu'il eût de grands biens, il a tenté

²Francois Mauriac, Souffrance et Bonheur du Chrétien, 1931, Oeuvres complètes, VII, 229-230.
de le suivre." In _Bonheur du Chrétien_, Mauriac says: "Cybèle est purifiée par Celui que je ne vois pas; elle se referme sur Lui, elle Le cache sous des pierres."1

Mauriac's personal love of Christ determines his attitude toward sin. Though sin may be defined as a violation of the law of God it is essentially a refusal of love to the Creator, by His creature. This is the way Mauriac chooses to look upon it. Since then, in his personal religion, the heart holds first place, we can understand his abhorrence of the rigid Jansenistic adherence to the letter of the law which characterized his early education, and his accusations of hypocrisy against those who profess it. His novel _La Pharisiéenne_ shows clearly his ideas on this subject. But we are concerned, in this study, with Mauriac's critical works. What evidence do we find there of the war which has been raging within his own soul?

In 1924, before he passed the crisis which he describes in _Souffrance et Bonheur du Chrétien_, and when, we might say, his struggle was at its height, he seemed to imagine the whole world at grips with the same problem. Reflecting upon the lives of Baudelaire, Maurice de Guérin, Rimbaud and Verlaine, he can only cry out:

"Unhappy the man who is fettered by creatures, living and inanimate, whom colours and sounds hold fast with the same kind of magic spell

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3 Simon, p. 31.

4 _Souffrance et Bonheur du Chrétien_, p. 266.
which once carried him, at some moment or other of his life, right up to the throne of the Trinity." Mauriac is convinced that, because an artist is gifted with keener sensitivity than other men, he is more susceptible to the attractions of the world of nature and, therefore, his effort to free himself of this enchantment is as great as the effort required of a man to hack a pathway for himself with a hatchet through a dense growth which hedges him in.  

In 1934, in his Journal, he expresses the opinion that André Lafon and Maurice de Guérin have carried their love of nature to the point where it has become the rival of God. Mauriac's personal encounter with Christ was a conversion quite unlike the one he has just described, the pathway cleared by the hatchet; it was rather like a conflagration in which all obstacles were consumed in the fire of Divine Love. We might compare Mauriac to the spouse in the Canticles, as he seems to approach each writer in turn with the question, "Have you found Him whom my soul loveth?" Indeed, we might go so far as to say that his "purely literary" criticism is quite distorted by this obsession. He himself does not hesitate to admit in his Journal that he is prepared to make many allowances for the imperfections of a writer in whose book he witnesses the struggle of a man with himself and with God, for a book which treats of the  

5Le Vie et la mort d'un poète, p. 375.  
6Journal I, p. 19.
various movements of nature and of grace.  

While searching for evidence of the supernatural, Mauriac finds in Claudel a poetry penetrated with divine grace. Of Bazin he says that his love for his pitiable heroines is only the reflection of the love which the Creator bears towards His creature. He suggests that one can read the spiritual temperature of the author by the thermometer of his novel. A novelist, he says, who has surrendered himself to God, submits the world to Him in his books. A novelist who is a prey to his passions describes a world which resists God.

Some writers, Mauriac feels, draw us to Christ precisely by showing us a world from which He is absent. The tragedies of Racine, for example, cry aloud for the Incarnation. Their horrors demand a Redeemer. Baudelaire shows us the emptiness of a soul without God. Yet, says Mauriac, his very blasphemies are an act of Faith. One must believe in the existence of a Being if one condescends to speak to Him, even in blasphemy. However, Mauriac sees in Mon Coeur mis a nu a genuine act of Faith, although he does not think Sartre would agree that Baudelaire had the Faith. Sartre believes that Mon Coeur mis a nu is simply an evidence of a spirit broken by

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7Journal II, p. 166.
8Réponse à Paul Claudel, p. 459.
9René Bazin, pp. 477-478.
10Mémoires intérieures, p. 164.
sickness and is no more a proof of faith than was Numquid et tu in the life of Gide. On the contrary, Sartre would remind us that Baudelaire had boasted several times of his lack of faith. But Mauriac is not ready to agree with Sartre. He says that when Baudelaire wrote Les Phares, he had no doubt that each of the eleven stanzas bore witness to the presence of the divine in man. He never doubts that Somebody is listening to that ardent summons. In Mademoiselle Bistouri, Baudelaire addresses himself to God, not with supplications and cries, for each word forms a question and demands a reply.\textsuperscript{11} In his Petits essais psychologiques, Mauriac says that Les Fleurs du mal are flowers of sin, of repentance and remorse and of penitence.\textsuperscript{12} Mauriac thinks that Rimbaud, too, is following Christ, in spite of himself, the same Christ which he follows in his hatred for the converted Verlaine.\textsuperscript{13} Although he calls Rimbaud "ce démon", he acknowledges that he was the angel who, in the life of Claudel, was the precursor and the herald of God.\textsuperscript{14} With Virginia Woolf, God is the temptation against which one must be on one's guard.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{11}Mémoires intérieures, pp. 51-52.
\textsuperscript{12}Petits essais psychologiques, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{13}Dieu et Maman, p. 298.
\textsuperscript{14}Réponse À Paul Claudel, p. 457.
\textsuperscript{15}Le Floc-Notes, II, 95.
But when Mauriac attempts to include Gide in his list of "Chrétiens malgré eux", he meets with some opposition. There existed between Gide and Mauriac a warm friendship, though one which was peppered with frank, mutual criticism, and it was no doubt his earnest desire to bring his friend to Christ that made Mauriac see in the works of Gide evidence of a faith which the latter protested did not exist. Writing in La Vie et la mort d'un poète in 1928, Mauriac says: "Gide nous découvre un Gide que le Christ inquiète, obsède, et peut-être importune". Gide, however, in a criticism of Mauriac's Vie de Racine, protests that it is Mauriac himself and not he, Gide, who is disquieted. He points out, furthermore, that, whereas Racine thanked God for having welcomed him back to His fold, in spite of the tragedies which he wished he had never written, Mauriac, on the other hand, rejoices that God gave Racine the time to write his tragedies before He laid claim to his soul. In other words, Gide implies that Mauriac is seeking permission to be a Christian without burning his books, a reassuring compromise which would permit him to love God without losing sight of Mammon.

But Mauriac is still not convinced of the reality of his friend's supposed lack of faith. Furthermore, he does not believe that his apparent serenity in rejecting this faith was really genuine. Mauriac says that Gide, unlike Barrès, was aware of the love which

16 La Vie et la mort d'un poète, p. 406.
17 Dieu et Mammon, Note I, pp. 330-331.
is the motivating force behind all sincere religious observance, that he realized that religious practices are not just a form of self-discipline. Perhaps Mauriac knew Gide better than the author of L'Immoraliste knew himself, or rather, perhaps, he understood the real personality which the latter was trying to hide, for Gide did admit finally in July, 1939, in conversation with François Mauriac, that if Catholics of his sort were more numerous he would certainly be converted.19

Continuing his search for Christ, Mauriac approaches the works of Molière. He finds here that the author does not deny the supernatural, but simply refuses to have anything to do with it and makes sport of the man who is anxious about his soul's welfare. Even if Orgon had not been the dupe of Tartuffe, says Mauriac, if Tartuffe had been truly devout, Orgon would still have been made to appear ridiculous simply because he was an over-zealous Christian and therefore, in the eyes of Molière, on a par with all those who, in any respect whatever, cannot strike a happy medium.20 But Molière himself has refuted this charge in his preface to Tartuffe. No doubt Christians of his own day, too, were raising the same objections to his play. Molière lashes them in caustic tones, insisting that

18 Journal I, p. 78.
he was condemning only wickedness and false piety in Tartuffe and that those who accuse him so unjustly are themselves hypocrites.  

In summing up his judgment of Proust, Mauriac says that the only fault of his novel is that "Dieu est terriblement absent". In Balzac he finds no evidence of personal contacts with Christ. Loti, on the other hand, is aware of the humanity of Christ. Mauriac says that if Loti were to meet Christ, living and mortal, on the road, he would doubtless follow him, but only as far as the tomb. Nothing is real to him except what his hands and lips can touch. Rousseau, however, is judged by Mauriac as too wrapped up in himself to take notice of anyone else, even of Christ. Though more inclined toward the philosophy of the East than the West, he is incapable, in the opinion of Mauriac, of the self-renunciation required either by the Gospel of Christ or by the Hindu religion. He is incapable of "losing himself in order to find himself", as Christ counsels His followers, or of losing himself to the point of self annihilation, in order to arrive at that state of beatitude promised by Buddha. In Chateaubriand Mauriac finds too much senti-

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22 Du Côté de Chez Proust, p. 292.

23 Mes Grands Hommes, p. 395.

24 Ibid., p. 414.

25 Ibid., p. 371.
mentality. He says: "La poésie des cloches, des cloîtres lui
dissimule la croix où une partie de l'humanité s'étend." 26

In 1930 Mauriac accuses Flaubert of letting his art usurp
the place of God. He says: "Il usurpe en pleine conscience la
place de l'Être infini, non pour lui-même mais pour ce prolongement
de lui-même, son œuvre." 27 He sees Flaubert as a sort of mystic on
the literary plane, ready to make any sacrifice for his work. How-
ever, nine years later, writing a Preface to Henri Guillemin's book
Flaubert devant la Vie et devant Dieu, Mauriac admits a change of
opinion. He now denies that there is any contradiction between God
and beauty, no more than there is between the light and its reflection.
Flaubert's vocation, says Mauriac, is to write only what is absolute
truth, searching always for the word which is the most precise. God,
says Mauriac, is less absent from the life of Flaubert than he, him-
self, realizes. Hell is the refusal of God, and there is no refusal
in the solitary toil of Flaubert. 28 This particular criticism of
Flaubert reflects the change which Mauriac finds has taken place in
himself as he writes his Bloc-notes several years later. At his age,
he says, the conflict of the Christian novelist is waged on a different

26 Mes Grands Hommes, p. 371.
27 Ibid., p. 400.
28 Henri Guillemin, Flaubert devant la Vie et devant Dieu, preface by
battle ground. It is no longer a question of scruples with regard to everything which concerns art in general and his in particular. Now, he asks himself: "Is art becoming an idol?" Many writers, he says, substitute for God, not only art, but the word, the "word which is not made Flesh." 29

Summing up the whole question of the presence of God in a novel, Mauriac concludes that His presence is the only thing which can save the personality of the novelist; for this very personality is in danger of disintegration by the fact that the author must put himself into each character he portrays, must transform himself at one moment into a demon, at another into an angel. The consequent tendency towards a decomposition of the personality must be counter-balanced therefore by another, more powerful attraction. The separate, conflicting forces within the writer will crystallize only around Him who does not change. The writer himself will be saved only in Him Who is One. He will find himself only when he finds God. 30

Now let us consider what has been the great dilemma for Mauriac through his whole literary career, namely, the problem of "le romancier catholique". How can one portray life, weak, human nature with all its sins and evil tendencies, without causing scandal? Mauriac looks for the answer in the works of others. Racine, as

29 Le Bloc-notes, p. 40.
30 Le Romancier et ses personnages, p. 308.
we have already noted, solves this problem by relapsing into silence. Not finding it possible to harmonize his writing with a life of complete dedication to God, he decided to give up this work and make his offering complete. But Mauriac seems unwilling to do the same, for, as Gide says, he seeks some kind of compromise by which he can love God without releasing his hold on Mammon.

Mauriac congratulates Bavin, perhaps with a touch of envy, because he can look back over his literary career and realize that he has never given scandal but, nevertheless, this negative compliment does not imply that he has also succeeded in presenting real life as Mauriac feels it should be portrayed in a novel.

Graham Greene has tackled the problem in a different way. Though portraying sin, he has shown how the sinner can be an instrument in the hands of God. Yet, in his declining years, Mauriac reaches the conclusion that the writer must be careful how he handles Grace as well as sin, for he says that all fiction, even when it takes account of the action of Grace in the world, perverts that truth which is not the product of invention and is beyond the power of words to communicate. 31

Mauriac seems to be left with his problem unsolved but he concludes that, although a novelist cannot write as objectively as would a philosopher or theologian about a world of criminal delights,

31 Mémoires intérieurs, p. 70.
he should, at least, make his readers aware of the presence of Grace in his novel. Even though this Grace is spurned and rejected, the reader should always feel this great undercurrent of love. This theory is in accord with the principle laid down by Newman and, as Simon points out, cited by Graham Greene, namely, that it is a contradiction of terms to await a sinless novel from man who is a sinner.\footnote{Simon, p. 57.}
CONCLUSION

In this study we have examined the critical works of François Mauriac from various angles. We have found, in the first place, that all literature, for Mauriac, is the study of man and that his concept of man is that of a creature composed of body and soul, an individual but not an isolated one. On the contrary, man, in Mauriac's opinion, since he is influenced to such a great extent by his environment, cannot be studied apart from it. Therefore Mauriac rejects the naturalist novel because it refuses to consider the soul of man and he censures Proust for pulverizing the human personality in attempting to disregard the exterior forces which help to form it.

The novelist, according to Mauriac, through a rigorous practice of self-scrutiny, can arrive at a deep knowledge of himself and of human nature in general and can share this knowledge with others. This aptitude for self-analysis, pursued with rigorous logic, the heritage of every son of Descartes, is relieved of some of its austerity by the contribution of Pascal, whose work might be termed a literature of the heart, since it is concerned primarily with the pursuit of happiness and of salvation. Mauriac observes, too, that the application of this logic to French literature cramps the style of the French novelist and, therefore, he suggests that the French
novel be permitted the enrichment of outside influences, the illogicality and complexity of real life as portrayed in the Russian and English novels.

Continuing his study of the distinctive aspects of French literature he points out the evidence there of two conflicting passions in the French temperament, the craving for activity and the attraction towards a life of meditation and retirement. He describes the French literary traditions in the field of religion, the lining up of French writers in support of one or other of two antagonistic leaders, and contrasts this type of writing with the spirituality found in the novels of Graham Greene.

Mauriac has shown very decided views on the subject of the art of the novel. The novelist's first concern, he says, is to portray life but he admits the difficulties to be found in this endeavour. Though he suggests that the more nebulous characters might possibly be capable of taking on life by the injection of the reader's passions and emotions, Mauriac admits that such characters, because of their lack of solidity, would not endure. He rejects as artificial various attempts to portray life in a novel, particularly the interior monologue used by Joyce. Mauriac discusses the relationships between the author and his book and remarks that, although many writers have projected themselves into their novels, and have used the novel as a means of delivering themselves of suppressed drives, it is by his ability to conceal his presence in the novel that the writer produces a masterpiece.
The modern novelists, the "alittérateurs" and "chosistes" meet with Mauriac’s disapproval because they have rejected everything born of the living mind and heart, because they are concerned with objects rather than people. Such novels, in their rigour and frigidity, lack the vitality of human passions. However, even the attempts at a psychological novel by such modern writers as Claude Mauriac and Nathalie Sarraute are considered defective by François Mauriac because, lacking solidity, they cannot endure.

Mauriac has traced modern trends in literature and concludes that the preoccupation with sex could lead even to the destruction of the novel itself. He sees, as a result of this preoccupation and also as the disastrous effects of two world wars, a mad race towards annihilation, to madness and despair.

In the Introduction we asked the question, "What have Mauriac’s critical works told us about himself?" We have found here a man ardently sympathetic towards his fellow man, with all the weaknesses of his human nature, yet who is conscious, too, of the nobility of the human being. Hence we have found him condemning those who despise "la bête humaine" and lauding those who portray his dignity. By the rigorous sincerity he demands of all, and the fact that he questions even his own veracity, he gives evidence of a scrupulous temperament. His distaste for the "escape" element in romantic and surrealist literature reveals the same traits which he shows in
his political works, a character always prepared to face the facts, to admit the truth and accept its consequences and, in so doing, to live at peace with himself. Finally, although he has not yet, even in his old age, solved his great dilemma, "le problème du romancier catholique", he has shown, in all his writings, his one great preoccupation, the search for God in his own life and in that of his fellow man.
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