

Representing the Mind in the French Catholic Novel

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## REPRESENTING THE MIND IN THE FRENCH CATHOLIC NOVEL

The period from the end of the First World War to the middle of the twentieth century is marked in French culture by a blossoming of interest in the workings of the mind. In 1920 the first translation into French of Freud's psychoanalytic theory appears, soon to be followed by the rest of his œuvre.<sup>1</sup> Henri Bergson, the philosopher of consciousness, is at the height of his fame, winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1927. The new philosophies of mind, phenomenology and existentialism, are being developed in France through this period, most notably by Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who will effect a dramatic change on the nation's intellectual life with the publication of *L'Être et le néant* and *Phénoménologie de la perception* respectively, both in 1945. In literature, Marcel Proust's masterpiece of introspective analysis, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, enters the canon with a Goncourt prize for the second volume in 1919, and continues to be published at intervals until 1927; the extent of Bergsonian influence on the work remains in debate. At the same time, the French Surrealists embrace the concept of the Freudian unconscious, exploring dreams, irrationality, and madness in their work. André Breton publishes his correspondence with Freud in 1932.<sup>2</sup> The existentialist conception of consciousness finds its major literary expression in the period in Sartre's *La Nausée* (1938). In broader currents of modernism, Édouard Dujardin's turn-of-the-century *Les lauriers sont coupés* will herald the rise of stream-of-consciousness narration, the term itself borrowed from William James's psychological investigations.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously with this literary focus on consciousness and the unconscious mind comes the flowering of another notable force in French culture, the Catholic novel. Building on the achievements of Jules Barbey d'Aureville, J.-K. Huysmans, and Léon Bloy in the previous generation, the inter-war Catholic novelists bring a depth to the literary representation of religious themes that is unequalled in the modern novel. Georges Bernanos, François Mauriac, and Julien Green all come to prominence during this period, as does the poetry and drama of their fellow Catholic writer Paul Claudel. The three novelists, who will be my focus here, are all psychological novelists as much as they are religious novelists, exploring the moral and spiritual struggles of their Catholic protagonists in

<sup>1</sup> The first French translation of Freud is *Origine et développement de la psychanalyse*, a translation of Freud's *Über Psychoanalyse* (1909), translated by Yves Le Lay and published in 1920 in the January and February issues of the *Revue de Genève*.

<sup>2</sup> Breton reprints the correspondence in *Les Vases communicants* (1932), in *Œuvres complètes*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1988–99), 1, 101–215 (pp. 210–15).

<sup>3</sup> *Les lauriers sont coupés*, suivi de *Le Monologue intérieur*, ed. by Carmen Licari (Rome: Bulzoni, 1977).

the face of doubt, temptation, and evil. My concern here is to explore how these writers understand the mind, and how they represent it in their fiction. I will be investigating how their religious belief informs their model of consciousness, and how far this might be read as a shared theory of mind across different Catholic texts and authors. I wish to explore how the representation of the mind in Catholic novels compares with the scientific, philosophical, and psychoanalytic theories of mind that were exerting such influence elsewhere in French literary culture at this time, as well as to examine what happens when these differing understandings of mental life come into direct contact.

While the Catholic faith infuses every text by Mauriac, Bernanos, and Green, none of the three writers was entirely comfortable with the label 'Catholic novelist'. Green found his homosexuality difficult to reconcile with his belief, and replayed the conflict between sexual desire and faith in many of his novels. Mauriac objected that only three of his novels—*Les Anges noirs*, *Ce qui était perdu*, and *Le Nœud de vipères*—truly deserved the label 'Catholic novel', as these were 'les seuls qui soient tout entiers fondés sur la Révélation'.<sup>4</sup> Like Green, Mauriac struggled to reconcile sexuality with Catholic doctrine, complaining in 1928 that 'le christianisme ne fait pas sa part à la chair' and being viewed with suspicion by Catholic commentators, before a personal crisis and 'conversion' in 1929 led to more orthodox creativity.<sup>5</sup> Bernanos rejected the idea of the Catholic novelist as a mouthpiece for Church doctrine, declaring:

Un écrivain catholique ne saurait appartenir à l'Église enseignante, et le tort d'un grand nombre de religieux est d'avoir voulu trouver en eux des collaborateurs dociles et ponctuels — comme un professeur se fait parfois remplacer au tableau noir par un des élèves de sa classe.<sup>6</sup>

Neither was Bernanos received uncritically by the Catholic establishment, which sensed an air of Manichaeism in the power accorded by the writer to Satan.<sup>7</sup> We should thus not take it for granted that the Catholic novelists' view of the mind will accord in all aspects with Church doctrine. Nor can we take it for granted that any one view is generally applicable to our three novelists: the existence of important differences between them is made clear by Bernanos's contemptuous description of Mauriac's work: 'le désespoir charnel transpire

<sup>4</sup> François Mauriac, *Œuvres complètes*, 12 vols (Paris: Fayard, 1950), III, 'Préface', pp. i–iv (p. ii).

<sup>5</sup> *Souffrances et bonheur du chrétien* (1931), in Mauriac, *Œuvres complètes*, VII, 223–76 (p. 229); first published in 'Souffrances du chrétien' in 1928. Donat O'Donnell cites the contemporary Catholic commentator Abbé Louis Bethléem condemning Mauriac's 1920s novels as 'very pernicious' and 'morally base' ('François Mauriac: Catholic and Novelist', *Kenyon Review*, 10 (1948), 454–71 (p. 461)).

<sup>6</sup> In an untitled essay, reprinted as 'L'Écrivain catholique: le rôle qui lui revient' (1943), in Bernanos, *Essais et écrits de combat*, ed. by Yves Bridel and others, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), II, 865–67 (p. 866). Subsequent references to this collection are identified by the abbreviation *EEC*.

<sup>7</sup> Michael R. Tobin, *George Bernanos: The Theological Source of his Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), p. 5.

comme l'eau au mur d'un souterrain'.<sup>8</sup> The mind's embodiment is for Mauriac an obstacle to salvation—Michael R. Tobin refers to his 'theology of disgust'—contrasting with Bernanos, whose novels stage demonstrations of incarnate faith, lived out through the body (as with the country priest's exclusive diet of bread and wine) as much as the mind.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, there is much common ground between them on matters of mind and faith, which is often brought into relief by the distinctions drawn with other contemporary understandings of the mind.

If we begin with the most fundamental ontology of mind, we come first to the belief in a divinely created soul, which is separate from the body and will outlive it. The distinction between mind and soul is not always a clear one: the early Christian author Tertullian affirms that 'the mind coalesces with the soul,—not indeed as being distinct from it in substance, but as being its natural function and agent': the mind is thus associated with consciousness, and the soul with the whole of the self.<sup>10</sup> The *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1907–14, which offers us a useful insight into the public understanding of doctrine in the early twentieth century, defines the relationship in terms that have striking parallels to the psychoanalytic model: 'It is established beyond doubt the fact that our normal consciousness of everyday life is profoundly affected by subconscious processes of the soul which themselves escape our notice'.<sup>11</sup> Where the concept of the soul distinguishes itself from psychoanalysis, however, and indeed from most other twentieth-century thinking on the mind, is in its immateriality. Dualism is not actually a tenet of Christian belief. As the theologian John W. Cooper points out, a monist understanding of body and mind is by no means incompatible with a belief in the Christian afterlife, which speaks of a physical resurrection of the body.<sup>12</sup> In practice, though, the Cartesian division of the self into a material body and an immaterial mind and soul is generally accepted among believers, and is particularly relevant to the theist conception of an immaterial deity inhabiting a material universe,

<sup>8</sup> Georges Bernanos, 'Spiritualisme et circonspection', in *EEC*, I, 1237–40 (p. 1237).

<sup>9</sup> Tobin, 'François Mauriac and Georges Bernanos: Two Theologies of the Body', *Christianity and Literature*, 44 (1995), 313–26 (p. 317).

<sup>10</sup> Tertullian examines classical ideas on mind and soul, before determining that any suggestion of a qualitative distinction between them must be rejected: 'If a separate condition between the soul and the mind is to be admitted, so that they be two things in substance, then of one of them, emotion and sensation, and every sort of taste, and all action and motion, will be the characteristics; whilst of the other the natural condition will be calm and repose and stupor' (*De anima*, in *The Writings of Tertullian*, trans. by Peter Holmes, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Clark, 1884), II, 410–541 (p. 437)).

<sup>11</sup> *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. by Charles G. Herbermann and others, 15 vols (New York: Robert Appleton, 1907–14), s.v. *soul*.

<sup>12</sup> *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism–Dualism Debate*, 2nd edn (Michigan and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000).

which mirrors on the large scale the soul/body relationship on the small.<sup>13</sup> Dualism certainly underlies the representation of mind in the French Catholic novel, as the following scene, the death of Bernanos's protagonist in *Sous le soleil de Satan*, illustrates:

Jamais son cerveau ne fut plus libre, son jugement plus prompt, plus net, tandis que sa chair n'est attentive qu'à la douleur grandissante, au point fixe d'où la souffrance aiguë s'irradie, pousse en tous sens ses merveilleux rameaux, ou court sous la trame des nerfs, pareille à une navette agile. Elle a pénétré si avant qu'elle semble atteindre la division du corps et de l'esprit, faire deux parts du même homme... Le saint de Lumbres à l'agonie n'a plus commerce qu'avec les âmes.<sup>14</sup>

As the Abbé Donissan's soul is taking leave of what Bernanos refers to as its 'enveloppe de chair' (SSS, p. 211), so his mind becomes detached from the nerve impulses sent to his brain, and thus from the sensation of physical pain they cause. Similarly, in Green's late novel *Chaque homme dans sa nuit*, the protagonist is asserted to be present, sentient but disembodied, after his death: Mr Knight claims he could have spoken to Wilfred as he sat by the latter's corpse, 'parce qu'il était là, Angus, il était loin et il était près, tout près...'.<sup>15</sup> The paradox of simultaneous closeness and distance emphasizes the immateriality of the soul. Wilfred's presence is no longer intelligible in spatial terms, as he exists in a realm that is not physical.

The dualist concept of the self puts Catholic writers at odds with the materialist 'mind-brain' model that will come to dominate in the final years of the twentieth century, a model for which the idea of a mind disassociated from neuronal activity is a contradiction in terms. Not only does this make their representation of the mind qualitatively different from that of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century writers who adopt such a model, but the dualist model also divides the Catholic writers from the quasi-neurological view of mental activity espoused by Freudian psychoanalysis, which also founds its assumptions on a resolutely materialist view of mental activity.<sup>16</sup> It is where the souls of Catholic writing distinguish themselves from the French phenomenological view of the mind, however, that we find the most interesting

<sup>13</sup> See Charles Taliaferro, *Consciousness and the Mind of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 4–6.

<sup>14</sup> *Sous le soleil de Satan* (1926), in Bernanos, *Œuvres romanesques*, ed. by Albert Béguin and others (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), pp. 55–308 (p. 275). Subsequent references are identified by the abbreviation SSS.

<sup>15</sup> *Chaque homme dans sa nuit* (1960), in Green, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Jacques Petit, 8 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), III, 411–708 (p. 708). Subsequent references are identified by the abbreviation CHN.

<sup>16</sup> Note, however, that Freud's materialism is not necessarily shared by those writers who are influenced by psychoanalysis. Surrealism, for instance, offers an apparently dualist view of the mind in André Breton's mystical *L'Amour fou* (1937), wherein Breton claims an evil aura takes possession of his mind as he passes the former home of a notorious murderer (*Œuvres complètes*, II, 673–785 (pp. 769–77)).

differences in literary representation. For Bernanos, Mauriac, and Green, the soul is God's creation, made with the same divine intention as the world it inhabits, and which the mind perceives and acts upon. The idea that the mind is in harmony with the natural world, and that this harmony implies the divinely created status of both, is prevalent in the Catholic novel. It provides, for instance, the first intimation of the coming conversion of the resolutely anti-Christian Louis in Mauriac's *Le Nœud de vipères*:

Un jour, sur la route de la vallée du Lys, nous étions descendus de la victoria. Les eaux ruisselaient; j'écrasais du fenouil entre mes doigts; au bas des montagnes, la nuit s'accumulait, mais, sur les sommets, subsistaient des camps de lumière... J'eus soudain la sensation aiguë, la certitude presque physique qu'il existait un autre monde, une réalité dont nous ne connaissions que l'ombre...<sup>17</sup>

The notion of a divine order perceptible in nature, which leads perceivers to infer the existence of God and thus their own status as God's creations, is an important one for Mauriac. In *Souffrances et bonheur du chrétien* he recounts the experience which brought him to this belief, an experience with some similarities to Louis's.<sup>18</sup> Earlier, in *Petits essais de psychologie religieuse* (1920), he discusses the case of Maurice de Guérin, whose nature-worship led him to what Mauriac sees as classical paganism, but argues: 'Sans doute beaucoup d'hommes, à la vue de l'harmonie du monde créé, s'élèvent jusqu'à Dieu. Bien loin d'en être détournés, comme Maurice de Guérin, par la Nature, elle les aide à découvrir et à aimer son Auteur'.<sup>19</sup>

Green's *Chaque homme dans sa nuit* offers a similar scene to the one from *Le Nœud de vipères*. A few pages after declaring to his agnostic uncle, 'on sait qu'on croit comme on sait qu'on est amoureux', the term 'amoureux' recurs as Wilfred undergoes an experience in a natural setting that is unmistakably religious:

Il s'assit sur l'herbe et palpa le tronc d'un des grands érables qui bordaient le chemin. Par un tour d'esprit qui lui était habituel, il se figura que ces arbres étaient des personnes et qu'ils veillaient sur lui. Un sentiment de sécurité délicieuse l'envahit tout à coup et il s'étendit de tout son long sur le dos. [. . .] Joignant les mains sous sa nuque, il laissa ses yeux se perdre au fond du ciel qu'il apercevait par les déchirures du feuillage, et brusquement il lui sembla qu'il était amoureux. De qui, il n'aurait su le dire. Son cœur contenait tant d'amour qu'il y en avait, pensa-t-il, pour une vie entière, mais il aimait de toutes ses forces quelqu'un qu'il ne connaissait pas. Les yeux clos, il murmura

<sup>17</sup> François Mauriac, *Le Nœud de vipères* (1932), in Mauriac, *Œuvres complètes*, III, 343–536 (p. 371). Subsequent references are identified by the abbreviation NV.

<sup>18</sup> Mauriac derives the following lesson from his observation of the natural world: 'Cybèle est purifiée par Celui que je ne vois pas; elle se referme sur Lui; elle Le cache sous des pierres, dans des feuilles; elle Le contient: l'ostensoir a des rayons de vignes et de forêts' (*Souffrances et bonheur du chrétien*, p. 266).

<sup>19</sup> *Petits essais de psychologie religieuse de quelques cœurs inquiets* (1920), in Mauriac, *Œuvres complètes*, VIII, 1–53 (p. 20).

avec une ferveur extraordinaire: 'Je t'aime!' Ces mots le délivrèrent comme d'un poids mystérieux et plus de dix fois, la petite phrase errait sur ses lèvres. Il ne l'avait jamais dite à personne de cette façon-là et il n'avait personne à qui la dire, mais il la disait et la redisait avec une joie singulière, une joie toute nouvelle. (CHN, pp. 462, 470-71)

As with Mauriac, the emphasis is here on sensory impressions which lead to the religious epiphany. Green's scene brings out the phenomenological implications of the event: the world is purposeful, loving, and protective, and we can be aware of this protectiveness and reciprocate this love if our perceptions are properly attuned to them. Contrast this with the existentialist phenomenology of Sartre's *La Nausée*, which also finds expression in a scene of man perceiving the natural world: the famous centrepiece in the park at Bouville, where Roquentin finally understands the nature of his affliction:

L'existence s'était soudain dévoilée. Elle avait perdu son allure inoffensive de catégorie abstraite: c'était la pâte même des choses, cette racine était pétrie dans de l'existence. Ou plutôt la racine, les grilles du jardin, le banc, le gazon rare de la pelouse, tout ça s'est évanoui; la diversité des choses, leur individualité n'était qu'une apparence, un vernis. Ce vernis avait fondu, il restait des masses monstrueuses et molles, en désordre — nues, d'une effrayante et obscène nudité.<sup>20</sup>

What Roquentin sees before him is a reality without order and without meaning, which his mind perceives as alien and hostile to its desire to comprehend and categorize, to divide matter into fixed entities with definable attributes. Roquentin is frustrated by the mismatch between his mental faculties and the brute reality with which they are confronted: 'je ne *pouvais pas* le comprendre, quand bien même je serais resté cent sept ans appuyé à la grille; j'avais appris sur l'existence tout ce que je pouvais savoir'.<sup>21</sup> This divorce between mind and external reality is the consequence of the absence of a creator's intentions behind the natural world, according to Sartre's atheist philosophy. Conversely, what we see in Green's and Mauriac's vision is a communion of minds: through nature, the human mind becomes aware of the presence of the divine mind, and the similarities between the two render the world familiar and comprehensible. Let us note in passing how the use of description in the scenes in question bolsters the philosophical outlook of each: leafy sunshine at the riverbank demonstrates to Louis and Wilfred the existence of divine intention in the world; patchy grass in the municipal park proves to Roquentin the opposite.

The idea of a communion of minds is important in the Catholic representation of consciousness through the theme of prayer, and more broadly, through the divine visions and other supernatural mental events which occur in Catholic novels. Overtly supernatural events are most often confined to the

<sup>20</sup> *La Nausée* (1938), in Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), pp. 1-210 (p. 151).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160 (emphasis original).

mental sphere in these texts, where ambiguity holds sway between a rationalizing psychological explanation or a genuinely divine (or, as the case may be, Satanic) intervention from outside the mind itself. Mauriac and Green balance this hesitation carefully: as Mauriac's Louis senses the presence of heaven in a church (*NV*, pp. 480–81), or Green's Wilfred hears a divine voice call to him, a purely psychological interpretation remains at the reader's disposal (*CHN*, p. 485). Indeed, the representation of the mind in both writers might be described as agnostic, at least in terms of the evidence presented for theistic interaction between human and divine minds. Bernanos maintains this ambiguity to some extent: his heroes are still able to doubt whether the mental phenomena they experience are of truly supernatural origin. However, the presence of the supernatural is asserted far more strongly in Bernanos's texts. When God calls out to Bernanos's country priest, the divine voice seems real enough to bring the priest out of his house in search of the caller.<sup>22</sup> While Donissan's encounter with Satan on a country path may be rationalized as a dream, the gift of seeing souls which he experiences immediately afterwards blends supernatural and physical perception in a way that is more difficult to discount (*SSS*, p. 188). Even more so is the clairvoyance accorded to the country priest when Mlle Chantal, daughter of an adulterous father and God-hating mother, comes to the confessional:

A ce moment, il s'est passé une chose singulière. Je ne l'explique pas, je la rapporte telle quelle. Je suis si fatigué, si nerveux, qu'il est bien possible, après tout, que j'aie rêvé. Bref, tandis que je fixais ce trou d'ombre où, même en plein jour, il m'est difficile de reconnaître un visage, celui de Mlle Chantal a commencé d'apparaître peu à peu, par degrés. L'image se tenait là, sous mes yeux, dans une sorte d'instabilité merveilleuse, et je restais immobile comme si le moindre geste eût dû l'effacer. Bien entendu, je n'ai pas fait la remarque sur-le-champ, elle ne m'est venue qu'après coup. Je me demande si cette espèce de vision n'était pas liée à ma prière, elle était ma prière même peut-être? [. . .] Et il s'est passé un autre petit fait que je rapporte avec l'autre, sans l'expliquer non plus. J'ai parlé au hasard, je suppose. Et cependant j'étais sûr de ne pas me tromper. « Donnez-moi la lettre, la lettre qui est là, dans votre sac. Donnez-la-moi sur-le-champ! » Elle n'a pas essayé de résister, elle a seulement eu un profond soupir, elle m'a tendu le papier, en haussant les épaules. (*JCC*, pp. 1135–37)

The priest later casts doubt on this version of events (*JCC*, p. 1144), suggesting that he may have imagined his command when Mlle Chantal spontaneously handed over the letter (the contents of which are never revealed, but, it is implied, may state Mlle Chantal's intention to avenge herself on her father by 'dishonouring' herself sexually). However, this later uncertainty does less to undermine our confidence in the supernatural event recounted, than to em-

<sup>22</sup> *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (1935–36), in Bernanos, *Cœuvres romanesques*, pp. 1029–1259 (p. 1140). Subsequent references are identified by the abbreviation *JCC*.

phasize its miraculous nature: so extraordinary is it that even its protagonist has difficulty in believing it after the fact.

Such supernatural episodes are a symptom of a broader Catholic conception of mental life as a combination of emanations from the self, influx from the external world, and a third influencing factor which comes from beyond the physical realm. In *Monsieur Ouine* Bernanos has the curé of Fenouille rebuke the village doctor for his psychological explanations of human morality with the words: 'Vous aurez un jour la preuve qu'on ne fait pas au surnaturel sa part'.<sup>23</sup> Prayer is seen literally as 'ce colloque avec Dieu' (*JCC*, p. 1209). Such a view accords well with the Bergsonian philosophy of mind, which was to explore mysticism in his later works, and posit the possibility of a mind open to supernatural communication with the divine (proffered by Bergson as evidence of God's existence).<sup>24</sup> This divine influence has implications for free will in the universe of the text. Bernanos's priests acknowledge that they are being used as God's instrument: 'Notre rôle est souvent tellement passif!' (*SSS*, p. 223), and Green's characters too see their actions as manipulated by divine intelligence: 'si nous sommes là, toi et moi, l'un devant l'autre, c'est parce qu'il [Dieu] le veut' (*CHN*, p. 632). Equally, evil deeds may result from malign external influence, rather than from free choice or innate tendencies in the evildoer. This is a theme to be found in Green's writing, where the pounding heart of a man on the point of committing rape and attempted murder 'ressemblait au pas d'un être invisible, marchant, les pieds dans sa poitrine',<sup>25</sup> but once again it is Bernanos who most strongly figures evil as an external force. The *Journal d'un curé de campagne* calls Satan 'l'ennemi intérieur' and suggests evil may be a form of demonic possession, quoting Luke's Gospel as evidence: 'La haine de Dieu me fait toujours penser à la possession. "Alors le diable s'empara de lui (Judas)"' (*JCC*, pp. 1048, 1105). *Sous le soleil de Satan* makes the concept of evil as an alien presence in the mind still more explicit: the narrator describes awareness of sin as 'la conscience engourdie [qui] prend peu à peu connaissance et possession de son hôte sinistre', a line that foreshadows the climax of the novel, in which Donissan looks into the eyes of the dead child he has been attempting to resurrect, and recognizes a Satanic consciousness in the returned gaze (*SSS*, pp. 208, 267).

Far from being incompatible with a Catholic world-view, free will is, of course, a tenet of Christian belief: people are guided into goodness or tempted into evil, but the responsibility for their actions remains their own. None of the Catholic novelists contradicts this view. Even Bernanos describes good

<sup>23</sup> Bernanos, *Monsieur Ouine* (1943), in Bernanos, *Œuvres romanesques*, pp. 1347–1562 (p. 1525).

<sup>24</sup> Henri Bergson, *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932) (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2008), pp. 324–38.

<sup>25</sup> Green, *Léviathan* (1929), in Green, *Œuvres complètes*, I, 579–814 (p. 673).

and evil as no more than 'seeds on the wind' that can take root in propitious minds, and makes the psychological drama of a mind wrestling with faith and temptation the core of most of his works (*JCC*, p. 1159). Curiously, it is in Mauriac's work, where external influence on the mind is barely suggested, that the question of free will becomes controversial, when Sartre publicly declares that its absence in Mauriac's work means that Mauriac is not fit to be called a novelist. In his 1939 essay 'M. François Mauriac et la liberté' Sartre accuses Mauriac of adopting a God-like perspective on his characters, which destroys both narratorial involvement and temporal flow, leaving only 'une languissante vérité *sub specie aeternitatis*'.<sup>26</sup> Bergsonian duration, the conscious experience of time's movement, is regarded as an inconvenience by Mauriac, who takes any opportunity to 'vider brusquement le récit de sa durée', according to Sartre.<sup>27</sup> Where the representation of the mind more generally is concerned, Mauriac's association of freedom with morally good choices, and, conversely, sinfulness with helpless compulsion, means that the 'freedom' of Thérèse Desqueyroux 'ne ressemble pas plus à la vraie liberté que sa conscience à la vraie conscience; et M. Mauriac, qui s'absorbe à décrire les mécanismes psychologiques de Thérèse, manque soudain de procédés lorsqu'il veut nous faire sentir qu'elle n'est plus mécanisme'.<sup>28</sup> Sartre's critique has some validity, and allegedly led to such a crisis of confidence for Mauriac himself that it caused his decade-long literary silence in the 1940s. From our own twenty-first-century perspective, however, criticisms that Mauriac's minds are insufficiently Bergsonian or existentialist indicate not so much an inherent flaw in his writing as a demarcation between competing philosophies of mind of the period, none of which has subsequently attained general endorsement. Mauriac's minute depiction of the cause-and-effect mechanics of psychological motivation does indeed exclude the arbitrariness and anarchy of absolute freedom; the detachment of his narratorial stance may well leave the suggestion of a synchronic perspective on the narrative's time-span. Both of these characteristics may nevertheless be seen as entirely defensible corollaries of a religious conception of mind. Man is 'condemned to be free' in Sartre's atheist universe precisely because of the absence of divine guidance and a divine plan; the theist universe has no need of such absolutes. And if such a divine plan existed, it might well justify a writer's decision to take a narrative perspective on his own creation which combines the present moment of the human characters with hints of the broader overview of the eternal and omniscient.

Were it not for Sartre's desire to knock an established figure of the older

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, 'M. François Mauriac et la liberté', in *Critiques littéraires* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), pp. 33–52 (p. 43).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

literary generation from his pedestal, the incompatibilities of their respective views of consciousness might never have been made explicit. The same cannot be said, however, of the psychoanalytic model which was very much the object of Catholic novelists' direct engagement, and its difference in outlook regarding our responsibility for our own actions was the grounds for Mauriac's and Bernanos's outspoken condemnation. Psychoanalysis was in the inter-war period a relatively new phenomenon in France, but one whose influence was growing rapidly towards a position of dominance in the understanding of the mind. Freud was himself an atheist, and critical of religion, and his ideas on sexuality in particular were seen by Catholic novelists as a threat. Both Bernanos and Mauriac present fictional psychoanalysts in their work, and in both cases the characters function as a warning against doctrines that would dissociate sexuality from sin, or encourage exploration of destructive or shameful urges in the cause of mental hygiene. In Bernanos, psychoanalysts and medical practitioners dabbling in the field deny the existence of the soul and scoff at the idea of a hell awaiting sinners.<sup>29</sup> The materialist view of the mind reduces miracles such as Donissan's clairvoyance to mental illness (SSS, p. 218). Moral conflict is tamed by medical labels such as 'hyperémotivité' and 'hyperesthésie', or downgraded to physiological disturbance, as when Donissan's crisis of faith is diagnosed as 'une grave intoxication des cellules nerveuses, probablement d'origine intestinale' (SSS, pp. 98–99, 231). Mauriac, whose attitude towards psychoanalysis hardened through his career, finally presents an outright condemnation of the discipline in the short story 'Thérèse chez le docteur'. Mauriac depicts the psychoanalytic session as a travesty of Catholic confession: Dr Schwartz refers to his couch as his 'confessional', and his patient notes the irony that his title of 'psychiatre' should translate as 'médecin de l'âme', when he denies the existence of any such entity.<sup>30</sup> The story is focalized through the analyst's wife, whose eavesdropping on his analysis crystallizes her misgivings on psychoanalysis into a forthright rejection of her husband and his calling. As the patient (Thérèse Desqueyroux, in one of three sequel narratives to the original novel) is encouraged to delve into the pain and obsession of her unhappy love affairs, Mme Schwartz suppresses a desire to cry out to her: 'Il n'a rien à vous donner, il ne peut rien pour vous que de vous enfoncer davantage dans cette boue. J'ignore à qui il faudrait vous adresser, mais pas à lui, pas à lui!' (TCD, p. 301). Mauriac's implication is clearly that a priest would lead Thérèse away from her sinful promiscuity, rather than rationalize and indulge it as the psychoanalyst does. Both Mauriac and Bernanos are suspicious of the value of psychological introspection, and both

<sup>29</sup> *Un mauvais rêve* (1950), in Bernanos, *Œuvres romanesques*, pp. 873–1027 (p. 935) (subsequent references are identified by the abbreviation MR); SSS, p. 108.

<sup>30</sup> 'Thérèse chez le docteur' (1938), in Mauriac, *Œuvres complètes*, II, 285–308 (p. 308). Subsequent references are identified by the abbreviation TCD.

criticize its use by Proust as the basis of his œuvre: Bernanos, with more than a hint of homophobia, finds Proust and his successors indecent in exposing the most private elements of consciousness, while Mauriac takes issue with the absence of moral purpose behind his exploration of the psyche.<sup>31</sup>

Mauriac equates the absence of judgement on sexual behaviour with amoral permissiveness, and rather misrepresents psychoanalysis in the short story by having Schwartz actively encourage patients to live out their sexual fantasies: '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. La même clef immonde lui servait pour interpréter l'héroïsme, le crime, la sainteté, le renoncement' (TCD, p. 302). (Similarly, Dr Gallet in *Sous le soleil de Satan* attempts to convince Mouchette that medical science has disproved Christian sexual morality: 'Nous n'avons, toi et moi, dans les choses de l'amour ni préjugés ni scrupules. Comment croire à une morale qu'une science aussi exacte que la mathématique — l'hygiène — dément chaque jour?' (SSS, p. 102).) But what finally provokes both Thérèse and Mme Schwartz to turn against the psychoanalyst is his derisive laughter when asked: 'Croyez-vous au démon, docteur? Croyez-vous que le mal soit quelqu'un?'. More serious, then, than the discipline's refusal to condemn extramarital, non-procreative sex, is its understanding of human behaviour as the product of drives that are, in theory, entirely comprehensible in terms of the subject's physiology, present environment, and past experience. Bernanos's country priest is making the same criticism of the secular, materialist view of mind when he writes in his diary: 'L'historien, le moraliste, le philosophe même, ne veulent voir que le criminel, ils refont le mal à l'image et à la ressemblance de l'homme. Ils ne se forment aucune idée du mal lui-même, cette énorme aspiration du vide, du néant' (JCC, p. 1143). The self-contained view of mind that sees behaviour in terms of instincts or ethics in terms of hygiene, with no need for outside reference to supernatural influence or divine moral law, is not only misguided, from a Catholic perspective, but actively dangerous, as it provides an apparently rational justification for behaviour that may lead to damnation, and blinds people to the external forces of evil which are luring them into this path.

<sup>31</sup> Discussing the contemporary novel, Bernanos refers to 'les plus brillants élèves du conservatoire Gide ou du conservatoire Proust, munis de leur brevet d'immoralisme', and declares of them: 'Jadis l'écrivain recevait cérémonieusement au seuil de sa conscience, et ne désignait que de loin prudemment, ainsi qu'un hôte soupçonneux, le plan général de sa demeure, et l'emplacement de ses chambres les plus secrètes. Aujourd'hui, il nous donne le trousseau de clefs, et une petite tape d'encouragement sur l'épaule: Allez-y!' ('Une vision catholique du réel' (1927), in *EEC*, 1, 1074–89 (pp. 1079–80)); Mauriac writes in 1928: 'Ne vouloir connaître de l'homme que son instinct le plus individuel, n'avoir d'autre ambition que d'embrasser d'un regard toujours plus lucide le chaos humain, que d'en enregistrer tous les mouvements confus et transitoires, il y a là une menace redoutable pour le roman moderne et qui pèse singulièrement sur l'œuvre de Marcel Proust' ('Le Roman', in Mauriac, *Œuvres complètes*, VIII, 261–84 (p. 280)).

Despite this irreconcilable difference in outlook, the Catholic novel's view of the mind does have a certain amount of common ground with the psychoanalytic model. The psychological analysis of characters in the work of all three novelists shares its discourse and its interpretation with those of psychoanalysis on occasion. Even Bernanos, whose hostility to psychoanalysis may have been the influence which led Mauriac to turn against it, sometimes appears curiously in harmony with the Freudian view.<sup>32</sup> Within a few pages of each other in *Un mauvais rêve*, for instance, we find these passages of psychological analysis:

Cela ne justifiait pas non plus le brusque emportement de sa haine en face de Mme Alfieri, moins encore cette fuite absurde dans les ténèbres. Il fallait sans doute remonter plus haut, beaucoup plus haut, à certaines tentations de l'enfance dont le hasard seul lui avait permis de triompher — mais dont la blessure était encore là, quelque part, dans un repli du cerveau.

And then, with reference to a different character:

Pour la première fois, la prodigieuse vie intérieure, toujours repliée sur elle-même et qui, selon un mot ignoble du vieux Ganse, cuisait depuis dix ans dans son jus, cette vie mystérieuse partagée tour à tour entre le désespoir et l'exaltation, traversée de figures de cauchemar ainsi qu'un carrefour suspect, ce flot souterrain allait rompre l'obstacle sous laquelle il creusait ses tourbillons, paraître au jour... (*MR*, pp. 977, 985)

Whether or not these passages are direct borrowings from Freud—and there is evidence that Bernanos knew his work well<sup>33</sup>—they certainly have much in common with his view of the mind. In the first, we see an interpretation of present behaviour through unconscious motivations linked to events in childhood, the memory of which is inaccessible to consciousness but persists none the less in a closed part of the mind. In the second, we have what might be a paraphrase of Freud's discussion of repression: compare Freud's description of repressed drives 'proliferating in the dark' of the unconscious realm until they are strong enough to breach the barrier with 'extreme forms of expression'.<sup>34</sup> Psychoanalysis as an explanatory system is thus not wholly alien to the Catholic novelists' conception of mind, even if it does, in Bernanos's words, neglect the non-material side of characteristics which are 'mi-spirituelles,

<sup>32</sup> On Bernanos's influence on Mauriac see Richard Griffiths, *Le Singe de Dieu: François Mauriac entre le 'roman catholique' et la littérature contemporaine, 1913–1930* (Le Bouscat: L'Esprit du temps, 1996), p. 148.

<sup>33</sup> Pierrette Renard, *Bernanos ou l'ombre lumineuse* (Grenoble: Publications de l'université Stendhal de Grenoble, 1990), p. 41.

<sup>34</sup> 'Sie [die Triebrepräsenz] wuchert sozusagen im Dunkeln und findet extreme Ausdrucksformen' ('It [the instinctual representative] proliferates, one might say, in the dark, and finds extreme forms of expression') ('Die Verdrängung' ('Repression') (1915), in Freud, *Psychologische Schriften*, Studienausgabe, ed. by Alexander Mitscherlich and others, 11 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1969–75), III (1970), 103–18 (p. 110)).

mi-charnelles, comme à la jointure du corps et de l'esprit'.<sup>35</sup> The real problem is a psychotherapy which encourages patients to unburden themselves of their shameful secrets and desires, while responding with none of the moral strictures of Christian teaching. Like Mauriac, Bernanos too sees the psychoanalytic session as a degenerate form of Catholic confession, and proposes that the genuine article may be more conducive to mental health:

Les maniaques de la libre pensée sont bien sots de dédaigner à l'église une méthode de psychothérapie qu'ils jugent excellente et nouvelle chez un neurologue en renom. Ce professeur, dans sa clinique, fait-il autre chose qu'un simple prêtre au confessionnal: provoquer, déclencher la confiance pour suggestionner ensuite, à loisir, un malade apaisé, détendu? Combien de choses pourrissent dans le cœur, dont ce seul effort délivre? (SSS, pp. 303–04)

The positioning of this passage in the closing pages of *Sous le soleil de Satan*, lent the authority of an authorial pronouncement by the impersonal narrator, gives it a particular emphasis, which brings out the ambivalent attitude expressed towards psychoanalysis. The priest's methods are essentially similar to the psychoanalyst's, their conceptions of the mind have much in common, and their aims coincide to some extent where the mental well-being of their interlocutor is concerned. These are no grounds for compromise, however: it is precisely the similarity of its views and methods that makes psychoanalysis such a dangerous surrogate for true Catholic confession.

The French Catholic novel of the mid-twentieth century may not explicitly theorize its conception of how the mind works, nor present an entirely homogeneous view across the work of its leading practitioners, yet it does explore human psychology and the ontology of mind from a Catholic perspective, and in doing so offers a sharply differentiated alternative to the prominent theories of mind that were being developed at this time. As such, its presence alters the cultural landscape of a period in which literary fiction was dominated by questions of consciousness: it is the neglected counterpoint to the inter-war texts that promoted or were inspired by an existentialist, Bergsonian, psychoanalytic, or Surrealist understanding of the mind. What is more, the Catholic novelists arguably represent a view of the mind which has more in common with general conceptions in the period than do the new theories espoused by Sartre, Breton, Proust, and others. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that the Catholic understanding of the mind was the default view of the mid-twentieth-century French readership: even at the start of the century, when over 90 per cent of French people were baptized Catholic, and nearly half the boys in secondary education attended Catholic institutions, it is estimated that no more than a third of the population

<sup>35</sup> Bernanos, *La Joie*, in Bernanos, *Œuvres romanesques*, pp. 531–724 (p. 571).

were regular churchgoers.<sup>36</sup> Certainly, the supernatural battleground between good and evil which is Bernanos's view of the mind is likely to have less in common with broad French attitudes at the time than might the tentative, doubtful faith of Green and early Mauriac. But these writers are speaking for more than just themselves when they present the mind as an immaterial entity and its phenomenological relationship with the world as a harmony of two products of divine intention. Equally, the understanding of the mind as open to supernatural influences, to direct communication with God, perceptual miracles, and Satanic temptation, with the corresponding limits on autonomous freedom this implies, was by no means an attitude to be scoffed at by the general reader. From our perspective in the twenty-first century, French cultural expression of the nature of consciousness in this period may appear to have been dominated by what was radically new, what was daringly controversial, or what took inspiration from fashionable theories from outside literature. But to writers and readers living through the period itself, the mind was not necessarily to be understood by means of any of these ideas. The mid-twentieth-century Catholic novel demonstrates that theology provides a varied yet coherent view of consciousness, which held a strong position in the literary culture of the time, and which was vigorous enough to take on any late-coming rivals who might seek to separate out the mind from the soul.

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<sup>36</sup> Maurice Larkin, 'Religion, Anticlericalism and Secularization', in *Modern France 1880-2002*, ed. by James McMillan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 203-27 (pp. 207-09).