

MAURIAC: HIS RECENT JOURNALISM

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Sara Margaret Wallace

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By

Sara Margaret Wallace

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1. Does Mauriac really have something to say, or is he merely trading on his reputation? How seriously does he view his present work?
2. What revelatory recollections does Mauriac share with readers? How does he evaluate his own life and work, as seen in retrospect?
3. What are his religious attitudes? Has he become chiefly an apologist for his church, or is religion a major point of reference in other areas of his life? How tolerant is he of other points of view and of other faiths?
4. What importance does Mauriac attach to membership in L'Académie Française? Has his point of view been consistent, or has it been modified by developments within the institution itself?
5. What are Mauriac's literary theories and judgments? What are his opinions of his contemporaries? What is his attitude toward young writers and other intellectuals?
6. How does Mauriac view recent history and the contemporary scene? Does he merely record events and his opinions thereof, or has he a well-defined political philosophy? How consistent is his point of view? Has he made any predictions? If so, to what extent have they materialized?
7. Has Mauriac the journalist escaped the stereotype of Mauriac the novelist?

Le Figaro and Le Figaro Littéraire (Paris daily,

and its weekly literary supplement, respectively), have long carried front-page articles on a variety of subjects from the pen of François Mauriac. Issues published between 1945 and the end of 1960 proved an ample source of material for this study.

A second source of information has been Bloc-Notes. This feature was found regularly, until the summer of

INTRODUCTION

François Mauriac, French poet, essayist, novelist, and playwright, was born in Bordeaux in 1885. At the Lycée of Bordeaux, he won first prize in French. 1909 saw the publication of his first book of poems, Mains Jointes. This volume was followed by another in 1911, L'Adieu à l'Adolescence. His first novel, entitled L'Enfant Chargé de Chânes, appeared in 1913, and he was married in the same year. Other novels followed. He also wrote essays on Racine, Molière, Rousseau, Flaubert, and Pascal. In 1926, he won the Grand Prix du Roman awarded by L'Académie Française. In March of 1932, Mauriac was elected president of the Société des Gens de Lettres. In June of the following year, he was elected to L'Académie Française.¹ His Complete Works were published in 1951. To these, he has added three novels (Le Sagouin, Galigaf and L'Agneau), and a book entitled Mémoires Intérieurs. In 1952, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. In recent years, he has become a journalist.

An analysis of several hundred articles written by Mauriac in the period between the close of World War II in 1945 and the close of 1960, suggests the following questions:

¹Kunitz and Haycroft, Twentieth Century Authors (N. Y. : H. W. Wilson Co., 1942) 936-937.

1961, occupying the entire back page of the Paris weekly L'Express. In this publication, Mauriac had complete freedom to express his views on all subjects, as indicated at the top of his page in each issue. He intended, as he says, to be a sort of eye-witness to history, setting down his reactions to events as they transpired. These observations were not intended to be political per se. As time went on, however, the writings took on more political significance.

The articles which appeared in L'Express between 1952 and 1957 have been published in book form under the same title as the newspaper feature. A second volume, covering the years 1957-1960, was scheduled to appear in the spring of 1961, according to Mauriac's article in Le Figaro Littéraire on October 15, 1960. The articles as they reappear in the published volume, Mauriac asserts, have not been retouched except for certain excisions. He has deleted some items which he feels are of no current interest, and a few which he considers too personal. He has deleted nothing, apparently, for the sake of his own reputation as commentator and prognosticator.²

All translations and paraphrases of Mauriac's material are done by the writer of this thesis.

²François Mauriac, Bloc-Notes (Paris: Flammarion, 1958) Preface, ii.

PART I
PERSONAL GLIMPSES

CHAPTER I

MAURIAC, JOURNALIST

Having made both his reputation and his living by writing fiction, Mauriac turned to journalism for the greater part of his later literary efforts. This launching of a second literary career raised two questions: when and why?

The answer came to light in Bloc-Notes. Mauriac gives the following explanation:

Ce démon inconnu -- ou cet ange -- qui me pousse par les épaules, m'a toujours possédé depuis ma dix-huitième année. Mais j'étais alors la proie d'un autre démon plus puissant et qui me charmait: écrire était toute ma vie. Et que m'importait la férocité des hommes, si je la peignait?

Celui des deux anges que je réduisais au silence m'inspira alors, à mon insu, une peinture cruelle et même féroce de ce monde que je ne songeais qu'à décrire. Il n'empêche que j'y figurais moi-même parmi les nantis à qui, dès le départ, tout est donné d'avance.

Tout m'était donné, sauf de pouvoir étouffer en moi une protestation sourdement irritée. Ce n'est pas le lieu de montrer que cette inquiétude naissait au plus secret de ma conscience religieuse: il fallut l'agression fasciste en Ethiopie, et surtout la guerre civile espagnole pour qu'enfin un faible cri me fût arraché. Puis ce fut l'occupation, ces horribles jours tout pénétrés d'une merveilleuse espérance. J'écrivais Le Cahier noir . . . ¹

¹Mauriac, Bloc-Notes, Oct. 13, 1955, 199-200. Hereinafter this work will be indicated as a page number in the text.

Mauriac insists upon freedom of the press, even though, as he observed shortly after the close of World War II, "Le monde est terriblement désaccoutumé d'être libre."²

In the same article, Mauriac spoke of two schools of journalism: one can chart a middle course, producing innocuous articles which will offend no one, or one can set down his honest reactions to each event as it occurs, however imprudent such observations may be. Mauriac has chosen, and consistently followed, the latter course, recognizing the risks involved: (1) of earning the reputation of a writer who contradicts himself and yields to his personal "humeurs" and (2) of wounding certain readers whose complacency he has upset. One must accept these risks in the interest of freedom:

Il faut accepter ces risques et quelques autres encore. La guerre est finie; la nouvelle Europe prend forme sous nos yeux; que les Français osent dire ce qu'ils ont à dire; qu'ils prennent conscience de cet immense bonheur qui leur a été rendu et qu'il a fallu payer si cher: le bonheur d'être une nation d'hommes libres. ³

Writing on June 20, 1954, as Mendès-France became Président du Conseil, Mauriac insisted that, no matter who was in power, he would write what he believed to be

²Le Figaro, 1. No date on microfilm, but issue is in sequence between May 8 and Oct. 3, 1945.

³Ibid.

in the public interest. "Moi, je reste du côté public."

(105) He intended to support Mendès-France, but not to the point of forfeiting the freedom of the press.

Rather:

en gardant notre franc-parler, en restant du côté public. Quand nous ne serons pas d'accord, et nous ne le serons pas toujours, ni sur tous les points, il ne faudra pas se retenir de le dire. (106)

That he had no intention of mitigating his observations because of what an individual or group might say, he made clear in the same article. He made no bid for popularity. "Le sucre est un article que je ne tiens pas," he said, and again, "Ma vocation est d'irriter." (106)

By way of illustration, we may observe his comments on the foes of Mendès-France:

Je souhaite passionément que Pierre Mendès-France remette à flot ce vieux pays. Il faut que ce ministère dure autant qu'il sera nécessaire pour le salut de la nation. Ceux qui ont juré sa perte, nous les aurons à l'oeil. Ils n'ouvriront pas la bouche que nous ne leur remettions le nez de force dans ce qu'ils ont fait. Nous les en barbouillerons. (106)

Writing in January of 1960, Mauriac assumed full responsibility for his own decisions and comments:

Je m'interroge, et je cherche ma route sans demander conseil à personne, puisque personne en vérité n'a jamais connu les données d'aucun de nos problèmes, et que nous avons toujours du nous décider seuls, comme nous mourrons, comme nous serons jugés, Seuls.⁴

⁴L'Express, Jan. 14, 1960, 48.

Mauriac takes very seriously the power of the press, which he calls a "terrible miroir." (226) He also takes seriously his role as journalist and commentator on the affairs of the day with their implications for the future. His vocation, his politics and his religion are all of a piece in this respect. On September 19, 1953, he said:

Ma vocation est politique dans le stricte mesure où elle est religieuse. Ne jamais le perdre de vue, mais ne rien céder de mes positions, de ce que je crois être vrai, par intérêt, par commodité, par lassitude -- ni même par amitié. (46)

This sense of mission is even more strongly expressed on April 1, 1954, as war began in Indochina. He would like to use an old man's prerogative to escape "absolute evil," as he termed this war. But he has "enlisted."

Je suis engagé, au sens matériel du terme, comme un soldat qui a signé son engagement. Que la passion politique m'entraîne ou m'égare, il n'en reste moins que je suis engagé dans ces problèmes d'en bas, pour raisons d'en haut. (69)

Mauriac was more optimistic in November of 1960. Insisting that no novel of his creation could compare in interest with the story of the past three years as set down in the forthcoming volume of Bloc-Notes, he launched into the praises of journalism. This "genre décrit et béni" might not be a good avenue on which to launch a literary career, but it is a glorious one on which to end it. He wrote:

Je me jette dans la mêlée, je m'en donne à coeur joie de bien, ou de mal écrire comme je l'entends, sans m'interroger sur le langage, sans me poser à son sujet aucune des questions de nos romanciers philosophes. Je me sers du style, selon le pouvoir qui m'a été donné, pour me fâcher, pour m'indigner, pour me moquer, pour défendre ce que je crois être vrai, pour laisser fuser, à travers les mots, l'amour qui ne s'exprime pas, ou pour servir, à mon rang modeste, l'homme en qui j'ai cru discerner une pensée directrice efficace, accordée au destin de la nation.

Ecrire c'est agir. Si cette action écrite devient un jour littérature, c'est aux époques lointaines d'en décider, j'en aurai couru la chance, mais je n'ai pas à m'en mêler. C'est affaire de vitrine. Pour moi, je continue de vivre et l'écriture se confond avec ma vie. ⁵

As may be seen from the foregoing, journalism for Mauriac is no mere leisure-time occupation, no mere capitalization on his past laurels. He seems to have a satisfying sense of the importance of the work he is now doing, as well as a profound sense of mission. This sense of mission, if not the vitriolic tone in which his views are sometimes expressed, is rooted in his religion, as Mauriac himself realizes. He wrote:

Chaque jour un peu plus, écrire, pour moi, signifie témoigner. Je n'ose ajouter: écrire, c'est prier. Il y faudrait tendre pourtant comme à ma seule justification, car j'ai atteint l'âge du silence. ⁶

⁵Le Figaro Littéraire, November 26, 1960, 1.

⁶Ibid.

CHAPTER II

MAURIAC'S REMINISCENCES

If, as Browning suggests in his poem The Rainbow, "the child is father to the man," it behooves the student of Mauriac to look into the latter's early experiences for the foreshadowing of the man he has become.

Characteristically, one of the first recollections which he shares with his readers is religious; namely, his first communion, which occurred at the chapel of the Institution Sainte-Marie on Mirail Street in Bordeaux. On May 12, 1953, he recalled it thus:

Je me rappelle ses larmes dans les bras de sa mère à qui, avant d'aller communier, il demandait pardon même de ses fautes futures. Je me souviens, après cinquante-sept ans, que j'étais agenouillé en bordure de l'allée et que j'ai senti tout à coup sur mes cheveux la main de ma grand-mère qui attendait son tour d'approcher de la Sainte Table. (26)

Mauriac mentioned the way the young people looked when they went to Mass at the Feast of the Assumption. The girls, who were "not so thread-shaped as those of today," but stocky and plump, resembled flowers opening as they appeared in dresses of percale or muslin. He is less complimentary about the appearance of the boys. They wore pants held above their knees by elastic and immense sun hats which made them look like mushrooms.¹

¹Le Figaro Littéraire, July 11, 1959, 1.

Mauriac remembered the weddings of the tenant farmers. He spoke of the guttural chants which one heard as the procession moved from the church to the celebration, preceded by the violin. He recalled the bride's kissing everybody including, on one occasion, the teacher, a blushing young priest. Mauriac wondered if he recalled that episode after he became a monk.²

Mauriac remembered other sounds of the summer nights -- the heavy trot of the horses on the wet pavement, the whistle of the locomotive, the siren of a boat leaving in the fog making him think of what he called "des grands espaces, des rives lointaines, des races inconnues: tout ce mystère du monde que l'aviation a détruit."³

Turning from these musings, Mauriac spoke bitterly of the changes that have occurred since his childhood -- not the technical marvels, but "what man has made of man."

Avant 1914 nous ignorions ce dont l'homme est capable. Non, ce n'est pas aux avions que je songe. L'homme n'avait pas atteint certaines extrémités de lui-même. Les monstres appartenaient encore à l'univers des contes de Perrault, ou de l'histoire sainte. Depuis l'Ogre a régné sur l'Europe et le Petit Poucet a été égorgé non pas une fois, mais mille et mille fois. Hérode a

²Le Figaro Littéraire, July 11, 1959, 1.

³Ibid.

massacré plus d'innocents entre 1941 et 1944 que pendant tout le reste de l'histoire. Je lis en ce moment les souvenirs posthumes de Rudolph Hoess, le commandant d'Auschwitz. Il raconte qu'il observait les enfants au seuil de l'extermination. Ils se mettaient généralement à pleurnicher. Mais après avoir été consolés par leur mère ils se calmaient et s'en allaient vers les chambres à gaz en jouant ou en se taquinant, un joujou dans les bras.

Quand je me rappelle mon enfance je ne me dis pas que c'était avant l'époque de l'auto, de la radio et du cinéma: je songe que nous n'étions pas entrés encore dans le temps des assassins. ⁴

Mauriac recalled the grown-ups of his childhood -- persons who are survived only by moss-covered, half-effaced tombstones. They were buried in their Sunday clothes, the old ladies wearing their wedding bonnets. On Resurrection Morning, Mauriac said, they would think they were at High Mass. ⁵

Reminiscing again in March of 1960, Mauriac used the term "demoiselles," saying that it evoked:

des images de pureté et de tendresse --celles de créatures qui dans mon enfance allaient par paires -- on disait: "Les demoiselles Ducasse, les demoiselles Desbarrot" -- et l'une était toujours plus brillante et l'autre plus effacée. Elles n'avaient aucune part à l'universelle corruption: créatures préservées dans des maisons et des jardins qu'on eût dit qu'elles avaient elles-mêmes secrètes, des maisons et des jardins à leur image, où mon enfance se perdait avec délices durant les journées que j'y passais quand nous étions invités chez les demoiselles. au fond de ce quartier perdu de la lande, appelé Jouanhaut. ⁶

⁴Le Figaro Littéraire, July 11, 1959, 1.

⁵Le Figaro Littéraire, December 12, 1959, 1.

⁶Le Figaro Littéraire, March 19, 1960, 1.

Here was a refuge, according to the childish mind. It was a small world whose boundaries were odorous kitchens, a company parlor that smelled of wax, mysterious attics, and the dark stable. Yet Mauriac said that he knew even then that it was a refuge only in his imagination. Tragedy was there, too. The father of the demoiselles had killed himself in one of the rooms because he could not face ruin. Nevertheless, François imagined the place as an enchanted world -- a world which was later to be obliterated by fire. "Les demoiselles" have a shadowy immortality in a world surviving only in memory.⁷

In August of 1960 another article of reminiscent nature appeared. Mauriac described such incidents as meeting a mountebank on the road. His brothers fled, leaving him alone, and he ran in tears to the prairie of Malagar, thinking himself pursued. On another occasion, his brothers made him sit on an ant hill. He also mentioned walking with the other children in a procession, carrying flowers to "Grisette" (a female donkey).⁸

Mauriac remembered the last visit of his paternal grandfather. Seated in the room of François' mother,

⁷Le Figaro Littéraire, March 19, 1960, 1.

⁸Le Figaro Littéraire, Aug. 13, 1960, 1.

and looking at family photographs, he found his own among them and sighed: "What a cemetery! I am the only one still living." A few days later, he too was dead. Mauriac wrote: "Cette scène sert de prologue à l'histoire d'une mort sans cesse au cours de mon enfance . . ." Then he told of deliberately scaring himself as a child by half-opening the door to the room where his grandfather had died.⁹

Mauriac speaks frequently of his childhood. This led Malraux to say to him on one occasion: "Vous avez aimé votre enfance et moi, j'ai horreur de la mienne."

However, Mauriac wrote: "L'ai-je tellement aimé? En vérité quel hecatombe autour de moi! L'ombre de la mort m'enveloppait."¹⁰

Mauriac spoke of himself in kindergarten days as "a puppy separated from its mother." Later, in his seventh year, he entered the Marianite School in the Rue de Mirail. Everything about this life was horrible, he reported, except for the long study period in the evening, Sunday and Wednesday before dinner, when he could sit at his desk in the gentle warmth of the stove with candies beside him, and read a book of his own

⁹Le Figaro Littéraire, Aug. 13, 1960, 1.

¹⁰Le Figaro Littéraire, Dec. 12, 1959, 1.

choosing.¹¹

The depth of his unhappiness at school is apparent in this description:

J'étais toujours dernier, même en lecture, moi qui passais mon temps à lire! Le sentiment de l'injustice me fit cracher un jour sur mon bulletin hebdomadaire et je frottai avec mon mouchoir pour effacer cette injuste place de dernier, jusqu'à ce que j'eusse troué le papier.¹²

Summing up his childhood, Mauriac wrote: "I could give it, at will, an idea 'lugubre' or 'radieuse': it is a matter of regulating the lighting."¹³

Mauriac said that he was recalling his childhood for himself alone. He had no desire to invite the universe to the resurrection of this little world of yesterday. He wondered about his progenitors:

Quelle fut la vie de ces hommes et de ces femmes dont je suis issu? Qu'ont-ils aimé, désiré, haï? C'est en moi-même que j'essaie de démêler ce qui me vient d'eux, quelles pensées, quels songes en moi sont nés d'un des coeurs qui ont battu longtemps avant le mien et dont il ne reste même pas une pincée de poussière, dans ce caveau à gauche contre le mur, au fond du cimetière de Langon.¹⁴

In the foregoing episodes, one may see plainly the formative influences which are reflected in the personality and in the writing of Mauriac.

¹¹Le Figaro Littéraire, Dec. 12, 1959, 1.

¹²Le Figaro Littéraire, July 11, 1959, 1.

¹³Le Figaro Littéraire, Aug. 13, 1960, 1.

¹⁴Ibid.

The shadow of death obscured the healthy, normal atmosphere which is the birthright of childhood. Not only was Mauriac deprived of a father at the age of twenty months, but he seemingly never escaped completely from reminders of this and other tragedies. Also, the only grown-ups in his environment seem to have been women, and they were not young. Worse, they seem to have ignored him most of the time.

Though child companions were not wholly lacking (François had three older brothers and one older sister), he seems to have been less a companion than a little tag-along and the object of teasing, as evidenced by the episodes of the mountebank and the ant hill. This is an unpleasant situation for a sensitive child. As for the procession to the abandoned house to offer flowers to Grisette, that is typical of the weird ceremonies created by imaginative children anywhere.

As noted, early school experiences were not happy. The lonely child found his only escape in reading. One can imagine his complete frustration when he failed to enjoy success even in that area, as indicated in the pathetic efforts to erase a bad mark.

Probably the painful experiences of his childhood combined with his strict orthodox Catholic upbringing to bring about his early and intense religious fervor, of which the first communion is an illustration.

Though later, as will be pointed out in our discussion

of his poetic theory,¹⁵ Mauriac endured the spiritual struggle experienced by many adolescents, religion has remained part of the fabric of his life.

Life in the province, the "Sud-Ouest," was relatively uncomplicated and moved at a slower tempo. The fact that Mauriac lived there until he was twenty, and has returned for occasional vacations thereafter, has kept him somewhat provincial in his outlook. Though he has lived in Paris for years, he is not truly Parisian. He continues to think nostalgically of Bordeaux and its environs. He says:

Les gens m'écrivent: "Qu'est-ce que Sud-Ouest? Que vous importe Sud-Ouest?" Sud-Ouest m'importe beaucoup: je suis Bordelais et rien de ce qui est bordelais ne m'est étranger. Même à la rubrique des sports, s'il est question d'une équipe girondine, je dresse l'oreille. (229)

¹⁵See Chapter VI, this thesis.

CHAPTER III

MAURIAC'S EVALUATION OF HIS OWN LIFE AND WORK

The process of discovering Mauriac's evaluation of literary works, contemporary personalities, news events, and political programs, led to the question of how he would assess his own life and his contributions to literature.

Jean Duché, in an interview in 1951, just after the publication of Mauriac's novel Le Sagouin,¹ managed to elicit some interesting comments relative to this matter.

Mauriac said that he had "turned in his assignment (copie)." Duché picked up this expression, asking Mauriac if he thought he would get a good grade.

Mauriac replied that even a successful life does not measure up to adolescent dreams. However, his career is what he wished it to be, though he would not necessarily begin it over again. He had come to Paris with the naïve ideas of a provincial about literary success, but these ideas had led him in the way of honors which he wanted. Upon Mauriac's asking for the hand of the girl who became his wife, her father inquired whether he would be a member of the Academy. Mauriac said that he confidently expected this, and also membership in the Legion of Honor.

¹Le Figaro Littéraire, July 14, 1951, 1.

In the same interview, Mauriac admitted that he had not met all the interesting people whom he could have met in his first ten years in Paris -- people like Fégué and the writers of the Nouvelle Revue Française -- because of the aforementioned preconceived ideas. Also, he said that, if he had it to do over again, he would not admit what he called ce double appartenance.

Duché wanted to know if this double appartenance referred to literature and the world. Mauriac replied that he referred to the world and to Christianity. Asked what he would do about it, Mauriac said that he would choose not to talk about the Church -- which Duché declared was an impossibility for him -- or he would live withdrawn like the philosopher Mounier. In a rare burst of gaiety, however, he said: "But I did not come out so badly -- probably because I am a Gascon."

Duché wondered what grade Mauriac would give his written assignment.

Mauriac replied that he had a fairly clear idea of his work for two reasons. First, he had just reread it in preparation for the publication of his Complete Works. Second, the work of Cormeau on the "art" of Mauriac just published by Grasset had helped him to see that it formed an ensemble. "Le romancier, le poète, l'essayiste, le journaliste sont le reflet constant d'un homme, de son milieu et de son époque." Mauriac added: "Il serait ridicule de dire que j'en suis content, mais je

trouve ou'elle existe."²

Duché thought that the double appartenance mentioned by Mauriac had been fruitful. Insisting that Mauriac probably could not have evaded the Christian aspect of his life, Duché wondered if he could have refused the other side.

Mauriac said that he would have been a parish priest. To Duché's suggestion that he would have found such a life boring, Mauriac replied unsmilingly:

Les elements du saint que nous aurions pu être existent en chacun de nous. Et ce serait notre condamnation . . . Mais il y a "la douce pitié de Dieu," comme disait Bernanos.³

Continuing the discussion of his Complete Works, Mauriac analyzed, compared and evaluated them, and explained their arrangement, which is not strictly chronological.

His early stories are grouped under the heading "Oeuvres de Jeunesse." There is one exception: "Un seul a échappé à ce traitement de défaveur: La Robe Prétexte, qui précède ici ceux de mes romans dont je ne rougis pas."⁴

On rereading this novel, Mauriac regretted his decision. The "mollesse" of its style, the imitation of Jammes and other faults make it "assez odieux" to

²Le Figaro Littéraire, July 14, 1951, 1.

³Ibid.

⁴Le Figaro Littéraire, Sept. 30, 1950, 1.

him today. Nevertheless, placed next to Baiser au lépreux, La Robe Prétexte permits one to measure the changes which ten years have wrought in Mauriac. The author of the early novel is still the "choir boy" about whom he wrote in 1927 in a preface for the re-édition of Mains Jointes (religious poems). He does not deny his faith of that time, any more than he denies his poetry, but his manner of believing and of writing then were both too simple. With Baiser au lépreux, at least on the literary plane, adolescence was gone. With this, Mauriac had found both his style and his readers. The other novels will be bitter and hard, with the possible exception of part of Le Mystère Frontenac.

None of the characters of Le Baiser au lépreux were invented -- only what happened to them. But the original Jean was not so ugly. "Ainsi exhumons-nous de notre enfance des êtres endormis, et nous reinventons leur vie."⁵

On rereading Le Fleuve de feu, Mauriac observed that it is not always the characters which he finds first, but an atmosphere. In the first fifty pages, which Mauriac considers the only good part, he finds again the atmosphere of an old hotel at Argeles in the Pyrenees, where he stayed for two months in the summer of 1919. As soon as the characters leave this atmos-

⁵Le Figaro Littéraire, Sept. 30, 1950, 1.

phere, he thinks, they lose most of their validity. Readers do not all share this feeling, apparently, for he says that many of them have remained faithful to Giselle de Plailly, "cette jeune fille perdue."

By contrast, the characters in Genitrix seem to be alive almost to the last page, perhaps because they do not change atmosphere, do not get far from the old "maison sinistre" built by Mauriac's grandfather in 1860. The characters do not belong to his immediate family, however.

J'ai introduit comme par effraction, dans la demeure de mes grands-parents, cette mère féroce et cet fils possédé, et cette jeune femme assassinée. Mais j'ai connu le fils, et, à travers lui, il m'a été aisé de retrouver les traits de sa "genitrix dévoratrice." ⁶

Destins is the first novel in which Mauriac sees the influence of the silent movie. It remains one of his favorites. He prefers it to Le Baiser au lepreux and Genitrix, although it has had less popularity among readers. He said that the title was bad, but added: "L'atmosphère panique m'enchanté encore, je l'avoue: j'y entends murmurer toutes les prairies de mon enfance 'au long des accablants et des tristes êtes'." ⁷

Mauriac said that he had made a discovery:

C'est que ses personnages passent d'un récit et qu'il se trouve avoir écrit, sans l'avoir voulu, un roman-fleuve, tout en ayant gardé l'avantage de

⁶Le Figaro Littéraire. Sept. 30. 1950, 1.

⁷Ibid.

se retrouver à pied d'oeuvre devant chacun de ses romans et de partir chaque fois à la conquête d'un monde nouveau.⁸

On the other hand, Mauriac seemed strangely indifferent when his play Asmodée was revived after sixteen years, and this despite the fact that it had been the first play by a living author to be presented by the Comédie Française at the time of its original publication, 1939.⁹ Mauriac's remarks follow:

Reprise officielle d'Asmodée hier soir en présence du président de la République. Après seize ans, j'écoute cette pièce qui est de moi et qui est totalement détachée de moi. Ce malaise que je ressens toujours à cause de toute ce qui dans l'oeuvre représentée appartient au metteur en scène, à l'interprète, garde les traces d'influence subies au cours de répétitions. Que mon coeur est loin de tout cela, ces temps-ci! Que j'y crois peu! L'arrosage des compliments rituels. (29)

It becomes clear through these statements that Mauriac is essentially satisfied with his life and work. He has done successfully the thing he most wanted to do. Apparently he still enjoys most of his works, and he has had the satisfaction of seeing his own progress. He has made a living by his pen, and he has received many of the most coveted honors given to literary men.

⁸Le Figaro Littéraire, Sept. 30, 1950, 1.

⁹Kunitz and Haycroft, Twentieth Century Authors.655.

CHAPTER IV

MAURIAC'S RELIGIOUS VIEWS

Conservative Tendencies

On the forms of worship, Mauriac is conservative. He dislikes the new form of the Mass, which is designed to permit more congregational participation, saying that it interfered with private prayer. To use his phrase, it is "comme s'il y avait désormais une suspicion jetée sur le recueillement, sur le rapport personnel avec Dieu." (61) He makes frequent reference to his fondness for the old canticles of his childhood, which, he said, would horrify people today, now that the Gregorian Chant has been restored, but which introduced him very early to the God of peace and love.

In January of 1960, Mauriac took issue with a statement in the unedited text of the late Juarez, published in L'Express: "Le christianisme traditionnel se meurt philosophiquement, scientifiquement et politiquement." Mauriac said that it was only the buildings, erected by man and perishable, which grew old. He continued:

Mais ceci me frappe: cette vieille Eglise mère, grâce à l'armature qui nous irrite parfois et que nous jugeons vetuste, a préservé le mystère de la vie divine. Elle a maintenu, elle seule avec l'Eglise orthodoxe, contre toutes les hérésies, les deux paroles du Seigneur qui ont changé notre destin: "Tes péchés te sont remis," et "Ceci est mon corps, livré pour vous." Bénies soient les antiques canalisations romaines qui auront apporté, à travers dix-neuf siècles, jusqu'à notre bouche, cette eau vive, sans en laisser perdre une seule

goutte.¹

Mauriac admitted that he did not always see things this way. In his adolescence, at the time when Juarez was making his assertions, Mauriac himself was disturbed. He was witnessing the assault of modernism at the heart of the Church, and, from the outside, the settlement of accounts of which the Church was paying the cost. He cited the Dreyfus Case as an example.

From 1910 on, however, Mauriac came under the influence of men like Péguy, Bergson and Claudel, and began to reject the ideas of Juarez.

In speaking of conservative tendencies in the Church, and their value, Mauriac used an interesting illustration, that of power brakes -- formidable but necessary.²

Liberal Tendencies

Mauriac has liberal tendencies as well as conservative ones. One respect in which this seems to be true is in his evaluation of persons of other faiths.

This attitude is apparent in the case of Simone Weil (pseudonym of Emile Novis, Jewish author who wrote chiefly about the German and Russian Revolutions, the proletarian revolution, the rise of Hitlerism, and the like).

¹L'Express, January 19, 1960, 44.

²Ibid.

Mauriac quoted some significant passages from her Second Notebook and discussed them enthusiastically.

"Certains cherchent le royaume de Dieu comme si c'était un paradis artificiel, seulement le meilleur des paradis artificiels." Thus spoke Simone Weil, and Mauriac elaborated:

Les seuls délices qui ne soient pas suspects: la croix sans consolation, la foi dans les ténèbres l'absolution sans allègement, l'eucharistie dans la sécheresse, le don total de soi à des êtres qui ne nous plairaient pas. Nous aurons amassé avarement un trésor de pièces fausses comme ces billes, ces "agates" qu'enfant j'imaginais très précieuses et maman ne me détrompait pas. Le Christ non plus ne nous détrompera pas. (27)

Simone Weil spoke again:

Chez ceux qui ont eu une éducation chrétienne, les parties inférieures de l'âme s'attachent aux mystères de la foi, alors qu'elles n'y ont aucun droit. Ceux que j'aime, je leur fais un tort infini en leur étant présente, en maintenant l'écran que je suis entre eux et Dieu.

She then compared herself with the third party who is with an engaged couple and ought to go away so that they might be truly together.

Mauriac said that she had seen clearly that false Christians -- Catholics of class and High Mass -- were the real atheists. (27)

As for orthodoxy, Mauriac said rightly that it would be ridiculous to talk about it in the case of Simone Weil. Jewish, not baptized, how could she have been orthodox? The remarkable thing about her story,

c'est la connaissance, la révélation person-

nelle du Christ tel que le catholicisme le conçoit, dans une créature née hors de l'Eglise, à qui par certains aspects l'Eglise fait horreur et qui n'a pas tenir compte de son credo. Mais jusqu'où ne s'est-elle pas avancée dans le mystère de Jésus! Réponse vivante à ceux qui prennent au pied de la lettre la formule "hors l'Eglise pas de salut." Mieux vaut appartenir à l'âme de l'Eglise comme Simone Weil qu'au corps de l'Eglise comme les chrétiens de naissance et d'habitudes.

Nous ne croyons pas en Dieu, nous l'aimons. Elle a bien compris ce malentendu essentiel avec les athées. Comment croiraient-ils à Dieu, ceux qui ne l'aiment pas? (27-8)

Mauriac said elsewhere that the vocation of the Jewish people, their temporal and spiritual destiny seemed greater than ever to him today. He also said that pious Jews like Jules Isaac and Edmond Fleg would find him faithfully at the meetings which they have arranged for Christians of all denominations in this "amitié judéo-chrétienne" recently founded by them and meeting at 55 quai d'Orsay. This group is attached to the International Council of Christians and Jews. Truly they have a common problem and responsibility. Mauriac said:

Les Juifs fidèles espèrent la venue du Messie, et nous son retour. Ce qui pour nous sera un retour, pour eux sera une venue. La plus ancienne prière connue des premières communautés chrétiennes, c'était déjà: "Viens, Seigneur Jésus." Depuis dix-neuf siècles, toutes les confessions chrétiennes ne répètent-ils pas: "Que votre règne arrive?"

And later in the same article:

Nous sommes tous, nous qui avons gardé la foi, chrétiens ou israéliens, perdus au milieu d'un peuple sans mémoire, qui a rompu l'alliance, qui ne se souvient plus de la promesse faite à Abraham notre père et que la fraternité judéo-

chrétienne doit se avouer dans une résistance commune à la même ténèbre, à la même mort.³

Again Mauriac commented favorably on the faith and practice of a non-Christian but spiritually-minded person. In May of 1954, he conjectured about what would have happened in the world if Gandhi had been Catholic:

Sa douceur a vaincu un empire. Quel mystère que ce soit peut-être cet Hindou qui, dans l'ordre politique, ait, le premier, compris ce que le Seigneur a voulu dire quand il a dit: "Heureux les doux car ils auront la terre en partage." (93)

At the time of Gandhi's assassination, Mauriac had written:

Que Gandhi soit mort assassiné, ce n'est pas cela que nous étonne, mais que les hommes l'aient laissé devenir si vieux et qu'ils aient supporté si longtemps le scandale de sa toute-puissante faiblesse . . . Ce unique feu qui vient de s'éteindre, dans quel endroit du monde va-t-il se rallumer?⁴

One cannot help noting, however, that Protestants do not receive the same tolerance. In June of 1953, at the time of the Coronation of Elizabeth II of England, Mauriac said that he preferred the style of Protestantism born of Calvinism to that which remains of Catholicism in the English Church founded by Blue-Beard. Even the buildings have caries! (30-31)

In a slightly more charitable vein, he wrote of a visit from Jean Schlumberger, who wanted him to sign a manifesto. Although unwilling to sign the document,

³Le Figaro, Nov. 29, 1948, 1.

⁴Le Figaro, Feb. 1-2, 1948, 1.

Mauriac spoke of his good breeding.

Et puis Schlumberger est protestant . . . La Réforme en France a sélectionné une race, crée une espèce: la rigueur intérieure s'exprime dans des manières sobres et strictes. Et même si la rigueur cède, les manières demeurent: ce qui d'ailleurs ne justifie pas la doctrine. (95)

By way of comparison, he added:

Port-Royal aussi a créé un petit monde impitoyable et pur dont nous n'approuvons pas la théologie mais où nous habitons encore volontiers par le coeur et par la pensée. (95)

Mauriac manifests some liberal tendencies insofar as his social and political conscience is concerned. In October of 1945, he wrote:

Je sais bien: la face du monde passera et nous sommes des voyageurs sur la terre. Pourtant, que les jeunes chrétiens ne se détournent pas de la terre: il faut que dans ce monde deshonoré par tant de crimes les hommes de bonne volonté aident de tout leur coeur et de tout leur esprit à la manifestation de la grâce.⁵

Two Concepts of the Church

Mauriac said that there were two races of Catholics. The writer would make the same assertion relative to Protestants. These two races confront each other and will never understand each other. One group sees in the Church primarily the depository which has been entrusted to it by the Lord, the truth fixed in definitions and rites, which each generation must transmit to the next, intact and unaltered. That which matters to the other group is the evangelization of the world and particular-

⁵Le Figaro, Oct. 3, 1945, 1.

ly of the poor. They are less interested in dogma and in ethics than in the good news that one must bring to people who have not yet received it, and, in the case of France, this means the working class. "On lui a pris son Seigneur, et elle (la classe ouvrière) ne sait où on l'a mis."⁶

One would have to say that Mauriac, to a certain extent, belonged in both camps, as the next two episodes will indicate.

Mauriac's Reaction to Bacchus

Perhaps the most complete single statement of Mauriac's attitude toward the Church, as well as his most vehement polemic on the subject, may be found in an article entitled "Lettre à Jean Cocteau," written in December of 19⁷51. It followed the presentation of Cocteau's play, Bacchus, at Marigny, at which Mauriac was present (until he became disturbed and walked out). According to newspaper accounts, Mauriac was "furious," though he said he was only "sad" -- sad that an entire hall at which all Paris was present could listen without protest to this comedian disguised as a Bishop who made use of the words of the Pater Noster to produce laughter.

According to Mauriac, Cocteau had never really understood the crux of Christianity -- the unbelievable

⁶L'Express, January 19, 1960, 44.

⁷Le Figaro Littéraire, Dec. 29, 1951, 1.

news that the creature is loved by the Creator and, what is more astonishing, the creature is capable of loving his Creator. Cocteau made this a subject for jesting. Later, Jean Desailly even disparaged the Eucharist.

Mauriac became personal in his criticism, insisting that Jean Desailly was Cocteau's mouthpiece, even to the extent that he sometimes escaped from his role and became Jean Cocteau. Mauriac also said that this play showed Cocteau "in the light of Sartre," which was no compliment. (According to the papers, Sartre had been in the audience, jubilant.)

Mauriac said that he well understood that the play concerned the Church of the Sixteenth Century, which he described as "paganisée et simoniac dont l'hérésie luthérienne fut la juste punition." It would have been all right to denounce its weaknesses, as others have done. Also, Cocteau could have solved the problem and given offense to no one if there had been in the play one "saint authentique" or even "un vrai chrétien." He demanded angrily:

Croyez-vous qu'il n'y avait aucune sainteté dans le seizième siècle? N'avez-vous jamais entendu de Thérèse d'Avila ou Saint Jean de la Croix? Mais tu as voulu que l'Eglise s'incarnât dans un évêque bouffon, et dans un cardinal politique, pire à mes yeux que le bouffon. La moquerie, à travers eux, atteint l'Eglise dans son âme.⁸

⁸Ibid.

The Church should be incarnate, not in persons of the type presented in the play, but in the vicar of the parish, or the *prêtre-ouvrier* of Vincennes, or the Little Sister of the Assumption, or the Sister of St. Vincent de Paul, who cares for the sick.

Why did Mauriac react so violently to Bacchus when Sartre's play Le Diable et le Bon Dieu disturbed him not at all? Mauriac had an answer ready. He contended that an atheist carries laboriously to the scene the reasons for his atheism. We expect nothing else from him and he can give us nothing else. We can only repeat what Pascal said about such persons: "They blaspheme that of which they are ignorant." Sartre's arrows are lost in an empty heaven. Whom could they touch, since there is no one there? Mauriac added that Sartre does not jest except in appearances; he treats serious matters seriously. Commenting that they were not friends, Mauriac still said that, in comparing Cocteau's play with Sartre's, he was doing Sartre an injustice. Admittedly, this was not a literary judgment. Mauriac has left that to others. "Ce que vaut Bacchus, à d'autres d'en décider."

Mauriac reminded Cocteau of his own debt to the Church and his never-ending need of it:

Dieu veuille qu'alors la femme-tronc, [as
Cocteau had called the Church in his play]
pénètre une dernière fois dans ta chambre, sous
l'aspect d'un homme consacré à qui elle aura
communiqué son pouvoir de délier: "A l'heure du

Christus venit, au chant du coq . . ." Le coq chantera, et contre le coeur de son Seigneur Arlequin pleura amèrement.⁹

Les Prêtres-Ouvriers

Mauriac was greatly interested in the prêtres-ouvriers. They were priests who worked in the factories. They dressed just like the other workers except that they donned robes to administer the sacraments. Mauriac described in great detail the progress of the Mass as conducted by one of these priests amid rude surroundings, in Le Figaro of December 25-26, 1948, page one. Evidently he was greatly moved by the experience.

To Mauriac's consternation, in the fall of 1953, a serious blow was dealt this ministry. Seminary students were forbidden to spend part of their training period in the factory. This meant that the main source of recruitment was cut off. "Les pauvres perdent toujours," said Mauriac. "Si la vie en usine a corrompu quelques clercs, la vie dans 'le monde' en corrompt un plus grand nombre." (46)

When the Prêtre-Ouvrier Movement was finally abolished, some readers were apparently astonished not to hear a word from Mauriac. In answer to their queries, he wrote a brief statement for L'Express, in October of 1959. He said that age had intervened in the struggle, but even in his youth, Mauriac had resigned

⁹Le Figaro Littéraire, Dec. 29, 1951, 1.

himself to seeing the spiritual flame rekindled, blown out, and rekindled elsewhere -- an elsewhere that is always France.

It is true that Marxist contamination was a risk for the prêtre-ouvrier, to say nothing of perils of another nature, for the young priest has a heart of flesh. Yet who has ever feared for him the contamination of bourgeois society?

Despite this check, the example of these priests and the witness they have borne remain. Mauriac believes that this apostolate of the working world is the only way to reach such people, though it may not have brought many persons into the formal Church. The priests were beloved by their comrades, even by the Marxists and the atheists. In the midst of the working class, they incarnated this unbelievable choice of purity and love, which only a great love could explain.

This ministry is missed. But these very checks compose the woof of this story which escapes shallow-minded persons, a story which will culminate in the return of the Son of Man. Mauriac added this thought: that the secret of Christianity is the creative check. Those who were shocked had not really understood the meaning of the crucifix hanging above their beds.¹⁰

Nevertheless, Mauriac was not truly reconciled. Although he believed that the Church must exercise

¹⁰ L'Express, Oct. 15, 1959, 44.

control, he said that he had always been disturbed by the unbelievable indifference to individual disasters in the Church, brought about by certain decisions.

"Tous ces âmes rejetées à la mer!" he lamented. He wondered if the "Holy Office" was disturbed by the effects of such decisions.¹¹

Salvation

Whenever one of his non-Christian confrères dies. Mauriac seems perturbed. When Roger Martin du Gard died suddenly, Mauriac shocked and angered one of the friends of the deceased by publicly expressing concern about his ultimate destiny instead of commenting on his literary works. The friend retorted acidly that Martin du Gard did not take stock in the argument, but that if there were an "elect", his friend would be one of them.

Mauriac said that he fervently hoped so, but he stood his ground, even to writing a second article on the subject. He justified himself on two counts (1) that the issue had to be faced, and (2) that he was more interested in Martin du Gard himself than in anything which the latter had written.¹²

Mauriac and Martin du Gard had argued this issue of salvation in the ecclesiastical sense in connection with the death of Gide. Mauriac had seized upon a

¹¹L'Express, Oct. 15, 1959, 44.

¹²Le Figaro Littéraire, Sept. 13, 1958. 1.

remark made by Gide during his last moments. A friend had asked, "Are you suffering?" To this, Gide had replied, "Yes, there is always this struggle between the reasonable and that which is not." Evidently Mauriac believed that Martin du Gard had the same problem.¹³

The Mission of the Western Church

In September of 1948, Mauriac asserted that the Western Church had a mission to perform in the present century.

Le sort de la liberté spirituelle dans le monde rest étroitement lié à celui de l'Évangile et associée au destin de la vieille Église-mère.

He predicted that we would see the duel of the two cities (Moscow and Rome) going on at the very heart of the satellite countries.

Mauriac's challenge to the Church of Today is this:

Le christianisme a fait l'Europe; le matérialisme -- et non pas seulement celui de Lenine -- l'a réduite au degré de misère où nous la voyons, mais d'où elle se relèvera si elle ne renie pas la vérité qui rend libre. ¹⁴

Summary

Mauriac evidently attends Mass regularly and prefers conservative patterns of worship, but is progressive in areas of social concern, and has admitted that there are probably saints outside the Catholic fold. He alternately lauds and chafes under what he calls the "power brakes" of the Church. He is tolerant of other

¹³Le Figaro Littéraire, Aug. 30, 1958, 1.

¹⁴Le Figaro, Sept. 19-20, 1948, 1.

faiths, but somewhat intolerant of what he calls "heresies" in Christendom. He is often lyrical in praise of his faith, but he does not hesitate to criticize anyone from the Holy Father down, for any action which he regards as a "scandale."

Religion is bound up with his earliest recollections; with the poetry of his youth; with his sense of vocation; with his meditation as an older man. It is uppermost in his thoughts of his deceased friends. It is the criterion by which he judges political activity, both domestic and foreign. It motivates, or at least colors his literary judgments. Indeed, it is the point of reference for nearly everything he does.

PART II
LITERARY DISCUSSIONS

CHAPTER V

AS MAURIAC SEES THE ACADEMY

As noted in Chapter III, membership in "L'Académie Française" was one aspect of Mauriac's youthful ambition. When he achieved this goal in 1933, he was understandably elated.

By 1953, however, he felt differently. He learned, apparently at the last moment, that he would be the target for an uncomplimentary discourse by le maréchal Juin. He was hurt because none of his friends had warned him, and bitter at the thought that such an episode could occur. In no other club, he was sure, would a neophyte, even if he were the maréchal of France, publicly vilify one of his seniors with the complicity of the group. The reason, Mauriac assumed, was that he was not playing the assigned role, not abruptly modifying his text on occasions when class interests were threatened. There was a further problem, in that he did not know how to respond to Juin without offending the dignity of the title. (34)

In May of 1954, Mauriac remarked ruefully that he did not go to the Academy except to vote, not because of bitterness toward his colleagues, nor because he did not respect their abilities and past contributions, but because they and he had, to use his expression, "pénétré dans la zone crépusculaire où les ombres prostrées attendent la barque qui tarde." He continued with the

none-too-flattering description of the group, including himself:

Quai Conti, nous sommes déjà à demi pétrifiés: chacun se sent devenir sa propre statue. Oui, un peuple de statues, mais qui n'a ni sentiments ni langage communs. On ne parle guère d'un socle à l'autre . . . (86)

He was pessimistic for another reason. In April of 1955 he wrote:

Avec tout le respect et toute la prudence que m'inspire un inguérissable attachement, je chercherai à rendre manifeste les raisons politiques du divorce chaque jour plus affirmé entre l'Académie Française et les Lettres françaises.¹

Writing in October of the same year, as Cocteau entered the Academy, Mauriac was even more pessimistic. Cocteau had written to him, saying that he would be unhappy if Mauriac did not welcome him "under the Cupola." Mauriac's mind harked nostalgically to the day, twenty-two years before, when he himself had been received. In the intervening years, however, Mauriac had seen too much of the machination and political strategy, though he had tried hard not to see these things. A portion of his reply follows:

Mais depuis, cher Jean, j'ai pénétré derrière ce décor. Plus on s'enfonce dans ces coulisses de la politique et plus on y trébuche sur des cadavres dont la peau ne vaut pas cher . . .

Mais ce que la plupart des Français ignorent, ce dont moi-même, durant un demi-siècle, j'ai détourné mon regard, je le vois maintenant, je ne

¹Le Figaro Littéraire, April 30, 1955, 4.

peux plus ne le voir. A mesure que je m'enfonce dans cette demi-tenèbre de derrière le décor, quelle stupeur que de découvrir les véritables metteurs en scène et ces machinistes que je dévisage un à un! (203)

Mauriac said that he would be with Cocteau only in spirit, but he would read his discourse and reread his poetry. (203)

Mauriac spoke in a somewhat different tone in February, 1959, on the subject of elections. He thought of earlier times when they had enjoyed making writers wait at the portals. He wrote: "Avoir traité si mal tant de grands hommes! Mais non, nous n'en rougissons pas. . .cela faisait partie de notre vocation." He remembered the candidate of his youth, who, rejected by the Academy, could not keep back the cry: "Et moi qui l'aime tant!"

The situation has changed. Mauriac admitted frankly in the above article that the generation immediately following his does not want to be associated with the Academy. He insisted that the reason was political.²

The article mentioned on the preceding page is more specific. Therein he endeavored to show how the Academy, created to serve literature, had come to believe that it should be the servant of the state. During all the authoritative regimes of the past century. the Academy had managed to preserve liberty of thought.

²Le Figaro Littéraire, Feb. 28, 1959, 1.

There had been "une opposition liberale, distingué et modérée" especially against the Second Empire. With the Third Republic, conditions changed. The more radical governments became, the more conservative the Academy grew. Just as, long ago, the scholastics demanded that philosophy become the hand-maid of theology, so the political philosophers of the right wing demanded that literature serve the state. This trend culminated in the election of Charles Maurras in 1938. According to Mauriac, this election and all elections since then, have been political.³

Still preoccupied with the decline of candidature in November, 1959, Mauriac complained:

Réforme à la Comédie-Française, réforme à l'Académie Goncourt. Pourquoi l'Institut échapperait-il seul à cette volonté de rajeunissement? Et pourquoi notre Académie refuserait-elle de rajeuner elle aussi? Je connais son attachement aux traditions et aux usages: mais il y a urgence.

Insisting that he cast no aspersions on the illustrious company, he demanded that the Academy face up to the problem of declining candidature, which had now reached the limits of catastrophe.

Not content with lamenting the situation, Mauriac presented a practical solution, namely, to abolish the system. The Academy could name its choice after a secret consultation with that person in which the

³Le Figaro Littéraire, Apr. 30, 1955. 1.

Academy would be assured of his acceptance. Then Mauriac would enlarge the domain as the Swedish Academy has done, "aux dimensions de la planète." This, he predicted, would add luster to the name of "L'Académie Française." and would make its prize one of the most coveted.

The time for such a change is now, Mauriac declared, for, though this is the period for change, it may be a short-lived period.

In the same article, Mauriac said that his proposal would not only eliminate embarrassment and enable the Academy to call the outstanding leaders in politics, the episcopacy, the army, and other categories, but it would circumvent another problem.

Trop de génies tuent les Académies. Certains mélanges sont explosifs. Si, en 1944, nous avons introduit d'un seul coup parmi nous Aragon et Malraux, Sartre, Breton, et Camus, la Coupoule aujourd'hui serait peut-être en miettes.⁴

Thus the reader will observe a greater fluctuation in attitudes toward the Academy than toward any other institution, but he will also note a basic interest in and concern for its welfare, together with concrete suggestions for improvement. Apparently this last proposal has not yet been accepted, but it might well bear serious consideration on the part of the august assembly known as "L'Académie Française."

⁴Le Figaro Littéraire, November 28, 1959, 1.

CHAPTER VI

LITERARY THEORIES AND TECHNIQUES

First Work Foreshadows Later Productions

When, in June of 1958, at Le Théâtre des Nations, Mauriac heard for the first time Wagner's opera Le Vaisseau Fantôme, he had a strange feeling of having heard it before. He said that he knew in advance, without being familiar with the end of the story, that the hero would reëmbark in the last act. The reason that it seemed so familiar, Mauriac decided, was that this opera was an earlier and more primitive form of the plot which Wagner later developed more completely and artistically in the better-known opera, Tristan and Isolde. Wagner's lovers become reunited only to lose each other forever. There can be no other denouement in the Wagnerian universe.

This and similar experiences led Mauriac to suggest an interesting theory. He believes if we have the creative gift, we begin early. Whatever the medium in which we work, that which we produce is an expression of the inner world which is peculiarly our own. That which we have to say from opera to opera, from book to book, from canvas to canvas, is implicit in our first production. It will be imperfectly expressed in the beginning, but the germ of our future work will be there.

Un artiste donne toute de suite l'essentiel de lui-même. Il jette maladroitement et d'un seul coup toute sa mise dans une oeuvre imparfaite. ou'il recommencera indéfiniment. Nous avons passé notre vie à refaire notre premier livre, nous aurons repris jusqu'à la fin la même histoire, sans que la lecteur songe à s'en plaindre parce qu'il n'aperçoit pas.

After the first work, according to Mauriac, progress is manifested chiefly in expression. Whatever the time lapse between the two operas, Wagner will say essentially nothing more in Tristan than he has said in the Vaisseau Fantôme.

Mauriac believes that the life lived enriches us less by new elements than by revealing to us that which is within us and which becomes clear in our first books.

Elle est à la lettre un bain revelateur et les figures surgissent peu à peu en chair qui étaient en nous dès notre naissance et qui commençaient à prendre forme dans les balbutiements de nos débuts. Une vie tumultueuse n'eut rien apporté de plus à Emily Bronte que le monde féroce et desolé des Hauts de Hurle-ments.

The characters in our stories are a phantom people come from ourselves.

Il n'est aucune de nos héroïnes que nous n'avons tirée de notre côté. C'est Eve éternelle que l'homme a créée et non Dieu. Madame Bovary est toujours moi. La plainte d'Yseult c'est celle de Wagner lui-même, enfin une part de sa plainte. Il est le couple desaccordé et ensorcelé. Il en invent le cri désespéré. ²

In Wagner, Mauriac believes, death gives an answer

²Le Figaro Littéraire, June 16, 1958, 1.

to everything, but it solves nothing. It does not constitute a response to the question posed by human love.

Si le Hollandais volant avait enfin engouté le repos auprès de Senta, si Yseult et si Tristan après s'être rejoints avaient survecu, ils fussent devenus importune l'un à l'autre, ou bien une affection d'habitude les auraient retombé sur le cendre, sur une cendre que le vent de l'oubli aurait finalement emportée.³

The theory herein set forth might be applied with some justification to Mauriac's own work.

Theory of Poetic Inspiration

Obviously flattered by being included in Marc Alyn's book, Poètes d'aujourd'hui, and pleased by the study given his poems by the younger man, Mauriac made some interesting comments.

First of all, he expressed appreciation of the works of Alyn himself, which, Mauriac said, differ from his in technique but not in the profound source of their inspiration.⁴

The discussion centered on the poem Sang d'Atys, which seems to be Mauriac's own favorite, as well as that of his critics. It is, he said, the only thing he wrote without ulterior motives. Other things were done in pursuit of his profession as a writer.

But the poem was written in his youth. He asked

³Le Figaro Littéraire, June 16, 1958, 1.

⁴Le Figaro Littéraire, June 18, 1960, 1.

himself why the poet within him was now silent. Was it because younger writers had discouraged him? Mauriac decided that that would be doing them too much honor.

This brings one to Mauriac's theory of poetic inspiration. Poetry, he thinks, is born of spiritual struggle. The struggle between the flesh and the spirit occupied all of his Christian life. The poetic inspiration welled up from the part of his soul least touched by Christian grace, but it soon touched what he termed "la zone religieuse." The poetry came, not from the deeply human part of him, nor from his spiritual nature, but from an inextricable mixture of the two. This "mélange troublé" brought condemnation from Christian critics, and brings self-condemnation now when Mauriac rereads Orages and Sang d'Atys

Marc Alyn had seen the heart of the struggle, pointing out the passage in which an eagle circles above the pine which Atys has become through the evil power of Cybele and the work of redeeming blood. But as soon as grace triumphs, Atys is silent.

Grace, which in the case of Paul Claudel is the only inspiration, has interrupted Mauriac's song. The closer he comes to God, not by the practice of virtue, but by the mere fact of advancing age, the more silent the poet in him becomes. He is journeying into a lengthening shadow. Every step takes him farther from men, even if

he seems to espouse their quarrels.

Nous sommes dans la paix. Une blessure originelle s'est fermée en nous, mais c'était elle la source de notre chant, non la grâce qui l'a guéri. C'est la profonde raison de mon silence.⁵

As long ago as June of 1949, Thierry Maulnier, in an article entitled "Mauriac poète,"⁶ had noted this tension as the distinguishing characteristic of Mauriac's poetry. He said:

Il y avait, avant Mauriac, beaucoup de poètes d'amour terrestre; il y avait beaucoup de poètes chrétiens, mais je n'ai jamais vu un seul dans lequel l'élan volontaire vers le divin emporte avec lui ce poids de voluptés mortelles et de délices condamnées.

He then quoted the chant of Cybele above Atys who has been changed to a pine:

Un jeune pin tendu vers l'essence divine
Fait des signes au ciel avec ses longues mains.
Sa cime cherche au dieu, mais ses lentes
racines
Dans mon corps tenebreux creusent de lents
chemins.

Livré en vain tes cheveux à tous les vents du
monde!
Tends tes branches au dieu que tu voudrais
saisir.
Rien, rien n'arrachera ta racine profonde
A mon immense corps engourdi de plaisir.

Plus tu t'érigeras vers l'azur dont l'abîme
Recele un pur amour inconnu de nos dieux,
Plus tes membres profonds jouiront de leur
crime
Dans la nuit de mon corps que j'ai fermé sur
eux.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Le Figaro Littéraire, June 11, 1949. 1.

Maulnier continued:

Les deux poles de toute poésie, le dieu des corps et l'Eros divin melent ici inextricablement leurs aimantations contraires, comme si c'était encore le dieu que l'esprit cherchait à travers le ténèbres de la chair, le dieu chrétien plus près du pécheur que du juste, le dieu paradoxal, le dieu qui surgit là où il n'était pas attendu.

A chaque page du recueil de Mauriac nous éprouvons cette alliance mystérieuse qui unit dans leur combat la terre et le ciel, le péché et la grâce, le sang qui bat au coeur du désir et le sang qui sauve le monde. Toute est solidaire, et les vagues roulées par l'abîme et les larmes humaines sont salées du même sel.⁷

Mauriac pursued this idea of spiritual struggle as the well-spring of poetry when he discussed Notes Intimes de Marie Noel.⁸ In her case, the struggle seems to have been two-fold: between her desire to spend her life in a convent and the situation in which she found herself -- in the service of her aging family -- and also against spiritual sterility, called "la secheresse."

In an article entitled "Poésie et Solitude," Mauriac again discussed poetic inspiration, saying:

Toute poésie est l'expression d'une solitude . . . C'est toujours d'une solitude que naît le poème, et même le roman, si dénué qu'il soit de lyrisme.⁹

The ensuing paragraph indicates unmistakably that this solitude is not a peaceful one. It is a withdrawal to an interior desert to escape the "large rire blessant"

⁷Le Figaro Littéraire, June 11, 1949, 1.

⁸Marie Rouget, poet writing between 1939 and 1949.

⁹Le Figaro Littéraire, Sept. 10, 1960, 1.

of which the young Barres spoke. Mauriac said that, at eighteen, he followed Barres' precept: "Opposer aux autres une surface lisse, être absent." Bitter experience forces one to withdraw into this desert, and he utters a cry. If he is possessed of genius, the cry will reëcho through the centuries. Poetry is made of flux and reflux between experience and withdrawal. The poem is what one has lived and felt, translated into words; it is but the chrysalis of the experience.

Is the person blessed, then, who has left behind him a literary work? Mauriac was not sure. To survive thus is to be subject to a second oblivion, and to be at the mercy of the critics in the meantime! How unarmed the dead are!

Then Mauriac decided not to worry.

Mais de quoi vais-je me soucier? Là où je serai, ce que les survivants penseront du pauvre être que j'étais ne m'importera plus. Ce qui subsiste éternellement de Rimbaud et de Verlaine, purifiés de toute infamie n'entend pas cette ruineur sur la terre autour de leur double trace, autour des pas qu'ils ont laissés, marqués à 10 jamais dans une boue admirable et durcie.

Emotional and Moral Pitfalls for Poets

The mental photograph which Mauriac wishes to carry of a poet such as Rimbaud, bears little resemblance to the tragic figure scarred by dissipation, whom he used

¹⁰Ibid.

to pass on the street.¹¹

This led Mauriac to take a look at this problem of emotional and moral instability on the part of many poets. The underlying reason, according to him, is contained in his definition of a poet:

Un poète est un enfant qui ne meurt pas, un enfant qui survit, privé des anges tutélaires de l'enfance, un enfant sans garde-fou, en proie à toutes les passions d'un coeur d'homme, d'une chair d'homme, à toute l'obscur frénésie du sang.¹²

Obviously, not all poets fall into these traps. According to Mauriac, poets like Goethe and Hugo represent, not exceptions, but superbe victories over "les forces obscures."

What saves poets, including Mauriac himself, from moral and emotional shipwreck? Mauriac believes that it is the "invisibles freins" of heredity from his solid, dependable ancestors. He says:

Les reflexes qui m'immobilisaient soudain à l'extrême bord de l'absurde ou de l'irreparable, c'était leur volonté au-dedans de moi. Ils m'ont sauvé, à moins qu'ils ne m'aient perdu, dans la mesure où pour un poète c'est perdre sa vie de la sauver.¹³

Theories and Techniques of Novel-Writing

Although Mauriac had written many novels, there was a period during which he produced none. His work had

¹¹Le Figaro Littéraire, Sept. 10, 1960, 1.

¹²Le Figaro Littéraire, Sept. 8, 1956, p. 1.

¹³Ibid.

been interrupted by the War. Then he wrote four plays. In 1951, however, Le Sagouin appeared and was exceedingly well received. As a matter of fact, Mauriac was somewhat surprised by its acclaim, as he indicated in the interview with Jean Duché, mentioned in Chapter III of this thesis. Coming as it did after the plays, Duché felt that it had been influenced by the theatre. Mauriac was not sure. He had started the novel during the Occupation, but had been interrupted. The principal character was supposed to be Paule de Cernes, but, when Mauriac came back to the fragment, it changed direction. Mauriac had a sudden vision of this child walking to his death. Perhaps the work was influenced somewhat by dramatic techniques.

The writer believes that Duché was right about the influence of the theatre. The novel moves in clear-cut, climactic episodes toward an inevitable dramatic conclusion, as indicated in the following brief sketch:

When Le Sagouin, who has been rejected all his life by everyone except his degenerate father, is first accepted and then rejected by the teacher and his wife, life becomes intolerable. The child walks steadfastly toward the river, followed by his father. The wife and mother, Paule, now free from the misfortune which she brought on herself, is, ironically, dying of cancer. The wife of the teacher refuses to face up to the situation, and

goes grocery-shopping. Her husband, however, cannot put aside his remorseful thoughts. Seated on the bed which had belonged to his own son, and holding his son's book which bears the sticky fingerprints of the little Sagouin, Guillou, he thinks of the child he rejected and hence sent into eternal darkness . Then the teacher looks beyond and, to use Mauriac's words, "cherche, cherche ce royaume d'esprits d'où peut-être l'enfant éternellement vivant voit cet homme et, sur sa joue noire de barbe, la larme qu'il oublie d'essuyer."¹⁴

Changing the subject, Mauriac said that he had intended making his novel, Le Chemin de la mer, longer. Asked why he had not done so, Mauriac gave a practical answer:

Parce que j'étais impatient . . . Cette crampe qui vous prend, l'envie de finir, l'éditeur qui attend . . . Je passe pour un petit seigneur des lettres, parce que je parle tous les temps de Malagar et de mes vignes, alors que j'ai élevé mes enfants avec le produit de mes livres . . . C'est très bon pour un écrivain d'avoir des enfants: ils vous font travailler -- mais trop vite. Et puis mon tempo est un tempo rapide. Tout ce qui est dense a été écrit dans un jaillissement -- cela explique les temps morts aussi. Ce qui en moi est essentiel, c'est le poète. La mort du Sagouin, le début de Genitrix, c'est un chant. Mais il arrive que le jet retombe. ¹⁵

Pursuing the subject of technique, Duché mentioned that Sartre reproached Mauriac with using "une technique

¹⁴Vol. XII, Oeuvres Complètes, beginning, 69.

¹⁵Le Figaro Littéraire, July 14, 1951, 1.

désuète." Mauriac was impatient with this notion, insisting:

Il n'y a pas de technique. Seul le don existe, qui crée sans le savoir la technique de chacun. Nos jeunes romanciers croient qu'il existe des recettes pour réussir un roman et que, par exemple, il faut faire semblant de ne pas savoir ce que pensent vos personnages . . . Et cette idée absurde qu'il y a des conventions mauvaises et d'autres qui sont bonnes! Les bonnes sont celles qui nous servent. Je me refuse à me poser des questions de technique. En écrivant Le Sagouin j'avais les êtres en moi. devant moi. et quand il fallait voir en eux, je voyais, et quand il ne fallait pas, je ne voyais pas. C'est tout.¹⁶

When Duché insisted that, in an earlier novel, Thérèse Desqueyroux, Mauriac had used such movie techniques as close-ups and flash-backs, Mauriac said that he did not consciously apply these techniques. He conceded, however: "Grâce au cinéma, j'ai eu le sentiment que nous pouvions dispenser des préparations à la Bourget ou à Flaubert." He added that he did not believe that we had necessarily made progress in jumping with both feet into the subject.¹⁷

To summarize, we might say that Mauriac is essentially a poet, expressing himself through impression rather than detailed statement. Though he does not consciously choose dramatic techniques, his work reflects them. There seems to be a sort of inner consistency, as

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

suggested by his theory that one's first work fore-shadows all the rest. As for his thesis that spiritual struggle is the source of all poetry, one can say that, in the case of Mauriac, it is true.

CHAPTER VII

MAURIAC JUDGES THREE CONTEMPORARIES

It is possible to see rather clearly Mauriac's estimate of his contemporaries, notably Cocteau, Malraux and Sartre.

Cocteau, Le Libellule

As previously noted, Mauriac consumed an entire front page of Le Figaro Littéraire in vituperating Bacchus and its author, Jean Cocteau.¹

When Cocteau was received into the Academy, Mauriac wrote:

Le libellule dont les ailes vibraient depuis près d'un demi-siècle au-dessus de nos têtes, la libellule ravissante et irritante qui ne se posait jamais, se pose enfin sur le dossier d'un de nos quarante fauteuils: ces fameux fauteuils qui n'existent pas. Repose-toi, cher Jean, au milieu des vieillards; tu dois être bien fatigué.²

Mauriac went on to say that they had thought of Cocteau as an ephemeral creature dancing in rays emanating from others, and would soon pass into oblivion.

Mauriac admitted that this judgment was erroneous. He added that perhaps the thing that attracted Cocteau to the Academy was its sense of permanence. The latter had carefully waited to present himself until the early impression held by Mauriac and others had been corrected.

Mauriac mentioned having heard Cocteau speak on the

¹See Chapter IV, this thesis.

²Le Figaro Littéraire, Mar. 12, 1955, 1.

radio. There was nothing new for him to say, for everything about him was known:

Les rencontres, les attachements, les ruptures,
les jeux autour de toi de l'amour, et de la mort,
la tentation du suicide, le recours aux faux paradis . . .

Mauriac also mentioned "ce mot que je trouve affreux:

'Je n'ai jamais souffert par amour.'"³

It is to Cocteau's credit, Mauriac thinks, that however much he may have been a prisoner of his own nature, as we all are, he struggled with all his might toward an ideal Cocteau. In Mauriac's words: "Il criait avec une obstination désolée: 'Vous ne me savez pas qui je suis, rendez justice enfin à mon vrai visage!'"

Mauriac admitted that they had made fun of him, accusing him of a lie, without realizing that little by little the lie was becoming true, that Jean Cocteau would not wait for eternity to be changed into the poet that he wanted to be.⁴

Mauriac expressed the belief that Cocteau would survive. In the case of writers like Corneille and Racine, it is the works which have survived; little is known about the men. Others, like Rousseau, Chateaubriand and Gide, survive in their memoirs. In Cocteau, the work is not distinguishable from the man. "Tu la

³Ibid, 1.

⁴Ibid, 5.

parles avant l'écrire. Tu l'écris en même temps que tu la vis."⁵

Malraux, Le Joueur

Mauriac mentioned Malraux in February of 1948, in an article entitled, "Malraux ou la vie d'un joueur."

Mauriac had waited through a rather boring political meeting for the express purpose of hearing Malraux speak. He could have listened much longer, not because he thought that Malraux said anything notable, but because of his interest in the man and his game. He said: "Un joueur, oui, et qui agite les dés dans ses mains de fiévreux."

As soldier and political leader, Malraux had attached himself to de Gaulle, whom he considered capable of changing the destiny of France and of counteracting Stalin's designs. It was against Stalin that Malraux was leading his party. "Ce David sans âge," as Mauriac called him, was fighting against Stalin more than he was fighting for de Gaulle.

Malraux announced Stalin's next offensive with the relish of a gambler about to risk his all, and pleased at the prospect.⁶

Ten years later, Mauriac again wrote about Malraux, comparing him unfavorably with de Gaulle.

⁵Le Figaro Littéraire, March 12, 1955, 1.

⁶Le Figaro Littéraire, Feb. 19, 1948, 1.

The events of history brought both into prominence, but, in the case of de Gaulle, the personal drama is mingled with the drama of French destiny, whereas with Malraux, it is only a personal career.

C'est du seul destin de Malraux qu'il s'agit. L'Histoire n'a rien à voir avec l'aventure de ce génie fiévreux dont nous suivons la courbe depuis son adolescence, de livre en livre, mais aussi de risque en risque . . .

Admitting that Malraux did indeed serve a cause, Mauriac accused him of doing so only to make his personality more colorful and his biography more interesting. He was always doing something unexpected for the same reason. "Il est malade au fond d'un désir de puissance," declared Mauriac.

Commenting on the fact that Malraux and de Gaulle worked in harmony, he wondered what the mutual attraction was. He said it was easier to see what made de Gaulle interesting to Malraux than vice versa.

C'est la signe qu'il subsiste dans ce grand homme, comme dans tout génie, une part un peu folle et qui nous le fait aimer -- et qui le rend si différent des hommes d'Etat de série . . .

Both are adventurers, but Mauriac thinks that de Gaulle's adventure is part of the destiny of France, and its significance will last through the ages. That of Malraux proceeds "du néant d'avant sa propre naissance au néant où la mort le précipitera."⁷

⁷Le Figaro Littéraire, near July 19, 1958, 1.
(Exact day not on microfilm).

Sartre, Le Philosophe

Back in 1949, Le Figaro Littéraire carried a lengthy discussion of one episode in the polemic battle between Mauriac and Sartre. The subject was La Politique by Sartre.

The latter began with the observation that the less one knows about a subject, the more warmth he often displays in discussing it. Such is the case with Mauriac, when he discusses politics. Accusing Mauriac of distorting his remarks, he wondered why the latter bothered about politics at all. When one has long disdained history and politics, it is difficult, in the last period of one's life, to make brilliant incursions therein.

Sartre said that the French bourgeoisie was declining, citing a lag of twenty-five years in industrial equipment and in the concentration of sales, the inertia of wealth, fear, decreased initiative, ideological uncertainty, the disappearance of class, and the decline in birth-rate.

Mauriac suggested that "M. le romancier célibataire" take a look at families to see if the birth-rate is declining. He suggested a trip from Lyon to Bordeaux to see whether class consciousness had disappeared. As for uncertain ideology, he agreed. He mentioned the ant-like passion of the bourgeoisie to save money for the future. He wondered how Sartre could have failed to see the push of the peasant and artisan toward the bourgeois-

sie, and the struggle of these people to raise the status of their children.

Mauriac had quoted a statement from Balzac, in which the latter described his epoch, that of Louis-Philippe.

To this, Sartre retorted that no one possessing a rudimentary understanding would compare two such dissimilar periods of time. Indeed, the only common factor was not the conditions, but the bad humor of Balzac and Mauriac, both of whom vituperate their epoch as old men often do.

With feigned shock, Sartre picked up a phrase from the quotation condoning the use of force against popular violence. He also picked up the expression, "beautiful souls" which Mauriac had evidently applied to Sartre and his followers. Sartre remarked sarcastically that it was a happy surprise for a person who did not believe in the soul to learn that he had one, and beautiful at that.

Sartre then mentioned a previous controversy, relative to Indochina, which he and Mauriac had debated. He accused Mauriac of realizing his error but refusing to admit it.

Sartre concluded by thanking Mauriac for offering his vote, should the former be a candidate for the

⁸Le Figaro Littéraire, May 7, 1949, 1.

Academy, but declining the honor, charging "certain academicians" with "bitterness, arrogance, and a profound sense of being superior to everybody else." Undoubtedly, the charge included Mauriac.⁹

The battle of ideas soon degenerated into one of personal animosity. This is typical of encounters between Sartre and Mauriac. Little jibes at each other find their way into articles where they seem unnecessary. Certainly there is no evidence of Christian charity here, but there is at least an honest admission of dislike.

One may say in summarizing these evaluations, that Cocteau has finally won a measure of intellectual respect from Mauriac, that Malraux appears to him as a fascinating opportunist, and that the relationship with Sartre seems to be one of mutual disapprobation.

⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER VIII

ATTITUDE TOWARD YOUNG THINKERS AND WRITERS

The Enquête

Greatly perturbed over the type of literature being produced, Mauriac expressed himself thus:

Nous avons littérairement atteint les limites de l'abject (je songe à certains livres reçus ces jours-ci). C'est l'ipéca qu'on nous ingurgitait quand nous étions enfants, pour nous faire vomir. Voilà le moment, peut-être, de la dernière nausée: celle qui délivre.¹

He said that he was not making war on the "grands oeuvres audacieuses," nor on "la poésie qui transfigure et qui purifie." "Il faut que l'homme soit connu et que nous jetions des torches dans ses abîmes," he agrees. He insists, however, that the abject is never beautiful, and he thinks that many modern writers are confusing psychiatry with literature. Simone Beauvoir is one of his prime targets because of her exploitation of eroticism. Apart from moral considerations, Mauriac thinks that eroticism is a dead-end street and constitutes a real danger to literature of which young writers should take cognizance.

With this in mind, he formulated a question which was put to the young intellectuals of France (the "under thirty" group) through Le Figaro Littéraire:

Croyez-vous que le recours systématique, dans les Lettres, aux forces instinctives et à la

¹Le Figaro Littéraire, June 25, 1949, 1.

démence, et l'exploitation de l'érotisme qu'il a favorisée constituent un danger pour l'individu, pour la nation, pour la littérature elle-même, et que certains hommes, certaines doctrines en portent la responsabilité? ²

The "enquête" continued for several weeks and replies poured in from all types of persons: Communists, surrealists, Christians, students, pagans, and young professionals. Some fifty of these replies were published. Some were extremely blunt and rude; others condescending; still others thoughtful and refined.

The novelist Françoise d'Eaubonne wanted to know "why the devil eroticism was the 'loup-garou' of Catholic intelligence, why intelligent people did not realize that the theological terror of the flesh has been passé 'depuis Méthusalem,' and why Mauriac worries about such things in the face of Dachau and Auscherwitz." She insisted that Mauriac and his ilk had been fighting a losing battle ever since St. Paul made of the great fraternal message of Christianity a struggle against the flesh, and reminded them that, before the Church began measuring bathing suits, it used to build cathedrals."

The Surrealist Jean Schuster, in speaking of his group, said that there was only an accidental connection between them and France, that they constituted a permanent danger to French institutions, that any connection with Christianity was inconceivable to them, and that they were constantly searching for new, untried ways

²Ibid.

of making love and of making its expression "plastique et poetique."

The pagan point of view was expressed by Bernard Prosen, among others. He protested Mauriac's assertion that eroticism was a dead-end street, saying that it was, instead, a path to the Creator, that to hear the Church Fathers, God would not be interested in anything but the head and the Devil would take charge of the "bas-ventre!" According to Prosen, virtue and vice are neutral.

Speaking for the young professionals of his acquaintance as well as for himself, G. Torris, physician, says that the young intellectual tends to abandon pure literature for the sciences of man. He and his friends try to keep up-to-date in their fields of specialization and then in such human sciences as anthropology, sociology and history of religions. When they feel the need of relaxing, they read detective stories or go to the movies. They leave literature to the young ladies, to the bourgeois of the province, to the employees who have their minds free once their eight hours of toil are accomplished. They probably do not dislike works of the imagination but they do not have time for them.

Only the Christians disappointed Mauriac. Then, at the last moment, he received the letter for which he had hoped. It came from a student of Arras, Cecile Gariel, and could have been written only by a young person,

idealistic, spiritual-minded and impulsive. She said that her generation would have little time for erotic literature or fiction of any kind, for they would be too busy manifesting the divine love from which all human love stemmed.

Mauriac said that he was not sorry to have launched the inquiry, and he seemed not to be shocked by the answers which many letters contained. He said:

Les dés, pour ces jeunes frères, ne sont pas jetés; ils cherchent encore, comme Rimbaud, "le lieu et la formule;" ils ne s'installent pas dans leur parti pris. Nous le sentons d'autant moins assurés qu'ils sont plus affirmatifs . . . Les épigones du Surrealisme répètent sans conviction un déjà très vieux catéchisme.³

To his "lecteurs scandalisés," Mauriac has two comments to make. First, the present generation is contemporary with the research which, from Freud to the Kinsey report, has ripped away the veils and inclined minds to consider sexuality as a subject for study, a problem. Erotic works have lost the prestige of forbidden subjects.

The second comment, in his own words, is:

Cette génération a surgi dans un monde non seulement dévasté mais avili. Elle n'a pas été bercée par de vieilles chansons. Ce n'est pas Peau d'Ane qui lui fut conté, mais les sinistres récits des camps d'épouvante. La Pudeur, elle aussi, a été déportée; elle aussi revient d'Auchwitz. La littérature érotique porte témoignage contre nous,

³Le Figaro Littéraire, Aug. 6, 1949, 1.

les anciens, dans la mesure où nous sommes responsables des crimes parmi lesquels nos fils ont grandi.⁴

Mauriac himself was surprised to find how little importance the young intellectuals placed upon works of imagination.

The writer believes that Mauriac has done well to raise the question and allow the young intellectuals to express themselves freely. The result was probably a legitimate sampling of current youthful opinion. Mauriac seems to have given a fairly accurate diagnosis. One might, however, question whether he was too easily reassured by Cecile Gariel's letter. Still, one must take into account the fact that young people like to startle their elders, and those with more orthodox ideas may hesitate to express them publicly.

A Quartet of Young Writers

The same sympathetic attitude toward young thinkers is apparent in Mauriac's discussion of four writers: Philippe Sellers, Eric Ollivier, Bertrand Poirot-Delpech, and Michel del Castillo.⁵ Though he is aware of their faults, he appreciates what they are trying to do.

Mauriac noted that Philippe Sellers came from a suburb of Bordeaux! According to Mauriac, Sellers,

⁴Le Figaro Littéraire, Aug. 6, 1949, 1.

⁵Le Figaro Littéraire, Oct. 25, 1958, 1.

Ollivier and Poirot-Delpech have the basic ingredients for success and need only to mature. Mauriac pronounced Ollivier's L'Officier de soleil "une belle histoire " but said he would like to see a more realistic work from him. He predicted that Poirot-Delpech would be a moralist in the tradition of Rabelais and Montaigne, but concluded with the remark: "Elève Poirot-Delpech, cessez donc un instant de ricaner."

Michel del Castillo, author of Tanguy and Colleur d'affiches, is Mauriac's favorite of the group. He marvelled that the younger man had come out of his tragic war and post-war experiences with "coeur intacte." His style is not flawless. Mauriac spoke of

une certain maladresse, surtout dans la présentations des personnages, et un style aux possibilités encore restreintes . . .

Probably this is because French is not del Castillo's native tongue. Nevertheless, Mauriac praised the second book

à cause de la réponse qu'y donne un enfant à la question posée par la férocité de la créature humaine, appelée à la sainteté et capable de Dieu.

All these writers have one trait in common -- a disregard for the rules set down by what Mauriac called "les techniciens du dernier bateau."

Chacun a pris sa route qu'il est seul à connaître, écoute une voix qu'il est seul à entendre, et nous confie un secret que nul autre ne pourrait nous livrer à son place.⁶

⁶Le Figaro Littéraire, Oct. 25, 1958, 1.

PART III
POLITICS AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

CHAPTER IX

FRANCE IN THE IMMEDIATE POST-WAR PERIOD

When the shouts of victory died away, problems of reconstruction were apparent in all areas of national life. All institutions were ripe for reorganization. Mauriac described the situation thus:

Cette crise de la magistrature française n'est qu'un symptôme parmi beaucoup d'autres; crise du corps électoral, crise des cadres dans tous les ordres, de la diplomatie, de l'armée, de l'apprentissage, crise de la Comédie-Française, crise de l'Académie . . .

The circumstances through which the French people had lived had shaken the foundations of national life.¹

The dependence of France upon her allies was not a happy situation. Symptoms of injured pride appeared in an article written in August of 1948:

Les Empires n'ont pas de coeur. En eussent-ils, ils n'auraient pas toujours le moyen d'être charitables. Nous ne sommes pas voués à une ruine éternelle; ils ne sont pas voués non plus à une prospérité sans fin. Nous portons les uns et les autres au dedans de nous des possibilités de relèvement et de désastre.²

One of the problems of post-war France was, of course, that of status. Mauriac was and is concerned about this. England then seemed to be the chief challenger. A British newspaper had conducted an inquiry in the fall of 1948, relative to the future of

¹Le Figaro Littéraire, Oct. 11, 1945, 1.

²Le Figaro Littéraire, Aug. 27, 1948, 1.

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France. Some replies indicated a belief that France could never again be a great nation, and even questioned whether she could be a second-rate power. The basis for the pessimism was the French political customs.³

After talking with various members of Parliament and being satisfied of their sincerity, Mauriac conceded that they needed to face the consequences of French internal politics, but argued that the idea of such an inquiry was absurd. With all Europe in such a predicament, what country could assign rank to its neighbor?

A l'ombre des deux mastodontes, chaque patrie dans ce qui subsiste d'Europe, tient une place irremplaçable qui n'est la première ni la seconde, qui est sa place: le jour où elle la perdrait, tout l'édifice déjà si branlant, s'écroulerait sans remède. L'Allemagne elle-même, mutilée, avec ses villes détruites, avec sa population décimée et affanée, occupe un poste essentiel dans l'économie européen, au vrai, exactement le même que lorsqu'elle se croyait assez puissante pour tenir tête au reste du monde.⁴

Continuing in the same vein, Mauriac asserted that the elements of genius in the Germans, as in the English and Italians, are at work, whatever the internal political fluctuations being used to "reconstituer ce tissu si précieux" in this narrow strip of the planet where man has yet given proofs of his dignity. The only question is whether or not this work will be interrupted forever by a supreme settling of accounts between the

³Le Figaro Littéraire, Sept. 30, 1948, 1.

⁴Ibid.

Anglo-Saxons and the Soviets.

For the immediate future, he was waiting to find out whether Britain would help in the creation of an army and a Parliament of Europe, and resist this penchant for blaming a weak France.⁵

A similar derogatory comment which came from a writer of the British Observer irritated Mauriac: "One builds on sand in building on France." His retort was the charge that "la poutre maîtresse qu'ont choisi les promoteurs du traité de Bruxelles et du pacte atlantique est rongée de termites." He added that, no matter how any nation felt about it, France was the "pierre angulaire" for the reconstruction of Europe. It was precisely for this reason that the Soviets were forced to destroy her economy and render the Marshall Plan ineffective.⁶

Although France may be pardoned for the status quo, the problems must be faced. The past of a great people is living. All that France has accomplished in a thousand years weighs heavily upon this generation and does not leave it free to refuse its role. This responsibility is unaltered by the circumstances which made France fall from her position. France will not decline if you will it otherwise. "Le secret de votre

⁵Le Figaro Littéraire, Sept. 30, 1948, 1.

⁶Le Figaro Littéraire, Nov. 10, 1948, 1.

destin est au dedans de vous."⁷

A ministerial crisis is always a little embarrassing, but, given the same problems, Mauriac wondered if any nation would do better. Perhaps what is needed at this time is one man.

One man can, at a moment in history, put the material and spiritual resources of a nation to work. A Clemenceau, a de Gaulle, a Roosevelt, a Churchill, a Stalin, can incarnate the will of their people who do not want to die. Mauriac added: "Aucun secours du dehors ne suffit: une nation se sauve toujours elle-même."⁸

France is not alone. Rather, she is "a suffering member of the great wounded body of Europe." How could it be otherwise, after five years of war? French boys are still falling in Indochina; for some families the nightmare continues; things are going badly on the home front. Still, Mauriac insisted that one must put the accent on the thought that they were moving!⁹

One cannot separate domestic and foreign politics nowadays. They are hopelessly intermingled. And, just as the Spanish Civil War prefigured the moment of upsetting the world, so when the two extreme parties come together, the curtain will rise on the prologue of atomic

⁷Le Figaro, Sept. 21-22, 1947, 1.

⁸Le Figaro, Sept. 5-6, 1948, 1.

⁹Le Figaro, Jan. 1, 1947, 1.

war. Such was Mauriac's premise in the article entitled, "Le Redoutable Prologue," written in the fall of 1948. To refuse to be blindfolded to the facts did not mean to consent to this war, but destiny was on the march.¹⁰

That to which Mauriac referred as the "Troisième Force" was attempting to keep the balance. If this "frêle gouvernement" did not succeed in gaining ascendancy over Communism, what would happen to France? As Mauriac phrased it:

Berlin apparaît comme un point névralgique bien anodin si nous le comparons à ce que deviendrait Paris, si nous songeons à tout ce qui cristalliserait autour du peuple français divisé contre lui-même.¹¹

The only hopeful sign observed by Mauriac was that, whereas Russian politics is accustomed to work upon inert humanity, the French working class reacts and resists, despite the fact that its frustrations and sufferings are shamelessly exploited. Obviously, the working class would have what Mauriac calls "le premier rôle dans ce prologue sinistre où le sang du peuple des deux côtés de la barricade serait le premier et le dernier verse."¹²

What other result could there be to such a Civil War, than the Apocalypse of a war on the continents? The party in France which weakened first would be

¹⁰Le Figaro Littéraire, Oct. 18, 1948, 1.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

immediately succored by one of the two antagonistic Empires. This intervention would involve the adversary. If this seems too pessimistic a view, Mauriac added: "Mais il faut commencer par tout craindre si nous voulons tout prévenir."¹³

The immediate danger envisioned by Mauriac did not materialize, for the "frêle gouvernement" did become sufficiently cohesive. There is probably latent danger, of recurrence, however, and the chain of events foreseen by Mauriac could conceivably occur.

¹³Ibid.

CHAPTER X

MAURIAC, POLITICAL COMMENTATOR

General Observations

Mauriac is outspoken in his comments on politics and politicians, as the following excerpts will attest.

In the spring of 1954, he gave a sarcastic description of a ministerial crisis:

C'est le jeu qui se joue ouvertement sans vergogne. Un très petit nombre d'hommes sont dans le coup, se passent le ballon, et même s'ils se haïssent, restent complices. Qu'il y ait ou non de crise ministérielle, le pouvoir appartient à l'équipe. La crise toujours se dénoue au-dedans de l'équipe. Dictature invulnérable, inentamable jusqu'aux élections. Et alors la loi électorale jouera, et la remettra en selle . . . (59-60)

In speaking of Parliament on one occasion, he said:

Le grand coeur du Parlement me fait songer au Girondin Barbaroux dont Robespierre disait: "J'aime assez Barbaroux; il ment avec une noble fierté. (37)

A typical Maurician compliment to certain parliamentarians appeared in the summer of 1955:

Observer les fourmis du Parlement, c'est découvrir l'obscur nécessité de leurs allées et venues. Quelques-uns sont au service de maîtres que l'on ne voit pas, qui ne sont pas si nombreux dont les noms tiendraient sur une feuille de bloc-notes. (190)

Another caustic comment appeared in November of 1955:

France a eu souvent le spectacle de ces Restaurations: les fusils changent d'épaule, les vestes se retournent. C'est réglé comme un ballet que l'Histoire remet de temps en temps à l'affiche. La dernière reprise date de la Libération. La peur ne joue plus; un peuple furieux n'occupe

pas la scène, du moins en France, et seuls les intérêts s'agitent. (203-204)

Regarding a new Constitution, Mauriac said in May of 1956: "Le malheur de la France ne tient pas au texte d'une Constitution, mais aux hommes." (234)

He said also that he did not believe that her misfortune came from ministerial instability. Rather, the problem is vested interests.

Les ministres changent mais ils sont aux ordres de maîtres qui ne changent pas. Depuis des années, les mêmes hommes font la même politique, au service des mêmes intérêts. (234)

In August of 1955, Mauriac aimed his darts at two classes of simpletons -- "le Français de droite qui a risqué toute sa mise sur les U. S. A. ennemis irréconciliables de l'U. R. S. S." and "le Français d'extrême-gauche qui s'est strictement boutonné dans la veste de Staline." (189)

In February of 1956, Mauriac was quite pessimistic about members of French political parties.

Les partis politiques de France offrent cette singularité d'être composés de gens qui ne s'entendent sur rien ni sur personne. (214)

Later in the same year, he remarked:

Il faut beaucoup travailler et passer beaucoup d'examens pour être médecin ou instituteur, mais la politique est une carrière ouverte au premier venu. (286)

Most of the politicians of the past ten years have one trait in common, according to Mauriac:

C'est que les données réelles du problème français leur échappent et que les solutions s'imposent sous la pression des faits qu'ils n'ont pas prévus, en dehors d'eux, malgré eux et contre eux. (285)

To those who criticize him, as a man of Letters, for dabbling in politics, Mauriac said:

L'homme de lettres qui s'intéresse aux politiciens et aux parlementaires comme Maeterlinck aux termites et aux abeilles, les dérange par le seul fait qu'il les regarde. (190)

Having been accused of "politique de sentiment," Mauriac observed that:

Un grand esprit politique, s'il n'a pas de coeur, doit agir parfois comme s'il en avait. Et s'il est dépourvu de principes, il doit, par habileté, se mettre à la place de ceux qui en ont et agir comme eux. (188)

In the same article Mauriac remarked:

Il semble que pour certains chrétiens, la politique soit la permission de faire ce qu'ils s'interdisent dans le privé. Les scrupuleux au confessionnal deviennent cynique à la table du Conseil, et c'est ce qui a fait d'eux les politiciens les plus néfastes de ces dix dernières années.

In his own case, Mauriac said that the Christian in him was indissolubly linked to the citizen. (208)

It is such comments from Mauriac, no doubt, that called forth from editor Pierre Brisson of Le Figaro Littéraire the following criticism on July 9, 1960:

Ses campagnes militantes depuis quelques années ont fait de lui un mémorialiste ou plus exactement un satirique du premier rang et dont les convictions de principe ont un chaleur telle qu'elles évaporent l'esprit de charité. Notez qu'il n'a jamais eu vraiment l'esprit de charité.

Des élans de coeur, de compassion et d'adhésion, oui, des élans de secours -- et avec quelle éloquence et quelle promptitude! -- mais c'est autre chose. On sursaute parfois, il arrive même qu'on s'indigne en voyant vibrer certaines flèches dans le cible, mais jamais dans ce qu'il pense ni dans ce qu'il écrit la moindre perte d'altitude. ¹

L'Affaire Mitterand

Time Magazine gives a compact resumé of the episode as follows:

Since the days of the Dreyfus Case, one of the perennial features of French government has been l'affaire -- that unique combination of intrigue, scandal and politics that seems to come along at times of great political unrest and to suggest the existence of deep, deadly and corrupt forces at work in the body politic. Last week faithful to the national tradition, President Charles de Gaulle's fledgling Fifth Republic uneasily probed its third and most fascinating political scandal -- l'affaire Mitterand.

It broke at a moment when France's rightists bitterly challenged de Gaulle's offer to negotiate a cease-fire with the Algerian rebels, and when one member of the French Assembly dramatically announced that assassins had crossed the Pyrenees, eager to put a few holes in Frenchmen who were considered to be soft on Algeria. So many French politicians had received assassination threats that there was joking about a "Condemned-to-Death Club." One of its charter members would undoubtedly be left-wing Senator François Mitterand, 43, a fervid anti-Gaullist and outspoken proponent of a negotiated peace with Algeria. ²

The affaire involved the attempted assassination, real or feigned, of François Mitterand, a long-time ally of Mendès-France and ten times a Cabinet Minister under the Fourth Republic, a man considered by some to be opportunistic, but generally regarded as basically honest.

¹Le Figaro Littéraire, July 9, 1960, 1.

²Time, Nov. 9, 1959, 25.

In the welter of charges, countercharges, investigations, and altered stories, a number of persons were implicated, chiefly right-wing politicians.

Then the matter was suddenly hushed up. To quote Time again:

Cynical Parisians observe that at a certain crucial moment in every affaire, after all the headlines, things mysteriously close over again. An unimportant figure or two may be convicted of something; the rest is silence, and large dossiers gather dust in police files.³

Mauriac made a number of observations about this incident, the first of which might lay him open to the charge of "politique de sentiment." Mitterand's first claim to innocence is that he came from the environs of Bordeaux.⁴

Mauriac expressed little doubt that Mitterand, along with Mendès-France, had been a designated victim. But it is nothing to kill the body, and the killers know that. The death of a public man at the hands of his enemies makes him a martyr. The dishonoring of a public man is the only assassination that may be profitable to his enemies. In this ignoble battle, to kill is nothing; to get out is everything.⁵

Mauriac also said that he was struck, on reading

³Time, Nov. 9, 1959, 25.

⁴L'Express, Nov. 5, 1959, 44.

⁵L'Express, Oct. 29, 1959, 48.

the provincial press, by how easy it was to succeed. François Mitterand, against whom nothing was proved, could bring all sorts of proofs of a plot, and the good people would just smile and shake their heads. If Mitterand were not a courageous man, he would be just as dead now as if he had fallen under cannon-fire.⁶

Mauriac expressed no doubt that Mitterand would ultimately give proof of his good faith, but said that some disgrace would remain despite the proof, even if it left no room for doubt.⁷

Whatever may have been the conditions of this attempt, the assassins are known and they go unpunished. Even when the police have been able to seize those involved in this and similar affairs, chains fall off, doors are opened, and a heavy complicity surrounds and protects them. Mitterand and his children are still under the shadow of a bloody hand.⁸

In November of 1959, Mauriac observed that things happen fast nowadays. The Dreyfus Case dragged on for six years, while a few months wound up the Mitterand one -- and no one knows what really happened.⁹

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹L'Express, Nov. 12, 1959, 44.

Mauriac added that, in the present political turmoil, one can scarcely refrain from asking who is fighting whom, but, up to now, crimes committed by the extreme right go unpunished.¹⁰

¹⁰Ibid.

CHAPTER XI

MAURIAC SURVEYS POLITICAL PARTIES

Writing in November, 1946, just before an election, Mauriac surveyed the situation. He said that we needed to know what our political candidates thought of man, of his dignity, of his rights, of his destiny. Our task, in the confused mêlée of political parties, is to learn to discern "les hommes fidèles aux idées mères de la civilisation."¹

The Twilight of Socialism

This expression was used by Mauriac in 1946. He also described the situation as "the ship wreck of an idea." That which remains of the Christian Gospel, unsupported by Christian faith, could not withstand the logic of those who treat human beings as if they were of no more value than any other animal.

What good, he wondered, was accomplished by the hanging of Nazis in Nuremburg, if small nations remain subservient, if the "transhumance des troupeaux humains" is not interrupted, and if conscript labor camouflaged by high-sounding vocabulary handles problems of pro-²duction and distribution by methods known to old Cheops?

The mental and spiritual revolution which made

¹Le Figaro, Nov. 6, 1946, 1.

²Le Figaro, Aug. 20, 1946, 1.

the socialists accept the Revolution of 1917 and the materialistic conception of the world which it implies, was not accomplished without a struggle, because of the aforementioned Christian heritage.³

Mauriac reminded his readers that the duel between the spiritual and the materialistic conceptions of the world was becoming more heinous because the two opposing forces are utilized by the will-to-power of antagonistic empires.⁴

Mauriac again spoke in this vein in December of the same year, under the caption, "Vocation trahie." He said that he did not deny that in all good faith the Marxists adhere to what they believe to be true, in conforming with dialectical history. But socialists and Christians have no reason for being in the world today except to say, "NØ" to this complicity of Marxist man and history.⁵

In the same article, he said that, when we speak of defending the person, we must remember that nations are made up of persons, that nations know torture, that they can be assassinated. The French Socialists are the defaulting advocates of a double cause: that of the human

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

being and that of small nations. Their decline, he asserted, was their punishment for being silent at the moment of history when they alone could raise their voices effectively, because they were not suspect among the proletariat as were those of bourgeois origin or religious affiliation.

Mauriac then anticipated that this mission would be fulfilled by the new Mouvement Republicain Populaire appearing on the horizon.⁶

Mouvement Republicain Populaire

Back in 1945, Mauriac had high hopes of the achievements of this new Party. Writing exultingly in Le Figaro, he said:

Pour la première fois, un mouvement politique, ouvert à tous, mais pénétré par la morale chrétienne, pousse de profondes racines dans la classe ouvrière, grâce aux Syndicats Chrétiens, à la J. O. C. (Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne). Dieu veuille que l'immense réserve que représentent les différents groupements de la jeunesse catholique et protestante comprenne enfin que chaque Français, aujourd'hui, est engagé, qu'il existe en particulier une politique extérieure qui signifie reconstruction d'une chrétienté en Occident et que ⁷ ressusciter l'Europe c'est faire l'oeuvre du Christ.

But the Party did not live up to its promise.

Mauriac wrote in December of 1953:

Il saute aux yeux que le clergé et que la jeunesse catholique, orientés chaque jour un peu

⁶Ibid.

⁷Le Figaro, Oct. 3, 1945, 1.

plus vers l'action sociale, auraient dû détacher de la droite les masses croyantes, et c'est bien ce qui, d'abord, a paru se passer. A la Libération, le triomphe de la démocratie chrétienne, le naufrage définitif du nationalisme "intégral", tout parut annoncer la formation d'un grand parti travailliste français à la fois socialiste et chrétien. . .

A quelle faillite spirituelle a abouti le Mouvement republicain populaire! Ce n'est pas parce qu'il est d'inspiration catholique, mais, au contraire, en dépit de cette inspiration, qu'il est devenu, en France, et dans les pays de l'union française, le complice le plus efficace de Mammon. (54-55)

The depths of Mauriac's discouragement with the M. R. P. was indicated in June of 1954 in the remark:

Le M. R. P. c'est le tramway nommé pouvoir. Que vous avez pour d'y perdre votre place! Si l'un de vous, pris d'une crise de conscience et se tenant le ventre, est descendu en cours de route, une fois soulagé comme il court après le tramway! (101)

The first time, according to Mauriac's statement, that he did not vote for the M. R. P. was in 1955. (205-206)

Criticism of the Right

Mauriac was accused by the editor of La Croix of of pretending that Truth and Justice are by definition on the left and ignored by the right. He retaliated by accusing his critic of believing that the ultimate end of Catholic journalism was to avoid getting burned and to avoid burning questions.

Mauriac also stated that the men whom the editor was supporting with all his hidden power, had played dominant roles in the dramas of Madagascar, Indochina

Tunisia and Morocco. He concluded:

L'injustice, mais aussi le crime ont été à droite, dans l'exacte mesure où la droite française est responsable de ce qui s'est accompli depuis dix ans, et à gauche dans la mesure où des elements de gauche y ont prêté la main. (206)

This was not the first time that Mauriac had criticized the right. In April, 1953, he had remarked that "L'ordure, anonyme ou non, est toujours d'extrême-droite." He was speaking then of some mail received which pertained to his articles on North Africa. (21-22)

In 1959, Mauriac mentioned the countless times that a smile or a shrug of the shoulders had been the only response when he warned the moderates among his friends that: "Les assassins ne viendront pas du côté qui vous fait peur." Their political comportement is regulated by a fear of Communism.

Mauriac asserted, however, that fear was a simple passion. The moderates were sure that no harm could come from the right, because nothing from that quarter threatens their interests. According to them, the real virtue of Fascism and even of Nazism was the neutralization of the masses.⁸

Mauriac then made a comparison between the fanatical killings during the period of religious wars with the political ones of the present. To kill people because they do not share one's ideas of God is certainly

⁸ L'Express, October 22, 1959, 48.

not commendable. But what about the attempt to assassinate Mitterand because of his views on Algeria? "This fierce hate," said Mauriac, "our fanatics have inherited from certain moderates who are not moderately hateful."⁹

Warnings against Communism

Mauriac is well aware of the dangers of Communist infiltration in France and elsewhere.

In November, 1946, he said that Marx and Lenin had, all their lives, expected and desired catastrophe. They would have been paltry revolutionaries if they had not been delighted by any situation or event favoring the downfall of capitalist society. The editor of Humanité was angry at this. But Mauriac asked why the editor should be angry that he attributed to his prophets the ideas that they openly proclaimed. Insofar as the Communist Party remains a revolutionary one, it cannot fail to be the Party of sabotage.¹⁰

Shortly before this, Mauriac had mentioned "L'an-neau de feu" maintained by the Soviet Union. Secretary Byrnes from Washington had spoken of peace with Russia. It sounds well. But the regime in Russia, in order to maintain itself, must draw back from the European community, thus blocking the first condition of

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Le Figaro, Nov. 17-18, 1946, 1.

peace, i. e., free exchange of ideas. Russia may have won the war, thanks to the heroism of her children, but the regime faces greater danger than ever -- dangers springing from the war -- contact of the Russian people with the West, and infiltration of European liberal thought into Russia. The people must be safeguarded by this ring of fire so that they will not be "contaminated" by ideas of comfort or liberty, and hence, unwilling to continue undergoing the stern discipline of their leaders. Only an internal crisis will break this "anneau de feu." Russia may prefer a "conflagration universelle" to such a crisis; or this old world may not be able to resist "au levain marxiste qui, déjà, dans chaque nation, travaille et fait lever la pâte humaine."¹¹

The writer has an uncomfortable feeling that Mauriac may have made an all too accurate diagnosis of the dilemma.

The Communist Party, as Mauriac sees it, is not and never will be a reservoir for "présidents du Conseil." One cannot incarnate, at the same time, the Marxist revolution and the democratic State. To serve one is to betray the other. Communism is much more than a Party; it is a spirit, a way of life, a religion, an order that draws back from the world and yet remains in

¹¹Le Figaro, Oct. 23, 1946, 1.

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the world to attack it from the inside.

About a year later, Mauriac again wrote about Communism. Luckily for France, the Communists received the order to unmask and show themselves as they were. Mauriac said that he had always had a horror of masks. That is why, no doubt, the comrade who got out of the plane with detectives from Moscow and Belgrade seemed less formidable than when Mauriac had seen him as the minister of the bourgeois Republic, animating the official dinners with his verve and chatting with what Mauriac called "une Altesse royale fremissante et flattée." When he showed his "figure de crime," worked openly and coldly executed his work of death, Mauriac felt reassured.

He became even more blunt in this article, saying:

Un virus reste un virus, même lorsque son action ne se manifeste pas au dehors et que le malade garde les apparences de la santé. Tout le temps que les communistes ont occupé le pouvoir et ses avenues dans une France qui s'habituaient à eux et où ils ne faisaient plus peur à personne, ils l'ont employé au noyantage des ministères et de l'administration, à cette remarquable mise en place, qui leur permet aujourd'hui d'atteindre les centres nerveux de la nation. La paralysie générale c'est tout de même du beau travail communiste, et le petit Père Staline est bien ingrat s'il est vrai qu'il a fait venir Thorez au Kremlin pour lui laver la tête et pour tirer les oreilles.¹³

¹²Le Figaro, Dec. 7, 1946, 1.

¹³Le Figaro, Dec. 1, 1947, 1.

The dogma of Soviet infallibility is part of the Communist baggage. French Communists, like their tutors, refuse to admit in any case that the USSR could possibly be wrong, and that is the factor that isolates them from the French community. Nothing in the recent history of "notre alliée soviétique" merits the slightest reproach. In the entire collection of L'Humanité, one will not find a word of disapproval, whether in regard to the pact with Hitler or the ravaging of Poland, according to Mauriac.

Since dialectical history makes any crime legitimate, so long as it is perpetrated by the USSR, the French Communists adhere in advance, with eyes closed, to the future politics of the Soviet, and France will pay the price. But it is useless to remind those who do not want to see trouble until it comes. They will have to set themselves against France on the day when Soviet tanks roll along the Champs-Élysées. A French Communist Party unconnected with the USSR does not exist.

The vocation of the French Communists would be to force the "grand Inquisiteur du Kremlin" to reform. Failing that, they would have two alternatives; to be only an outcast Party, suspect if not outlawed, or to dominate the nation with the aid of Soviet tanks.¹⁴

¹⁴Le Figaro, Dec. 16, 1947, 1.

About the only reassuring comment from Mauriac on the subject of Communism, appeared December 10. He reported that the French Communist Party had succumbed under the blows of the Kremlin. The USSR had coldly sacrificed it by ignoring individuals, the national parties, their interests, their particular character. while thinking only of minerals for their factories. The proletariat resisted foreign oppression and made use of critical faculties which Mauriac thought they no longer possessed where the Soviet was concerned.¹⁵

In July of 1956 Mauriac wrote an interesting analysis of the problem posed by the Kremlin. It is not a man (Stalin) but a principle at stake. All the blood that was spilled at Stalin's command was not spilled because he was a fool. It undoubtedly appeared necessary to him. He thought he was acting for the general good, according to his idea of man. Whatever the nature of Stalin may have been, the part which he played in History has given him this "coloration sinistre" as Mauriac termed it. Dialectical materialism is a machine to crush the individual for the greater good of this entity: the human race. The idea which one has of man, his origin and his destiny, governs the use which we make of him.

¹⁵Le Figaro, Dec. 10, 1947, 1.

"Cain, what have you done to your brother?" The question is addressed not only to the assassin who is so because of hate, greed or envy, but to the one who assassinates because the individual Abel is without value in his eyes and because the system demands that he be sacrificed to the general good. (243)

Stalin was not an incomprehensible monster, according to Mauriac. He was only a politician like the others, but of a "grande espèce, " draining off against an adversary the consequences of his "calomnie" because he had the audacity and the power. (245-246)

Mauriac admits that there is a kind of stability in Eastern Europe -- a stability created by spilled blood, forced labor, and controlled and subservient thought and aspiration. But this is not what free men want.

To be sure, liberty brings risks. The peril of death is its corollary. As Mauriac phrased it: "Les peuples libres cotoient la mort comme des somnambules
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le bord d'un toit."

The peoples of Europe must never lose sight of the fact that, soon or late, they will find themselves as much alone in the face of the USSR as Little Red Riding Hood facing the wolf. But a little time is given

¹⁶Le Figaro, Dec. 23, 1947, 1.

to prepare for this encounter -- perhaps time to see it coming.¹⁷

Summary

It seems to the writer that Mauriac has described quite accurately the two dangerous extremes of French politics: the extreme right wing, and the Communist Party. Apparently, he sees the futility of protecting completely the status quo, but he is equally aware of the dangers of Communism. According to him, the great weakness of the extreme right is its guarding of class interests above all else. The great weakness of the extreme left is its going against the nature of man born Christian, but who stews in the broth of materialism in which his leaders confine him.¹⁸

The current atrocities in Algeria committed by the right wing as embodied in the O. A. S. (Secret Army Organization), as well as the Mitterand affair, and recent attempts on de Gaulle's life, all attest the accuracy of Mauriac's observations.

As for the Communist Party, Mauriac's grasp of Soviet psychology and tactics might well be implanted in some American minds, as well as in French ones. The

¹⁷Le Figaro, Dec. 23, 1947, 1.

¹⁸Le Figaro, Nov. 6, 1946, 1.

innocuous infiltration into key positions, the inexorable sacrifice of the individual and of the nation itself to the Party, the physical violence, and the diabolical brain-washing -- all these are fully comprehended by Mauriac. The pattern is plain and openly blue-printed for anyone to see provided that he is willing to look. Mauriac insists that France -- and the world -- take a long, penetrating look.

CHAPTER XII

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, BAROMETER OF FRENCH POLITICS

Background Problems

One ever-present problem in recent years has been the cold war. Mauriac posed the question: "Why have men chosen to carry on a cold war, which they are pursuing everywhere with varying fortunes?" He answered his own question. It is the only kind possible if they do not want to blow up the planet, or if they want their children to play hop-scotch on the sidewalks of Paris in the summer twilight.¹

He said grimly that it would probably take a little blood to conjure fate -- the corpse of Petkov (chief of the Bulgarian opposition) at the end of a rope, Maniu condemned to death at Bucharest, some Greek peasants lying under the sky, Buchenwald where men become beasts. Perhaps this is the tribute which cold war exacts -- the shedding of blood and the quota of crimes to assuage the Devil's thirst -- as an alternative to total destruction.²

It would be useless to ask the ambassadors, who were soon to meet in London, to try to understand each other, since their masters hate each other, and the hate of one State for another is an abstract passion with

¹Le Figaro, Nov. 8, 1947, 1.

²Ibid.

which one cannot come to terms. On the other hand, Russians and Americans must work out their hatred by non-violent means, or, at least, limit the sacrifices of human beings to the minimum

de crimes judiciaires et d'assassinats légaux nécessaires à l'honneureux épanouissement du système soviétique parmi les peuples qui goûtent les délices de son voisinage.

The only recourse is to persuade the rival empires to retain the atom bomb and germ warfare as symbols only, and to postpone their use as long as possible, in the interests of self-preservation if not of regard for others.³

Unsatisfactory modern diplomacy is another problem. In May of 1945 Mauriac wrote that, as the Conference of the Five meeting in London, was about to dissolve in impotence and confusion, it was time for international public opinion to be manifested, and time that universal suffering should force the masters of the world to take into account in their calculations the currency of their exchequers: man.⁴

In 1947, Mauriac was lamenting the fact that diplomacy had become dehumanized.

Les nations civilisées ne prennent plus entre elles de contact humain. Au cours de ces ren-

³Ibid.

⁴Le Figaro, near May 8, 1945, 1. (Day not on micro-film.)

contres, elles ne s'incarnent plus dans des esprits capables de persuader mais aussi d'entendre raison. Il n'y a plus de conversations ni d'échanges: aucune chance n'est donnée au charme personnel. à cette sympathie humaine dont la paix, en a si souvent bénéficié. Aujourd'hui, une Conférence internationale, ce sont les boniments de baraques rivales sur un champ de foire: on ne convainc pas un haut-parleur, on s'efforce de crier plus fort que lui. ⁵

Mauriac mentioned a tendency in our time for those who have been oppressed to become oppressors in their turn. The situation described is in the Middle East, but Mauriac evidently believes that the problem is not confined to that area.

C'est une loi de ces temps qu'un groupe humain persécuté, à peine est-il délivré de ces oppresseurs, opprime à son tour. L'esprit totalitaire enfante les mêmes monstres chez les victimes d'hier que chez leurs bourreaux. Les Juifs du groupe Stern, par la terreur qu'ils ont répandue, ont arraché de leurs foyers près de six cent mille êtres humains, dont cent mille chrétiens, qui, en Syrie, en Transjordanie, en Judée et en Egypte, recommencent de monter le Calvaire à peine de gravir. ⁶

Foreign Affairs Involving France

As one might expect, Mauriac's discussion involves mainly French Indochina and North Africa, although other areas are mentioned from time to time.

The horror of the carnage in Indochina provoked in Mauriac the desire to escape "ce brouillamini d'erreurs et de violences," as Goethe had defined politics. (68)

⁵Le Figaro, Dec. 23, 1947, 1.

⁶Le Figaro, Nov. 16, 1948, 1.

The fall of Indochina provoked from Mauriac the comment that the Christian Democrats had betrayed their vocation, which was to make manifest the truth that politics does not escape the moral law. (80)

Mauriac has been greatly concerned about North Africa and French political action there. "Maroc" appears quite frequently in his articles, and his sympathy has seemed to be with the Arabs.

The Bloc-Notes of April 6, 1953 quote letters from both Arabs and French Colonials in Casablanca, expressing their views on the situation and their reactions to Mauriac's articles.

One Moroccan wrote:

I do not know how . . . to find the words necessary to thank you for the article that you did on Morocco and especially on Islam. For many French people do not know that we love them more than they think. I have given fourteen years of my life for the French cause and I come back from the Far East gravely wounded. I do not regret what I have done provided that the true French like you continue to love us. (19-20)

This is balanced by a letter from a Frenchman:

It must be that you really have no idea of the Moroccan problem. Fortunately 99 out of 100 people of Morocco being completely illiterate and of an intellectual level which does not surpass that of animals, are quite incapable of understanding what the fomenters of troubles are trying to explain to them, but on the other hand they have the instincts of wild beasts. (19-20)

Another Moroccan said: "We know thanks to you that the human and liberal traditions of the true France are

intact."

A Frenchman said:

The only therapeutic agent appropriate for you is a cold shower . . . I am informing you that I intend to spend my vacation in France this summer. The crowning point of my stay will be the kick I will administer to your posterior, preferably in broad daylight and in a public place! (19-20)

Another Moroccan wrote:

I am happy to hear at last a great French voice raised against the abuse and the despotism that France tolerates in this land. If sound justice were given, there would be no Moroccan problem. (19-20)

There are indications in this correspondence that Mauriac is often maligned, but one must admit that he seems to enjoy the combat. It is faintly reminiscent of St. Paul's boasting of the hardships which he has undergone for the sake of the Gospel. The thing which really disturbs Mauriac is that, as he wrote in April of 1953, all the filthy letters come from the extreme right. No Communist has sent him a letter of that type.

Mauriac was chairman of the Comité France-Maghreb, which was founded in 1953 to advise Mayer's Cabinet on action to take regarding a problem in their Protectorate of Morocco. Theoretically, this Committee's responsibility included all of North Africa, but actually, it dealt only with Morocco.⁷

⁷Collier and Son, Colliers Year Book, 1954, 215-216.

The problem was this. The French authorities had prepared a program of reforms intended to initiate the Moroccan people into the workings of democracy and self-government. The Sultan, Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef, refused to sign the reform decrees, and asked for great changes in the Protectorate Treaty. He was known to favor the Istqlal Party, which demanded complete independence.

Many Moroccans opposed the Istqlal Party, notably the Berber mountaineers, a simple, rugged, old-fashioned Moslem people, largely pro-French. Their leader was the Pasha of Marrakech, Sidi Thami el Glaoui. A large group of them addressed a petition to the French authorities asking that ben Youssef be deposed, because his modernist religious views made him unfit to be Immam (spiritual leader), and his favoring of the Istqlal ran counter to their politics.

The Mayer Cabinet in France did not know what to do. It was then that the Comité France-Maghreb was formed. They recommended support of ben Youssef on the grounds that, according to the Protectorate Treaty, France should defend the legitimate ruler against his discontented subjects.

The French did not act, but the Moroccans did, finally making Sidi Mohammed ben Moulay Arafa Sultan.⁸

⁸Ibid.

Mauriac continued to lament the progress of events in North Africa. He described the vicious circle of rebellion and repression as a monotonous, episodic "film policier," the worst feature of which was being ignored. A suspect who was arrested was often interrogated under cruel conditions. If and when he was released, he would not keep his resentment to himself, but pass it on to his friends, brothers or children. The current generation, growing up in a poisoned atmosphere, will mature quickly. Already they hate France. Mauriac said that it was like striking one's head against the wall to see Frenchmen taking such measures in Morocco. It must be from lack of imagination to see the consequences, for the crimes are those of "bêtise." (88-89)

In June of 1954, Mauriac spoke of snatching the band from the periodical Forces Nouvelles, to read the report of Etienne Borne, who had been called upon to account for his actions. Mauriac said that he knew in advance the contents: eight years of massacres which have assured the economic equilibrium of France, Dien-Bien-Phu, the atrocious repression of Madagascar, the terror in Morocco and Tunisia, all of which counted less than the Party political prestige. Borne mounted the tribune, Mauriac said, with a sponge -- too small a sponge for so much blood! (88-89)

Bloc-Notes of November 2, 1954 carried the grim

news of the beginning of war in Algeria. Mauriac did not place the blame upon those who actually started it, for they probably did what was expected of them. (133)

August 20, 1955 found Mauriac still of the opinion that ben Youssef was the proper leader for Morocco. (189)

About a month later, he again mentioned the indispensability of ben Youssef to his own people and to France, and expressed the hope that they would find such an intermediary in Algeria. (194-195)

A few days later, Mauriac expressed disgust that certain persons could not see, even from the experiences of Indochina and Tunisia, the value of negotiation and the futility of war at this moment in the evolution of the colonial problem. (197)

November 10, 1955 found Mauriac rejoicing over the fact that Mohammed V (ben Youssef) was back in power, but lamenting the fact that the dead do not return. How many of them would be alive now but for the machinery set in motion by a few persons! The deposition of the Sultan cost so much in blood that no one dared to ask what it cost the Treasury. (204)

An article written in July, 1956 suggested that the situation in Algeria would not follow the pattern of Morocco, largely because of the difference in the personality and prestige of its leaders. He wrote:

L'Algérie est un point d'infection qu'il n'appartient plus à personne d'isoler. Les effets

prévus, inéluctables, se développent de jour en jour à la périphérie. Lentement, semble-t-il, au Maroc, où le prestige de Mohammed V lui permet de temporiser, d'attendre l'événement. Habib Bourghiba, lui même autre bataille. (249)

Remarking in July of 1956, that nothing is so futile as regret, and that it serves no useful purpose to remake History according to one's views, Mauriac declared that the destiny of France in Algeria was settled on February 6, 1956. Everything that has happened or that will happen there is the result of premises posed that day. He continued:

C'est une souffrance que de fixer le moment précis où tout aurait pu être sauvé. Notre Histoire d'avant la guerre est jalonné de ces dates fatales. L'histoire de Hitler nous montre le Destin qui fixe des rendez-vous successifs aux démocraties imbéciles et chaque fois défaillantes. (249-250)

The fateful date of February 6 was the time when Guy Mollet replaced Mendès-France, and appointed General Catroux to replace Soustelle in Algeria. According to all commentators, Mauriac said, Mendès-France was incapable of substituting something better for that which he wished to destroy in Algeria. Nevertheless, Mauriac maintained:

Or, il est le seul homme d'Etat français qui ait eu le courage de reconnaître et de déclarer ouvertement que le fascisme règne à Alger et que rien ne sera fait, qu'on ne l'ait d'abord abattu. Il dit, il proclame qu'il faut réduire à l'impuissance les hommes à qui M. Guy Mollet rendit les armes, le 6 février 1956, et qui continuent d'être les maîtres, puisque M. Lacoste exécute leurs volontés et se rallie docilement à leurs Consignes. (315)

In August of the same year, Mauriac mentioned that the Suez Affair had seemed more dangerous than the assassination which touched off World War I. The lack of foresight and also of sense of solidarity on the part of England and France had brought the world perilously close to a conflagration. He said specifically:

Le danger d'une conflagration reste la carte maîtresse du colonel Nasser et les hommes légers qui nous mènent pourraient être entraînés à agir comme si cette carte était sans valeur; voilà qui donne à rêver sombrement. (252, 257-258)

He said in the same article that he believed that war was feared equally in Moscow and Washington, and that Washington was resolved not to risk war. However, he posed the question: To what extent is staying out of war contingent upon the will of the people? (257)

The shortsightedness of the politicians caused Mauriac to say sarcastically:

Passer l'éponge, tourner la page, c'est une nécessité de la politique dès qu'on la considère comme une profession. S'il fallait obliger les responsables à rendre des comptes, chacun devrait à son tour occuper la sellette, et ne manquerait pas de se décharger sur les autres. (259)

In the same pessimistic vein, Mauriac wrote about a month later:

Les politiciens, il n'en est presque aucun qui ne sache tourner à sa gloire un désastre militaire qu'il a organisé, et se tresser des couronnes avec les étrivières qu'il a reçues. (265)

In October, 1956 Mauriac attacked the attitude of the United States in the process of criticizing French politics. He insisted that the reasons for the

treatment that "Yankee pharisaism" inflicted upon them were inherent in their own politics.

Insisting that he had not forgotten the lifelong debt which France owed the Americans, he still expressed resentment at their being treated as colonialists by those whom he referred to as the exterminators of the red race and the last European slave-holders! He added that the way Americans treated the descendants of their slaves was apparent to the entire world. (270-271)

A similar derogatory comment appeared in 1960. He was on his way to Rome to address the Société africaine de culture. Having thought for a week about them and their problems, he said he felt closer to them than to the Race which was at that moment preparing for the punishment of Caryl Chessman.⁹

On November 7, Mauriac was slightly more optimistic. Atomic war had not yet erupted. History had not yet decided who had won and who had lost, although Israel seemed to have gained. Russia had only to threaten and she got her way. Nasser, for a "colonel battu" did not look too bad. The U. N. had the last word and was getting a small army at its disposal. If the U. N. consented and Russia closed her eyes, France might be able to get her ships out of Suez. Best of all, the obtuse officials, Mollet, Lacoste, Bourguès-Maunoury,

⁹L'Express, Feb. 25, 1960, 44.

and Lejeune must understand by now the times in which they are functioning! (280)

The November 20, 1956 issue of Bloc-Notes carried the report that there would be no oil for France so long as a single French soldier remained at Port-Saïd. Mauriac said that the United States was to blame for this, and the worst feature was that for once American politics was founded upon reason! Americans could not act otherwise, face to face with Russia -- whom France herself had given an unexpected pretext to intervene in the Middle East. He added that the era of the great colonizing nations was ending. (285)

Perhaps the height of Mauriac's pessimism was reached on November 30, 1956. Never, he said, had the consequences of politics so swiftly overtaken the authors -- Russia's ultimatum, the chilled relationship with the United States whose politics (he felt) belittled France and ignored her interests, and the condemnation by the U. N. -- yet M. Guy Mollet remained unruffled! (285)

There was one advantage, Mauriac admitted ruefully, at reaching the depths. That was the rock whose roughness the politicians needed to feel. (285)

Their politicians had to go to Suez to become aware that Russia was interested in the Middle East, and that the United States would not tolerate her presence there. (286)

In mid-December of 1956 and again in early January Mauriac praised the exemplary courage of Hungary, where man defied the system:

L'indomptable Hongrie démontre au monde que le sens de l'Histoire peut être déterminé par la volonté du plus faible, quand le plus fort est inhumain, systématiquement. L'Histoire des hommes condamne l'inhumain. Le malheur est que, dans l'ère atomique, il reste au plus fort de pouvoir noyer sa ruine particulière dans la destruction de tout le reste. Le glas sonne en Hongrie, certes, mais pour qui? (291)

L'homme a résisté le système; c'est le fait nouveau que les sociologues ont dû enregistrer parmi tous ceux dont ils sont chaque jour assaillis -- car l'Histoire va vite depuis qu'elle est devenue dialectique! Mais ce fait nouveau-là bouleverse tout. (293)

Mauriac said that the passage from the Colonial Era to that of Federation in Africa should have occurred at the time of the Liberation when people were ready for it. De Gaulle had advocated this in Volume II of his Mémoires. Now war, death and an enduring hatred are rooted in the land where they wanted to build an enduring friendship. The whole unfortunate situation resulted from the work of those whom they voted into office. (256)

He had written earlier that the sinister part of the international political situation was the fault of those who held the cards.

Mais qui donc les leur a mises entre les mains, sinon la Nation elle-même, condamnée à suivre une politique: celle dont précisément elle avait cru se garer par les choix qu'elle avait faits? (250)

Therein lies the greatest problem of a democracy!

Mauriac has long been aware of the interdependence of nations. Again and again this idea appears in his writings. While expressing surprise that Nasser's coup had caught the Western Powers off guard, he also expressed regret that England and France did not realize their solidarity until it was too late to use it as a counterweight. He predicted that France would get repercussions from the English defeat at Suez, just as England would get those from the French struggle in Algeria. (252)

As for the role of the United Nations, Mauriac agreed with Maurice Duverger in Le Monde, that the nations sitting in judgment apply to other peoples principles which they themselves would not follow in the same situation. Nevertheless, Mauriac insisted that this organization was still the only buffer between them and war. (279)

The fact that neither the United States nor Russia wanted war was beside the point. To defend the peace it was necessary to avoid at all costs the creation of situations in which the gamblers could no longer control the political game and where the bluff became history. (279)

Mauriac's awareness of the seriousness of bad political action is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in a statement which appeared in Bloc-Notes for December

19, 1953:

Les crimes de la vie personnelle peuvent être rachetés et effacés, non ceux de la vie politique. L'Histoire ne pardonne pas, parce qu'elle ne s'interrompt jamais, parce qu'elle développe sans arrêt, dans tous les sens, et sur tous les plans, les conséquences d'un acte une fois posé, mais celles aussi de nos dérobades et de nos refus. (56)

CHAPTER XIII

MAURIAC EVALUATES FRENCH STATESMEN

Of all the actors on the French political stage, Mauriac evidently regards only two -- Mendès-France and De Gaulle -- as having the stature of statesmen. The others are merely politicians.

Pierre Mendès-France

When Mendès-France became Président du Conseil, Mauriac declared that he hoped for the success of the regime, and would be quick to criticize the foes of Mendès-France, though he would not refrain from expressing any difference of opinion.

True to his promise, Mauriac did exalt Mendès-France and criticize his foes unmercifully.

Mauriac expressed regret that Mendès-France had been brought to power by the Communists. He said:

On ne peut considérer que tristement . . .
qu'un Pierre Mendès-France, qui va entreprendre
enfin une politique française digne de ce nom, ne
se considère pas mandaté par le peuple tout entier.
(107)

Radicalism seemed to Mauriac a strange political vehicle for a man like Mendès-France.

Ce radical qui a refusé le pouvoir durant des
années et qui a préféré la vérité aux profits d'une
carrière politique, quel drôle de radical! Au vrai,
on ne saurait avoir moins la tripe radicale que
cet Hercule appelé à nettoyer les écuries de
l'Augias maçonnique et clérical qui a dirigé pen-
dant dix ans la politique française. (131)

Mauriac expressed the hope that the "présence

chrétien" of Mendès-France would either transform the left and thus transform French internal politics, or bring about a true right which would serve principles instead of interests. (130-131) It would seem that Mauriac was a little over-optimistic.

In July of 1954 Mauriac declared his belief that Mendès-France was the only living French statesman whose vision was not blinded by parliamentary and electoral opportunity, and who was determined to translate his beliefs into action despite opposition. (114)

On another occasion, Mauriac said:

Je doute qu'il soit un animal politique au sens parlementaire. Je le crois d'une autre espèce que les carpes du Palais-Bourbon qui chérissent leur profonde boue. (121)

Mauriac expressed approval of Mendès-France's efforts to "remettre la France à flot", as he phrased it. He agreed that only a strong France is a useful ally. By strengthening France, Mendès-France will do more to strengthen the Atlantic Alliance than

ceux qui ont entretenu la guerre indochinoise de huit ans, qui ont ruiné l'amitié franco-marocaine et mis le feu à la Tunisie. (108)

In October, Mauriac said that Mendès-France did not know that he was searching for the Kingdom of God with its justice and peace, but the human peace and justice for which he was working were no different from those for which we pray daily. (132)

Mauriac took issue with Thierry Maulnier, who held

Mendès-France responsible for existing evils -- all the errors and crimes which the latter had denounced and whose consequences he was successfully undoing. (132-133)

Mauriac quarrelled with Teitgen and the M. R. P. on much the same basis, grumbling:

Pierre Mendès-France leur montre pourtant ce que peut un homme seul. Ils haïssent pour cela. Il existe une haine singulière, chez nous, contre la prééminence de l'esprit. (141-143)

In December of 1954 Mauriac wrote that he understood better than ever why Mendès-France always put the emphasis on economics and why he was eager to get to work on the internal problems of France. Only a France restored and stable could deal as an equal with her powerful allies. (149)

In February of 1955 Mauriac accused M. Maurice Schumann and others of deliberately forestalling the financial reforms of Mendès-France for political reasons. (163)

In May Mauriac reported that Pierre Mendès-France had been derisively called "Superman" by his enemies. In Mauriac's opinion, he may well be such, as compared with his critics. Mauriac remarked pessimistically:

En démocratie, un homme supérieur devrait s'astreindre à donner l'illusion qu'il ne dépasse pas le niveau. Mais il est plus facile qu'aux médiocres d'avoir l'air profond qu'aux grands esprits de faire la bête. (180)

Mauriac made a similar observation a little later:

L'intelligence y fut toujours redoutée . . . C'est son intelligence qui fait de Pierre Mendès-France un suspect dans une partie de l'opinion et qui, au Parlement, le rend odieux à une droite sans pensée. (193)

Obviously the government was reaching a stalemate. Therefore it was with evident relief that Mauriac wrote on May 23, 1956:

Enfin! La dimission de Pierre Mendès-France nous délivre d'une équivoque qui devenait chaque jour moins supportable. (237)

Nevertheless, Mauriac was not happy about this turn of events. He was definitely displeased with the administration of Guy Mollet. In November Mauriac wrote:

Quel recours nous reste-t-il? Un des derniers hommes d'Etat de sa génération qui n'appartiennent pas à l'équipe fatale, Pierre Mendès-France, suscite pour cela même la haine la plus furieuse qu'ait inspirée un parlementaire français depuis Clemenceau. Quand presque tous sont coupables, c'est l'innocent qui devient le hors-la-loi. (288)

Mauriac said that he was having difficulty in explaining this ostracism to foreign journalists who questioned him. He could only quote Teitgen: "Tout plutôt que Mendès-France!" (288)

In this connection Mauriac quoted the following excerpt from the Manchester Guardian:

The most remarkable political man that France has produced since the War cannot find, in the parliamentary system which he serves loyally, any more stable place than that of a prophet crying in the desert. (314)

In April of 1957, Mauriac said that people, even including some friends of Mendès-France, had made fun

of him for defending the latter. He lamented the fact that each of them had not taken up his pen in defense of Mendès-France each time that "la calomnie" had manifested itself. The nation would not then have been in its present state. (309)

On November 30, Mauriac reported that there had been a great session of Parliament. As for Mendès-France, Mauriac said that he "had held a bomb in his hands." He told the truth as usual. Mauriac was quick to add that this did not mean that Mendès-France was always right -- only that he was not motivated by vested interests and not afraid of the powers that may be unleashed in Algeria. His concluding remarks follow:

Son crime est moins de dire ce qu'il dit que d'analyser honnêtement une situation politique donnée devant cette Assemblée qui ne veut rien entendre parce qu'elle ne veut rien voir. L'idée qu'il se fait d'un ensemble franco-maghrébin, cette construction longue et difficile, offense ces politiciens de l'immédiat et les rend furieux, eux qui, derrière un écran de mots, sont bien résolus à attendre que les militaires aient gagné la partie -- et qui n'attendent rien d'autre -- et celui qui désire, qui prépare autre chose est un traître. (389)

Charles de Gaulle

If there is one figure who dominates the scene in contemporary France, it is De Gaulle. For Mauriac his utterances seem to carry a divine sanction. He has a deep-seated fear that France will spurn his counsel to her irreparable loss; that she will turn deaf ears to his words as did men in the times of the Biblical

prophets. According to Mauriac De Gaulle possesses

la faculté d'analyser froidement et sans romantisme une donnée politique et d'imaginer en¹ même temps la dure solution qu'elle implique.

In February of 1946, just after De Gaulle had withdrawn from the political scene, Mauriac discussed the dilemma which caused "le mal." As he phrased it, De Gaulle had three Gordian knots to untie.

First, there was the problem of economic order. But De Gaulle could not raise an army of 400, 000, free the Rhine and Danube and envisage means of restoring France's ruined economy all at once. The war had to be won first.

The second knot was foreign policy. He was determined not to yield any quarter anywhere in the world where the rights of France were concerned. "L'histoire dira que l'indépendance de son pays fut sa plus profonde passion." But France is always caught between factions manoeuvred from abroad. This time the situation was worse than usual. France was completely at the mercy of her allies.

The last knot demanded that he restore in France the democratic institutions and respect their free interplay, and, at the same time, gain the consent of

¹Le Figaro, Feb. 14, 1946, 1.

²Ibid.

the parties to act according to his own methods. That was the crux of the problem. As Mauriac phrased it:

Nous n'avons pas su incorporer à l'institution démocratique l'intelligence, la volonté, l'incomparable prestige de "ce grand esprit altier et solitaire" (the last expression, Leon Blum's).

The political game has begun all over again, but France is the loser.³

Nevertheless, Mauriac expressed the certainty that De Gaulle would be recalled, even by those who had made inevitable his departure. He was equally certain that De Gaulle would respond. Mauriac's only question was from what depths of despair would come France's cry for help. As for himself, Mauriac said:

Et moi, je suis de ceux qui auront cru que De Gaulle nous a été donné et c'est pourquoi je tremble que la folie des hommes ne lui permette d'accomplir jusqu'au bout la mission qu'il a reçue de l'Histoire et de Dieu.⁴

Whenever the political situation seemed particularly hopeless, Mauriac thought wishfully of De Gaulle. On the following occasions, for example, he suggested the need for De Gaulle: February 19, 1955 (164); March 9, 1956 (217); November 30, 1956 (288); October 28, 1957 (377); November 21, 1957 (386).

Mauriac knows that this is not always a popular attitude, as evidenced by the following:

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Au seul nom de De Gaulle, nous verrions, au fond du panier, se désenlacer toutes ces pattes ennemis. Nous verrions faire front toutes les pinces, et ce joli monde se dresser comme un seul crabe. (377)

In July of 1958 Mauriac described De Gaulle as owing nothing to circumstances. He does not adapt himself to the event. It is the event which must take cognizance of the man. De Gaulle belongs to the time when France was the "Grande Nation" and dominated Europe by the force of arms and by intellectual power. No other Frenchman so incorporated the country of the past and future. Clemenceau had his moments of grandeur, as on November 11, 1918, when he not only spoke of France as he had never done before, but actually was France for a few moments, but then he became again the sarcastic and bitter old man. On the other hand, De Gaulle has remained

cet ambassadeur des siècles de gloire -- mais non certes aveugle aux conjonctures de l'heure, ⁶ étonnement attentif, au contraire, et averti.

Mauriac was right in his prediction that France would recall this solitary, heroic figure. He was right, also, in predicting that, given such an opportunity De Gaulle would restore a measure of stability. Great strides were made. But once the initial emergency is past, destructive criticism of such a leader often

⁶Le Figaro, July 1958 (day not on microfilm), 1.

ensues. Here was no exception. Mauriac, however, is still of the same opinion regarding De Gaulle's indispensability.

Writing in September of 1959, Mauriac invited those who accused him of being blind when it comes to De Gaulle to check the testimony of the rest of the world.⁷

Mauriac defended De Gaulle's politics by saying that of necessity he had been skillful and sly. He said also that De Gaulle was grandeur personified, and grandeur ignores the offenses of small people, and considers no trick forbidden provided that it is not base in its inspiration nor criminal in its consequences.⁸

On another occasion, Mauriac said that where France was concerned, De Gaulle took lessons from no one:

De cette nation qu'il aime plus que sa vie, disons plutôt: avec laquelle il se confonde, il pris l'exacte mesure; il voit son peuple tel qu'il est à ce moment de l'Histoire, à ce tournant du destin. Il en connaît le fort et le faible. Mais il n'est pas seulement le plus lucide des Français, il est aussi le seul qui puisse tenir tête aux factieux, non parce qu'il a raison, et bien qu'il ait raison, mais parce qu'il est lui.

After De Gaulle is gone there will be time to go back to the political game and play by the old rules.⁹

An article written at the end of October of 1959

⁷L'Express, Sept. 24, 1959, 44.

⁸Ibid.

⁹L'Express, Oct. 8, 1959, 44.

discusses the third volume of De Gaulle's Mémoires, and presents once more the thesis that the man and the moment were inextricably fused.

Ce soldat solitaire, une conjoncture historique sans précédent lui avait permis, durante quatre années, de concevoir et d'accomplir seul ce qu'exigeait, à son idée, le salut de la patrie,¹⁰ sans autre contrôle que celui de sa conscience.

De Gaulle wasted no time. Though he had not chosen the men who surrounded him, nevertheless, he utilized them to the level of their competence, but he alone made the decisions.¹¹

Mauriac believes that the most critical period in his story shows De Gaulle at his greatest. No other general would have thought of trying to reestablish order in the provinces delivered to the power of factions over which there was no central control. At least, another general probably would have delegated this to the remnant of the French Army. Not De Gaulle! He had an idea that seemed foolish to thoughtful minds then -- that France on the side of the Allies might have her share in the victory. Was there still time? De Gaulle thought so.¹²

¹⁰Le Figaro Littéraire, Oct. 31, 1959, 1.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

He threw the whole army into the last battle and chose to remain alone, without soldiers and almost without police, to face these factions. He attempted a fantastic amalgam and succeeded.¹³

Furthermore, he, the chief of a conquered and ruined nation, still managed to impose his will on the "Anglo-Saxons tout-puissants." He remained in Strasbourg in spite of them, forcing them to modify their terms.¹⁴

He hastened to rebuild the State also and to "remettre l'économie en marche," as Mauriac expressed it, succeeding to an amazing degree in a few months. The process is described in detail in the Mémoires. He makes no defense of anything he has done. Mauriac remarked that, to his knowledge, De Gaulle is the only military leader who makes no plea and seeks no praise. He presents the facts, leaving no doubt that he believes he has acted in all circumstances for the best.¹⁵

Bloc-Notes of October 11, 1954 carried a comment on the style of the General. Mauriac said that it was not enough to have had a part in great events; one must know how to write. On this basis, De Gaulle is

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

assured of immortality.

Comme César, comme Napoléon, le général de Gaulle a le style de son destin, un style accordé à l'Histoire. (129)

Five years later, Mauriac again wrote about the General's style. This time, however, he administered a scathing rebuke to M. Jean-François Revel for his criticism of De Gaulle's speeches. Revel found the style in the impromptu speeches bad. Mauriac found it good, since it expressed what was meant and touched the hearts and minds of the hearers. Mauriac accused Revel of attacking this as the only vulnerable point in the man whom he wished to criticize.

Mauriac continued the defense, saying that De Gaulle had no ghost writers for any of his speeches, that his formal addresses left nothing to be desired, and that he could scarcely be expected to travel up and down the country with pen in hand, laboriously preparing an address for each town and village. Instead, he let his heart speak, giving the once proud nation reasons for not losing hope.¹⁶

Mauriac then quoted from the closing lines of the first volume of De Gaulle's *Mémoires*:

Penché sur le gouffre où la patrie a roulé,
je suis son fils qui l'appelle, lui tient la
lumière, lui montre la voie du salut . . . Main-

¹⁶Le Figaro Littéraire, Aug. 8, 1959, 1.

tenant j'entends la France me répondre. Au fond de l'abîme elle se relève, elle marche, elle gravit la pente. Ah! mère, tels que nous sommes nous voici pour vous servir . . .

Mauriac said that if this were a message from beyond the tomb, we could shrug our shoulders at the vanity of the man. But they had seen this resurrection occur.¹⁷

Mauriac argued that Revel had passed judgment on the basis of a few random quotes taken out of context. This, Mauriac insisted, was his quarrel. Revel had a perfect right to dislike De Gaulle and his style, and also to find it bad that France was living in a monarchy.

Car à quoi bon le nier? Il est vrai qu'en ce moment un prince chrétien gouverne la France. Pour moi, tout républicain que je suis, je m'y résigne; si le roi de France m'avait guéri des écrouelles, je l'aurais trouvé fort bon. Et puis quoi! ce prince règne par la volonté du peuple qui est venu de chercher. ¹⁸

Mauriac finished the commentary with the suggestion that "ce sagace docteur" would do better to criticize those who brought France to such a pass.

Here we see that, while this purports to be a "querelle de langage," it soon passes over into a defence of the man and his program, not, however, without some justification. For Mauriac, De Gaulle can do

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

no wrong.

Writing in January of 1960, eighteen months after De Gaulle's recall, Mauriac took issue with the conclusion of an editorial in L'Express:

La nature de choses fait que la paix en Algérie, la laïcité de l'enseignement, le rythme de la production ne seront rétablis qu'ensemble par la fin du régime, pas avant et pas autrement.

Although the editor evidently thought the balance sheet of De Gaulle was one of catastrophe, Mauriac said:

Mais, dans le monde, vous êtes seul à le croire: le redressement français est une évidence constatée et commentée dans toutes les langues de l'univers.

Mauriac then asked what specific changes the editor would make if he were in De Gaulle's place, with respect to African affairs, diplomatic relations and finances. As for the scholastic battle, whatever stand De Gaulle had taken would have alienated half the country. By taking no action and leaving elected persons solely responsible, he came out of the affair with a minimum of damage.¹⁹

Mauriac also reminded the editor that while he was dreaming of the end of this regime, he had not posed the question as to what the new one would be. According to the editor, all would be better and everything would return to its accustomed order. That, Mauriac

¹⁹L'Express, Jan. 7, 1960, 44.

averred, was the trouble! He added:

Et nous pensons -- et toute la France et le monde entier pensent avec nous -- que notre salut est lié, non certes à un régime, mais à la présence de l'homme contre lequel vous vous dressez. ²⁰

Mendès-France and De Gaulle Compared

Mauriac made some interesting comparisons of these two statesmen, the circumstances which brought them to power, their ways of working, the conditions of their success, and their destiny.

As for their basic difference, Mauriac wrote:

De Gaulle est le type même de l'homme solitaire, intraitable, qui ne s'adapte pas. Pierre Mendès-France, au contraire, a le goût et même le passion de persuader, le génie de convaincre. Il ne nourrit aucun préjugé contre le régime. (159)

Mauriac made an interesting statement regarding the status quo in January of 1957:

Le gouvernement socialiste actuel, ivre d'échecs jusqu'à l'euphorie, ne titube même plus parce qu'il est irremplaçable. Seule la catastrophe pourrait imposer l'homme redouté ou l'homme détesté: le général de Gaulle ou Pierre Mendès-France.

Encore faudrait-il que la catastrophe fût à la mesure de cette peur et de cette haine, pour que l'excès de malheur forçât la main à ceux des parlementaires de qui tout dépend. Mais même alors peut-être seraient-ils les prisonniers de la calomnie qu'ils ont eux-mêmes orchestrée. Peut-être n'oseraient-ils avoir recours à l'innocent qu'ils ont chargé de leurs propres fautes. (299)

In May of 1957 Mauriac observed pessimistically

²⁰Ibid.

that the parliamentary organism would reject all reformers -- would eliminate a Mendès-France, a De Gaulle, or any other man of State who incarnated an idea of the vocation and possibilities of France but did not take into account the vested interests. He also said that both Mendès-France and De Gaulle were children of a certain epoch: the Liberation. They would not be replaced. (322)

Again in September of 1957, Mauriac put Mendès-France and De Gaulle in the same category with a shrewd observation:

La question n'est pas ici de savoir s'ils eurent toujours raison; mais l'on et l'autre se sont fait une certaine idée du relèvement français et ont agi selon cette idée sans tenir compte des intérêts qui, dans le cours normal des choses, incline souverainement la politique française. Seul le désastre crée l'intervalle pendant lequel un homme politique de cette classe peut agir. Cela ne dépasse guère six mois et puis tout rentre dans l'ordre, ou plutôt dans le désordre accoutumé. (363)

CHAPTER XIV

CONCLUSIONS

It is natural that a lonely, sensitive child, sheltered from "the world" but forced by painful childhood experiences to withdraw into a world of his own imagining, should have become the rather somber, introspective, sometimes lyrical, sometimes caustic writer, François Mauriac. He may grow poetic over a nightingale at Malagar, but his comments may fly like chips of hot metal from a machine. He is capable of intense loyalties as, for example, to De Gaulle. He is also capable of scathing denunciations, as in the letter to Cocteau after the presentation of Bacchus.

Mauriac said that journalism might not be a good way to launch a literary career, but was a glorious way to end it.

He regards his journalism as the fulfillment of a mission. As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, he considers himself enlisted in the military sense in the affairs of this world for reasons from above.

Apparently this had been in the background of his mind since youth, but had been pushed aside by other literary and personal interests. The Spanish Civil War and similar upheavals added a new compulsion to begin this type of writing.

Evidently the compulsion is still there, but the work has become an exciting challenge as well. Mauriac stated in 1960 that no novel of his creation could possibly be as interesting as the record of the events of these past few years. He no longer concerns himself with questions of style, but only with what he calls "witnessing." If his writings become literature, all well and good, but that is not his primary purpose.

Perhaps the most telling statement of his attitude is the one quoted on page 5 of this thesis (translation mine):

A little more truly every day, for me to write is to witness. I dare not add: to write is to pray. I must hold to this thought as my sole justification, for I have reached the age of silence.

As we have seen, François Mauriac takes both himself and his work seriously. Like De Gaulle whom he admires, he apparently does not find it necessary to apologize for nor to explain anything which he has said or done. There seems to be little doubt in his mind that his conclusions are correct.

As far as his life is concerned, he wanted to write from the time he was eighteen, and he has done so. He has made both a living and a life from his chosen career. He has won honors which the world considers significant, such as membership in L'Académie Française, the Nobel Prize, the right to have his Complete Works

nublished, and a measure of political prominence. He has lived to see a son follow successfully a literary career. He himself has been successful as poet, novelist, playwright and journalist.

He finds little fault with his literary works. He does not care for Asmodée now, dislikes the title of Destins, and has rejected La Robe Prétexte, but evidently approves the rest.

Writing is a natural vocation for him and, as he says, "L'écriture se confond avec ma vie." One cannot separate the man from his work. More and more his pen has become a potent weapon which he says is not deflected because of personal considerations.

It was natural because of family background and childhood experiences, that Mauriac should turn early to the Church. He found in religion, however, not so much a solace as a sense of mission. As already noted, religion is infused into all his thinking and activity, from criticizing a work of literature to condemning the French policies in North Africa. Though old-fashioned in such respects as preferring the old cantiques and the older form of the Mass, he is strangely modern in his insistence that the Church be a militant force working toward political, economic and social betterment.

He was an ardent advocate of the order of factory worker-priests known as the Prêtres Ouvriers, and very

unhappy at their suppression, asserting that "the poor always lose."

Although somewhat prejudiced against Protestants, particularly Anglicans, Mauriac is quite tolerant in his attitudes toward other faiths such as Judaism, Islam, and the brand of Hinduism practiced by Gandhi. In relation to Gandhi, Mauriac lamented the fact that the Indian leader had not been Catholic, or at least, that his policy of non-violence had been tried "on one of the hills of Rome." In speaking of the Jewess, Simone Weil, Mauriac remarked that it was better to belong to the soul of the Church as she did, than to belong to its body as did Christians of habit alone.

Mauriac, like most other young writers, had hoped to be a member of L'Académie Française. He had been elated when that hope became a reality.

Over the years, however, he has become disillusioned. He says frankly that it has become a servant of the State rather than the servant of literature that it was intended to be, and represents only a segment of the State at that. Because of this political affiliation, it leaves out some significant writers such as Sartre and Malraux. The latter scorn it as a hard shell of conservatism.

Mauriac believes that the Academy is still a worthwhile institution, but that it should make certain

modifications. He would like to see it operate on a basis similar to that of the Nobel Academy, and abolish the system of candidature since candidates are conspicuously absent nowadays. He would like to see the Academy restored to its pristine position as a true patron of the arts and sciences instead of remaining a tool for right wing politics.

One might say that his point of view toward the Academy is progressive if not consistent.

Poetry, according to Mauriac, is born of solitude and spiritual struggle. The sensitivity which characterizes the poet leaves him an easy victim of moral and emotional pitfalls, against which a sound moral heritage and virile religion seem to be the only safeguards.

Mauriac believes that one's first canvas, novel or opera is a foretaste of all the rest. One refines craftsmanship thereafter, but makes no basic change.

Mauriac says that he has no technique for the writing of novels and needs none. He is impatient with modern authors who quibble about literary conventions, saying, for example, that when he finds it necessary to look into the minds and hearts of his characters, he does so! His work does show, however, the influence of dramatic techniques.

He is perturbed also about what he considers the

confusion of psychiatry with literature apparent in the work of some contemporaries.

Mauriac tends to be critical of his literary contemporaries, especially Cocteau and Sartre. With the latter, he seems to go out of his way to be irritating. He has absolutely no respect for Simone Beauvoir or any other writer with her point of view.

On the other hand, he is strangely tolerant of young writers. He appreciates what they are trying to do. Even the hedonistic "young intellectuals" found in him an apologist, even though he obviously did not agree with their conclusions.

Usually religion enters into his literary judgments as a determining factor, particularly if the author is supposed to be a Christian, as in the case of Cocteau's play, Bacchus. His attitude toward works produced by atheists like Sartre seems to be: "What can one expect?" Whether or not he is capable of judging a piece of literature completely apart from religious considerations is debatable.

Mauriac is rather pessimistic about the contemporary scene. Politics are motivated by the same vested interests as before, while the people are oddly indifferent to their political responsibilities. France is too often a pawn in the chess game between the Soviet and the Anglo-Saxon players. The slaughter in Indochina

and North Africa has been, in his eyes, inexcusable. Over all our heads hangs the threat of nuclear warfare, prevented from falling on us only by fear on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Man has unlocked the secret of the ages, but he cannot cope with the results of his discovery.

One can find evidence of the "politique de sentiment" of which Mauriac has been accused, in some of the correspondence regarding North Africa, in his attitude toward De Gaulle, in his suggestion that Mitterand, coming from the same background as Mauriac himself, must be innocent, and his unequivocal denunciation of politicians with whom he disagrees.

Mauriac records events together with his opinions, but he sees these events, not as isolated incidents, but as part of larger movements.

In Mauriac's political philosophy there are some unresolved problems. He says he believes in democracy. Yet, repeatedly, he has said that what is needed at a certain juncture is one man, to galvanize discordant factions into a working team.

The corollary to this idea is the fact that democratic machinery is too inflexible to utilize, over a long period of time, the abilities of a man like Mendès-France or De Gaulle, who do not fit the political pattern. They can retain their power only in a crisis.

and the nation is the loser when they fall.

Again and again, Mauriac mentions that events are the faults of those in power -- but the people are to blame for putting them there. By so doing, they condemn themselves to follow a political direction which they thought they were avoiding.

Mauriac is well aware of the inexorability of history. Though politicians, to use his expression, may "pass the sponge and turn the page," there is no erasure of political mistakes and crimes. Their consequences are rooted in the acts themselves and will not be changed. History is unforgiving. For example, Mauriac declared that the entire outcome of the Algerian situation was decided on February 6, 1956. This was when Mollet succeeded Mendès-France and sent Catroux to replace Soustelle in Algeria.

Mauriac's point of view is fairly consistent. He decided a long time ago that the Mouvement Republicain Populaire had betrayed its vocation, and he has not changed his mind. He has found nothing wrong with De Gaulle and nothing right with Mollet. He insisted from the beginning that an improvement in French administration of North Africa would keep it at least partially French in spirit if not in politics, but a continuation of existing policies would cause permanent alienation.

It is in international politics that Mauriac most

completely escapes the stereotype of the novelist whose horizon is limited to the environs of Bordeaux.

Contrary to Sartre's opinion, Mauriac does understand politics in its ramifications, though not himself a politician. Perhaps he does over-simplify a little at times, as when he placed so much faith in the transforming powers of the M. R. P.

He understands the interdependence of nations as in the case of Suez. He knows that the presence or absence of war is not wholly contingent upon the will of individual nations. War may be touched off by any one of the world's potentially explosive situations, and would soon involve powers beyond the immediate area.

As far back as 1947-1948, he warned his readers that even a French Civil War between the Communists and their opponents would soon involve both the Soviet and Anglo-Saxon blocs, creating a worse holocaust than the world has ever known.

The United Nations, though in Mauriac's opinion not wholly satisfactory, is still the best deterrent to war that we have at the present time. As such, it should be supported.

Mauriac described accurately, I believe, the dilemma of Soviet-Non-Soviet relations. Free exchange of ideas is a primary condition of peace, but the present regime in Russia, in order to maintain itself, must

draw what Mauriac calls "a ring of fire" to prevent this.

He also described accurately the methods of Communist infiltration into a country. The Party members behave innocuously when they first come into power and make no one afraid. Thus they slip into places of leadership in the nerve centers of a nation before they show their true colors. Then it is too late for the opposition to react effectively. Since the control center is Moscow, not only personal but also national loyalties are destroyed.

As for predictions, Mauriac has not done badly. He foresaw that Mendès-France, for all his acumen and scrupulous functioning through democratic channels, was reaching an impasse. He predicted the recall of De Gaulle. He said that Mitterand would come out of "l'affaire" successfully, but with a few scars which would never be quite removed. He has insisted for years that the extreme right wing of French politics was culpable for many problems and much violence which went unpunished, a thesis which recent events have corroborated. He insisted that Mohammed ben Youssef was the real leader of Morocco, and the latter became the first constitutional monarch of that land. He saw clearly what France was doing in North Africa and what the result would be.

Mauriac's sphere of influence has widened and deepened over the years since he began his career as a journalist. He sees the configuration of national and international politics with the same clarity as the plots of his recent novels. The same artistry of style that went into his earlier work is apparent in this genre into which he made a tardy incursion. He has become not only a serious commentator, but an effective satirist whose barbs are increasingly on target.

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