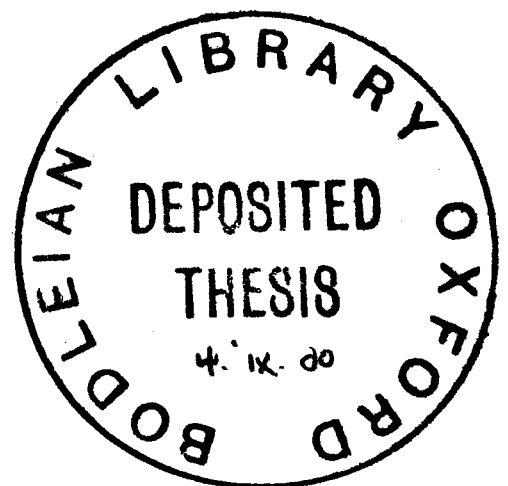


**A “Catholic Novelist” in Context :
suggestions for a reassessment of the work of
François Mauriac**

Edward Welch, St. John’s College, Oxford.

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

Hilary Term, 2000.



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This thesis focuses on a writer who was a constant presence in the French literary field for a large part of the 20th Century and who, by the time of his death, had established himself as one of the major post-war intellectuals, yet who is increasingly typecast simply as a ‘Catholic Novelist’. The thesis aim to counter this tendency by highlighting other, intriguing and overlooked aspects of his work and career : the pervasive presence of the body in his novels, his Sartrean sensitivity to the problem of intersubjectivity, or his post-war intervention over decolonisation, and the ethical questions this forced him to confront. The distinctiveness of the thesis lies in its stress on the need to resituate literary texts and other works of art in their socio-cultural contexts – that is to say, in the context of other discourses or representations of the world in circulation at the same time. Thus, Part 1 explores how both his artistic theory and practice are shaped, in unpredictable ways, by the ideological framework of Catholicism into which he is inserted in his early years. Part 2 argues that despite, or perhaps because of, his innate conservatism, Mauriac emerges as a writer who is sensitive to, and captures the nature of, the modern world, and the experience of living in that world. His modern sensibility is reflected in his preoccupation with intersubjectivity, one he shares with other writers of the period who are, perhaps, more recognisably modern. Part 3 examines how his political interventions, and his corresponding transformation from novelist to intellectual, are managed by *L’Express* magazine, and how in fact he came to collaborate with a journal whose politics were radically different from his own. Overall, through an approach which can be described as materialist and, from a religious perspective, agnostic, the thesis aims to demonstrate how Mauriac can still be seen to have relevant and interesting things to say to a contemporary audience.

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This thesis focuses on a writer who was a constant and respected presence in the French literary field for a large part of the 20th Century, one whose work attracted the attention of both Gide and Sartre. He was also a writer who, by the time of his death, had established himself as one of the major post-war intellectuals, a result especially of his important intervention over decolonisation during the 1950s. Yet since his death in 1970, he has slowly drifted towards the margins of the literary field, and has become increasingly typecast as simply a ‘Catholic Novelist’, a novelist whose concerns and view of the world are shaped strongly by his Christian faith. He is seen as a writer preoccupied with questions of guilt, sin and religious hypocrisy, but who also explores the possibility of salvation.

If this rather one-dimensional image of Mauriac’s work has been allowed to take hold, it is in many ways due, ironically, to the critics who specialise in him and offer interpretations of his work. In France especially, he has been worked on by critics who frequently share his Catholic faith, something which can colour their response to his texts. They view the world with similar eyes, their interpretation of it informed by a similar set of underlying assumptions. They show themselves eager to draw out the spiritual themes in his work, the moral lessons or the messages of hope which can be drawn from it. It is not that these interpretations are in any way wrong, although it is true

that a perspective informed by religious faith can often lead to some key aspects of his novels, such as Mauriac's surprising preoccupation with the body, being obscured. The main problem they pose is simply that they have come to dominate discussion of his writing rather too much.

At its most straightforward, then, the aim of my thesis is to challenge the dominant image of Mauriac. It sets out to remind us of his complexities by drawing attention to other, intriguing and overlooked aspects of his work and career – the pervasive and disturbing presence of the body in novels which, if the label they carry is to be believed, should be guiding our mind towards matters of the spirit ; his Sartrean sensitivity to the risks and negotiations involved in intersubjectivity ; and his courageous participation in the debate over decolonisation, interesting not only in historical terms, but also for the ethical questions it forces him to ask about his responsibilities to the other, responsibilities made more acute by his prominent and privileged place in society as an artist.

Besides its agnosticism, the distinctiveness of my approach lies in its stress on the need to recontextualise individual works of art. It is broadly one of cultural materialism. That is to say, I am interested in the ways in which a work of art, and prior to that, the vision of the artist who creates it, are shaped by the socio-cultural context in which they develop – by the way in which, for example, the artist is trained to see the world as a result of being inserted into a particular ideological framework. Moreover, I believe that those concrete, external factors can be shown to have a real and tangible influence on a particular work's form or content. I am concerned too to explore the ways in which the

vision of the world articulated by a work of art relates to the other representations in circulation at the same time.

Thus, I argue in this thesis that various aspects of Mauriac's work and career can only be fully accounted for if we appreciate how they relate to, and are shaped by, the socio-cultural context in which they are produced. To be a 'Catholic Novelist', for example, a writer offering an essentially conservative moral perspective on the world, is not without significance in the context of a period dominated by radical artistic experimentation which is exploring and expressing radical changes in the understanding of subjectivity and identity. I consider the ways in which Mauriac is shaped and affected by, or responds to, the environment in which he and his work evolve, and the various different representations of the world to which he is exposed – those, for example, articulated by the Catholic faith into which he is inserted in his early years, and to which he remains faithful throughout his life ; by the radical new philosophical discourses of Nietzsche and Freud which prove to be a continual challenge to that faith ; or by the disturbing and for him immoral new art of figures such as André Gide.

I explore the most obvious and important example of Mauriac's imbrication in his *milieu* in Part 1 of the thesis, when I trace the strange persistence of the body in his fiction to the influence on him of the ideological framework into which he is inserted as a child. I argue that being trained to see the world through Catholic eyes, and being introduced in particular to a rigorous taboo of the body has tangible effects on his artistic theory and practice. As a 'Catholic Novelist', he attempts to invest art with a strong moral function, one reflected in the distinctively 'Classical' mode of writing he adopts. However, I suggest that a rift appears between Mauriac's theory and his novelistic

practice : his own work is seen to disrupt his intentions, challenging the attempt to practise a 'moral' form of writing through the way it releases – in a similar way, ironically, to the contemporary art he had condemned as 'immoral' – the very libidinal, disruptive currents he was hoping it would regulate and suppress. Mauriac's fevered preoccupation with the body reflects his anxious awareness of the presence in his work of something undesirable because forbidden.

Part 2 represents perhaps the most sustained challenge to Mauriac's traditional image. It suggests that while Mauriac may not be a modern writer, in the sense that he is not – indeed, never could be – a member of the artistic avant-garde, certain aspects of his artistic vision nevertheless display a perhaps surprising degree of contemporaneity. He shows himself to be a writer who is sensitive to and captures the nature of the modern world, and the experience of those living in that world. Indeed, it is arguably his innate conservatism which makes him so sensitive to the rapid changes taking place around him. I argue that his modern sensibility is reflected particularly in his alertness to the problem of intersubjectivity. It is one which, his work suggests, becomes increasingly acute with the onset of modernity, and which also comes to concern his fellow, perhaps more recognisably modern, writers and artists. Mauriac shows himself to have an almost Sartrean sensitivity to the delicate balance of power at work in intersubjective relationships. In his treatment of intersubjectivity and his general concern with the nature of lived experience, Mauriac emerges as a writer who is very much of his time, in that he at once produces an image of the times in which he lives, and is himself shaped by those times and the questions they pose.

Contextualisation is inevitable and essential when we turn to his post-war political journalism, the *Bloc-notes*. It marks the time when Mauriac is most explicitly caught up in history, and engaged in a continual series of dialogues, polemics and debates. Part 3 begins by exploring the ethical questions Mauriac is forced to address when he confronts the issue of decolonisation. We see how his sensitivity to intersubjectivity, and his sense of responsibility to the other, plays an important role in prompting him to intervene. He is also troubled by his own status as a writer and his privileged position in the social order. At the same time, it becomes clear that his intervention is made possible by a series of social and cultural mechanisms. It depends as much on who he is – on his status precisely as a writer, or the position he has reached within the cultural order – as on what he says. This is thrown into relief by his collaboration with *L'Express* especially, which both recognises and promotes further Mauriac's status as an 'intellectual', an independent voice of reason or moral consciousness. Part 3 goes on to explore Mauriac's relationship with the news magazine in greater detail, showing how it leads him to become caught up in the other radical changes affecting France in the 1950s and 1960s. Chief among these are the processes of modernisation which take hold in France at the same time as the problem of decolonisation unfolds. *L'Express* places itself at the forefront of this movement for change, something reflected in its promotion of the *Nouvelle Vague* and the ideologies of economic liberalism and consumer capitalism. I begin by exploring the basis for Mauriac's collaboration with *L'Express*, which in effect involves nothing less than the commodification of Mauriac, and go on to consider the divorce between the two, the result not so much of political as ideological differences. I argue that Mauriac's departure

is a symbolic moment, his return to the orthodox fold as a columnist for *Le Figaro littéraire*, and as a supporter of de Gaulle representing the moment when the old order is displaced by the new. Mauriac is no longer an actor in the world, but is increasingly acted upon, alert more and more to the threat posed to him by the accelerating and destructive processes of modernity.

Overall, then, the thesis offers a set of readings which highlight the different contours of Mauriac's work and writing, and which draw out in particular the ways in which he relates to the context in which he develops. It reminds us of the extent to which he is enmeshed in his century – to the point, indeed, that he illustrates changes affecting French culture and society as a whole – and does so in the hope of providing a more complex, more well-rounded image of the man and his work. It is driven too by a desire, in some sense, to see justice done to him, to see him be given the recognition he deserves as a significant figure in 20th Century French culture. This is true especially with respect to his involvement in the debate over decolonisation. It is important to remind ourselves of the questions he was asking at the time, and of the fact that he was among the first people to ask them.

It is perhaps this sense of Mauriac as social actor which emerges most clearly from the thesis. We are left above all with clear impression of his complex and intriguing career, one which can be seen to illustrate, in a way which has a general relevance, the nature of and mechanisms behind the field of literary and cultural production. The different aspects of his career which emerge through the thesis, such as his initial consecration by the literary establishment rather than the avant-garde in the 1930s, or his post-war transformation from novelist to intellectual, remind us that artistic success is not

solely a matter of creative genius, but of contacts, positionings and perceptions, the search for alignment with and acknowledgement by others. That Mauriac himself knew this, knew the rules of the game he had to play, is perhaps surprising – but ultimately, entirely appropriate for a man who, for all his concern with the spiritual, remained preoccupied with the real and the material, with the basic business of living in the world.

Acknowledgements

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I would like to dedicate the thesis to my parents, Derek and Christine, and to Claire.

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Abbreviations and conventions of reference.

Throughout the thesis, reference is made in the text to the following critical editions of Mauriac's work.

ORTC *Œuvres romanesques et théâtrales complètes*, ed. by Jacques Petit,
4 vols (Paris : Gallimard, coll. "Bibl. de la Pléiade", 1979-85).

OA *Œuvres autobiographiques*, ed. by François Durand (Paris : Gallimard,
coll. "Bibl. de la Pléiade", 1990).

BN *Bloc-notes*, ed. by Jean Touzot, 5 vols (Paris : Seuil, coll. "Points", 1993).

References to all other works by Mauriac are footnoted.

Introduction : a walk along the cliffs with François Mauriac

In his obituary of François Mauriac, published shortly after the author's death in September 1970, Rayner Heppenstall notes how, in the aftermath of their deaths, it is common for writers and their work to endure a spell in critical 'purgatory', a spell whose length can vary dramatically¹. While some writers may see their work savagely re-evaluated and their stock devalued, before being slowly 'rediscovered' and celebrated once more², others are less fortunate. They are condemned slowly to drift into obscurity and spend their time haunting the margins of the literary canon as they lose the attention of the general critical community, remaining of interest only to a specialised few. What, then, has been the fate of Mauriac himself in the past thirty years? Has he too spent time in purgatory, and if so, has it come to an end? It is true that since his death, Mauriac's critical fortunes have been mixed. His place in the canon of established and respected writers – the writers who, it has been agreed, have something distinctive or important to say about the world, or who contribute in some way to the development and practice of literature and literary technique – seems assured. It is implied, for example, by his continued place on school and university syllabuses in Britain and France, or by a reasonably substantial and detailed three-quarter-page entry in the recently revised *Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, one of whose functions is arguably to

¹ Rayner Heppenstall, 'Mauriac : man of anguish', *The Sunday Times*, 6 September 1970.

² The recent fortunes of Jean-Paul Sartre offer a tempting illustration of this phenomenon. Having been a rather unfashionable figure for a number of years, the twentieth anniversary of his death has seen a renewed interest in the man and his work. His rehabilitation has been signalled in particular by the publication of Bernard-Henri Lévy's imposing tome, *Un siècle de Sartre*, at the start of 2000. The social and cultural mechanisms behind these cycles of consecration and reconsecration deserve further study.

indicate the relative significance of the writers within the French literary field³. Rather more crudely, it is also suggested by the on-going commercial success of his books. The 1990s alone saw the publication of a volume of *Œuvres autobiographiques* in Gallimard's prestigious "Pléiade" series, to complement the four-volume *Œuvres romanesques et théâtrales complètes* which had appeared during the late 1970s and early 1980s ; a new collected edition of his novels published by Le Livre de Poche⁴ ; and, most strikingly and prestigiously of all, a new critical edition of the *Bloc-notes*, the journalism which defines his career in the final eighteen years of his life, published by Le Seuil in 1993. Indeed, the appearance of the *Bloc-notes* in Le Seuil's "Points" paperback collection, which publishes and helps to make more accessible work by key intellectuals and thinkers, means Mauriac finds himself in the company of some unlikely bed-fellows, such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Moreover, specialist interest in Mauriac is enough to sustain at least one annual conference, two annual journals, and for many years, a dedicated research centre at Bordeaux University⁵.

Nevertheless, it is becoming difficult to avoid the impression that for those without a specialist interest in his work, Mauriac is an increasingly secondary figure in the field of 20th Century literature. It seems he is gradually slipping to the margins, overlooked as other, perhaps more dynamic and more modern writers catch the eye. Indeed, as a more apocalyptically minded colleague once put it, Mauriac may already have fallen off the 'cliff' of critical interest, having become perceived as a writer whose

³ Nicholas Hewitt, 'François Mauriac', in Peter France (ed.), *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* (Oxford : The Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 510-511.

⁴ François Mauriac, *Œuvres romanesques*, ed. by Jean Touzot (Paris : Le Livre de Poche, coll "La Pochothèque", 1992).

⁵ See the *Nouveaux Cahiers François Mauriac*, 7 vols (1993-), which has replaced the *Cahiers François Mauriac*, 18 vols (1974-1991), and the *Cahiers de Malagar*, 13 vols (1987-). See also the *Travaux du Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes sur François Mauriac*, Université de Bordeaux-III, 36 vols (1977-1994).

concerns no longer held much relevance for critics, and about whom there was little more of interest worth saying. Evidence to confirm this perception could perhaps be found in the fact that, in Britain at least, only two other doctoral theses have been written on Mauriac in the last twenty years⁶.

Underlying the present thesis, of course, is the conviction that such an impression is wrong, and that Mauriac has not yet slipped from the cliff, even if it may be true that he is slowly being jostled towards its edge. We must nevertheless ask how it comes to take hold. The problem lies for a large part in the way in which Mauriac's work has been presented and discussed by critics over the years. For while he may have a place in the literary canon, it is one which has been perhaps too well defined, to the extent that he has become almost imprisoned by it. Mauriac has become known principally as a 'Catholic Novelist', a novelist whose concerns and view of the world are shaped strongly by his Christian faith. He is seen as a writer preoccupied with questions of guilt, sin, religious hypocrisy and the possibility of salvation. Moreover, the interest of his work is frequently reduced to one problem in particular. In the context of the undergraduate French literature modern period paper at Oxford University, for example, of which study of the 'Catholic Novel' can form a part, he is usually presented to students as a form of committed writer. His work is shown not only to explore the question of religious faith, but also to encourage the reader to acknowledge the importance of and need for it. As such, his novels are seen to confront a series of aesthetic problems, most notable of which is the danger of didacticism. His work must convey his convictions, and especially the possibility of Grace, without appearing to preach, or damage the ambiguity on which

⁶ Margaret Parry, 'Time and consciousness in the work of François Mauriac' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 1985), and Paul Cooke, 'Mauriac's myth of the poet, with special reference to *Le Mystère Frontenac*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993).

a novel depends for its success. It is a problem which, as John Flower in particular has demonstrated, the texts can be shown to overcome with varying degrees of success⁷. As a result, it might appear for the non-specialist that ‘le cas Mauriac’, and the specific difficulties or questions raised by his work, have been dealt with and resolved, that he can be put to one side as new problems are tackled. There is little impetus to explore his work any further, or to consider it in different contexts.

Yet when we look back again over Mauriac’s life, it comes as a shock to compare this straightforward image of the ‘Catholic Novelist’ with the reality of his complex career, his varied output, and the significant role he plays in the culture of 20th Century France. He emerges as a striking and intriguing figure, one who spans the century in terms of the events he experiences and in which he plays a part, and who remains a constant presence in the literary and cultural field for 50 years. He is intriguing particularly because he proves himself to be an unpredictable character, never quite acting in the ways one might expect. For example, as Gisèle Sapiro has recently shown, and as I explore further in Part 2 of the thesis, his pre-war literary career followed the lines one might expect of a writer who remains faithful to his bourgeois origins : Mauriac would always be associated with literary orthodoxy rather than the avant-garde⁸. This was confirmed when he was elected to the *Académie Française* in 1932. However, with the onset of war, he proved to be the only member of the *Académie* to engage in resistance activities, putting himself in real personal danger as a result : he joined the *Comité national des écrivains*, which brought together those writers and intellectuals

⁷ See John Flower, *Intention and Achievement : a study of the novels of François Mauriac* (Oxford : The Clarendon Press, 1969).

⁸ See Gisèle Sapiro, ‘Salut littéraire et littérature du salut’, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 111/112 (1996), 36-58, and below, Part 2, section 1, pp. 96-98.

opposed to the German occupation, soon after it forms in 1941, and published the resistance text *Le Cahier Noir* in 1943⁹.

Mauriac's unpredictability is illustrated further by developments in his post-war career, not the least significant of which is the fact that, although he continued to produce a handful of novels during the period, he became more of a journalist than a novelist. It is reflected above all in his surprising collaboration with the newly-launched *L'Express* news magazine from 1953 to 1961. Part 3 explores, amongst other things, how the ageing and still fundamentally conservative writer came to join forces with a young, radical, left-leaning magazine, one promoting a socio-cultural agenda which challenged the traditional order embodied by Mauriac himself¹⁰.

Mauriac remains intriguing too in terms of the work he produces. Part 1 of the thesis, for example, explores and attempts to account for the remarkable density, or the sheer physical presence of his writing whenever the body is described in his novels. The startling way in which he dwells on and captures the body and his preoccupation with physical experience are a perhaps surprising dimension of texts which we might expect, given the label they carry, to be more concerned with the evocation and exploration of the spiritual, of Grace rather than nature. Yet they have gone largely unnoticed and unexplained.

This disjunction between a writer with a complex career, a complex role in culture, and complex writing, and the dominant image of Mauriac as simply a 'Catholic Novelist', is one of the features of him and his work which first attracted my attention. Our sense of the complexity and variety of his work, as well as his importance as a

⁹ Sapiro, art. cit., p. 53.

¹⁰ See below, Part 3, section 3, pp. 181-215.

political commentator and intellectual figure is becoming increasingly lost. At its most straightforward, then, the aim of this thesis is simply to remind us of some of the other dimensions of his work. It focuses on three intriguing but frequently overlooked features in particular. While Part 1 examines the pervasive presence of the body in his novels, Part 2 draws attention to his seemingly forgotten concern with the problem of intersubjectivity. Finally, Part 3 opens by highlighting once more what proves to be a bold and courageous intervention in the debate over decolonisation in the 1950s, one which made him a convincing example of what Sartre was theorising at the time as the *écrivain engagé*.

Central to my analysis of his work is a general belief in the need to recontextualise individual works of art. My approach is broadly one of cultural materialism. I am interested in the concrete, usually external factors – be they social or cultural – which determine the production of a work of art, or shape the nature of the artist's vision of the world. A work of art is not a timeless object created in a vacuum, but the product of a particular mind, with its own particular history, working in a particular time and place. Its themes, preoccupations or images express the artist's response to, or vision of, the world in which he lives ; but that artist himself is equally a product of his times. His vision of the world is influenced and shaped by the environment in which he works – that is to say, by the events which unfold during his life, and by the ideas, philosophies, and other representations of the world in circulation at the same time. Surrealism, for example, is a historically specific phenomenon which could come to fruition only after the emergence of Freud's theories of the unconscious. Likewise, artists working in the post-war period, such as Giacometti, Bacon and Beckett, seem

independently to reach a similar conclusion about the fragility and anguish of the human condition in the twin shadows of holocausts past and potential.

I argue in this thesis that various aspects of Mauriac's work and career, and particularly the three I choose to deal with more closely, can only be fully accounted for if we appreciate how they relate to, and are shaped by, the socio-cultural context in which they are produced. I do not understand this simply to mean the 'objective' or 'historical' facts to which we can refer concerning Mauriac, his background, or the times in which he wrote – for example, the fact that he was born into a bourgeois family and was brought up by a devoutly Catholic mother. Rather, I am concerned too with the ways in which these facts translate into or point towards the various worldviews, ideologies or representations of the world to which Mauriac was exposed throughout his life – those, for instance, articulated by the Catholic faith to which he is introduced in his early years, and to which he remains faithful throughout his life ; by the radical new philosophical discourses of Nietzsche and Freud which prove to be a continual challenge to that faith ; or by the disturbing and for him immoral new art of figures such as André Gide which emerges during the early years of the Twentieth Century. Throughout the thesis, I examine the numerous ways in which this environment inflects his work as he responds to it, defines himself against it, or shows himself to be moulded by it.

I explore the most obvious and important example of its influence in Part 1 of the thesis, when I trace the strange persistence of the body in his fiction to the influence on Mauriac of the ideological framework into which he is inserted as a child. I argue that being trained to see the world through Catholic eyes, and being introduced in particular to a rigorous taboo of the body, has tangible effects on his artistic theory and practice. As

a 'Catholic Novelist', he attempts to invest art with a strong moral function, one reflected in the distinctively 'Classical' mode of writing he adopts. However, I suggest that a rift appears between Mauriac's theory and his novelistic practice : his own work is seen to disrupt his intentions, challenging the attempt to practise a 'moral' form of writing through the way it releases – in a similar way, ironically, to the contemporary art he had condemned as 'immoral' – the very libidinal, disruptive currents he was hoping it would regulate and suppress. Mauriac's fevered preoccupation with the body reflects his anxious awareness of the presence in his work of something undesirable because forbidden.

Part 2 represents perhaps the most sustained challenge to Mauriac's traditional image. It suggests that while Mauriac may not be a modern writer, in the sense that he is not – indeed, never could be – a member of the artistic avant-garde, certain aspects of his artistic vision nevertheless display a perhaps surprising degree of contemporaneity. He shows himself to be a writer who is sensitive to and captures the nature of the modern world, and the experience of those living in that world. Indeed, it is arguably his innate conservatism which makes him so sensitive to the rapid changes taking place around him. I argue that his modern sensibility is reflected particularly in his alertness to the problem of intersubjectivity. It is one which, his work suggests, becomes increasingly acute with the onset of modernity, and which also comes to concern his fellow, perhaps more recognisably modern, writers and artists. Mauriac shows himself to have an almost Sartrean sensitivity to the delicate balance of power at work in intersubjective relationships. In his treatment of intersubjectivity and his general concern with the nature of lived experience, Mauriac emerges as a writer who is very much of his time, in that he

at once produces an image of the times in which he lives, and is himself shaped by those times and the questions they pose.

Contextualisation is inevitable and essential when we turn to his post-war political journalism, the *Bloc-notes*. It marks the time when Mauriac is most explicitly caught up in history, and engaged in a continual series of dialogues, polemics and debates. Part 3 begins by exploring the ethical questions Mauriac is forced to address when he confronts the issue of decolonisation. We see how his sensitivity to intersubjectivity, along with a sense of responsibility to the other, plays an important role in prompting him to intervene. He is also troubled by his own status as a writer and his privileged position in the social order. At the same time, it becomes clear that his intervention is made possible by a series of social and cultural mechanisms. It depends as much on who he is – on his status precisely as a writer, or the position he has reached within the cultural order – as on what he says. This is thrown into relief by his collaboration with *L'Express* especially, which both recognises and promotes further Mauriac's status as an 'intellectual', an independent voice of reason or moral consciousness. Part 3 goes on to explore Mauriac's relationship with the news magazine in greater detail, showing how it leads him to become caught up in the other radical changes affecting France in the 1950s and 1960s ; for as Kristin Ross has recently reminded us, the drama of decolonisation is linked inextricably to the broader processes of modernisation which take a firm grip in France almost simultaneously¹¹. *L'Express* places itself at the forefront of this movement for change, something reflected in its promotion of the *Nouvelle Vague* and the ideologies of economic liberalism and

¹¹ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies : decolonisation and the reordering of French culture* (Cambridge, Mass. : The M. I. T. Press, 1995).

consumer capitalism. I begin by exploring the basis for Mauriac's collaboration with *L'Express*, which in effect involves nothing less than the commodification of Mauriac, and go on to consider the divorce between the two, the result not so much of political as ideological differences. I argue that Mauriac's departure is a symbolic moment, his return to the orthodox fold as a columnist for *Le Figaro littéraire* and a supporter of de Gaulle representing the moment when the old order is displaced by the new. Mauriac is no longer an actor in the world, but is increasingly acted upon, alert more and more to the threat posed to him by the accelerating and destructive processes of modernity.

Therefore, the thesis offers a set of readings which highlight the different contours of his work and writing, and which draw out in particular the ways in which he relates to the context in which he develops. It reminds us of the extent to which Mauriac is enmeshed in his century – to the point, indeed, that he illustrates changes affecting French culture and society as a whole – and does so in the hope of providing a more complex, more well-rounded image of the man and his work.

Yet why should such a project be needed? Why has it become necessary to offer a reassessment of Mauriac's work? How does the situation arise in which these other dimensions of his career and texts have been overlooked or lost sight of? Why does the perception of Mauriac as primarily a 'Catholic Novelist' take shape? Ironically, the fault arguably lies, at least in part, with those critics who specialise in him and offer interpretations of his work. If a certain image of Mauriac has taken hold, this is perhaps due to the unusually homogeneous critical community which has gathered around him, especially in France. Many critics' responses to his work are frequently coloured by the Catholicism they share with him. They view the world with similar eyes, their

interpretation of it informed by a similar set of underlying assumptions. In short, they share the same ideology. As I discuss further in Part 1, this leads to the development of a form of complicity between the writer and his critics, who are keen to offer readings which draw out the religious momentum of his work. They highlight the spirituality of his work, the moral lessons to be drawn from the actions of his characters, or the way in which he intimates the possibility of divine grace¹².

If what we might call these ‘official’ readings of his work are problematic, it is not only because they contribute to a monochromatic image of Mauriac as concerned above all with questions of religious faith, but also because the assumptions underlying the worldview which informs them means that certain important features of his work remain fully to be considered. This is particularly true, as I discuss at length in Part 1, of the question of the presence of the physical and the bodily in his novels. I point out how the evocation of physicality and physical existence in his work is usually discussed in terms of its opposition, within the Christian moral framework, to the soul or the spiritual. It is seen mainly as one of the conflicting forces in the grip of which his characters are caught. However, no real effort is made to examine more closely what emerges as the distinctive way in which the body is described, or why it might seep through his novels to such a degree. The critics show themselves unable to step outside the polarised worldview they share with Mauriac and consider, as I go on to do, how it might itself have shaped Mauriac’s writing in tangible and significant ways.

I am not the first to recognise the partial nature of an approach which stresses the religious and spiritual dimensions of Mauriac’s work in favour of its other aspects. Over the past few years, John Flower has established himself as the champion of what has

¹² See below, Part 1, section 1, pp. 21-24 for further discussion.

become the second major approach to Mauriac, namely that of psychocriticism¹³. His main aim is to deal directly with what the orthodox approach confronts more warily. He highlights the distinctly disturbing aspects of Mauriac's novels, from their intense expression of sexuality and preoccupation with bodily experience to the latent theme of incest which reappears at various points in his work¹⁴. Flower places the texts' perverse underside outside a moral or religious frame of reference, and instead argues that the dominance and intensity of such themes makes Mauriac's work rich material for readings informed by psychoanalysis. This claim is supported by the sixteen articles by various critics which he gathers in the volume *Psycholectures*. William Kidd, for example, uses Freudian concepts to elucidate characters' motivations, actions and reactions to events¹⁵. More problematically, however, Flower's own approach seems to involve treating Mauriac's novels as nothing less than a set of symptoms with which we can diagnose Mauriac himself, and gain an insight into his psychology. Flower is particularly interested, for example, in the constant reappearance of the mother figure in the novels, and argues that the portrayal of the intense, even potentially incestuous, mother-son relationship in *Genitrix* reflects or plays out Mauriac's own passionate feelings for his mother. In *Genitrix*, he suggests, we have 'a subconscious expression of Mauriac's love for his mother, which was at once pure and, as is the case with many children, deeply

¹³ Various other approaches to Mauriac have of course been adopted. I am merely focusing here on the two most prominent. Jean Touzot in particular has undertaken a rigorous stylistic analysis of Mauriac's novels, examining the network of images and the rhetorical tropes and figures he uses. See *François Mauriac : une configuration romanesque* (Paris : Archives des Lettres Modernes, 1985), and *La Planète Mauriac* (Paris : Klincksieck, 1985). The numerous Anglo-Saxon *mauriaciens* are also notable for their eclectic approaches, from Malcolm Scott's historical studies, to Toby Garfitt's exploration of Mauriac's narrative techniques and treatment of time in the novels, and indeed John Flower's psychocriticism. Their diversity is captured in John Flower and Bernard Swift (eds), *François Mauriac : Visions and Reappraisals* (Oxford : Berg, 1989).

¹⁴ John Flower, 'Ce qui était perdu et la "passion étrangère"', in *Psycholectures/Psychoreadings* (Exeter : University of Exeter Press, Bordeaux : Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1995), pp. 164-174.

¹⁵ William Kidd, 'Oedipal and Pre-Oedipal elements in *Thérèse Desqueyroux*', in John Flower (ed.), *Psycholectures/Psychoreadings*, op. cit., pp. 92-114.

sexual, if only subconsciously so'¹⁶. It appears that for Flower, Mauriac, through his literature, is in some way exorcising problematic emotions and feelings – with the task of the critic, it is implied, being to work out precisely what those feelings are.

Flower's readings in particular remind us of the dangers of a psychocritical approach to the texts. Firstly, the aims of psychocriticism, and its object of study, are never properly made clear. It seems to be preoccupied with analysing and understanding the author more than the texts he leaves behind. Yet what it offers about that author can be nothing much more than speculation, as Flower himself admits¹⁷. Secondly, it does little in the way of contributing to our understanding of the texts themselves, their mechanisms, structures and meanings – or rather, their meaning is reduced to being a simple symptom of a problem for which we lack firm evidence anyway.

Not that there may not be an important link between Mauriac's psychological state and what he writes. On the contrary, I would argue that the contribution of psychocriticism is precisely to draw our attention to the importance of what Flower calls the 'formative influence' of the writer's childhood years, and the potential effect of his psychological development on his writing¹⁸. They are the issues on which I focus in Part 1 of the thesis, when I set out to determine why Mauriac develops into a specifically *Catholic* novelist, why he comes to write in the shadow of a particular set of preoccupations or problems. It seems difficult to deny that there is a strong link between a specific text and the author who produces it, despite the attempts by structuralist and post-structuralist literary theorists to call into question and undermine the concepts of

¹⁶ John Flower, 'Towards a Psychobiographical Study of Mauriac : the case of *Genitrix*', in Flower (ed.), *Psycholectures/Psychoreadings*, op. cit., pp. 129-142. See also 'La Mère, personnage clé dans les romans de Mauriac', *ibid.*, pp. 9-20.

¹⁷ Flower, 'Towards a Psychobiographical Study of Mauriac', art. cit., p. 139.

¹⁸ Flower, 'Towards a Psychobiographical Study of Mauriac', art. cit., p. 133.

‘author’ and ‘authorship’¹⁹. A text will always be, to a certain extent, the expression or reflection of a particular imagination.

However, it is also the case that these theories of literature and language have forced us – and rightly so – to rethink the way we perceive the link between the two. If Barthes announces the ‘death’ of the author, then it is the death of the author as he seems to be perceived by Flower, and indeed the majority of the critics working on Mauriac – that is to say, as an empirically observable entity lying unproblematically ‘beyond’ the page, about whom we know certain biographical facts, and to whom we can ultimately refer in order to ‘understand’, or resolve the meaning of, his texts. This is a view which it has become increasingly difficult to hold in the light of modern critical theories. When we move ‘beyond’ the page, and attempt to get to grips with its author, we find we must confront not an object about which we can make a set of definitive statements, about whom we can speak the truth, and who himself holds the truth of his words, but another network of texts, another series of discourses requiring a similar amount of interpretation, and a type of analysis similar to that required for other texts. Text and author exist not in a hierarchy, or with one in some sense ‘behind’ the other, but in a continuum. The author himself, as Barthes puts it, is ‘dessiné dans le tapis’²⁰ ; he, like us all, is part of the same textual weave, is himself a product of discourse. Our focus should not be on who Mauriac might ‘be’, but on the far more concrete question of what he *says*. The critic’s job is to piece together the worldview, or representation of the world, articulated by his various statements, and beyond that, the origins of that worldview, the ways in which he

¹⁹ The classic example of such an attack is Roland Barthes’ ‘La mort de l’auteur’ (1968), in *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris : Seuil, coll. “Points”, 1984), pp. 63-69. For an overview of the debate, see Seán Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author : criticism and subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 1992).

²⁰ Roland Barthes, ‘De l’œuvre au texte’, in *Le Bruissement de la langue*, op. cit., p. 77.

is trained to see the world. This slight but significant shift in perspective is the second general principle, along with that of recontextualisation, which underlies this thesis. Indeed, its validity is proved in the discussion which opens my work, for it allows us to get to grips with precisely how and why Mauriac is a ‘Catholic Novelist’.

Thus, it is through a reading of diverse aspects of Mauriac’s work and career, one which might be characterised as materialist and agnostic, and which is willing to draw on the insights afforded by modern critical theory, that I aim to demonstrate how he can still be seen to have relevant and interesting things to say to a contemporary audience ; demonstrate too that he need not yet be left to fall from the cliff of critical interest.

Part 1. Faith, class and the carnivalesque : the making of a Catholic Novelist

1. Introduction.

One of the most powerful and unsettling aspects of Mauriac's supposedly 'Catholic' novels is the insistent, almost obsessive way in which they dwell on the body, and evoke physical existence. Like animals, his characters interact primarily at the physical level. Félicité in *Genitrix*, for example, is described as a 'jeune mère animale' who, we are told, 'flairait avidement le nouveau-né' (ORTC, i, p. 621) ; and in *Le Baiser au lépreux*, we see Jean Péloueyre pick up on Noémi's 'odeur de jeune fille, un jour fauve de juillet' as it fills the room on their first meeting (ibid., p. 460). Similarly, the reader is jolted by the way Thérèse sees her unborn child as 'cette créature inconnue, toute mêlée encore à ses entrailles' (ORTC, ii, p. 52) ; the rawness of the word 'entrailles' in particular strips the event of any transcendent quality, and reduces it to the purely physiological. Moreover, the narrating eye itself shares the characters' concern with the bodily. It foregrounds the materiality of existence relentlessly as it picks out sweaty palms and glistening necks, its descriptions impinging on our sense not only of sight, but of touch and smell. The first aim of this part of the thesis, then, is simply to stress the important place of the body in Mauriac's fiction, and underline the extent to which a sense of the physical permeates his work, for it is often overlooked ; but it also sets out to account for the peculiar intensity of his description of the body, why it is that the body is captured in such raw, basic and physiological terms – terms which seem a little too insistent, excessive or preoccupied. In other words, the focus here is on the lexical dimension of what in Part 2 I will call Mauriac's materialist vision of man, on the strange richness of the words he uses to describe the body. The fleshy nature of these descriptions is particularly intriguing because it contributes to a striking contradiction to be found at the heart of his work. During the period of the mid-1920s leading up to his spiritual crisis of 1928, he produces the sequence of work which is most flooded with sensual and bodily experience : the texts ranging from *Le Baiser au lépreux* in 1922 to *Destins* in 1928,

via those such as *Genitrix* (1923), *Le Désert de l'amour* (1925) and *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927). Yet as he produces this work, he is simultaneously criticising his contemporaries for their own preoccupation with the body, and arguing that it should be controlled and regulated – banished from thought, and presumably from books. As he puts it in the *Journal d'un homme de trente ans* in 1919, 'la chair doit être assujettie ou elle nous écrase' (OA, p. 260). I explore the origins and nature of this prescriptiveness, which I trace to his insertion into the rigid ideological framework of Catholicism, and how it shapes the way he writes and his understanding of language. I argue that the views of art and writing this leads him to hold are challenged by his own work : the troubled fleshiness of his writing is evidence of what Mauriac finds to be a disruptive return of the bodily and the libidinal to his writing, in the face of his efforts to use that same writing as a means of keeping the body at bay.

It is not that the presence of the body, and Mauriac's preoccupation with the physical nature of man have gone entirely unnoticed by critics. Far from it, in fact. They have long recognised its central role in generating what Swift has called the 'sulphurous' atmosphere of his work¹. Lachasse, for example, has observed that *Le Baiser au lépreux* is 'd'abord l'histoire d'un corps', exploring as it does Jean's self-loathing and disgust at his physical condition². Furthermore, numerous commentators have underlined how all his novels are fired by the tense passions and desires which erupt between the characters, from the suffocating and almost incestuous relationship between mother and son in *Genitrix*, to the pagan sensuality of Bob and Paule in *Destins*. They have explored the way these portrayals are supported by a network of images and symbols, drawn particularly from the natural world. Thérèse is seen as a 'louve' imprisoned in the cage of the family, Jean Péloueyre in *Le Baiser au lépreux* becomes a 'larve' or 'grillon', other characters are cast as hunters or hunted as they

¹ Bernard Swift, 'François Mauriac et le don de l'atmosphère', *Cahiers François Mauriac*, 13 (1986), p. 357.

² Pierre Lachasse, 'Pour une connaissance du "monstre" dans *Le Baiser au lépreux*', *Revue des Lettres Modernes*, Série François Mauriac, 4 (Paris : Minard, 1984), p. 61.

are caught up in the sexual economy³. The critics agree that the physical and the demands of the physical dominate the world of his characters ; that, as Holmberg puts it, ‘dans chaque roman, à chaque étape de son évolution en tant que romancier, les problèmes créés par les impulsions érotiques restent son affaire’⁴. However, that Holmberg should choose to describe the erotic or the bodily here as ‘problematic’ is significant. It indicates the way in which the physical dimension in Mauriac’s texts has frequently been treated by critics. For although its importance is widely accepted, its critical fortunes, or its use as a starting point for the interpretation of his texts, remain limited. This is because discussion of the physical dimension in Mauriac’s texts nearly always takes place within a specific context.

It has long been accepted that the poetics of Mauriac’s work are structured by his radically polarised Catholic worldview which, as it maps a moral framework on to the world, constantly opposes the two poles of nature and grace, body and soul, physical and spiritual. The body, the ‘corps de boue’ as he describes it in the preface to *Thérèse* (ORTC, ii, p. 17), and its temptations and corruptions, are something from which man must escape. This tension is essentially what defines his works as Catholic Novels, as they evoke the pull exerted by each pole, and suggest that movement between them, and particularly a return to grace from nature, may be possible. The urgency which drives his work as he urges his readers to search for God, and his intentions as a novelist, are well-known, and have been well-defined by various critics⁵. For Flower, Mauriac is a type of committed writer. Convinced of man’s post-lapsarian state, but certain too that he is assured of God’s love, he sets out to make man aware of his condition, and persuade him that another possibility lies open for

³ See for example John Flower, *Intention and achievement : a study of the novels of François Mauriac* (Oxford : The Clarendon Press, 1969), ch. 4. See also Jean Touzot’s two books on Mauriac’s networks of images, *François Mauriac : une configuration romanesque* (Paris : Archives des Lettres Modernes, 1985), and *La Planète Mauriac* (Paris : Klincksieck, 1985), and Michel Bonte, ‘Images et spiritualité dans l’œuvre romanesque de François Mauriac’, in *Présence de Mauriac* (Bordeaux : Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1986), pp. 141-148.

⁴ Arthur Holmberg, ‘Eros et agapê : Mauriac découvre une téléologie du corps’, *Cahiers François Mauriac*, 13 (1986), p. 345.

⁵ For discussion of Mauriac’s aims as a novelist, see in particular John Flower, op. cit., ch. 1, and Malcolm Scott, *The Struggle for the Soul of the French Novel : French Catholic and Realist Novelists, 1850-1970* (London : Macmillan, 1989), ch. 6.

him, or rather that there is only one real option: that of turning towards and embracing God⁶. In other words, the tension between nature and grace should be a dynamic one. If the physical dimension is important, it is as the minor term in a dialectic, to be transcended as man escapes from its clutches into the realm of the spiritual.

Of course, the question of how such convictions are to be communicated in novel form, and the aesthetic problems they cause, has been one of the dominant themes of Mauriac criticism through the years. In a well-known article, Albert Sonnenfeld has set out clearly the risk of dogmatism and didacticism run by a writer trying to encourage others to acknowledge what he sees as the truth⁷. Mauriac himself drew attention to the clash between, on the one hand, his desire as writer to provide his characters with the 'right' outcome to their lives by leading them to God, and, on the other, his awareness that aesthetic success is predicated on ambiguity and uncertainty. As he put it in *Le Roman*, his essay on novelistic technique written in 1927, he faced the tricky task of having to 'concilier la liberté de la créature et la liberté du Créateur' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 766). He had argued in 1924 that a possible solution to these problems lay in what he termed, in an interview with Frédéric Lefèvre, an 'apologie indirecte du christianisme'⁸. His novels would suggest or imply the presence of the spiritual, or the realm of grace, rather than state it explicitly. John Flower has argued that this is most subtly achieved in *Le Nœud de Vipères* (1932), through the way Mauriac manages to project patterns of grace on to the pagan cycle of nature. The latter is then seen to carry and suggest the former, and works to make Louis' conversion at the end of the novel entirely 'natural', a logical conclusion to his life⁹. In his earlier novels of the 1920s though, and specifically those leading up to the famous crisis of 1928 (*Genitrix*, *Le Désert de l'amour*, *Thérèse*, *Destins*), the indirect apology is seen to take on a darker form, as Mauriac becomes preoccupied with

⁶ Flower, op. cit., pp. 5-7.

⁷ Albert Sonnenfeld, 'The Catholic Novelist and the Supernatural', *French Studies*, 22, 1968, pp. 307-19.

⁸ Quoted by Scott, op. cit., p. 189.

⁹ See Flower, op. cit., pp. 74-79.

portraying what he calls in *Le Roman*, after Pascal, ‘la misère de l'homme sans Dieu’ (ORTC, ii, p. 756). The reader is confronted by a series of characters locked in a Godless world, and where basic human nature, in the form of greed, lust and passion, is rampant. If the characters he paints are themselves beyond hope, they can nevertheless serve an instructive purpose. Bob in *Destins* thus becomes an example to the rest of us as his dissolute behaviour illustrates the perils of following the urges of nature. Similarly, Arlette Lafay has argued that *Genitrix* has a cathartic function, providing ‘une initiation au mystère de l'espérance et du rachat dont la mort des personnages a marqué les principales étapes’¹⁰.

Now, this notion of the *apologie indirecte* is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it brings various difficulties at the level of narrative technique: if his characters cannot see that God provides the answer to their situation, then, as Malcolm Scott observes, it is up to the narrator to make the point¹¹. This leads to the narratorial interventions criticised by Sartre in his famous article¹². Secondly, and this is something to which I shall return later in this part of the thesis, it is possible to see the idea of the *apologie indirecte* not so much as a deliberate strategy, but as an alibi, an excuse for the disturbing, challenging books Mauriac finds himself writing. Thirdly, if it *is* a deliberate strategy, then it is one which carries a great deal of risk, as it depends on the reader making the right inference and recognising the need to factor in the potential for salvation. Hence, perhaps, another reason why Mauriac feels the need to intervene: his *apologie* is simply too indirect.

The final problem caused by this notion of the *apologie indirecte*, though, is one to do not so much with the texts themselves, as with the interpretations they inspire. One of the most distinctive features of Mauriac criticism is the extent to

¹⁰ Arlette Lafay, ‘Réflexions sur la fonction cathartique dans *Genitrix*’, *Cahiers François Mauriac*, 13, 1986, p. 255.

¹¹ Scott, op. cit., p. 189.

¹² Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘M. François Mauriac et la liberté’ (1939), in *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), pp. 33-52. In the second part of the thesis, I examine more closely Sartre’s article and his criticism of Mauriac’s novelistic technique, arguing that it is more fruitful, and interesting, to see his intervention as raising various philosophical questions about Mauriac’s work, and in particular, his portrayal of intersubjectivity.

which many critics, particularly in France, share the author's Catholic worldview. Their own acceptance of the faith means they map the same moral framework on to the world, and have the same basically Cartesian sense of man's duality. This has important implications for the analysis of Mauriac's texts, as John Flower has pointed out¹³. Such critics prove to be a faithful community of readers, eager to highlight the momentum towards transcendence, and argue that grace can be seen at work in even the darkest of his 1920s novels¹⁴. In effect, they establish the 'official' or at least most dominant reading of his texts, helping Mauriac out as they assert that his are above all stories of salvation. Farid, for example, argues that 'nous pouvons, dans tous les romans de Mauriac, suivre l'ascension tâtonnante de ses héros du gouffre du péché à la lumière de la grâce'¹⁵. They do accept that the physical realm is at the heart of his work ; indeed, discussing *La Pharisienne*, Jacques Monfrier goes as far as calling it 'la base même du roman', and acknowledges that '*l'ordre des corps* est le domaine privilégié du romancier' ; but for him, it can only ever be 'la base' of the novel 'comme l'on parle de la base d'une pyramide'¹⁶. The body provides the foundations for the work, but what counts is the edifice which rises above it and away from it, and which reaches for the sky.

What remains the dominant critical approach to Mauriac's texts – one, in other words, from within the framework of a Catholic world-view – is nevertheless problematic, for two reasons in particular¹⁷. The first is one of interpretation. Critics may argue for a reading which demonstrates the potential for transcendence and salvation – one, in other words, in line with the author's own intentions and desires ; but such a reading is frequently difficult to justify in the face of certain texts, and particularly those of the pre-crisis period in the mid-1920s. *Thérèse* especially, for

¹³ Flower, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁴ cf. Brian Thompson, 'Canaux de grâce dans un monde cassé', *Cahiers François Mauriac*, 13 (1986), 335-344, and Jacques Madaule, 'La Grâce dans l'œuvre de François Mauriac', *Revue des Lettres Modernes*, Série François Mauriac, 2 (Paris : Minard, 1977), 77-91.

¹⁵ Amed Farid, 'Ombre et lumière dans *la Pharisienne*', *Cahiers François Mauriac*, 13 (1986), p. 268.

¹⁶ Jacques Monfrier, "'l'ordre des corps" et les désordres de la chair, ou les voies de la charité dans *La Pharisienne*', *Nouveaux Cahiers François Mauriac*, 5 (1997), p. 212.

¹⁷ The second major approach, of course, being the psychocriticism championed by John Flower in particular, as I discussed in the introduction to the thesis. See pp. 12-14.

example, would seem to question the whole possibility of escape from or transcendence of the human condition. It is not for nothing that Thérèse's last act is to step out into the street, and down into what the narrator had previously characterised as a 'fleuve de boue' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 101). As the narrator watches her blend into the crowd, we remember Mauriac's words in the preface to the novel that he has the *hope* she will not do so alone (*ibid.*, p. 17). The power of the novel lies in this uncertainty, in our sense not so much that some people may not find God, but that the whole notion of salvation may have no currency. The novel is permeated by a mood of doubt, which is reflected most clearly not just in Thérèse's inability to explain her motives, but even more disconcertingly, in the way that the very possibility of explanation, of narration, is itself called into question ; 'par quel aveu commencer? Des paroles suffisent-elles à contenir cet enchaînement confus de désirs, de résolutions, d'actes imprévisibles?', Thérèse wonders despairingly as she prepares her story on her journey back to Argelouse after the trial (*ibid.*, p. 26). James Reid has subtly and persuasively argued that, by making narrative and its problems an explicit theme of the novel, with Thérèse writing and rewriting the story of her life in the train back to Argelouse, Mauriac's text both draws attention to the artifice of narration, and questions the whole notion of 'plot' – precisely the things on which the Christian message relies in order to convince. As he puts it, 'rather than impose a linear Christian destiny on the narration of his characters' lives, the novels undermine all such plots by bringing to the fore the ambiguity of any act of narration'¹⁸.

In other words, there is as much evidence against a Christian plotline of transcendence and salvation as there is for it. To assert its authority, when discussing the texts of the 1920s at least, depends on a leap of faith by critics which the texts themselves seem unable or unwilling to take. Their ambivalence is crystallised most clearly by *Destins*, embodied as it is in the two central characters. Pierre, despite choosing what might seem to be the exemplary vocation of missionary, is an arid

¹⁸ James Reid, 'Mauriac : the ambivalent author of absence', *Studies in Twentieth Century French Literature* 11 (1987), p. 186.

character whose piety only serves to accentuate his unjustified superciliousness. Bob is by far the more seductive of the two, his pagan sensuousness reinforced by his contiguity with the pulsating natural world. The power of these texts lies in the fact that the conflicts which structure them are not resolved, that – as I shall argue later – they somehow go against the intentions Mauriac had as a writer. Indeed, it is surely significant that his most durable works are not those where answers are given more explicitly and with more certainty (the majority of the texts written after the spiritual crisis and Mauriac's reaffirmation of his faith, with the notable exception of *Le Nœud de Vipères*), but those which are riddled with doubt, which unsettle their readers, question them, and leave them troubled. Ultimately, though, discussion of the texts in terms of their religious dimension or effectiveness will always remain somewhat static. It is essential that alternative readings, such as that proposed by Reid, are heard ; but beyond that, critics in opposing camps must simply agree to differ. To argue for or against the texts' Christian, transcendent dimension is, as Mauriac might say, to 'oppose[r] une affirmation à une autre affirmation' (*OA*, p. 325). The persuasiveness of the argument one way or the other depends primarily not on a reading of the texts themselves, but on whether critics share the Christian worldview with the writer, or stand outside it.

A new perspective, however, is arguably provided by addressing the second problem posed by the dominant critical approach. Those viewing the texts from within that framework may indeed, like Monfériér, accept that the body is Mauriac's privileged domain ; but in their eagerness to assert the primacy of spiritual over physical, or explain away why the body is such an insistent presence in his fiction, they overlook the *ways* in which it is represented or manifests itself. They fail to consider why it is that whenever he turns towards it, we see moments of what we can call lexical intensity, moments when the words he uses to describe the body seem to leap off the page and confront us with the fleshiness of the body itself. Mauriac's representation of the body needs to be scrutinised first of all because it is worthy of interest in itself ; its presence and importance in the texts needs to be brought out and

underlined. Secondly, it also provides the starting point for a more general enquiry. When we identify the particular ways in which the body manifests itself in his fiction, we begin to realise that attempting to account for it leads us on to explore a more fundamental question, one which is at the heart of this part of the thesis. To clarify why the body is written in the way it is, why it floods the work, asserts itself, and needs to be explained away by both critics and Mauriac himself, means taking a step back, as we find ourselves being encouraged to ask no less a question than why it is precisely that Mauriac is a *Catholic* novelist, why he becomes a writer preoccupied by the body, sin and the moral health of man. In other words, we are invited to consider the social and cultural forces which determine Mauriac and his writing.

Although this may appear to be a fundamental question, it is one which is in fact rarely asked. Several critics have charted Mauriac's development as a novelist, and the way in which his novelistic techniques have altered¹⁹; but few have considered why he become a novelist who writes within the Catholic faith, and consequently why key tensions such as that between grace and nature should play a central role in his work. Malcolm Scott has drawn attention to the fact that the Catholic Novel in general is a historical phenomenon. He shows how it developed in the 19th Century as a direct response to the dominant literary force of Realism, and what he calls its 'sceptical mode'²⁰. With its determinedly materialist vision of the world, Realism had itself launched a challenge to Christianity: 'even when the Realist novelist is not consciously writing in an anti-Christian or anti-clerical vein, the

¹⁹ See, for example, Richard Griffiths, *Le Singe de Dieu* (Bordeaux : L'Esprit du Temps, 1996), and for a consideration of his later work, Marie-Françoise Canérot, *Mauriac après 1930 : le roman dénoué* (Paris : SEDES, 1985). Discussion of his novels frequently involves making a claim for a particular work as marking the 'summit' of his achievement as a novelist. Flower, for example, sees *Le Nœud de Vipères* as the most effective novel, with what follows having less importance, an argument which David O'Connell claims is 'now largely rejected' (*François Mauriac Revisited*, Twayne's World Author Series (New York : Twayne, 1995), p. 184.). Other candidates have included *L'Agneau* (for François Durand, *OA*, lxxvii) and *Un Adolescent d'autrefois*, Mauriac's last novel, written in 1969 (for Margaret Parry, 'Time and consciousness in the work of François Mauriac', unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 1985). The choice of novel often says more about the critic's own preoccupations and the case they are arguing than the merits of a particular text. As I shall be discussing later, I would agree with Flower that *Le Nœud* certainly marks some form of high point; but I will also be suggesting that the most complex, effective and interesting novels are the cluster of texts written in the mid-1920s, in the pre-crisis period.

²⁰ Malcolm Scott, op. cit., ch. 1.

very secularity and materiality of his assumptions force off the page all possibility of an extra-material order of things'²¹. What he calls the 'struggle' between the two modes of writing is predicated on the Catholic novelists' desire to contest Realism's scepticism, and to assert the existence of an extra-material dimension. Scott places Mauriac in the context of this struggle. He highlights Mauriac's criticism of Realist and Naturalist writers for not only failing to suggest the possibility of the supernatural, but denying it altogether : in the *Mémoires intérieurs* (1959), Mauriac comments that 'mon horreur d'un univers comme celui de Zola, par exemple, n'a pas tenu à ce qu'il montrait, mais à ce qu'il ne montrait pas. Ce qu'il écrivait m'eût moins rebuté si l'invisible n'avait pas été non seulement absent mais nié' (*OA*, p. 556). Scott goes on to argue that Mauriac's central problem is that, although aware of the need to escape the confines of Realism, he must nevertheless continue to work within a broadly realist framework ; he must confront 'the literary and technical problems of depicting the spiritual within the novel's realist compass'²².

Scott's work is important for the way it contextualises Mauriac's development as a writer, and introduces a much-needed historical perspective. However, his account provides only a partial answer to the question of why Mauriac becomes a Catholic novelist, because it remains within the domain of purely *literary* history. The motivations for Mauriac to write in the way he does can arguably be traced further back than his own conscious decision to respond to what he sees as an erroneous representation of the world, however. In order to understand more fully why Mauriac is a Catholic novelist, we must broaden the range of our historical perspective. We must pay heed, in fact, to the advice Mauriac himself gives to anyone attempting to interpret a writer and his work : 'la première pensée du biographe, qui veut avancer dans la connaissance d'un homme, est de chercher d'abord du côté de ses ascendants. L'individu le plus singulier n'est que le moment d'une race'²³. In other words, we must explore the nature of the socio-cultural context in which the writer develops, and

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 50.

²² *ibid.*, p. 181.

²³ *La Vie de Jean Racine* (1928), in *Œuvres Complètes*, 12 vols (Paris : Fayard, 1952), viii, p. 60.

consider the effects of being born into a devout middle-class family, whose faith worked in particular to reinforce a general bourgeois taboo of the body to the extent that, as Mauriac put it in *Ce que je crois* (1962), ‘la pureté du cœur et du corps n’était pas une des vertus chrétiennes. C’était la Vertu’ (*OA*, p. 586). We must, in short, examine the history that made Mauriac.

I intend to examine it from one point of view especially. If Mauriac is shaped by his *milieu*, then he is shaped in particular by what is said around him, by what he is told, and above all, by how he is told to see and speak the body. It is the linguistic dimension of this which is central. At the heart of this part of the thesis is the conviction that, as Roland Barthes puts it, ‘le sujet n’est qu’un effet de langage’²⁴. Barthes here is putting forward a materialist view of subjectivity which sees the individual as constituted by his integration into the signifying system of language, or more precisely, perhaps, his insertion into a particular discursive framework. This framework is the set of discourses laid down by a particular social group and through which they see or represent the world. It is language charged with history and belief, or what we could call ideology. In *Ce que je crois*, Mauriac suggests that many of his dramas can be traced to ‘l’intersection de la chair et de l’âme’ (*OA*, p. 616). I will argue, modifying this a little, that many of the problems and complexities of his work, and its distinctively ‘sulphurous’ atmosphere have their roots in the intersection of body and *language* ; that Mauriac must confront a series of crises which result when the individual is inserted into a particular discursive order (one which has its own particular rhetorical constructs such as that, precisely, of the soul), when that order leads him to treat things in a particular way, and above all, when he puts his faith in language, only to find himself betrayed by it. It is in his peculiar representation of the body that we find the clearest evidence of these dramas, and so this is where I begin my investigation.

²⁴ Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes (Paris : Seuil, coll. “Ecrivains de toujours”, 2nd edn, 1995), p. 77.

2. Mauriac and the perversion of carnival.

In the opening scene of *Thérèse*, we watch as Thérèse slips out of the courthouse in Bazas at the end of her trial, accompanied by the family lawyer Duros, and is met by her father, Larroque. The three begin to walk, making their way through the damp and darkened streets on their way to the carriage left at the edge of the town so as to avoid unwanted attention. As they do so, the two men begin to engage in conversation, and talk across Thérèse, who is between them, ‘comme si elle n’eût pas été présente ; mais, gênés par ce corps de femme qui les séparait, ils le poussaient du coude’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 20). Elbowed out of the way and ignored as the two men reflect on the successful outcome of the case, and a result which has minimised damage to the reputations of the family and her father, she drops back and is absorbed into the misty night, as Mauriac establishes the mood of pathos which will persist throughout the novel : ‘l’odeur de fournil et de brouillard n’était pas seulement pour elle l’odeur du soir dans une petite ville : elle y retrouvait le parfum de la vie qui lui était rendue enfin ; elle fermait les yeux au souffle de la terre endormie, herbeuse et mouillée’ (*ibid.*). This may appear no more than a minor incident in the initial unfolding of the story, albeit one which can be interpreted quite neatly in terms of the novel’s central themes. For example, it can be seen metaphorically, reflecting Thérèse’s relationship with the family, and the family’s own self-interest, making concrete as it does the family’s desire to push Thérèse into her place and out of sight. The interest and importance of the scene, though, arguably lies more in the striking way in which Thérèse is described. Sandwiched between the two men, she is suddenly transformed into an object, stripped of her identity as she becomes nothing but a body, ‘ce corps de femme’. This objectification is underlined by the disconcerting presence of the masculine pronoun in the next clause, which through its reference to ‘corps’, confirms her status as simple physical matter. Again, the fact that she is characterised as an object can undoubtedly be read in thematic terms. It underlines perhaps, that as far as the family is concerned, she must exist now more than ever only as a mere functional unit in its overall structure, and perform the role she has been allotted. As Bernard

tells her on her return to Argelouse, ‘vous n’avez qu’à écouter, qu’à recevoir mes ordres, – à vous conformer à mes décisions irrévocables’ (p. 77). However, while it is easy to see the objectification of Thérèse simply as a device subtly and skillfully exploited by Mauriac to generate a particular impression, it soon becomes clear, as we read our way through his fictional world, that she is not unique in being described in this unsettling fashion. Indeed, rather than the scene being a metaphor for or index of Thérèse’s own situation, I would suggest that it illustrates more the peculiar way in which the body operates generally in his work. It captures the way in which the texts consistently, even insistently foreground the individual not as consciousness but as an object in all its unavoidable solidity. Like Thérèse between the two men, the body is intrusive ; it comes to the fore and gets in the way. Furthermore, I would suggest that it is annoyingly so in particular for Mauriac himself. If the incident does have a metaphorical value, it lies in the way it figures, unwittingly, Mauriac’s own relationship to the bodily. Over the course of the following three sections, I will argue that Mauriac is engaged in a constant tussle with the body as he tries, like Larroque and Duros – appropriately, as we shall see, two symbols of authority – to elbow a troublesome force into place and keep it under control. Yet despite his best efforts, and his use of the most powerful weapon in his armoury, namely language, it reappears relentlessly and disruptively. It is this struggle, I will suggest, which is at the heart of the distinctive atmosphere of his work.

As soon as we enter Mauriac’s world, we find ourselves in a realm dominated by physical existence. In the opening scene of *Le Baiser au lépreux*, for example, Jean’s physical appearance is the first thing to which the narrator draws our attention : ‘il était si petit que la basse glace du trumeau refléta sa pauvre mine, ses joues creuses, un nez long, au bout pointu, rouge et comme usé. [...] Les cheveux ras s’avançaient en angle aigu sur son front déjà ridé : une grimace découvrit ses gencives, des dents mauvaises’ (ORTC, i, p. 447). Similarly, when Maria Cross makes her entrance in *Le Désert de l’amour*, our attention is drawn first of all to her chin, ‘où le temps inscrit l’âge des femmes. La quarantième année avait touché de-ci de-là

ce bas de figure, tiré la peau, amorcé un fanon' (ibid., p. 740) ; and the opening chapters of *Genitrix* are dominated by the evocation of Mathilde's fevered suffering : 'une fatigue infinie, un brisement de tout l'être la détournait de remuer un doigt – fût-ce pour décoller la chemise de sa chair suante' (ibid., p. 584). His work is populated throughout by characters who, as he puts it in *Le Roman*, are caught up in 'la préoccupation d'être humain' (ORTC, ii, p. 761) : involved, in other words, in the basic business of living and functioning as a human being. Several characters appear to be under the spell of their bodies, scrutinising its workings and alert to its changes. They live in a delicate equilibrium, sensitive to even the slightest risk of illness. A disturbance in Jérôme's routine means, as Noémi is told, that he 'se fait du sang' ('le dernier chapitre du *Baiser au Lépreux*', ORTC, ii, p. 537). Both Noémi and Elizabeth in *Destins* find the body impinging on their lives as obesity sets in. Noémi is told that 'si vous ne prenez pas d'exercice, vous deviendrez enorme. Votre cœur est déjà gêné par la graisse' (ibid., p. 536) ; and in the opening scene of *Destins*, we watch Elizabeth as she 'peinait comme si ses jambes, fines encore, ses pieds petits, n'eussent plus la force de soutenir un corps presque obèse' (ibid., p. 109).

If the physical governs the characters themselves, it also defines their relationship with others, for they respond to each other primarily on a physical level. Not only are their eyes quick to pick out particular physical details – during the initial silence of the first meeting between Raymond and Maria in *Le Désert de l'amour*, for example, as she notices 'cette joue brûlante, cette chair trop jeune que le rasoir faisait saigner', he catches a glimpse of 'le cou nu, l'épaule un peu hors de la robe' (ORTC, i, p. 792) – but their other senses are also highly tuned. They are receptive to touch and smell in particular, living as they do in a world drenched in sensations : as Noémi in *Le Baiser* walks through church, for example, 'l'air agité par son corps mystérieux quand elle traversait la nef, Jean Péloueyre l'accueillait sur sa chair comme le seul baiser qu'il ait jamais connu' (ibid., p. 458). In *Destins* especially, we are given a powerful impression of the tactile nature of Mauriac's universe : 'dans les vignes endormies, au fond des chais ténébreux, des mains se cherchaient, des yeux se

fermaient en se rapprochant. Le monde, jusqu'à quatre heures, demeurait vide, accueillant pour ceux qui n'ont pas peur du feu ; que craindraient-ils? Cette ardeur prolonge leur ardeur et l'argile ne brûle pas plus que leurs corps' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 141). Odours too are repeatedly foregrounded as we have seen, from Jean catching Noémi's 'odeur de jeune fille', to Thérèse, in the scene discussed above, soaking up the smell of autumnal decay in Bazas. Countless other characters show a similar sensitivity. Mathilde in *Genitrix*, for example, notices that her brother, having returned from a nocturnal adventure, 'sentait le tabac, le musc, il sentait le lit' (*ORTC*, i, p. 592). The clearly animalistic dimension of this is made explicit in *Le Désert de l'amour*, when Mauriac reflects on the shared attraction of Paul and Raymond for Maria : 'comme deux papillons, séparés par des lieues, se rejoignent sur la boîte où est enfermée la femelle pleine d'odeur, eux aussi avaient suivi les routes convergentes de leurs désirs et se posaient côte à côte sur Maria Cross invisible' (*ibid.*, p. 799). Like animals, his characters respond to scents which stimulate their instincts.

Their instincts over breeding are particularly strong. Bernard in *Thérèse*, for example, rejects the idea of a marriage between Jean Azévédo and Anne not least because Jean risks infecting the family's bloodstock, coming as he does from a 'famille de dégénérés, tuberculeux jusqu'à la moelle, tout le monde le sait' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 44). The question of breeding and heredity is also central to *Le Baiser*. The whole drama of the novel stems from the fact that the pairing of Jean and Noémi, decreed by the local priest, is an unnatural one. It goes against the usual laws of selection, as those around them recognise instinctively. Fernand Cazenave, for example, scoffs at the idea of Jean getting married. On hearing the plans, 'il ricana et dit que ce n'était pas sérieux [...]; il osa demander à mi-voix si Jean était seulement "mariable"' (*ORTC*, i, p. 457). Jean, as is clear from his appearance, is a member of an inferior breed which, in the normal course of things, would simply die out. Giving him a chance to reproduce is a perversion of that law, and results in the miserable relationship the two must endure. This is captured most graphically in the brief and intensely figured sex scene which concludes with a description of Jean as 'plus

hideux qu'un ver auprès de ce cadavre enfin abandonné' (ibid., p. 466). Appropriate too, as we shall see, is the fact that the cause of this perversion, what Félicité Cazenave calls 'une union monstrueuse' (ibid., p. 467), is the Church.

Of course it could be argued that Mauriac's portrayal of man as essentially a physical being is not in itself especially unusual. There are, after all, clear, and perhaps ironic echoes of Zola and the other Naturalists in his focus on the power of instinct or the notion of heredity. Certainly, his vision of man as human animal is easily recuperable, as I have discussed above, in terms of his pessimistic view of the human condition and man's post-lapsarian state (see above, p. 19) ; and in Part 2, when I return to consider what I will call his materialist vision, I will argue that he can be seen to have much in common with other 20th Century artists such as Giacometti or Beckett who, like Mauriac, are sensitive to the nature of the human condition, and capture what it feels like to be alive at a basic, physical level. Here, though, I want to suggest that the distinctiveness and interest of his portrayal of man lie particularly in the peculiar and insistent *descriptions* of the body which consistently contribute to it, such as that of Marcel in *Ce qui était perdu* : 'une mèche de cheveux barrait le front ridé. Sa barbe avait poussé et dévorait les joues. Deux grands plis portaient des ailes du nez, encadrant la bouche entr'ouverte' (ibid., p. 295) ; of Paule in *Destins* : 'Paule avait une robe de toile qui, à chaque pas, dessinait ses cuisses longues ; ses pieds étaient nus dans des espadrilles ; sur l'une de ses jambes brunes, il y avait du sang' (ibid., p. 146) ; or finally, of Raymond in *Le Désert* as he plans the conquest of Maria : 'la nuit d'été battait en vain ce jeune mâle bien armé, sûr de sa force, à cette minute, sûr de son corps, indifférent à ce que le corps ne peut pas posséder' (*ORTC*, i, p. 804 ; cf. var. b, which uses even more vivid language : '[...] indifférent à tout cela que ce corps n'était pas créé pour pénétrer'). In these examples, we see how Mauriac's descriptions of the body seem to accentuate our impression of the fleshiness of his characters, and heighten, in the case of the last two in particular, the sexual or libidinal tension – the 'atmosphère sulfureuse' – which circulates in his work.

Three aspects of his descriptive technique especially contribute to this effect. Central to it, firstly, is the repeated use of two key nouns, *corps* ('body') and *chair* ('flesh'). The use of *corps* in particular, as I suggested in my initial discussion of the example from *Thérèse*, throws our attention on to the individual as body rather than being. The eye which describes Raymond in the example given above sees him with an objectifying gaze, in the sense that it recognises the body for what it is, a form of organic machine. Certainly, it may seem appropriate to underline Raymond's corporeality, or the power of the body at a moment when he is preparing for the conquest of Maria ; but the potency of this descriptive mode lies in the fact that it is sustained throughout Mauriac's texts. The body is consistently foregrounded and named as an object even at incidental moments, as we have seen above both in the scene from *Thérèse* discussed initially and the first description of Elizabeth in *Destins*, or as we see again in the description of Bernard as one of 'ces corps de gros mangeurs, issus d'une race oisive et trop nourrie, n'ont que l'aspect de la puissance' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 52). Our awareness of the body's materiality is reinforced by the way it is frequently referred to by the second noun, *chair* – from Mathilde's fevered body as 'chair suante' and Thérèse's reaction to the birth of Marie ('avec cette chair détachée de la sienne, elle désirait ne plus rien posséder en commun', *ibid.*, p. 69) to the description of Raymond as 'ce garçon au visage déchiré (parce que sa chair d'enfant supportait mal le rasoir)' (*ORTC*, i, p. 753 ; cf the similar remark, p. 792, quoted above). The power of this term lies in the way it suggests rawness and unfinishedness, evokes a sense of the body as living matter in constant process and as something easily marked and scarred. As Mauriac puts it in *Le Baiser*, 'la chair est fidèle à ne rien oublier de ce qu'elle subit' (*ibid.*, p. 480)²⁵.

²⁵ Some raw statistical data, drawn from the Frantext database, gives at least an impression of the frequency with which these two central words appear in Mauriac's fiction. In the five Mauriac novels in the Frantext corpus (*Le Baiser au lépreux*, *Genitrix*, *Thérèse*, *Le Nœud de Vipères*, and *Le Mystère Frontenac*), *corps* occurs 125 times, and *chair* 50 times. By way of comparison, the two words occur 100 times and 22 times respectively in the twelve Gide novels in the Frantext corpus, and 43 and 14 times respectively in the six Colette novels in the database.

Secondly, if our awareness of the body is grounded in the continual use of these two general terms, it is further heightened by the way in which the describing eye repeatedly closes in on particular details of the body. We are constantly taken down to skin-level and made to dwell on small-scale features, such as the skin around Marcel's mouth in the description above, or the face of Thérèse's father, 'ce visage sali de bile, ces joues hérissées de durs poils d'un blanc jaune' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 22). Throughout his texts, our attention is drawn in particular to a series of details including the nose (cf the description of Jean Péloueyre quoted above, p. 29), the cheeks and cheekbones (in his description of Thérèse, Mauriac highlights her 'joues creuses' and 'pommettes', *ORTC*, ii, p. 25), the mouth (for example Victor Larousselle's 'lèvres grosses et quasi violettes', *ORTC*, i, p. 741), the neck and the legs. This close-range scrutiny of parts of the body rather than the whole also often brings with it an increased erotic or libidinal charge, as in the focus on Paule's legs, in the scene quoted above, or that on the lips of Maria Cross ('la bouche un peu forte, épaisse [...] fixait toute la sensualité de ce corps', *ORTC*, i, p. 844).

Thirdly, these highlighted areas of the body are thrown further into relief by the frequently peculiar way in which they are described. The mechanics of the body are foregrounded as Mauriac uses vocabulary which is often coldly anatomical. Thérèse, for example, does not simply breathe in ; rather, the air fills her 'poitrine dilatée' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 25). Describing Irène de Blénauge in the opening pages of *Ce qui était perdu*, the narrator picks out 'ce cou d'oiseau où la corde d'un muscle saillait' (ibid., p. 276). Illness, or the gradual decay of the body is captured in terms which are harshly, and sometimes shockingly, objective. After Mathilde's miscarriage, we are told that the midwife carries off a 'paquet sanglant' (*ORTC*, i, p. 588) ; the face of the ageing Maria Cross is marked by 'cette destruction lente, partie du cou et qui montait vers la bouche et les joues' (ibid., p. 741) ; and as doctors examine the bodies of the characters inhabiting this sickly world, we see a proliferation of medical terminology : Jérôme Péloueyre's 'artériosclérose', Mathilde's death from an 'infection puerpérale', already aggravated by a weak heart

(as Fernand is told by the doctor Duluc, ‘tu te rappelles que lorsque j’ai ausculté ta dame pour sa grippe, je t’ai signalé son aorte?’, *ibid.*, p. 598), Bob’s ‘pleurésie’. Furthermore, the bodily features Mauriac picks out are never neat or well-finished. Rather, they jut out or thrust themselves forward ; their surface is disrupted by protruding veins, spots and blackheads, what Thérèse calls ‘les signes du sang en mouvement’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 57), and another indication of the body in process. This is reinforced still further by the fact that bodies in Mauriac’s world are constantly sweating, spilling beyond themselves, impinging on the world, and drawing attention to themselves as they glisten in the sun. All these elements are brought together in a vivid description of Jean Gornac in *Destins* : ‘le sang affluait à ses joues, à son crâne trempé de sueur, gonflait les veines de ses mains, de son cou trop court, de ses tempes’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 110).

These three aspects of his descriptive technique combine to create what we can call, using the term coined by the Russian Formalists, an effect of defamiliarisation. Fragmenting the body, and describing it in unexpected terms makes it unfamiliar. Clothing it in new or unusual language suddenly brings it to the fore ; we are made aware of it again, made to see it in a new way. For the Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky, ‘art removes objects from the automatism of perception’²⁶ ; in his well-known phrase, art exists ‘to make the stone *stony*’²⁷. Art makes us experience again the distinctive materiality of the world, and restores the edge to perceptions which have become blunted by familiarity. This is almost a physical process for Shklovsky ; the sensation of seeing things anew is a physical experience, like feeling the scales fall from one’s eyes. We are made to experience our perception of the world as a physical process : ‘the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known’²⁸. This is the sensation given to us, arguably, by Mauriac’s descriptions of the body. They make the body bodily, make us

²⁶ Victor Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’ (1917), in David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory : a Reader* (London : Longman, 1988), p. 21.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 20. Shklovsky’s italics.

²⁸ *ibid.*

aware of its materiality, make us experience anew the experience of physical existence. The effect is above all a property of the language he uses. The moments when our eye is caught by the vividness, the starkness or the violence of a description or a word like ‘entrailles’ – moments of what we might call lexical intensity – are moments when we encounter what Shklovsky calls ‘roughened language’²⁹. Its strangeness or distinctiveness means we become aware of it *as* language ; we are struck by it, stumble across it, made to take another look. In doing so, we notice its own materiality, its own physical presence. This materiality, the ‘fleshiness’ of the writing, itself accentuates, or mimics the fleshiness of the body it denotes.

Thus, through their incessant return to the body, and the constant accumulation of bodily details and descriptions, Mauriac’s texts leave us with an overwhelming impression of the physical. Once in his world, we find the body inescapable. It is picked out at every turn, catching the narrator’s eye at even the most incidental moments, from Cadette in the ‘dernier chapitre’ of *Le Baiser*, ‘le tablier blanc tendu sur le ventre’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 537), to Félicité’s head in *Genitrix*, ‘où un peu de crâne blanc paraissait entre les mèches teintes’ (*ORTC*, i, p. 585). He seems preoccupied by it, unable to avoid drawing it to our attention. Indeed, as its endless fragmentation and scrutiny might suggest, the body is effectively fetishised, becomes subject to an excessive and unusual fascination. Now, this fetishisation of the body, and the distinct fleshiness of his texts, are particularly significant for the way they would seem to challenge one of the central claims being made by Mauriac at the time in his theoretical essays and other non-fictional texts about the novelist’s intentions. In *Le Roman* in 1927, he argues that the goal of the contemporary novelist is to ‘tout oser dire, mais tout oser dire *chastement*’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 766, my italics). Mauriac’s notion of a ‘chaste’ form of writing is an important but problematic idea. In what way might writing be said to be ‘chaste’? The term suggests a form of expression which offers purity and precision, a writing which holds the world at arm’s length, which pins down its passions and emotions and holds them up to scrutiny ; it implies a

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 27.

writing of control and cleansing clarity, one which allows for recognition and insight. As I will discuss more fully later, Mauriac finds the model for such a chaste writing provided by the 17th Century neo-Classical writers, and Racine in particular. Indeed, the ‘Racinian’ or Classical nature of his style in texts such as *Genitrix*, for example, has frequently been noted³⁰. Yet the way he writes the body in particular, as we have seen, seems to be some way removed from a Racinian, or perhaps Jansenist purity. After all, is not fetishisation one of the most obvious forms precisely of *perversion*? The body in his fictional texts is not so much ‘assujetti’ by the narrating eye, as let loose by it.

Moreover, it is let loose in a highly distinctive way. The images of the body offered by the texts and the intense, fleshy writing with which they are communicated, gives them what can quite accurately be called a *carnavalesque* dimension. The term has already been used to describe Mauriac’s world : in a recent article, Jean-Marie Planes characterises the image of man offered by his works, one which shows him in constant thrall to his passions, as a ‘carnaval des damnés’³¹. However, the term ‘carnival’ is not one to be used lightly. Rather, it must be understood in the specific sense given to it in recent years by various critics, and above all by Mikhail Bakhtin in his pioneering work on the carnivalesque in Rabelais³² ; doing so sheds a very interesting light on Mauriac’s work, and the tensions within it.

Bakhtin’s characterisation of the carnival is now well-known. He stresses that it is a popular festival, one marked by transgression, the disruption of hierarchy and the established order ; it is a celebration of fertility, what he famously calls ‘the feast of becoming, change and renewal’³³. He argues that the practices of popular culture articulate the spirit of carnival particularly in images of the body, images which are

³⁰ See for example Marie-Françoise Canérot, *Mauriac après 1930 : le roman dénoué*, op. cit., p. 16, and Gaston Duthuron, ‘*Genitrix*, roman racinien’, *Cahiers François Mauriac*, 2 (1975), 198-208.

³¹ Jean-Marie Planes, ‘Mauriac, le carnaval des damnés’, *Magazine Littéraire*, 367 (juillet-août 1998), 59-61.

³² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1984).

³³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, op. cit., p. 10.

expressed in the terms of what he calls ‘grotesque realism’³⁴. The mode of grotesque realism, exemplified for him by Rabelais’ texts, foregrounds what he terms the ‘material bodily principle’ or, as he puts it, ‘the human body with its food, drink, defecation and sexual life’³⁵. The grotesque body is one which is in constant process, protruding into the world and spilling beyond its own confines : ‘it is not a closed, completed unit ; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits’³⁶. Grotesque imagery captures not only the body’s exterior, but also its inner features, such as the blood, the bowels or the heart. It highlights the body’s orifices and excrescences, such as its nose, mouth or ears, the points at which it is contact with the world and impinges on it. It is above all a highly positive image of the body, and as such, reflects the nature of carnival itself as a festival of the body and the body’s productivity.

Now, the images of the body offered by grotesque realism are startlingly similar to those in Mauriac’s texts. As we have seen, whether skeletal or corpulent, his bodies are inescapable. Like the carnival body, they are parodies of, or radically opposed to what Bakhtin calls ‘classical bodies’ – the bodies of classical statuary which are smooth and seamless, ‘a strictly completed, finished product’³⁷. I have discussed how his representation of the body focuses on its excrescences and protrusions, how the writing itself accentuates our sense of its materiality. Another dominant carnivalesque motif is the characters’ preoccupation with food, the belly and digestion, or what Bakhtin memorably calls the ‘material bodily lower stratum’³⁸. This is captured vividly in the ‘dernier chapitre’ of *Le Baiser* with a central scene of almost comic potential, in which Noémi taunts her father-in-law Jérôme, reduced though illness to eating puréed peas, by tucking in to a plate of stew. Tension increases as thoughts of food begin to distract the two, and they become transfixed by its smell : ‘tout à coup, il se redressa, renifla, tourna vers la porte son nez pointu et

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁸ *ibid.*, ch. 6.

pincé de grand malade : “Mais Noémi, ça sent le civet...” (*ORTC*, ii, p. 539). In a moment which has strong echoes of the carnivalesque, the characters are reduced to a pair of noses picking out the odours of the stew as they take over the room : ‘le civet encore invisible régnait déjà par la force de son fumet. Et même ces deux nez exercés de Landais discernaient le goût du laurier, la pointe de girofle’ (*ibid.*, p. 540). The arrival of the food itself is like a moment of worship, Noémi’s head bowed as she savours it : ‘il parut enfin. Noémi pencha sa tête sur le plat fumant et parfumé. Cadette la guidait : “Là, Madame, il y a un morceau de râble”’ (*ibid.*). In *Le Baiser* itself, both Jean and Félicité appear at times like manic carnival dolls. Jean’s meditation, we are told, ‘n’allait pas sans contractions du front, gestes, rires, vers déclamés – toute une pantomime dont le bourg se gaussait’ (*ORTC*, i, p. 449). The sense of comic spectacle is even more striking in the later description of Félicité : ‘son grand corps tout en jambes, son buste sphérique, sa tête de vieille Junon attachée à ses seins – toute cette forte machine détraquée, usée, obéissait aux injonctions du fils bien-aimé, comme s’il eût, en pressant un bouton, mis en branle un mécanisme’ (*ibid.*, p. 456).

Perhaps more curious in this text, though, is the figure of the priest : ‘en dépit de sa ronde petitesse, rien en lui n’est jovial. Malgré la corpulence, l’austérité intérieure transparaît’ (*ibid.*, p. 460). This description is significant for the way it reveals the persistence of the codes of the carnivalesque. It seems corpulence is still recognised as a sign of festivity and joviality ; but the priest undermines these accepted bodily codes, with his corpulence in fact belying austerity, or what Bakhtin would call the ‘dry moral seriousness’ of the cleric – a seriousness which runs counter to, and actively disapproves of carnival. The disruption of carnival’s codes by the priest can in fact be seen as representative of the carnivalesque dimension of Mauriac’s work in general. For if the motifs of carnival are undoubtedly present in his work, their connotations have changed radically. I would argue that Mauriac’s is a *perverted* carnival, a carnival which seems to have turned bitter, gone sour. If the body is in process in his texts, it is mainly because it is in decline or decay. The

corpulence or excess of the body is no longer a joyful excess, but one which threatens, a sign more of illness than rude health. His characters often appear grotesque in the strictly modern sense, caught in strange poses which bring out their peculiar or outlandish appearance. Maria Cross, for example, is seen playing her piano : ‘elle jouait penchée en avant, la tête comme attirée par les mains’ (*ORTC*, i, p. 812). In short, while he too may be preoccupied with the body, his preoccupation is no celebration, but an edgy, even fevered fascination. A sense of this is generated especially in his portrayal of the too-rich beauty of youth, a beauty which, as in the case of Bob in *Destins*, is already decaying, corrupt and corrupting.

Clearly, the very fact that we can talk of a ‘carnavalesque’ dimension in Mauriac’s work is itself interesting, and something for which we need to account ; perhaps unsurprisingly, he has rarely been associated with such an idea. Yet the presence of these carnivalesque motifs, and the general fleshiness of his novels during the 1920s in particular is made even more intriguing by the fact that *at the same time*, in his non-fictional texts, we see him reacting against fleshiness, the bodily, and overt displays of sexuality in his own responses to the spectacle of carnival. In 1926, he writes the short text ‘Bordeaux’, an account of his childhood in the city, and part of what will later become the autobiographical text *Commencements d'une vie* (1932). One of the first memories, brief but intense, which he chooses to recall is his experience of the carnival. It is an experience made all the more vivid by the fact that in Bordeaux, the carnival took place not, as might be expected, on the traditional days of feasting, but on Ash Wednesday, the day of penitence and renunciation of earthly pleasures : ‘une de mes plus fortes impressions d'enfance m'est venue de cet usage des Bordelais de choisir, pour se livrer aux folies du carnaval, non les jours gras, mais le mercredi des Cendres’ (*OA*, p. 91). Such a subversion of the official liturgical calendar and established religious practice is itself a classic carnivalesque gesture ; but for the young Mauriac, firmly ensconced within the Catholic faith, its blasphemous nature confirms the carnival as something perverted and corrupt. He seems to see this corruption expressed above all in the carnival participants’ overt

displays of sexuality and the bodily, which he captures in one memorable scene : ‘des hommes habillés en femmes relevaient leurs cottes et hideusement s’accroupissaient entre les rails du tramway’ (ibid.). The fairs which occur in March and October, the traditional points in the festive calendar, are remembered especially for the ‘barques louches’, where ‘au-dessus de l’entrée, était inscrit un seul petit nom de femme’ (ibid.). They are places of ambiguity and temptation, where the usual rules of civilised life are suspended. The child’s fearful reaction to these events is reaffirmed by the narrator as he looks back over the scene, his disapproving tone clear in the epithets he uses : the carnival as a period of ‘madness’, the ‘hideous’ squatting of the transvestite, the fairs which ‘encumbered’ the place des Quinconces and from which it was liberated only in the summer months (*OA*, p. 92). Overall, he communicates a strong sense of the carnival as something threatening or dangerous, which jostles him in the street, or chases him off it to the safety of his own room, where he looks on as a disapproving spectator (*OA*, p. 91)³⁹.

The fact that we can juxtapose the carnivalesque dimension of his own texts – understood overall in terms of the intense, excessive way in which he represents the body – and his own critical response to the spectacle of carnival, is more than just a nice irony, however. I would argue that the co-presence of the two is central to understanding what causes the peculiar features of the texts I have been discussing. In accounting for it, we can pinpoint more accurately the source of the ‘odeur mauriacienne’, the distinctive taste of his work and its powerful fleshiness. This is because it encourages us to consider the important role played by Mauriac’s social *milieu* in shaping him and his art. His reaction of disgust and disapproval to the carnival is in fact a precise echo of what Stallybrass and White have shown to be a general bourgeois response⁴⁰. As such, it is a useful reminder that he views the world through bourgeois eyes, that he shares the preoccupations and preconceptions of his

³⁹ A passing reference to Bordeaux’s Ash Wednesday carnival as a ‘scandale’ in a ‘bloc-notes’ some forty years later confirms the indelible impression it leaves on Mauriac. See *BN*, iv, p. 419.

⁴⁰ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, (London : Methuen, 1986).

class, and in particular, its attitude to the *body*. Tracing the fortunes of the carnival from the Renaissance to the 20th Century, Stallybrass and White show how it becomes increasingly marginalised as a social practice, being either tamed and diluted, or fragmented and suppressed. They argue that this marginalisation is closely linked to the emergence and dominance throughout Europe of the bourgeois social order, which brings with it its standards and norms of behaviour, a strict moral framework codifying what it means to live in a correct and proper manner. The bourgeoisie begins to distance itself from the carnival, and in doing so, make it the festival of the lower orders, the uncivilised masses : ‘we now have evidence over a long historical period of the discursive construction of the fair as the antithesis of order, civility and decorum’⁴¹. This growing suspicion of the carnival, they suggest, reflects a corresponding, more fundamental shift in attitudes to the body itself. Indeed, as Mauriac’s own observations make clear, carnival becomes above all a graphic reminder of the way in which the body can lead astray : ‘idleness, dissipation, disorder, debauchery : these are the demonised terms for the topology which Bakhtin celebrated, from the perspective of the low, as the grotesque’⁴². Stallybrass and White argue that the increasing marginalisation and suppression of the carnival as a social phenomenon, a place where people were seen to be in thrall to their bodies, reflects the growing efforts by the bourgeoisie to regulate or suppress the body at the individual, psychological level. The body was no longer a cause for celebration, but something to be regarded with horror, a threatening beast or the root of evil. Exerting control over the body was essential if the individual was to be in any sense a civilised human being : in the Enlightenment, they suggest, ‘the suppression and distancing of the physical body became the very sign of rationality, wit and judgement’⁴³. It is an attitude Mauriac himself comes to share, and will express throughout his life. In *Ce que je crois*, for example, he observes that ‘pour beaucoup d’hommes [...], le problème est de n’être pas dévorés par cette part d’eux-mêmes : l’animalité. Dominer

⁴¹ Stallybrass and White, op. cit., p. 31.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 105.

la vie ne va pas sans dominer la part instinctive de l'être' (*OA*, p. 587). The result of what Stallybrass and White call this 'labour of suppression'⁴⁴ is a self which is centred, stable and self-present – that is to say the transcendental ego which, as Terry Eagleton points out, has become the classic bourgeois conception of subjectivity⁴⁵. At the heart of this sense of self, too, is the Cartesian dualism of body and mind – a dualism which contains the germ of a more polarised opposition or hierarchy. For while the mind is the realm of reason, the spirit or the soul – in short, all that is noble about man – the body is easily associated with all that corrupts or detracts from this. The two domains become the opposing terms in the moral framework which dominates Western culture. Putting the body in its place becomes not just a case of wit or judgement but, in a religious context, of salvation and virtue. The opposition is fundamental to the worldview of Mauriac's *milieu*, and structures the way in which it sees the world, and particularly the body. Indeed, Mauriac himself provides the clearest articulation of it in *Dieu et Mammon* : 'c'est l'esprit qui atteint à Dieu, et la chair assouvie qui nous sépare de lui infiniment' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 793). I now want to explore how such attitudes are passed on to Mauriac as he develops in his *milieu*, and consider the important consequences they have for his work.

Mauriac himself was deeply sensitive to the influence exerted on an individual by his background. As he says, 'C'est votre classe qui vous détermine. Il ne faut pas être plus marxiste que Marx'⁴⁶. Mauriac's origins are, of course, firmly middle-class : he was born into a family which Jean Lacouture defines as being 'bourgeoisie ascendante', a combination of landowners (on his father's side), and merchants (on his mother's)⁴⁷. His parents' marriage also brought together two conflicting strands in the French bourgeoisie, as his father's republicanism collided with his mother's devout Catholicism – and perhaps the most decisive moment in Mauriac's life comes

⁴⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 105.

⁴⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory : an introduction* (Oxford : Blackwell, 1983), p. 58.

⁴⁶ François Mauriac, *Les Paroles restent*, interviews recueillies et présentées par Keith Goesch (Paris : Grasset, 1985), p. 194.

⁴⁷ Jean Lacouture, *François Mauriac*, 2 vols (Paris : Seuil, coll. "Points", 1990), i, p. 24. See pp. 23-31 for his account of the Mauriac family history.

when he is two years old : the early death of his father leaves him to be brought up by his mother in a strongly religious atmosphere. As he puts it in *Dieu et Mammon*, ‘cette religion m’a été imposée dès ma naissance’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 785). It is uncontroversial to say that this strict religious upbringing is central to what he calls the ‘drama’ of his life (*ibid.*) and his development as an artist. *Dieu et Mammon* itself is written at the height of the drama it provokes, when Mauriac suffers his spiritual and moral crisis in 1928. This crisis turns on three key problems : firstly, his niggling doubts over the authenticity of his own faith, caused for him by the fact that it was received rather than chosen : ‘toute ma vie, j’ai dû lutter contre la crainte de suivre une foi reçue de dehors et que je n’avais pas choisie. Chez ces vieilles brebis, on observe rarement la conversion au sens profond : c’est-à-dire la mort du vieil homme, la naissance de l’homme nouveau’ (*OA*, p. 829) ; secondly, he must confront the increasing difficulty he has in living up to the demands of a strict moral framework, as it collides with his own desires and passions : ‘la nature l’emportait lentement sur la grâce ; je désespérais de rétablir entre elles un équilibre, et voyais se dresser l’une contre l’autre ces deux puissances ennemies. Ce que ma passion exigeait, mon Dieu ne voulait pas que j’y arrêtas, même une seconde, ma pensée’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 788) ; thirdly, the crisis articulates his own anger at what is the central preoccupation of the faith he comes to share, namely its repression of sexuality and its denial of the body : ‘ne rien concéder à la chair, c’est la vraie loi chrétienne qui te fut enseignée dès que tu commenças à comprendre’ (*ibid.*, p. 793). Or, as he puts it more starkly in *Souffrances et bonheur du chrétien* during the same period, ‘le christianisme ne fait pas sa part à la chair ; il la supprime’ (*OA*, p. 117). His hostility towards what he sees at this point as the unreasonable demands of his faith and its obsession with carnal sin marks a real moment of revolt. It leads him, indeed, to the brink of renouncing his faith – although the crisis is finally resolved with the intervention of Charles Du Bos and the abbé Altermann during the same period, and the reassertion of his faith, marked in 1929 by the writing of *Bonheur du chrétien*⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ See Lacouture, *op. cit.*, ch. 11.

Yet as Mauriac himself was to suggest in 1965, as he looked back over his career, the repression of sexuality demanded by his faith could in fact be seen as beneficial, a vital part of what made him the writer of texts such as *Thérèse* : ‘les refoulements et les complexes chez certains, cela peut donner le pire. Cela peut donner au mieux ce qui s’appelle un romancier catholique, et alimenter une fructueuse carrière d’écrivain’ (*OA*, p. 586). I want to explore more closely the mechanisms of this repression, and the way they are imposed by his *milieu*, because in doing so, we see Mauriac’s hunch to be correct. The attitude to the body which is at the heart of the faith into which he is integrated and which he comes to share, plays a significant role in shaping the nature of his artistic work, and does so in particular by affecting the way he writes : that is to say, it shapes both the style and language he adopts, and his understanding of what writing can and should do. Moreover, I will argue that this conception of writing is itself problematic, and contributes to the crisis of 1928, as Mauriac tries to confront the gap between what he thinks art should do, and what in fact he finds his own art doing. Firstly, though, we must consider Mauriac’s own account of his upbringing.

3. *Commencements d’une vie*, or the shaping of identity.

If the individual is determined by his background, then this process takes place at one fundamental level in particular : it shapes the way that individual perceives the world. For Mauriac to be born into the Catholic faith means to be born into a particular way of understanding and interpreting in the world ; means, in other words, to enter into a specific ideology. This can be defined in fairly neutral terms as a worldview structured around particular preoccupations and beliefs – such as the belief, in the case of the Catholic faith, that the body is a source of corruption which, if its demands are followed, puts at risk the chance of salvation. To become a member of a social group means to be integrated into its ideology, trained to see the world in a certain way. Mauriac’s portrayal of his early years, *Commencements d’une vie*, can be read as a graphic account of this education.

Although an apparently straightforward text, offering as its title would suggest, an account of Mauriac's childhood and adolescence in and around Bordeaux, *Commencements d'une vie* is curious in many ways. Published in 1932, it is in fact made up of two earlier texts, combined more or less successfully, as François Durand points out (*OA*, p. 850). While 'Bordeaux', which recounts his adolescence and forms the last three chapters, was written in 1926, 'Mes plus lointains souvenirs', which deals with his childhood, was written in 1929, and makes up the first seven chapters of the book. It marks his first attempt at autobiography as the term is normally understood: that is to say, it is a text which sets out to give an ordered, broadly chronological account of the writer's own life, or what Lejeune, in his now well-known definition, calls a 'récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité'⁴⁹. Yet at the same time, it will also be his only real attempt to give a retrospective narrative thread to his life, a point he makes clear in his introduction to the text: 'j'ai naguère écrit le premier chapitre de mes souvenirs; il m'a suffi de le relire pour décider de m'en tenir là' (*OA*, p. 65). Mauriac holds true to his word: his only other systematic account of his life is that provided in the postface of the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs* of 1965. His introduction to *Commencements d'une vie* expresses a sense of unease and reluctance with the autobiographical project which is also caught in the title of the work, with its disconcerting indefinite article. Why does he refer simply to *a* life rather than, as one might expect, to '*ma* vie'? The effect of the indefinite article is to suggest a strangely impersonal perspective, Mauriac in some way dislocated from his past or viewing himself from the outside. One of the reasons for this, which I will consider further in the next part of the thesis, is the existential problem which autobiography poses for Mauriac. He is uncomfortable with the stasis imposed by self-definition, the vulnerability which comes when the self is offered up for inspection by others. At the

⁴⁹ Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 14.

same time, the external perspective opened up by the title of the text can be understood in another way.

In his notes to the text, Durand suggests that one of the main threats to the unity of *Commencements* as a whole lies in the fact that where 'Souvenirs' is organised temporally in its description of Mauriac's childhood, the second part is organised spatially (*OA*, p. 850) ; but in fact, the two texts are not as different as this division may imply. The striking thing about both is their constant foregrounding of the structures surrounding the young Mauriac, and his place within them. Just as 'Bordeaux' locates Mauriac in the context of the city in which he spent his youth, so too 'Souvenirs' can be seen to describe him in a way which is spatial or relational as it establishes his place in the social framework into which he has been born. Each chapter of 'Souvenirs' focuses on a different element of his *milieu* and situates him within it. The first two chapters, for example, highlight his place in the home and his family history, while the last three portray his life at the *collège*. Indeed, the narrator draws our attention to this context as much as to the young Mauriac himself, devoting chapter six to a portrait of his schoolmasters for example. In doing so, he creates a strong impression of the child's passivity in relation to his surroundings : the young Mauriac is not the active protagonist Lejeune implies we might expect to find at the centre of an autobiography. For while *Commencements d'une vie* certainly focuses on the development of Mauriac's personality, that personality is shown to be shaped from without, moulded by the framework around him, as much as forged from within. His identity is determined by his position in relation to the group as a whole. As he puts it in 'Bordeaux', 'au collège, dans la famille, je faisais partie d'un tout, je n'existais qu'en fonction d'un groupe' (*OA*, p. 95). He is named rather than naming, defined by the impersonal *on* : 'pour moi, on n'essaya jamais de m'embellir : une paupière déchirée avait agrandi un de mes yeux ; on m'appelait Coco-Bel Œil' (p. 71). Allotted a certain position within the group, he is made to recognise his place in a broader framework.

We can see this process of definition in terms of the dominant theme of the book, that of Mauriac's education. Indeed, the structures he chooses to highlight in particular are those where his education begins, from the nursery in the first chapter to his time at the *Collège Grand-Lebrun*. However, it soon becomes clear that this education involves more than just the formal schooling he receives ; rather, it means being trained to interpret the world, and live his life in the way of the social group around him – in other words, from within the framework of meaning provided by the Catholic faith. The horizon of his early years is populated by various figures of authority representing the faith – his mother at home, the nuns who run the nursery, and the priests of the *collège* – each of whom plays a role in putting in place and reinforcing its worldview as Mauriac develops. In effect, the text narrates what Lacan would call Mauriac's entry into the 'Symbolic Order'. This is the term he gives to the structures of society which pre-exist the individual, and into which the individual is inserted as s/he develops. Entry into the order takes the form of the regulatory processes which we have seen affecting Mauriac : the individual is made to conform to the group, to submit to a higher authority and recognise that s/he exists only in the context of its broader structures ; but crucial to the Lacanian perspective is that the symbolic order is also the domain of language. It is primarily a discursive order, its laws and structures codified by language⁵⁰. To enter the symbolic order, in other words to become a properly social animal, means above all learning to speak. Doing so marks a key stage in the child's development, for only then can it play a role as a fully functioning individual. It is in this sense that, in Barthes' term referred to above, the subject is an 'effect' of language⁵¹. As Britton puts it, the subject, 'far from being an autonomous self-generating spirit, is produced by the material agency of the

⁵⁰ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London : Routledge, 1996), pp. 98, 201-203. For an account by Lacan of the symbolic order, see section two of 'Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse', in *Écrits I* (Paris : Seuil, coll. "Points", 1970), pp. 145-170.

⁵¹ cf note 24 above.

signifier – constituted *by* his insertion *into* the Symbolic order'⁵². Identity derives from the ability language bestows on the individual to make meaning, to articulate and therefore understand the world, to say 'I'⁵³. While this is clearly a universal process, its various manifestations are arguably historically and culturally specific : for the language the individual enters is that spoken by a particular group at a particular moment. In other words, it is the historically specific set of *discourses* which codifies the group's own laws, beliefs and interests – that is to say, its own ideology, or its rules for living. Entering the symbolic, while it means learning to speak or represent the world, means above all learning to represent it in the way established by the social order.

In Mauriac's account of his education this discursive framework is seen to play a central role in shaping the individual. His text is striking for the way it foregrounds the discourses of the order which surrounds him, discourses which take the form of prayers in particular. The prayers and religious texts he hears and repeats are quoted directly at various points in his narrative : for example extracts from the *Imitation de Jésus-Christ* which he reads every Sunday (*OA*, p. 76), or the prayers of the school services (p. 87). Indeed, as we see in the opening chapter, the process begins early on, with the bedtime prayers led by his mother (p. 70). These prayers play a key role in shaping the individual ; as Mauriac himself puts it, they are the 'paroles de feu qui marquent un cœur pour la vie' (p. 76). In saying the prayers, he is introduced into a particular vision or representation of the world as they highlight certain concepts central to the faith, such as the heart and the soul (as in the bedtime prayer, p. 70), or the infinity of God (p. 76). Their use of apostrophe too serves to focus the mind on God, the ultimate figure of authority.

⁵² Celia Britton, 'Structuralist and poststructuralist psychoanalytic and Marxist theories', in Raman Selden (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism Volume 8 : from Formalism to Poststructuralism* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 203. Britton's emphasis.

⁵³ cf Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique* (Paris : Seuil, coll. "Points", 1974), p. 34 : 'dans et par la *représentation* – nous dirons le signe –, et le *jugement* – nous dirons la syntaxe –, s'articule un *ego posé*, pour pouvoir, de cette position, doter de sens un espace posé comme préalable à son avènement'. Kristeva's emphasis.

Simultaneously, though, his education is also working on a second front. This is essential if the first is to achieve its full impact, for its meaning is born out of the contrast between the two. At the same time as it is concentrating the mind of the young Mauriac on God, it is laying down the law on the body : references in the prayers to sin, passion and temptation (as in the *Imitation*, p. 76) are reinforced by active intervention on the part of agents of the faith as the child is trained to see the body in a certain way. The order's dual focus is captured in the first chapter with a striking juxtaposition of scenes : from a description of bedtime prayers and rituals, Mauriac moves on to describe his time at the nursery school run by the nuns, and highlights a curious incident associated with the body. While he prudishly questions its authenticity, dismissing it as a tale told by his brother, the fact that he should choose to remember it is nevertheless interesting : 'ils prétendaient que, lorsqu'un bruit insolite retentissait, la sœur reniflait tous nos petits derrières jusqu'à ce que son odeur eût décelé le coupable' (p. 71). While the nuns' actions give the scene a comic, almost carnivalesque dimension, their search for the culprit, and the sense of guilt which is brought into play, is significant. The nuns, it seems, are working to instill an attitude of distrust and fear towards the body ; it must be suppressed or controlled – failure to do so leads to punishment or ridicule. This attitude is communicated in particular through the terms used to refer to the body : *coupable* in this religious context takes on its full force, sharing as it does, along with terms such as 'sin' and 'temptation', the semantic field being exploited in the language of prayer. In other words, the nuns are helping to put in place in the individual the moral framework identified by Stallybrass and White. The discourses of the order focus on the two poles of high and low, mind and body, good and evil, and reinforce them ; but crucially, they do so in subtly different ways. For while God, the heart and the soul are named constantly, it is striking that the body is never named directly. References to it and its functions remain in the realm of euphemism, of circumlocution : 'en cas de besoin pressant, on devait lever un doigt pour "le petit" et deux doigts pour "le gros"' (p. 71). To put the body into words, to bring it to consciousness, is to run a

dangerous risk. As he puts it later in *Ce que je crois* : ‘la vertu de l’enfance et de l’adolescence, c’était d’ignorer ces choses, de n’en pas parler, bien sûr, mais même de n’y pas penser. Y arrêter sa pensée suffisait à vous précipiter à l’abîme. N’en pas parler, n’y pas penser. Ignorer son propre corps’ (OA, p. 586). In effect, the body is fenced off by the discourses of the order, as it puts in place what Foucault calls a ‘logic of censorship’ : ‘de ce qui est interdit, on ne doit pas parler jusqu’à ce qu’il soit annulé dans le réel ; ce qui est inexistant n’a droit à aucune manifestation, même dans l’ordre de la parole qui énonce son inexistence’⁵⁴. It is in this sense, perhaps, that Mauriac’s faith ‘ne fait pas sa part à la chair’ : there is no room in its vocabulary for the words which would bring it into being. If the body cannot be named, then it quite simply does not exist.

Now, one of the most significant things about *Commencements d’une vie* is that it not only recounts Mauriac’s education, but at the same time confirms its effectiveness. The narratorial voice of the text is that of someone who continues to share the worldview which we see being passed on to him. Our sense of this is particularly strong in ‘Souvenirs’ where, as Durand points out, ‘c’est avec émotion que sont évoquées les prières d’autrefois’ (OA, p. 852). His affectionate portrayal of the order which shaped him is combined with the narrator’s own interventions in the present tense which point to his own continuing faith (for example p. 88). His enthusiastic tone could certainly be attributed to fresh fervour, the fact that the text was one of the first to be written following his crisis and the reassertion of his faith. As such, it could be contrasted with the moodier atmosphere of ‘Bordeaux’ noted by both Durand and Malcolm Scott, who draws attention to Mauriac’s expression of resentment at what he saw as the stifling of the individual by the group (cf. p. 95 for example)⁵⁵. Yet while this moodiness could be interpreted as a sign of the simmering tension which will erupt in 1928, the influence of his education is equally important in this pre-crisis period. As we have seen, ‘Bordeaux’ itself provides evidence of this

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *La Volonté de savoir* (Paris : Gallimard, 1976), p. 111.

⁵⁵ Malcolm Scott, *Mauriac : the Politics of a Novelist* (Edinburgh : Scottish Academic Press, 1980), p. 38.

in the way it represents the carnival, and its role is further confirmed in the other essays of the period. From these essays, we can see how Mauriac's education leaves a lasting impression as it informs his sense of self and his general philosophy of life.

Principally, his upbringing bequeathes him a strong moral sense, that is to say a sense of what is needed if he is to live properly and according to the precepts of his faith – indeed, as I have suggested, the crisis itself results in part, perhaps, from the efforts he must make to live according to its demands. It soon emerges that one of the keys to this, unsurprisingly, is the need to control the body and its desires. Mauriac is left in particular with an indelible sense of the body's dangers, his constant anxiety articulated most clearly in the fevered comment in *Journal d'un homme de trente ans* already highlighted : 'la chair doit être assujettie ou elle nous écrase' (OA, p. 260). Repressing the body plays a central role in ensuring the development of a correct sense of self, a process which Mauriac refers to in his essays of the 1920s as self-creation.

The theme of self-creation returns frequently in his essays of the 1920s, where he reflects most extensively on his design for life. As he puts it in *Le Jeune Homme* (1926), for example, 'la domination de la vie ne va pas sans la domination de soi-même ; car, pour dominer, d'abord il s'agit d'être ; mais nous ne sommes pas : nous nous créons' (ORTC, ii, p. 714). These essays frequently strike a moralising tone. In *Le Jeune Homme*, for example, Mauriac sets out to address the next generation of writers and artists emerging around him, a group which he had already attacked two years earlier in *La Vie et la mort d'un poète*. In this earlier text, he takes issue with the way they have begun to portray and explore the self. He argues that they have been corrupted by the influence of André Gide, criticising them in particular for following Gide's philosophy of the *acte gratuit*, and deluding themselves into believing that authenticity lies in the spontaneity of unmotivated action (OA, p. 55). He finds distasteful their readiness to cultivate and admire the self's disparate strands, and the way they revel in inconsistency and discontinuity : 'rien de si affreux que d'être un carrefour grouillant. C'est peu de dire que ces jeunes gens n'y veulent aucun service

d'ordre' (ibid.). *Le Jeune Homme* argues instead that authenticity and sincerity lie in the effort of self-creation.

Now, it is important to understand precisely what Mauriac means by this. It is tempting at first to see in his use of the term evidence that Mauriac's conception of the self is informed by the philosophy of Henri Bergson, who placed the notion of self-creation at the heart of his work. That Mauriac was familiar with the philosopher's ideas is suggested in particular by his reference to Bergson in *La Vie et la mort d'un poète*, and his direct quotation from *L'Evolution créatrice* (OA, p. 55). This is the text in which Bergson explores most thoroughly his core concept of self-creation, the idea that 'exister consiste à changer, changer à se mûrir, se mûrir à se créer indéfiniment soi-même'⁵⁶. It appears that Mauriac's imagination is seized by the notion of self-creation in particular. His statement in *Le Jeune Homme* that 'nous ne sommes pas : nous nous créons' is a clear echo of Bergson's view that 'nous nous créons continuellement nous-mêmes : création de soi par soi'⁵⁷ ; and in *La Vie et la mort d'un poète*, Mauriac had already suggested that 'la règle même de la vie' was to 'se créer indéfiniment soi-même' (OA, p. 55). Yet despite these indications of influence, it seems that the implications of Bergson's ideas are not fully absorbed by Mauriac⁵⁸.

For Bergson, self-creation is a constant process of growth and development which means that the self, though growing out of its previous states in an organic and consistent way, can never be entirely self-identical. Mauriac, on the other hand, has a rather more traditional view of the self, and this is reflected in his understanding of the idea. In *Le Jeune Homme*, we see that he associates self-creation not so much with continuous, organic expansion or growth as with increased self-awareness. For him, it means the active intervention on and ordering of the self: 'enseignons au jeune

⁵⁶ Henri Bergson, *L'Evolution Créatrice* (1907), in *Œuvres* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), p. 500.

⁵⁷ ibid.

⁵⁸ For an exhaustive examination of the possible influence of Bergson on Mauriac, see Margaret Parry, 'Time and Consciousness in the work of François Mauriac' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 1985). Parry also considers the ways in which Mauriac was influenced by Proust in his understanding of memory and experience of time.

homme qu'il est né chaos et que le jeu de la vie consiste à naître une seconde fois de ce chaos' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 714). The individual is 'reborn' by building a cohesive self out of his disparate strands, organising them, drawing out the best elements and rejecting or controlling the more dangerous impulses. Self-creation calls for self-analysis, the proper deciphering of feelings, emotions and motivations : 'il nous est possible de connaître les lois qui régissent le flux et le reflux de notre cœur' (p. 710). It involves a general process of self-discovery, the pursuit of self-knowledge. Those who 'se refusent à toute intervention qui altérerait leur moi' he says, 'sont les mêmes qui s'ignorent en tant que personnes' (p. 714).

Moreover, the ultimate goal of this search, for Mauriac, should be to uncover and recognise the unchanging kernel of identity which he insists is at the core of the self. This traditional sense of permanence and self-presence is crucial to Mauriac, and one to which he lays claim at various points. For example, it is figured twice in the metaphor of the 'roc'. In the preface to *Trois Récits*, published in 1929, he compares the individual to a rock being washed by the tide. If the tide marks the latest emotions, feelings and interests of the self, it does so around an underlying essence of identity : 'j'aime cette image du flux et du reflux autour d'un roc central – passion ou croyance – qui exprime à la fois l'unité de la personne humaine, ses changements, ses retours et ses remous' (*ORTC*, i, p. 1358). As Paul Cooke has suggested, this unchanging core, what Mauriac also calls 'l'essentiel de nous-même' (*OA*, p. 67) or the 'fond solide' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 711), can be identified with the soul. The soul, Cooke points out, is for Mauriac 'something which grounds the identity and individuality of the self'⁵⁹. The soul is the guarantor of being, even if the individual's psychological states are transitory or variable. The link is made clear when the image of the rock returns 36 years later in the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs* : 'la vie nous aura traversés sans nous enrichir ni nous appauvrir. Et nous revoilà tels que nous fûmes au départ : le même rocher intact, que la vague a recouvert et qu'elle découvre' (*OA*, p. 758). He expresses

⁵⁹ Paul Cooke, 'Mauriac's myth of the poet, with special reference to *Le Mystère Frontenac*' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993), p. 86.

with glee his sense that he remains fundamentally unchanged, that the old man can reach back into and relive his childhood (something confirmed when it becomes a central theme of *Un Adolescent d'autrefois* published four years later): 'le vieil homme s'enchanté sombrement d'une certitude dont il ne cherche à convaincre personne [...], c'est qu'il n'est pas devenu un autre. Ô permanence de l'âme! Identité de soi-même avec soi-même, de tout temps à jamais!' (OA, p. 757).

Overall, as Scott points out, self-creation, that is to say the pursuit of self-knowledge, is a moral imperative for Mauriac⁶⁰. Those who fail to get a grip of themselves, to scrutinise and pin down their impulses, to reach out and grasp their essence, are nothing less than monsters: 'nous sommes tous des monstres dans la mesure où nous refusons de nous créer' (ORTC, ii, p. 715). They are monsters in particular, perhaps, because they remain in thrall to their bodies, to the animal part of man. Mauriac makes clear in *La Vie et la mort d'un poète* that the body profits most from man's lack of self-awareness: 'ce qui bénéficie de cette ignorance de nous-mêmes, c'est la chair. La méconnaissance de nos limites, quel profit pour elle, et comme elle a vite fait d'empiéter! C'est elle, l'adversaire formidable dont l'empire s'étend sur les coeurs qui ne se connaissent pas' (OA, p. 56). Thus it seems Mauriac has kept constantly in mind the lesson he was taught by the nuns of the nursery school, that a proper sense of self can only be achieved if the body is kept in check, if one is aware of the threat posed to man by the flesh. Self-knowledge not only brings that awareness, but allows the grip on the body to be maintained – it brings, in short, the lucidity which Mauriac comes to see as a key to potential salvation⁶¹.

Yet how is the novelist in Mauriac affected by the moralist's stern command of self-creation in the face of the perils of the body? In his discussion of Mauriac's work during the 1920s, Scott suggests that a gulf opens up between Mauriac as moralist on the one hand and artist on the other: 'in the novelist who was holding

⁶⁰ Mauriac: *the politics of a novelist*, op. cit., pp. 45 and 48.

⁶¹ cf. his comment in *Dieu et Mammon* that 'je suis persuadé, maintenant, que la sainteté est, avant tout, lucidité' (ORTC, ii, p. 818). Lucidity, of course, is the defining feature of his two most problematic heroes, Thérèse and Louis, and is what opens the way for Louis' conversion at the end of *Le Nœud de vipères*.

forth with such apparent confidence on the problems of his craft, the moral and social conscience was very much in conflict with the literary vocation'⁶². He argues that the essays with a strong moralising tone, where Mauriac calls for self-creation, self-knowledge, lucidity and order, clash with *Le Roman* of 1927. Setting out his theories of the novel in this essay, Mauriac argues especially that the novelist must pay heed to the lessons of Dostoyevsky and work to capture the unfathomable nature of man : 'qui a entendu profondément la leçon de Dostoïevski ne peut plus s'en tenir à la formule du roman psychologique français, où l'être humain est en quelque sort dessiné, ordonné, comme la nature l'est à Versailles' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 765). As Scott goes on to argue, *Thérèse* in particular exemplifies some of those lessons : the ambiguity of Thérèse's motives, to both her and the reader, are well-known, and central to the novel's success. Moreover, as Scott also points out, this ambiguity contradicts and raises doubts about the validity of the moral code and the call for clarity being set out simultaneously elsewhere in Mauriac's writing⁶³.

The contradiction here between the moralist saying one thing and the novelist another is an important one, as we shall see, and undoubtedly plays a part in his crisis of 1928. Furthermore, it is one which echoes that which I have drawn out in my own discussion, between the bodily nature of Mauriac's texts and his own negative response to the body. However, Scott's opposition between the moralist and the novelist is problematic, and needs to be refined before the nature and implications of the tension can be more fully understood. It generates an image of a schizophrenic Mauriac, the novelist and moralist at loggerheads as they pursue different agendas ; but in discussing Mauriac's work as a novelist, it is important to distinguish between his theory and his practice. We see in *Le Roman* that the *theorising* novelist reflecting on the techniques and functions of fiction in fact shares similar aims and ideas to the moralist of *Le Jeune Homme*. Indeed, Mauriac's assertion in the earlier text that 'nous ne sommes pas, nous nous créons' reappears in exactly the same form in *Le Roman*

⁶² Scott, op. cit., p. 44.

⁶³ Scott, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

two years later (*ORTC*, ii, p. 768). Fundamental to the contiguity between the two is Mauriac's conception of *language*, which Scott overlooks, and which I want to explore in the final section of this first part of the thesis. I want to argue that his understanding of the function of language, and his own use of it, play a crucial role in determining the nature of his literary texts and the peculiar effects I have been highlighting. In particular, I will suggest, he puts faith in the naming and controlling power of language, in its ability to 'assujettir' the body and its urges. This leads him to adopt a particular mode of writing, as he aligns himself with his favoured writers of the Classical period ; but the investment he makes in language in fact proves to be deeply problematic. Rather than keeping the body at a safe distance, offering a 'chaste' or cleansing representation of it, his writing foregrounds it, makes it inescapable. In short, what he depends on most is also what betrays him, as his investment in language turns out to be a Faustian pact.

4. Mauriac's Faustian pact.

The role of language in the process of self-creation emerges at various points in Mauriac's writing. Indeed, it seems that he learns another useful lesson from the nuns at his nursery school : if the body is to be 'assujetti', then language would appear to offer the most effective way of doing this. He frequently foregrounds the power of language to define and pin down the world. In *Les Maisons fugitives* (1939), for example, he criticises those who 'cohabitent avec des vices qu'ils ignorent et qui sont inexistants à leurs yeux *puisque'ils ne les nomment ni ne les définissent*' (*ORTC*, iii, p. 905, my emphasis). Language, for Mauriac, is a precision instrument : to name the body's desires and vices is to recognise and so control them, keep them at bay. This sense of the clarifying power of language is a theme which reappears elsewhere. In a 'bloc-notes' of 1966, for instance, he discusses a novel by Bruno Gay-Lussac which portrays the world from the perspective of a young child. Doing so leads him to reflect briefly on his own childhood, and his remarks form an interesting appendix to *Commencements d'une vie*.

What he finds remarkable in Gay-Lussac's novel is its evocation of the years of early childhood, 'cet univers de sensations brutes venues de choses qui ne sont que ce qu'elles ont l'air d'être' (*BN*, iv, p. 260). During these early years, Mauriac goes on to suggest, the child is little more than a young animal contiguous with the world around him : 'l'enfant n'est pas autre chose que son corps, et ses pieds nus appartiennent au sable'. He lives only at a physical level, immersed in 'un univers de jouissance intense, de jouissance animale'. It is a world of immediate and unreflecting experience, or what he calls 'cet univers d'avant toute transposition, d'avant toute orchestration' (*ibid.*). The child does not yet have the ability to organise or articulate the world ; he inhabits a pre-linguistic domain, a world out of which he has yet to make sense. Considering his own childhood, Mauriac plays down his experience of this domain. The novel, he says, 'nous fait vivre de la vie du petit animal que j'aurai été moi-même très peu de temps' (p. 261). More significant for him, it seems, is the escape from the undifferentiated world of the 'jouissance animale' into the realm of orchestration and meaning, what he terms the realm of 'beauté déchiffrée et exprimée' (p. 260). The ability to name and interpret, he implies, is a liberation from the domain of the purely physical. Crude and unreflective experience is replaced by contemplation, unthinking physical pleasure by recognition and appreciation of 'beauté'. Language provides distance and control. It acts like a filter to refine mere sensation and transform it into discerning judgement.

The refining or purifying power of language is also acknowledged in 'Bordeaux', as Mauriac reflects on his visits as an adolescent down to the quays of the city : 'ce fut aussi vers ce temps que je commençai de descendre les marches qui unissent la place des Quinconces au fleuve, et qu'à *travers quelques poèmes*, je voulus aimer les vaisseaux' (*OA*, p. 93, my emphasis). If he went down on to the docks, it seems he could appreciate them fully only if they were refracted through poetry – deciphered, named, and so made beautiful by its language. They perhaps help to cleanse the messy and dangerous reality of the port he goes on to describe, with its 'quais boueux' and 'dockers farouches'. Indeed, the refining effect of the language of

poetry could itself be reflected in his choice of ‘vaisseaux’ to describe the boats he finds. Moreover, the young Mauriac’s distanced contemplation is also a neat counterpoint to Raymond in *Le Désert de l’amour*, whose willing immersion in the life of the docks was an indication of his corruption. The most potent sign of this is the tattoo which appears on his arm (*ORTC*, i, p. 841). The inscription on his body of that culture’s own art form is an ironic echo of the art projected on to the docks by the young Mauriac in order to bring them under his control.

That the young Mauriac should call on poetry to mediate between himself and the world, or that the linguistic realm he mentions in the *Bloc-notes* article is described in aesthetic terms, is no surprise. For it soon becomes clear that art, and specifically linguistic art, has a significant role to play in the processes of self-knowledge and control, representing one of the ways in which the demands of the moralist can be met. A sense of the important *moral* function of art comes out strongly in *Le Roman*. In his essay, Mauriac argues forcefully that the central role of the novelist and his art is to contribute to our self-knowledge : ‘*nous ne concevons plus une littérature romanesque détournée de sa fin propre qui est la connaissance de l’homme*’ (p. 759, Mauriac’s emphasis). Art has an educative function for Mauriac : the novelist must clarify the complexities of the heart and unpick its passions, bring out the ‘boue cachée’ lurking beneath the surface : ‘le propre du romancier est justement de débrouiller, d’organiser, d’équilibrer le chaos de l’être humain’ (p. 762). Indeed, while Mauriac certainly draws attention to the lessons to be learned from Dostoyevsky, he goes on to retreat from the potentially radical implications of such a position, as Scott concedes⁶⁴. If he suggests that writers attempt a blend of Russian complexity and French order, it is clear that his sympathies lie with the French project, for they should nevertheless ‘demeurer *enfin* des écrivains d’ordre et de clarté’ (p. 765, my emphasis). The novelist must be a ‘sondeur d’abîmes’, to borrow Jean Lacouture’s phrase, prepared to confront man with his true nature : ‘nous nous vouons à la découverte intérieure. Nous ne dissimulerons rien de ce que nous aurons

⁶⁴ Scott, op. cit., p. 44.

vu' (p. 773). In short, art's role is to bring order to chaos, to instill the understanding of the self which will allow self-control. Mauriac's attitude towards art, then, is fundamentally normative, a result of morality becoming embroiled in aesthetics. The *correct* use of art is to provide distance and control over the self, and especially the body and its demands, in the same way perhaps that poetry provided a cleansing distance between the docks and the young Mauriac. It is in this sense perhaps that we can understand his call for the pure or 'chaste' writing referred to above (p. 35). However, used *incorrectly*, art itself allows the body to run amok as it intensifies our awareness of its desires and urges. His main criticism of Gide and his followers – that is to say, of artists who refuse to know themselves and so recognise the dangers of the body – is that their art is inevitably erotic, flooded with a sense of the bodily. Rather than pinning the body down, their writing in fact unleashes it, encourages the reader to be swept away by it : 'Comment Gide ne voit-il pas qu'une littérature érotique sera le fruit de sa doctrine? Ce courant auquel il veut que nous nous abandonnions sans lutte, cette marée, ce flux et ce reflux ont un nom : désir, assouvissement ; assouvissement, désir' (*OA*, p.56).

Crucially, it emerges that if this moral function is to be fulfilled, the key for Mauriac seems to lie not so much in what is said, as in the way it is said : to be a writer of order and clarity means above all adopting a certain *form* of expression or practice of writing. Moreover, he appears to have one particular form in mind. The best writers, he says in 1926, know that the erotic excess in literature can be curbed if they adopt a certain mode : 'les meilleurs d'entre les écrivains corrigent cet excès par le souci très classique d'exprimer ce qui est en eux le plus clairement qu'il se puisse'⁶⁵. In other words, the most responsible form for him, the one which offers the most effective way of keeping the bodily in check, is the *classical* mode, the mode of the 17th Century writers with whom he felt a particular affinity. As he puts it, 'arriver à rendre clair ce qui est obscur, est le dessein essentiel du classicisme'⁶⁶. Mauriac

⁶⁵ *Les Paroles restent*, op. cit., p. 118.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

readily suggests that the writers of the Classical period, and Racine especially, provide a model for his own project. Writing in 1952, he observes that ‘la plupart de mes romans appartiennent à cette école romanesque française dont on peut dire qu’elle est issue du théâtre classique et, en particulier, de la tragédie racinienne’ (*ORTC*, iii, p. 929). What he sees as the common ground he shares with these writers emerges particularly in a brief discussion of the 17th Century to be found in a manuscript version, dating from 1941, of what will become his Resistance text, *Le Cahier Noir*. His analysis of the period here pursues the themes of lucidity and self-knowledge which are central to the essays of the 1920s. For him, the writers of the 17th Century went furthest in understanding man and his condition. Their success lay above all in their own self-knowledge, the fact that they could recognise and control their animal nature :

le dix-septième siècle, parce qu’il fut lucide, qu’il osa regarder en face les passions entre plus qu’aucune autre dans le mystère de la chute et du rachat [...]. C’est ce qu’a bien compris N[ietzsche] lorsqu’il dit du dix-septième “beaucoup de fauve au fond, beaucoup d’exercice ascétique pour garder sa maîtrise”. En fait il n’était pas plus fauve qu’un autre mais le vrai est qu’il se connaissait en tant que fauve⁶⁷.

Their mastery, a combination of clarity and self-control, is exerted through language in particular, it seems. What Mauriac admires in Racine is ‘une passion pensée, exprimée, clarifiée, mise au net, par un petit nombre de mots très ordinaires’ (*OA*, p. 491). His language is the language of lucidity : ‘nous sommes enfermés dans la cage, entre les barreaux de vers tous pareils, face à des passions nues qui se regardent et qui se décrivent, et qui se racontent avec une lucidité que leur fureur ne limite ni n’altère’ (*ibid.*). There is a sense in which the form of expression itself takes on a moral or talismanic force – as if simply to adopt this practice of writing, to use it to talk about man, will guarantee insight into his problematic nature.

This Classical mode, arguably, is the one Mauriac himself duly adopts. As I noted above, the strongly Classical, and more specifically Racinian, feel of his novels

⁶⁷ ‘Lettre pour un désespéré pour qu’il espère’, Paris, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques-Doucet, fonds François Mauriac, MRC 2584, p. 48.

at a thematic level has frequently been underlined⁶⁸. *Genitrix* echoes the mood of the Racinian world both in its intense, claustrophobic relationship between mother and son, and, with its reference to Classical mythology, in its very title. Toby Garfitt in particular has drawn out the parallels between Thérèse and Phèdre⁶⁹, and Mauriac himself has remarked that ‘Phèdre apparaît dans le filigrane de presque tous mes récits et je n’ai pas eu de peine à concevoir pour la scène une figure dominatrice dont la passion fût le moteur de toute l’intrigue’ (*ORTC*, iii, p. 929). Part of this Racinian feel, though, is arguably generated by similarities at the *formal* level, as Mauriac adopts a mode of expression which can be said to imitate that of the Classical period. Roland Barthes puts it well when he says that Mauriac ‘pratique la grammaire de Port-Royal’⁷⁰. The parallel is suggested firstly by the weaving into his novels of echoes of and quotations from several writers of the period (for example Racine in *Le Baiser au lépreux* (*ORTC*, i, pp. 451, 459), Bossuet in *Genitrix* (*ibid.*, p. 616), Pascal in *Le Désert de l’amour* (*ibid.*, p. 838), *Destins* (*ORTC*, ii, p. 204) and *Le Mystère Frontenac* (*ibid.*, p. 609), Boileau also in *Le Mystère* (*ibid.*, p. 593), and so on). This is reinforced by Mauriac’s own practice of writing, which is marked in particular by its rigorous structure and grammatical precision, and which, in its frequent use of forms such as the imperfect and pluperfect subjunctive (for example *ORTC*, i, p. 859), displays the signs of an elevated, not to say conservative, literary register⁷¹.

⁶⁸ See above, p. 37 and n. 30.

⁶⁹ Toby Garfitt, *Mauriac : ‘Thérèse Desqueyroux’* (London : Grant and Cutler, 1991), pp. 35-41. See also Jacques Monférier, ‘Thérèse, Phèdre et le destin’, in *Revue des Lettres Modernes*, Série François Mauriac, 2 (Paris : Minard, 1977), 109-118. For a discussion of the Racinian dimension of Mauriac’s theatre, see André Séailles, ‘François Mauriac et Jean Racine, ou l’enfer des mal-aimés’, in Jean Touzot (ed.), *François Mauriac* (Paris : Les Editions de l’Herne, *Les Cahiers de l’Herne*, 48, 1985), pp. 299-306.

⁷⁰ Roland Barthes, ‘Responsabilité de la grammaire’, in *Œuvres Complètes*, 3 vols (Paris : Seuil, 1993), i, p. 80.

⁷¹ Indeed, Mauriac seems willing to follow the grammatical conventions even when it appears unnecessary, even ‘unrealistic’, to do so. For example Thérèse, reflecting on her first meeting with Jean Azévédo, says to herself at one point that ‘je fus étonnée qu’il n’y eût personne dans la cabane où je pénétrai’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 57). Here we see elements of what are normally seen as part of written discourse (past historic and imperfect subjunctive forms) emerge in what is clearly the spoken discourse of his character.

Furthermore, as Jean Touzot has shown, Mauriac's texts respond well to rhetorical analysis⁷². Like the discourses of Classical tragedy, they are rich in rhetorical devices – that is to say they are structurally very carefully worked and syntactically self-aware. This syntactic rigour is deployed in particular by a narrative voice whose chief function is to elucidate the world it articulates for us ; and, as in the case of Racine's language for Mauriac, such formal precision is a key component of that elucidation. The interventions of the narrator in his text are usually moments of clarification, moments where differences are identified and distinctions made. In *Le Baiser au lépreux*, for example, we are told that following the departure of Jean for Paris, Noémi feels herself to be different, even if she is incapable of understanding why (*ORTC*, i, p. 479) ; but the narrative voice, with the precision of its discourse, can give us a clearer picture : 'inquiète de n'éprouver plus la paix d'avant que cet homme la possédât, comment eût-elle discerné ce désaccord entre son cœur toujours endormi et sa chair à demi éveillée?' (ibid., p. 480). In *Genitrix* too we see how description involves the identification and definition of experience. Of the suffering Mathilde, we are told 'la flamme abandonnait de nouveau cette chair consumée. Sa fatigue immense devenait une paix' (ibid., p. 585). The narratorial voice is one which can speak with almost Olympian certainty, intervening in *Le Désert*, for example, to tell us that 'rien que cela, le sexe, nous sépare plus que deux planètes' (ibid., p. 769), or establishing a mood of inevitable and fateful momentum in *Thérèse* : 'qu'il reste peu de temps à Thérèse pour préparer sa défense!' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 29). This certainty is a property as much as anything of his forceful rhetoric, be it the use of rhetorical question, exclamation or assertion.

Now, more needs to be said about Mauriac's adoption of the Classical mode. For as we have seen, Mauriac himself seems to recognise that the choice of one form of expression over another is not a neutral or inconsequential act, but instead can have important moral consequences. The moral dimension of form has been explored further by Roland Barthes in particular. In *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*, he makes clear

⁷² See Jean Touzot, *Le Planète Mauriac*, op. cit.

that form is not a simple vehicle or container for meaning. Rather, form itself is shot through with significance : ‘dans n’importe quelle forme littéraire, il y a le choix général d’un ton, d’un éthos, si l’on veut’⁷³. In other words, every form or mode of expression codifies a certain set of values and beliefs, signals a particular attitude towards the world. Barthes calls this combination of form and meaning, what we might call value-added form, an *écriture*, or practice of writing : ‘l’écriture est donc essentiellement la morale de la forme, c’est le choix de l’aire sociale au sein de laquelle l’écrivain décide de situer la Nature de son langage’⁷⁴. Before a writer commits himself to words, he must choose not so much what he will say as how he will say it. In doing so, he automatically signals his chosen place in society, the position from which he to speak, and the beliefs to which he holds allegiance. As Michael Moriarty puts it, ‘the choice of an *écriture* is an adherence to a whole set of ethical and political values’⁷⁵. Thus, as Barthes points out, irrespective of what a writer says, the *écriture* he assumes is already a stance towards the world, already a form of engagement purely in the sense that it marks him out as holding a particular position : ‘l’écriture à laquelle je me confie est déjà tout institution ; [...] elle affiche ma situation, elle m’engage sans que j’aie à le dire’⁷⁶. After all, there are no apolitical positions, no writing which does not express some form of response to the world.

What in effect we see in both *Le Roman*, and before that in *La Vie et la mort d’un poète*, then, is Mauriac drawing out his motives for choosing a particular *écriture*. If Mauriac exploits the ‘grammaire de Port-Royal’, he also aligns himself with the morality or worldview which that language was used to express. The 17th Century, for Mauriac, was not simply the period which produced the greatest insights into the condition of man. It was able to do so because it was also a deeply religious period : ‘une époque qui s’attache à connaître l’homme est aussi une époque catholique et son catholicisme se mesure à cette connaissance’⁷⁷. In other words, the

⁷³ Roland Barthes, *Le degré zéro de l’écriture* (Paris : Seuil, coll. “Points”, 1972), p. 14.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷⁵ Michael Moriarty, *Roland Barthes* (Cambridge : Polity Press, 1991), p. 32.

⁷⁶ Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁷⁷ ‘Lettre à un désespéré’, Jacques Doucet, MRC 2584, p. 48.

Classical mode is also a *Catholic* mode, the form best suited to the articulation of a Jansenist morality which must clarify and distinguish between good and evil, vice and virtue. He makes the link between the two explicit in *Dieu et Mammon*: ‘selon l’enseignement chrétien, les grands classiques, même libertins, distinguent le bien et le mal et connaissent l’homme par cette distinction’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 778). Critics have often debated the extent to which Mauriac can be described as having a Jansenist outlook⁷⁸. If he can be talked of as a Jansenist, then it is perhaps best understood not so much in terms of his agreement with particular elements of doctrine, but in the sense that he adopts a similar practice of writing, one which signals an overall vision of man and the world as division, dichotomy and opposition. If he chooses the Classical mode, he does so for what it represents – or more accurately, for the *way* it represents, for the morality which is articulated in the very form itself.

Yet if Mauriac exercises his conscience in choosing a certain mode of expression, and in doing so signals a certain stance towards the world, the choice he makes is not entirely free. As Barthes puts it, ‘il n’est pas donné à l’écrivain de choisir son écriture dans une sorte d’arsenal intemporel des formes littéraires’⁷⁹. Rather, his choice of *écriture* is historically determined, and by two forces in particular: firstly by the one which I have focused on throughout this first part of the thesis, that is to say the social context in which he develops. Here we see perhaps the most profound effect of Mauriac’s education: in training him to see the world in a certain way, it influences the very way he will express himself as a writer, his very use of language. Moreover, the fact that he adopts the form he does confirms his acceptance of those origins. It is what Barthes calls ‘un acte de solidarité historique’⁸⁰, an act which marks him out as speaking from within and maintaining a certain tradition, a particular representation of the world.

⁷⁸ See for example Margaret Mein, ‘François Mauriac and Jansenism’, in John Flower and Bernard Swift (eds), *François Mauriac: visions and reappraisals* (Oxford: Berg, 1989), pp. 147-164, and Jeong-Suk Son, ‘La recherche de la transcendance dans les romans de Mauriac’, *Nouveaux Cahiers François Mauriac*, 6 (1998), 152-170.

⁷⁹ Barthes, op. cit., p. 16.

⁸⁰ Barthes, op. cit., p. 14.

At the same time, though, a writer's desire or need to signal this solidarity is affected by the second determining force at work. For his is not a lone voice, one in isolation : to speak up *for* also means, inevitably, to speak *against*. To choose one mode of writing is to choose it in preference to others, and so to the stance they signify. The writer's choice of *écriture*, Barthes reminds us, is influenced not just by his own history, but by the history taking place around him, by 'une confrontation de l'écrivain et de sa société'⁸¹. This is reflected clearly in *La Vie et la mort d'un poète*, where our sense of Mauriac's chosen mode comes not so much from his own definition of it but arises implicitly, from his discussion and criticism of the techniques of the new generation of writers. The *écriture* Mauriac assumes signals his response to the historical context in which he finds himself, and which he must confront as he writes. His choice of the Classical mode is an act of solidarity not only in the sense that it signals his continued allegiance to the ideology of his social group, but also in that it is a sign of support, a rallying to the cause, at a time when that set of values finds itself under attack.

Clearly, this notion of Mauriac's writing as response approaches Scott's convincing argument discussed above (p. 25) that the cultural phenomenon of the Catholic Novel in general is a reaction against the materialism of the Realist and Naturalist writers ; but it seems that Mauriac, despite his criticisms of Zola in particular, faces more pressing problems than the need simply to respond to the Naturalist writer, to put God or a supernatural dimension back into literature. Indeed, comparing the two writers is a useful way of bringing into focus the difficulties faced by Mauriac, as there is in fact a high degree of contiguity between them. Not only do they share a broadly similar technique (in that Mauriac must continue to work within a generally mimetic framework) but they also have a similar middle-class background. Mauriac is less a rival to Zola, than a descendant of his. As Gaston Duthuron observes, *Le Baiser* for example could at various moments be mistaken for

⁸¹ *ibid.*, p. 16.

a Naturalist text⁸². This is not least because the drama has physiological rather than psychological origins, is the result not of incompatible minds, but of incompatible bodies. I suggested above (p. 31) that the two can be seen to share a similar vision of man as human animal, primarily a physical being dominated by his desires and urges ; but I also suggested that if Mauriac, like Zola, conveys a sense of instinctual, animal man, he does so in an significantly different way – namely through his insistently fleshy representation of the body. This is the clue that an important shift has taken place, a shift between two different modes of representation. The gaze which dominates Zola's texts is the amoral gaze of science, the gaze of the doctors in the closing chapter of *L'Assommoir* who inspect, analyse and document Coupeau's body, or of the rational and scrupulous observer who sets out his aims in *Le Roman expérimental*. That which roves through Mauriac's texts, on the other hand, is a preoccupied gaze, one which is drawn endlessly to the body, which oscillates between fascination and disgust, and which sees the body and its problematic force at every turn. To put it another way, the difference between the two is a difference in *écriture* : the *scientific* force of Zola's writing, which promises evidence, insight and observable proofs, gives way to the *moral* force of Mauriac's Jansenist *écriture*. The body itself remains unchanged ; what does change is the eye which sees it, and the writing which represents it. Yet how is it that two authors with similar backgrounds – both provincial middle-class, both experiencing a religious education in their formative years⁸³ – and who were writing only thirty or forty years apart, have such different modes of expression?

Barthes points out that, given the nature of *écriture* as a historical phenomenon, a change in modes of writing will bear the traces of broader historical developments. If Balzac and Flaubert adopt different *écritures*, he says, it is in part because they write either side of a shift from one economic system to another, which

⁸² Gaston Duthuron, 'De Zola à Mauriac : *Le Baiser au lépreux*', in Jean Touzot, *François Mauriac*, op. cit., p. 174.

⁸³ At the age of five, Zola was enrolled at a religious institution, the pension Notre-Dame, in Aix.

brings with it ‘des changements décisifs de mentalité et de conscience’⁸⁴. Arguably, to move from the writing of Zola to that of Mauriac is to have a similar sense that some fundamental change has taken place – a change which has a profound effect on the middle-class in particular. Zola’s *écriture* can be seen to reflect the confidence of a class at the height of its powers, be they economic, technological or scientific. Although he paints a critical period of his period, revealing a ‘secret history’ of corruption, repression and sexual depravity, even a text like *Germinal*, with its suggestion of revolutions to come, leaves us more with an impression of the strength of the dominant order. As the miners battle against the managers and mine-owners, it becomes clear that capital seems likely always to triumph over labour because it is displaced from the site of conflict, an anonymous force located, if anywhere, in Paris. At the same time, the very nature of Zola’s approach, with its roots in the new scientific ideologies of positivism and Darwinism (reflected in his preoccupation with heredity and determinism), expresses a fundamental confidence in the power of science and modern scientific method, and faith in the possibility of achieving total knowledge.

Forty years later, though, the impression given by Mauriac’s writing is somewhat different. To move from Zola to Mauriac is to move from a sense of confidence to one of a class in crisis, to be immersed in a mood of uncertainty as Mauriac tries to respond to what he sees as the disarray around him. Indeed, it seems that nothing less than the future of his middle-class order itself is in doubt – for as the two moralising essays of the 1920s make clear, its stability is threatened by the perversion of the next generation emerging around him. Both *La Vie et la mort d’un poète* and *Le Jeune Homme* are shot through with a note of disquiet and urgency. This is reflected, as we have seen, in his vivid warnings about the dangers of the flesh in the former, and his repeated use of the imperative ‘enseignons’ in the latter, as he calls for the re-education of the youth of his day and sets out what he calls a ‘petit traité de l’éducation des fils’ (*ORTC*, ii, pp. 714-716 especially). The prescriptiveness

⁸⁴ Barthes, op. cit., p. 16.

of these essays is not so much the sign of someone in control or setting an agenda, as an indication of Mauriac's attempt to regain the initiative. This is suggested not least by the very fact that he devotes a whole essay to defining the phenomenon of the 'young man', as if to do so – that is, to attempt to define and understand it – might contain the problem, or at least bring it to attention. It is the action, perhaps, of a man under pressure, a man trying to apply a brake to what seems like the unravelling of the bourgeois order.

The clearest indication that something is amiss is to be found in the contemporary cultural practices which surround him. Mauriac is confronted by a proliferation of the art which we have seen him deem irresponsible. Not only is art such as the literature of Gide and his followers the product of minds which have lost a sense of moral rigour, but it is itself a powerful agent of corruption. In *La Vie et la mort d'un poète*, he figures the Dadaist movement as a virulent disease infecting the new generation (*OA*, p. 54), and he is particularly suspicious of other newly emerging forms of popular culture – jazz music especially is a potent force which the new generation finds hard to resist.

That Mauriac depicts Paris as the place where moral decay is at its most advanced, and where the new bourgeois generation is most exposed to danger, is perhaps what might be expected from a provincial, conservative writer. More striking are the settings he chooses in order to convey this impression. For Mauriac's Paris is not so much that of the street as what Stallybrass and White call the 'bourgeois bohémias'⁸⁵, the Paris of the bar and the nightclub. A night-club provides the setting for the framing scene of *Le Désert*, where the louche and corrupted Raymond will once more meet Maria Cross and think back over his life ; and in his first novels, *L'Enfant chargé de chaînes*, the provincial hero finds himself in a club almost as soon as he steps off the train on his return to Paris (*ORTC*, i, p. 53). They are places where dissolution is triggered not so much by alcohol as by the music played in them – be it gypsy music in *L'Enfant chargé de chaînes* (*ibid.*), or jazz in *Le Désert de l'amour*

⁸⁵ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, op. cit., p. 189.

(ibid., pp. 737, 843). Its chief effect is to provoke a loss of self-control. Like the dangerous literary texts Mauriac criticises, we see it liberating libidinal impulses in particular, as dancers give themselves over to their bodies : ‘dans une salle étroite et basse, des tziganes jouent frénétiquement une musique sauvage. Des messieurs en habit poussent des cris, cependant qu’un danseur plus apache que nature, s’applique à la valse chaloupée et fait le moulinet avec le corps inerte et souple de la danseuse’ (ibid., p. 53). In *Le Désert*, Mauriac describes a young American in similar terms, drawing attention again to the sexual overtones of the dance : ‘attentif aux directions d’un dieu intérieur, il improvisait seul des pas, obscènes peut-être’ (ibid., p. 843). The scenes and experiences he portrays here are in many ways strangely reminiscent of the carnival he describes in *Commencements d’une vie*, with its cavorting participants ; and the parallel is strengthened by the fact that those who perpetrate the music which makes the dancers succumb to their impulses are marginals and outsiders such as the gypsies who made the fairs and carnivals of Bordeaux such fearful places for the young Mauriac. That this parallel should emerge is particularly striking because the ‘bourgeois bohémias’ Mauriac picks out to give a sense of the moral corruption of his age are precisely the places where Stallybrass and White suggest the carnivalesque is to be found in bourgeois society. In fact Mauriac here unwittingly reveals an interesting and problematic point. Stallybrass and White argue that while the carnivalesque may be suppressed and fractured by the bourgeois order, it does not in fact disappear⁸⁶. Rather, it takes on a mercury-like force, becoming fluid and unpredictable. No longer temporally constrained, it can return to disrupt and challenge the order, erupting at unexpected moments and in unexpected places – and especially, it seems, in modern artistic practices : ‘the “carnivalesque” might erupt from the literary text, as in so much surrealist art, or from the advertisement hoarding, or from a pop festival or a jazz concert’⁸⁷. Unable or unwilling to avoid the carnivalesque as it

⁸⁶ Stallybrass and White, op. cit., p. 178.

⁸⁷ ibid., p. 181.

returns in a new guise, the new generation gets swept away by it in their search for pleasure.

The reasons for the new generation's disarray are clear to Mauriac. He diagnoses the symptoms of what he calls their 'incoordination' in *La Vie et la mort d'un poète* : 'il est juste d'ajouter qu'aujourd'hui c'est en effet sous cet aspect d'incoordination qu'hommes et femmes nous apparaissent le plus souvent, parce que les cadres religieux, familiaux, ethniques ne les soutiennent plus' (*OA*, p. 57). In other words, the key problem for him has been the undermining of the stable structures of his society – structures which, as we have seen in the case of Mauriac himself, are capable of instilling in the individual a proper sense of identity, self-control and moral judgement. As he goes on to point out, their disappearance is one of the consequences of 'une longue tuerie' (*ibid.*) : the new generation is living in the aftermath of a war which devastated the frameworks of society and, as Toby Garfitt has recently argued, radically changed perceptions of the self⁸⁸. Arguably, however, the war is not solely to blame for this damage. What Mauriac sees as the essential structures of society are undermined not only by war, but also perhaps by the intellectual and cultural climate of the period. It is not for nothing, perhaps, that he will later associate the emergence of Freud's psychoanalytic discourse with the end of the war : 'dès le lendemain de l'autre guerre, son empire s'est imposé à nous tous', he says in *Mémoires intérieurs* in 1959 (*OA*, p. 369). In other words, the effects of the 'longue tuerie' combine with the emergence of philosophies and ideas which provoke a radical questioning of established values and beliefs.

The process had in fact been underway since before the turn of the century. Indeed, the germ of uncertainty can arguably already be found in Zola's texts. For the discourse of enlightenment which he uses, the discourse which in itself confirms the power and confidence of the period, is one which nevertheless reveals uncomfortable

⁸⁸ Toby Garfitt. 'Le Désert de l'amour : les Olympiques de Mauriac?', in *Cahiers de Malagar*, 11 (1997), 11-26. Garfitt argues that Mauriac's novel, although set in 1907, can be read as a portrait of a historically specific 'corps de l'entre deux guerres', a body which has survived the war but has been left with an acute sense of its own mortality and solitude.

and troubling insights about man, and suggests that technological sophistication is nothing but a veneer. It is a discourse of certainty which brings uncertainty in its wake. Naturalism is at once the ultimate expression of confidence in the notions of progress, knowledge and objective truth, and also, ironically, a moment when such notions begin to be questioned. It marks the entry into a period of increasing hesitancy, one which sees the appearance of new philosophies and ideas which disturb perceptions of the world. The final years of the 19th Century, for example, see Bergson's assault on positivism and empiricism, – that is to say the doctrines of objective truth – and his privileging of intuition over intellect⁸⁹. As Eliane Tonnet-Lacroix puts it, in the wake of his philosophy, 'la conception de la psychologie humaine s'est trouvée totalement modifiée'⁹⁰. Nietzsche's philosophy, with its radical challenge to entrenched moralities, also takes hold in France during the 1890s, and is firmly established by the turn of the Century⁹¹. Avant-garde art plays an important role during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries in reflecting and generating a new mood of suspicion as it launches a repeated attack on fundamental notions: a constant stream of artistic works can be seen to problematise truth, identity and perception. Impressionist painters, for example, focused attention on the moment and captured the act of perception itself, encouraging viewers to recognise that the world they see is a subjective construct. The Dadaist and Surrealist movements criticised by Mauriac in *La Vie et la mort d'un poète* undertake a radical defamiliarisation of the world, questioning the way it is interpreted, the role of logic and revealing the influence of the disruptive realm of the unconscious. The period is also dominated by one troubling figure in particular, namely Gide. He is what Mauriac will later call 'un être de défi' (*OA*, p. 514), working constantly to problematise the world and our experience of it. His texts insistently point to a world of unstable values, one where truth is not founded in any external reality. Rather, in texts such as *La Porte étroite*

⁸⁹ See, for example, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889).

⁹⁰ Eliane Tonnet-Lacroix, *La littérature française de l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Nathan, 1993), p. 99.

⁹¹ See Douglas Smith, *Transvaluations: Nietzsche in France 1872-1972* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), ch. 2; cf. Geneviève Bianquis, *Nietzsche en France: l'influence de Nietzsche sur la pensée française* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1929).

(1909) and *La Symphonie pastorale* (1919), truth becomes a property of convincing narrative techniques, little more than a function of the rhetorical strategy of sincerity. Moreover, as Mauriac himself implies when, in *La Vie et la mort d'un poète*, he insists on discussing texts in terms of their author's own psychological or moral condition, the work of Gide and others is also exploring and putting into circulation new and, as far as Mauriac is concerned, provocative models of subjectivity, new ways of seeing the self. Thus, when he comes into contact with avant-garde art, Mauriac is confronted by representations which challenge his sense of self and call into question the stable identity which, as we have seen, he feels to be central to man. He must come to terms with a fundamental crisis of bourgeois identity – that is to say, with an assault on the self-present transcendental ego which will be a dominant feature of the thought and culture of the 20th Century.

Mauriac's problem is compounded by the arrival on the French intellectual scene of the one doctrine which will do most to raise questions about the nature of the stable, centred ego : namely, Freud's psychoanalytic discourse. Although in the *Mémoires intérieurs* Mauriac, as we have seen, suggests that Freud's ideas began to take hold in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, it was more precisely four years later, in 1922, when the first French translations of his work were published⁹². Now, the Freud question is a controversial one in Mauriac studies. Various scholars continue to debate the extent to which Mauriac was influenced by Freud, how much of his work he might have read, even whether he might have undergone a form of psychoanalytic treatment⁹³. If it is difficult to measure the extent of Freud's influence on Mauriac, or Mauriac's detailed knowledge of his work, the almost talismanic power Mauriac accords to the psychoanalyst is clear. His influential role in the development of culture as a whole, whether good or bad, comes sharply

⁹² M-J. Bataille, 'Le Nœud gordien : Mauriac et la psychanalyse', in John Flower (ed.), *François Mauriac : Psycholectures/Psychoreadings* (Exeter : University of Exeter Press, 1995), p. 251.

⁹³ For discussion of these ultimately undecidable issues, see in particular three essays in *Psycholectures*, op. cit. : Paul Croc, 'Lunettes freudiennes', M-C. Praicheux, 'Mauriac, Freud : l'absence d'une conjonction de coordination', and the article by Bataille cited above. It is Bataille who speculates about the possibility that Mauriac may have consulted a psychoanalyst. See pp. 251-252. His evidence is flimsy.

into focus for Mauriac when he reflects on the period towards the end of his life. He sees Freud's arrival as something akin to a Copernican revolution. 'Depuis un demi-siècle', he says in *Mémoires intérieurs*, 'Freud, quoi que nous pensions de lui, nous oblige à tout voir, et d'abord nous-mêmes, à travers des lunettes que nous ne quittons plus' (*OA*, p. 369). The emergence of his thought marks nothing short of a paradigm shift, a radical and seemingly irreversible switch from one state of mind to another. Indeed, the shift is such that, he says in *Ce que je crois*, the old world, the pre-Freudian world, has simply become unthinkable: 'il est difficile de concevoir aujourd'hui ce monde d'avant Freud' (*OA*, p. 586). This clearly has important implications for Mauriac, for the pre-Freudian world is his world, the world which we have seen shape him. As such, Freud's is the definitive blow to the established and stable social order which is seemingly displaced for good, his coming like a loss of innocence after which things can never be quite the same. The damage he does is made clear in the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs* of 1965. Turning once more to the environment in which he grew up, Mauriac dwells on the fact that in the pre-Freudian Eden, 'certaines fautes ne comportaient aucune circonstance atténuante. Aucune n'était imaginable, à une époque où Freud n'avait pas changé la nature de bien des péchés' (*OA*, p. 736). He recalls the time when the term *péché* had not only meaning but power, playing as it did a crucial role in the moral framework through which he was taught to see the world; but Freud confronts him with a theory of man which deconstructs the hierarchies and oppositions on which that framework depends, and robs fundamental terms of their meaning. The threatening power of the label *péché* and the potent distinction between innocence and sin are leached away as Freud gives us a world where 'sinful' sexual urges are seen to be a natural part of a child's development.

Thus, the Mauriac of the 1920s is a man on the defensive as he attempts to come to terms with a radical shift in the way the world is seen. The very concepts of man and the world as he understands them are being called into question, as is the established and stable order whose values he cherishes. The rearguard action he is

forced to mount against this attack manifests itself not just in the moralising essays of the 1920s. Strikingly, two of his fictional texts are devoted to responses to two of his main antagonists. The short story of 1933, *Thérèse chez le docteur* is notable above all for its biting portrait of a psychoanalyst ('comme ses autres victimes, il la pousserait à s'assouvir. La délivrance de l'esprit par l'assouvissement de la chair : c'était à cela que se ramenait sa méthode', *ORTC*, iii, p. 13) ; and in 1952, he points out that *Le Baiser au lépreux* is, amongst other things, 'une sorte de réponse, au fond, un peu naïve, à Nietzsche'⁹⁴. Despite his status as sickly *soushomme*, underlined repeatedly throughout the novel as Mauriac focuses on his physical condition, Jean nevertheless triumphs over his situation because Noémi, who belongs to the superior race of masters by dint of her physical beauty, reciprocates his love as he lies dying, and remains faithful to him. Thus the Christian 'will to love' is seen to counter Nietzsche's new morality, the division of the human race into two castes of master and slave⁹⁵. The core element of this response, though, is undoubtedly the Classical mode he adopts, the mode of morality. With it, he can attempt to re-establish a sense of right and wrong, wrest back control of these key terms and save them from perversion at the hands of writers such as Gide, who are constantly willing to 'prétendre que le mal est le bien' (*OA*, p. 513). He must protect the ideology in which he believes, and argue for a return to the old ways, the ways of clarity and lucidity.

Yet I want to suggest that Mauriac also finds himself confronted with a threat from another, wholly unexpected source – for he must face a challenge not only from

⁹⁴ François Mauriac, *Souvenirs retrouvés*, entretiens avec Jean Amrouche (Paris : Fayard-I.N.A., 1981), p. 149. The clear concern which prompts this response contrasts sharply with that of two notable contemporaries. For Gide, Nietzsche's thought offers a challenge which writers must be prepared to take up : 'je comprends que Nietzsche fasse peur ; mais les idées qui ne heurtent rien d'abord ne sont en rien réformatrices'. André Gide, *Prétextes* (Paris : Mercure de France, 1904), p. 83. Valéry's response to the philosopher is striking for its measured, almost superior tone. It seems any contact he has will be on his own terms : 'je suis très intéressé par sa morale de maître et celle d'esclave, mais que de jeux de mots!'. Paul Valéry, 'Lettres et notes sur Nietzsche', in *Valéry, pourquoi?* (Paris : Les Nouvelles Impressions, 1987), p. 16.

⁹⁵ Though as we shall see when I return to the text in the next part of the thesis, the situation is more complicated than this reading would suggest. The text crystallises the two conflicting models of intersubjectivity at work in Mauriac's fictional universe, as the Christian 'will to love' which wins out here, and which suggests that the intersubjective relationship is based on reciprocation, collides with the Nietzschean 'will to power', where the relationship to the other is predicated on domination and repression.

the ideas and cultural practices which surround and disturb him, but also from his own, highly problematic artistic work. As we have now seen, a clear contradiction emerges in the 1920s between Mauriac's theories and his own novelistic practice, between the goals he sets for art, and what we see his own art in fact doing. This impression is inescapable when we consider the work he produces in the three years which separate *La Vie et la mort d'un poète* of 1924 and *Le Roman* of 1927 – which separate, in other words, the criticism of his contemporaries for writing literature tainted by an 'érotisme morne', and his own call for what he terms a 'chaste' writing, which would bring clarity, insight, and increased self-knowledge. For while 'érotisme morne' seems more like a prophetic description of the atmosphere in *Le Désert de l'amour* as Paul and Raymond circle round Maria Cross, the interest and power of *Thérèse* will lie precisely in the fact that neither Thérèse nor the reader can truly fathom the motives for her actions. Indeed, the latter text arguably questions the very possibility of self-knowledge. Overall, the writing he produces in the period between the two essays would seem to be anything but chaste, understood not only in these thematic terms, but also at the material, lexical level to which I have been drawing particular attention – that is to say, in terms of the particular words we find being used to describe the body in his fictional texts, and which generate a striking sense of physical intensity.

In this light, *Le Roman* reads less like a confident statement of intent than what Scott terms a call to order, an attempt by Mauriac to rein himself in and remind himself of what he should be doing. As Scott puts it, 'perhaps the call to 'order' in *Le Roman* represented an unconscious imposition of limits on his own inventiveness, designed to discipline the terrifying products of the imagination'⁹⁶. Likewise, the suggestion which emerges in the essay that his novels offer an 'apologie indirecte' of Christianity is perhaps an attempt to explain away or justify what are becoming increasingly troublesome and provocative texts. After all, *Le Roman* was written at the time when pressure was beginning to build on Mauriac as he came under attack

⁹⁶ Scott, *Mauriac : the Politics of a Novelist*, op. cit., p. 45.

from the religious authorities for the ‘perversion’ of his work. The contemporary reaction of the Catholic press to his novels has been documented by Jean Touzot⁹⁷. It is striking how a number of these critics identify the main problem posed by his works as being above all the way he evokes man and the world – that is to say, in descriptions which are too richly atmospheric, and which, as I have argued myself, heighten the reader’s impression of physical sensation and experience. For example, Touzot quotes one critic who draws attention to ‘une surabondance d’images thermiques, tactiles et surtout olfactives, sens les plus grossiers, vrais sens de la concupiscence’⁹⁸. A second, discussing *Le Désert*, is disturbed by the text’s overwhelming stress on the physical, and the erotic tensions generated by the triangular relationship at its heart : it is, he says in a way which neatly confirms my own argument, ‘un livre qui pue la chair’⁹⁹.

Yet if Mauriac’s essay on the novel can be seen as a self-directed call to order, it is also true that it is one which fails. For the very next novel, *Destins* – which began appearing in serial form towards the end of March 1927, only two months after Mauriac wrote the lecture published as *Le Roman* – is as intensely atmospheric as his previous works. The portrayal of Bob and Paule, the sensual young couple, clashes powerfully with that of the arid Pierre, who practises an admirable amount of self-discipline, but who lives a sterile life as a result. Furthermore, the libidinal mood of the text is again conveyed, as I have shown, not so much through action as through vivid and intense moments of description (see above, pp. 29-30, for example). It seems that Mauriac, in short, simply cannot stop writing about and bringing out the fleshiness of life. Ironically, far from controlling the body, as he would hope, a sense of the bodily and the libidinal is, like the jazz music and the modern writing he criticises, what his own art brings out most of all.

The implications of this disjunction between theory and practice are brought into focus by Gide’s intervention in May 1928. The pretext for this is Mauriac’s

⁹⁷ Jean Touzot, ‘Quand Mauriac était scandaleux...’, in *Œuvres et Critique*, 2 (1977), 133-144.

⁹⁸ cited in Touzot, art. cit., p. 135.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

biography of Jean Racine, written shortly after *Destins* in the latter part of 1927, and published in early 1928. Gide's letter marks a moment of truth for Mauriac, as it confronts him with the key problem which he had so far failed to address directly : namely the fact that he was consistently writing books which challenged and disrupted his faith and its worldview. As Gide says to Mauriac, 'vos romans sont moins propres à ramener aux christianisme des pécheurs, qu'à rappeler aux chrétiens qu'il y a sur la terre autre chose que le ciel' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 833). Gide is surely thinking here of *Destins* especially, with both its powerful evocation of Bob and Paule and the sensual realm in which they move as they disappear into the countryside on a summer's afternoon (*ibid.*, pp. 141-142), and its seductive portrait of a Bob who nevertheless epitomises the 'jeune homme' criticised by Mauriac in his essay. For Gide, Mauriac is the 'inquiétant auteur de *Destins*' (*ibid.*, p. 832), an author who, not unlike Gide himself, writes disconcerting books, ones which call into question what we assume to be right and wrong. After all, Mauriac has us siding with the morally dissolute Bob, who seems to live solely for sensual pleasure, against the earnest and intellectual Pierre, having just encouraged us to sympathise with and share the thoughts of a suspected poisoner.

Mauriac finally admits to the problematic nature of his texts in his response to Gide, which follows swiftly on from the latter's letter. The central theme of *Dieu et Mammon*, published in 1929 but begun in 1928 (*ORTC*, ii, p. 1343), is that of the writer's responsibility (*ibid.*, p. 805) ; but ironically for one who was criticising the art of his contemporaries for its irresponsibility four years earlier, it is now his own work which is under scrutiny and which he recognises as potentially dangerous. He realises that to 'peindre les passions, toutes les passions, peut avoir des effets incalculables et, dans la destinée de beaucoup d'hommes, un retentissement presque infini' (p. 806) ; but he defends himself against the accusation that he writes morally unhealthy books by making one new and significant claim – namely, that a writer is never in complete control of his art : 'nos critiques les plus sévères devraient méditer et s'efforcer de comprendre ce mot de Goncourt : "on n'écrit pas le livre qu'on veut." Non, on n'écrit

pas le livre qu'on veut' (p. 819). He pleads that the writer cannot be held entirely responsible for his books, that he can never be entirely sure of what they say : 'nos censeurs nous accablent comme si notre ouvrage dépendait entièrement de notre volonté libre, comme si nous décidions délibérément d'écrire un bon livre ou un mauvais livre, un récit édifiant, ou scandaleux' (p. 820). His critics have failed to appreciate that other, more mysterious forces are at work over which the writer has little or no command : 'ils ne paraissent avoir aucune idée, même très lointaine, de ce qu'il y a de mystérieux, d'imprévisible, d'inéluctable, dans toute création romanesque' (ibid.). Thus it seems that in this essay, Mauriac acknowledges openly that art is not necessarily a dependable tool which can be used to bring control and reinforce a sense of order, but is just as likely to bring disorder and disruption. As such, this marks a significant shift in thinking from *La Vie et la mort d'un poète*, and even *Le Roman*, where as we have seen, he implies that the writer's control over what he says is more or less secure, as long as what he creates is guided and shaped by a proper moral sense.

That Mauriac's art should problematise and contest rather than help to control and clarify is itself not a problem. After all, Gide for one comments in his letter that Mauriac's literature is 'excellente' (p. 833) ; but it becomes so when at the same time, Mauriac attempts to remain within the order and faith being challenged by his work. This is a problem which Gide also raises, and which Mauriac attempts to address in his essay, as its title suggests. Gide is quick to spot what Mauriac attempts to do in his biography of Racine. As Mauriac implies in his preface to the text, *La Vie de Jean Racine* can be read as an indirect attempt to rationalise his own problems as a writer : 'un auteur ne se décide à écrire une biographie entre mille autres que parce qu'avec ce maître choisi il se sent accordé : pour tenter l'approche d'un homme disparu depuis des siècles, la route la meilleure passe par nous-mêmes'¹⁰⁰. Mauriac finds in Racine another writer torn between what are fast emerging as the conflicting demands of art and faith. In effect, he is looking for a precedent for his own situation. He presents

¹⁰⁰ *La Vie de Jean Racine*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, op. cit., p. 59.

Racine as someone who, like him, was born into a rigid, Jansenist background, who had the urge to write, and in doing so produced dangerous art which, as it drew out the libidinal in man, saw him being condemned as an ‘empoisonneur public’. Yet Racine was also someone who could return to the Christian fold in later years ; whose work, on the assumption that it was not entirely within his control, did not jeopardise his chance of salvation. We can see Mauriac establishing Racine as a precedent most clearly when he imagines the young playwright rationalising the choices he must make :

“faut-il choisir? devait songer le jeune Racine. Dieu ne peut exiger que je me détruise et c’est me détruire que d’étouffer l’œuvre que je porte. Suis-je même libre d’empêcher qu’elle naisse? [...] Lorsque toutes mes créatures vivront, que j’aurai donné tout mon fruit [...] alors peut-être, s’il est temps encore, songerai-je sérieusement à désarmer le Dieu impitoyable de M. Singlin et de la tante Sainte-Thècle”¹⁰¹.

As Gide observes in response to this passage, ‘en somme, ce que vous cherchez, c’est la permission d’écrire *Destins* ; la permission d’être chrétien sans avoir à brûler vos livres’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 833). In other words, Mauriac is attempting to negotiate a compromise between his faith and his art, between God and a body of work which flirts with Mammon – more or less, in short, to have his cake and eat it. However, Gide implies that the real moral to be drawn from Racine’s life lies not in the situation of the young playwright imagined by Mauriac, but in the attitude of the later Racine who renounced his literary career : ‘Racine rend grâce à Dieu d’avoir bien voulu le reconnaître pour sien, *malgré* ses tragédies qu’il souhaitait n’avoir point écrites, qu’il parlait de brûler [...]. Vous vous félicitez que Dieu, avant de ressaisir Racine, lui ait laissé le temps d’écrire ses pièces, de les écrire *malgré* sa conversion’ (*ibid.* Gide’s emphasis).

Gide here makes clear that Mauriac’s point of view and that of Racine are radically opposed. The compromise which Mauriac attempts to make marks the point where parallels between the two writers must cease. They are separated by one crucial difference in particular : namely, Racine’s artistic silence following *Phèdre*. In his

¹⁰¹ *op. cit.*, p. 80.

biography, Mauriac is careful to give this a mainly aesthetic interpretation, suggesting that Racine writes no more because he achieves artistic perfection with his final play¹⁰². Gide, though, casts it in a more moral light. He sees in Racine's silence a sign that he recognises the fundamental incompatibility of art and faith, and the need to choose between the two – for one, it seems, will always compromise the other ; and above all (though not, as we shall see, exclusively), it is art which compromises faith. As Gide suggests, using one of his favourite images, if Racine chooses faith and renounces art, it is because he accepts that art always involves 'la collaboration du démon' (ibid.). To put it another way, art has a peculiar force : something in the way in which it operates disturbs the established order, disrupts the established ways of seeing, challenges the accepted representations of the world – and this would appear to be true of all art, not just the degraded or 'corrupt' art which Mauriac attacks in *La Vie et la mort d'un poète*. Its destabilising power is illustrated, of course, by the responses which his own work provokes. He gains a reputation with the religious authorities in particular who argue, as both Touzot and Jean Lacouture observe, that his books should be placed on the index of proscribed works because of their morally damaging content¹⁰³. In short, it seems that the only guarantee of devotion is artistic silence. Interestingly, this is an idea which seems to begin haunting Mauriac early on in his career. Four years previously in *La Vie et la mort d'un poète*, he suggests that 'la sainteté, c'est presque toujours le silence' (OA, p. 61). As soon as a writer breaks his silence, and expresses himself through art, he poses a threat to his faith, to the established religious and moral order. Now the key question, of course, is why this should be so. What is it about art, or what is it that art does, which makes it such a potent force of disruption?

Julia Kristeva, in her book *La révolution du langage poétique*, has attempted to provide an answer to these problems. Kristeva's starting point is the Lacanian model of the subject discussed above (pp. 46-47). This suggests that individuals are

¹⁰² op. cit., p. 107.

¹⁰³ See Touzot, art. cit., p. 133ff. and Lacouture, op. cit., pp. 359-361.

fully formed only when they are integrated into the symbolic order, which is above all the domain of language. Kristeva brings out the way in which this process of integration is essentially a collision between the biological and the social, involving as it does the splicing of a particular physical being into the general signifying structures of society. She examines in particular the mechanisms of insertion, and the relationship between the symbolic and the pre-linguistic realm – the realm of mainly physical experience evoked by Mauriac in his discussion of the novel by Bruno Gay-Lussac (see above, p. 55). For Kristeva, it is also the domain of what she calls the ‘semiotic’, by which she means the initial, pre-verbal forms of signification produced by the child. The semiotic comprises the physical and mental drives and energies running through the body, a loosely-structured pattern of desires and demands which are directed at the outside world. While these drives and impulses are meaningful, they are not yet properly codified or articulated in a conventional, socially significant way. Rather, they constitute ‘une articulation toute provisoire, essentiellement mobile, constituée de mouvements et de leurs stases éphémères’¹⁰⁴. They are a heterogeneous series of mainly libidinal impulses which are bound up with the body and express its needs and urges. As such, they are linked to an experience of the world which, as we have seen Mauriac himself strikingly suggest, is one of *jouissance*, of the pleasurable and ultimately selfish search for gratification. Raw and unsocialised, the semiotic is essentially disruptive, an unstable and unregulated force.

Learning to speak, or entering the symbolic, involves the proper structuring of these undifferentiated impulses, the articulation of the heterogeneous flow into the stable and fixed meanings of a shared signifying system. As Britton puts it, the symbolic is ‘meaning as subject position, as structure, and as ideological closure, based on a stable separation of signifier and signified producing “finished” meanings’¹⁰⁵. Linguistic and specifically syntactic structures are what allow the division, ordering and representation of the world by the speaking subject. Kristeva

¹⁰⁴ Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique*, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁰⁵ Celia Britton, art. cit., p. 246.

observes that the realm of signification ‘est toujours celui d’une proposition ou d’un jugement’¹⁰⁶. In other words, language affords the power to make statements about the world, to lay claim to it and therefore, potentially, to control it. This power is one in which, as we have seen, Mauriac revels and in which he invests. In effect, entry into the symbolic is a regulatory process both linguistically and, given that it is language which mediates the structures of society, socially as well. The symbolic curbs and socialises the semiotic, channelling the potentially disruptive urges and desires in appropriate directions according to the laws and prescriptions of society¹⁰⁷; and as both Mauriac himself reveals when he recounts his own education (see above, pp. 47-48), and Kristeva underlines, it is language specifically which enforces this ‘interdiction de la jouissance’¹⁰⁸.

Crucially, though, if the semiotic is suppressed by the emergence of formal language, it does not disappear, but remains intertwined in the symbolic, maintaining what Eagleton terms a ‘pulsional pressure’ within language¹⁰⁹. In effect, the semiotic goes on to form the physical foundation of language, emerging at various points – in tone, rhythm and its material edge, what Barthes calls ‘le grain de la voix’, or the trace of the body in language¹¹⁰. Kristeva identifies the continued presence of this ‘rythme sémiotique’ as a source of tension within language, at once integral to the symbolic yet as we have seen, in opposition to it. While on the whole it may be kept in check by the symbolic, its disruptive power nevertheless remains, as she makes clear when she argues that ‘indifférent au langage, énigmatique et féminin, cet espace sous-jacent à l’écrit est rythmique, déchaîné, irréductible à sa traduction verbale intelligible’¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁶ Kristeva, op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁰⁷ An archetypal example of this would be the incest taboo.

¹⁰⁸ Kristeva, op. cit., p. 78.

¹⁰⁹ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an introduction*, op. cit., p. 188.

¹¹⁰ Roland Barthes, ‘Le grain de la voix’, in *L’obvie et l’obtus* (Paris : Seuil, coll. “Points”, 1982), p. 238 ; cf. *Le plaisir du texte* (Paris : Seuil, coll. “Points”, 1973), p. 105, where he describes the idea more extensively : ‘c’est le langage tapissé de peau, un texte où l’on puisse entendre le grain du gosier, la patine des consonnes, la volupté des voyelles [...], toute une présence du museau humain’.

¹¹¹ Kristeva, op. cit., p. 29.

Clearly, parallels can be drawn between what Kristeva calls the ‘semiotic’, and the force which Stallybrass and White term the ‘carnavalesque’. Like the carnivalesque, the semiotic is a libidinal force having its origins in bodily impulses. Furthermore, both are disruptive forces which are subject to control and regulation by the social order ; but at the same time, they are also forces whose disturbing power can still be liberated – and liberated to significant effect by cultural practices in particular. For central to Kristeva’s thesis is the claim that literature is the domain where the symbolic is most at risk from the disruptive return of the semiotic. She defines art as the ‘sémiotisation du symbolique’, a practice which marks ‘l’afflux de la jouissance dans le langage’¹¹². In other words, art is the point where the semiotic and its energies seep back into formal language to the greatest extent. Literature is the realm where language is most readily released from its constraints, and where meanings are allowed to proliferate. The semiotic manifests itself in syntactic disruption, in the foregrounding of the materiality of language, or in increased lexical intensity, the explosion of polysemic or figural moments. As Eagleton puts it, ‘the semiotic is fluid and plural, a kind of pleasurable creative excess over precise meaning’¹¹³. It is also an excess in which the reader is caught up : the influx of *jouissance* is at once a feature of the texts themselves and, as Barthes in particular has suggested, a central part of the experience of reading they provoke – one, that is to say, of uncertainty, of dissipation, of an almost threatening loss of control¹¹⁴. Ironically, therefore, it is language itself – normally, as we have seen, the agent of order – which in the literary context proves to be an agent of disorder, responsible for bringing disruption and destabilising meaning.

This is what leads Kristeva to argue that art can have a significant political dimension, one which operates not so much at the level of content as that of form. To disrupt the structures and signs of language is to challenge and perhaps undermine the dominant order, because it means challenging the very tool used by that order to

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 77.

¹¹³ Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

¹¹⁴ See Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte*, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83, for example.

articulate the beliefs and ideologies which constitute it. As Kristeva puts it, ‘à travers des thèmes, des idéologies, des significations sociales, l’artiste fait passer dans l’ordre symbolique une pulsion asociale’¹¹⁵. This is particularly true of avant-garde art which, as I discussed above, sets out to scrutinise the way we represent the world, and problematise our ways of seeing ; and Kristeva identifies the end of the 19th Century as a period when the revolutionary potential of art, through concerted experimentation, is particularly potent. By scrutinising the representational powers of language, and undermining its stable structures, the art of poets such as Lautréamont and Mallarmé, and later that of their 20th Century descendants is, she argues, able to problematise other, fundamental principles – not the least of which is the bourgeois conception of the self. The notion of a stable identity is undermined, she suggests, by texts which through their formal innovation, consistently expose the reader to the flow of the semiotic : ‘avec Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Joyce, Artaud, *lire* signifie abandonner l’opération lexicale-syntaxique-sémantique du déchiffrement, et refaire le trajet de leur production’¹¹⁶. Confronting these texts ‘expose le sujet à des risques impossibles : abandonner son identité dans le rythme, dissoudre le butoir du réel dans une discontinuité mobile’¹¹⁷.

As both Britton and Eagleton have pointed out, this aspect of her argument in particular is not without its problems¹¹⁸. Yet interestingly, it is at least partly borne out by Mauriac’s reaction to avant-garde art which I discussed above (p. 46) : namely, his sense that something is amiss in the world around him, that the stability of society is being in some way threatened by new cultural practices which bear witness to a disturbing shift in perceptions of the self. However, it is also revealing to consider Mauriac’s own art in the light of Kristeva’s theory. For as we have seen, Mauriac is in no way a revolutionary or avant-garde writer, in the sense that he is not a writer setting out to question or undermine fundamental truths or the established order.

¹¹⁵ Kristeva, op. cit., p 69.

¹¹⁶ Kristeva, op. cit., p. 98. Kristeva’s emphasis.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Britton, art. cit., p. 248 ; cf. Eagleton, op. cit., p. 190. Both agree that, as Eagleton puts it, ‘her argument is easily caricaturable : will reading Mallarmé bring down the bourgeois state?’

Indeed, he is consciously writing against these new movements and their ambiguities, intending as he is for his writing to bring clarity, insight and control. To put it another way, he wants art to *reinforce* the symbolic order. Hence, perhaps, his preoccupation with grammatical form, with the need to find a responsible practice of writing – that is to say, one which can exploit most effectively the symbolic dimension of language and the power of representation and judgement it offers.

Mauriac's position, then, is the inverse of Kristeva's : the two theories of art are diametrically opposed. Ironically, though, Mauriac's own practice challenges his view and confirms that of Kristeva. For as I have shown, his work too is disruptive. Mauriac writes troubling books, books which are seen as provocative and which fall foul of the authorities. Moreover, as Scott forcefully points out, he does so despite himself¹¹⁹. His novels confirm the argument that art has the power to disturb, and that what it disturbs in particular is the symbolic, the established and dominant structures of society. The challenge they make is expressed most clearly at the thematic level, and is illustrated powerfully by *Thérèse* especially. Mauriac's most enigmatic character poses a danger to the society in which she circulates because she undermines and repeatedly questions its accepted ideas and authorities : she clashes with the representatives of that order (namely her father and her husband), who even from the opening pages, as we saw, must constantly elbow her into place literally and metaphorically. Furthermore, the birth of her child Marie sees her reject her socially-assigned role as parent ('le bruit commençait de courir que le sentiment maternel ne l'étouffait pas' : *ORTC*, ii, p. 69). In *Le Baiser au lépreux*, we see how it is the Church which is responsible for the perversion of the natural order as it insists on the arranged marriage between Jean and Noémi. The main source of the texts' disruptive force, though, is arguably located elsewhere, at a more fundamental level. For as we have seen, what the authorities find most problematic about Mauriac's work is the way he describes the world, the very words he uses to capture and evoke life – in other words, the descriptive moments where the narrator's eye lingers and the reader

¹¹⁹ Scott, *Mauriac : the Politics of a Novelist*, op. cit., pp. 58-61.

can start to scent the smell of the body. These are points, we might say, where the semiotic re-emerges with particular energy in his writing, making itself felt in the lexical intensity which I have argued is one of the most striking features of his writing. It appears as the narrating eye incessantly scrutinises and renders the body, and the materiality of the body is mimicked by the materiality of language itself.

Yet we have seen repeatedly that the central task Mauriac sets his writing is that precisely of controlling the body. It is for this reason that he adopts a Classical mode of expression, and his writing is so rigorously and tightly controlled at the syntactic level. Here, then, is where we see the consequences of what emerges as Mauriac's Faustian pact with language : as he appeals to the propositional power of language to control the bodily, the bodily in fact seeps back into his texts at other points, and he is betrayed by its lexical or figural realm, where meaning is especially hard to control. In other words, we can identify a crucial disjunction at the heart of his writing practice, one between its syntactic and lexical dimensions or, we might say, between rhetoric and figure. Mauriac's writing, in effect, is schizoïd : while one of its elements exerts the symbolic power of language, another provides a channel for the return of the semiotic, the libidinal, the material. His grammar works to keep the body in its place ; but simultaneously, his lexicon draws it forcefully to our attention. The lexicon is the weak point in Mauriac's writing through which the semiotic and libidinal currents can re-emerge. It is the source of the stench of flesh which caught the attention of the religious authorities and led them to mark out his books as troublesome ; it is what disrupts the reading of his texts and disturbs the mind.

At the same time, this disjunction between the attempted chastity of his writing and its actual bodiliness, the collision between precision and fleshy excess, is arguably as disturbing for Mauriac as it is for the authorities. After all, the body is what he had always been taught to suppress, what he is hoping to regulate through his work, and what he once more tells himself to curb in *Le Roman* – only to find it reappear with renewed vigour in *Destins*. In other words, and inversely to his intentions, Mauriac's art is revolutionary in the sense suggested by Kristeva : in

providing a channel through which the bodily can appear, it allows a disruptive return of the repressed, the return of something which challenges his own worldview, the structures of his own moral framework, and which remains a consistently haunting and troublesome presence. That it is an unwanted and disturbing presence is signalled particularly by the fevered and nervy tone which characterises his description of the body, and by the fact that the carnivalesque motifs which surface in his work are ‘perverted’, or have turned sour. For as Stallybrass and White predict, whenever carnivalesque impulses intrude where they should not, when they reappear in places from where it was thought they had been banished, their return is a shocking and disruptive one, a cause not for celebration but of anxiety and neurosis¹²⁰.

Yet if the return of the bodily is undesirable for Mauriac, it is nevertheless arguable that the tension it generates is fundamental to the distinctiveness and success of his texts. The disjunction between syntax and lexicon can be seen to provide the material foundation for the central thematic oppositions of his work : Grace and Nature, pagan and Christian, body and soul. It provokes the nervous energy which runs through his texts, and particularly the most disturbing and effective texts of the pre-crisis period – those, in other words, which lead up to *Dieu et Mammon*, and Mauriac’s own recognition that writing unleashes mysterious and troubling forces. I would suggest that it is this tension more than anything which identifies his texts as specifically Mauriacian or Catholic, in the sense that they are texts which only a Catholic, someone bound up in the Catholic faith, its worldview, and especially its anxious surveillance of the body could write. His novels are defined by his attempt to pin down a slippery and mercury-like force, an attempt demanded of him by a faith which makes him see and therefore write the body in a certain way. It is in this struggle to pin down the body with his writing that the source of the ‘odeur mauriacienne’ is to be found.

¹²⁰ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, op. cit., p. 108. See also ch. 5, ‘Bourgeois hysteria and the carnivalesque’.

The importance of the tension between syntax and lexicon, or the symbolic and the semiotic, is highlighted when we consider the novels written in the post-crisis period, the first of which is *Ce qui était perdu*, published in 1929. Tellingly, this, along with *Le Nœud de vipères* (1932), is one of the three novels which Mauriac himself considers to be truly ‘Catholic’, the third being *Les Anges noirs* (1936). They are texts which, as he puts it, are ‘tout entiers fondés sur la Révélation’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 884) ; which, as they lead their main characters – and therefore with luck their readers – to God, provide a clearer, more explicit religious message. Thus it seems that Mauriac’s immediate response to the problem of control he acknowledged in *Dieu et Mammon* is to tighten his grip on the meaning of his texts, to exert a greater degree of control over them and reassert the power of the symbolic. It is a solution which is not without its problems, Jacques Petit pointing out that in *Ce qui était perdu*, Mauriac intervenes somewhat clumsily at various moments to clarify the spiritual status of his characters (*ORTC*, ii, pp. 1061-62). To reassert the message of his faith in this way is to compromise his novel’s aesthetic success, as its ambiguity is lost. Mauriac avoids the problem in *Le Nœud* through the skilful use of the first person narrative. The text is dialogic, one which awaits a response, which offers a possible rather than definite truth, which gestures to the path of redemption Louis is likely to take rather than leads down it. Generally, though, his post-crisis novels are less consistently successful, and perhaps the most telling evidence of this is the fact that they are far less well-known and well-read than the darker, troubling fiction of the 1920s. Yet the striking thing in texts such as *Ce qui était perdu* is that even as Mauriac takes a firmer control over their meanings, the bodily nevertheless continues to seep back in, present as it is in the very first pages of *Ce qui était perdu* (*ORTC*, ii, p. 276 ; cf. pp. 287, 295). The semiotic, it seems, is a force which is always latent in his work, always erupting through the surface of his texts, catching the reader’s eye, and ensuring that the distinctive taste of Mauriac’s writing remains.

5. Conclusion.

It is perhaps easy to forget that Mauriac's novels, indeed Mauriac himself, are a precise historical phenomenon, products of a particular combination of circumstances – such as the fact that Mauriac writes during a period when the bourgeois order is troubled by uncertainty and instability, or that he does so from within a worldview with a strong set of convictions, chief amongst which is a rigid taboo of the body. This part of the thesis has demonstrated the importance of resituating Mauriac in context in order fully to understand the forces at work on his writing. It has shown too that the context we must consider is not purely literary, but more broadly socio-cultural. We have seen that the discourses which circulate around him – discourses which constitute society and Mauriac himself – profoundly affect and influence his own literary discourse, the very way in which he writes. I have shown that these effects are real and tangible, and can account for specific features of his writing. My approach is one which can help ground what can be impressionistic talk of the 'atmosphere' of his texts or their 'style', and identifies more clearly what it is that gives his best work its particular edge.

One of the most significant things to emerge from this discussion, perhaps, is the central contradiction between Mauriac himself, as an intentionally conservative writer – in the sense that he intends his art to bring not disruption and chaos but clarity, understanding and control – and his best work, which displays the problematic power of art, its ability precisely to trouble and disturb. It is a contradiction which appears again when we consider his texts from another perspective. As we have seen, Mauriac himself is hostile to, and feels threatened by, the new artistic movements appearing around him, and the new philosophical moods they reflect. Yet arguably, he is among the first writers to capture and explore one of the most important new intellectual moods of the 20th Century, one whose roots can already be found in the texts of his contemporaries. In 1952, Mauriac comes to realise that one of the key

themes of his texts is what he calls ‘le problème de l’autre’¹²¹. The next part of this thesis will continue the recontextualisation of Mauriac and his work by considering his claim to be an ‘existentialiste avant la lettre’¹²², and focus on his telling and re-telling of one of the most fundamental stories of all : ‘l’histoire de deux êtres qui se sont affrontés’ (*ORTC*, iii, p. 167).

¹²¹ ‘Vue sur mes romans’, *Le Figaro littéraire*, 15 novembre 1952, repr. in Jean Touzot (ed.), *François Mauriac* (Paris : Les Editions de l’Herne, *Les Cahiers de l’Herne*, 48, 1985), p. 166.

¹²² *ibid.*

Part 2. Images of modernity : Mauriac and the problem of the Other

1. Introduction : Mauriac ancient or modern?

As I discussed in the introduction to the thesis, Mauriac has perhaps suffered more than most writers at the hands of critics, both friendly and hostile, who have helped to establish a certain image of him and his work. The important role played by critics in shaping the perception of a writer's work, and the potential power they have as a result, is recognised by Mauriac throughout his career. His attitude is above all one of suspicion, made clear in the opening chapter of *Dieu et Mammon* (1928), where he launches a scathing attack on the critical community. The majority of critics, he says, are interested above all in being able to slot a writer into a pre-defined position in the literary field : 'beaucoup de critiques veulent savoir à qui ils ont affaire ; ils n'aiment que les écrivains qu'ils peuvent classer' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 782). Unconcerned, or more likely, unable to understand the complexities of the writer's work, the critic quickly grows irritated at those who refuse to conform to the image laid down for them : 'il tient à ses tableaux synoptiques, exècre les écrivains hybrides, n'ayant plus le goût, ni le loisir, ni sans doute le pouvoir d'entrer dans leur complexité' (*ibid.*, p. 783). Yet the power of the critics is nevertheless confirmed to him when in 1960, he looks back at his career. He is unsurprised to discover that he has long since been allotted his place in literary history, and given what he sardonically calls his own, neatly labelled 'vitrine' : 'sur ma vitrine à moi on a écrit "Roman traditionnel". Là, du moins, j'existe, je suis exposé à ma place avec mes titres de livres, avec mon étiquette, et je fournis parfois des textes pour les dissertations françaises, des exemples pour les exercices grammaticaux'¹. As he reflects on his fortunes at the hands of the critics, however, he fails to mention the one man who arguably helped to establish this image more than anyone, and who could perhaps do so, ironically, because he understood Mauriac's work only too well.

¹ François Mauriac, 'La vitrine', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 26 novembre 1960, repr. in Jean Touzot (ed.), *François Mauriac* (Paris : Les Editions de l'Herne, *Les Cahiers de l'Herne*, 48, 1985), p. 54.

Jean-Paul Sartre's article on Mauriac's novel *La Fin de la nuit* was published in the *Nouvelle Revue française (NRF)* of February 1939. His attack on Mauriac's work is famous for its closing sentence in particular, in which he concludes that 'Dieu n'est pas un artiste ; M. Mauriac non plus'². This is the culmination of a vigorous critique. As the title of his article suggests, Sartre's analysis turns on the question of freedom. He argues that a successful novel works by generating the illusion of freedom, that is to say by giving the reader the impression that its characters, like him, are projecting forward into their own undecided future, that they share his own potentiality. When we read, Sartre argues, we slip into a character's life and share his drama with him. As he picks up the story of Rogojine in Dostoyevsky's *The Possessed*, Sartre suggests, 'je me glisse en lui et le voilà qui s'attend avec mon attente, il a peur de lui *en moi* ; il vit'³. This process of absorption, though, can only take place if we feel their futures remain unknown to us and them, if their development is shrouded in ambiguity : 'voulez-vous que vos personnages vivent? Faites qu'ils soient libres'⁴. The best way to ensure this is not to define or analyse characters and their states of mind, but simply to present them and their actions to the reader : they should remain inscrutable, as we recognise those around us to be in life⁵. As soon as he feels that the future of a novel's characters is pre-determined, whether through heredity, social influences, 'ou quelque autre mécanisme', the spell is broken for Sartre. He drops out of the novel's world, for it can no longer support his own consciousness, his own duration⁶.

The problem is one which, for Sartre, Mauriac's novel illustrates clearly, and he locates its source in Mauriac's narrative technique. The reader's initial attempt to identify with Thérèse and slip into her consciousness, a move seemingly encouraged early on as Mauriac adopts her point of view in the opening pages of the novel, is thwarted, Sartre argues, by Mauriac's continual movement back and forth between

² Jean-Paul Sartre, 'M. François Mauriac et la liberté', in *Situations*, I (Paris : Gallimard, 1947), p. 52.

³ Sartre, art. cit., p. 34.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*

presenting her as a subject and an object of consciousness. Sartre highlights how Mauriac can shift rapidly from one perspective to the other. We may begin by seeing the world, and Thérèse herself, through her own eyes, privy to her thoughts and experiences, and knowing only what she knows ; but we are then jolted into another position, find ourselves with the narrator observing her from the outside, and being given insights into her character of which she is seemingly unaware : ‘elle entendit sonner neuf heures. Il fallait gagner un peu de temps encore, car il était trop tôt pour avaler le cachet qui lui assurerait quelques heures de sommeil ; non que ce fût dans les habitudes de cette désespérée prudente, mais ce soir elle ne pouvait se refuser ce secours’ (*ORTC*, iii, p. 83). Thus the reader finds himself in a strange position, at once the accomplice of Thérèse and her judge. As Sartre asks in relation to this passage, ‘qui juge ainsi Thérèse une “désespérée prudente” ? ce ne peut être elle. Non, c’est M. Mauriac, c’est moi-même’⁷. The reader in Mauriac’s text is placed not at the level of the characters, but at that of the narrator, a narrator whose role it is to bring insight and clarification ; not at the level of the human or subjective, in other words, but at that of the absolute or divine.

In short, what Sartre finds most problematic in Mauriac’s texts is the author’s omniscience, the fact that he behaves like God in his own universe : ‘toutes les bizarreries de sa technique s’expliquent par ce qu’il prend le point de vue de Dieu sur ses personnages : Dieu voit le dedans et le dehors, le fond des âmes et les corps, tout l’univers à la fois’⁸. His description of Thérèse as a ‘désespérée prudente’, ‘n’est pas une hypothèse, c’est une clarté qui nous vient d’en haut’⁹. Sartre’s reference here to the ‘clarity’ of Mauriac’s vision is highly appropriate, for the focus of his criticism is precisely Mauriac’s Classical mode of expression or *écriture*, the mode of clarity and lucidity which, as we saw in the first part of the thesis, he argued it was essential for a novelist to adopt¹⁰. What was for Mauriac a moral necessity, however, has become, for

⁷ Sartre, art. cit., p. 40.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 42.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁰ See above, Part 1, section 4, pp. 60 ff.

Sartre, aesthetically and even philosophically problematic. In intervening to define his characters or clarify aspects of their personality, Mauriac commits the cardinal Sartrean sin of robbing them of their freedom. They become little more than objects with a fixed essence : ‘avant d’écrire il forge leur essence, il décrète qu’ils *seront* ceci ou cela’¹¹. Mauriac, he concludes, is guilty of ‘assassinating’ his characters¹².

In criticising Mauriac’s narrative technique, Sartre is adamant to the point of being normative. No author, he says, has the right to act like God, passing judgement on his characters and behaving like a privileged spectator : ‘il est temps de le dire : le romancier n’est point Dieu. [...] Je soutiens qu’il n’a pas le droit de porter ces jugements absolus. Un roman est une action racontée de différents points de vue’¹³. Indeed, his attack has a chilling sense of finality about it. As Sartre’s criticisms begin to accumulate, it reads like a man being sentenced. Mauriac’s technical errors, he concludes, disqualify him from being called a novelist : ‘appellerez-vous “roman” cet ouvrage anguleux et glacé? [...] *La Fin de la nuit* n’est pas un roman – tout au plus une somme de signes et d’intentions. M. Mauriac n’est pas un romancier’¹⁴. Sartre, in short, is seemingly intent on putting Mauriac in his place and dealing with him once and for all.

Mauriac, it seems, was caught off guard by Sartre’s intervention, his central reaction at being the subject of such a devastating critique one of surprise. As he says in an interview thirty years later, ‘j’ai été frappé, si vous voulez, par l’attaque de Sartre’¹⁵. Why indeed did Mauriac merit such attention from Sartre, and why Sartre invest so much energy in confronting him? In a recent article, Caroline Casseville has drawn attention to the complex motivations, both philosophical and political, behind Sartre’s attack on Mauriac¹⁶. As the four-year gap between the publication of *La Fin*

¹¹ Sartre, art. cit., p. 43.

¹² *ibid.*, p. 44.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁵ *France-Soir*, 28 février 1969, cit. in Michel Contat, M. Rybalka, *Les Ecrits de Sartre* (Paris : Gallimard, 1970), p. 72.

¹⁶ Caroline Casseville, ‘Mauriac et la critique sartrienne’, *Nouveaux Cahiers François Mauriac*, 1 (1993), 77-95.

de la nuit and Sartre's critique would suggest, his article is not a spontaneous response to Mauriac. Rather, Casseville underlines that it in fact forms part of a broader campaign orchestrated by Jean Paulhan, the then-editor of the *NRF*, to help launch Sartre's literary career. As she demonstrates, Paulhan, having spotted Sartre's talent, had charged himself with stage-managing the young and unknown author's *entrée en jeu* into the literary arena¹⁷. Yet the motive behind the attack on Mauriac was more sophisticated than the simple case of an unknown writer taking on a well-established figure in order to generate publicity and mark his arrival on the literary scene. As Anna Boschetti points out, Mauriac is one of a number of writers targeted by Sartre at the time, each of whom occupies a specific position in the literary field, and so has a certain symbolic value : 'des maîtres dont le jeune écrivain se réclame (Faulkner, Dos Passos) ; des auteurs de son âge auxquels il se confronte (Camus, Blanchot, l'ami Nizan) ; des aînés plus ou moins célèbres, influents, discutés (Mauriac et Giraudoux, Ponge et Parain, Drieu la Rochelle et Charles Morgan)'¹⁸. In commenting on and situating himself in relation to these writers, Sartre can mark out his own territory. As such, Mauriac interests him as much for what he symbolises or the position he holds as for the particular problems or intricacies the work itself may pose.

What, then, was the nature of Mauriac's position? By the late 1930s, although Mauriac's success and prestige as a literary figure had long since been established, it was prestige of a certain sort. This is reflected clearly in his election to the *Académie française* in 1932, an institution which embodied the social and literary orthodoxy and the force of tradition. While election to the *Académie* marked Mauriac's consecration – that is to say, the general recognition and enhancement of his artistic value –, it was consecration by the establishment rather than, as Mauriac himself would have preferred, by the artistic avant-garde, represented by the group of writers at the *NRF*. As Mauriac acknowledges in the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs*, he

¹⁷ Casseville, art. cit., pp. 79-81.

¹⁸ Anna Boschetti, *Sartre et 'Les Temps Modernes'* (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 1985), p. 63.

craved recognition by the *NRF* as he sought to establish his literary career in the 1920s : ‘c’était *La Nouvelle Revue française* qui comptait pour moi, c’était l’approbation de Jacques Rivière, de Ramon Fernandez, d’André Gide surtout’ (*OA*, p. 815) ; but that recognition would always elude him. Despite strong friendships with its individual members (Jacques Rivière, Charles Du Bos, Gide), he never really moved beyond the fringes of the journal itself, having a spell as its theatre critic in 1925-26, but remaining an otherwise occasional contributor. He was kept out firstly by his social position. For the *NRF* group, as Lacouture puts it, Mauriac was ‘celui qui a toute sa vie dîné en ville et fréquenté les “gens du monde” [...], un écrivain lauréat de la bourgeoisie, en attendant l’Académie’¹⁹ ; and in his interviews with Jean Amrouche in 1952, Mauriac himself agrees that his election to the *Académie française* rather than the *NRF* was in some instinctive sense right, that the *Académie* was a more appropriate place for him to be, simply because of his own basic allegiance to the bourgeois values it embodied, and which were also recognised by his family. He found himself wanting to reassure his family, sceptical of the whole notion of a literary ‘career’, by conforming to what it would recognise as the signs of success : ‘il faut tout de même revenir au fait que j’étais un jeune bourgeois, de tradition bourgeoise, appartenant à une famille bourgeoise, qui croyait donc aux valeurs auxquelles croyait sa famille et qui [...] voulait rester dans le droit fil de ce que sa famille considérait comme la réussite’²⁰.

Beyond this social dimension, he was also kept apart from the *NRF* by a corresponding literary and intellectual conservatism. For, as I discussed in the first part of the thesis, Mauriac is simply not an avant-garde writer, and could never be so. He is prevented from this by the moralist within him who, as we saw, has a very clear sense of what he considers to be the ‘correct’ function of art²¹. Malcolm Scott sums the situation up well when he says that Mauriac ‘was always to associate the

¹⁹ Jean Lacouture, *François Mauriac*, 2 vols (Paris : Seuil, coll. “Points”, 1990), vol. i, p. 262.

²⁰ François Mauriac, *Souvenirs retrouvés*, entretiens avec Jean Amrouche (Paris : Fayard-I.N.A., 1981), p. 118.

²¹ See above, Part 1, section 4, p. 60.

onslaught on traditional form with moral subversion'²². As I argued, his stance is articulated in his adoption of the Classical *écriture*, which is a reactionary mode in the sense that its choice is a reaction to what he sees as the dangerous developments going on around him. This is why the emergence of the bodily in his texts is such a striking and, for Mauriac, destabilising return of the repressed.

The publication of Sartre's critique by the *NRF*, then, is perhaps the final confirmation of Mauriac's incompatibility with the revue²³. Sartre's article itself both exploits the instinctive recognition of Mauriac's orthodoxy and reinforces it with his own analysis. Its power lies in the way a new poetics emerges out of the definition and criticism of orthodox practices which, by being thrown into relief, then become seen, unavoidably, as old and outmoded. Sartre, in other words, uses Mauriac as a means of engineering a break, of establishing a clear divide between old and new, of placing himself, as Pierre Bourdieu would put it, 'en avant'²⁴ – that is to say, in a new space where, as he is the first to claim it, he can be the first to make the rules. Hence the article's strongly normative element.

It is this normative dimension which, taken at face value at least, makes Sartre's attack problematic : in effect, of course, he is blaming Mauriac for failing to write like an existentialist, and for not having an appropriate (in other words, Sartrean) notion of freedom. His normativity has also led to various, often impassioned attempts to refute or at least refine the critique²⁵. Sartre's criticism of Mauriac's authorial interventions and omniscience in particular have been seized on, for it is a charge which can be levelled not only at Mauriac but at many other French

²² Malcolm Scott, *Mauriac : the politics of a novelist* (Edinburgh : Scottish Academic Press, 1980), p. 45.

²³ For Mauriac on his relationship with the *NRF*, see in particular *Souvenirs retrouvés*, op. cit., pp. 117-125. See also John Flower, 'Mauriac's contributions to the *Nouvelle Revue française*', in John Flower and Bernard Swift (eds), *François Mauriac : visions and reappraisals* (Oxford : Berg, 1989), pp. 117-131.

²⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art* (Paris : Seuil, coll. "Points", 1998), p. 263. For his discussion of the evolution of the literary field as a conflictual process, the emergence of avant-garde movements, and the 'ageing' and overthrow of established artists and their work, see pp. 234-268.

²⁵ Both Nelly Corneau, *L'Art de François Mauriac* (Paris : Grasset, 1951), pp. 364-380, and Casseville, art. cit., attempt to refute the critique. William Holdheim, 'François Mauriac and Sartre's Mauriac criticism', *Symposium*, 16 (1962), 245-258 suggests ways in which it could be refined.

novelists. As Mauriac himself puts it, ‘tout le roman français, depuis *la Princesse de Clèves* jusqu’à *Adolphe*, et même celui de Stendhal et de Balzac, tombait sous les coups des critiques dont Sartre m’accablait’²⁶. However, to dismiss Sartre’s criticisms on this basis is in fact to miss what is the crucial point of the article, one which becomes clear in its final paragraph, and which is frequently overlooked. For Sartre is not necessarily arguing that the techniques of intervention and omniscience are wrong *per se*, but that they are wrong in a contemporary context – that they no longer offer an accurate way of representing the world and the people in it, given that a fundamental change has occurred in our understanding of that world. Mauriac, he says, ‘a voulu ignorer, comme font du reste la plupart de nos auteurs, que la théorie de la relativité s’applique intégralement à l’univers romanesque, que, dans un vrai roman, pas plus que dans le monde d’Einstein, il n’y a pas de place pour un observateur privilégié’²⁷. He has failed to recognise the significance of the fact that he is writing in a post-Einsteinian world. It is no longer realistic to adopt a position from which to make absolute judgements when the possibility that such a position exists has so recently been called into question ; and likewise, by extension, perhaps, it is unwise to model oneself on God in a world where God no longer exists. Mauriac, in short, is in a world which he is no longer qualified to represent, which requires a new poetics and a new philosophy – one which, it is implied, Sartre is best placed to articulate. Through his critique, in other words, Sartre is keen to establish Mauriac not simply as a traditional writer, but as an anachronism, a symbol of the old order who has nothing of relevance left to say ; and he does so, arguably, with some success. As Mauriac himself puts it when he looks back, ‘le jour où l’écrivain le plus important de la nouvelle génération essaie de vous tordre le cou, ce jour-là, vous avez nettement le sentiment qu’il y a quelque chose de changé’²⁸.

²⁶ François Mauriac, ‘Ma conception du roman’, in *Paroles perdus et retrouvées*, ed. by Keith Goesch (Paris : Grasset, 1986), p. 66.

²⁷ Sartre, art. cit., p. 52.

²⁸ François Mauriac, *Les Paroles restent*, interviews recueillies et présentées par Keith Goesch (Paris : Grasset, 1985), p. 85.

Yet ironically, in the face of Sartre's eagerness to establish Mauriac as an ancient, the more we explore Mauriac's artistic vision – which we can define not only as what his eye represents, what he sees in the world, but also as the way he sees it – the more we are left with a striking impression : while Mauriac may not be an avant-garde writer, he is arguably nevertheless one who is very modern. In the first part of the thesis, I discussed the ways in which his view of the world, and representation of it, are shaped by his background. I explored what I called the history that made Mauriac, and the way this history influenced his development as a specifically 'Catholic' novelist, and in particular, determined his distinctive, tension-filled relationship with the body. At the same time, though, even if Sartre takes him to task for failing to appreciate the significance of the notion of relativity, it becomes clear that Mauriac is also a writer who is of his time : he is a writer whose vision is produced in part by forces, events or ideas which are also shaping the world around him, as well as one who at various times in his work captures those forces and events, gives a sense of the particular nature of his time. More specifically, I want to argue that Mauriac's 'modernity' expresses itself in two ways in particular : firstly, in what we can call his materialist vision. In Part 1, I began to explore how Mauriac is sensitive to, captures and conveys physical sensation, and the often problematic experience of existence. That this materialist vision is also a modern vision is indicated by the striking parallels we are encouraged to draw between his images of man and those of other, perhaps more recognised artists of the modern condition, such as Beckett, Bacon and especially Giacometti.

Secondly, Mauriac's modernity can also be seen to lie in the portrait he offers of the world around him. He can be seen as a perhaps unexpected painter of modern life, a painter who captures experiences specific to the modern condition, such as that of city life. Moreover, I will argue that his portrait reveals modernity to mean one thing in particular, raises a question which will preoccupy not only him but 20th Century thought and culture in general : modernity seems to bring with it a sudden, more acute awareness of the other, a greater sensitivity to the other's presence and to

the problems the other can pose. It is a theme which, although generally overlooked by critics, is central to Mauriac's own work, and one which, ironically, Sartre's critique helps to bring to our attention. Sartre may criticise Mauriac's intervention, and his definition or labelling of his characters ; but this can be seen not as a flaw, but as an instance of a broader problem with which Mauriac engages throughout his work. It reappears again, for example, in his preoccupation with his image as a writer, and the way in which he is classified and labelled by those around him. Such images are expressions of the power individuals are capable of exerting over each other, and form part of the complex dynamic of intersubjectivity. It is a dynamic which is represented by Mauriac in his texts, but also experienced by him in a way which has important consequences for other aspects of his work such as his attitude to autobiography.

My aim in the second part of the thesis, then, is to explore Mauriac's portrait of modernity and draw attention to the concern with intersubjectivity which emerges from it. In doing so, I am arguing for the realignment of Mauriac, and attempting to change the image of his work – an attempt which turns in part on highlighting his preoccupation with the image. I aim to challenge the label 'Catholic Novelist', one which can disguise what are important similarities with the central figures of 20th Century French culture. In short, I will explore how Mauriac can be seen as an existentialist writer, in the broad sense that he is concerned with the nature and problems of existence in the 20th Century, and in particular the ways in which that existence is determined by the presence of the other. Such a realignment is in fact encouraged by Mauriac himself, the idea a regular feature of interviews, articles and speeches in the post-war years. Ironically, moreover, it is Sartre who gives him the most appropriate vocabulary with which to express what he finds, as he looks back at his work, to be a constant preoccupation – that, as he puts it, of 'ce que les philosophes appellent aujourd'hui le "problème de l'autre"'²⁹. Speaking in Oxford in

²⁹ François Mauriac, 'Vue sur mes romans', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 15 novembre 1952, repr. in Jean Touzot (ed.), *François Mauriac*, op. cit., p. 166.

1947, he suggests that

il y a un point cependant où le roman tel que je l'ai conçu rejoint celui de mes cadets existentialistes : *le Désert de l'amour*, c'est le titre d'un de mes livres [...] mais ce pourrait être le titre de mon œuvre entier. Ce drame de l'avenir, cette impossibilité où nous sommes de posséder l'autre non en tant qu'objet passif et que je vois, mais en tant que sujet, en tant qu'il est cet être qui me regarde, cet être à jamais inaccessible, c'est là un des thèmes de la philosophie existentielle.³⁰

Mauriac, it seems, is audaciously suggesting a possible reinterpretation of his work, provoking us into considering it in existential terms, and stressing his own modernity, the way he captures the mood of the times. It is a suggestion which seems to have gone largely unnoticed, but which deserves to be investigated further.

2. Mauriac, modernity and the emergence of the Other.

Nine years after he launches his critique of Mauriac's work, Sartre's eye is caught by the work of Alberto Giacometti, and he writes the first of two articles on the Swiss-born sculptor³¹. Sartre's interest also came to be shared by Jean Genet, who would later write a book exploring Giacometti's sculptures and his technique³². Clearly, if to be attacked by Sartre was a sign that a writer was to be consigned to the past, so to be celebrated in this way by two of the major figures of existentialism implied recognition and acknowledgement as a modern artist – that is to say, as an artist deemed capable of articulating the experience of modern man, and possessing the techniques or the vernacular enabling him to do so : a vernacular which, as we saw, it was suggested Mauriac lacked. As he explores Giacometti's spindly and skeletal statues in his first article, Sartre argues that our shock on seeing them comes in part from the way in which they differ radically from the dominant forms of statuary. In the same way that, as he was suggesting at the time, Nathalie Sarraute is an 'anti-novelist'³³, so too he implies that Giacometti is an 'anti-sculptor'. The history

³⁰ 'Ma conception du roman', in *Paroles perdus et retrouvés*, op. cit., p. 69.

³¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, 'La Recherche de l'absolu', *Les Temps Modernes*, janvier 1948, 1153-1163. In 1954, he wrote a second article, 'Les Peintures de Giacometti', *Les Temps Modernes*, juin 1954, 2221-2232, to which I shall return later in this part of the thesis.

³² Jean Genet, *L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti* (Paris : L'Arbalète, 1963).

³³ In his preface to Sarraute's *Portrait d'un inconnu* of 1948.

of sculpture, Sartre argues, is littered with what he calls ‘créatures lisses et muettes’, an endless series of smooth, well-finished, physically inoffensive statues with a triumphant pose and insolent perfection. The aim of such statues, for him, is to make us forget our own bodies and the problems they cause us : ‘il y a si longtemps que nous sommes les familiers de créatures lisses et muettes, faites pour nous guérir du mal d’avoir un corps’³⁴. They encourage us to overlook the dangers of the world, the fact that the world must be lived in, that our bodies will be put at risk : ‘ces génies domestiques ont surveillé les jeux de notre enfance ; ils témoignent dans les jardins que le monde est sans risques, qu’il n’arrive rien à personne’³⁵.

Giacometti’s work stands in sharp, almost brutal contrast to such traditional statues. The viewer is disturbed by being confronted with bodies which have been exposed to the world, which have lived in the world – by being confronted, in short with ‘le mal d’avoir un corps’. The bodies shaped by the sculptor, unlike those of traditional statues, have a story to tell. As Sartre puts it, ‘à ces corps-ci, quelque chose est arrivé’³⁶. As we examine Giacometti’s figures, we find ourselves being caught up in that narrative. Our task, it seems, is to try to piece together what their story might be. His creatures have a recognisable air, perhaps uncomfortably so : ‘sortent-ils d’un miroir concave, d’une fontaine de Jouvence ou d’un camp de déportés?’³⁷. Yet if the precise details of their story remain elusive, its underlying theme nevertheless becomes clear : Giacometti’s work, concludes Sartre, ‘nous raconte l’étonnante aventure de la chair, *notre* aventure’³⁸.

Sartre’s exploration is interesting in particular for the perhaps surprising similarities it brings to mind between Giacometti’s figures and Mauriac’s work. As we compare the statues, and the way in which Mauriac describes his characters, striking parallels between the two begin to emerge. As Aline Moraud has already noted, for example, the scrawny Jean Péloueyre in *Le Baiser au lépreux* ‘dresse une

³⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘La Recherche de l’absolu’, art. cit., p. 1161.

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 1161-1162.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1162. Sartre’s emphasis.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.*, Sartre’s emphasis.

silhouette à la Giacometti' as he walks through the forest³⁹. Furthermore, Sartre's powerful formulation of the 'mal d'avoir un corps' offers a neat way of characterising Mauriac's similarly sensitive awareness of the body's presence which, as I began to explore in the first part of the thesis, distinguishes his portrait of man. Mauriac, perhaps, could be called a textual Giacometti, capturing in words what Giacometti expresses in his figures. It is not that all his characters have the appearance of one of the sculptor's statues. On the contrary, as I discussed in Part 1, they are frequently corpulent, like Elizabeth Gornac in *Destins* or Félicité in *Genitrix*⁴⁰; but in common with the more skeletal characters, such as Jean Péloueyre, described by Mauriac, their bodies impinge on their experience. Mauriac repeatedly evokes what it feels like to live with a body, as he paints the body in process. In the opening pages of *Destins*, for example, we watch as Elizabeth 'aperçut son beau-père assis, une canne entre les jambes. Le sang affluait à ses joues, à son crâne trempé de sueur, gonflait les veines de ses mains, de son cou trop court, de ses tempes' (*ORTC*, ii, pp. 109-110). Mauriac's world is populated by bodies to which something is happening, which call for our attention. He captures what it feels like to be alive, to feel the heart beating, to be weighed down by a body, in the same way that Giacometti confronts us with the sheer physical presence of the body even as, ironically, he whittles it down almost to translucence. Reading Mauriac's descriptions of his characters becomes a strangely physical experience. As I pointed out in Part 1, we are made to stumble over the features he describes, and are confronted by closely observed and seemingly magnified details⁴¹. In the same way that, for Genet, Giacometti's figures work not just at a visual but also a tactile level – 'je détourne les yeux et ma main continue seul ses découvertes : le cou, la tête, la nuque, les épaules...les sensations affluent au bout de mes doigts'⁴² – so to the reader of Mauriac's fiction almost senses the breath of his characters, feels the bristles on their chin : 'Thérèse scruta ce visage sali de bile, ces

³⁹ Aline Moraud, 'François Mauriac auteur de "Nouveaux Romans"?', *Travaux du Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur François Mauriac*, 7 (juin 1980), p. 10.

⁴⁰ See above, Part 1, section 2, p. 30.

⁴¹ See above, Part 1, section 2, pp. 34-35.

⁴² Jean Genet, *L'Atelier d'Alberto Giacometti*, op. cit., p. 6 ; cf. pp. 18-19.

joues hérissées de durs poils d'un blanc jaune que les lanternes éclairaient vivement' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 22).

In other words, both Giacometti and Mauriac have what we could describe as a strongly materialist vision, a vision which is sensitive to and captures man's material nature. As Mauriac himself puts it, he is 'un métaphysicien qui travaille dans le concret'⁴³. He is an artist of experience and sensation, one who captures what it means to live in the world and perceive the world, at both a psychological and a physical level. In *Le Désert de l'amour*, for example, when he describes Raymond's playfulness with his young nieces, it is the physical sensations of the contact which are drawn to our attention : 'il prenait n'importe quoi de frais, de tiède et de vivant comme une défense contre ce qu'il appelait les cadavres' (*ORTC*, i, p. 746). Mauriac's vision is striking not least because, as I discussed in the first part of the thesis, it keeps imposing itself despite his best efforts to keep the bodily under control. It is as if he cannot stop seeing the fleshiness of the world, until he must finally acknowledge that it is this fleshiness which defines his art, which makes it distinctive. As he puts it in his interviews with Jean Amrouche, 'mon art prend sa source dans le plus trouble, le plus compliqué, le plus *charnel* de moi-même'⁴⁴. His vision colours the way he sees every aspect of his world, including his faith. Indeed, it lends itself to a powerful portrait of Christ, as it allows him to give the idea of incarnation its fullest sense.

In his telling of the life of Christ, *Vie de Jésus* of 1936, Mauriac foregrounds Christ the man, the sweaty, dusty Christ who accosts a Samaritan woman as he rests by the road and asks for water⁴⁵. As we read the text, we again have an inescapable sense that things have happened, and will happen to this body. Like one of Giacometti's anti-statues, Mauriac's portrait challenges what he sees as the dominant image of Christ, that of 'le Christ triomphant, surhumain'⁴⁶. Instead, he pictures Christ

⁴³ François Mauriac, 'Critique de la critique', in *Journal*, ii (1937), in *Œuvres Complètes*, 12 vols (Paris : Fayard, 1952), xi, p. 154.

⁴⁴ *Souvenirs retrouvés*, op. cit., p. 181. My emphasis.

⁴⁵ François Mauriac, *Vie de Jésus*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, op. cit., vii, p. 35.

⁴⁶ *Souvenirs retrouvés*, op. cit., p. 175.

as he confronts mortal existence, suffering, and above all, death. His writing captures the horror of the crucifixion, the running blood and the wounds : ‘ceux qu’il aime, se pressent, montent une garde autour de sons corps exposé, recouvrant, voilant de leur amour sa nudité, trop saignante, trop douloureuse pour offenser aucun regard. A travers le sang et le pus, il voit sa douleur réfléchie sur des visages chéris’⁴⁷ ; and his description of the scene when he returns to it in the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs* is starker and more brutal still : ‘la victime clouée à la Croix est aussi nue que peut être un corps dont la peau même a été déchirée’ (*OA*, p. 781). Once more, in both these descriptions, we see how Mauriac offers an almost tactile portrait of his character.

However, Mauriac’s vision is also striking because, as the comparison with Giacometti would suggest, it is one which he shares with other 20th Century artists : the materialist vision, it seems, is a distinctively *modern* vision of man. His, perhaps, is an instance of a new way of seeing, a new perspective which develops through the Century. Arguably, the 20th Century is what could be called the phenomenological age, one which focuses on capturing and exploring our perception and experience of the world. The origins of what is an important development in its own right, are complex. Briefly, it seems that it can be traced in part to a general shift in the intellectual climate at the end of the 19th century. As Mauriac himself suggests in *Le Roman*, the period was marked in particular by the rejection of positivism, and what he terms its ‘mépris des différences individuelles’. During the reign of positivism, he says, ‘jamais on n’eut si peu le sens, le goût de la chose, telle qu’elle est, jamais on ne se soucia moins de saisir l’individu dans sa réalité, ni de l’étudier comme un être particulier, unique’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 760). Its rejection brought with it a return to the exploration and analysis of the individual and individual experience of the world. This finds its most consistent initial expression in the new philosophies of Bergson and Husserl, and later, in Proust’s new literary mode.

The new mood is one Mauriac sees taking shape around him : in the *Mémoires intérieurs*, he remembers meeting René Crevel, who told him of his plans to write a

⁴⁷ *Vie de Jésus*, op. cit., p. 148.

book entitled *Histoire de mon corps* (OA, p. 370)⁴⁸. This is part of a more general turn to the self, the post-Gidean cult of authenticity and sincerity of which, as I discussed in the first part of the thesis, Mauriac was suspicious⁴⁹. Mauriac's perception of the new mood, and the new modes of writing it brings with it, is clear in *Le Roman* – which is, amongst other things, his attempt to work out his own position in the evolving cultural scene. He quotes at length a new, young writer named Alain Lemièrre, who says that his main concern is to evoke sensations and feelings : ‘quand j'écris, je cherche à rendre surtout le volume des choses et leur chaleur, leur densité, leur mollesse ou leur fermeté [...]. Je veux faire toucher. Je n'écris que pour les mains’ (ORTC, ii, p. 761). Mauriac goes on to agree that this fascination with representing lived experience, the desire to explore the ‘préoccupation d'être humain’, is what interests the majority of contemporary writers : ‘voilà je crois les sentiments qui nous dominent tous, aînés et cadets’ (ibid.). Chief amongst these writers, presumably, is Mauriac himself ; for Lemièrre's observation is an accurate description of Mauriac's own work. Indeed, his is perhaps the most powerful example of the writing Lemièrre is striving for, in the way it illustrates how a writer might, as Lemièrre puts it, ‘donner la vie à la chair ; y pousser du sang’ (ibid.).

In other words, Mauriac himself is inevitably part of the new intellectual climate. He cannot avoid being caught up in the changing mood and the gradual spread of ideas. It is a process which he will later describe, using a suitably physical metaphor, as being one of ‘osmose’ (BN, v, p. 271). This absorption of the ideas in circulation around him is illustrated by the role of Bergson in his work. I drew attention in Part 1 to the various references he makes to the philosopher during the 1920s⁵⁰ ; and his discussion in the preface to *Commencements d'une vie* of the problems faced by the autobiographer in representing the self also takes on a

⁴⁸ Crevel's largely autobiographical novel *Mon corps et moi* was published in 1925, and was in fact more psychology than physiology. As should now be clear, Mauriac himself, ironically, is far more of a bodily writer – not least, as we shall see later, in the second volume of *Mémoires intérieures*, to whose opening chapter the title of Crevel's book could quite happily be given.

⁴⁹ See above, Part 1, section 3, p. 52.

⁵⁰ See above, Part 1, section 3, pp. 53-54.

Bergsonian tone : ‘tel sentiment, telle passion qu’il éprouva, mais qui furent, dans la réalité, mêlés à beaucoup d’autres [...], il faut bien qu’il les isole, qu’ils (*sic*) les délimite, qu’il leur impose des contours, sans tenir compte de leur durée, de leur évolution insaisissable’ (*OA*, p. 66)⁵¹. Although, as we saw in Part I with his use of the idea of self-creation, his understanding is not always complete, the traces of Bergsonian thought which can be found through his work nevertheless indicate the ways in which his ideas are inflected by his intellectual context.

Thus Mauriac, with his tactile writing, arguably helps to inaugurate a new vision of the world and those in it, as he finds his attention turning to what will later be called the ‘human condition’. Clearly, in relation to Mauriac, the term does not have the philosophical associations of contingency or absurdity which it will accumulate at the hands of the existentialist writers ; but it is nevertheless in the sense that Mauriac evokes the condition or experience of being alive, of being in the world, that he anticipates later artists. As Moraud has suggested, the way in which he portrays certain characters prefigures the work of writers such as Beckett or Sarraute⁵². The similarities are particularly striking in the ‘dernier chapitre’ of *Le Baiser au lépreux* (1932). The episode is set in a dimly-lit and claustrophobic dining room. Our attention is focused on the bickering interdependence of Noémi and her father-in-law, and above all on their quarrel over Noémi’s provocative decision to eat a plate of stew while Jérôme is restricted to a meagre diet, a quarrel which draws attention to their constant awareness of the body : ‘du gibier!’ cries Jérôme at one point, as the offending *civet* is brought for Noémi, ‘et en sauce, encore! La viande, le soir, c’est déjà mortel pour moi ; mais du civet! Et je l’aime tant, ajouta-t-il d’un ton pleurard. Je n’y résisterai pas’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 539). Their repeated reference to the body, and the way in which it controls their lives, recalls the clowns in *En attendant Godot*, who are continually brought down to earth by some physical discomfort, forced to think their lives through in terms of the body.

⁵¹ I consider more fully Mauriac’s discussion of autobiography here later in this part of the thesis. See below, section 4, pp 134-135.

⁵² Aline Moraud, ‘François Mauriac auteur de “Nouveaux Romans”?’ , art. cit., pp. 12-13.

Like those of Beckett and Giacometti, then, Mauriac's portraits of man respond to his changing status and situation in the 20th Century. All three artists reflect a pervasive mood of anxiety and uncertainty over man, his nature and future – a mood which, for Mauriac, is symptomatic of what he calls in *Le Roman*, 'la misère de l'homme sans Dieu' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 771). This, arguably, is not a timeless misery, but one specific to the 20th Century : the misery of a post-Nietzschean world which has pronounced the death of God and suffers a sense of disorientation as a result, experiences a sense of radical change which the artists of that world must begin to articulate. Indeed, in a letter written in 1924, as he begins work on *Le Désert de l'amour*, Mauriac says that his aim will be to 'peindre l'homme de mon temps, l'homme sans Dieu. Je montrerai le vide infini creusé dans le monde d'aujourd'hui par l'absence de Dieu'⁵³. It is in this way perhaps, the idea that Mauriac's work is itself caught up in the attempt to express a changed situation, that we can understand Moraud's suggestion that he can be seen to foreshadow later writers such as Beckett, Duras and the *Nouveaux Romanciers*⁵⁴. At the formal level, clearly, his work has little in common with that of the later novelists, and their exploitation of innovative narrative techniques. For the *Nouveaux Romanciers*, though, formal innovation is not necessarily an end in itself, but a means of expressing the fact that there is something new, something different about man. Robbe-Grillet suggests as much when he entitles one of his theoretical essays 'Nouveau roman, homme nouveau'⁵⁵. It is an evolution which Mauriac is already beginning to capture but which, as it becomes more acute, will later require a far more radical form of expression.

Therefore Mauriac is a writer with modern eyes, one who, like his contemporaries, is sensitive to the nature of human experience and who conveys what it feels like to be alive ; but he is modern too in the fact that he is sensitive not just to a general human condition, but also to a specifically *modern* condition. He is a writer

⁵³ François Mauriac, *Nouvelles lettres d'une vie*, correspondance recueillie et présentée par Caroline Mauriac (Paris : Grasset, 1989), lettre du 28 janvier 1924 au Père Louis de Mondalon, s.j., p. 89.

⁵⁴ Aline Moraud, art. cit.

⁵⁵ Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'Nouveau roman, homme nouveau', in *Pour un nouveau roman* (Paris : Les Editions de Minuit, 1963), pp. 113-121.

who captures the look and feel of his own era. His is the France of the early 20th Century, a country which like others in the Western world, was undergoing unusually rapid changes. It continued to be affected by the processes of accelerated development and mechanisation which gave rise to the condition known as modernity. For those who experience them, these processes produce a corresponding sense of life's faster pace. Mauriac conveys the historically specific experience of living in the modern world at various points in his work. It is a world which has come to be associated more than anything, thanks to Baudelaire in particular, with the urban environment. Baudelaire's painter of modern life is embodied by his *flâneur* exploring and observing the streets of Paris⁵⁶. That Mauriac too may also offer a portrait of modern life is an aspect of his work which is frequently overlooked.

Mauriac is often seen as a poet of the past and of the country ; of alien, provincial lands and a decaying bourgeoisie. As Amrouche puts it, 'c'est un monde moribond que vous peignez. Vous peignez cette bourgeoisie campagnarde qui vit encore d'une existence quasi médiévale'⁵⁷ ; and Monfériet points out that his novels are not normally associated with images of the urban landscape. In the city, he suggests, Mauriac loses his sure-footedness : 'la ville ne paraît pas à première vue un sujet ni un décor favori des romans de Mauriac. Que de fois a-t-on remarqué que le poète des chaudes après-midi de la lande girondine perdait son pouvoir d'envoûtement lorsqu'il entraînait ses personnages sur le pavé parisien!'⁵⁸. His view is also shared by Hewitt. If Mauriac plays a role in capturing his era's mood of anxiety, despair or 'misery', argues Hewitt, he does so most successfully not, as might be expected, by painting the decadent 'Paris mondain' in which he was moving at the time, in novels such as *Le Mal* of 1924, but by exploring and exploiting the provincial setting of the South West⁵⁹. However, if urban settings are a less important element of

⁵⁶ cf. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (London : Verso, 1983), ch. 3, 'Baudelaire : modernism in the streets'.

⁵⁷ *Souvenirs retrouvés*, op. cit., p. 194.

⁵⁸ Jacques Monfériet, 'La ville dans l'œuvre romanesque de François Mauriac', *Cahiers de Malagar*, 2 (1988), p. 11.

⁵⁹ Nicholas Hewitt, 'Mauriac dans le contexte culturel des années vingt : la tentation de la littérature mondaine', *Nouveaux Cahiers François Mauriac*, 1 (1993), 61-75.

his work, they nevertheless remain an intriguing one. The moments when he turns to the city, and Paris in particular, are moments when he turns to a world leaping ahead, and offers an image of the rapid changes taking place around him.

Indeed, his portrait of 'Paris mondain' is a key element of this image. More than anything, this is because it is a youthful world, of bars and night-clubs, and it is through his depiction of youth that Mauriac conveys most immediately a sense of the evolution affecting the world in which he moves. He evokes it in various works, from his first novel, *L'Enfant chargé de chaînes*, which follows a Balzacian model in recounting the experiences of a young provincial man as he makes his way in Parisian society, to *Le Désert de l'amour*. He also lives it himself, giving a flavour of its decadence in an entry in the *Journal d'un homme de trente ans* from 1914 : 'l'autre soir, au Bœuf sur le toit, C[octeau] régnant, avec à sa droite, R[adiguet] Antinoüs hiératique. Et le nègre du jazz s'avança un instant vers le couple auguste, et leur versa de tout près, dans l'oreille, sa romance' (OA, p. 268). The most prominent members of this world for him, it seems, are the 'jeunes hommes', the new generation of young men in their early 20s which he sees growing up around him. The phenomenon of the 'jeune homme' is one which fascinates him throughout the 1920s : *Le Jeune Homme*, the essay which he devotes to it in 1926, is accompanied by portraits in various novels, the most notable being that of Bob in *Destins* of 1928. I discussed the moral dimension of the essay in the first part of the thesis, and its role as a call to order⁶⁰. It highlights the dangers of youth, the possibility that young men can be led astray by love and the search for pleasure, and the need for them to be educated, taught the importance of self-control and self-knowledge. What interests me here is more his description of the young man's way of life, or mode of existence in the world. For if in his essay, he suggests that the *jeune homme* is a timeless phenomenon, that young men of every age are essentially the same, and must overcome the same problems – as he puts it, 'dans chaque génération, des témoins s'appliquent à réunir les traits du "jeune homme d'aujourd'hui" et à montrer par quoi il est différent de ses aînés ; mais

⁶⁰ See above, Part 1 section 3, p. 52.

que d'artifice dans ces sortes d'ouvrages! Voilà plus d'un siècle que la jeunesse française, d'une génération à l'autre, ne varie guère' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 685) – his claim is in fact belied by his own evocation of that youth in both the essay and his novels. The impression we are given is that the experience of the *jeunes hommes* he sees around him is one which is historically quite precise.

It is determined most obviously by the fact that the next generation is what Mauriac calls a 'jeunesse de survivants' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 687), one which has been marked by the experience of the First World War. They live with what Toby Garfitt has identified as a 'corps de l'entre-deux-guerres'. As he notes, 'le statut du corps de l'entre-deux-guerres est assez particulier'⁶¹. It is a body made suddenly aware of its own vulnerability and mortality, and of the fragility of the world in which it lives. The new generation's confidence in the future has been lost : 'pour nos jeunes gens, nés sous le signe de l'avion chargé de bombes, voués à l'asphyxie, il n'y a pas de postérité' (*ibid.*). They turn away from the future, and focus their energies on the present moment. This desire to live purely in the present contributes to what Mauriac calls the 'frénésie' of the young (*ibid.*, p. 686), a frantic search for immediate fulfilment or a means of escape from the world : 'rien n'existe à leurs yeux que la minute présente ; et, par tous les moyens, ils en tirent profit ou ils s'en évadent, selon qu'ils préfèrent le réel ou le rêve' (*ibid.*, p. 687).

However, it becomes clear that this frenetic mood is being further stimulated by a series of contemporary developments. Mauriac points out that the post-war era is a distinctive one because it is the era of speed : 'une ivresse est particulière à notre temps : la Vitesse, griserie inconnue de nos pères'. The new generation is discovering the car and the intoxication of speed, 'folie qui emporte sur les routes, ces jeunes hommes casqués ou tête nue, à figure de destin' (*ibid.*, p. 688). It is unsurprising in *Destins* to find the arrival of Bob's Parisian friends marked by the beat of a powerful engine (*ibid.*, p. 181). The sensation of speed offered by the car is in fact only one of a

⁶¹ Toby Garfitt, 'Le Désert de l'amour : les *Olympiques* de Mauriac?', *Cahiers de Malagar*, 11 (1997), p. 16.

number of new phenomena which contribute to the general quickening of life's pace. We see Mauriac's characters caught up in various experiences which provoke them to live life at an increased rhythm. They are influenced in particular by changing cultural practices : new forms of music such as jazz, for example, inspire dancers to respond with increasingly energetic movements, until they become nothing but a blur for the onlooker : 'cette jeune femme en rouge tournoyait de joie, les bras étendus comme des ailes, et l'homme la tenait par les hanches : qu'ils étaient heureux, ces deux éphémères unis en plein vol!' (*ORTC*, i, p. 843).

Through Mauriac's portrait of youth, then, we gain a vivid sense of encroaching modernity not as an abstract event, but as a mode of existence, a way of living shaped by newly emerging forces, mechanisms and environments. This is made clear in *Destins* especially : the arrival of Bob's Parisian friends at Viridis, his family's house deep in the Gascon countryside where he is recovering from an illness, makes for a striking scene. In effect, we witness the collision of two worlds. The emergence of the Parisians from the car marks the eruption of modernity into a world moving at a slower speed. Their arrival is marked by a noticeable acceleration in the tempo of the action. Everything about them has an urgency and rapidity, from their powerful car to the quickfire conversation in which they engage immediately : "Oh! la jolie bonnetière! J'adore les meubles paysans. Et cet amour de fauteuil!" "Les landiers ont beaucoup de chic" (*ORTC*, ii, p. 181). The sustained bout of breathless exchanges contrasts with the measured, largely third-person mode of the rest of the novel. Their invasion of the old world is complete when they bring out a portable gramophones and dance to the latest tunes, as if the pace of life to which they have become accustomed must be maintained : "Quel disque?" "*Certain feeling!*" "Non, vous savez, celui que Bob aimait tant...*Sometimes I'm happy*". Ils dansaient maintenant, aux sons d'une musique de sauvages' (ibid., p. 183). This sudden blast of noise and movement is in powerful contrast to the slumbering countryside around them, with its closed shutters and general air of torpor. When they leave, it is no surprise that they do so amid the sound of clattering chairs (ibid., p. 184).

The reaction of Maria, Bob's grandmother, to the invasion is one of bewilderment and horror. The Parisians betray themselves above all by their 'clameur', a barrage of sound which she fails to understand (ibid., p. 181). The modern world for her is one which is alien and corrupt, Maria seeing the visitors as 'monstres' (ibid.). Her response when they have disappeared is to purify her world, to wash away the traces of modernity they leave behind : 'quand ils seraient partis enfin, Maria Lagave brûlerait du sucre, laverait les carreaux à grande eau' (ibid., p. 183). Bob, of course, leaves with them, on what proves to be his final journey : he dies in an accident as the car travels at 120 kph (ibid., p. 190). For him to become a victim of speed is in many ways an appropriate end. His accelerated life and death are in keeping with what Mauriac sees as the ephemeral nature of the *jeune homme*, who possesses charm and beauty for only a short time before they fade away : 'un garçon de vingt ans se décompose, se dissout, se colore, s'obscurcit comme un beau nuage ; et ce qu'hier nous adorions en lui aujourd'hui est effacé' (ibid., p. 688). Or, as one of Bob's friends puts it, he has "le charme de ce qui est déjà presque fini..." (ibid., p. 183). As such, Bob, and the other young men like him, could be seen to be the clearest reflection, or the embodiment of the similarly accelerated condition which is modernity.

If the *jeune homme* of the privileged circuits of 'Paris mondain' is the most prominent illustration of the condition of modernity, he is not alone in experiencing its effects, for they are being felt across the city. We see a similar situation in the other glimpses of Paris provided by Mauriac, and particularly those of life in the streets. In *Thérèse*, the streets of Paris are seen as flowing rivers of people : 'le flot humain coulait déjà, battait la terrasse du café de la Paix où étaient assis Bernard et Thérèse' (ORTC, ii, p. 100). Similarly, Jean Péloueyre, as he sits in the same café, notices 'un triste fleuve de visages' (ORTC, i, p. 478). To Yves in *Le Mystère Frontenac*, as he sits on a bench on the Champs-Élysées, those around him appear to be like insects, settling occasionally at his elbow but failing even to notice him before they disappear again : 'ces hommes et ces femmes bourdonnaient comme des

mouches de la lande, hésitaient comme les libellules, et l'un d'eux se posait, parfois, à côté d'Yves, contre sa manche, sans même le voir, puis s'envolait' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 665). Like others before him, and most notably Baudelaire, he watches the headlong rush of modern life. As if in a film which has been speeded up, the passers-by become a blur, as does the traffic flowing across a nearby roundabout : 'autour de lui, les êtres et les autos viraient, se mêlaient, se divisaient dans ce carrefour' (*ibid.*, p. 664). Once more, we are given an inescapable sense of the constant movement of the city, and the hurried activity of its inhabitants, who seem to have moulded themselves to the requirements of their evolving world.

These snapshots of modernity, and Mauriac's sensitivity to the speed of modern life, the way in which the city dwellers blur as they go about their business, can be seen to relate to another issue which surfaces when we explore further his portrait of modern life and the city. It is one of the most intriguing aspects of his portrayal, and is suggested by Yves' experience on the bench – namely, his lack of contact with those who sit next to him even as they brush his sleeve.

Some of the new phenomena which emerge as a result of the processes of modernisation seem to have one effect in particular for Mauriac : they appear to make the self more sensitive to the other. Or, to put it another way, one of the consequences of modernity, Mauriac implies, is that the other begins to impinge more and more on the self's experience. It becomes clear that two of these phenomena especially play a part in this. The first is a new cultural practice. The main contribution of cinema, for him, is the way in which it makes the spectator more aware of the human face : 'avant le cinéma, nous nous rendons compte aujourd'hui que le visage humain était une terre presque inconnue'⁶². It invites exploration of the face and the interpretation of emotions : 'nous lui devons cette merveille de lire un cœur à livre ouvert, de déchiffrer sur les traits d'un homme ou d'une femme reproduits en gros plan, leur passion la plus secrète'⁶³. As the camera closes in, we learn to read their feelings.

⁶² François Mauriac, 'Le romancier peut se renouveler par le théâtre et le cinéma', in *Journal*, iii (1940), in *Œuvres Complètes*, op. cit., xi, p. 258.

⁶³ *ibid.*

At the same time, he finds a second innovation offering a similar, though perhaps more immediate experience. Taking a trip on the equally modern Paris *métro* in 1914 – the system was opened only in 1900 – he observes that ‘dans le métro, comme il n’existe pas de paysage, bon endroit pour étudier la face humain’ (*OA*, p. 221). The *métro*, it seems, is another new invention which brings the other more sharply to our attention. Indeed, writing in 1947, Mauriac will make an explicit connection between the two : ‘il existe un plaisir du métro, qui pour moi n’est pas très différent de celui que me donne le cinéma. Comme l’écran, mais non plus à travers la grimace d’un acteur, le métro met à notre portée le visage humain et tout ce qui s’y déchiffre’⁶⁴. The *métro* gives us time to dwell on the face of the other and, like the cinema, to explore the emotions it displays.

In travelling on the *métro*, Mauriac becomes caught up in a situation which arises as a direct result of modernisation – namely, the need to keep expanding cities on the move, to help maintain in circulation the people Yves sees buzzing around above ground. This leads to the development of mass transportation, which in turn results in the creation of radically new environments. As the sociologist Georg Simmel had already observed, people were increasingly being confronted by a disconcerting new experience : ‘before the development of buses, railroads, and trams in the nineteenth century, people had never been in a position of having to look at one another for long minutes or even hours without speaking to one another’⁶⁵. Individuals found themselves brought together in an enclosed and often darkened space, with little to look at other than each other. Simmel’s observation is neatly confirmed not just by Mauriac’s own experience in the *métro*, but also in *Le Désert de l’amour*, when he exploits the setting of the tramway in Bordeaux in order to stage the first encounters between Raymond and Maria Cross, as they examine each other in silence : ‘comme elle l’observait pourtant! Avec l’application, la méthode d’une femme qui avait dû se dire : “ce visage va me consoler des minutes misérables qu’il

⁶⁴ François Mauriac, ‘Le métro sans premières’, in *Journal*, v (Paris : Flammarion, 1953), pp. 136-137.

⁶⁵ Georg Simmel, *Soziologie*, cit. in Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London : Verso, 1997), p. 38.

faut vivre dans une voiture publique ; je supprime le monde autour de cette sombre visage angélique”” (*ORTC*, i, pp. 766-67). Yet while Mauriac initially suggests in his article on the *métro* that the new intimacy it offers is a source of pleasure, and is essentially unproblematic, we are nevertheless left by the end of it with a feeling that the situation is in fact rather more complicated. For if the self is suddenly more aware of the other, then the question of response to the other immediately becomes an important issue : once the other impinges on the self’s consciousness, how does the self react? As Mauriac goes on to observe, ‘le métro est un endroit éminemment sartrien où, “à huis clos”, chaque voyageur devient la proie de tous les autres’⁶⁶. It is not just that the other is open to inspection, but that the self too is equally at risk from what he calls the ‘patiente et un peu surnoise étude’ of other passengers⁶⁷. While the new environments of the modern world, then, make the self more aware of the other, it seems too that at the same time, the self is made more vulnerable, more exposed to the investigative gaze of the other.

This problem of intersubjectivity is one which, as we shall see in the next section, Mauriac explores in his own work, both representing it in his novels and, as becomes clear from his discomfort with the idea of autobiography, himself experiencing it. Strikingly, though, he himself also suggests that it has surfaced as a significant item on the general cultural agenda. He makes this clear in the preface to *Trois Récits*, written in 1929. Two of the three short stories, ‘Insomnie’ and ‘Coups de couteau’, focus on the conflict between couples. As he looks back at them in his preface, he points out that he is not alone in exploring this theme, and that it is in fact one which is preoccupying a number of his fellow writers : ‘ici, j’aborde le “drame du couple” qui préoccupe singulièrement nos contemporains’ (*ORTC*, i, p. 1362). He singles out Jacques Chardonne and André Maurois as examples of those who are dealing with what he will later term ‘l’histoire de deux êtres qui se sont affrontés’ (*ORTC*, iii, p. 167). Overall, it seems that the problem of intersubjectivity is, as he

⁶⁶ ‘Le métro sans premières’, art. cit., p. 137.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

puts it, the ‘drame essentiel de notre époque’ (*ORTC*, i, p. 1362). It is as if the developments of the outside world, and the problems they bring with them – most notably, in this case, a more acute awareness of the other – are slowly shaping and filtering into the work of that world’s artists, and being explored and articulated by them. Mauriac’s are indeed accurate and prophetic words : the ‘drame du couple’, and the broader problem of intersubjectivity with which he starts to get to grips, become a major preoccupation of 20th Century culture. So how does Mauriac portray this modern problem, the inter-relationship between self and other? As we saw in the introduction to this part of the thesis, he comes to use Sartrean terms in post-war discussion of his work. Does he therefore share a Sartrean perspective on the question?

3. Intersubjectivity, solitude and the violence of love.

The problem of intersubjectivity is one of the most persistent themes of 20th Century culture and thought. This is perhaps inevitable, given the increasing influence through the period of phenomenology, and subsequent philosophies which focus on the self’s consciousness of or relation to the world. For exploring our experience of the world will unavoidably lead to an examination of our experience of and contact with the others in that world. The general consensus, it seems, is that the relationship between self and other is deeply problematic, having its roots embedded firmly in conflict. Self and other are seen to co-exist not in a state of harmony or community, but of antagonism. Opinions differ as to the origins of the conflict, and which of the two parties is more to blame for it.

For Sartre, the power seems to lie above all with the other, ‘autrui’. Although he makes clear that the relationship between self and other is reciprocal (in other words, that the self can play *autrui* to other selves), the dramatic account he gives of it in *L’être et le néant* focuses very much on the effect of the other on a largely passive self, an effect which is essentially negative. This is made clear when he introduces *autrui* as a protagonist in the drama of the self’s existence. He puts to one side almost

immediately the fact that the self sees the other, and stresses instead the significance of the self being seen by the other : ‘c’est que, en effet, autrui n’est pas seulement celui que je vois, mais celui *qui me voit*’⁶⁸. It soon becomes clear that the self is at the mercy of the other. The other has power over the self simply because it can embrace the self entirely with a single look. When the other sees me, Sartre argues, ‘je suis possédé par autrui ; le regard d’autrui façonne mon corps dans sa nudité, le fait naître, le sculpte, le produit comme il *est*, le voit comme je ne le verrai jamais’⁶⁹. In other words, the self is present to the other not as subjective consciousness, but as an object. The other’s look seizes and defines the self, bestowing on it a fixed identity. With the emergence of *autrui*, for Sartre, comes the negation of the self : ‘autrui [...] se présente, en un certain sens, comme la négation radicale de mon expérience, puisqu’il est celui pour qui je suis non sujet mais objet’⁷⁰. In Sartrean terms, the ‘pour-soi’ of subjective consciousness is turned into ‘en-soi’, and the self’s potentiality, its very freedom, is threatened. A state of conflict is the inevitable result of this attack, as the self retaliates by attempting to objectify the other in turn. Thus each consciousness engages in a battle to transcend or win out over the other, to pin it down and transform it into *en-soi*. However, Sartre suggests that such a potentially endless struggle usually settles into patterns of sado-masochism, as one protagonist acquiesces or succeeds in imposing itself on the other⁷¹ ; and as Masters observes, Sartre finds more evidence for masochism than sadism in human relationships⁷². The self is frequently happy to allow itself to be subjugated and defined by the other, to play the role allotted for it by the other, as this is a convenient way of avoiding the problem of freedom.

For Lévinas, on the other hand, whose philosophy, like that of Sartre’s, can trace its roots back to Husserlian phenomenology, the main threat to the equilibrium of the intersubjective relationship comes from the self. Lévinas presents the self as a

⁶⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’être et le néant* (Paris : Gallimard, coll. “Tel”, 1976), p. 266. Sartre’s emphasis.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 404. Sartre’s emphasis.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 267.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, pp. 404-453.

⁷² Brian Masters, *Jean-Paul Sartre* (Oxford : Heinemann, 1970), p. 76.

free but disruptive force, whose initial response is to consume the world around it, to incorporate anything alien to itself or beyond itself⁷³. He places the focus on the need to constrain these self-centred desires, and argues that this can only take place when the self is made to recognise the presence of the other and the other's resistance to its demands. For Lévinas, the self must learn to acknowledge the sanctity of the other, its absolute alterity. With the arrival of the other, and the self's acknowledgement of its presence comes what he calls the first law of co-existence, 'tu ne commettras pas de meurtre'⁷⁴, and the emergence of an ethical relationship between the two.

Even if the two philosophers disagree over the main antagonist, be it self or other, and the portrait of the relationship offered by Lévinas is more encouraging than that of Sartre, they nevertheless appear to be working from the same basic premise, one which had been articulated most recently by Nietzsche. Both men, like Nietzsche before them, make it clear that intersubjective relationships are based above all on *power*, on the ability and desire of one to win out over and subjugate the other. Is this view of intersubjectivity one with which Mauriac concurs?

Le Baiser au lépreux of 1922, the curious story of Jean Péloueyre, would suggest not. As we saw in Part 1, the novel for Mauriac is a response to Nietzsche and his philosophy⁷⁵. His view is shared by Bernard Cocula, who calls it a 'roman antinietzschéen'⁷⁶. Mauriac's portrait of Jean and his unhappy arranged marriage with Noémi can be read as an attempt to challenge the Nietzschean view of man. For Mauriac, this means Nietzsche's division of man into two castes of weak and strong, slave and master, his celebration of the 'will to power' and the *surhomme*, and in particular, his condemnation of Christianity – Nietzsche sees any religion which promotes humility, self-sacrifice and abnegation as its virtues as a religion of the

⁷³ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et infini* (Paris : Le Livre de Poche, 1996), pp. 112-117.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 217.

⁷⁵ See above, Part 1, section 4, p. 71.

⁷⁶ Bernard Cocula, 'Le Baiser au lépreux : roman antinietzschéen', *Cahiers de Malagar*, 3 (1989), 17-35.

weak, a slave morality⁷⁷. I discussed earlier how Mauriac's decision to confront Nietzsche reflects his own anxieties. He sees the new philosophy as a threat not only to his own beliefs, but also to the wider social and moral order, which the Christian faith helps to constitute and maintain. The threat is made more acute since, *Le Baiser* suggests, Nietzsche's ideas have captured the imagination of the next generation in particular. It is essential reading among students, Jean finding a copy of the *Morceaux choisis* in the luggage of a friend who has recently returned from university (*ORTC*, i, p. 449). Moreover, the potency of Nietzsche's words is illustrated by their effect on Jean himself as he reads some of the extracts. One of these is section 260 from *Beyond Good and Evil*, in which Nietzsche distinguishes between master and slave moralities. Reading this passage is a revelation for Jean : 'il regardait sa face que le soleil brûlait sans qu'elle en parût moins jaune, répétait les mots de Nietzsche, se pénétrait de leur sens, les entendait gronder en lui comme un grand vent d'octobre' (*ibid.*, p. 450). He sees himself reflected in Nietzsche's description of the strong and the weak, and is made to recognise his own status as *soushomme*, something which Mauriac himself highlights from the start of the novel by his repeated reference to Jean's physical frailties : 'il était de ces esclaves que Nietzsche dénonce ; il en discernait en lui la mine basse ; il portait sur sa face une condamnation inéluctable ; tout son être était construit pour la défaite' (*ibid.*, p. 451). It seems that Jean is condemned to suffer the fate predicted for him in the other passage he reads, from section two of *The Anti-Christ* : "périssent les faibles et les ratés : et qu'on les aide encore à disparaître!" (*ibid.*, p. 449). Like his fellow members of the caste of *soushommes*, he will be conquered, cast aside, eliminated.

Shortly afterwards, however, he finds himself being offered an arranged marriage with Noémi, a beautiful local girl. The pair are totally unsuited, and a loveless marriage, bringing only misery and ending in failure, seems inevitable. Yet Jean agrees to the proposal, seeing it as a chance finally to seize the initiative and act

⁷⁷ Nietzsche offers countless analyses of Christianity. The most sustained is *The Anti-Christ* (1895). A discussion of master and slave moralities can be found in section 260 of *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886). This is the account stumbled across by Jean Péloueyre when he first encounters Nietzsche's work.

not like a slave but like a master, to learn how to impose his will on those around him : ‘n’était-ce pas enfin l’instant de s’échapper du troupeau des esclaves et d’agir en Maître? Cette minute unique lui était donnée pour rompre sa chaîne, devenir un homme’ (ibid., p. 459). His notion that, as a *soushomme*, he can break free and ‘become’ a master is nonetheless misguided, as he demonstrates by accepting the marriage plans : even the act which he sees as evidence of his initiative and masterly potential is in fact only a reaction provoked by the situation which others have put before him. As Mauriac observes, ‘plus tard, songeant à cette seconde où se noua son destin, il s’avoua que dix pages de Nietzsche mal comprises le décidèrent’ (ibid.).

The misery of the couple is predictable, Jean’s frigidity combined with the physical repulsion Noémi feels towards him. Jean is quick to notice a change taking place in her, for which he realises he is responsible. We see that, ironically, he does in fact have some sort of power over her as, like a cut flower, she is slowly drained of life : ‘c’était lui, lui, Jean Péloueyre, qui meurtrissait ces yeux, qui décolorait ces oreilles, ces lèvres, ces joues : rien qu’en étant là, il épuisait cette jeune vie’ (ibid., p. 469). Affected by the sight of her suffering, Jean falls increasingly in love with her : ‘ainsi défaite, elle lui était plus chère. Quelle victime fut jamais plus aimée de son bourreau?’ (ibid.). When, after he returns home after a spell in Paris, Jean finds Noémi blossoming once more, he decides to take action, and begins to turn failure into some form of success. The answer he finds lies not in a misguided attempt to impose his will on Noémi. Rather, his love for her inspires him to set her free through a gesture of the self-sacrifice derided by Nietzsche. He infects himself with tuberculosis when he visits a local boy with the disease, and begins to die. His self-sacrifice is then rewarded by Noémi’s reciprocation of his love as he lies on his death-bed, and her own self-sacrifice as she rejects the advances of a young and handsome doctor and remains faithful to Jean’s memory : ‘elle connut que sa fidélité au mort serait son humble gloire et qu’il ne lui appartenait plus de s’y soustraire’ (ibid., p. 499). Mauriac’s message is clear : the Christian ‘will to love’ can win out over the ‘will to power’ which originally motivates Jean, and can transcend the Nietzschean

division of men into masters and slaves, a division which should see Jean trampled underfoot and forgotten as the doctor takes his place. Thus it seems that intersubjectivity can be founded not on conflict, but on reciprocation and unity.

However, Mauriac's later texts question and undermine the apparent optimism of *Le Baiser au lépreux*. They suggest, rather, that Nietzsche and Sartre may in fact be right, and that intersubjective relationships are driven by antagonism – that, as Sartre puts it, 'l'essence des rapports entre consciences n'est pas le *Mitsein*, c'est le conflit'⁷⁸. In his interviews with Jean Amrouche, Mauriac remarks that one of the most persistent themes of his texts is precisely that of the 'will to power' : 'il y a dans beaucoup de mes personnages, dans presque tous mes héros, une volonté de puissance forcenée'⁷⁹. His characters see the other as something to be conquered. They are always ready to intervene in the lives of others, to manipulate them and use them as objects. It is a characteristic illustrated not least by Félicité, the domineering mother at the heart of *Genitrix*, published only a year after *Le Baiser* in 1923. Her hostility towards her daughter-in-law Mathilde is predicted in *Le Baiser* itself : 'on racontait qu'elle avait dit un jour : "Si Fernand se marie, ma bru mourra"' (*ORTC*, i, p. 456). The death of Mathilde in the first chapter of *Genitrix* signals what Félicité takes to be victory in an almost primeval battle to fight off the pretender who threatens her relationship with and hold over her son.

The undercurrent of violence which we sense runs through the relationship with the other also emerges elsewhere. The lovers Raymond in *Le Désert de l'amour* pictures being left behind in their beds in the early hours of the morning are described as having been assassinated : 'à sa sortie de la chambre, dans le petit jour, l'homme s'éloigne, sifflotant, et laisse derrière soi, en travers du lit, un corps recru, comme assassiné...' (*ibid.*, p. 849). For Raymond, women become a means of expressing his own mastery and confirming, in the wake of his rejection by Maria Cross, his own attractiveness and power. Many of Mauriac's characters, including Raymond, display

⁷⁸ Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, op. cit., p. 470.

⁷⁹ *Souvenirs retrouvés*, op. cit., p. 254.

what Nietzsche calls in *Daybreak* the ‘striving for distinction’. It is gratifying to see the other carry the imprint of the self, to see the other being inflected by the self, and to see the other’s recognition of the self’s status and power. As Nietzsche puts it, ‘we want [...] to perceive or divine how the next man outwardly or inwardly *suffers* from us, how he loses control over himself and surrenders to the impressions our hand or even the sight of us makes upon him’⁸⁰. Even when the self’s actions bring happiness to the other, he enjoys this success, Nietzsche argues, ‘not inasmuch as he has given joy to the next man [...] but inasmuch as he has *impressed* himself on the soul of the other, changed its shape and ruled over it at his own sweet will’⁸¹. The conflictual energy this desire generates is particularly intense in *Le Nœud de vipères*, as each member of Louis’ family attempts to impose their will on the others. When, towards the end of the book, Louis discovers evidence of his wife’s jealousy towards his nephew Luc, because Louis felt more affection towards him than to his own rapacious children, his first response is one of pleasure : ‘le petit Luc lui avait été odieux... une femme capable de haïr un petit garçon... jalouse à cause de ses propres enfants ? Parce que je leur avais préférais Luc? [...] Je jouissais de n’avoir pas été indifférent à une femme, d’avoir soulevé en elle ces remous’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 512). Louis is also a cunning manipulator, able to exploit the weaker characters around him. Robert, his illegitimate son, becomes a pawn in his plan to disinherit his children. At the same time, his son-in-law Phili is treated by the family as little more than a plaything for his daughter Janine. His decision to leave her for a piano-teacher is an expression of freedom, and of his desire to escape a situation where he has been reduced from subject to object. As Janine tells Louis, “‘Je l’avais ; il était à moi ; il m’appartenait : je restais maîtresse de l’argent ; je lui tenais la dragée haute’” (*ibid.*, p. 618). Moreover, Louis’ narrative is itself an expression of the striving for distinction. The letter we watch him compose is a text which is designed to have an effect, to leave its mark – whether this be on Isa, as Louis intends, as he attempts to account for his

⁸⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 68. Nietzsche’s emphasis.

⁸¹ *ibid.* Nietzsche’s emphasis.

bitterness and hatred during their marriage, or on the reader, as Mauriac hopes. Mauriac wants us to be struck and educated by the story, made to realise not only the possibility of redemption for a supposedly ungodly man, but also the hypocrisy of what he calls in his preface the ‘chrétiens médiocres’ both surrounding Louis and in the world at large (ibid., p. 383)⁸².

In itself, Mauriac’s somewhat gloomy view of human relationships as essentially conflictual is perhaps unremarkable. More interesting is what he suggests is the source of such aggression towards the other, the need felt by his characters to strive for distinction. This gradually becomes clear as we explore further Mauriac’s portrayal of intersubjectivity. The origins of his characters’ antagonism towards the other are surprising, and are in fact the product of a more fundamental problem, one which is central to his view of the human condition. Looking back at the major themes of his work in a ‘bloc-notes’ of 1965, Mauriac suggests that his immediate preoccupation was not so much the hate, aggression or conflict existing between men, but rather man’s essential *solitude* : ‘ce n’est pas tant la haine que j’ai décrite dans les êtres que leur solitude, et surtout cette solitude à deux, si j’ose dire, la solitude du couple humain’ (BN, iv, p. 144). As such, Mauriac’s starting point in his exploration of the ‘problème de l’autre’ is slightly different from that of both Sartre and Lévinas.

The condition of solitude is brought sharply into focus by Mauriac’s experience in the *métro*. As we have seen, he suggests in his article on the *métro* that it could be considered an ‘endroit éminemment sartrien’, with each passenger, as Mauriac puts it, ‘se saisissant de l’adversaire comme d’un objet’⁸³ – at once scrutinising the other and themselves at risk from scrutiny, from the power of the other to objectify them. Mauriac, though, finds his own response to be different. What he sees and feels as he rides in the *métro* is less a sense of antagonism between self and other than one of curiosity, interest or affinity : ‘car il existe une sympathie triste

⁸² For a discussion of the rhetorical, ‘performative’ or didactic intention of *Le Nœud de vipères*, see John Flower, *Intention and achievement : a study of the novels of François Mauriac* (Oxford : The Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 74-80, and Susan Suleiman, *Authoritarian fictions : the ideological novel as a literary genre* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 223-232.

⁸³ ‘Le métro sans premières’, art. cit., p. 137.

et ardente devant le monde qu'autrui porte en soi. [...] Comme les moindres propos qu'échangent deux écoliers, des étudiants, ou plus encore des ouvriers, nous captivent! Avec quelle attention nous nous efforçons de les recueillir!’⁸⁴. However, such a response is not as positive as at first it might seem. For these feelings of ‘sympathie triste’, he suggests, are in fact provoked by man’s basic solitude. As he puts it, it is a response to the world ‘qui déjà arrachait ce soupir à Fantasio : “Quelles solitudes que tous ces corps humains!”’⁸⁵.

In the context of the *métro*, the choice of this quotation is highly appropriate. For it is precisely the juxtaposition of numerous bodies in the *métro* compartment which underlines the individual’s isolation. Mauriac here captures the paradox of the *métro* : the apparent intimacy it creates is deceptive ; what it in fact brings with it is a state of intimate solitude. The physical proximity it demands inevitably means the self is more aware of the other’s presence ; but the effect of this is simultaneously to remind us more acutely of the gap separating self and other. The *métro*, Mauriac notes, is above all a silent place, in which our sense of the other’s inscrutability is reinforced. When eyes meet, the brief exchange which takes place reminds us only of the vast gulf dividing each individual from the next : ‘il arrive même qu’un bref regard croise le nôtre, et qu’il y ait comme un interrogation, un appel à peine perceptible, venu d’une autre étoile’⁸⁶. In short, it seems the *métro* brings individuals together only to remind them of their fundamental isolation. It contributes to the alienation which, as Yves’ experience above ground in *Le Mystère Frontenac* would suggest, is being accentuated by modernity⁸⁷.

Indeed, Mauriac’s sensitivity to the solitude of existence provides another striking parallel with the work of Giacometti. In his second article on the sculptor, Sartre draws attention to Giacometti’s preoccupation with what Sartre terms ‘le vide’. Giacometti, he argues, is concerned not just with the statue itself, but with the

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p. 138.

⁸⁷ Yves’ own sense of that alienation is in fact reinforced when he watches the *métro* as it ‘absorbait et vomissait des fourmis à tête d’homme’ (*ORTC*, ii, p. 665).

distance which separates it from other statues, and from the spectator. He is possessed by a sense of man's fundamental isolation, a feeling that distance is in some way an integral part of the object itself: 'à ses yeux, la distance, loin d'être un accident, appartient à la nature intime de l'objet'⁸⁸. Through his statues, he sets out to convey this impression, the idea that all objects, including man secrete their own space. Hence, Sartre suggests, the impression that, no matter how close we are to them, his figures always appear to remain at a distance from us ; that as we approach, they seem to recede⁸⁹. It is impossible for the spectator to cross the space secreted by the figure. An unbridgeable gap to the other always remains, one which renders the other unobtainable : 'entre les choses, entre les hommes, les ponts sont rompus ; le vide se glisse partout, chaque créature secrète son propre vide'⁹⁰.

Mauriac's sense of the isolation of man is conveyed in similarly spatial terms, through his favourite image of the 'désert de l'amour' – an image which, as we have seen above (p. 102), he feels captures the central preoccupation of his fictional work. He discusses what he understands by it in his interviews with Jean Amrouche. For him, the image does not imply a *lack* of love or feeling for the other – indeed, as the behaviour of many of his characters, from Félicité Cazenave to Louis in *Le Nœud de vipères*, would suggest, there is no shortage of passion in Mauriac's world. Rather, it captures the impossibility of that love being fulfilled or satisfied. His characters must face up to the impossibility of communing fully with the other, of breaking out of their own isolating space : 'il est certain que, personnellement, j'ai toujours été attiré par "le désert de l'amour", c'est-à-dire par la solitude dans l'amour, par l'impossibilité d'atteindre l'autre, comme dirait Sartre, de le posséder en tant qu'il est un autre'⁹¹. The other, for Mauriac, is fundamentally unknowable, will always remain beyond the grasp of the self. This essentially tragic vision of man's situation is, as Roda Kanawati has rightly pointed out, at the heart of his work. She has discussed

⁸⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Les peintures de Giacometti', art. cit., p. 2221.

⁸⁹ *ibid.* ; cf 'La Recherche de l'absolu', art. cit., pp. 1159-1160.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 2223.

⁹¹ *Souvenirs retrouvés*, op. cit., p. 270.

eloquently how solitude and its consequences form some of the major themes of his work, from the failure of communication, as characters try and fail to find the words which will bridge the gap to the other, to the bitter deception of physical love⁹². Mauriac's characters are condemned to disappointment as they realise that physical possession of the other never satisfies – that, as Mauriac puts it in the short story 'Insomnie', 'la volupté n'est qu'une parodie, qu'un faux-semblant ; elle est cette frange de chair que laisse entre nos mains l'être qui nous échappe' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 260). They can only watch as the other slips through their fingers.

However, the condition of solitude, and the constant disappointment this brings, is not just tragic in itself, but is also the starting point for a further set of problems. It emerges, paradoxically, that love is what in fact breeds violence most readily. The striving for distinction in Mauriac's world is not so much a sign of strength as one of insecurity. His characters are in constant need of reassurance. If the self is cut off from the other, it nevertheless remains dependent on the other. Indeed, it is dependent on the other precisely because of its solitude : the presence of the other, and above all the other's response, is essential for the self's sense of identity. Only in the eyes of the other can the self truly feel to exist. Georges Filhot feels this particularly strongly, having come into contact with Thérèse Desqueyroux in *La Fin de la nuit*. As he puts it, 'elle voyait en moi avec une lucidité merveilleuse ; elle me définissait ; je prenais corps enfin à mes propres yeux ; j'existais tant qu'elle était là' (*ORTC*, iii, p. 197). Consequently, the biggest fear haunting Mauriac's characters is that of the other's indifference. Without a response from the other, a sign of the other's interest, the self's own sense of identity is threatened. It is because Raymond's advances are rejected by Maria Cross that he goes on to leave a string of lovers in his wake, trying with each one to erase the memory of the pain he feels when Maria sends him away, and confirm to himself his own desirability : 'elle venait de lâcher dans le monde un garçon dont ce serait la manie de se prouver à soi-même qu'il était

⁹² See Roda Kanawati, 'L'enfer de la solitude dans l'univers mauriacien', *AUMLA*, 42 (1974), 202-206, and 'L'aliénation amoureuse dans l'univers romanesque de François Mauriac', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 19 (1982), 148-156.

irrésistible, bien qu'une Maria Cross lui eût résisté' (*ORTC*, i, p. 826). Similarly, the bitterness and anger felt by Louis in *Le Nœud de vipères* can be traced to what he sees as his deception by his wife Isa. When he meets and marries her, his feeling is one of relief above all. He is happy finally to have made an impact on another human being : 'tout d'un coup, j'avais la sensation de ne plus déplaire, je ne déplaisais plus, je n'étais pas odieux' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 401). It is when he suspects that, at the time of their marriage, Isa was still in love with her previous fiancé, and that she saw the marriage largely as one of convenience, that his bitterness and anger towards her takes root. He feels to have been deceived by her responsiveness, and given a false sense of security and identity through her apparent acknowledgement of him : 'la terreur me glaçait : "Tout était faux, me disais-je, elle m'avait menti, je n'étais pas délivré"' (ibid., p. 412). Louis finds himself once more to be 'l'homme qu'on n'avait pas aimé, celui pour qui personne au monde n'avait souffert' (ibid., p. 415). His hatred of Isa, in effect, is the result of having his own identity once more thrown into doubt, of having once again to come to terms with the other's indifference.

In all, perhaps, what drives all his characters is the search for what Thérèse calls in *La Fin de la nuit*, 'ce merveilleux bonheur d'être préférée' (*ORTC*, iii, p. 147). For Thérèse, love is a tense and nerve-wracking game. The self has a constant need to keep the other guessing, keep them in a state of uncertainty over its feelings. The most dangerous move one can make, she says, is to confess one's love for the other. To do so is to risk defeat, as the other relaxes, reassured, into indifference : 'et elle-même, que de fois avait-elle serré la bouche pour empêcher l'aveu qui eût assuré sa défaite! Car tout le jeu avait toujours tenu dans cette pauvre ruse, dans cette terreur que l'autre se rassure et devienne indifférent' (ibid., p. 144). At the same time, though, it is this very uncertainty, the product of the love one individual feels for another, which provokes the violence of intersubjective relationships.

Even if the other remains unknowable, the self must nevertheless search for some indication of the other's feelings, as sign of the other's love ; and the only sure method, it seems, is to make the other suffer. To see the other suffer because of the

self is a reassuring sight, the clearest proof of love. In the short story ‘Coups de couteau’, for example, while the main protagonist is comforted by his wife’s jealousy of his mistress, his own problem is precisely that his lover no longer suffers for him : “‘tu as donc un peu souffert, ma pauvre Babeth?’” Il répétait : “‘tu as souffert’” avec un vague plaisir. Puis : “Andrée, elle ne souffre pas ; je n’ai jamais eu ce bonheur de la voir souffrir à cause de moi” (*ORTC*, i, p. 896). Instead, he suffers from her indifference, from the fact that she knows he loves her. As his wife goes on to tell him, ‘elle tient son bonheur : tu l’aimes. Elle a ce bonheur...’ (*ibid.*, p. 897). The situation is summed up most succinctly for Mauriac by a line of poetry by Anna de Noailles, which he quotes during his interviews with Amrouche : ‘la paix qui m’envahit quand c’est vous qui souffrez’. He goes on to observe that ‘pour être en paix, il faut que l’autre souffre parce que la souffrance de l’autre est la seule preuve qui vous rassure, qui vous prouve que vous êtes aimé’⁹³.

Therefore, Mauriac paints a complex and disturbing picture of the collision between two beings. The aggression and power displayed by the self is seen to be a product of the self’s own uncertainties and anxieties. At the same time, he suggests that the truest form of love is the suffering and pain which one party provokes in the other ; but the violence of love is only the most obvious of the problems caused by the self’s solitude and the other’s unknowability. For this fundamental state of isolation, Mauriac suggests, affects all forms of intersubjective contact. He is preoccupied by one other problem in particular : the other may be unknowable or indefinable, but this does not prevent his characters from attempting to define and fix those around them. In other words, Mauriac also explores the dynamic of objectification which Sartre argues is at the heart of intersubjectivity – the way, that is to say, in which the individual is not so much treated as an object by another being as transformed into one. Mauriac’s world, in short, is the potent world of the adjective.

The adjective is a powerful and dangerous tool. Through being described and labelled, the other is seized and reduced to an essence or, as Sartre would put it, to the

⁹³ *Souvenirs retrouvés*, op. cit., p. 93.

status merely of 'being'. For Roland Barthes, 'un rapport qui s'adjective est du côté de l'image, du côté de la domination, de la mort'⁹⁴. Mauriac's characters are always ready to summarise and label each other. The world he paints is rife with gossip and rumour, and he captures the ways in which opinions accumulate around an individual and become agreed upon by other members of the social group. Mauriac frequently quotes the judgmental voice of the collective. Raymond Courrèges, it has been decided, is 'la plaie de la famille' (*ORTC*, i, p. 744), while Maria Cross is known across Bordeaux as a 'femme entretenue'. As Raymond's mother, who emerges as a spokeswoman for the moral majority, comments, 'il était malheureux que le curé n'eût pas rappelé à la pudeur cette femme entretenue au vu et au su de toute la ville, et qui étalait un luxe insolent' (*ibid.*, p. 749). Likewise, the collective in *Thérèse Desqueyroux* agree that Thérèse has a winning charm: 'pour le cocher de M. Larroque, Thérèse d'instinct retrouvait ce rire qui faisait dire aux gens: "On ne se demande pas si elle est jolie ou laide, on subit son charme..."' (*ORTC*, ii, p. 27). However, they are quick to notice and condemn her apparent lack of interest in her newly-born child Marie: 'le bruit commençait de courir que le sentiment maternel ne l'étouffait pas' (*ibid.*, p. 69). In other words, Mauriac's characters are content simply to work with caricatures of those around them. The accumulation of adjectives produces an image of the other which they can exploit for their own benefit. As they tell their stories, both Thérèse and Louis, the most lucid of his characters, recognise they are guilty of this. Is Bernard really as boring and small-minded as she has implied, Thérèse wonders. 'Que sais-je de Bernard au fond? N'y a-t-il pas en lui infiniment plus que cette caricature dont je me contente, lorsqu'il faut me le représenter?' (*ibid.*, p. 59). Similarly, Louis too acknowledges that he has misrepresented Isa and his family to serve his own ends: 'tendance fatale à simplifier les autres; élimination de tous les traits qui adouciraient la charge, qui rendraient plus humaine la caricature dont notre haine a besoin pour sa justification...' (*ibid.*, p. 477).

⁹⁴ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (Paris: Seuil, coll. "Écrivains de toujours", 2nd edn, 1995), p. 49. For further discussion of the power of the adjective, see also his article 'L'image', in *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris: Seuil, coll. "Points", 1984), pp. 413-421.

Of course, as we have seen Sartre point out, Mauriac himself is guilty of abusing the power of the adjective as he defines and analyses his characters. However, it is perhaps now possible to see this not as a flaw – evidence of bad faith or bad writing – but as a result of Mauriac himself becoming caught up in what his texts reveal to be a general problem, an inevitable part of intersubjective relationships. Indeed, his sensitivity to the problem is perhaps due to the fact that it is one which he not only explores in his fiction, but himself experiences. He too feels the effects of being trapped by images of the self. He is aware of the damage they can do, the way in which they threaten the integrity of the self. This awareness arguably plays an important role in the development of his work, as it is reflected in the ambivalent attitude towards autobiography which is a noticeable aspect of his career. Writing the self unavoidably means presenting the other with images of the self, opening the self up to interpretation by the other, putting into circulation images over which the self quickly loses control. It is with an exploration of Mauriac's relationship to autobiography that I conclude this part of the thesis.

4. From *Commencements d'une vie* to the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs* : negotiations with autobiography.

Mauriac has a difficult relationship with autobiography. As I discussed briefly in Part 1, *Commencements d'une vie* of 1932 is his first and only 'proper' autobiography, in that it is an attempt to write a systematic and broadly chronological account of his life ; and his reluctance to engage in autobiography is further suggested by the fact that the text is merely a more or less successful combination of two earlier texts⁹⁵. He waits another 30 years before attempting once more to set down the path of his life in the 'postface' to the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs*, published in 1965. Yet this text is in its way equally curious, a bald, factual document which is rigorously chronological : several paragraphs begin by naming a significant date, to the extent that it reads at times like a curriculum vitae, or perhaps an obituary notice. So why

⁹⁵ See above, Part 1, section 3, pp. 46-47.

this reluctance to tell his own story, to give an account of his life – especially since, if Durand is to be believed, ‘nul sujet ne retient plus Mauriac que lui-même’⁹⁶?

The most recent attempt to explain his resistance to autobiography has been made by Paul Cooke⁹⁷. Cooke argues that writing his autobiography is a troubling experience for Mauriac because he finds that it problematises his sense of self. I discussed in Part 1 that Mauriac is firmly wedded to what Cooke labels a ‘metaphysics of presence’⁹⁸: he has a strong sense of self-identity and, given his Christian beliefs, is wedded to the idea of a central ‘roc’ or soul which remains an unchanging core at the heart of man⁹⁹. Cooke suggests that Mauriac’s attempts to capture this stable identity through writing an autobiography in fact call into question precisely the validity of such a conception of man, and indicate, rather, that identity is more provisional and more unstable than Mauriac would like to believe. His efforts to represent his early life, for example, confront him with images which contradict each other, or which those around him fail to recognise. Looking back at *Commencements d’une vie*, he remarks in the introduction to the text, ‘j’admire avec quelle audace j’y ai mis l’accent sur la solitude et sur la tristesse de mon enfance. Au vrai, j’avais beaucoup d’amis et nul n’a eu plus que moi le goût des palabres sans fin, des confidences, des lettres. Etais-je si désespéré?’ (OA, p. 65). Thus, Cooke concludes, he finds that ‘his attempts to capture the self which he regards as permanent reveal, rather, multiple versions of this self, each of which is a function of the language employed in the narrative present and no more permanent than the mood which engendered it’¹⁰⁰. It is this disconcerting discovery which, for Cooke, makes him shy away from autobiography.

⁹⁶ François Durand, ‘François Mauriac, un autobiographe versatile?’, *Cahiers François Mauriac*, 17 (1990), p. 206.

⁹⁷ Paul Cooke, ‘Problems of establishing an autobiographical identity: the case of François Mauriac’, in Paul Cooke, David Sadler, Nicholas Zurbrugg (eds), *Locating identity: essays on nation, community and the self* (Leicester: DeMontfort University, 1996), pp. 17-30.

⁹⁸ Cooke, art. cit., p. 27.

⁹⁹ See above, Part 1, section 3, p. 54.

¹⁰⁰ Cooke, art. cit., p. 27.

However, I would disagree with Cooke's interpretation of Mauriac's autobiographical reticence. I would argue that his suspicion of autobiography is not a result of it troubling his sense of self. There is no real evidence to suggest that this is threatened by autobiographical writing. Indeed, he reasserts his belief in the essential unity of man at several points in his work. He notes in the article 'Danger de l'attitude', for example, that 'c'est bien moins mon évolution qui me frappe que ma fixité'¹⁰¹. Cooke is certainly right to point out that, in the introduction to *Commencements d'une vie*, Mauriac expresses his concern at the gap which emerges between the images of childhood produced by autobiographical writing and the reality of that life. However, if the gap concerns him, it does so arguably not because it sparks doubts about the nature of his own identity, but because it confirms to him that autobiography betrays or falsifies the individual he knows himself to be. It offers to others an inauthentic image of the self. This is inevitable, as he goes on to discuss in his introduction. He points out that autobiography cannot capture the flow of an individual's life, but can provide only a snapshot of the self. The writer must fix an individual who was in fact constantly moving forward in time, gradually evolving : 'il faut bien qu'il immobilise, qu'il fixe cette vie passée et qui fut mouvante' (*OA*, p. 66). He is forced to simplify complex emotions and situations, to edit his material : 'tel sentiment, telle passion qu'il éprouva mais qui furent, dans la réalité, mêlés à beaucoup d'autres, imbriqués dans un ensemble, il faut bien qu'il les isole, qu'il les délimite, qu'il leur impose des contours' (*ibid.*).

Mauriac here, though, is not offering a critique of autobiography as a prelude to suggesting ways in which such problems might be avoided, and one might write better, truer or more authentic autobiographies. I would argue that his concern is not merely with the fact that the images of the self produced by autobiography are inauthentic. Rather, he considers them not only to be inauthentic, but also dangerous – dangerous not because, as Cooke would have it, they undermine his sense of

¹⁰¹ François Mauriac, 'Danger de l'attitude', in *Journal*, i (1934), in *Œuvres Complètes*, op. cit., xi, p. 70 ; cf. similar remarks in the preface to *Trois Récits* (1929), in *ORTC*, i, p. 1358, and the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs* (1965), in *OA*, p. 757.

identity, but because the contours they delineate freeze or objectify the self, fix the identity of the self for the other's benefit. If Mauriac, as we have seen, shares Sartre's recognition of the other's ability to control, define and classify the self, it seems he is also aware that autobiographical writing is complicit in this: it makes the self vulnerable to analysis and interpretation by the other, offers the self too readily to the other's gaze.

He had already hinted at the problem when, in the opening sentence of *Dieu et Mammon* written four years earlier, he announced that 'écrire, c'est se livrer' (ORTC, ii, p. 777). For the Mauriac of *Dieu et Mammon*, discussing the recent publication of his *Vie de Jean Racine*, this means primarily that the writer can reveal more than he bargains for when ostensibly he is writing about other issues. The introduction to *Commencements d'une vie* focuses our attention on a second meaning: to write about the self, to offer an image of the self and put it in broad circulation, is to relinquish control of the self, to become public property, an object fit for inspection and analysis. It is a problem captured in the final scene of 'Bordeaux', the second of the two texts making up *Commencements d'une vie*, in which Mauriac imagines the city of Bordeaux placing his bust in a park after his death: 'peut-être même te réserve-t-elle, comme à certains de ses fils d'une gloire médiocre, Maxime Lalanne ou Léon Valade, un buste à quelque tournant d'allée du jardin public' (OA, p. 110). Not only is his transformation into the bust an apt *mise en abyme* of the autobiography he is about to finish, with the objectified and static image of the self Mauriac feels it has produced. It is significant too because in itself, it is a representation of Mauriac as others see him. The reader's final contact with Mauriac is from the perspective of an onlooker, as the text closes with Mauriac being viewed and defined by spectators gathered at an imagined ceremony of inauguration. One of his contemporaries, he notes, 'viendra, entre deux trains, pour l'inauguration et lira un discours sous un parapluie' (ibid.) – a speech in which, perhaps, the essence of Mauriac will be expressed. Taking his place alongside Bordeaux's other famous sons, he becomes appropriated by the city. He is something of which it can feel proud, an object which the autobiography he has just

completed helped, in part, to create, contributing as it did to the image held of him by the world.

This image of the self which he sees circulating in the outside world, what he will call in the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs* his 'personnage', remains a constant preoccupation. As he puts it in the later text, 'un écrivain, lui, a l'illusion d'être à tous les moments de sa vie, en représentation, par ses livres, par ses pièces, par ses articles' (*OA*, p. 651). He is concerned too by the gap between that persona and the 'être de chair' (*ibid.*) he knows himself to be. The gap troubles him particularly since, as the closing scene of *Commencements d'une vie* would suggest, the 'être de chair' will be outlived by his persona. He gets to grips with what this means in a gloomy chapter of *Les Maisons fugitives*, written in 1939, in which he realises that his death will mean the truth about himself will inevitably be lost. In their efforts to reconstitute the being he once was, those around him will be left only with his texts to work with, and the images of Mauriac they provide – images which he now knows to be flawed : 'il faut travailler non sur la personne vivante, mais sur des textes, sur des lettres [...], sur des journaux prétendus intimes et toujours destinés au public. Nous ne disons jamais l'essentiel même quand nous en avons la prétention' (*ORTC*, iii, p. 901). Moreover, it is these they will use to construct in turn their own images of Mauriac. Indeed, he finds the process is already under way, as he is confronted by an unrecognisable representation of himself in a recent biography : 'j'ai déjà lu un *François Mauriac* : la bande portait cette annonce : *Un cœur sans amour*. Le livre ne contenait pas une date qui ne fût inexacte, une précision qui ne fût une erreur. Et pourtant, on le consultera plus tard, si je survis' (*ibid.*). This, he acknowledges, is only the start. We can sense his helplessness as he realises that the future of his image – and therefore of his very identity – is effectively out of his hands : 'on racontera, sous mon nom, l'histoire d'un personnage fabriqué d'après des données fausses et de fausses confidences' (*ibid.*).

This sense of powerlessness, of the fortunes of his identity being in the hands of others, is also one of the first issues he explores in the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs*. One of the central incidents of the first chapter is his dealings with two

photographers from *Paris-Match* magazine. They have come to the South West to capture Mauriac in his *milieu*, taking pictures of him in places associated with his childhood and his novels, from the Landes and Malagar to his *collège* in Bordeaux. Mauriac is struck by the fact that as they search out the various locations, they seem not to need him : ‘à travers les images, mes deux photographes cherchaient à capter des instants que j’ai vécus bien des années avant qu’ils aient eux-mêmes ouvert les yeux à la lumière. L’étrange est qu’ils pourchassaient sans que je fusse là’ (*OA*, p. 634). It is as if they know precisely what they want, what images they are looking for. In an earlier version of the text, Mauriac tells how he finds one of them arranging a scene by an open window : ‘devant la fenêtre ouverte sur un horizon immense, il dispose à son idée d’humbles choses dont je me sers chaque jour, un cahier, une lampe. Il n’a presque plus besoin de moi’ (*ibid.*, p. 636, var. a). Mauriac is simply required to play a preordained role, to place himself in the correct position and take up the correct pose : ‘oui, c’était bien ce chêne-là qui était sacré pour nous ; j’appuie ma joue sur l’écorce à l’endroit où je posais mes lèvres, le dernier matin d’octobre, avant la rentrée’ (*ibid.*, p. 635). He seems at times to be nothing but an observer. Indeed, what he is watching, in effect, is the construction of the myth of Mauriac. By being photographed in such settings, from pine forest to vineyard, he is being associated with a series of visual clichés, images which have the appropriate connotations, and which match the reader’s preconceived ideas of Mauriac and his work¹⁰². Thus we see again Mauriac’s passivity, the way in which his image – be it in the form of bust or photograph – is determined and shaped by others. If he is

¹⁰² The photographers’ success in doing so is reflected in the faithful reading of their images given by Roland Barthes shortly after their publication in 1960. Strikingly, as he discusses the photographs and what they connote, he picks out precisely the objects and settings which Mauriac watches the photographer select in order to connote what Barthes might call ‘mauriacité’ : ‘voici par exemple une “composition” d’objets : une fenêtre ouverte sur des toits de tuile, un paysage de vignobles ; devant la fenêtre, un album de photographies, une loupe, un vase de fleurs ; nous sommes donc à la campagne, au sud de la Loire (vignes et tuiles), dans une demeure bourgeoise (fleurs sur la table), dont l’hôte âgé (loupe) revit ses souvenirs (album de photographies) : c’est François Mauriac à Malagar (dans *Paris-Match*)’. Roland Barthes, ‘Le message photographique’, in *L’obvie et l’obtus* (Paris : Seuil, 1982), p. 16.

suspicious of autobiography, then, it is above all because it means surrendering the self to readily to the other, turning the self into an object for the other's consumption.

Yet perhaps the most noticeable aspect of the episode is the fact that despite his reservations, Mauriac nevertheless obliges the two photographers. Rather than turn his back on them and refuse to participate, he continues to pose for them. This is evidence of the paradoxical position in which he finds himself : on the one hand, he is troubled by the inevitable inauthenticity of the images of the self he will leave behind, and the thought that he will be represented by his 'personnage' ; but on the other, he is driven by the will to be remembered. He recognises in the *Nouveaux mémoires* that he suffers from what he calls 'cette folle espérance de survie dans la mémoire des hommes' (OA, p. 686). He wants to leave his mark on the cultural memory, to leave a record or legacy of himself – and a photo-spread in *Paris-Match*, of course, is a particularly effective way of achieving this. In short, perhaps, Mauriac is haunted by the fear of feeling the other's indifference. Autobiography remains a strong temptation ; but is there a way of writing about the self which avoids the problems of fixity and stasis which he associates with autobiography since the 1930s?

The two volumes of *Mémoires intérieurs*, published in 1959 and 1965, can be seen in part as a concerted attempt to find a solution to the problems posed by autobiography. It is an attempt which is particularly successful, I would argue, in the *Nouveaux mémoires* – at times, in ways which are striking, and even radical. The titles themselves suggest texts which will have an autobiographical flavour, and indeed, they mark the first extended return by Mauriac to an investigation of his past, his memories and his thoughts, since *Commencements d'une vie* of 1932. They represent, perhaps, a taking of stock as he moves into old age. Nevertheless, in the opening pages of the *Mémoires intérieurs*, Mauriac reaffirms his break with autobiography, refusing, he says, simply to 'raconter sa vie' (OA, p. 369). Even so, he continues, neither does this necessarily mean that he will say nothing about it : 'refuser d'écrire sa vie, ce n'est pas pourtant pas se résoudre à n'en rien laisser

connaître' (ibid., p. 371). The question then becomes, of course, how is this to be done? How does Mauriac negotiate the problems posed by autobiographical writing?

The first technique, which he tests in the *Mémoires intérieurs*, is an attempt to take what he calls an 'indirect' approach to the self, by searching for reflections of the self, echoes of the past, and traces of memory in the books he has read over the years : 'si nous renonçons à une approche directe de l'être que nous fûmes, il nous reste d'en rechercher le reflet dans les livres qu'il a aimés' (ibid.). While some recognisably autobiographical moments are to be found in the text – especially in the opening two chapters, where we read an account of his schooldays and an evocation of the *vendanges* at Malagar – it is made up in large part of a series of his personal responses to literature. This is not least because the text is in fact a tapestry of literary articles written for *Le Figaro littéraire* during the 1950s. The recollections themselves are fairly predictable, from further discussion of Racine and Pascal (in chapter 11), to a piece stressing the Christian in Baudelaire (chapter 4), and an attack on the *Nouveau Roman*, which he sees as the cold and inhuman reflection of an increasingly dehumanised world (chapter 15).

More successful, and more interesting, is the approach which emerges in the *Nouveaux mémoires*, and on which I want to concentrate more fully here¹⁰³. It in fact brings with it the explicit rejection of what Mauriac had attempted in the earlier volume. As he considers the *Mémoires intérieurs*, Mauriac recognises that his search for an image of himself in the books he had read was not so much an indirect approach to the self as a diversionary tactic or, as he calls it, an 'alibi' (*OA*, p. 723). His discussion of literature was a barrage, an 'armature' designed to hold back his memories, to restrain the autobiographical drive ; but the autobiographical temptation proves too hard to resist, and his defences start to give way : 'cette armature composée de tout ce que j'avais lu a cédé peu à peu sous la pression d'un flot que

¹⁰³ For further discussion of the *Mémoires intérieurs*, see André Séailles, 'François Mauriac, critique littéraire dans les *Mémoires intérieurs*', *Cahiers François Mauriac*, 5 (1979), 54-72, and François Durand, 'Vertus et limites de Mauriac critique dans les *Mémoires intérieurs*', *Revue des Lettres Modernes*, Série François Mauriac, 5 (1995), 75-87.

j'essaie d'endiguer, de fixer' (p. 658). The articles which he assembles in the second volume are more overtly autobiographical than those in the first. Indeed, some of the snippets he produces are quite revealing. Chapter 12, for example, recounts both his experience of the 'Paris mondain' of the 1920s, and the diagnosis of and recovery from throat cancer in the early 1930s¹⁰⁴. However, the *Nouveaux mémoires* do not necessarily represent a straightforward or unreflective return to autobiography, a form of belated sequel to *Commencements d'une vie*. Rather, it is a return which brings with it subtle but significant shifts of focus and technique.

Looking back at the *Mémoires intérieurs* from the *Nouveaux mémoires*, Mauriac suggests a second reason why he has decided to abandon the approach to the self he took in the earlier volume. He expected the 'lectures d'une vie' to offer an endless supply of material, that 'la réserve immense de littérature ingurgitée et assimilée durant plus de soixante années ne cesserait d'alimenter une œuvre singulière qui n'est ni un journal ni un recueil de souvenirs' (*OA*, p. 658). However, he is surprised to find that the well is running dry. One of the reasons for this, it seems, is that he is reading less and less. Indeed, his increasing inattention to literature is highlighted at the start of the first chapter – for the book which we might expect to be a further exploration of his reading opens with an image of Mauriac sitting distractedly, an open book ignored on his lap: 'ce livre dont je voulais parler reste ouvert sous mon regard qui ne s'y arrête pas' (*ibid.*, p. 629). His attention is elsewhere; something more immediate has begun to preoccupy him: 'vivre suffirait désormais à m'occuper' (*ibid.*). Mauriac finds himself increasingly absorbed by the simple fact of living, by the feel of the flow of life. In other words, he is more concerned with living not in the past, as an autobiography or a book of recollections would demand, but in the present moment. This subtle shift in focus has important

¹⁰⁴ It is perhaps significant that these two events coincide in the same chapter. Although no explicit connection is made between the two, we could possibly be invited to see the cancer as a form of divine warning or retribution for his flirtation with the decadent world of the *Bœuf sur le toit* when, as he puts it, 'le moindre cocktail avait agi sur mes nerfs, sur mon foie, mais aussi sur ma vie morale' (*OA*, p. 752).

implications for the way Mauriac writes, and for the way we are invited to read his text.

While the book's title may suggest a journey into the past, the reader is disconcerted to find that the focus of the text itself is as much on the present. It is dominated by the present tense from the opening page, and an active first-person narrator relating his current thoughts and memories. As such, it highlights not just the memories themselves, but the current *act* of remembering. 'Comment me faire comprendre?' he asks at one point, attempting to explain why he feels disturbed by a change in the date of the *rentrée scolaire*. 'Il faut se souvenir de ce petit garçon que j'étais, d'avant le téléphone et le cinéma, d'avant la radio' (*OA*, p. 637). Mauriac foregrounds the process of recollection in the present, transcribing his thought patterns as he tries to identify the moments when his critical attitude to the small-minded bourgeois world around him began to take shape: 'ce sont les moments où naissait en moi, de l'enfant bourgeois et dévot, un homme... – non! ce n'était pas encore un homme (et ce n'en fut jamais tout à fait un) – plutôt un hybride, divisé contre lui-même, déjà lucide et résolu à le demeurer, jusqu'au jour – mais quand ce fut, je ne saurais le dire – où il connut que sa vocation était liée à cette lucidité sans exemple dans son milieu bourgeois' (*ibid.*, p. 725).

This evocation of the act of remembering is in fact part of a broader focus on the present moment, and more specifically, on Mauriac's own experience in the present. For if his memories interest him, it seems to be above all because the process of remembering is an integral part of the general business of living, of functioning as a physical and sentient being. It is this which is now his major concern; he has, he says, no other story to tell: 'il n'existe plus pour moi d'autre histoire à raconter et à écouter que d'être né et d'avoir vécu et de vivre encore' (*ibid.*, p. 630). Moreover, he tells it in a powerful and striking way: in the same way that he evoked the corporeal existence of his characters in his novels, so too he returns to his own body to convey not just his thought processes, but what it feels like to be alive, to experience existence itself. In the first paragraph of the text, for example, we see him captivated

by the sound of his own body as the blood circulates in his veins, and transcribing the sensation of ‘ce sang qui afflue encore à ma main posée sur mon genou, cette mer que je sens battre au-dedans de moi, ce reflux et ce flux qui ne sont pas éternels’ (ibid., p. 629). However, the old man’s preoccupation with the bodily is not a sign of a deep-rooted anxiety over the body and its powers of corruption, as it was with the younger Mauriac forty years earlier. Rather, the sensuousness of the flesh has become the clearest, the most welcome proof of life as he approaches death – a proof further reinforced by the writing which captures its sounds and sensations, and which therefore becomes a visible trace of life. Thus the *Nouveaux mémoires* are not so much a representation of his past life, as a tangible sign that his life continues.

In other words, we see in the opening pages of the text an exploration not of Mauriac’s ‘personnage’, but of his ‘être de chair’. The solution offered by the *Nouveaux mémoires* to the problems posed by autobiography is precisely to focus on the individual Mauriac felt was betrayed by autobiography. It dwells not on the ‘vie extérieure’ lived out by his persona, but on his ‘vie intérieure’. Mauriac reminds us immediately of the problematic gap between the two by juxtaposing his initial evocation of the ‘être de chair’ and the account of the visit by the *Paris-Match* photographers – an account during which it becomes clear that he intends to take leave of his ‘personnage’. The experience of having his photograph taken by a flowing stream gives him another opportunity to stress the inauthenticity of the image, and the delusion of attempting to represent or define a life through capturing one moment of it. For like the footprint left by the photographer as he stands in the river to capture Mauriac sitting on its bank, that moment is immediately carried away by the flow of time : ‘à l’endroit où, botté de caoutchouc, le photographe était entré dans le lit de la Hure, aucune trace n’a subsisté de son passage d’un instant. [...] Tout est là encore sous mon regard de ce que la pellicule a fixé, et rien n’en demeure puisque, lointains ou proches, les instants sont toujours ce qui n’est plus’ (ibid., p. 636). Truth, for Mauriac, lies not in the moment, but in duration and continuity. The message of the first chapter, as it comes to a close with this reflection, therefore seems clear : the

Nouveaux mémoires is not the text to read if we are in search of images of Mauriac. What, though, does it offer? Can the 'être de chair' be explored in a way which avoids the dangers posed by the image and the adjective?

If the reader fails to heed the warnings of the first chapter, and persists in reading the text for images of Mauriac, he quickly finds himself becoming frustrated and disconcerted. For one of its curious features is the way in which, if he turns to consider himself, Mauriac will often begin to suggest a possible image, or way of characterising himself, only to retract or deny it almost immediately. As he tries to explore his attitude towards death, for example, he realises that his mind refuses to focus on the future, and instead focuses insistently on the past. To embellish this idea, Mauriac likens himself to a boy looking back from a cart along the road he has travelled. 'Ainsi ce que tu continues de dévorer des yeux, ce n'est pas ce que tu as devant toi : le jour de ta mort, qui sera peut-être une nuit, un crépuscule, une aube, et vers lequel tu roules, [...] c'est ce dont tu t'éloignes à chaque instant de ta vie' (ibid., pp. 690-91). Yet before the reader has had time to grasp and explore this image, and before it has had time to settle on Mauriac, he questions its veracity. As he reflects on the image himself, he realises that it does not quite capture his relationship to the past accurately enough, and disagrees with its suggestion that his past life is disappearing steadily from view : 'ici la comparaison avec la route qui sortait d'entre les roues de la carriole n'est plus vraie' (ibid.). He rejects this first image and offers a second in its place. He feels a spatial rather than the initial, temporal image is a more appropriate way to capture his relationship to the past, because nothing is being lost from sight as he ages. When he looks back, he seems to be gazing at objects laid out on the seabed : 'ce que tu vois ressemble plutôt à un fond de mer où rien ne se serait perdu' (ibid.). Moreover, the reader's attempt to assimilate this second image is itself disrupted by the recollections and therefore writing which the analogy sparks. Mauriac begins to pick out what he sees on the seabed, and the memories start to accumulate, from faces familiar to him to the silver paper from a chocolate bar he remembers picking up in the school yard. As this happens, the reader is left with an unusual impression, a sense

of writing in constant movement as images are hooked and unhooked from Mauriac. He finds himself being carried away from the initial image by the flow of Mauriac's writing, the build-up of recollections and the series of clauses which express them :

Au-dessus de ce gouffre d'années, l'eau demeure claire et ne dissimule rien de ce qu'elle recouvre : tous les visages, certes, les maisons, les jardins, les routes, mais aussi les saisons et les heures, l'odeur de la récréation de quatre heures en juin, ou quand l'hiver la glaçait, et ce papier d'argent d'une "bille" de chocolat ramassé dans la cour déserte et noire que barrait le flamboiement de l'étude. (ibid.)

Mauriac seems to slip from our grasp as the footholds provided by the images crumble, and the text itself disrupts our attempts to pin down its author.

As this happens, we perhaps begin to realise why reading the text for an image of Mauriac is arguably to read it wrongly. To do so is to overlook the significant shift of focus to the present of existence signalled at the start of the text : we must remind ourselves that as we are read, and are tantalised by possible images of Mauriac, we are not so much dealing with the final products of his thought, as watching his thinking as it unfolds. Jarrety puts it well when he suggests that the focus of the text is not on Mauriac's 'visage', on a possible portrait of the man, but on 'la main qui travaille'¹⁰⁵ – its focus, in other words, is on Mauriac's *practice*. It is this, perhaps, which is the key to Mauriac, what it is he wants to be remembered for. The 'meaning' of Mauriac and his life, the text seems to suggest, lies not at the level of the signified, some supposed essence which it might reveal, but at that of the signifier. The answer to Mauriac lies, literally, before our eyes. We should look no further than the text itself, the act of writing which this represents, the flow of his sentences as they take us from one memory to another.

In this context, the significance of the sharp contrast in style provided by the text's obituary-like 'Postface' becomes clear. What appears to be the real or 'proper' autobiography – the text which does the things an autobiography should do – is dull and unsatisfying compared to the lyricism and flowing style of the prose which it follows, and which quickly seems more worthy of our attention. The 'Postface' holds

¹⁰⁵ Michel Jarrety, 'Mauriac en miroir', in *Présence de François Mauriac* (Bordeaux : Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 1986), p. 284.

the meaning of Mauriac only insofar as it suggests that this meaning is possessed not by it, but by the text which precedes it, and which foregrounds the practice of writing above all. Therefore, it seems that in the *Nouveaux mémoires*, Mauriac finds a solution to the problems which he discovered as he wrote *Commencements d'une vie*. He succeeds in disarming the power of the adjective by stressing that the meaning of 'Mauriac' is not an essence but an action ; that a true response to him and his work is not to label and name him, but to read and engage with his work.

5. Conclusion.

In the second part of the thesis, therefore, I have explored how the view of Mauriac as an 'ancient' or outmoded author – a label implied by Sartre's critique of his fiction – can be challenged and shaken off. I have suggested ways in which he can be realigned to reveal the preoccupations which he shares with other 20th Century artists who, like him, focus on the nature of the human condition. As a result, Mauriac emerges as a perhaps surprisingly modern writer – modern not in the sense that he is some way radical or experimental, but in that he is distinctly of his time. He is shaped by and sensitive to the processes and changes involved in 'modernity', as alert as anyone to the particularities of the modern life which he captures in his novels.

We have seen too that for Mauriac, modernity means in particular becoming increasingly aware of the 'problème de l'autre'. I have considered his largely pessimistic portrait of the relationship between self and other as one involving conflict, struggle and the constant threat of violence. It is a situation to which he is especially sensitive because, as the *Nouveaux mémoires* make clear, it is as much lived as represented by Mauriac. Indeed, his exploration of the problem in the *Nouveaux mémoires* comes at a time when the issue of the threat posed by the other, and the image of the self they can hold and impose, is particularly pressing. During the 1950s and 1960s, Mauriac's profile continues to grow thanks to his newly acquired status as a major post-war intellectual figure. This status is achieved mainly as a result of his journalism, and particularly his weekly *Bloc-notes* column, which

became his central occupation in the postwar years, and in which he commented on a generally unstable political situation. He emerged as an increasingly prominent figure on the political scene thanks to a series of seemingly deliberately provocative positions, from his liberal stance on the problem of decolonisation, to his wholehearted and vocal support for de Gaulle following the latter's return to power in 1958 – support which found him increasingly scrutinised, criticised and parodied. In short, the period of the 1950s and 1960s is one in which he is more than ever a 'personnage' ; but why does Mauriac put himself in such a situation? Why does he expose himself so wittingly to the scrutiny of the other when he was already well aware of the dangers of doing so? What provoked him to step even further into the public domain and court the controversy he does with his postwar journalism?

The answer to these questions can once more be traced in part to the effect of the other on the self, to the dynamic of intersubjectivity. As the *Nouveaux mémoires* draw to a close, Mauriac puts forward the possibility that intersubjectivity need not always be conflictual. An alternative, potentially more positive scenario emerges as he focuses on his relationship with Christ. This relationship is central to his faith, and is one which he envisions in a particular way. We saw above in the discussion of *Vie de Jésus* how Mauriac underlines the incarnate nature of Christ. It is essential for Mauriac to know that God was, as he puts it in *La Rencontre avec Barrès* (1945), 'mêlé charnellement à l'aventure humaine' (OA, p. 179) ; he is reassured to think that Christ, too, knew the 'préoccupation d'être humain'. Mauriac's faith depends on a sense of direct contact with this physical Christ, on an immediate, intersubjective relationship at the human level with Christ the man. Without this form of contact, and the possibility of a response on the human level, he says, the Christian faith would for him have remained an unworkable abstraction : 'si je n'avais pas connu le Christ, "Dieu" eût été pour moi un mot vide de sens. [...] Il a fallu que Dieu s'engouffrât dans l'humanité, et qu'à un moment précis de l'histoire, sur un point déterminé du globe,

un être humain, fait de chair et de sang, ait prononcé certaines paroles, accompli certains gestes, pour que je me mette à genoux'¹⁰⁶.

Yet if his relationship with Christ as he portrays it in the 'épilogue' to the *Nouveaux mémoires* is not one of conflict, neither is it necessarily straightforward. When he turns to scrutinise the portrait of Christ hanging on the wall of his study, we notice that the contact between the two is not as perfect as we might expect. There is no seamless communication between man and God. Rather, their contact suffers from the flaws which dominate the other human relationships depicted by Mauriac – for Christ, too, proves to be inscrutable. Mauriac is disconcerted by the gaze he sees directed at him by the figure in the painting, unable as he is to interpret it: 'je ne sais si ce regard qu'il arrête sur moi me condamne ou me pardonne' (*OA*, p. 777). In fact, it seems Christ's look is one which does not judge so much as interrogate. Christ's presence and his enquiring gaze stimulate a productive uncertainty in Mauriac, provoking him into self-scrutiny: 'peut-être a-t-il voulu me rendre évidente, écrasante, la contradiction de ma vie' (*ibid.*). Under the watch of Christ, he is forced to ask again how sincere a Christian he has been, and how he can reconcile what he calls the 'contradiction de ma vie' – the desire, as he puts it, to 'à la fois miser sur le Christ et miser sur le monde' (*ibid.*, p. 778). Thus Christ's role is not to label or name the man before him, but to encourage a greater lucidity as Mauriac considers himself and scrutinises the nature of his own position.

While it appears that this form of intersubjective contact, at once productive and demanding, may be rare, it is not necessarily isolated. His eye had been caught by a similarly interrogative look only relatively recently, and its effect was the dramatic reshaping of his career. In 1952, Mauriac won the Nobel Prize for literature. Almost simultaneously, he found himself becoming caught up in the growing problem of decolonisation. Being in contact with the colonised, learning of the atrocities being carried out in Morocco, and feeling the expectancy of those around him who recognised his increasingly prominent position, led him to re-examine his own place

¹⁰⁶ *Vie de Jésus*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, op. cit., vii, p. 8.

in society, and his function and responsibilities as a writer. The juxtaposition of two events, the Nobel Prize ceremony and the bloody repression of protests in Casablanca, is the main trigger which provokes him to act. His response to the situation makes him almost a textbook example of Sartre's 'écrivain engagé'. If he is outmoded as a novelist, he finds his new vocation as a committed writer. Part 3 of the thesis explores this important shift in his career, the motivations behind it, and the form it took. It proves to be linked intricately to the broader social and cultural developments affecting France at the time, mainly as a result of Mauriac's involvement for seven years with the radical and sophisticated news magazine *L'Express*. We shall see how this more than anything played a vital role in ensuring Mauriac's transformation from simple novelist to intellectual – and even, we could say, 'media star'.

Part 3. From novelist to intellectual : Mauriac's post-war reconfiguration

1. Introduction.

Throughout this thesis, I have been stressing the need to recognise the importance of the historical context for our understanding of Mauriac's work, and the way that context shapes and influences it. This is particularly true when we turn our attention to his post-war career. It is a period dominated by his journalism, and by the *Bloc-notes* in particular, the weekly column he wrote for 18 years, first for the news magazine *L'Express* (after an initial, brief spell at his journal *La Table ronde*), and then for *Le Figaro littéraire*¹. While Mauriac used it to discuss a wide range of topics, the column bears witness above all to his preoccupation with the politics of the era. During the 1950s and 1960s, Mauriac was more than ever caught up in history, and became noted for his position on two issues in particular. Firstly, he emerged as an outspoken critic of the colonialist policies in North Africa, as France began the long process of decolonisation ; and secondly, in the 1960s especially, he was the loyal, not to say notorious, supporter of de Gaulle during his time as President of the Fifth Republic.

Mauriac's intervention in the drama of decolonisation in particular saw him develop into an increasingly important figure – to the extent, indeed, that he was no longer merely influenced by history, but could himself help to influence it. During the latter part of his career, Mauriac was no longer just a novelist, and he was certainly more than a simple journalist. Rather, he established himself firmly as an intellectual, one of the distinctive group of people whose status as a writer or artist itself becomes the guarantee of independence of mind, integrity, and truth, and who, as Pierre Bourdieu suggests, can trace their lineage back at least as far as Zola². By the 1950s, Mauriac had reached a point where he had become recognised and acknowledged by society as a thinker, commentator and voice of moral consciousness, a voice which

¹ In what follows, I use the term *Bloc-notes* to designate the project as a whole. Individual columns will be referred to as 'bloc-notes'.

² On Zola and what Bourdieu calls the 'invention of the intellectual', see *Les règles de l'art* (Paris : Seuil, coll. "Points", 2nd edn, 1998), pp. 215-220.

was prepared to speak out : in the way he participates in the debates of the period, Mauriac proves himself to be a powerful example of what Sartre had begun to call the ‘écrivain engagé’.

In Part 3 of the thesis, then, I set out to explore various aspects of this career as an intellectual. The first half considers the intervention which confirms him as one of the leading commentators of the time. It argues that an important motivation for Mauriac’s involvement in the debate, culminating in his denunciation of the French practice of torture in Algeria, lies in what could be called the ‘ethical shock’ he experiences when confronted by the violence in North Africa : a sense of personal responsibility towards the other, as Mauriac’s sensitivity to the other and the condition of otherness inflect the path of his career in important ways, and a sudden reappraisal of the nature of his status as a writer. This reappraisal is signalled by a striking artistic silence, as Mauriac takes his leave of the novel for 14 years. For if the violence of decolonisation calls into question the possibility of justifying culture, aesthetic pleasure and creative activity, it nevertheless demands that the writer exploit his privileged position within the cultural order. Thus, the ‘bloc-notes’ of the period can be seen as examples of committed writing in the Sartrean sense, his articles aiming to expose the brutal order at work in the colonies and so stimulate a similar recognition of responsibility and need for change in his fellow Frenchmen. However, at the same time, they highlight the inevitable limits of such commitment, as Mauriac’s courageous involvement and ethical response is seen to be problematised by his particular position within the cultural order.

It also emerges that a significant aspect of Mauriac’s intervention over the violence in North Africa is the role played by *L’Express* in packaging and presenting it. Section three goes on to explore more closely what proves to be the complex and intriguing relationship between the two. Mauriac’s collaboration with the youthful, radical and left-leaning magazine is arguably the most interesting and unexpected moment of his career. I argue that the common platform of anti-colonialism which allows the two to join forces belies an important series of ideological differences

which lead to his inevitable departure. The most important of these is the fact that for *L'Express*, decolonisation is part of the broader project of modernisation, the second of the two key narratives which, as Kristin Ross has recently reminded us, dominated France in the 1950s and 1960s³. Mauriac's involvement with the magazine exposes him to the emerging social and cultural order of what becomes known as the 'Nouvelle Vague', one which he finds disturbing. His departure is seen to symbolise the shifts under way in French culture and society at the time, as the new order displaces the old order he embodies. Section three concludes with an investigation of Mauriac's final years at *Le Figaro littéraire*, a time when his return from the radical margins is, conversely, a shift from centrality to marginality. I suggest that his willing embrace of the Gaullist regime is mirrored by a sense of helplessness as he feels himself increasingly to be alienated in the modern world de Gaulle himself, ironically, is striving to create.

2. Responsibility and *engagement* : Mauriac and the problem of decolonisation.

If the developments in Mauriac's post-war career are striking, it is not because journalism was a new venture for him. It had always formed part of his output. For as he once pragmatically put it, it is easy to forget that a writer, like any other professional, must 'arrondir ses fins de mois'⁴. Since the start of his career, he had been contributing pieces to various, often right-wing newspapers such as *Le Figaro*. Some of the articles he produced during this time were collected to form the three volumes of *Journal*, published throughout the 1930s. Neither was it surprising to see him become involved in the political debates and events unfolding around him. Mauriac had already intervened in the political arena, most notably during the Spanish Civil War of 1936. Indeed, his expression of support for the Basques, and his attacks on Franco, have long been seen, not least by Mauriac himself, as a key moment in his development as a writer. It marks the point when he begins to distance himself from

³ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies : decolonisation and the reordering of French culture* (Cambridge, Mass : The M.I.T. Press, 1995).

⁴ François Mauriac, *Mémoires politiques* (Paris : Grasset, 1967), p. 17.

the literary realm and turn more towards the outside world. As he would say 20 years later, ‘il fallait nettement choisir et s’engager. Parmi les catholiques, nous ne fûmes que trois, Jacques Maritain, Bernanos et moi, à prendre parti contre le général Franco’⁵. As Nathan Bracher has argued, Mauriac’s intervention can be seen to mark the point when he begins to address the question of what commitment means for a writer, and recognises that as a writer with a certain degree of prestige, his words might have an effect on the world⁶. During the Second World War, too, he was acknowledged as a significant Resistance writer, thanks especially to the *Cahier Noir* of 1943, and the hope and optimism it expresses⁷; but what strikes us about his involvement in the drama of decolonisation – which erupts in North Africa in the early 1950s, and will continue until the end of the Algerian War in 1962 – is the degree to which it commands his attention and captures his imagination, to the extent that journalism becomes almost a full-time occupation. It is true that during the first of France’s ‘colonial wars’ in Indochina, which began in the late 1940s, Mauriac was quick to dismiss criticism of the French attempts to hold on to power, and expressed his loyalty to the colonial enterprise⁸. However, when violence broke out in Morocco and Tunisia in late 1952 and early 1953, as protests in favour of independence were suppressed by the police, Mauriac’s editorials in *Le Figaro* became increasingly outspoken. He rounded on the colonialists in North Africa, and condemned what he calls ‘ce racisme né du lucre et de la peur’⁹. At the same time, he took an active part in establishing the *Association France-Maghreb*, which aimed to promote understanding and reconciliation, becoming its first president.

⁵ François Mauriac, *Les Paroles restent*, interviews recueillies et présentées par Keith Goesch (Paris : Grasset, 1985), p. 194.

⁶ Nathan Bracher, ‘Mauriac and the Spanish Civil War : ethics and aesthetics of commitment’, *Romance Notes*, 33 (1993), 297-304.

⁷ For an account of Mauriac’s war-time work and a selection of his writing, see Jean Touzot, *Mauriac sous l’Occupation* (Lyon : La Manufacture, 1980).

⁸ See, for example, two articles from this period reprinted in *Mémoires politiques*, op. cit. : ‘Le bourreau de soi-même’, from September 1947, pp. 443-45, and ‘la dure vérité’, from October 1950, pp. 447-48.

⁹ ‘La vocation des Chrétiens dans l’Union française’, in *Mémoires politiques*, op. cit., p 453. See also ‘Pour une nouvelle alliance entre la France et l’Islam’, pp. 454-55, and ‘Un coup de baton étoilé’, pp. 461-62.

His increasing outspokenness and political activity in support of the colonised peoples had several practical consequences, not the least of which, perhaps unsurprisingly, was a progressively more tense relationship with the editorial board of *Le Figaro* : along with the majority of its readers, the paper remained staunchly in favour of colonialism. A split between the two became inevitable. Although he remained with the paper officially until 1954, the hardening of his own anti-colonialist stance, combined with vitriolic letters from the Catholic establishment over his comments, meant he began scaling down his contribution during the late summer of 1953. As he would put it in the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs*, ‘je coûtais trop cher au journal’ (OA, p. 820). This led to perhaps one of the most interesting moments of his career, for his silence was noted by the two young editors of *L’Express*, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber and Françoise Giroud, who had launched the weekly news magazine only a few months earlier, in May 1953. As we shall see later, they had founded the magazine with the intention of putting forward a radical new agenda, at the heart of which was the call for decolonisation.

Mauriac was approached by Servan-Schreiber to write for the magazine, and he accepted. In March 1954, he transferred the *Bloc-notes* column from *La Table ronde* – a journal which he had established in 1948 in the hope of filling the gap left by the temporarily defunct *Nouvelle Revue française*, but where once again he was in dispute with a right-wing board – and took up residence on the back page of *L’Express*, from where he could articulate his position. He would continue to write for the magazine until 1961, sharing the platform with stars of the left wing such as Camus and Sartre, and himself acquiring a left-wing patina as a result. As I go on to discuss later, however, his growing disagreement with much of the magazine’s social and cultural agenda, especially its anti-gaullist stance and promotion of the *Nouvelle Vague*, finally caused him to leave *L’Express* for the stiller waters of the *Figaro littéraire*, where the *Bloc-notes* column was published until his death in 1970. The focus of this section is the period up to 1958, when Mauriac was most vigorous as he denounced the Fourth Republic’s attempts to deal with the North African problem.

For with the return to power of de Gaulle, Mauriac became more cautious about speaking out : his belief in de Gaulle's ability successfully to resolve the issue of decolonisation meant he did not want to destabilise the new régime's position, even if this led to what could be seen as a problematic silence over continued police brutality¹⁰.

The particular positions adopted by Mauriac at the time have been well-documented, both by Mauriac specialists¹¹, and by historians placing him in the overall context of debates on decolonisation. They all highlight his important role as one of the leading liberal Catholic 'grandes voix', to borrow Fouilloux's term¹². Sorum suggests that, particularly early on in the debate, 'his enormous prestige as a great writer and a Catholic moralist gave his criticisms more weight than those of any other intellectual'¹³. While later recognising that decolonisation was inevitable¹⁴, Mauriac was not a radical anti-imperialist in the manner of Sartre working for the end of the colonialist system. Rather, he remained at the time an anti-colonialist. This position is essentially one of (ultimately problematical) compromise, as Sorum points out : while recognising the need for reform of the colonialist system, anti-colonialists still believe in the legitimacy of a continuing French presence as part of the country's 'mission civilisatrice'¹⁵. Nevertheless, the position allowed him to take an enlightened stance with respect to Morocco and Tunisia where French interests were not so entrenched : he called clearly for autonomy and came to see independence as inevitable. He was more cautious when confronting the Algerian problem, aware of the greater complexity of the situation and the stronger French claims to the territory,

¹⁰ A point to which I return later. See below, section 3, pp. 208-209.

¹¹ See for example Slava Kushnir, *Mauriac journaliste* (Paris : Minard, 1979), ch. 5, and Jean Lacouture, *François Mauriac*, 2 vols (Paris : Seuil, coll. "Points", 1990), ii, ch. 6.

¹² Etienne Fouilloux, 'Intellectuels catholiques et guerre d'Algérie', in Rioux and Sirinelli (eds), *La Guerre d'Algérie et les Intellectuels, Cahiers de l'Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent*, 10 (1988), p. 62.

¹³ Paul Clay Sorum, *Intellectuals and Decolonisation in France* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1977), p. 53.

¹⁴ François Mauriac, *Les Paroles restent*, op. cit., p. 197.

¹⁵ Sorum, op. cit., p. 16. In a speech given in 1960, for example, Mauriac criticises colonialist exploitation in Black Africa while expressing his support for the work of Christian missionaries in their 'conversion' of indigenous people. See 'La vocation de l'homme blanc', in *Paroles perdues et retrouvées*, textes recueillis et présentés par Keith Goesch (Paris : Grasset, 1986), pp. 270-281.

and preferring to see some form of continuing French involvement as Lacouture points out¹⁶; but he remained persistent in calling for a more responsible French presence. Less easy to establish, however, and what I want to explore more closely, is Mauriac's motivation for becoming so involved in the debate. Why does he allow himself to become caught up in what prove to be explosive arguments¹⁷?

The Nobel Prize and Mauriac's 'ethical shock'.

Mauriac himself is in no doubt that he is motivated above all by his faith. He states in one of his earliest 'bloc-notes' that 'ma vocation est politique dans la stricte mesure où elle est religieuse' (*BN*, i, p. 97). His view is shared by various commentators, from specialists to historians of the period. In his recent book, for example, Cocula argues that the *Bloc-notes* bears witness to Mauriac's broad Christian mission¹⁸. Similarly, Fouilloux remarks that 'ses interventions répétées, les premières surtout, sont le cri d'une foi blessée'¹⁹. In the torture being practised in Algeria, Mauriac finds clear evidence of the fact that, as he puts it, 'toute notion de justice s'est obscurcie en nous' (*BN*, i, p. 478). His condemnation of the colonialist régimes is made in accordance with a rigorous, Christian moral framework – one in the name of which the politicians themselves often claimed to act, yet which they seemed all too willing to betray.

Nathan Bracher, on the other hand, suggests Mauriac's motives also have a political or ideological dimension. He argues that the events in North Africa 'called into question [...] the writer's keen sense of national identity'²⁰. As Bracher rightly points out, Mauriac's nationalistic sentiment is a constant element of his world view, highlighted most clearly by the rallying cry of *Le Cahier Noir*, and even by his broad

¹⁶ Lacouture, op. cit., ch. 6. For his account of Mauriac's more cautious response to the Algerian problem, see p. 296 ff.

¹⁷ At times almost in a literal sense. Mauriac's prestige and his outspokenness combine to make him an appealing terrorist target for the duration of the colonialist wars. See for example *BN*, i, p. 256, n. 1, *BN*, iii, p. 99, n. 2, and Lacouture, op. cit., p. 389.

¹⁸ Bernard Cocula, *Mauriac : le Bloc-notes* (Bordeaux : L'Esprit du Temps, 1995).

¹⁹ Fouilloux, art. cit., p. 66.

²⁰ Nathan Bracher, 'Mauriac and Decolonisation : civilisation, history, and national identity', *Contemporary French Civilisation*, 18 (1994), p. 167.

support for the war in Indochina. Bracher stresses the fact that at the heart of his attitude is, to borrow de Gaulle's famous phrase, 'une certaine idée de la France'²¹ – a vision of the country as the epitome of the civilised and civilising nation, its 'mission civilisatrice' buttressed above all by its cultural heritage and Christian vocation²². However, Bracher argues, the bloody repression of the colonised people in the Maghreb makes Mauriac acknowledge the extent to which his idea of France has been betrayed²³. In other words, it could be said that if the problem of decolonisation demanded his full attention, it was because he realised suddenly that France itself had become implicated in crimes perpetrated until then only by others. As Bracher goes on to highlight, this realisation provokes what will be a dominant theme of the *Bloc-notes* during its first five years, namely what he calls 'a whole series of disturbing reflections on the nature and origins of civilisation'²⁴. Mauriac offers an angry, even radical critique of the dominant order, arguing repeatedly that so-called 'civilised' society is a sham, a thin veneer masking violence and corruption : 'toute civilisation repose sur une horreur cachée : prostitution, traite des femmes, police des mœurs, maisons de correction' (BN, i, p. 240). Exposing the gap between his own noble ideal of France and its actual reality is perhaps the first, necessary step in guiding the country back to its true path. Thus, concludes Bracher, 'it is largely his own personal attachment to "une certaine idée de la France" that prompts him to throw himself into the political battle over decolonisation in North Africa, and it is often through that nationalistic ideal that he will appeal to his readers'²⁵.

Both these attempts to explain Mauriac's motivation are convincing to a degree. That his national pride is indeed at stake is made clear by Mauriac himself when he says that 'notre vocation est de rendre la France ressemblante à cette image qui survit dans le cœur des hommes libres du monde entier' (BN, i, p. 512). Furthermore, Bracher's argument is particularly useful for the way in which it draws

²¹ Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de guerre*, 3 vols (Paris : Plon, 1954-59), i, p. 1.

²² Bracher, art. cit., p. 169.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 175.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 173.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 184.

attention to Mauriac's important critique of civilisation. However, the accounts so far offered by the various critics remain incomplete. In particular, more needs to be said about what remains the startling *volte-face* which sees Mauriac condemning the colonialist enterprise so soon after expressing his support for the campaign in Indochina. What is it about the events in North Africa which sparks his sudden change of mind?

One of the problems with these accounts is their failure properly to consider the nature of the writer's own position. They imply that Mauriac is a straightforward witness to events, that his engagement in the debate is a simple case of rallying to a cause. Other critics similarly suggest that his involvement is a matter of expressing outrage from a secure moral position. Gosselin implies this, for example, when she characterises the *Bloc-notes* as an 'oraison', and identifies what she terms his 'rhétorique de sermonnaire et de moraliste'²⁶. I want to argue, rather, that the problem for Mauriac lies not just in the horrific nature of the events themselves, in the violence of oppression, but in the way in which these events force him to scrutinise the nature of his own position. His disturbing critique of 'civilised' society is made with an increasing awareness of his privileged place in that order. Firstly, he is conscious of his place in society as a member of the bourgeoisie, 'parmi les nantis à qui, dès le départ, tout est donné d'avance' (*BN*, i, p. 301). This awareness brings with it a sense of his own responsibility, for he realises that as a Catholic, he too is bound by the demands of its moral framework as much as the politicians he criticises. Mauriac himself has an obligation to speak out, and challenge what he calls 'l'injustice établie'. In his final interview with Jean Amrouche, he comments that 'plus que jamais je sens ma responsabilité, [...] je ne crois pas, je crois de moins en moins qu'on ait le droit de se dire officiellement catholique et de se résigner à l'injustice établie'²⁷. The crucial thing, of course, is that to speak out is easier for Mauriac than it is for

²⁶ Monique Gosselin, 'Le *Bloc-notes* de 1953 à 1961 : une oraison publique', *Cahiers François Mauriac*, 17 (1990), p. 59.

²⁷ François Mauriac, *Souvenirs retrouvés*, entretiens avec Jean Amrouche (Paris : Fayard-I.N.A, 1981), p. 308.

most, thanks to his distinctive position even in the context of the privileged order in which he finds himself – namely, his position specifically as a *writer*, as an independent voice endowed with the ability to articulate positions and ideas in a distinctive and powerful way. I want to suggest that it is his status as a writer especially which Mauriac finds to be problematised when he is confronted by the drama of decolonisation ; that he is forced to reassess precisely what it means to be a writer ; and that when he does so, he must confront several troubling issues.

That this is the case is suggested by one striking aspect of his post-war career in particular, which so far seems to have been somewhat overlooked. For during this time, not only does journalism more or less become his full-time occupation, but his involvement coincides with a striking artistic silence, one which will last fourteen years : although the early 1950s saw a flurry of fictional works (*Le Sagouin* and *Galigai* published in 1952, and *L'Agneau* in 1954), all were begun either during the war or in the immediate post-war period. There would be no more fiction until *Un Adolescent d'autrefois* in 1968 ; but what might provoke him to abandon the realm of art? While it is true that the rate at which Mauriac produced his novels had been in steady decline since the early 1930s – he published twice as many in the period 1922-1932 as he did in the period 1932-1942 – his silence is not simply a sign that his literary inspiration had finally dried up. In a 'bloc-notes' of 1954, he remarks that 'je pourrais aujourd'hui même mettre en route un autre récit' (BN, i, p. 266). Rather, there are various clues to suggest that his silence should be interpreted in other ways.

Not the least of these is the significance Mauriac gives to being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in December 1952. He is struck in particular by the collision between the award ceremony in Stockholm and the massacre in Casablanca which marks the beginning of violent repression by the French. Looking back on the event three years later he observes that 'une rencontre me frappa : je recevais le prix Nobel le jour et presque à l'heure où, à Casablanca, une foule misérable tombait dans le traquenard qui lui avait été tendu' (BN, i, p. 303). It leaves him in no doubt as to what his response should be. As he says with a flourish, 'désormais je fus engagé'

(ibid.). He is disturbed, it seems, by this sudden juxtaposition of high culture, an event which celebrates man's refinement and sophistication, and messy violence. The coming together of the two marks the moment when he acknowledges he must act. Its initial importance thus lies in the way in which it makes him aware of the distinctive nature of his own position, makes him realise that he can and must exploit the prestige which comes with the prize for political ends. In a letter to Georges Duhamel in April 1953 he remarks that 'au milieu de tous ces honneurs [...] je ne cessais de prier pour que je trouve à mon retour une occasion de les faire servir'²⁸. In other words, it seems, this conjunction of events provokes a *prise de conscience* in Mauriac, a sudden recognition and scrutiny of his own position, followed by the immediate and necessary response of the political commitment expressed by his articles, as Mauriac condemns the aggression of the colonial authorities²⁹.

Thanks to the combination of this *prise de conscience* and his response of political commitment, Mauriac in fact provides a near-perfect illustration of the 'écrivain engagé' who had only recently been defined by Sartre: 'je dirai qu'un écrivain est engagé lorsqu'il tâche à prendre la conscience la plus lucide, et la plus entière d'être embarqué'³⁰. In his essay on the role of literature and the writer, Sartre argues that the writer must have a clear sense of being 'en situation' in the world, aware both of the nature of society, and also of his position within that society. With this knowledge comes the recognition that his words can have a performative force. Conversely, without it, Sartre suggests, that force is absent: 'l'écrivain "engagé" sait que la parole est action: il sait que dévoiler c'est changer et qu'on ne peut dévoiler qu'en projetant de changer'³¹. That Mauriac too had come to recognise this is reflected in the powerful and effective engaged writing he goes on to produce, as we shall see later. However, such a recognition brings with it another realisation, indicated by the surprising re-evaluation that newly engaged writer gives of his earlier work. In the

²⁸ *Correspondance François Mauriac - Georges Duhamel* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997), p. 229.

²⁹ 'La vocation des Chrétiens dans l'Union française', for example, was published in January 1953.

³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. "Folio-Essais", 1995), p. 84.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 28.

‘bloc-notes’ of 13th October 1955, the engaged writer takes the novelist to task. He criticises his work firstly for its lack of political intention – if his novels were satirical then it was ‘à mon insu’³² – and secondly for its indifference in the face of the world, for ‘que m’importait la férocité des hommes, si je la peignais?’ (BN, i, p. 301). What mattered above all for the novelist was artistic creation ; man’s ferocity interested him only insofar as it formed part of a satisfying aesthetic experience. As he says, ‘écrire était toute ma vie’ (ibid.); but for the committed journalist, the aesthetic transformation of the world is problematic, distracting from or neutralising the ethical problems it poses. If, as Sartre had argued, prose is a tool with which to change the world, then for the novelist to pursue it for its own sake was to blunt it almost wilfully. It seems that for Mauriac the committed journalist, writing as purely artistic practice takes on a negative inflection.

Thus in the committed writer’s criticism of the novelist for his lack of political responsibility, we have a sense of his unease over the status of the writer, and specifically the writer as artist – an unease arguably reflected in his shift out of the fictional domain. What is more, it becomes clear that this uncertainty over the status of the writer is part of another, more troubling motivation for Mauriac’s engagement beyond that simply of needing to respond to the horror of the events in North Africa in a constructive way.

If Mauriac’s intervention in the debate has the potential to make a difference, if he can make a significant contribution to the situation, then this is due in large part to his prestige as a writer, his status as a dominant and respected figure in the cultural order. Moreover, it is a prestige further enhanced by the award of a prize which recognises his contribution to culture precisely, and indeed specifically as an artist (as Lacouture points out, the citation of the Nobel Prize jury fails to mention his earlier political interventions³³). Yet one of the key questions raised by the post-Nobel Prize

³² This criticism echoes a similar point made with reference to *Le Nœud de vipères* during his discussions with Jean Amrouche: ‘je n’ai pas voulu écrire une satire. C’est mon sujet qui s’est développé dans cette direction-là et qui m’a entraîné’. *Souvenirs retrouvés*, op. cit., p. 307.

³³ Lacouture, op. cit., p. 242.

writing concerns the problematic nature of culture and its place in society – and consequently, the equally problematic status of those who contribute to or participate in it. As we read the *Bloc-notes*, we become aware of how culture is problematised by the acts of violence perpetrated by an apparently ‘civilised’ society. At various moments, the juxtaposition of violence and culture forces us to ask how art can be justified in the face of barbarity. Mauriac himself must confront this when, after hearing first-hand evidence of the use of torture in Algeria, he goes to choose a record : ‘j’ouvre disraitement l’album des disques de Mozart, les Sonates pour piano interprétées par Giesecking’ (*BN*, i, p. 241). He finds himself repulsed by the vulgarity of his own refined pleasure in the wake of what he has just heard, his appreciation not just of Mozart, but of a particular interpretation of his music – ‘cette musique du ciel n’est pas pour moi. Je suis comme un homme qui a pris part, sans le vouloir, à un crime’ (*ibid.*). We realise that culture is both deceptive, disguising man’s true reflex of brutality, and gratuitous, a pointless pursuit in the face of more urgent matters : in Mauriac’s case, the need to bear witness, ‘aller se livrer’ (*ibid.*). Furthermore, these reflections also point to a second, altogether more disconcerting problem with culture, which emerges when we consider more closely his critique of ‘civilisation’.

As Bracher highlights in his article, this critique is a persistent theme of Mauriac’s post-Nobel Prize writing. Particularly disturbing is the way in which it suggests not just that ‘civilised’ society is a veneer disguising a morass of corruption and decay, but that a clear causal link can be established between ‘civilisation’ and violence. Civilised society depends on violence, Mauriac tells us. It is built on acts of repression and exclusion : ‘toute civilisation exquise repose sur l’esclavage. Sinon elle ne serait pas exquise’ (*BN*, i, p. 139). Equally troubling, though, is the role we can see culture plays in this. Culture and art are used by civilised society to forget the brutality on which it is grounded : ‘Versailles fut une perfection dans cet ordre : le décor sublime inventé pour masquer la misère et le désespoir permanent des deux tiers de l’espèce humaine’ (*ibid.*, p. 78). Culture is the clearest manifestation of ‘civilisation’, and this is underlined by the fact that Mauriac’s reflections on the

nature of civilisation are frequently triggered by an aesthetic or cultural experience, be it a ballet at the British Embassy, which provokes his reflection on Versailles cited above, or reading Henry James' notebooks and his descriptions of Victorian society (ibid., p. 139). Culture, in other words, is not innocent. Rather, by masking the true nature of 'civilised' society it helps to reinforce the 'ordre injuste' and maintains its veneer of refinement. It is, in effect, itself a product of violence. In the spectacles he sees and the books he reads, Mauriac perhaps recognises the implications of Walter Benjamin's well-known observation that 'there is no cultural document that is not at the same time a record of barbarism'³⁴. The significance of this for Mauriac's own position is obvious and deeply ironic. As a novelist contributing to his country's cultural wealth, he too has assisted in masking the true nature of that order, perhaps provided a distraction like the one he finds in Mozart. His work may capture 'la férocité des hommes' – indeed, doing so could well have helped make his work the success which wins the Nobel Prize³⁵ – but this violence is recuperated and neutralised by being part of the aesthetic experience. It has no importance beyond being vital for the work's artistic integrity and the reader's aesthetic gratification. It perhaps takes the moment of the Nobel Prize itself to make the link between violence and culture shockingly clear.

The motivations behind Mauriac's engagement, then, are complex ; but it seems that a central factor is the challenge made to his own position as a writer and member of the dominant cultural order. It is this *prise de conscience* of his own responsibility, in terms both of his sense of culpability and his moral obligation, which distinguishes his writing on decolonisation from his earlier journalism. The articles of the 1930s which make up the three volumes of *Journal* are marked above all by a sense of solipsism, the significance of events in the world around him being judged by their effect on the artist's soul. As Mauriac says in the 'avertissement' to

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian', in *One-Way Street and other writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London : Verso, 1997), p. 359.

³⁵ The jury's citation singles out Mauriac's 'analyse pénétrante de l'âme et l'intensité artistique avec laquelle il a interprété, dans la forme du roman, la vie humaine'. Quoted by Lacouture, op. cit., p. 242.

the first volume, 'il arrive qu'une maladie ou une simple lecture prenne autant de valeur qu'une révolution : c'est bien leur retentissement dans notre vie intérieure qui mesure l'importance des événements'³⁶. Those on the Spanish Civil War, meanwhile, if they have lost the narcissism of the *Journal* articles, display a distinct air of moral superiority, as Mauriac attacks the passivity of the cinema audience, 'la foule engourdie et repue'³⁷, before the interrogative gaze of the victims of Franco's aggression in Spain looking out from the newsreels.

The Civil War journalism can perhaps be seen as an intermediate stage in his development as a committed writer, in which Mauriac's sudden sense of history is not yet matched by his recognition of his own position and therefore responsibility in that history. For, crucially, it is only when he is confronted by the drama of decolonisation that he becomes aware of the way in which the gaze of the victim also interrogates him – almost literally in fact. The early 'bloc-notes' tell of a series of encounters with young Arabs, encounters which seem to reinforce Mauriac's sense of responsibility by reminding him of his position within the dominant order. As he says after meeting a Moroccan boy, 'ils n'ont pas d'avenir, nous l'avons détruit. Sentiment terrible d'appartenir à la race qui opprime' (*BN*, i, p. 75). For Mauriac to meet the victims of his culture's repression, and to return their look, is an uncomfortable experience. His reaction is one of guilt above all, a feeling that he is himself partly responsible for their repression. What we might call this 'ethical shock' is a strong and striking echo of Lévinas' reflection on the nature of intersubjective relations, and in particular, the philosopher's discussion of the role played by the other in forming the self's moral consciousness.

As I discussed briefly in Part 2 of the thesis, the presence of the Other, and its recognition by the self, for Lévinas, should work to restrain the self's freedom. The Other establishes what he calls the first law of intersubjectivity, 'tu ne commettras pas

³⁶ *Journal*, i (1934), in *Œuvres complètes*, 12 vols (Paris : Fayard, 1952), xi, p. 4.

³⁷ 'Le démon de l'Espagne', in *Mémoires Politiques*, op. cit., p. 85.

de meurtre'³⁸. Unfettered, the self's freedom expresses itself in the desire to reduce anything alien to itself, which exists outside itself, to the level of the same. The self 'lives from' the world which surrounds it, absorbs it and draws pleasure from it. As Davis puts it, '*living from...* offers a mode of encounter with the world which confirms the identity and sovereignty of the self; the world is fully available to me, ready to meet my needs and fulfill my desires'³⁹. Such a relationship to the world could characterise the aims of the French colonialists, whose desire is to absorb the North African territories, to erase its people as others by subsuming them under the flag of the French State, and imposing upon them the French identity. Moral conscience comes into being, for Lévinas, when this impulse is restrained, when the self's assumption of its own sovereignty is disrupted by the recognition of an Other which is irreducible to the same: 'accueillir autrui, c'est mettre ma liberté en question'⁴⁰. The self must acknowledge the Other's absolute difference or alterity. It could be said – although as we will see, the perspective will need modifying somewhat – that Mauriac's response to his meeting with the Arab boys provides an exemplary illustration of this, not only in terms of his feelings of guilt, but also in the way it is triggered by direct contact at the particular, intersubjective level. It provokes a conscious awareness which once again obliges him to consider his own specific responsibility; or, as Lévinas puts it, 'le visage me rappelle à mes obligations et me juge'⁴¹. It is a response which is not only unavoidable – indeed, as he will say in 1960, 'nous sommes engagés, que nous le voulions ou non' (BN, ii, p. 492) – but also ethical in the strictly Lévinasian sense, recognising the need above all for a new, more enlightened response to the other, one which will replace the dominant instinct of repression.

³⁸ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et Infini : essai sur l'extériorité* (Paris : Le Livre de poche, 1996), p. 217.

³⁹ Colin Davis, *Lévinas : an introduction* (Cambridge : Polity Press, 1996), p. 43. Davis' emphasis.

⁴⁰ Lévinas, op. cit., p. 84.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 237.

‘Parler, c’est agir’ : Mauriac and committed writing.

Having explored the basis for Mauriac’s involvement in the crisis of decolonisation, we must now consider how precisely he can be said to be engaged. One of the criticisms levelled at his journalism prior to the *Bloc-notes* is that it is only what Cocula calls an ‘engagement d’écriture’. As he remarks, discussing Mauriac’s Spanish Civil War articles, ‘l’engagement de Mauriac, même s’il est le reflet d’une fraternité, d’une solidarité, d’une souffrance, même s’il correspond à une volonté profond de répondre à une exigence de justice, n’est qu’un engagement d’écriture. Il porte en cela ses propres limites’⁴². Nevertheless, Mauriac’s engagement remains fundamentally one of ‘écriture’. It is through his intervention as an intellectual and writer as much as for the (ultimately abortive) *Association France-Maghreb* that he is recognised as a key player in the decolonisation debate. Cocula’s observation, though, does help us to focus on various important questions which I will attempt to address : how can writing work as a form of engagement or action? What makes his writing on decolonisation effective in the way earlier writing was not? In short, how might his journalism of the 1950s demonstrate that, in Sartre’s words, ‘parler, c’est agir’⁴³?

Having established that a writer can only be committed when he has recognised that he is ‘en situation’ in the world, Sartre goes on to stress two key elements of the committed writer’s project : the writer wants to provoke change in the world, and the only way to do that is through what he terms ‘dévoilement’. By this, he means the critical perspective or distance which an author opens up on society by representing it, providing his readers with an image of their world. It is a form of contestation, a challenge to the ‘Official History’ of the dominant order : ‘si la société se voit et surtout si elle se voit *vue*, il y a, par le fait même, contestation des valeurs établies et du régime’⁴⁴. When they are faced with this reflection, his readers should recognise their own responsibility, the fact that they too are ‘en situation’. Ignorance about the world and their place in it is no defence after the writer has spoken : ‘la

⁴² Cocula, op. cit., p. 88.

⁴³ Sartre, op. cit., p. 27.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p 89. Sartre’s emphasis.

fonction de l'écrivain est de faire en sorte que nul ne puisse ignorer le monde et que nul ne s'en puisse dire ignorant'⁴⁵.

Mauriac's various comments on the role of journalism echo these ideas strikingly. He focuses both on the journalist's role in society and his relationship with his readers. In a lecture given in 1947, just before Sartre publishes his manifesto, Mauriac sets out to define his own journalism against what he sees as its two dominant forms. For him, newspapers either repeat slavishly a particular party orthodoxy (as in the case of the Communist *L'Humanité*) or, more pervasively and more worryingly, in the case of mass circulation dailies such as *Paris-Soir*, aim to appeal to the largest possible audience by repeating and therefore reinforcing the common, received opinions in circulation. Good journalism, for him, must challenge those opinions and orthodoxies, and denounce the failures of the political order ; it must 'aller surtout contre le courant de l'opinion générale et des mœurs exécrables de la politique'⁴⁶. To 'déranger l'interprétation officielle des événements' (*BN*, i, p. 321), as he puts it in the *Bloc-notes*, means representing the world in a new way, one which avoids the conformism of cliché – 's'interdire les clichés, pour un journaliste écrivain, c'est donc s'obliger à découvrir et à formuler pour soi-même une pensée politique' (ibid., p. 386). In other words, for him a good journalist is above all a voice of dissent, and as such, a voice speaking from a particular position in the political arena – namely, one on the margins, that of outsider or political other. From 1952 to 1958, it is the position he adopts to contest and denounce 'civilised' society, and expose how justice is incompatible with the current colonial order. Adopting it also has other, more practical considerations, for his *prise de conscience* distances him not only from the position of conservative orthodoxy, but also from the paper which embodies that stance. His new position on the margins is nowhere reflected more clearly than in his shift from *Le Figaro* to *L'Express*. The new magazine had been quick to style itself as the radical, free-thinking alternative to the old order, its basic agenda being nothing

⁴⁵ ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁶ 'Journalisme et journalistes', in *Paroles Perdues et Retrouvées*, op. cit., p. 257.

less than the complete modernisation of France – a project of which decolonisation was seen as a central and inescapable component⁴⁷.

If Mauriac's conception of the journalist's role in society remains consistent, however, his relationship with his readers, as members of that society, is more complex. In 'Journalisme et journalistes', he sees himself holding the marginal position for his readers in particular. He wants to 'donner une voix à tous ceux qui n'ont pas le droit de la parole'⁴⁸. Establishing himself as the spokesman for his readers, those who cannot speak or make themselves heard against the stifling weight of the 'Official History', he sets out his aim as being to 'formuler tant de questions que vous vous posez et [...] chercher avec vous une réponse'⁴⁹. By engaging on their behalf in the debates of the moment, he can help them find their way, 'les aider à se reconnaître dans les ténèbres où nous nous débattons'⁵⁰. Thanks to his clear-sighted commentary, Mauriac suggests, like-minded readers will find an easier path through the confusion and deceit of politics.

In the context of the debate over decolonisation, though, the idea of 'giving voice' takes on a new meaning. For now, those to whom he is giving voice as he calls for justice in the Maghreb are the repressed other of colonisation, the victims of French brutality. He is no longer speaking with the enlightened minority of readers so much as speaking to them. His articles have a new goal, to make readers recognise the situation faced by the colonial people and the truth about the repression being practised on their behalf by the French authorities. In other words, 'se reconnaître' can be seen to have taken on a second meaning, one not so much of finding one's way as of recognising one's situation, the nature of one's own position: in short, experiencing a sense of *dévoilement*. As they read his articles, his readers are manoeuvred into the marginal position he takes and see the world from his perspective; they are put in a situation where they are obliged to act. As Sartre puts it,

⁴⁷ I return to this point in more detail below. See section 3, p. 186 ff.

⁴⁸ 'Journalisme et journalistes', art. cit., p. 257.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 254.

‘écrire, c’est donc à la fois dévoiler le monde et le proposer comme une tâche à la générosité du lecteur’⁵¹. That what he says about the world does trouble the established order is perhaps most clearly seen in the hostile letters he receives from readers in response to his articles in *Le Figaro* condemning the colonialist order in Morocco. These are displayed for the benefit of readers of the *Bloc-notes* in an early article (*BN*, i, pp. 61-2). Their reaction is one of stubborn resistance rather than generosity, a voluntary blindness : ‘ils ne s’étonnent jamais du sang répandu pour le maintien de l’ordre’ (*ibid.*, p. 133). In the same way that distance grows between Mauriac and the newspaper, so too, naturally, he is no longer in tune with his readers at *Le Figaro* ; they are no longer his natural constituency. Clearly, his articles can have their full performative potential only in a receptive context. Hence his move to the more fertile ground of *L’Express*, where public opinion can be more easily stimulated. As he says in response to a letter, ‘il n’y a qu’un moyen de faire cesser le crime, c’est que l’opinion publique intervienne avec force et c’est à quoi nous nous employons’⁵².

He makes this comment, in fact, in the context of a new development in the colonial wars which makes his demand for an enlightened response to the problem of the colonised other increasingly urgent : the use of torture by French soldiers in Algeria, allegations of which began to emerge in late 1954, shortly after the start of the war. This revelation prompts an article by Mauriac which is perhaps the most convincing example of how engaged writing might work, above all as a powerful and startling call to account. As historians have observed, the use of torture quickly became the focal point of the colonial wars as it made shockingly concrete the way in which France’s image as the country of the Rights of Man was being undermined⁵³ ; but it was also a troubling echo of Nazi practice, a parallel readily drawn by commentators : in the article discussed below, the French methods of internment and interrogation are seen as examples of ‘l’école de Himmler’ (*BN*, i, p. 240), and at the

⁵¹ Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁵² *L’Express*, 26 février 1955, p. 2.

⁵³ Sorum, *op. cit.*, pp. 113 ff.

same time, notes Jean Touzot, the journalist Claude Bourdet was denouncing ‘votre Gestapo d’Algérie’ (ibid., n.1). The issue is thus of vital importance for Mauriac. His intervention is praised by Fouilloux who sees it as his most convincing : ‘nulle part il ne se montre aussi convaincant que dans sa dénonciation de la torture’⁵⁴. It is certainly one of the earliest, made in January 1955 in an article entitled ‘La Question’ (BN, i, pp. 237-41, published in *L’Express* of 15 January), some two months after the start of the war in Algeria and two or so years before other key accounts of torture such as Henri Alleg’s similarly named *La Question* of 1958. Mauriac’s goal in writing the article is clear : he wants to bring to a halt the practice of torture. Thus I want to focus here on how he sets about achieving this aim, on the article’s rhetorical strategies and performative force : where does its effectiveness lie?

The power of the article itself is immediately apparent when it is read in the first of the five volumes in which the original columns were republished, first by Flammarion and more recently by Le Seuil. Even a cursory glance reveals how the staging of his dialogue with the lawyer Pierre Stibbe, who confronts him with evidence of torture, generates a sense of tension and urgency, beginning with a direct appeal for Mauriac to speak : ‘vous seul pouvez parler...Vous seul’ (BN, i, p. 237). Before considering the article itself more closely, though, I want to consider a second dimension : the context in which the article was originally received by its readers. Reading the article in its current format of the Seuil volume is arguably different from doing so in its original setting of the magazine. Firstly, what was a piece of journalism embedded in a particular historical moment has become a historical or cultural document, signified by its consecration in Le Seuil’s prestigious “Points” series. Our own historical distance with respect to events means the original shock and controversy provoked by the emerging evidence of torture has leached away. Secondly, and more importantly here, we must consider the fundamental differences between the two types of print media : the techniques of design and layout which magazines exploit mean our responses to the text can be affected in various ways.

⁵⁴ Fouilloux, art. cit., p. 66.

Only when we replace the article in its initial context can its potential effectiveness be fully understood.

Historically, as I have suggested, the significance of the article lies both in its subject matter and in the speed with which Mauriac intervenes ; but two other factors are also in play at the time of its original reception. Firstly, the very fact that it is authored by Mauriac immediately gives it extra weight. His outspokenness during the previous three years had confirmed him as a dominant figure in the intellectual field : even as he was planning his new magazine, Servan-Schreiber had singled out Mauriac as one of the four key intellectuals, along with Sartre, Camus and Malraux, whom he hoped would write for the magazine⁵⁵ ; and it is precisely Mauriac's collaboration with *L'Express* which is the second key factor determining the reception of his article. Important here is not only the fact that it makes his intervention possible in the first place, in that the magazine's own political stance, a left-of-centre liberalism, means he can talk about the situation in a way that he could no longer at *Le Figaro*. What is also striking is the way in which the magazine manages and exploits that intervention.

One of the key features of *L'Express* of the 1950s, as I mentioned above and discuss in more detail later, was the explicit agenda it sought to promote. Servan-Schreiber was convinced that the way ahead for post-war France lay in rapid modernisation along American lines, which meant specifically the market- and consumer-led growth championed by reformers such as the Radical Party politician Pierre Mendès-France ; but *L'Express* is particularly intriguing because not only does it support the agenda of modernisation, but it arguably *embodies* it in its very practice : firstly through its success as a modern business in a competitive market, and secondly through the way it reflects that modernity in its actual fabric, consciously aping the American model of the news magazine, and *Time* in particular⁵⁶. Its tabloid-style size, and bold use of cover photographs and banner headlines, brought a radically different look to French newstands dominated by broadsheet newspapers,

⁵⁵ Serge Siritzky et Françoise Roth, *Le Roman de 'L'Express'* (Paris : Atelier Marcel Jullian, 1979), p. 20.

⁵⁶ Siritzky and Roth, op. cit., p. 22.

with their tightly packed columns and small typefaces, and symbolised the break with the past the editorial team was advocating in its pages⁵⁷. This growing design literacy is seen to its full effect when we consider how the magazine packages Mauriac and his article, working to enhance what he says as much as possible, to maximise its impact.

Before we even reach the article itself, we are confronted by the front page of the magazine, dominated by a photographic portrait of Mauriac, alongside which is the headline 'Mauriac accuse'⁵⁸. The portrait is a powerful one, his face half lit as he stares broodingly in the direction of the lens, thus catching the eye of the reader picking up the magazine. The reader is troubled by his ambiguous look, which could be one of anger or, more disconcertingly, of accusation. This is reinforced by the headline which forces us to ask who he is accusing and about what. The slogan is an obvious reference to another famous intervention over an act of injustice and serves to reinforce Mauriac's place in a tradition of engaged intellectuals – to the extent of implying that Mauriac is the contemporary Zola. Indeed, as we consider the glowering figure preparing to launch into one of his brutal and sulphurous denunciations, it seems the verb 'accuser' takes on an almost performative force in his hands : the mere fact that it is Mauriac who denounces seems enough to bring about change.

As we turn to the article headed by the title, 'La Question', in bold type, we begin to see how the cover prefigures various themes of the passage⁵⁹. Yet it does so in a complex and sophisticated way, hinted at immediately by the ambiguity of the title. 'La question' can mean both torture and a more general form of interrogation or questioning. That Mauriac wants to keep both narrow and broad meanings in play is foreshadowed by the notion of accusation in the headline and confirmed by several striking and disconcerting features of the text itself. Firstly we realise that the article is not about torture as such, but Mauriac learning about and reacting to the new

⁵⁷ cf. Raymond Manevy, *L'évolution des formules de présentation de la presse quotidienne* (Paris : Editions Estienne, 1956), ch. 4.

⁵⁸ *L'Express*, 15 janvier 1955, cover.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 15.

development. More specifically, we see his hesitation and reluctance to become involved overcome as the situation is gradually revealed to him. Secondly, the passage is overtly literary in style. The stichomythia of the dialogue form (“il faudrait des preuves. On n’a jamais de preuves.” “Moi, j’ai vu”, *BN*, i, p. 237) combined with brief interjections in the present tense (‘je soupire’ ; ‘je l’observe’, *ibid.*) create a strong sense of pace and tension. The action develops in three ‘acts’ : in the first, longest section, we see how Mauriac’s resistance and his questioning of Stibbe’s story allows the evidence about the situation in Algeria to build up (ll. 1-105, pp. 237-40) ; then we see Mauriac’s frustration and denunciation of the order which allows this (ll. 106-126, pp. 240-41) ; finally, when Stibbe has left, we see Mauriac recognise the nature of his own situation and his responsibility, both in terms of his guilt and his obligations – ‘je suis comme un homme qui a pris part, sans le vouloir, à un crime et qui hésite à aller se livrer’ (ll. 127-142, p. 241). In other words, we witness the gradual process of *dévoilement* he undergoes.

The passage brings together the key stages of the ‘coming to consciousness’ I have traced through his earlier writings and restages them as Mauriac overcomes his weariness (‘que de fois l’aurai-je entendu ce “vous seul” !’, p. 237) and realises he must continue his campaign. The opening moment of the scene underlines this : it is dominated by the thematic of the look, in a reminder of the early meetings with the Arabs discussed above, and which made concrete to Mauriac the abstract roles of colonised and coloniser, strengthening his moral consciousness as a result⁶⁰. Stibbe’s appeal for him to exploit his particular status (‘vous seul pouvez parler’) is reinforced by his look, ‘le regard de ceux qui ont vu de leurs yeux, qui ne peuvent plus penser à rien d’autre’ (*ibid.*). Yet Mauriac’s first acknowledgement of the look is elliptical, made as he turns away, unable to support it and its call to account (‘je détourne la tête’). Indeed, Stibbe’s clear look of witness is in ironic contrast to the look Mauriac gives in return, which is dishonest and objectifying (‘je l’observe à la dérobée’). His reluctant attitude is one almost of *mauvaise foi* as he attempts to justify his resistance,

⁶⁰ See above, p. 163.

blaming a lack of hard evidence ('à quoi bon, puisque "ça" ne laisse pas de traces!', p. 238) and incredulous at Stibbe's descriptions of torture ("ce n'est pas possible", dis-je', *ibid.*).

At this point we begin to see the effectiveness of the dialogue form as Mauriac exploits the various ironies it allows. The discussion begins to take the form of an interrogation as Mauriac poses a series of questions about why torture is practised and the legal situation surrounding it. As he questions the lawyer, though, he finds his own position interrogated as evidence of malpractice mounts up. He is startled to find that suspects are taken before the judge without a defence lawyer: "sans avocat? Je croyais que la présence de l'avocat était exigée par la loi" (*ibid.*). In an echo of his original intentions as a journalist, the questions he asks reflect the common, received opinions of the majority, opinions of which he is quickly disabused: "la police a donc le droit de détenir un individu plus de vingt-quatre heures sans le déférer au magistrat? On m'avait pourtant dit..." (*ibid.*). In the same way that he obliges his readers to recognise the nature of the order in which they live, Mauriac must realise that he has no excuse for inaction now. He must confront a central truth, the extent to which the system of justice, the most fundamental element of civilised society, has been corrupted. An implicit parallel is drawn between the cynical abuse of the law by the French authorities and the tortured Arabs' sense of honour and adherence to a strict moral code, as Stibbe describes one suspect's feelings of guilt after having confessed – "il était fou de désespoir et de honte: « je suis déshonoré, gémissait-il, je les ai livrés... »" (*ibid.*).

After Stibbe has painted a graphic picture of the situation in Algeria, our attention shifts to Mauriac's reaction. The dominant themes of his critique of 'civilisation' return, combined with anger at the betrayal of France ("nous sommes cette France qui a proclamé les droits de l'homme à la face d'une Europe enivrée", p. 240) and those who look up to France ("et dire que pour la plupart de ceux que nous faisons souffrir, la France reste cette France-là", *ibid.*). A new response to the other must be found outside force, based on France's philosophy, its culture, its

spirituality : “ce n’est pas par la force, c’est par son message humain que la France reste conquérante” (p. 241) ; but part of the frustration of his outburst comes from his doubt over the effectiveness of such outbursts since people, typified by the right-thinking readers of the Figaro, “s’irritent au contraire de ce qu’on les oblige à voir ce qu’ils ont résolu à ignorer” (ibid). His hesitation persists as Stibbe leaves, a final appeal for action met with a dismissive “oui...oui...” (ibid.).

Indeed, as the final scene focuses on Mauriac alone, we see the first of a further series of ironies, as his initial reaction is to behave like those he has just denounced, as he distractedly reaches for a record. He too will be guilty of ignoring the situation, and will do so by turning to the refined pleasures of culture ; but it is the jolt of reaching for music after what he has heard, the clash of violence and culture, which finally provokes him, as he realises his own guilt. The resistance shown by others cannot be an excuse for his own inaction. As the scene closes we see a haunted figure ‘qui hésite à aller se livrer’ (p. 241) : he must accept his responsibility as both accomplice and witness and so speak as Stibbe desired, write a text which will reveal the truth about events in Algeria. Here we become particularly aware of the peculiar power of the text. For with a start, we also realise that the text he will decide to write is in fact the very text we have been reading : he writes a text which tells the story of its own prehistory, of the events which provoke it. Furthermore, at the heart of the narrative is Stibbe’s own story of torture and corruption. Thus, Stibbe’s telling of the story can be seen as a *mise en abyme* of the effect of engaged writing. It is because he is told this story that Mauriac will write the text we read, which in turn he hopes will provoke the reader in a similar way : both by repeating the story of torture and its gruesome details, and by narrating and demonstrating the effect of that story on him, giving us the example of his own *dévoilement* and urging us to follow. The questions posed by the front cover of the magazine begin to be answered. We realise that he is denouncing not only the practice of torture, but also those who allow it to be practised : the majority who, as he was tempted to do, choose to look away. The look which he could not support, that of Stibbe and the other ‘obsédés’, is the one he now

rests on the reader. His summons is further reinforced by the final scene, which offers another *mise en abyme*, this time of the retreat into culture. It provides a double jolt for the reader : not only does he witness Mauriac's experience of the clash between culture and violence, but he also realises that it is mirrored by his own situation, the fact that the text he is reading and which is telling him about torture is itself a cultural document – an uncomfortable and problematic experience.

The text, then, exploits sophisticated and satisfying artistic techniques in a way which questions our right to the refinement of such cultural pleasures in the face of violence. It is perhaps an exemplary illustration of Benjamin's comment, brutally honest in the way it carries the scars of the violence which permits it : we are not allowed to forget that the text we find satisfying has its roots in violence. As it documents acts of brutality committed against members of another culture, it opens up a chilling perspective : that the glorious emergence of Western culture through time, exemplified by the Great Men of the literary tradition introduced to native children in the schools of the Empire, has entailed the less-than-glorious suppression of other cultures, and continues to do so.

Yet in a final twist, this perspective is one which, it becomes clear, Mauriac himself unwittingly illustrates both in his own response to the cultural other, and the anti-colonialist position he adopts. For while he may be a political outsider during the first years of the *Bloc-notes*, he remains very much a cultural insider, part of the cultural order he criticises. As I discussed in Part 1 of the thesis, he has a fundamental belief in the value of that order, and this is confirmed by the fact that he chooses to accept the Nobel Prize. If, as he says, Sartre refused the prize, it is because 'accepter le prix Nobel, c'est accepter un certain ordre. Moi, je ne renie pas cet ordre, l'ordre de la bourgeoisie à laquelle j'appartiens'⁶¹. He recognises that his position as an outsider is relative, and that beyond his position lies another, more permanently alienated, colonised other. I have argued that one of the motivations for his engagement is the need for a more enlightened response to this other, one which is non-violent above all.

⁶¹ *Les Paroles restent*, op. cit., p. 195.

However, I also want to suggest that the response he proposes can itself be seen to involve a form of violence.

Mauriac's intervention over the practice of torture invites us to consider not only the value and roots of culture, but also the intersubjective dynamic involved in the colonial relationship, that between the colonial self and the colonised other. The nature of the relationship is articulated by the acts of torture practised by the French authorities ; it is inscribed on Arab bodies by the broken bottles they wield. Clearly, to adopt again the perspective offered by Lévinas, colonialism is a situation in which the absolute alterity of the other has not been respected. Lévinas argues that with the self's recognition of the other's alterity comes peaceful co-existence ; the relationship between the two 'se maintient sans violence – dans la paix avec cette altérité absolue. La "résistance" de l'Autre [...] a une structure positive : éthique'⁶². A peaceful and therefore ethical relationship establishes a divide between self and other, a limit in the form of the other's resistance to the self and its desire to draw on, or 'live from' the world. Inversely, therefore, violence is inevitable when the self ignores the other's alterity, when the presence of the other fails to trigger the self's moral consciousness. This is a situation illustrated, it could be said, by the actions of the colonial self, which aims simply to appropriate the colonised, to 'live from' them and their labour in the way that it 'lives from' the energies provided by food, air, light and so on. Torture is required, perhaps, when the colonised other refuses to acquiesce, when it finally resists being absorbed by the self in this way. As Pierre Vidal-Naquet points out, 'les victimes ne sont pas un petit groupe en quelque sorte spécialisé de malfaiteurs ou de "suspects", mais la masse même de la population dans la mesure où elle ne se laisse pas docilement encadrer par l'appareil colonial'⁶³. In short, attempts to bridge the gap which exists between self and other, to reduce the other to the same as the colonial powers want to do, cannot help but result in violence.

⁶² *Totalité et Infini*, op. cit., p. 215.

⁶³ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *La torture dans la République* (Paris : Maspero, 1983), p. 17.

As Mauriac recognises in his denunciation of torture, violence simply is not the way to approach the situation. Rather, he says, ‘c’est par son message humain que la France reste conquérante’ (BN, i, p. 241); but Mauriac here is betrayed by his metaphor. His characterisation of France as ‘conquérante’, triumphant as it spreads its message, gives a clear indication of the problematic nature of his own response. For if Mauriac is involved in an encounter with the Other, it is very much on his own terms – as befits his continuing belief in France’s ‘mission civilisatrice’. The Arabs he meets appeal to him above all because they have received a French education and have been drawn into French culture : ‘dans l’Islam entier des garçons arabes, parlant français, nourris de culture française, se tournent de nouveau vers la France avec une immense espérance’⁶⁴. Similarly, if at the time he can preach reconciliation and co-operation between Christianity and Islam⁶⁵, it is because he is reassured to find that Islam has many elements in common with his own faith : ‘j’ignorais par exemple la place que la Vierge Marie occupe dans la spiritualité musulmane...’⁶⁶. To identify a common ground in this way, to make the other familiar, is to make it what Lévinas terms ‘intelligible’, and so neutralise and subsume it : ‘l’intelligibilité, le fait même de la représentation, est la possibilité pour l’Autre de se déterminer par le Même, sans déterminer le Même, sans introduire d’altérité en lui’⁶⁷. In short, Mauriac’s own response of assimilation, however well-intentioned, is itself a kind of violence in the way it erases the identity of the other. As we consider it alongside the violence of torture, we realise that we face a stark choice in our dealings with the other : either we

⁶⁴ François Mauriac, *Lettres d’une Vie*, correspondance recueillie et présentée par Caroline Mauriac, lettre à Pierre Mauriac, février 1953 (Paris : Grasset, 1981), p. 314.

⁶⁵ See for example, ‘Pour une nouvelle alliance entre la France et l’Islam’, art. cit., written in March 1953.

⁶⁶ *Correspondance François Mauriac - Georges Duhamel*, op. cit., p. 230. In expressing his response to the ‘educated’ Moroccans he meets and their culture in these ethnocentric terms, he illustrates, perhaps uncomfortably, Frantz Fanon’s point that ‘pendant la période de la libération, la bourgeoisie colonialiste cherche avec fièvre des contacts avec les “élites”. C’est avec les élites qu’est entrepris le fameux dialogue sur les valeurs. La bourgeoisie colonialiste, quand elle enregistre l’impossibilité pour elle de maintenir sa domination sur les pays coloniaux, décide de mener un combat d’arrière garde sur le terrain de la culture, des valeurs, des techniques, etc’. See Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (Paris : Gallimard, coll. “Folio-actuel”, 1991), p. 74. While, as we have seen, Mauriac is not a colonialist in the accepted sense of the word, it is probably fair to say that for Fanon, all those who retained some sense of white superiority could be classified as such.

⁶⁷ *Totalité et Infini*, op. cit., p. 129.

recognise the other's absolute alterity, or we reduce the other to the same – we choose either peace or violence. There is no half-way measure. The compromise which the anti-colonialist position seems to offer, enlightened reform with continued colonial presence, is shown to be illusory.

Nevertheless, it would be churlish to suggest that this problem invalidates an intervention which was fundamentally sincere. To do so would be to overlook the courage he showed in taking an outspoken and potentially dangerous stance, one which won him widespread respect. As one young Frenchman observed, responding to Françoise Giroud's 1957 survey of what she termed the *Nouvelle Vague*, the new, post-war generation, 'j'admire aujourd'hui Mauriac pour son courage politique et humain (qui semble "inutile" et "utopique" pour un homme qui n'avait pas besoin de faire cela)'⁶⁸; but it was precisely because Mauriac did not need to intervene that he felt obliged to do so. His sustained interrogation of culture, its role in society and its implications is nothing less than an examination of his own *raison d'être*, and brings to the surface fundamental and uncomfortable tensions. With our historical distance, as we admire his articles, their artistry and style, it is all too easy to forget that they have their roots in violence, and to overlook what Mauriac himself realised in a way which was both powerful and poignant. Above all, perhaps, the preoccupations he expresses in the first years of the *Bloc-notes* and the questions he raises, provide a response to his concern that political journalism is inevitably ephemeral, that 'rien ne s'évapore aussi vite qu'un écrit politique et ne devient si rapidement incompréhensible'⁶⁹. For while the political events and issues he reflects on may themselves be transitory, they serve to highlight profounder concerns, ethical issues which cut through history and remain with us today. Mauriac's analyses remind us again not only that the ethical should inform the political, but also of the disturbing regularity with which the two spheres are held apart.

⁶⁸ Françoise Giroud, *La Nouvelle Vague* (Paris : Gallimard, 1958), p. 132.

⁶⁹ *Nouvelles Lettres d'une Vie*, correspondance recueillie et présentée par Caroline Mauriac, lettre à René d'Uckermann, 14 juin 1957 (Paris : Grasset, 1989), p. 296.

Committed writing : success or failure?

One crucial issue relating to Mauriac's incisive article denouncing torture – arguably, in fact, its most significant – remains to be resolved, as the issues it raises are those I go on to explore further in the next section. While 'La Question' and other articles of the *Bloc-notes* retain their relevance for the modern-day reader through the persistent moral and ethical issues they raise, what counted in the short term was its political effect ; hence, I have argued, the way the article is packaged by *L'Express* in order to maximise its impact. To consider the success of the article as an intervention in the debate – attempting to gauge whether its rhetorical intention is matched by its performative force – is to shift from an ethical to a historical perspective. Reconsidering 'La Question' from this angle reminds us that decolonisation is not an isolated event or problem, but part of a complex series of changes affecting France in the 1950s and 60s, changes in which Mauriac, because of his status as intellectual and his participation with *L'Express*, is caught up.

Mauriac's article presents us with something of a paradox ; it is after all an apparently successful intervention. As Mauriac observes later in the same year, 'il a suffi d'un seul de mes articles sur les méthodes policières en Algérie pour qu'elles aient été fort adoucies pendant trois ou quatre mois' (*BN*, i, p. 311). In his account of the use of torture during the conflicts in North Africa, Vidal-Naquet highlights the role played by Mauriac's article in contemporary Parliamentary debates, and relates that it led directly to two measures being taken by the authorities : firstly, police officers suspected of using torture were returned to France, and secondly, a commission of enquiry was set up under Roger Willaume⁷⁰. However, as Mauriac himself implies, the effects of the article were short-lived. Indeed, one of the conclusions of Willaume's enquiry was to recommend that torture be permitted under certain restricted circumstances⁷¹. Certainly, the practice of torture continued unabated for the remainder of the war, despite the continuing campaign by press and

⁷⁰ *La torture dans la République*, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 28.

intellectuals. Thus, what the brief and isolated success of ‘La Question’ serves to do more than anything, perhaps, is highlight the general *failure* of such interventions, and focus attention as well on a central question raised by Vidal-Naquet : ‘comment la torture a-t-elle pu subsister de pair avec la dénonciation qui en a été faite dans une partie de la presse, et notamment dans les journaux considérés comme “sérieux”?’⁷² – journals, that is to say, such as *L’Express*, which placed themselves at the forefront of the campaign against torture.

The answer to this question is complex, but ironically, the pages of the very magazine which promotes Mauriac’s successful intervention provide some of the most graphic clues – graphic here in a literal sense in fact. Considering once again the original setting of ‘La Question’ reveals how an important contemporary tension is displayed in the page layout of the magazine. The only piece of editorial material on the last page, Mauriac’s article occupies just over half the space. The lower half is dominated by two advertisements. One, the larger of the two, occupying just under a quarter of the page (which is of approximately A3 size), is for Perrier mineral water ; a second, smaller one on its left, is for a Parisian shop specialising in fur coats. In other words, at the same time as Mauriac is addressing his readers, urging them to take action, and denouncing those who want to ignore the injustice in Algeria, advertisements for products designed to appeal to their sophisticated lifestyle are trying to distract them. His readers are being encouraged to avert their eyes – literally and also, perhaps, metaphorically.

In attempting to answer the problem he poses, Vidal-Naquet argues that if their interventions fail, the fault lies not so much with the intellectuals themselves as with the apathy of their readers : however ‘enlightened’ or receptive a readership appears to be, ‘il manquera toujours à beaucoup ce qui est nécessaire pour la protestation comme pour la révolte : *la disponibilité*’. Readers are repeatedly distracted, ‘sollicité[s] par bien d’autres émissions’⁷³. Their attention is caught by

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷³ *ibid.* Vidal-Naquet’s emphasis.

other events, other narratives. One of these in particular is especially potent and appealing – and told most passionately by the magazine which is simultaneously trying to encourage their protests. The advertisements which frame another gloomy episode of the distasteful narrative of decolonisation are pointers to, and invitations to participate in, the second story dominating *L'Express* at the time : that of the rejuvenation and prosperity that come with the much-needed modernisation of France. In the face of these conflicting messages, the readers show themselves to be all too willing to respond to the latter, and to avert their eyes from the first – turn away, in other words, from Mauriac's gaze. In 1957, the magazine published another victim's account of the experience of torture ; and at the same time, it launched its survey into the new generation it snappily labelled the *Nouvelle Vague*, an attempt to understand and define the mood of the era. The *Nouvelle Vague* survey provoked 15,000 responses, the account of torture virtually none⁷⁴.

The second half of this part of the thesis sets out to explore more closely this narrative of modernisation, its contradictions, and Mauriac's role in it, arguing that it means two things above all for him : firstly, the magazine's pursuit of the agenda of modernisation means his collaboration is exploited in certain ways and for certain ends – as the striking way in which it packages his article on torture has suggested ; secondly, we see him react to certain things, particularly social and cultural developments, which are a corollary of that agenda, and which provoke him to leave *L'Express*. Indeed, I suggest, once he feels that the problem of decolonisation can be resolved under de Gaulle, he becomes increasingly aware of the changes which are affecting his world, and the threat posed to him by encroaching modernity.

3. Mauriac, *L'Express*, and the challenge of modernity.

In his discussion of the various fields of cultural production, Pierre Bourdieu has suggested that every writer has what he calls a 'natural site', by which he means that they find a place in a publishing house or newspaper which most closely matches

⁷⁴ Serge Siritzky et Françoise Roth, *Le Roman de 'L'Express'*, op. cit., p. 152.

their own values, agenda, or socio-cultural profile⁷⁵. Finding this site is essential for their success, for ‘les producteurs ou les produits qui ne sont pas à leur place – qui sont, comme on dit, “déplacés” – sont plus ou moins condamnés à l’échec’⁷⁶. Thus, for example, Samuel Beckett is taken up by Editions de Minuit, something which establishes and confirms both as experimental, independent and avant-garde. Similarly, it is unsurprising to find Mauriac writing frequently for *Le Figaro* up to the early 1950s. Both shared a broadly similar right-wing, conservative perspective which was rooted in and reflected the worldview of a traditional, patrician, bourgeois constituency. For most of his time at *Le Figaro*, Mauriac’s articles coincided consistently with the viewpoint of both the paper and its readers. This is particularly true in the immediate post-war period, when he became involved in an extensive anti-Communist polemic, and adopted a strongly patriotic stance which included his expressions of support for the French government’s colonialist policies in Indochina⁷⁷. However, as I discussed in section 2 of this part of the thesis, his compatibility with the newspaper and its constituency was tested and then disrupted by his sudden *prise de conscience* over the problem of decolonisation, and his espousal of a more liberal, pro-independence standpoint. His forthright expression of such views in the columns of a newspaper which, like its readers, was staunchly pro-colonialist, created a widening rift with the editorial board which made his departure inevitable. In other words, in order to say what he wanted about decolonisation – an issue which, as we have seen, became a question of personal responsibility for him – he needed to find a more appropriate site ; and, in the context of the debate over decolonisation at least, there was none more appropriate than the newly launched (in 1953) *Express*. Through their calls for colonial reform, both Mauriac and the magazine found themselves in the position of what Serge Serror calls ‘atypicality’. Serror coins this term to describe

⁷⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l’art*, op. cit., p. 276.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ See above, p. 152 and n. 8.

those whose attitude is, if not one of revolution, at least one of revolt⁷⁸. While they remain loyal to the dominant order – as we shall see, *L'Express*, for all its reforming zeal, never calls into question the fundamental capitalist ideologies on which the French system, its economic and social order, is predicated: indeed, its aim is to make them work more effectively – those in an atypical position are nevertheless critical of it, are at odds with the views held by the majority, and aim to inflect it in certain, more enlightened ways.

Yet intriguingly, Mauriac's collaboration with the magazine seems in most other respects to be highly *unnatural*, an infringement of the unwritten laws of the journalistic field, and so apparently risking the failure Bourdieu predicts. This impression is captured nowhere more startlingly than in a photograph taken in 1954, soon after his arrival at *L'Express*⁷⁹. Indeed, as Mauriac sits at a desk, pen in hand over a sheaf of papers, and surrounded by the magazine's two editors, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber and Françoise Giroud, it seems he is in the process of signing a contract. Two things strike us immediately: the first is the almost shocking difference in age between the columnist and his editors, a generational gap since Mauriac was approaching seventy at the time, while they were little more than thirty. This radical age difference is reflected in their appearance, though what catches our eye is not so much Mauriac's dark, formal suit, as the look of the other two: while Giroud, in her pale and simple dress, is the epitome of contemporary style, Servan-Schreiber has his jacket off and his sleeves rolled up – a literal reflection of his metaphorical determination to roll up his sleeves and get on with the business of reinvigorating France. It is in this sense, getting involved with two people who embodied the dynamism of a new generation, that Mauriac seemed to have strayed some way from his 'natural site'. As Giroud reflects, 'it really was an extraordinary moment, the spectacle of this elderly gentleman, weighed down with all the honours with which

⁷⁸ Serge Serror, 'L'Express et l'opinion publique' (unpublished mémoire de DEA, Université de Paris, 1960), p. 17, n. 2. 'L'atypique, tout en s'opposant au groupe, y demeure: son but n'est pas de l'abolir, mais de l'infléchir'.

⁷⁹ Reproduced in Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: decolonisation and the reordering of French culture*, op. cit., p. 131.

the Establishment endows its own, leaving the ancient and honourable paper *Le Figaro* to join forces with two rebels who were putting together a new and virtually unknown magazine'⁸⁰. Her impression is shared by Mauriac. Looking back on his time at the magazine in the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs*, he recognises that it brought together 'des esprits que tout aurait dû séparer, et que tout sépara d'ailleurs, après peu d'années' (*OA*, p. 821). Yet given the sense of strangeness they both feel, how come the collaboration between the ageing, bourgeois, essentially conservative writer, and the youthful, then-radical, left-of-centre magazine lasts seven years? Not only that, but why is his collaboration actively sought out by Servan-Schreiber? Early on, as the magazine project takes shape, he sets himself a clear target : 'dans mon journal, je veux Mauriac, Camus, Sartre et Malraux'⁸¹. His determination is echoed in the suggestions made by members of his team that they should attempt to poach Mauriac from *Le Figaro* even before the tensions between the two over Morocco become more apparent⁸². Such enthusiasm encourages us to ask why Servan-Schreiber was so keen to have Mauriac and the other intellectual heavyweights participate in the magazine, to consider what he wanted from them – in short, to examine why, as he puts it, 'je sens que j'ai besoin d'eux'⁸³. My aim in this section, then, is to explore why his collaboration with the magazine is possible – why, however briefly, it can be his 'natural site' – and also why their divorce was inevitable. For by 1961, Mauriac's place was no longer with a magazine which promoted what he saw as the tawdry and degraded culture of the *Nouvelle Vague*, and in another appropriate move, he switched the *Bloc-notes* to the *Figaro littéraire*. The current section helps to shed new light on the development of Mauriac's journalism during this time, particularly with respect to the change in his writing provoked by the return to power of de Gaulle and the subsequent shift to the *Figaro littéraire* ; but in recontextualising his work and examining the relationship with *L'Express* and its consequences, we also see how it

⁸⁰ Françoise Giroud, *I Give you my Word*, trans. Richard Seaver (London : Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1975), p. 133. Originally published as *Si je mens...* (Paris : Stock, 1972). Original text unavailable.

⁸¹ cit. in Sirtzky et Roth, *Le Roman de 'L'Express'*, op. cit., p. 20.

⁸² Jean Lacouture, *François Mauriac*, op. cit., p. 330.

⁸³ Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, *Passions* (Paris : Fixot, 1991), p. 206.

provides a powerful illustration of what Kristin Ross has called the ‘reordering’ of French culture in the 1950s and 60s⁸⁴, a series of seismic shifts which *L'Express* itself helps to trigger.

‘La vieille poule aux œufs d’or’ : Mauriac at *L'Express*.

Servan-Schreiber’s desire to see Mauriac involved in the magazine would not in itself be sufficient to bring that involvement about. For any collaboration, an element of common ground is still required, and in fact, it proves to be quite extensive during Mauriac’s first few years with *L'Express*. They share not only concern over the question of decolonisation in particular, but also what Scott calls a ‘growing scorn’ for the ineffectual Fourth Republic⁸⁵. The period of the Fourth Republic, established in the post-war years, was dogged by instability thanks to a parliamentary system which saw a series of minority governments toppled and replaced. Moreover, the country’s economy was stagnating at a time when growth was urgently required. Serror, for example, notes that in 1953, the feeling among the French population was that living standards had been in constant decline for the previous five years⁸⁶. More positively, both Mauriac and Servan-Schreiber recognised that Pierre Mendès-France, the Radical Party leader, had the potential to improve the situation, or ‘remettre le vieux pays à flot’, as Mauriac puts it (*BN*, i, p. 176). Nevertheless, the broad agreement which forms this shared platform belies crucial differences between Mauriac and the magazine, differences which will, in fact, ultimately lead to the split between the two. They arise because the two invest the situation with different meanings, or have a different understanding of what precisely is at stake. Where the response of one is in terms of a poetic idealism, that of the other is based on political pragmatism. As we saw in the last chapter, Mauriac relates the colonial conflict and its violence to an idealistic or symbolic ‘certaine idée de la France’. He hopes to see the country’s tarnished grandeur restored by a more enlightened form of relationship

⁸⁴ Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies : decolonisation and the reordering of French Culture*, op. cit.

⁸⁵ Malcolm Scott, *Mauriac : the politics of a novelist*, op. cit., p. 108.

⁸⁶ Serge Serror, op. cit., p. 10.

with the colonies. Similarly, prefiguring his later portrayal of de Gaulle, he begins to cast Mendès-France as an epic hero, who captures his imagination as he battles against the mediocre men around him in the name of France (*BN*, i, p. 250).

For *L'Express*, though, decolonisation was part of an entirely different paradigm. What concerned the team was not so much an abstract sense of France's 'grandeur', but its present and future development. As Ross puts it, they were 'anxious to leave the crises of the *après-guerre* period and decolonisation behind them, to consecrate their efforts on the economic renovation of their country, and to benefit from the general improvement in the standard of living that followed from it'⁸⁷. They saw decolonisation as a component in a comprehensive political and economic agenda. It was an essential part of the process of modernisation required by the country in the post-war years. The magazine, Giroud observes, 'asked its readers to believe that the happiness and future of France did not reside in the conservation of its colonial empire ; it asked its readers to trace then follow through the real means of progress'⁸⁸. The colonies, for them, represented a relic of the country's imperial past, one which hampered its move into the future ; colonisation was simply incompatible with modernisation. Where, then, *did* the future reside? How was modernity to be defined and modernisation to be achieved?

On reading *L'Express*, it becomes clear that the magazine's editorial team had no doubt as to where the answer lay. For them, it was to be found in the broadly liberal economic agenda for which Mendès-France in particular was arguing at the time. During the 1950s, he emerged as one of the leading thinkers on the economy in French politics. Convinced that he was the only politician capable of carrying out the reforms necessary for modernisation, the magazine set about promoting Mendès-France and the ideas he represented with enormous conviction. Their support for him is made clear immediately : the first issue headlines an interview with the politician in which he sets out more clearly what he believes modernisation to mean⁸⁹.

⁸⁷ Ross, op. cit., p. 144.

⁸⁸ Françoise Giroud, op. cit., p. 186.

⁸⁹ *L'Express*, 16 mai 1953, p. 7.

Mendès-France himself shared the socialist inclination for state intervention. Echoing the various economic plans drawn up in France during the late 1940s and early 1950s, he argued for government planning and investment to ensure a strong industrial base ; but importantly for *L'Express*, as we shall see, this is combined with his recognition for the need to embrace the market. Giroud is quick to underline this when she says that 'Mendès-France was an advocate of government planning but also a staunch supporter of the market economy'⁹⁰. As Rioux observes, the aim of intervention was itself to increase industrial efficiency and productivity, to ensure competition, and through this, increase choice for the consumer⁹¹. This stress on productivity and competition signals that for Mendès-France and the other reformers, modernisation is predicated not just on economic growth, but particularly on encouraging the manufacture and consumption of goods, or consumer capitalism.

In order to succeed, of course, this in turn depends on the presence of willing consumers. Now, one of the key problems facing the governments of the Fourth Republic was precisely the *lack* of such a consumer culture. As Vinen points out, while it had certainly existed on the Parisian boulevards since the end of the 19th Century, France as a whole 'remained dominated by a culture of self-sufficiency, utilitarianism and meanness'⁹². In other words, for economic take-off to be achieved required nothing less than the wholesale re-education of the French, and the creation of a consumer society. As Weiner puts it, the Fourth Republic had to 'encourage the French to do away with their traditionally parsimonious ways and become consumers'⁹³. Indeed, Kuisel notes that throughout the 1950s, successive governments engaged in active attempts to stimulate the market and encourage spending : between 1952 and 1954, for example, price freezes were combined with wage increases⁹⁴.

⁹⁰ Giroud, op. cit., p. 186.

⁹¹ Jean-Pierre Rioux, *La France de la Quatrième République*, 2 vols (Paris : Seuil, coll. "Points-Histoire", 1983), ii, 'l'expansion et l'impuissance, 1952-1958', p. 168.

⁹² Richard Vinen, *France 1934-1970*, (London : Macmillan, 1996), p. 121.

⁹³ Susan Weiner, 'The *Consommatrice* of the 1950s and Elsa Triolet's *Roses à crédit*', *French Cultural Studies*, 17 (1995), p. 124.

⁹⁴ Richard Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 268.

Their efforts met with some success, as the French rose readily to the bait. Rioux notes that between 1950 and 1957, consumption increased by 40%, with demand quickly outstripping supply⁹⁵. As he observes laconically, ‘au total, les Français ont incontestablement préféré consommer plutôt qu’investir ou épargner’⁹⁶.

L'Express is both intriguing and important because its support for Mendès-France and what Kuisel terms the ‘neo-liberal order’⁹⁷ he represented went beyond a series of favourable editorials. Rather, it displayed more or less absolute commitment, both to the possibility of bringing Mendès-France to power, and to the idea of the rebirth of France along the lines he was suggesting. As Giroud says of the magazine, ‘in its political ramifications, – and the overlap is constant – economics was the very *raison d’être* of *L'Express*’⁹⁸. The team, she says, was ‘a group of people who wanted with all their might to move France out of its rut’⁹⁹. They were intent on helping to redefine France, and define the modernity it would experience. Certainly, the committed stance adopted by the magazine marks a break from the (at least superficial) objectivity of the traditional press. In the way it sets out to promote a very clear agenda and series of goals, rooted firmly in an economic and political philosophy, it could be said to have more in common with Sartre’s *Les Temps Modernes*, itself launched in 1945. Indeed the complementarity of the two journals is suggested by the way *L'Express*, throughout the 1950s, repeatedly plays host to both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty ; and as Ross points out, Sartre chooses the magazine to announce his split with the Communist Party in 1957¹⁰⁰. More accurately, perhaps, *L'Express* can be described as bringing the serious analysis of the specialist press – that found in journals such as *Les Temps Modernes* – to a wider audience, or what we

⁹⁵ Jean-Pierre Rioux, op. cit., p. 240.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 244.

⁹⁷ Kuisel, op. cit., p. 250.

⁹⁸ Giroud, op. cit., p. 140.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁰ Ross, op. cit., p. 68.

would today call the mass market¹⁰¹. The magazine featured articles by academics and specialists discussing various contemporary problems and issues, from urban development to nuclear power. It developed a section entitled *la marche des idées* which was designed to ‘apporter aux lecteurs des documents qu’ils ne peuvent trouver ailleurs et la synthèse des ouvrages importants dont ils doivent connaître le contenu’¹⁰². These documents were frequently published as ‘dossiers’ within the magazine itself, numbered separately and clearly intended to be detached and kept as a sort of reference library of modern life. Giroud herself saw one of the magazine’s main innovations being the way it set out to act as an intermediary between a form of ‘brains trust’ defining and shaping the modern France, and the general public : ‘it was a rather original adventure in that it brought together a handful of real journalists [...], in other words people capable of translating ideas into writing in such a way that they became clear and striking, of simplifying them, of disseminating them ; and it also brought together a handful of important government officials, university professors, business leaders and politicians, all of whom had the experience and ability to furnish us not with bits and pieces of information but with the whole picture’¹⁰³. In short, the magazine was the first, as she puts it, ‘to bring together what you might term a doctrine [...] and a journalistic technique capable of making it lively and sensitive to the needs and mood of the times’¹⁰⁴.

One of the most obvious manifestations of this technique, as I discussed briefly in section 2, is the format adopted by the magazine¹⁰⁵. Its own deliberately modern design, modelled on the American news weeklies, embodies the modernity advocated by its contributors. The brevity and clarity of the articles setting out the agenda are reflected nicely in typography and layout which themselves are clean, crisp

¹⁰¹ From an initial level of 35,000 copies at its launch in 1953, the circulation of the magazine grew steadily : after two years, 150,000 copies a week were being printed and 115,000 sold, making it the second most popular news weekly after *Le Canard Enchaîné*. It was regularly outselling its natural rival, *France-Observateur*, which was the first news weekly, launched in 1950, by two or three to one. Data from Serron, op. cit., pp. 14-15 and Table 5, p. 81.

¹⁰² Siritzky et Roth, op. cit., p. 122.

¹⁰³ Giroud, op. cit., p. 139 ; cf Siritzky et Roth, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁰⁵ See above, section 2, pp. 170-171.

and uncluttered and so break the mould of the traditional French press. Giroud again : ‘from the format to the contents, not to mention the writing style, the selections, the use of captions, the typography : we invented it all’¹⁰⁶. In other words, being *seen* to be modern was as important as discussing and defining modernity itself.

However, if *L'Express* resembles *Les Temps Modernes* in its general ethos and spirit of *engagement*, it remains radically different in one very important way : while it may bring *Les Temps Modernes* to the mass market – could even, perhaps, be characterised as *Les Temps Modernes* with advertisements – it is precisely the presence of advertisements, its relationship to the market, which makes the difference. Where the whole philosophy of Sartre’s journal is reflected by the way it stands aloof from the rigours of the market, that of *L'Express* is reflected by the fact that it is prepared to embrace it. The magazine’s relationship to the market is a crucial factor both in its overall development during the 1950s, and in its involvement with Mauriac in particular, as we see it get caught between two opposing logics – one of commitment, the other of commercialisation.

This important tension arises because *L'Express* is a committed journal arguably committed to one task especially – namely, promoting the consumer society on which the success of the new agenda depends, and helping to usher the French towards the market. Its commitment to the agenda of Mendès-France and the reformers emerges not only in its weighty political and economic analyses, but also in the seemingly unrelated, apolitical areas of the magazine – areas, in fact, where we can see the theoretical ideas being translated into the more recognisable terms of everyday life. One of the most important examples of this is *Madame Express*. The magazine introduced a section devoted to womens’ interests, entitled ‘une page au féminin’, in 1954. This expanded and became *Madame Express*, ‘supplément pratique’, in 1958. The development of such a section is another example of the

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 148. Strictly speaking, her claim is not entirely accurate. *France-Observateur* was exploiting a similar template at the time, albeit with less commercial success. Nevertheless, what is interesting is less the accuracy of Giroud’s claim, than what is at stake for her in making it – namely, the need once again to stress the innovative, cutting-edge nature of the magazine.

magazine's innovation, for as Serror points out, it was unheard of at the time in the mainstream political press¹⁰⁷. It was carried out in response to the fact that *L'Express* counted a large number of women amongst its readers (at 36%, by far the largest among the *journaux d'opinion*/political press¹⁰⁸). Once more, the magazine establishes itself as a messenger of change, promoting and shaping the revolutions underway : the image offered by the supplement is that of the newly dynamic career woman, epitomised by Giroud herself, and one which its readers, coming from a predominantly bourgeois background, would either recognise or aspire to. Simultaneously, though, the creation of the 'page au féminin' is a pragmatic response to the key role women were seen to be playing in the building of a consumer society – a point made by the editors at the time of its introduction, when they highlight the fact that '83% des achats sont effectués par les femmes'¹⁰⁹. It is only sensible to target them and encourage them further into the market ; encourage them, in other words, to consume more, if consumption is one of the keys to modernisation. Consequently, *Madame Express* is dominated by guides to the latest fashions and accessories, its explicit aim being to make consumption easier for busy women, who are busy above all because they must also 'tenir une maison, élever des enfants, s'habiller'¹¹⁰. An interesting message thus begins to emerge from these pages. Modernity, as far as *L'Express* is concerned at least, does not seem to involve any profound change in women's roles. Their dynamism is unproblematic as long as it does not challenge their role within the traditional bourgeois framework. Rather, modernity is about style and look ; it is above all something which can, or must, be bought. *Madame Express*, then, is working assiduously to oil the wheels of the market. It acts as an intermediary between consumers and producers, educating both in the mechanisms of the market as it alerts the latter to the need to recognise the desires, and power, of the consumer :

¹⁰⁷Serror, op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁹ *L'Express*, 10 avril 1954, p. 10. For further discussion of the part played by women in establishing the consumer society in France, and the role of the mass media in stimulating their participation and fuelling their desires through the images of modern domesticity it offers, see Susan Weiner, 'The *Consommatrice* of the 1950s and Elsa Triolet's *Roses à crédit*', art. cit.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

‘nous signalerons aux industriels, aux commerçants [...] les améliorations que les femmes souhaitent, les suggestions qu’elles font pour que leur vie quotidienne matérielle soit simplifiée’¹¹¹. The ideology of free market economics is articulated in even the most innocent of consumer tests as the magazine works to stimulate competition¹¹².

L'Express, of course, is a far from disinterested player in this. It is in its best interests to ensure that the circulation of goods is maintained – not only because it stands to gain further profit from increased advertising, but also, and more fundamentally, because its own future depends on it. Economics is its *raison d'être*, not only because it is central to the ideas it is trying to promote, but also in another, more basic way. Like the goods whose advertisements it carries, the magazine is itself a commodity. If it is to survive, it must be bought and read ; it must carve out a place in the market and fend off its competitors. Indeed, it proves to be exemplary in this respect. It offers a textbook case of business success as it achieves sustained growth despite its ‘ludicrously small’ initial capital of \$20,000¹¹³ – success achieved through the careful management and modern, efficient practices prescribed by Mendès-France : as an alert business should, it exploits gaps in the market and capitalises on opportunities (such as the chance to expand its readership amongst women). In a way, the fact that *L'Express* succeeds as a commodity is itself part of the point : the magazine is not simply promoting the new agenda, but proving its validity as it does so. Nevertheless, a certain tension does arise from the fact that the magazine is both a business and a committed journal, one acknowledged by the protagonists themselves. It is essential, Giroud remarks, that ‘the person responsible for the commercial decisions remains fully aware of the very special nature of his or her product’¹¹⁴. She seems to recognise that commercial interests are an inevitable threat to the purity of

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² ‘*L'Express* n’hésite pas à critiquer, quitte à perdre des annonceurs. Des bancs d’essais sont organisés : on enlève les étiquettes des boîtes de conserve, on fait goûter à toute la rédaction, et on publie les résultats!’ Siritzky et Roth, *ibid.*

¹¹³ Giroud, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 152.

motive associated with commitment. An awareness of this problem is suggested too by Servan-Schreiber's desire, early on, to ensure the financial independence of the magazine¹¹⁵ – in other words, he wanted to keep the world of purely commercial interests at arm's length in the same way that *Madame Express*, through its consumer tests, reflected a stance towards the market which was both complicit and critical. Equally, though, it is to this tension, one which derives from the magazine's position on the cusp of commitment and commercialisation, and which is at the heart of *L'Express* during its first decade, that we can trace Mauriac's own collaboration, and specifically Servan-Schreiber's desire to see his involvement. Indeed, that the tension should come most clearly into focus with Mauriac's involvement is perhaps appropriate. Its resolution in the 1960s is part of the general paradigm shift within *L'Express* in which Mauriac himself is caught up, and which sees him leave the magazine as it decides between the two conflicting motivations.

One of the earliest moves made by Servan-Schreiber, as we have seen, is to establish the magazine as the authoritative voice of a 'brains trust'. The presence of this team of specialists lends weight to the rhetoric of truth he is quick to establish in its very first issue, when he says in his editorial that 'il faut dire la vérité telle que nous la voyons'¹¹⁶. Yet Mauriac's involvement is not based on any particular political or economic expertise, as it might be said to be in the case of Sartre, and certainly Merleau-Ponty. Rather, his function is to provide the magazine with a greater *moral* authority. His collaboration confirms that it is something to be taken seriously: 'l'arrivée du prix Nobel va renforcer l'influence du journal'¹¹⁷. He brings with him, in other words, what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'symbolic capital'. This is the name he gives to the prestige accumulated over time by an individual whose success depends on recognition by others, on their acknowledgement of his distinctive talent or ability: 'le capital symbolique, c'est n'importe quelle propriété (n'importe quelle espèce de capital, physique, économique, culturel, social) lorsqu'elle est perçue par des agents

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 153.

¹¹⁶ *L'Express*, 16 mai 1953, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ Siritzky et Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

sociaux dont les catégories de perception sont telles qu'ils sont en mesure de la connaître (de l'apercevoir) et de la reconnaître, de lui accorder valeur'¹¹⁸. Symbolic capital brings with it authority and respect, a certain status within the socio-cultural order. As such, it is essential for any agent intending to intervene successfully in the world – for *L'Express* to substantiate its claim to be an important player in the political field, for example. As a newcomer, the magazine possesses only a very small amount, but neither has it got time to wait for its potentially slow and gradual accumulation. If it is to achieve its ambition and make an immediate political impact, the capital must be accrued in other ways, must be imported from other sources. As Giroud points out, 'when you are publishing a magazine which has to make an immediate impact [...], it is indeed better to open your columns to people whose authority is impressive'¹¹⁹. Firstly, then, Mauriac is desirable because he is one such source. The symbolic capital he has accumulated over his years as writer and artist, and the way it translates into his reputation as a free-thinking intellectual, is the precondition for his participation in *L'Express* – in fact, it is what permits him to intervene in the first place (and those interventions, of course, themselves further increase the value of his symbolic capital). Clearly, too, Servan-Schreiber's appeal to the idea of a 'brains trust' works in a similar way. That it provides the magazine with its serious analytical content is beyond doubt; but the idea of having a body of expertise at the magazine's disposal also plays shrewdly on the popular perception of intellectuals as being unconcerned by short-term interests, and so the surest repository of truth. Indeed, this is how Giroud herself chooses to characterise Mauriac's participation: 'it was not a question of helping to satisfy any base political ambition, but of trying to bring Mendès-France and his ideas to power [...] for the good of France'¹²⁰.

However, Giroud's description of Mauriac's authority as 'impressive' can be interpreted in another, quite revealing way. The symbolic capital appropriated by the

¹¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques* (Paris : Seuil, coll. "Points", 1994), p. 116.

¹¹⁹ Giroud, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 138.

magazine clearly gives it the ability to intervene in political debates such as the problem of decolonisation. As I suggested in the previous chapter its presentation of 'la Question', Mauriac's article on torture in Algeria, demonstrates its ability to exploit that capital to maximum effect ; but the ambiguities which surfaced with the advertisements which framed the article and told the distracting story of new prosperity, are also apparent in the packaging of the article itself. It seems that what counts is not just what Mauriac says, but the fact that he says it *there* ; not just that he adds to the journal's authority but that he is *seen* to be doing so. The magazine readily makes use of visual images of Mauriac. A powerful example is provided not only by the portrait used on the cover at the time of the torture article, but also when the first 'bloc-notes' is published in April 1954. This is accompanied by a photograph in the middle of three columns showing a meditative, sombre Mauriac with his eyes half-closed, in a position which is almost one of prayer¹²¹. The portrait is a potent one, loaded with motifs (isolation, reflection, spirituality) which reinforce a particular image, or perhaps more accurately, myth of Mauriac as intellectual. Elements of this myth are underlined further in the presentation of Mauriac which accompanies the article, and which introduces him as the voice of moral conscience : 'le grand écrivain catholique commente librement et avec le courage que l'on sait les événements de l'actualité littéraire et politique'¹²². Now, while these pictures of Mauriac serve to confirm our impression of him, they also reinforce that of the magazine as a whole. If Servan-Schreiber seeks out Mauriac, it is not just because his is a powerful voice, but also because he corresponds to the *image* Servan-Schreiber wants to establish – that, as Serror puts it, of *L'Express* as the 'journal des intellectuels'¹²³.

It is perhaps clear by now that the question of image is one of the magazine's central preoccupations, and one which informs its thinking from the start : hence the way it exploits design to signal the new approach being advocated in its pages. The Americanised look, journalistic style and new techniques of layout all reinforce an

¹²¹ *L'Express*, 10 avril 1954, p. 15.

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ Serror, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

impression of boldness and dynamism ; but why does image and sensitivity to the image being projected, play such an important role in the magazine's thinking? The concern it shows arguably reflects a general contemporary trend. In her recent study, Kristin Ross characterises the period of the 1950s and 60s as marking the 'dawning of image culture'¹²⁴. She takes this to mean in particular the rise of the visual image in culture, as film and especially television begin to assert themselves. However, the idea of the 'image culture' can also be understood in another way, one being explored at the time by Roland Barthes. In his *Mythologies*, we can see him getting to grips with a culture which is predicated increasingly on the circulation of projected images, constructed or intended appearances, and which feeds off them as much as reality – or rather, as he was intent on demonstrating, was taking those projected images *as* reality, confusing the culturally constructed with the natural¹²⁵. Indeed, this culture of appearance arguably established itself more effectively thanks to the increased circulation of visual images, a relationship suggested by the way visual images provide a starting point for several of Barthes' analyses¹²⁶. Moreover, it is perhaps borne out by *L'Express*'s active manipulation of images, from those of Mauriac to those in *Madame Express*.

Furthermore, from Barthes' examination of the contemporary culture emerges not only the importance of the image *per se*, but also its role in a broader economy. This is seen most clearly, appropriately enough, in his brief discussion of *L'Express* and its involvement in the Minou Drouet affair (the controversy in 1955 over a series of poems apparently written by an eight year old girl yet displaying emotional and technical sophistication). Barthes suggests that the general fascination for her poetry can be traced to the way it overtly displays all the signs of poetry, that it can be readily recognised as such ; what counts above all, in other words, is that it has the *appearance* of poetry. He goes on to observe that 'ce n'est pas par hasard que

¹²⁴ Ross, op. cit., p. 12.

¹²⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris : Seuil, coll. "Points", 1972).

¹²⁶ The most famous being his analysis of the photograph in *Paris-Match* of a saluting African soldier. See *Mythologies*, op. cit., p. 201.

L'Express a pris en charge Minou Drouet : c'est la poésie idéale d'un univers où le *paraître* est soigneusement chiffré'¹²⁷. Barthes here brings out the mercantile dimension of the image, establishes a clear link between image and profit or financial value. In doing so, he provides a key to understanding how *L'Express*, and the culture around it, is working. It is surely no coincidence that the image culture dawns at the same time as consumerism is being encouraged, and begins to spread through French society, nor that several of the images Barthes analyses are those given off by an expanding range of consumer goods (detergents, cars, plastics). It is a time when goods must sell themselves, and fight off their competitors by projecting themselves more effectively. This competition includes *L'Express* itself, of course. It invests such importance in its image, perhaps, because it recognises how important it is for success in the market place. As Serror observed at the time, 'un journal se vend [...] autant pour ce qu'il est réellement, que pour ce qu'il paraît être'¹²⁸. An attractive image, in short, is the key to a successful commodity.

In the light of this, we see why else Mauriac's involvement is attractive to Servan-Schreiber. He is seen, at least in part, as a useful selling point. He brings with him the symbolic capital essential for political intervention, which is then skilfully put to work as 'la Question' demonstrates ; but if his portrait is intended, as we saw in the last chapter, to be eye-catching in an ethical sense, so too it is simultaneously in a commercial sense. It makes for an enticing and intriguing front cover, the questions it provokes demanding we buy the magazine to discover the answers. This last transaction is crucial, the final element in the framework : for Servan-Schreiber is not interested in Mauriac's symbolic capital solely for its own sake. Symbolic capital is valuable in particular because it can be converted into a more concrete form : that of economic capital, cash profit. As Bourdieu says, symbolic capital can be seen as 'capital "économique" dénié, reconnu, donc légitime, véritable crédit, capable d'assurer, sous certaines conditions [...] des profits "économiques"'¹²⁹. Once more, as

¹²⁷ Barthes, op. cit., p. 159. Barthes' emphasis.

¹²⁸ Serror, op. cit., p. 34.

¹²⁹ Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art*, op. cit., p. 235.

the magazine shows itself alert to ways of maximising its assets and manipulating its resources, we see how it gives a working demonstration of what it means to be an effective modern business. Mauriac, in Servan-Schreiber's hands, himself becomes a commodity, is put into circulation and made to turn a profit. As he himself wryly remarks, 'évidemment, je suis pour lui sa vieille poule aux œufs d'or'¹³⁰.

The rise of the *Nouvelle Vague* and the problem of modernity.

Mauriac, then can be seen to play a key role in establishing the image of *L'Express* as the 'journal des intellectuels'. The appeal of this image is suggested by the consistent growth in sales enjoyed by the magazine during the 1950s : after 1955, its print run never dropped below 120,000 copies¹³¹. Particularly interesting is the way the image seems to strike a chord with the young especially : at the time of Serror's survey in 1959, 44% of the magazine's readers were below the age of 35¹³², confirming Florence Malraux's feeling on arriving at the magazine that it is 'le journal de ma génération'¹³³. Interesting too is the way that it seems to be the image specifically which attracts them. *L'Express* becomes the magazine 'dont la seule lecture constitu[e] déjà un engagement politique'¹³⁴, the magazine to be seen reading – a response perhaps appropriate to those growing up in an image culture. What is more, the magazine's own reaction to this popularity is similarly appropriate to a journal at the forefront of such a culture.

There is a certain irony in the magazine's success among younger readers, because it can be seen partly to be responsible for the developments which provoke Mauriac's departure. In 1957, *L'Express* launches a detailed survey of France's new and young generation, which Giroud famously labels *La Nouvelle Vague*, and once more, the tensions and ambiguities we have traced through the creation of *Madame Express* and Mauriac's own collaboration come to the surface. For on the one hand,

¹³⁰ cit. in Jean Lacouture, op. cit., p. 336.

¹³¹ Serror, op. cit, Table 3, p. 50.

¹³² ibid., Table 2, p. 21.

¹³³ Siritzky et Roth, op. cit., p. 142.

¹³⁴ ibid.

the survey is a serious study, one which again confirms the magazine's place at the forefront of modernity. The team set out to exploit the latest polling techniques to provide the most complete picture of the nation's youth since 1870¹³⁵. Yet on the other, it provides the opportunity for an extensive marketing exercise, as the magazine works to capitalise on and confirm its image as the 'journal des jeunes'. As Serror observes, 'on ne saurait sous-estimer la contribution de l'enquête d'Octobre 1957 dans la formation de "l'image de *L'Express*"'¹³⁶. The survey is trailed extensively from mid-Summer 1957, when the project is announced, and between July and October 1957, the magazine adopts the sub-title 'le journal de la nouvelle vague'. The commercial importance of the *Nouvelle Vague* phenomenon for the magazine is also neatly summed up by the fact that it takes care to copyright the slogan¹³⁷. In this way, the *Nouvelle Vague* exercise becomes a clear attempt to reorientate itself, to respond to market conditions and exploit its success in a particular area of the market. As such, it is an indication of the increasing importance of image in determining the direction of the magazine. At the same time, the magazine's definition and promotion of the *Nouvelle Vague* also proves to be a key turning point in its relationship with Mauriac, becoming a focus for the tensions which will lead to his departure in April 1961.

As a slogan, *La Nouvelle Vague* serves to define not only the rising generation of thirty-somethings typified by Giroud and Servan-Schreiber themselves, but also the cultural practices of that generation, and its film and fiction in particular. As Lynn Higgins points out, the new generation identified by Giroud 'included the majority of the *Nouveaux Romanciers* and all of the *Nouvelle Vague* film-makers'¹³⁸. Indeed, there is a striking coincidence between the ability for Giroud clearly to identify and label the new social group, and the appearance of the visibly new cultural practices which

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 154.

¹³⁶ Serror, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 34, n. 3 : 'on notera que l'expression "nouvelle vague" a été déposée par *L'Express* et est protégée par la loi'.

¹³⁸ Lynn Higgins, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics* (Lincoln, Ne. : University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 6.

reflect that group, including the first films by the ‘new wave’ of directors such as Godard and Truffaut¹³⁹. As Higgins observes, there are clear similarities between the dominant themes of the novels and films, and the attitudes and opinions expressed by the generation itself¹⁴⁰. This means above all a sense of alienation, and a suspicion of the established order which echoes the tone of the original *prise de position* taken by *L'Express*. In other words, this period of the final years of the 1950s seems to mark an important stage in the development of the new (bourgeois) order, the point at which images of itself begin to take shape and are mediated by culture¹⁴¹. Unsurprisingly, *L'Express*, as its self-appointed spokesman, readily plays a role in consolidating this developing social and cultural identity. In 1958, it establishes a prize for fiction, “le prix de la Nouvelle Vague”, won by Christiane Rochefort’s *Le Repos du guerrier*, and is a keen supporter of the new cinema, publishing pre-release stills from Resnais’ *Hiroshima mon amour* in 1959 for example¹⁴².

At the same time as the new mood becomes more clearly defined and reflected by the images filtering into the culture, so too Mauriac’s awareness that there is some sort of shift or reordering under way begins to grow. In short, if the modern spirit sees Mauriac being exploited in certain ways, the first real challenge comes when that modernity takes on a concrete form, when it begins to be articulated in the images of the new order. His attitude is initially one of ironic superiority – in December 1957, his article on Philippe Sollers, who had just published his first work, is entitled ‘une goutte de la vague’ and begins ‘voici ma contribution personnelle à la “Nouvelle Vague”’ (*BN*, i, p. 551) – but this quickly turns into real anger. Two things especially disturb Mauriac. Firstly, he is distracted by increasingly overt images of sexuality, which begin to figure more prominently both in the arts, and in everyday street decor. As he says in 1958, ‘l’erotisme coule à pleins bords aujourd’hui. Il crie, il hurle dans

¹³⁹ Godard released his first film, *A bout de souffle*, in 1959. Truffaut was a founder of the *Cahiers du cinéma*, the forum in which the new filmmakers defined their cinematic agenda.

¹⁴⁰ Higgins, op. cit., p. 19 and n. 1.

¹⁴¹ Arguably a second important stage comes in the mid-1960s, when the new order becomes the subject of a series of satirical portraits in novels such as Perec’s *Les Choses* (1965), and de Beauvoir’s *Les Belles Images* (1966).

¹⁴² *L'Express*, 30 avril 1959, pp. 38-39.

toutes les rues, par mille affiches. Chaque salle de cinéma lui est dédiée' (BN, ii, p. 182). His recognition of the cinema's role in establishing this new mood provokes a striking, bitter 'bloc-notes' in 1959. He relates how, having resolved to see one of the films of the *Nouvelle Vague* 'dont on nous rebat les oreilles' (BN, ii, p. 301), he goes into a restaurant for lunch beforehand, where his attention is seized by the spectacle of a couple at the table in front of him : 'déjà, seul à ma table, [...] j'étais dans un film'. Mauriac creates the impression of a sexually charged atmosphere, suggesting an affair or liaison between 'cette blonde, belle et fanée qui [...] décortiquait des crevettes avec une avidité hideuse, sous l'œil froid d'un Don Juan fatigué lui aussi' (ibid., p. 302).

The effectiveness of the passage lies above all in his ironic and knowing use of cinematic terms and filmic descriptive techniques in his evocation of the scene. He narrates the scene almost as a New Wave director might film it, suggesting as he does that the cinema has a potentially pervasive influence, able to modify even our basic modes of perception : 'le cinéma accoutume notre œil à voir partout une figuration autour d'un couple en gros plan' (ibid.). His own description of the incident reflects this : the couple dominates the foreground of the 'stage' and the cinematic eye zooms in to linger on a series of small and significant details, the physical actions and gestures which accumulate to give the sense of sexual tension between the two : the 'avidity' with which she eats, suggesting desire displaced, his cold eye and pallor, her throat and laugh, 'un rire scandalisé et complaisant' (ibid.). This sense of tension and claustrophobia is increased by the describing eye cutting back and forth between them, switching from the woman devouring her prawns to the man's eye as it observes her. His thumbnail sketch rapidly establishes an overpowering mood of malaise and degradation, not least in Mauriac himself. A further degree of complexity is added to this brief passage by the way it also focuses on his reaction to the scene as spectator, recreating the position of cinema-goer as voyeur : 'ce qui allait suivre était inscrit en clair. Je pouvais me passer de sous-titres'. His response is one of almost physical repulsion, and he flees the 'horreur' at the earliest opportunity : 'je réglai en hâte l'addition, donnai au taxi l'adresse de mon appartement désert' (ibid.). What the

scene presents him with is the human relationship reduced to its bare bones, the basic sexual transaction, a situation which, as we have seen, haunts him throughout his work. Here, in the world of the new order, it would seem to be the default mode of interaction, one from which it appears to be increasingly difficult to escape other than by shutting out the world entirely – once in the sanctuary of his flat, he wants to ‘s’étendre, fermer les yeux’ (ibid., p. 303).

The second difficulty faced by Mauriac is linked in various ways to the first. In December 1960, he publishes two ‘bloc-notes’ which he terms his ‘examen de conscience’ (BN, ii, p. 517), and which set out the reasons he sees for the tension with *L’Express*. They mark the first time he explicitly identifies the *Nouvelle Vague* as a problem. He criticises what he sees as the magazine’s split personality, divided between the serious political and economic analysis of the first part and the second, where ‘on pénètre dans un autre monde très “féminisé”, voué au mythe de la Nouvelle Vague’ (ibid., p. 518)¹⁴³. He singles out in particular an ironic article by ‘une de ces dames de *L’Express*’ (519) on the young Spanish princess Fabiola after her wedding to the Belgian king, which treated her ‘d’un peu haut, gentiment, bien sûr, en “petite fille modèle”’. He takes offence above all at ‘le complexe de supériorité d’une romancière de la Nouvelle Vague devant une jeune fille espagnole qui croit ce que Thérèse d’Avila a cru et qui a peut-être rêvé d’imiter sa vie’ (ibid.).

There are two clear issues involved here, which help to crystallise the differences between Mauriac and the rest of the magazine. Firstly, the stance of critical irony adopted by the author of the article, the writer Christine de Rivoyre, is itself significant. What is at stake in her critique perhaps are changing conceptions of the role of women and the notion of femininity – conceptions which the magazine hoped to shape in the same way that it wanted to help bring about economic and social renewal. The attitudes of the enterprising, independent and career-minded women at *L’Express*, exemplified by Françoise Giroud and reflected in the pages of

¹⁴³ Though as I argued earlier, the style of *Madame Express* and indeed its very presence in the magazine is a result of the political and economic thinking Mauriac considers a hallmark of the ‘proper’ *Express*. See above, pp. 190-191.

Madame Express, are at odds with the traditional model of passive femininity which the princess seems to embody for them. Rivoyre is looking at her from across a gap which the magazine itself helped to widen, one which Mauriac himself had already recognised some three years earlier in fact. In an interview with Madeleine Chapsal, he points out that ‘la conception de la femme a changé, les femmes ont changé : la femme d’aujourd’hui est autre’¹⁴⁴. The particular cause of Mauriac’s anger though, and the second issue raised by the disagreement, is the author’s apparent disdain of the princess’s religious beliefs and her potential for saintliness. Her attitude reflects what was an increasingly dominant theme in the magazine, and one which Mauriac was quick to detect – that of the persistent questioning of religious authority. In January 1960, for example, *L’Express* publishes a newly-discovered critique of Christianity by Jean Jaurès. For Mauriac, ‘ce qui m’inquiète le plus dans le texte de Jaurès [...], ce n’est certes pas son contenu, c’est la place importante qu’il occupe dans ce numéro’ (*BN*, ii, p. 368). Indeed, the anti-religious mood was reinforced in the same issue as it carried a satirical caricature of a priest by the radical left-wing cartoonist Siné (*ibid.*, n. 2). Indeed, in the face of repeated pleas for him to leave the magazine, he justifies his continued collaboration by suggesting that his role is to ‘faire entendre une certaine parole là où elle n’est presque jamais entendue’ (*ibid.*, p. 516).

In other words, although the immediate cause of his departure may be political, a particularly virulent attack by Servan-Schreiber on de Gaulle, the longer term reasons are cultural, or more accurately, ideological differences. As he says in his *examen de conscience*, ‘nos divergences politiques ne sont pas graves. Ce qui est grave, c’est la contradiction entre deux esprits’ (*ibid.*, p. 517) – that is to say, a contradiction between old and new orders. As the new order begins to assert itself, Mauriac finds key tenets of his ideology being challenged : that of the old bourgeois

¹⁴⁴ ‘Le métier d’écrivain’, *L’Express*, 5 avril 1957, repr. in Madeleine Chapsal, *Envoyez la petite musique* (Paris : Le Livre de Poche, 1984), p. 19. Though how radical their notion of women’s ‘liberation’ really is, as I suggested in my discussion of *Madame Express* above, remains open to question. After all, while they themselves set a dynamic example, the overall picture of a woman’s place in society and the home they offer seems largely to be a traditional one. The aim of *Madame Express* seems to be not to liberate women from the domestic environment, but to make that environment, and women’s exploitation of it, more efficient.

order into which, as we saw in the first part of the thesis, Mauriac himself was quickly inserted, with its taboos on sexuality and the religious discourse which helps to keep these in place. Thus, there is a certain symbolism in Mauriac's departure from the magazine, a sign that the new order has displaced the old, and that the old order and its values have become irrelevant. That Mauriac had become an anachronism is reflected by reaction to his departure. The magazine's central concern, naturally, is the effect it will have on sales figures : 'personne, ni dans la rédaction, ni dans la service des ventes, ne doute que l'hémorragie sera terrible'¹⁴⁵. In fact, they see subscriptions fall by five hundred, and sales by one thousand – this on a weekly circulation which was approaching 200,000¹⁴⁶ – with readers' correspondence expressing either indifference or active delight at his departure¹⁴⁷. Moreover, this mood of indifference, not just towards Mauriac but intellectuals in general, is prefigured some three years earlier in the *Nouvelle Vague* survey : when asked to choose, from a list of ten intellectuals, who had most influenced their generation, 20% of respondents nominated Sartre and 9% Mauriac (sharing second place with Gide) ; but by far the largest number, 48%, gave no opinion¹⁴⁸. As far as they were concerned, it seems, none of the candidates had had any bearing on their lives.

If his departure had little impact, then, it was not only, as Siritsky and Roth put it, 'une leçon d'humilité pour tous les journalistes'¹⁴⁹, but also confirmation of what Ross identifies as a general trend. She sees the period of the late 1950s and early 1960s as marking the waning of the category of 'intellectual', suggesting that 'at issue is a kind of changing of the guard : the replacement of the reigning post-war intellectual couple, Beauvoir and Sartre, by the new reigning couple of "everyday life" : Servan-Schreiber and [...] Françoise Giroud'¹⁵⁰. Indeed, the magazine itself can be seen to act as a *lieu de transition* between the two orders, a place where we see this

¹⁴⁵ Siritsky et Roth, op. cit., p. 223.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 224.

¹⁴⁷ *L'Express*, 20 avril 1961, p. 2. One M. Guyon, for example, writes 'cinq ans que j'attendais, pour m'abonner, l'évacuation de Sa Chrétienne Suffisance!'

¹⁴⁸ Françoise Giroud, *La Nouvelle Vague*, op. cit., p. 338.

¹⁴⁹ Giroud, op. cit., p. 224.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 66.

change occur, and which happens over the 10 year period it takes for the magazine to resolve the tension of being on the cusp of commitment and commercialisation. Certainly, its commitment – what we could call the defining feature of the post-Sartrean intellectual – is beyond doubt in the early years. It is demonstrated most graphically, perhaps, by Servan-Schreiber's decision to turn *L'Express* into a daily paper in the months leading up to the general election of January 1956 so as to support Mendès-France more effectively, even if doing so put the future of the magazine itself at risk¹⁵¹. Yet a shift away from commitment is inevitable given the team's equally persistent preoccupation with the magazine's image – that is to say, with making it a successful commodity (and if commitment is the defining feature of the intellectual, perhaps the commodity, or commodification, is the defining feature of 'everyday life'). Now, if the image or style of a product is what determines its success, then ultimately, it will also determine its development or substance ; for, as *Madame Express* itself was hoping to remind manufacturers, a commodity needs to be modified when it no longer meets the requirements or desires of its consumers. As we have seen, through the 1950s, *engagement* was not just an essential part of the magazine and its team, but also of its image. It offered those who bought it, and particularly the young generation, a sort of *engagement* by proxy ; but it is when commitment is commodified in this way, when it is translated into circulation figures, that it is most at risk. With the end of the Algerian war in 1962, *L'Express* finds its sales falling rapidly. The management team blames this on the magazine's vigorous campaigning during the war, when it had been seen as 'le journal de la guerre d'Algérie'. With the war over, 'les Français n'ont plus qu'une envie : oublier ce cauchemar. Ils ont donc tendance à vouloir oublier aussi *L'Express*'¹⁵². Commitment, it seems, is no longer in fashion. The image which contributed so much to the magazine's success now loses it money. The solution is a radical one, the magazine

¹⁵¹ 'L'entreprise a beau perdre 20 millions par mois, seul compte à ses yeux l'objectif politique qu'il s'est fixé : en gagnant les élections de juin 1956, remettre PMF au pouvoir.' Siritzky et Roth, op. cit., p. 85.

¹⁵² Siritzky et Roth, op. cit., p. 253.

relaunching itself in 1964 as a glossy news weekly. Yet if the reinvention is successful in halting the slide in sales figures, it has its price, as commitment is finally eclipsed by commercialisation. There is, literally, no room for the intellectual star in a magazine which was increasingly reflecting the shiny new world of the efficient but anonymous technocrat. As Ross observes, 'had Sartre wanted to write for *L'Express* after 1964, he could not have. Its new format [...] featured short, unsigned news chunks in a standardised, accessible style'¹⁵³ : a far cry from the days when Sartre would send in reams of pages to be edited to a usable length by de Beauvoir¹⁵⁴. *L'Express* had become as easy to consume as any other product on the market¹⁵⁵.

Despite Servan-Schreiber's reluctance to see him leave, then, it was clear that *L'Express* was no longer Mauriac's 'natural site'. The radical, modernising agenda which had, against expectations, made their collaboration possible in the first place, finally drives them apart. The various ways it expresses itself, such as the development of *Madame Express*, or the magazine's preoccupation with the *Nouvelle Vague*, bring to the surface their basic ideological incompatibilities. The gap between old and new orders, which had been smothered by Servan-Schreiber's pursuit of Mauriac's symbolic capital, ultimately proved to be unavoidable. Mauriac had to look elsewhere for his natural constituency.

Following his departure from the magazine in April 1961, the *Bloc-notes* does not reappear until the following October in the *Figaro littéraire*. Mauriac had continued to write for the literary review throughout his time at *L'Express*, contributing the articles which make up the two volumes of *Mémoires intérieurs*. Now, in the face of the challenge of modernity, it offers him readers more likely to share his growing sense of 'dépaysement' (*BN*, iv, p. 311) than what he calls the 'public dynamique' of *L'Express*. As he says, somewhat laconically, it is 'un public

¹⁵³ Ross, op. cit., p. 69.

¹⁵⁴ Sirtzky et Roth, op. cit., p. 128.

¹⁵⁵ De Beauvoir takes great delight in exploiting this image. As Laurence, the central character in her satire on the new bourgeois order, remarks having opened the magazine, 'débitée en minces rubriques, l'actualité s'avale comme une tasse de lait ; aucune aspérité, rien ne s'accroche, rien n'écriche'. *Les Belles Images* (Paris : Gallimard, 1966), p. 100.

très intéressant, mais c'est autre chose. Beaucoup plus de dames'¹⁵⁶. Thus, in the same way that to a certain extent, he moulded what he said to fit the cast of *L'Express* (one of his first articles being a satirical portrait of *L'Académie Française*), so too the appearance of the *Bloc-notes* column in the *Figaro littéraire* will mark a noticeable change of tone and concern : 'je retrouverai ici mon vrai climat, ce qui a toujours alimenté ma rêverie, ce monde intérieur dont je sais bien qu'aujourd'hui les philosophes se moquent'¹⁵⁷. In other words, as the move to *L'Express* signals his increased engagement, so his transferral of the column to the *Figaro littéraire* indicates an intended detachment for the political world and a turn inwards, journalism perhaps similar to that of the 1920s and 30s. Yet while the *Bloc-notes* of the *Figaro littéraire* may be more apolitical, it is no less ideological. His full-time return to the review also means his return to the Establishment fold, a shift from a position of paradox¹⁵⁸, to one of orthodoxy. Where once he played an important role in challenging Official History, he now plays a part in writing it¹⁵⁹.

As is well known, the dominant theme of the *Bloc-notes* in its final years is Mauriac's consistent, some would say excessive, support for de Gaulle. Or, as Malcolm Scott puts it, his chief role seems to become that of 'Gaullist myth-maker'¹⁶⁰, with his most infamous contribution perhaps being the hagiography published in 1964, and called simply *De Gaulle*. Mauriac sees in de Gaulle the man of destiny, who embodies his own vision of France, and who will restore its grandeur : 'il incarne la France de l'histoire ; il donne une réalité charnelle à ce qui n'était qu'une idée. Tant

¹⁵⁶ François Mauriac, *Les Paroles restent*, op. cit., p. 200.

¹⁵⁷ 'Pour un nouveau départ', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 13 mai 1961, repr. in Jean Touzot (ed.), *François Mauriac* (Paris : Les Editions de l'Herne, *Les Cahiers de l'Herne*, 48, 1985), p. 336.

¹⁵⁸ In the etymological sense of the word as speaking against the *doxas* or received ideas in circulation. This meaning is exploited by Roland Barthes in particular. For definition and discussion, see 'la division des langages', in *Le Bruissement de la langue* (Paris : Seuil, coll. "Points", 1984), p. 129.

¹⁵⁹ The shift is perhaps most powerfully captured when we compare the photographs chosen for the covers of the five volumes of the new edition of the *Bloc-notes* published by Seuil. Where on the cover of the first we see an earnest-looking Mauriac locked in conversation with Servan-Schreiber in what appears to be the magazine's workshop, an image which captures the mood of business-like determination and comradeship of its early days, the photo on the third volume shows Mauriac in the far more opulent surroundings of what appears to be the boardroom of the *Figaro* on the *Champs-Élysées*.

¹⁶⁰ Malcolm Scott, *Mauriac : the politics of a novelist*, op. cit., p. 115.

qu'il respire, qu'il conçoit, qu'il agit, cette France a l'air d'exister' (BN, iii, p. 133). He promotes him as one of the great figures of French history, individuals who single-handedly keep alive the spirit of France : 'cet homme est entré dans la compagnie des héros et des saints qui, à travers le temps et ses malheurs, ont maintenu la France vivante' (ibid., p. 462). He is generous in his comparisons, drawing parallels with Charlemagne, Joan of Arc, and even, once, with Christ (ibid., p. 544). In his recent book, Scott paints a less monochrome picture, and suggests that Mauriac's support for de Gaulle during the 1960s was not unconditional : 'le soutien de Mauriac ne s'offrait aucunement comme un chèque en blanc'¹⁶¹. He points out that Mauriac was ready to disagree with the President over various issues, such as de Gaulle's friendly approaches to Germany, or his desire to make France a nuclear power¹⁶². Nevertheless, Mauriac's broad support of de Gaulle and his régime was beyond doubt. Scott notes that 'Mauriac ne voulait pas déstabiliser ce régime ou cet homme qu'il aimait'¹⁶³. Inevitably, perhaps, the impression began to grow that Mauriac was rather too lenient in his treatment of de Gaulle – not least when it became clear that the same problems of police brutality and repression in North Africa, which caused him to speak out with such effect in the mid-1950s, were continuing under the new order.

Mauriac grew increasingly cautious in his dealings with the Algerian situation, and even if this can be seen in terms of his desire not to compromise the régime, particularly when it seemed to be on the verge finally of resolving the crisis, this caution led to what were perceived at the time to be problematic silences. When, for example, Mauriac let pass without comment the infamous night of the 17th October 1961 when the Parisian police suppressed a peaceful demonstration against a recently imposed curfew, and several hundred protesters were killed, he found himself forced to defend his silence in a later 'bloc-notes' : 'si je me suis tu, ce n'est ni par politique, ni par timidité, mais parce que je ne veux rien avancer que ce que je crois juste. Ce que j'ai à dire sur ce sujet sinistre, je le dirai' (BN, iii, p. 67). As Scott argues, it is

¹⁶¹ Malcolm Scott, *Mauriac et de Gaulle* (Bordeaux : L'Esprit du Temps, 1999), p. 199.

¹⁶² ibid., pp. 204-208.

¹⁶³ ibid., p. 201.

true that Mauriac did continue to condemn the violence surrounding the conflict, speaking out against the O.A.S. terrorist organisation, and criticising the minister of the Interior, Roger Frey, for allowing the harsh suppression of anti-O.A.S. demonstrations in 1961 and 1962¹⁶⁴ ; but it is also true that Mauriac's comments are far briefer and far less powerful than in the past, and their aim seems to be somewhat different. When he does comment on the killings on the night of 17th October, for example, he sets out as much to deflect blame from de Gaulle as condemn the atrocities themselves, arguing that de Gaulle could hardly be held responsible for the deaths since he had no control over the police : 'pour l'armée, le general de Gaulle lui appartient, il a pu agir sur elle. Il joue la partie avec elle, et non contre elle. En revanche, la police lui demeure étrangère. La police relève de l'Intérieur. Pour lui, il la subit comme nous tous' (ibid., p. 73). Not, perhaps, the most reassuring of arguments for his readership at the *Figaro littéraire*. Overall, the impression of Mauriac's increasing sycophancy towards the President became progressively more difficult to avoid¹⁶⁵.

Although his role as de Gaulle's myth-maker is important, not least for the sheer volume of writing it generates, perhaps equally significant, and what I want to focus on here, is the more passive position we see him adopt as *consumer* of Gaullist myths. Several articles begin by responding to, noting or commenting on de Gaulle's televised press conferences and addresses, and his regional tours : 'je regarde sur mon petit écran le général de Gaulle au milieu de la foule qui le presse. Il pleut, il est tête

¹⁶⁴ Scott, op. cit., p. 186.

¹⁶⁵ Alan Morris discusses an incident involving Mauriac's *De Gaulle* which illustrates both the degree to which Mauriac had been absorbed back into the orthodox fold, and the ability of what Bakhtin would call the régime's monologic discourse to smother dissenting voices in the early years of the 1960s. The hagiographic nature of Mauriac's work provoked an angry response from the writer Jacques Laurent in the form of his *Mauriac sous de Gaulle*, an attack more on de Gaulle than Mauriac. This caused even more controversy, and led to a counter-attack by the State : taken to court on charges of *outrage au chef d'Etat*, he was found guilty, fined, and told to cut about twenty pages from the book. As Morris concludes, this meant that 'as long as de Gaulle remained at the Elysée Palace, no serious demythification could take place, for it would represent an unpatriotic attack on the President of France, and hence be liable to legal action'. See *Collaboration and Resistance Reviewed* (Oxford : Berg, 1992), p. 33. What is also striking about the incident is that Mauriac, usually so ready to confront an adversary, and particularly over de Gaulle, mentions neither the book, nor the subsequent trial : see *BN*, iii, p. 489, n. 2.

nue' (*BN*, ii, p. 488 ; cf. pp. 189, 339 and 378). It could be said, in other words, that his written myths are a response to, or better, a translation of the visual images put out by the régime. Like *L'Express* in the 1950s, it recognised early on the growing power and importance of the image in modern society, in terms both of visual images, and of a particular look or style – the former, of course, being the most effective means of conveying the latter. The régime seized on the advantages offered by the relatively new technology – television taking hold in France really only in the latter half of the 1950s – as it sought to establish itself. As Kuhn points out, television 'fitted in perfectly with de Gaulle's personal vision of how France should be governed, by furnishing a direct link between the President and the people'¹⁶⁶ ; but the dramatic, stage-managed press conferences at which de Gaulle announced policy measures were inevitably exploited for their symbolic impact. As Kuhn goes on to observe, 'de Gaulle used television to help propagate the myth of his self-ascribed destiny to rule France. His television appearances were as much a part of his own conscious fashioning of his place in history as immediate responses to the exigencies of the political situation'¹⁶⁷.

Mauriac proves to be an impeccable and faithful interpreter of the images put before him as he watches the President on television, be it the fragile strength of de Gaulle's lofty isolation ('Je m'intéresse moins d'abord à ce que dit de Gaulle qu'à son aspect physique. Comment résiste-t-il? Comment tient-il? Sa force calme rassure. Oui, il tient, il résiste. Je puis l'écouter en paix', *BN*, ii, p. 338), or his intimate contact with the people during his regional tours ('Il sourit, serre les mains tendues, caresse des têtes d'enfants', (*ibid.*, p. 488)). To switch from a 'paradoxal' position to one of orthodoxy, then, is also to switch from active to passive. Mauriac is no longer intent on inflecting the State's agenda but seems happy simply to reflect it, to repeat its *doxas* and keep them in circulation. As the Gaullist régime brings stability and growth into the 1960s, Mauriac is ready to proclaim that he is 'gouverné

¹⁶⁶ Raymond Kuhn, *The Media in France* (London : Routledge, 1995), p. 113.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 116.

raisonnablement' (*BN*, iv, p. 153). The journalist of the 1960s is one who does not act though his writing so much as react, fending off what he sees as unjustified and disloyal criticism of de Gaulle.

These ideas of passivity and reaction, though, must also be taken in another sense, one which provides an intriguing counterpoint to the first. For two central narratives dominate the *Bloc-notes* of the Gaullist years : not only that of de Gaulle's rule, but also the continuing story of modernisation. By shifting from *L'Express*, Mauriac may escape its anti-Gaullist vitriol, but he cannot avoid the challenge from modernity which is what, as we have seen, really drives him away. In the *Figaro littéraire*, we see how this challenge develops in a new way, and one which is potentially more threatening. What strikes us in the columns of the 1960s is not only Mauriac's happy acceptance of de Gaulle's rule, but also the passivity of someone affected by the policies of a régime which is pursuing modernisation, or *aménagement*, at an increased pace ; its exploitation of television is an early example of the way it is intent on harnessing new technology. We begin to see what Mauriac's displacement as a member of the old order means in concrete terms. As part of the old order, Mauriac is no longer in control, but must live through the consequences of modernisation – consequences which, for those not actively involved in guiding the process (the new bourgeois order led on by *L'Express*) are essentially negative. I have already discussed, in Part 2 of the thesis, Mauriac's sensitivity to the changes in experience provoked by modernity as it began to shape life in the 1920s. Forty years later, the problem has become more acute than ever as, throughout the 1960s, Mauriac articulates the experience of someone left behind by modernisation, of those on the outside who suffer its side-effects as much as receive its benefits. If Mauriac must live modernisation, he lives it above all as alienation in what he calls 'ce monde inhumain' (*BN*, iii, p. 532). He sees around him a world becoming increasingly mechanised, one in thrall to the machine, and in which evidence of human existence is remorselessly being removed. It is a world captured for him in the non-figurative art which begins to dominate the period : 'l'absence de l'homme y est partout célébrée

comme une victoire. [...] Aucun cœur ne bat plus dans aucun livre' (ibid.). Yet the effects of modernity are no longer making themselves felt simply in the cultural realm, but at the basic levels of everyday life, perception and experience.

In his very first 'bloc-notes' written for the *Figaro littéraire*, Mauriac makes the first of numerous references to the sonic booms triggered by jet fighters as they pass above Malagar, his house deep in the Gascon countryside. These booms take on an emblematic power, as what appears to be an abstract or invisible process erupts into a concrete, physical threat: 'un coup sourd fait trembler les vitres. Les pierres tressaillent comme si elles étaient blessées, et en vérité elles le sont' (ibid., p. 58). Furthermore, this threat to the house, the physical imprint of history, is a threat to History itself: 'ce qui a duré des siècles, et qui aurait duré encore des siècles, est donc condamné'. For him, the booms are evidence of what he sees as the growing determination of the new order to erase the past, a determination suggested by the finality of 'donc'. This becomes a persistent theme of the *Figaro littéraire* columns, as Mauriac realises that the world he knew is gradually being dismantled and replaced: 'je recherche avidement les moindres signes d'une permanence des temps d'autrefois, ce qui a résisté, ce qui résistera encore un peu à l'homme fou de technique' (ibid., p. 228). Indeed, what seems to be the wilful historical amnesia he sees emerging around him can be seen to be inscribed in the project which does most to define the new generation: all those aged 13 or older at the start of the war were excluded from the *Nouvelle Vague* survey as they were felt to be 'chargé d'un passé qui ne portait pas d'ombre sur les moins de trente ans'¹⁶⁸. As Mauriac observes, 'la Nouvelle Vague est sans mémoire pour ce qui l'a précédée' (BN, iii, p. 357). His anxiety over the threat posed to history itself may reflect a further, more personal concern. For if history is at risk, so too potentially is his own place in it, his own future in the cultural memory. As he says, the arrival of the culture of the *Nouvelle Vague*, with its radical ahistoricity, could presage a future in which 'le premier geste de chaque génération, à son entrée dans la carrière, soit un coup de torchon sur le

¹⁶⁸ Françoise Giroud, *La Nouvelle Vague*, op. cit., p. 21.

tableau noir' (ibid., p. 42). Hence, perhaps, his willingness ultimately to cooperate with the photographers from *Paris-Match* sent to capture him in his *milieu*¹⁶⁹. His complicity in their efforts to construct the myth of Mauriac can be seen as a reflection of his increasing desire to leave what he calls 'une dernière trace, une dernière image de moi-même' (BN, iv, p. 427). Moreover, it is highly appropriate that this last trace will take the form precisely of *images* – as if Mauriac is acknowledging that these are what will have the most currency as the image culture becomes further established¹⁷⁰.

Mauriac also feels the impingement of modernity at one of the most basic levels of existence, temporal experience. He must try to come to terms with the world in its 'mutation accélérée' (BN, iii, p. 532). One of the most striking features of the *Bloc-notes* throughout its 18 years is the difference in style and tone between texts written in Paris and at Malagar, a difference which reflects the contrasting modes of existence he experiences in each place. To go to Malagar, he says, is in some sense to drop out of time. He leaves the frenetic pace of what he calls the 'mécanique parisienne' (BN, i, p. 264) and enters a world where life is lived at different rhythm, that perhaps of the organic pace of the seasons : 'sensation que j'éprouve aussi nette que celle du froid et du chaud d'être ici sorti du temps – non certes de la vie : mais je respire dans un monde intermédiaire où le train de l'univers ne me concerne plus' (ibid., p. 331). It is a rhythm which he finds more authentic, his time at Malagar being 'le temps où je me ressemble le plus' (BN, iii, p. 406), and which is also captured in his writing. For the different way in which he experiences time at Malagar is reflected in a style which contrasts strongly with that of the articles written in Paris. The 'bloc-notes' of the 4th October 1963 (BN, iii, pp. 405-408) provides a powerful example of this, as he reflects on the tranquil day ahead of him at Malagar. The use of both the present tense and deictics anchors him in the here and now, and focuses our attention

¹⁶⁹ cf. Part 2, section 4, pp. 137-138.

¹⁷⁰ His anxiety is perhaps also reflected in his decision to deposit his manuscripts in the *Bibliothèque Jacques-Doucet* in Paris during the 1960s. Doing so ensures that the physical evidence of his existence as a writer is protected from dispersal, and even potential destruction, as he points out in the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs* : 'il y aura là désormais, confié à l'Université de Paris, un fonds qui s'accroîtra, je l'espère, au long des années à venir. Je me suis ainsi prémuni contre la dispersion de cinquante ans d'écriture' (OA, p. 807).

on him as the experiencing subject : ‘je suis dans ce cabinet que j’aime, j’ai allumé ce feu de sarments, j’écoute à haute fidélité un concerto de Mozart pour cor et orchestre. Je ne souffre de rien. Je ne souffre pas’ (p. 406). This is combined with long, unfettered sentences which reflect the seamless flow of time, his thoughts resisting closure as they spill over into suspension points :

Il me semble que ce jour triste et doux qui avance, toute lumière éteinte, épouse ma paix, et que la maison et la vigne, et que les collines embrumées, et que les tilleuls pluvieux (car ils sont faiblement agités et ils s’égouttent), que tout me parle à mi-voix comme si j’avais obtenu des choses et des êtres ce que Paul demandait aux Galates : qu’on ne me fasse plus de peine... (p. 407).

This impression is further reinforced when we turn the page to find that his reflection continues, past what would in itself have served as a powerful conclusion. The passage provides a sharp contrast with the writing required of him in Paris. His Parisian articles often feature an accumulation of statements and punchy assertions, the points made in a series of brief sentences as if mimicking the fast pace of political life and debate as events unfold and demand instant comment and response.

Mauriac’s sense of the differing rhythms of life in the two places becomes increasingly acute during the 1960s, as he attempts to convince himself that even if Parisian life runs to a rhythm which is ever-increasing, at least life in the country ‘unifie le temps que nous vivons et le rend étale’ (*BN*, iii, p. 408). He focuses more intently on the lives of those around him, the peasants and farmers who continue to live at the traditional pace of the seasons, and searches for some sense of continuity in the remnants of past ways : ‘je suis entré dans l’étable, où un bœuf demeure encore. [...] J’écoutais ce bruit calme de la rumination, je respirais cette odeur puissante et douce qui avait baigné l’obscur existence de mes ancêtres oubliés’ (*ibid.*, p. 533). We watch as Mauriac becomes increasingly ill at ease in a modern and mechanised world, a dehumanised world which grows steadily more hostile towards ‘les êtres de chair et de sang que nous sommes’ : ‘cette indifférence, ce mépris d’une technocratie sans entrailles pour les êtres de chair et de sang que nous sommes, je commence à ne le plus pouvoir souffrir’ (*BN*, iv, p. 312). To exist in a world ‘sans entrailles’ is

especially troubling, perhaps, for a writer who, as I have stressed throughout this thesis, is preoccupied above all with the business of living ; a writer who evokes what it means to live, gives a sense of the sheer physicality of the world, and of man in all his fleshiness. Modernity alienates him above all because it threatens to erase what is the central concern of his writing : the simple and immensely problematic fact of being human.

Yet the fundamental irony is that his alienation is the result of policies pursued by the régime he so fervently supports, a situation he is finally forced to acknowledge : ‘ce qu’est devenu ce territoire prétendument “aménagé”, et que ce soit sous le règne de De Gaulle que la vieille France soit morte...’ (ibid., p. 486). In telling the two narratives – the triumph of Gaullism and the threat from modernity – Mauriac, it could be said, unwittingly articulates some of the basic contradictions of the régime and its period : it wants to erase or forget the past while simultaneously painting de Gaulle as a great historical, even epic character, and equates France with that one man at the same time as it aims to transform its citizens into efficient but anonymous technocrats, and seems intent on reducing man to machine.

4. Conclusion.

As this thesis begins with Mauriac’s integration into the dominant order of the 19th Century bourgeoisie, so it ends with that order being challenged and displaced. As we have seen at various points in the thesis, the threat to this order is one to which Mauriac shows himself sensitive throughout the 20th Century, and whose reality, as modernity encroaches upon him more and more, is reflected in his growing sense of alienation. Yet at the same time, Mauriac himself shows a striking ability to evolve and reinvent himself, to keep himself in play as his position and the demands on him change. It is ironic that this process is aided by a journal which is itself at the forefront of a drive to modernise and reshape his country and its culture. Mauriac’s post-war trajectory is a good illustration of the economy of culture, the intersection of economic and cultural capital which makes Mauriac a desirable commodity. His

transformation from novelist to intellectual is significant too for the way it illuminates the broader changes at work in French culture and society as modernisation and modernity begin to take hold. Given the sensitivity to the nature of experience which we have seen Mauriac demonstrate at various points in the thesis, it is unsurprising to see him experience and convey these changes at the level of the lived in particular. As he approaches death, he must come to terms with the problem of living in a bloodless, faceless technocracy when the human face, and a need to feel the on-going flow of life, are vital for him. What, though, of the other problem modernity poses Mauriac, the vexed question of his 'survie' in the cultural memory? While the blackboard may not have been wiped clean, as he feared, are the traces he left beginning to fade with time? This is a question appropriate for the conclusion of my study.

Conclusion

The initial aims of my thesis have arguably been accomplished. My discussion of the three chosen areas of his work and career should have helped to underline the contours and tensions of his writing, the modern sensitivities informing his artistic vision, and his general imbrication in, and intricate interaction with, the events, developments, and ideas of his century. However, if I set out to remind us of Mauriac's forgotten complexities, or to attempt in some sense to do justice to him, I did so with a certain degree of realism. I am not expecting my work to help re-ignite interest in him, or revitalise his critical fortunes. For Mauriac probably never will be the most fashionable of writers. He is perhaps not always exciting enough as a thinker or writer, although I would argue that the *Nouveaux mémoires intérieurs* in particular stands as a sophisticated and important response to the problem of autobiography. Nor could he be seen as an intellectual risk-taker – something reflected in his fearful and suspicious reaction to Nietzsche and Freud, or the avant-garde art which surrounded him in the 1920s.

Yet while he may not always be the most interesting of thinkers, he is undeniably an interesting and important *actor*. What emerges most clearly, perhaps, when we look back over the thesis, is a sense of Mauriac's complex and involved career, one at once intriguing and illuminating. It is intriguing for the number of twists and turns he takes : from right to left politically, from novelist to intellectual, or from radical agitator to establishment hagiographer. It is illuminating for the way it illustrates, in a way which is both powerful and of general relevance, the nature of the field of literary and cultural production, and the mechanisms which drive it. As Pierre Bourdieu and his fellow sociologists remind us, administering a timely and healthy dose of demystification, it is

all too easy, when we examine a writer and his work, to be dazzled by the metaphysics of artistic creation. For literary success, or failure, is as much about contacts, networks and positioning, or perception and acknowledgement by others of a certain status. As we have seen throughout the thesis, Mauriac's fortunes and position at various points in his career provide a striking example of this – whether it be his consecration by the *Académie française* rather than the *NRF*, something which makes him ripe for attack by the newly emerging Sartre, or his gradual accumulation of sufficient symbolic capital to allow his transformation from novelist into intellectual.

At the same time, it is also true that we have no need to turn to Bourdieu's analyses of the literary field to be made aware of the social forces shaping the artist's life and work. For the dose of demystification is administered in part by Mauriac himself. In his own sensitivity to the social and cultural mechanisms governing the artistic realm, he shows himself to be a Bourdieusian *avant la lettre*. Mauriac too knows the rules of the game he must play, from his recognition of the power of the *NRF*, of what it means to be recognised by them, or of the position to which his background and beliefs will lead him, to his awareness of why, for *L'Express*, he is such an object of desire. He knows that it is a mercantile game as much as a matter of intellect, creativity or visionary insight ; that the artist's ultimate duty is still to 'arrondir ses fins de mois'.

In short, for all his concerns with the spiritual, Mauriac remains firmly rooted in the real, in the material – imbued, that is to say, with a strong sense of what is involved in the basic, concrete business of living in the world. He is sensitive to the nature of existence, to the experience of existence, its problems and demands. It is ultimately for this reason, for his own often forgotten concern with the material as much as the spiritual, that I feel Mauriac deserves to be read and remembered still.

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