SYMBOLIC DESCRIPTION IN THE EARLY NOVELS OF
FRANCOIS MAURIAC

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate Faculty, have
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INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for this study is found in Nelly Corneau's L'Art de François Mauriac, written in 1951. In her discussion of Mauriac's expression, she points out his tendency to create a link between his characters and the external setting of his novels through his descriptive style. Corneau designates and defines this link as follows:

L'expression mauriacienne dit à la fois tout ce qu'elle veut dire et plus qu'elle ne dit; elle est frangée d'irisations et de résonances; elle est doublée, non point d'une ombre, mais d'une irradiation de sourde clarté. Et dans cet ourlet de lumière qui la borde palpitent les reflets de tous les grands thèmes mauriaciens.¹

A careful examination of Mauriac's works and of his style reveals that the "expression doublée" pointed out by Corneau would in English be termed "symbolic description."

The purpose of this study is to document the importance of Mauriac's descriptive technique which is the primum mobile of the duality which is created in his early novels. This will be studied with regard to its prevalence, function, and, as far as possible, its effectiveness.

After establishing that symbolic description exists in the works of Mauriac, an attempt will be made to explain

¹Nelly Corneau, L'Art de François Mauriac (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1951), p. 315.

his possible intentions in originally adopting it as a stylistic device, as well as his gradual rejection of it in his post-1925 novels. We will take up in sequence his use of seasonal description (spring, summer, fall, winter) his use of time, of atmospheric changes, and ultimately several unclassified descriptive techniques. A brief résumé of those pre-1925 novels which will be studied is included in order to aid the reader in situating the descriptive passages which are the crux of this study.

Cormeau, in her analyses, does not limit Mauriac's use of symbolic description to any particular period of time, but states that "Même, lorsqu'il abandonne la fiction et que, dans ses essais, il se voue aux méditations les plus pieuses, sa diction réintroduit subrepticement l'univers sensible qui ne se laisse jamais oublier."² While it is true that Mauriac never completely ceases to use some symbolic description, it would appear from the evidence adduced in this dissertation that there is a definite decrease in its occurrence in the later novels. We have attempted to analyze not only this stylistic peculiarity per se, but also to indicate its possible raison d'être. Although Cormeau has served as the principal inspiration

²Cormeau, L'Art de François Mauriac, p. 336.

for this study, there are a number of other noteworthy Mauriac scholars. Pierre-Henri Simon, in his Mauriac par lui-même, especially in the chapter on the roman-poème, has furnished an analysis of the poetic aspects of Mauriac's style. In his chapters on "La Crise de la conscience religieuse" and "La Vision du monde humain," he describes the chronological and thematic progression of the author's works, utilizing selections from Mauriac's novels to make his point.³

Alain Palante's Mauriac, le roman et la vie (1946) treats Mauriac's work as an illustration of the change which has come about in the French novel over a period of years. He particularly emphasizes, by means of comparison and contrast with novels from other periods, Mauriac's unique contribution to the trend away from minute observation and psychological objectivism, and toward introspection. As did Cormeau and Simon, Palante points out that Mauriac's work has all the creative possibilities of poetry.⁴

A work similar to that of Palante in title, but more specialized in nature, was written by Joseph Majault,

³Pierre-Henri Simon, Mauriac par lui-même (Paris: Aux Editions du seuil, 1953).

⁴Alain Palante, Mauriac, le roman et la vie (Paris: Le Portulan, 1946).

Mauriac et l'art du roman, (1946). In it, Majault highlights to a greater extent than Palante the religious problem of Mauriac's novels, as seen by critics. To some degree he attempts to justify the qualities of Mauriac which are usually considered objectionable among Catholics.⁵ Although numerous studies have been written and others are still being published, Cormeau remains the most exhaustive one available to students of Mauriac. In her work Cormeau treats his principal themes, the construction of his novels, his expression, and to some extent the influence of his life upon his works.

An accurate consideration of Mauriac's works on any level should be related to some knowledge of the writer's life and to some of the factors which might have influenced his thinking as a novelist. A brief discussion which may be used for the purpose of orientation is found in Morris Bishop's A Survey of French Literature, and is here quoted in part:

François Mauriac was born in 1885 in Bordeaux, of an old family of the high bourgeoisie. His father died when he was a baby; he was brought up austere by a devout mother and educated in Catholic schools in the University of Bordeaux. Young men of his family and class normally became lawyers or physicians; having a comfortable income, he chose to be

⁵Joseph Majault, Mauriac et l'art du roman (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1946).

a literary man and nothing else. He was a hospital orderly in the First World War; since then his placid family life in his Bordeaux town house and his country estate in the Landes has been interrupted only by his campaign against fascism at the time of the Spanish civil war, by his gallant work for the Resistance during the Second World War, and by political journalism in the postwar period. He entered the Académie Française in 1935, and received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1952.

His character and thought have been influenced, if not molded, by his regional Bordeaux background, by his bourgeois family and training, and especially by his ardent religious faith.

He is the great modern Catholic novelist of France. His concern, his constant theme, is the disquiet of the spirit, tempted to its destruction by sin, but clinging desperately to the Christian hope. Or, to put it in traditional terms, his theme is the battle of good and evil for the human soul.

His favorite setting for his fictions is one of the old upper-bourgeois Catholic families of Bordeaux or of its tributary countryside. These families are typically ingrown, inbred, grimly devout, fiercely avaricious. Into their closed circle penetrates a disturbing element from without. This disturbance is likely to be lawless Nature which may be identified with sin. The story is the struggle of the family against the attack of the demonic world. The center of the author's interest is the psychology of his characters, tortured and self-torturing, irresistibly drawn to the sin they fear and hate.⁶

⁶Morris Bishop, A Survey of French Literature: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1955), pp. 403-404.

CHAPTER I

SEASONAL DESCRIPTION

An analysis of the descriptive material in Mauriac's novels reveals the extensive use of a type of imagery that may be called "seasonal description." Because of the frequency with which certain actions--which intrinsically are capable of occurrence throughout the year--tend to occur in a specific season, carefully described by the novelist, it becomes clear that he attaches symbolic significance to each of the seasons of the year.

The various divisions of this chapter--spring, summer, fall, and winter--represent different thematic backdrops against which Mauriac frequently sets the action of his novels. An attempt will be made to show that specific settings and actions tend to go hand in hand so repeatedly as to make of this juxtaposition a stylistic device peculiar to Mauriac, a device recalling both metaphor and allegory, yet distinct from each.

Spring

Spring is the first of the seasonal descriptions to be considered. From the examples presented below, which are typical rather than exhaustive, it seems apparent that Mauriac uses spring to symbolize youth, a beginning of a new experience and hope.

Mauriac's earliest novel, L'Enfant chargé de chaînes, is one example of his use of spring to accompany a beginning. Jean-Paul Johanet begins an attempt to escape from boredom by joining a group called Amour et foi, an organization of social action. This gesture of his is accompanied by an indication of spring: "Il songeait à ce congrès d'Amour et foi, qui avait lieu à Bordeaux. Il pourrait s'y arrêter quelques semaines avant d'aller fuir à Johanet les vacances de Pâques."¹ This is the first of several examples to found where spring accompanies a beginning. In La Chair et le sang spring marks the beginning of Claude Favereau's life at the estate of Lur, where he goes after leaving the seminary. Still another occurrence of this use of spring is found in Le Baiser au lépreux where spring accompanies Jean Péloueyre's departure for a new life in Paris. In Le Mal Fabien Dézaymeries' annual return visit to the Landes region is always accompanied by a returning spring, as though to suggest his return to an abandoned life of innocence and piety, which he momentarily resumes on these annual occasions. Spring might be said to accompany a beginning in this particular novel in the sense that it

¹François Mauriac, L'Enfant chargé de chaînes (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1913), p. 48.

All page indications (within parentheses) in the body of this dissertation will refer to the novel being discussed at that point.

always prevails when Fabien lives in the atmosphere which recalls the beginning of his life. And, in the final chapter of the same novel, spring once again is in the air when Fabien, having resolved to leave Fanny Barrett forever, decides to return permanently to the Landes region. There is a renewal of Fabien's effort to regain his previous peace of mind and rid himself of the anguish caused by his religious conviction that there is no mid-point between Heaven and Hell where he can enjoy physical pleasures without fear of eternal condemnation: "Dès juin, les cigales empêchèrent toute somnolence de devenir sommeil, jusqu'à ce que la forêt, le soir, se répandit en parfums."²

In addition to the use of spring to represent a beginning, it is also seen to parallel youth, as in the early chapters of La Robe prétexte. The narrator, preparing for his first communion, awaits the event with anxiety, expecting to experience the type of revelation described to him by the priest. As it happens, he feels only a type of self-glory and a mental confusion:

. . . le square Saint-André était déjà vêtu de feuilles et les bougies blanches et roses des marronniers se dressaient en l'honneur du Mois de Marie qui était proche. Les martinets déchiraient la lumière. Le vacarme d'invisibles

²François Mauriac, Le Mal (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1924), p. 229.

moineaux emplissait les arbres. Des pigeons au vol sifflant se posaient tous ensemble au milieu de la place, faisaient semblant de vouloir se laisser prendre par un enfant et ne s'envolaient qu'à la dernière seconde.³

The narrator has undergone considerable physical and mental preparation for his first communion, and thought he fully understood its significance. His readiness was matched by that of the external setting. The abundance of nature reflected a readiness for the coming of spring; but just as the narrator found that the magnitude of his experience was beyond his comprehension, a similar feeling of elusiveness made itself felt in the surroundings: the first birds of spring fluttered about the square, but when a child tried to catch one, it flew out of his reach. In symbolic terms he had failed to capture the entire meaning of the communion, and the pigeon might understandably call to mind the "Saint-Esprit."

In a later passage of La Robe prétexte spring was described as representing the beginning of the narrator's maturity as well as the beginning of his first love. Spring was purely symbolic when the narrator recalled his early school life:

Ce furent de mornes semaines sans fièvre, occupées

³François Mauriac, La Robe prétexte (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1914), p. 19.

de misères d'écolier. Ces deux années sont dans mon passé un lac de brume d'où rien n'émerge. En moi, hors de moi, rien ne m'avertissait du brusque et fou printemps ni de ses épuisantes délices (p. 75).

Spring was not the season one would have chronologically expected next within the context of the novel, and one must assume that printemps, here, refers to the span of years during which the boy became aware of his physical being and of the full import of the word "sin," which had heretofore been rather vague and meaningless. The abruptness of his experience was conveyed in the use of the phrase "brusque et fou," while the attraction of sin for the youth was vividly implied in the words "ses épuisantes délices." Spring was used to represent a beginning as well as the nature of that beginning.

Another idea often embodied in Mauriac's use of spring is that of hope. In La Chair et le sang, after a winter of prolonged illness and lethargy, Claude suddenly revived with the change of seasons. When he awoke one day at dawn, "un peu de lune pâle se fondait dans un azur vierge qui faisait rêver à l'enfance du monde. Il crut entendre pour la première fois des chants d'oiseaux."⁴ Claude's enthusiasm on learning that May Castagnèdes was to come to Lur for her honeymoon resulted from his conviction that her

⁴François Mauriac, La Chair et le sang (Paris: Emile-Paul Frères, Editeurs, 1920), p. 185.

failure to reconcile her religious ideas on love with the experience of sexual love would propel her toward him for counsel. He felt he alone could give her this. His hope at this prospect made him more aware of the season and of his surroundings in general than he had been through the entire winter. This explains his dream-like state and the allusion to the earliest days of earth's creation, for he was perhaps envisioning a vita nuova.

Another example of spring accompanying hope is found in Préséances with Madame Etinger's arrival at Florence's home bringing news of Augustin. No word had been heard of Augustin since he disappeared after relating his life story many years ago at Gravette. For the first time since the day of his disappearance Florence's spirits revived. As if to accentuate the hopefulness of both characters the February day was described as follows: "C'était un de ces crépuscules de février qui ont ici déjà l'odeur du printemps."⁵ Since it is not likely that spring would be evident as early as February, Mauriac appears to be forcing an association between the new-born hope of his characters and the fickleness of that season which inaugurates a new year.

⁵François Mauriac, Préséances (Paris: Emile-Paul, 1920), p. 144.

Nuances within Seasonal Symbolic Description

A more complicated device used within the broad category of seasonal description is the development of certain symbolic nuances which create a harmony between the fluctuation of seasonal characteristics and emotional variations of the people concerned. In Préséances for example, spring appeared to enhance the growing hopefulness of the writer as he awaited the honor of riding a coach in an annual school celebration. His parents beamed with pride, and he recalled later "cet après-midi tiède, l'éclatement des bourgeons au bout des marronniers, cette montée de sève et de piailllements de moineaux vers le premier soleil de printemps"(p. 16). But suddenly he learned that his place had been taken by another boy. He was aware that he had been cheated by a more socially prominent student. In tune with his deception, "La journée dénouait son masque de faux printemps, et c'était une aigre bise qui m'apportait des échos de la fête"(p. 20). The false spring accompanied a false hope, and a bitter breeze seemed to echo the boy's bitter resentment.

A similar descriptive device occurs in Le Mal. Mauriac, in his effort to portray Fabien's rising interest in Fanny Barrett, notes that "ce pays résiste au printemps comme aux passions un coeur austère"(p. 25). Subtly implied in this phrase is Fabien's struggle to adhere to

his orthodox upbringing and to stifle an increasing curiosity about Fanny Barrett, who differs radically from his childish concept of women. Mauriac is, in a sense, maintaining his use of spring as representing a new experience, but he is paralleling the reluctance of earth to recognize the coming of something new with Fabien's hesitation to satisfy his curiosity about Fanny Barrett. This is but one example of a desire on the part of Mauriac to mold his descriptions to the emotional needs of his characters. Here he portrays the earth as involved in a conscious struggle to resist springtime. The struggle, however, is actually a human one, intensified by the use of a description of the exterior setting which symbolizes resistance with forcefulness, particularly through the comparison to "un coeur austere."

Still another example of Mauriac's use of symbolic nuances is to be found in Genitrix. Here the decline of spring parallels the decline and death of the young Mathilde: "cette nuit murmurante du printemps au declin . . ."⁶ And within this same framework of a dying season and a woman's death, "La faiblesse du vent émouvait à peine les plus hautes cîmes"(p. 55). Even the wind falls,

⁶François Mauriac, Genitrix (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1924), p. 10.

declines in strength, and seems to equate the growing weakness of Mathilde and the increasing difficulty of her breathing. Then the wind dies, the night becomes very still, and Mathilde passes on. As in Le Mal, cited earlier, Mauriac repeats his idea of spring representing youth when he describes the young Mathilde; but in Genitrix the symbol is extended and enriched when the death of spring parallels the death of the young Mathilde.

In Mauriac's descriptions of spring the significant feature, in so far as their descriptive and dramatic value is concerned, is to be found not only in the writer's choice of words, but also in his choice of a point at which to introduce his descriptions. Spring repeatedly accompanies identical situations in different novels. And this tendency may be seen even in those later novels in which extensive use of symbolic description has been abandoned.

Summer

If spring tends to be found in conjunction with youth, hope, or a new experience, summer generally accompanies the crises in Mauriac's early novels.

It is during summer that Claude begins his friendship with the Dupont-Gunthers in La Chair et le sang. Summer marks the entire section of the novel devoted to the development of Claude's love for May and his increasing sense of responsibility for Edward. As summer progresses,

May, Edward, and Claude grow closer together; as it declines, so does their mutual admiration. At the summer's end Claude is alone, the heat of his passion having died with the heat of the season.

Two of the perhaps most effective examples of Mauriac's use of summer to accompany the height of a struggle occur in Préséances. The first is the use of summer to parallel the betrayal of Augustin, which is the central action of the novel. The second is the return to summer as the setting for the psychological struggle which results from that betrayal.

The narrator, motivated by his determination to climb the social ladder, decides to profit from the anonymity of Augustin to do so. He creates a myth to the effect that his friend is of noble parentage and, once having established a feeling of respect for the boy, he makes it a point to be seen in his company frequently, thus giving himself a privileged position in the eyes of his socially prominent friends. He invites Augustin to accompany him when the family goes to spend the summer at Gravette. There, one summer afternoon, simply as a form of diversion, the narrator and Florence persuade Augustin to describe his unhappy past life. While watching Augustin and listening to him, they recognize true sincerity for the first time. There, on the shore at Gravette and in the heat of summer, is fixed

the error and obsession of the writer's and Florence's subsequent lives--the error of having used and injured an honest man. Years later, when some hope of seeing Augustin again seems possible, the narrator remarks of his sister: "A cet instant sans doute voyait-elle comme moi, au delà des années finies, une plage triste sous un ciel accablant où nous avons obligé Augustin à nous livrer le secret de sa vie"(p. 140). In memory she recalls the summer afternoon, and every feature of that distant setting is molded to reflect the tensions and emotions of the characters by such words as "triste" and "accablant," which impose life upon a scene otherwise inanimate. Beyond the use of summer as the exterior setting for the main incident of his novel, Mauriac makes it the time to which Florence and her brother always return in memory to recapture the only meaningful experience of their lives, a glimpse of true sincerity. They are haunted by every aspect of the day when they betrayed Augustin, as witnessed by this passage of reminiscence: "Cependant, la tête levée, les yeux mi-clos, je revoyais la véranda de Gravette, la mer écumeuse confondue avec les lourdes nuées, Augustin étendu dont le vent soulevait les cheveux"(p. 229). The essence of the entire novel is contained in that summer setting of Préséances, a tale of passion and burning sincerity. As in La Chair et le sang, Mauriac concludes the tale with a return to summer.

He abandons his characters in an even more tense struggle as they attempt to live with the haunting realization of their tragic error, the betrayal of Augustin: Florence, partially insane, devoting her energies to the occult sciences in order to forget her past life, her brother, the narrator, trying to adjust mentally to his awareness that man's past actions are often irreparable.

In the final chapter of the novel the narrator describes his feelings as he lies on the shore at Gravette many years after his trip there with Augustin:

. . . je cache ici mon dépouillement. Nudité des murs crépis, stérilité de la plage où il n'est rien que des coquilles vides, un varech sableux, des méduses mortes, horizon vacant où, devant la chute du soleil, ne se défont que les nuages et, parfois, la fumée d'un transatlantique invisible; tout m'enseigne ici le dénuement et je me recrée à l'image de cet aride univers. Souvent, je m'étends, nu, sur le sable où sous les pins si peu réels qu'ils ne donnent aucune ombre: ils entourent mon corps, vivantes torches de résine qui, parfois au soleil d'août, toutes ensemble, s'allument. (pp. 251-252)

Barrenness, sterility, death--these words refer both to the summer setting and to the narrator's past and present life. The scene, which earlier had been highlighted by the burning sun and the rising tension as they listened to Augustin, suddenly changes in accordance with the change within the characters. Summer still accompanies a struggle as it had earlier in the novel, but now the struggle is drained of all forcefulness, and this inertia is emphasized by Mauriac's description of a setting which harmonizes with the feeling

of futility and emptiness which the narrator feels.

The final scene of Préséances is an example of Mauriac's use of description to form a nature-man link or as Henri Simon put it:

Il arrive parfois qu'entre un aspect noté du monde extérieur et les passions qui agitent les personnages, les rapports soient tout contingents: les deux éléments de conscience sont rapprochés fortuitement dans la narration comme ils ont pu l'être dans l'existence.⁷

On only one point can one differ from Henri Simon: instead of chance the available evidence indicates a studied effort to form a link between the exterior world and the characters.

Le Baiser au lépreux is another summer tale in which Mauriac's seasonal symbolism plays an important role. Jean Péloueyre views the morning's coming with repugnance. Darkness is his preferred medium, darkness which can hide his ugliness from humanity. He expresses his feelings one summer morning when he says, "O mon âme, . . . mon âme, dans ce matin d'été plus laide encore que mon visage!"⁸ Throughout the summer the possible tragedy of his forthcoming marriage with the beautiful Noémi weighs upon Jean.

⁷ Pierre-Henri Simon, Mauriac par lui-même (Paris: Aux Editions du seuil, 1953), p. 37.

⁸ François Mauriac, Le Baiser au lépreux (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1922), p. 31.

The marriage takes place and it soon becomes clear that no happiness can result from this union for which Jean is physically unsuited. Summer declines as Jean's hope for happiness declines. Although the marriage of Jean and Noémi occurs in early autumn, the season remains summer in character, oppressively so, with a heat which seems to increase the ugliness of every feature of the wedding, from the ceremony to the subsequent reception. The dreadfully hot night appointed for the consummation of the marriage is the time of Jean's short-lived hope that he might be able to love Noémi; it is also the time of her despair, guilt, and unhappiness. It is a time of ultimate failure for both as they shrink from each other in horror, both oppressed with the realization of their helplessness to overcome their repulsion, unable to alleviate their suffering. In view of Mauriac's tendency to place moments of crisis in a summer setting, it is not surprising that he kept this scene summer-like despite a chronological change to early autumn.

In this same novel summer also accompanies the concluding struggle, the psychological as well as the physical one. Throughout the summer Jean endures the tortures of tuberculosis. Though he has deliberately exposed himself to the disease in order to bring about his death, and in this way escape his misfortunes, his determination wavers when he sees that his young doctor is trying to win

Noémi's affection. He then tries to define his own heart's desire; whether to live and assert his right to Noémi's love, or to accept death as a welcome exit from a life which has proved only a series of insurmountable obstacles, each grounded in futility. The decisive conclusion of Jean's battle is death. And in keeping with Mauriac's use of summer as the setting for crises, it seems natural that the action be so graduated that the decline toward death harmonize with a decline in the summer heat. Jean's death is reserved for another, more consonant season.

Genitrix further confirms Mauriac's representation of summer as the time for crises. In chapter seven occurs the most striking one of the story. Félicité, Fernand's mother, is trying to overcome the domination that her deceased daughter-in-law's memory exercises over Fernand. The weather, though it is only early summer, already is oppressively hot. At the opening of the chapter, "malgré cette matinée déjà ardente"(p. 85), Félicité sees Fernand return from a walk in the garden, and she seizes upon the heat as a subject for drawing Fernand toward her: "Que tu as eu chaud, mon pauvre drôle." (p. 93) Her offer to wipe his brow is refused and Fernand, for the first time, openly accuses her of having killed Mathilde. The battle, a silent struggle, revolves around Félicité's attempt to overcome Fernand's indifference. The summer heat mounts as does

Félicité's anger. She suffers in silence until the day she discovers that Fernand has cut and saved Mathilde's picture from a group portrait made at the time of his wedding, and has discarded the rest, including her picture. Her rage is accompanied by the overpowering heat of summer: "Etouffant, la mère poussa les volets. Le soleil de midi pesait sur le jardin aride." (p. 100) Félicité's pent-up feelings, resulting from Fernand's indifference toward her, suddenly flood to the surface. "Etouffant" seems to summarize her anger at seeing material evidence of Fernand's renunciation in the form of the mutilated picture. The sun weighing upon the external setting, along with the word "aride," gives fullness both to the torture Félicité has known from Fernand's attitude and to the sterility of her life without his love.

The struggle between Mathilde's memory and Félicité's desire to dominate continues throughout the summer. It seems augmented by the ever-increasing heat: "Le vent du Sud brûlait la peau, sentait le pin consumé. Du côté des Landes, le ciel devait être rougeâtre et fumeux. De seconde en seconde augmentait la soif de la terre torturée." (p. 177) As before, the thirst of the earth has its parallel in Félicité's thirst for Fernand's love, as remote from her attainment as water from the parched earth. But an even more outstanding indication of Mauriac's use of symbolic

description is embodied in his choice of "torturée" to describe the earth. This word expresses both Félicité's and Fernand's suffering as well as describes the external setting, and in addition contains such overtones as to form a link between nature and man by attributing animation to an otherwise inanimate setting. In isolation this would be nothing more than a not overly audacious metaphor. However, considering the number of such metaphors, and their consistency, it would appear that something more than lyric description is aimed at. We have here, in context, a description that is both dramatic and symbolic. Or, as Simon has phrased it:

. . . il aperçoit un lien nécessaire, une solidarité vitale, de telle sorte que le décor et l'aventure, le climat physique et le climat moral sont donnés ensemble, s'expliquant l'un par l'autre, dans une totalité à la fois profondément psychologique et intensément poétique.⁹

Autumn

Mauriac usually uses autumn to accompany those scenes in his novels which deal with imminent death or with a decline toward a final state. The decline of spring was a decline of the qualities represented by spring, youth, and hope. The decline of summer paralleled a lull in a crisis or central action. Autumn represents something more

⁹Simon, p. 38.

engulfing, more definitive. This is the season when death is in the air. This is the season for contemplating the future. Death, decline, introspection, all go hand in hand with autumn.

In the opening chapter of L'Enfant chargé de chaînes Jean-Paul Johanet views autumn as a season favorable to his melancholy and to his introspection: "Jean-Paul avait toujours mieux aimé se terrer, dans l'automne pluvieux, au fond des landes qui avaient servi de décor à ses jeux d'enfant." (p. 16) Later, when Jean-Paul tries to devote himself to a life of pleasure and forget his past religious ideals: "Les dernières langueurs de septembre finissant éveillent chez le jeune homme comme chez l'enfant l'angoisse de la rentrée--l'effroi au seuil de la vie inconnue." (p. 104) Still later, Jean-Paul realizes the futility of his attempt to escape from himself. He is aware of the permanence of his past errors on the slate of time. It is autumn, and he wonders why he remains "l'enfant chargé de chaînes." In the concluding chapter of the novel it is autumn, and Jean-Paul reviews his past life. He fully realizes that any further attempt to escape the restlessness from which he suffers would be futile. Autumn accompanies his period of declining hope and seems to emphasize his descent toward a state of helpless resignation.

In La Robe prétexte, the narrator first learns of his

father's death in autumn, and the impact of this announcement forces him to begin serious thinking about his future life. It is also autumn when the narrator first walks through the streets of the city along after dark and feels a growing excitement and curiosity. The suddenness of his realization of true freedom is felt in the description of autumn at this point:

Un brusque vent arrachait les dernières feuilles de platanes comme si le tardif automne voulait achever d'un coup son oeuvre. Il s'était oublié à peindre tendrement les frondaisons, farder la mort des feuillages. C'était l'heure du dépouillement."(p. 125)

In this passage the coming of autumn is not a gradual process, but rather it is an "hour" of sudden change. In the story the boy's experience as he walks alone in the darkened city is completely overwhelming to him, and his sudden sensitivity to the attractions hidden in that darkness is not a gradually created one. All at once he knew what darkness housed.

The death of the narrator's adolescence is the theme of La Robe prétexte. In the final chapter of the novel he realizes the change which has taken place in his life. He designates the moment when Camille rejected his love as the turning point, when he shed his adolescence completely and became an adult. The autumn description which occurs in the final scene enhances the feeling of sadness at his

rejection, and the sadness of the setting so reacts upon the narrator that he hastens his departure from Ousilanne. Leaving Ousilanne symbolizes for the writer the end of his youth and of an environment which had shaped his life, that had been the source of his pleasures, conflicts, and present sorrow:

Un précoce automne s'était appesanti sur le domaine abandonné. . . . Les feuilles pourrissaient dans les allées. . . . La veille du départ après le dîner, il pleuvait sur les feuilles mortes et telle était la nuit que je n'aurais pu me diriger dans les allées." (p. 308)

The premature autumn accompanies the premature transition from adolescence to adulthood. In the description of the setting the rain pours down upon what was already dead while, concomitantly, the narrator adds his regret to a completed chapter of his life and views with anxiety the future which awaits him.

In Le Baiser au lépreux autumn comes after Jean and Noémi have realized the futility of attempting to consummate their marriage. As indicated earlier, the season had been summer-like--hot and dry--during their intense struggle. At the point of their mutual resignation we have a sudden release of rain upon the rooftop: "Le pluvieux automne chuchotait sur les tuiles." (p. 67) The release implied by the sudden rain coincides with the release of sorrow which results from Jean and Noémi's unspoken agreement to cease

their struggle and to recognize defeat.

Later, after Jean has returned from his exile in Paris and has passed through the most tense moments of his struggle to define his desire for life or death, autumn is the season which parallels his steady decline in health: "Il reconnaissait quand, à l'aube, on ouvrait la fenêtre pour qu'il respirât mieux, le parfum de ses tristes retours de chasses aux crépuscules d'octobre." (p. 138) Autumn accompanies the sorrow of Jean's last moments as he hears the familiar sounds of nature for the last time. "Tristes," here, describes Jean as accurately as it does the returning hunters, and thus a certain harmony is created by Mauriac between the hero and the world about him.

In Genitrix the first mention of autumn comes after the season of heat and the clash between Fernand and Félicité. The story enters a period of emotional calm which is reflected by the dying of summer and the coming of autumn. Mauriac inserts a statement which explains the sudden calm by saying that "Dans les pays du feu, les passions des hommes s'accordent à la violence du ciel, mais quelquefois s'apaisent avec lui" (p. 145). Just as Fernand and Félicité endure the most intense moments of anger during the oppressive summer days, their moments of calm occur during a period of seasonal calm. This passage underscores the fact that, at least on occasion, Mauriac

was conscious of a link between nature and man in his novels.

In Le Mal, autumn marked the period of Fabien's meeting with Fanny Barrett in Italy. When he began his affair with her, he promised himself that only later would he attempt to evaluate the results of his debauchery. His thoughts were placed in the form of a description of nature: "Il mesurerait l'étendue des moissons hachées par cette grêle et des pures forêts anéanties par ce feu." (p. 86) It is clear, in context, that he is here referring not to an external setting, but rather to his passions and to the ruins he foresaw if he were to unleash them.

Autumn was in the air and nature was filled with premonitions of death when Fabien indulged in his first affair. As Fabien left Fanny's room: "Un cloître apparut, une margelle, et dans l'azur, ce cyprès unique" (p. 87). The impact of Fabien's action was felt in this single line. For in it were symbolically contained the purity from which he had fallen in the form of the cloister, the depth to which he had morally fallen represented by the well, and the death of his former innocence in the form of the cypress tree, a traditional symbol of death. For Fabien his action was a sin, a fall from a former height, a moral death, and all of these are embodied in the external description.

Winter

In the early novels Mauriac most frequently uses winter to accompany either the occurrence of death or a time of loneliness or isolation. That there are not many winter scenes in the early novels is due to the fact that these works deal primarily with rising action or crisis; not with the culmination of this action.

In La Robe prétexte the narrator is socially obligated to spend a winter of isolation, in mourning, out of respect for a father whom he has never known. He says of the winter, "Ce furent de mornes semaines sans fièvre, occupées de misères d'écolier." (p. 75) Later, after having fallen in love with Camille, the narrator is separated from her throughout another winter--once again the season of isolation.

In La Chair et le sang Mauriac uses winter to accompany Claude Favereau's isolation and despair. Claude has fallen in love with May Dupont-Gunther, but she does not accept his love and plans to marry Marcel Castagnède. Claude's sorrow dulls his whole mental and physical being, and he spends the winter trying to forget May. He is indifferent to nearly everything which goes on around him during this time: "L'isolement de l'hiver, le désœuvrement, le condamnaient à ces moroses délectations qu'il ignorait à l'époque des grands travaux." (p. 174) If

isolation characterizes winter in this passage, it is also, according to Mauriac, the cause of Claude's increased sorrow and depression.

In Préséances, winter accompanies the beginning of Florence's isolation from Augustin. Her only desire is to find where he has gone. Her brother learns that he has left for Africa and the finality of his announcement destroys her will to live. At the same time its effect is felt in the peculiar characteristic noted in the weather: "Tout l'hiver est là déjà bien qu'à peine commencé" (p. 104)

The end of winter marks the end of Jean Péloueyre's life in Le Baiser au lépreux: "Les pluies de l'hiver finissant enserrèrent la chambre ténébreuse." (p. 144) This is the only mention of winter in the novel, and by describing the "pluies d'hiver" as actually enveloping Jean's room, Mauriac seems to foretell the death that is to claim his hero.

Death is again in the air when winter occurs in Genitrix. Fernand's mother had died after a long period of struggle to regain her son's affection: "Elle mourut au déclin de l'hiver." (p. 177) Félicité's death does not bring freedom to Fernand; after a year has passed, he still has failed to adjust to her absence. Winter prevails in the concluding chapter of the novel when Fernand realizes his

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absolute loneliness and unhappiness: "Au jour, le ruissellement de la pluie l'éveilla. Ces matinées ténébreuses de l'hiver, qu'il les haïssait!" (p. 204) His hatred of winter is due to the fact that winter shuts him in with his own loneliness and makes him doubly aware of his helplessness to be anything but what his mother has molded him to be through her unwavering domination of his life.

In Le Mal winter parallels Fabien's isolation both from his school mates as well as from his mother, and stresses this separation as he becomes more deeply involved in his affair with Fanny Barrett. Moreover, as one might expect, winter prevails at the time of the death of Fabien's innocence, the disappearance of his physical purity.

In short, the seasonal symbolism in Mauriac's early novels appears to be as follows: spring represents youth, hope, a beginning, something new; summer and its oppressive heat surrounds the emotional crisis; autumn implies an imminent death, an impending decline, and is regularly accompanied by intensive introspection; winter is the period of death, of loneliness and isolation. Mauriac's use of this symbolism is too subtle, too indirect to be termed allegory; yet it is too regular to be termed chance. It is almost as if we have two worlds--that of man and that of nature--synchronized like some Cartesian clock, so that

one reflects, or better, indicates the same "time" as the other.

CHAPTER II

MAURIAC'S TIME DESCRIPTIONS

Mauriac extends the use of symbolic description beyond the realm of seasonal description to that of time. In certain of his novels this changes according to the demands of the plot. However, most of his novels emphasize one specific period of day, depending upon the major theme with which Mauriac is dealing. For the purpose of examining the time symbolism, the novels under consideration may be divided into two main groups: those in which the scenes of major importance are placed in the evening hours, and those in which they are placed in the early afternoon hours.

One of the most representative novels from the first group is L'Enfant chargé de chaînes. The theme of this work is the gradual disenchantment of Jean-Paul Johanet as he seeks by various means to find some interest in life. The tone of the novel is one of growing depression. The time of day emphasized throughout the novel is evening. The symbolism is at times implied, finally stated, as will be illustrated.

In the opening chapter of the novel, "Jean-Paul travailla jusqu'à l'heure où, devant sa fenêtre ouverte au crépuscule, il regarda le jour mourir et les souvenirs

passé chante indéfiniment comme les flots d'une mer calme?" (p. 85) After this passage of explanation Jean-Paul resumes his reminiscing, for Mauriac endows twilight with such a strong persuasive power toward memory that Jean-Paul can escape its invitation only for a moment. The symbolism Mauriac attached to the twilight hours is repeatedly implied in L'Enfant chargé de chaînes, and ultimately clarified. Since he feels twilight to be most suitable to reminiscence, it is natural that he emphasize this period in the novel, for Jean-Paul's memories of his past were the key both to his behavior as well as to his ultimate disenchantment. At one point in the novel he tries to find satisfaction in sensual pleasures, but his past training haunts his conscience and prevents his success. He tries eventually to explain his disenchantment and succeeds only by recognizing that his past actions will remain a permanent part of him and enchain him in a perpetual state wherein he can know only a "semi-satisfaction." It would therefore appear that Mauriac feels that his choice of time is conducive to the awakening of memories and enhances the theme he desires to develop.

A symbolism comparable to that of L'Enfant chargé de chaînes may be outlined for the other novels of the first group. For instance, the most crucial scenes of Le Mal, La Robe prétexte, and Le Baiser au lépreux are all placed

in the evening. The features which they have in common must be considered before one can come to an accurate conclusion concerning why Mauriac chose this particular time on which to place symbolic emphasis.

To begin with, the theme of each is a death of ideals or of hope--in short, tragic in nature. In Le Mal Fabien's most tense moment of decision occurs the night when he first sleeps with Fanny Barrett. Darkness accompanies an act which, for Fabien, can only be sinful and consequently lead to his unhappiness. In La Robe prétexte the evening hours, when the narrator sheds his adolescence, mark the most important single moment of the novel. His sudden maturity results from his tragic realization that he can never hope to have Camille's love. His entire adult life is saddened by this fact. All of his attempts to escape his melancholy fail: "L'enfant que je fus s'était évanoui au tournant de l'allée dans cette tâche de lune."² A similarly tragic situation occurs in Le Baiser au lépreux when Jean and Noémi spend their first night together as husband and wife, a night of intense and futile struggle for both: "A l'aube un gémissement faible marqua la fin

²François Mauriac, La Robe prétexte (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1914), p. 19.

d'une lutte qui avait duré six heures."³

In Le Baiser au lépreux Mauriac's choice of time was even more meaningful, for Jean Péloueyre had earlier been described as loving darkness because it covered his unattractive body from public view. From his wedding night forward through the novel, the darkness of night he formerly loved becomes a horror which haunts him throughout the day: "Il eût voulu retenir chaque minute et que le soir ne vînt jamais." (p. 61) Night represented for Jean a renewal of his struggle, his guilt, and his shame. From the three novels of the first group, it is apparent that Mauriac most often has chosen night as the time to accompany and vivify tragedy. When, on the other hand, Mauriac desires to create a different ambiance, he tends to choose a different time for this purpose.

Perhaps the best guide to analyzing Mauriac's intended symbolism for his use of the hours of early afternoon in the second group of novels may be found in Simon:

De même on ne peut manquer d'être frappé par la prédilection pour l'été, pour les heures de l'après-midi, soit inexorablement éclatantes et sèches, soit alourdies d'orage prochain: c'est

³François Mauriac, Le Baiser au lépreux (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1922), p. 31.

que cette même force du soleil qui mûrit les raisins sur les côteaux attise les désirs charnels, pousse les âmes à la concupiscence et à la révolte.⁴

This preference is restricted, as was that for the evening hours, to certain themes. When Mauriac wants to develop a theme in which feeling dominates thought, he tends to choose the hours of early afternoon.

A common theme, that of domination and revolt, may be discovered in the three novels of the second group. The theme of La Chair et le sang is that of the domination of the flesh. The theme of Préséances is in a sense the domination of Florence and her brother by social ambitions, and the central event of the novel is their one unconscious moment of sincerity or revolt against these ideals. In Genitrix motherly domination was the theme, along with numerous types of open revolt resulting from that domination. In each novel the time of day emphasized is afternoon.

In La Chair et le sang, Mauriac describes the unconscious feeling of physical pleasure which Claude, May, and Edward all experience from their first summer outing:

O bien-être! Le vol mou d'un oiseau trouble l'azur; l'oblique soleil les oblige de ne plus rien voir du monde qu'au travers de leurs cils rapprochés. Entre l'eau et l'éther, leurs minces corps sont pris. Un poisson saute comme une goutte de mercure! Enfin,

⁴Pierre-Henri Simon, Mauriac par lui-même (Paris: Aux Editions du Seuil, 1953), p. 40.

arrachés au tiède embrassement du fleuve, les jeunes gens envahis d'orgueil physique, gonflent leur poitrine, tendent vers la lumière des bras musculeux qui déjà ne ruissellent plus.⁵

Claude felt a strong desire for May and was helplessly the victim of his feeling. The whole scene which occurred in early afternoon beneath the hot sun, was one in which feeling dominated thought.

Another example of Mauriac's preference for the early afternoon hours is found in Préséances, when Florence and her brother unconsciously forget their social aspirations and become completely absorbed in Augustin's story. This is an unconscious revolt against society which had hitherto bound them to the search of artificial goals. During Augustin's confession their emotions are intensified, and their passions, as suggested by Simon, seem to be ripened by the physical environment.

An even clearer example of Mauriac's choice of early afternoon as a time favorable to revolt is Genitrix. It is in the oppressive heat of a Landais summer noontide that Fernand first openly confronts Félicité with the accusation of her guilt in Mathilde's death. It is at this time of day when "le soleil de midi pesait sur le jardin aride,"⁶

⁵François Mauriac, La Chair et le sang (Paris: Emile-Paul Frères, Editeurs, 1920), p. 68.

⁶François Mauriac, Genitrix (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1924), p. 10.

that Félicité, overcome with jealousy and anger at Fernand's devotion to the dead Mathilde, becomes most enraged. This is the time when Mauriac evidently feels there is a significant correlation between the features of the natural setting and human behavior.

In each of the three novels mentioned there exists at least one of the results Simon attributes to physical climate. In La Chair et le sang there is a suggestion of "les désirs charnels," and in Préséances and Genitrix of "la révolte," whether the revolt is conscious or not. Increased tension and a tendency toward active revolt occur concurrently with the afternoon hours and their oppressive heat. In each of the novels Mauriac presents a theme in which the domination of feeling over thought is of prime importance. And his choice of climatic conditions tends to emphasize the tensions in his characters.

When one is familiar with the principal themes of Mauriac's works it is not difficult to see why little emphasis is placed on morning. Traditionally speaking, morning has usually been thought of as representing a renewal of hope, a freshness, or a beginning. While his novels have moments when hopefulness or happiness prevail, their main import is tragic, and he has chosen times more compatible with the effect he wished to produce. To such an

extent is this so, that his choice seems to reveal a symbolic theory on his part regarding certain times of day.

CHAPTER III

MAURIAC'S USE OF ATMOSPHERE SYMBOLISM

One of the obvious aspects of Mauriac's symbolic description is his use of atmospheric changes to parallel emotional developments in his novels. In each of the novels under consideration use has been made of these variations to accompany a change within the story or to form an interpretive link.

In L'Enfant chargé de chaînes, when Jean-Paul begins to feel great shame over his newly adopted life of dissipation, "la vitre ruisselait comme un visage plein de larmes."¹ This comparison may be a substitution for a reaction still not outwardly expressed or even recognized by Jean-Paul. Shortly thereafter he weeps openly over his self-inflicted unhappiness: "Jean-Paul pleurait doucement, la tête dans son oreiller. L'orage crevait sur la terre aride et sèche." (p. 125) In this passage rain is implicitly equated with expressed sorrow.

Mauriac in La Robe prétexte uses rain in a similar but somewhat more complicated fashion. In the middle section of this work the narrator's cousin, Philippe, comes

¹François Mauriac, L'Enfant chargé de chaînes (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1913), p. 48.

from Paris for a short visit. During his stay Camille repeatedly makes comparisons between her two cousins, each time to the narrator's disadvantage. Saddened by his growing feeling of inferiority, he receives a final shock when one evening Camille is completely indifferent to him. At this point, with the narrator both angered and hurt, he adds: "un orage éclata pendant la nuit. Après un coup plus violent que les autres, les roulements s'espacèrent. J'ouvris la fenêtre, attentif au bruit que faisait l'eau sur les feuillages."² The storm symbolizes Camille's final insult of scorning the narrator. The effect of her action continues to disturb the narrator's thoughts, but diminishes in importance when he remembers that his cousin will be returning soon to Paris. His attention to the falling rain can be understood as exemplifying his concentration on his personal sorrow at that moment.

The use of rain to accompany or symbolize sorrow recurs in the final chapters of the novel when the writer leaves his childhood home for the last time: "La veille du départ après le dîner, il pleuvait sur les feuilles mortes et telle était la nuit que je n'aurais pu me diriger dans les allées." (p. 308) The rain on dead leaves

²François Mauriac, La Robe prétexte (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1914), p. 19.

accurately symbolizes the sorrow of the writer as he looks back on his dead youth. Even the dawn of his new life is described in terms which seem to communicate sadness:

"l'aube grise et mouillée se levait à travers la nudité noire des branches." (p. 308) In addition to sadness there is in this description a feeling of darkness and barrenness which sets the tone of his future life without Camille.

Mauriac's use of rain to accompany sorrow is more extensively developed in La Chair et le sang. In that novel Claude Favereau's first meeting with Edward Dupont-Gunther results in a misunderstanding. Edward orders Claude about as a servant, and does not learn until some time later that Claude has been educated for the priesthood. Claude returns home after this first encounter with Edward and lies awake full of regret and resentment over the treatment he has received. Here occurs a descriptive link between Claude's feelings and nature, a link produced by words which echo earlier events of the day:

Ce soir là, Claude regarda de sa chambre monter un orage: les arbres tous à la fois frémirent; le vent du sud y creusa des houles. Un contrevent claqué, mais dominant la rumeur des végétations et la persistante vibration des insectes, cette même musique qui avait troublé sa sieste emplît la nuit, y mêla comme la voix d'un océan invisible. Le piano se tut, le vent tomba.³

³François Mauriac, La Chair et le sang (Paris: Emile-Paul Frères, Editeurs, 1920), p. 68.

The rising storm parallels the coming of the Dupont-Gunthers to the estate of Lur earlier in the day. The trembling of the trees recaptures the reaction of the peasants of Lur to their arrival. The wind's destruction seems to repeat Edward's destruction of Claude's optimism concerning his future at Lur. The beauty of the music Claude hears blots out his resentment toward Edward. Edward's attitude makes him aware that he might never be able to communicate with the Dupont-Gunthers because of an insurmountable social barrier. His realization takes the form of a statement applied to the external setting: "l'orage n'est pas pour nous, murmure Claude." (p. 43) Thus, the very actors in the Mauriac drama are aware of nature's link to man.

Edward later apologizes to Claude for his rudeness, but the stormy sky does not clear until Claude meets May for the first time in the library at Lur. When he sees her standing beside the window: "Derrière elle un ciel lourd de nuées montrait par des déchirures un métallique azur. La pluie cessait, mais le vent faisait s'égoutter les arbres; les oiseaux avaient leurs voix particulières des fins d'orage" (p. 48). Most of Claude's gloom is forgotten and he is awed by May's beauty. He knows she is socially out of his realm, but her kindly attitude impresses him in spite of this realization, and his mood of depression changes in the same manner as birds change their songs at

the end of a storm.

The return of storms in this novel marks a return of Claude's depression. For instance, in a later chapter of the novel Edward and May leave Claude standing alone in the middle of the living room and they disappear in order to discuss a family crisis together. Claude knows May is expecting a visit from Marcel Castagnède, a possible suitor, and he knows his love for her is endangered by this visit. He feels lonely and sad, not only because he has actually been deserted by his two friends, but because he senses that May will soon leave him forever. The description of a mounting storm breaks in at this point:

D'ailleurs l'après-midi lourd s'emplissait d'un silence et comme d'une immobilité qu'expliquait au sud, là-bas, dans l'encadrement épais et sombre des charmes, cet horizon d'ardoise qui, peu à peu, montait, ternissait l'azur. (p. 84)

The silence and immobility intensify Claude's lonely feeling, and the mounting gray clouds on the horizon seem to suggest the imminent approach of Marcel.

The description of the storm is more broadly developed in a later chapter. May seeks Edward's advice concerning Marcel's visit, but receives no help from him. Her grief at being denied the aid of the only individual to whom she can turn finds its expression in her tears and is accompanied by a change in the already clouded sky: "Une immense nuée orageuse couvrait le ciel; un lourd

souffle s'éleva tout d'un coup."(p. 85) The grayness of the sky becomes complete, and May's sorrow is expressed in her tears over the loss of Edward's affection. The heavy "souffle" of the wind might almost with equal accuracy be applied to May's audibly expressed sorrow.

At this point Claude sees May weeping. He asks Edward the cause of her grief, but is told never to ask questions which do not concern him. Claude is very sensitive to Edward's rudeness and saddened by being so abruptly dismissed. At the moment when both Claude and May have felt the sting of Edward's anger, "des gouttes de pluie s'écrasèrent contre les feuilles; l'odeur de la terre s'éleva" (p. 89). The rain strikes the earth and in reaction the odor arises from the soil. The cause and effect sequence in the description parallel that between Edward and the two other protagonists and once again, a nature-man link is stressed.

Mauriac's use of atmospheric changes in the latter part of La Chair et le sang harmonizes with the emotional development of his characters to such an extent that it appears to be a voluntary attempt at symbolization. One summer morning May kisses Claude for the first time. Her kiss makes him realize how much he loves her and how sad he will always be without her. As if to forecast all of these feelings, immediately after May's kiss: "plus de

soleil, mais un ciel terni qui semblait peser lourdement aux lignes infléchies des côteaux" (p. 126). This darkness suggests the burden of the love which will weigh upon Claude after this incident, and which will lead him to a frank recognition of his long ignored physical desire.

He had earlier imagined that May's religious ideas of love would conflict so greatly with her experience of sexual love that she would seek his counsel. His supposition does not prove true. When he realizes that May adapts well to her marriage to Marcel Castagnède, it is Claude who suffers such pangs of disillusionment that he even considers suicide. But he realizes that the sole cause of his grief lies in his thwarted desire for May's love, not in his concern for her spiritual well-being. The details of his struggle to avoid this admission, and of his final surrender to the truth that he is subservient to "la chair et le sang," are found symbolically depicted in a passage such as:

Sur le marronnier qui l'abritait, la pluie soudain chuchota, le feuillage dru ne laissait passer aucune goutte, toute l'ombre s'emplit de ce chuchotement, la terre en fut comme éveillée, la pluie lui arracha son parfum le plus secret. (p. 198)

Or, in other words, Claude's sudden realization of his desire for May begins to affect the hard shell of mental discipline beneath which he has taken shelter. But in spite of the fact that his entire being is filled with desire, in spite of the fact that his body has been

awakened, he still tries to refuse to recognize the truth: all men are inevitably prisoners of their flesh and blood. Atmospheric descriptions, similar to that above, are widely used in La Chair et le sang. In some cases these passages seem so strikingly symbolic that they could serve as aids in interpreting the otherwise difficult points in the novel. Certain scenes, such as that relating Claude's self recognition, often only hint at the true nature of the psychological struggle occurring, and it takes a closer investigation of the accompanying external description to understand them better.

Mauriac continues his use of atmospheric descriptions in Préséances. One example occurs in the main part of the novel when Augustin is relating his past to Florence and her brother. He has just finished describing his nurse's attempts to acquaint him with religion when he suddenly concludes his story. He did not need any instruction, he said, to understand God for he knew Him through the strength of His enmity, which he felt around him. As if to confirm that belief, the narrator recalls, in looking back, "Je montrai à Florence, du côté de l'ouest, une orageuse nuée et lui dis qu'il serait sage de nous rembarquer."⁴ What

⁴François Mauriac, Préséances (Paris: Emile-Paul, 1920), p. 144.

can be termed a continuation of the symbol of the storm as a manifestation of some characteristic of God is developed immediately afterward. It begins to pour, and Augustin refuses to take shelter with Florence and her brother. Instead, he sits motionless in the boat and seems completely unaware of the deluge. Whether the rain in this scene is meant to be interpreted as an indication of God's presence, or simply as reality, it is significant that Augustin is unafraid to face the rain. Florence and her brother, on the other hand, immediately flee just as they always do before a crisis, whether it consists of facing reality, truth, or danger. They have experienced a moment of true sincerity during Augustin's confession, but they are unable to find the motivation or will to maintain that sincerity in their own lives. They resume their former behavior and continue their fruitless efforts to attain the more obviously valuable goals of society.

In a later scene of Préférences, Mauriac describes in some detail Florence's misery following her realization that she can not live without Augustin. She tries many means of forgetting him, but eventually succumbs to her dejection. The description notes that "Du côté de l'océan, le ciel n'était que ténèbres"(p. 165). The clouds which cover the ocean recall the gloom which engulfs Florence's life without Augustin.

In Le Baiser au lépreux there occurs only one significant instance of atmospheric symbolic description. This is found in the latter portion of the novel when Noémi unsuccessfully opposes Jean's visit to the home of a friend who is dying of tuberculosis. Jean insists on going, even though he is ill, and as Noémi spends the day awaiting his return, she experiences a vague fear. The exterior setting at this point is in agreement with her feeling: "Un orage ternissait le ciel. On eut dit que le silence des oiseaux immobilisait les feuillages."⁵ Out of this complete silence, breaking this tension, there comes the sound of the church bell announcing the death of Jean's friend, and then "de larges gouttes creusaient la poussière, lui arrachaient son odeur des soirs d'orage"(p. 125). The atmospheric release occurs simultaneously with Noémi's learning of Jean's daily visits. Her fear, now confirmed, is therefore more intense. As if to emphasize the import of Noémi's realization, the devastating effect of the rain upon the earth is mentioned here.

Mauriac continues his use of atmospheric description in Genitrix, though to a lesser degree than in his first novels. In one of the early scenes he mentions that "la

⁵François Mauriac Le Baiser au lépreux (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1922), p. 124.

faiblesse du vent émouvait à peine les plus hautes cîmes."⁶
This lack of motion in the setting reenforces the feeling of death in the air, both with reference to Mathilde as well as to the wind. After Mathilde's death Mauriac notes that the wind too had died and that a complete silence now reigned. This harmony between the development of the novel and the description seems to confirm a voluntary symbolic intent: the diminishing wind equated with decreasing vitality.

In the closing scene of Genitrix Mauriac uses atmospheric description to symbolize Fernand's loneliness and sorrow: "Les arbres s'égouttaient dans un silence surnaturel et il n'y avait plus rien au monde que ce bruit calme de larmes." (p. 203) Rain in this quotation is given a specific symbol of expressed sorrow by Mauriac's choice of the word "larmes." Mauriac elaborates on this passage later in the same chapter when Fernand becomes conscious that he is still a prisoner of his mother's life-long domination. As he lies alone in his room he knows true silence for the first time and resumes his depressed mood of the previous evening: "Parce qu'il entendait, comme la veille, les branches s'égoutter interminablement et qu'il n'y avait plus autour de la maison morte que ce bruit calme de larmes

⁶François Mauriac, Genitrix (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1924), p. 55.

peut-être retrouva-t-il son âme de ce moment-là." (p. 215)
Sorrow was interminable for Fernand, and this feeling is built up in the description of the leaves perpetually dripping their tears of rain.

Both in Genitrix and Le Mal one finds examples of Mauriac's atmospheric symbolic description. At a point early in the story Fabien is alone in his room and has just been kissed by Fanny Barrett. He opens the window "et il avait, bien qu'il fût demi-nu, respiré la brume comme s'il eût trouvé de la joie à être mordu par cette nuit de décembre, à être violenté."⁷ These lines might be read in this fashion, if taken in their possible symbolic sense: Clothed only in the innocence of his undisturbed life, Fabien experienced great pleasure in recalling Fanny's kiss. It was pleasant, though it violated all the ideals his mother had instilled in him. The "brume" can be understood as indicating the onset of sin, but Fabien was still innocent of any but a vague feeling which might indicate his attraction to an immoral act.

From the examples analyzed, it is clear that Mauriac repeatedly uses atmospheric description in the early novels with symbolic emphasis: rain and tearful sorrow, storm and

⁷François Mauriac, Le Mal (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1924), p. 51.

disputes, heat and passion. This is the basis of Mauriac's rather traditional symbolism. But what it lacks in originality, it more than makes up for in subtlety and artistry.

CHAPTER IV

UNCLASSIFIED DESCRIPTIVE THEMES

There remains a group of widely varying examples of Mauriac's symbolism which can not be readily classified. This group, in spite of its diversity, includes some of Mauriac's most outstanding work with this technique.

Jean-Paul, in L'Enfant chargé de chaînes decides that he will turn to a life of dissipation and idle amusement in search of peace of mind. The season is autumn:

sur les champs dénudés c'était l'époque des
semailles et les tournolements d'alouettes. Jean-
Paul s'attardait dans ces brumes reconnues: un
fantôme le retenait au seuil des troubles expériences
qu'il voulait tenter¹

In the midst of the barrenness of his life Jean-Paul thinks that perhaps he should turn to an aimless pleasurable existence. The memory of his past ideals fills him with paralyzing inhibitions and prevents him momentarily from taking the all-important initial step in search of diversion. The descriptive passage contains both the feeling of Jean-Paul's hesitancy and the contrast of a forthcoming experience. It is a season for sowing and for the flights of skylarks, both of which imply a certain newness and lightness. But the phantom which restrains Jean-Paul is

¹François Mauriac, L'Enfant chargé de chaînes (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1913), p. 104.

obviously that of his past, as opposed to the frivolous future he faces.

In La Robe prétexte the writer kisses his cousin Camille goodbye before going to Paris, and, while he holds her in his embrace and glories in his love for her, Mauriac has him notice the external setting: "Je me rappelle qu'en cette longue minute au fond de l'azur encadré par la fenêtre, je voyais le croissant de la lune et une seule étoile rapprochés, comme au ciel d'une peinture naïve."² This momentary nearness of two celestial bodies coincides with the love scene, and the tone of the writer's feelings seems to be defined, or at least suggested by Mauriac's choice of the word "naïve" in drawing a comparison in the setting.

In chapter seven of La Chair et le sang Claude stood alone in the garden of Lur watching the car of the Castagnèdes fading in the distance after their visit. He knew that Marcel would soon return and would not leave without May. He said May's name to himself and

alors il pensa au séminaire, à des jours calmes, à cette paix. La nuit sentait les roses mourantes comme la chapelle où il se souvint qu'il restait après les autres; puis il resongea à un ami de sa

²François Mauriac, La Robe prétexte (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1913), p. 104.

quinzième année qui mourut, un soir de juin, dans un grand frémissement.³

Because this passage is apparently so unrelated to the actual events of the story at this point, it seems natural that it should arrest a reader's attention. Once analyzed, it can explain Claude's intuitive sadness at foreseeing that May will disappear from his life: "les roses mourantes, un ami . . . qui mourut . . . un grand frémissement." Claude, it would appear was trying to recapture the religious calm he once had known at seminary. The evening air, he tells us, was scented with dying roses, and he foresaw the end of May's love for him. He recalled a situation which characterized his present and future, that of loneliness. He used to remain alone in the chapel after everyone had left, and he was now left alone thanks to the interruption of the Castagnèdes. Then he thought of the death of a friend, a death which would seem to refer to that of his soon to be destroyed friendship with May. The word "frémissement" appears to describe the effect of that death on Claude almost more than upon the dying person. This passage, perhaps even more than the ones cited earlier in this section, sets the tone of the scene, even though symbolism is not stressed as such. The description tends to

³François Mauriac, La Chair et le sang (Paris: Emile-Paul Frères, Editeurs, 1920), p. 115.

reenforce and highlight certain themes rather than be an end in itself.

In Préseances Mauriac introduces the sea as a symbol of life and gives that image a continuity and development to harmonize with the hero's situation and thoughts. The writer, in describing his life since the memorable experience at Gravette, says that he has maintained his social ties with the powerful sons of society, and that only adherence to a life of recreation enables him to go on living after his betrayal of Augustin:

sans les Fils, je me fusse trouvé seul sur cette plage où Augustin m'avait abandonné, en face d'une mer tentatrice et infranchissable dont il disait que la route écumeuse mène à l'Etre Infini--seul et sans étai, au milieu d'un grand vent de Pentecôte.⁴

Referring to the events of the novel, the writer is not literally abandoned on a shore after Augustin's disappearance. Can the shore refer to the barrenness and sterility of the hero's life after Augustin leaves him? Can the sea which tempts him represent the profundity of nature, of reality, as distinguished from the artificial, insincere society of which he is a part? Can the Pentecostal wind represent the grief of the writer at realizing that he has betrayed Augustin, a grief similar to that of the disciples when they were revisited by Christ at Pentecost? Or it may

⁴François Mauriac, Préseances (Paris: Emile-Paul, 1920), p. 108.

refer specifically to the time when Augustin's sincerity of spirit entered the writer, just as Christ's spirit returned to walk among the disciples on the day of Pentecost after his agony, burial and resurrection. The hero refers to his efforts to escape the memory of Augustin by intensely devoting his time to frivolity. He then goes on to explain that "ainsi font, avec du sable, des enfants accroupis et le dos tourné à la mer"(p. 109). The line strikes a comparison between the writer and a child who ignores the sea and works intensely at a project which will ultimately be ruined by the sea of reality. The writer turns his back on life, and seeks diversions which will eventually prove useless in overcoming the barrenness of his existence. Once again, an apparently banal descriptive line serves to highlight the underlying Mauriac thesis of a man-nature link.

CHAPTER V

THE BASIS FOR MAURIAC'S SYMBOLIC DESCRIPTION

The early novels of Mauriac have been analyzed with a view toward emphasizing the use made in them of symbolic description. There does remain, however, the problem concerning Mauriac's intentions with regard to his style. Though certain symbolic passages cited might appear only fortuitously linked to the characters or to the action, others have unambiguous symbolic value, eg. "larmes" for rain. The common characteristic of Mauriac's descriptions has been their insistence upon a nature-man link throughout the early novels. Assuming that Mauriac purposely wrote his early novels in such a way as to keep the reader constantly aware of a link between man and nature, one might well wonder why he found this desirable.

One possible explanation is that Mauriac wished to re-emphasize facts or events in the novels by giving them a dual aspect. It is also possible that he wished by means of this link to intensify the theme of the stories. There are several statements made by Mauriac which shed some light on this problem. In his Journal of 1932-1939 he noted:

Newman croyait que, si les champs et le ciel nous donnent cette impression de pureté et d'innocence, c'est que la nature fut créée avant l'homme pécheur et qu'elle n'a pas de part au crime d'Adam. Mais depuis le temps que l'homme vit de la terre, s'y

couche pour dormir ou pour pleurer, jusqu'à ce qu'il s'y abîme et retourne en poussière, la nature est devenue humaine; elle est faite de la cendre du péché humain et ne ressemble en rien à ce qu'elle était lorsqu'elle naquit dans la pensée de Dieu. Son seul aspect trahit d'abord les besoins de l'homme: ces blés et cette vigne, c'est notre faim et notre soif, et plus que notre soif: notre inguérissable désir d'ivresse, de sommeil et d'oubli.¹

Aside from the possible metaphysical intricacies of this statement, it does reveal that Mauriac felt at the time of this note that nature actually harmonized with man's actions and reflected his needs. He further clarified his idea on this subject by adding that:

La seule campagne où nous puissions supporter de vivre a été notre confidente, notre complice. Elle a pris fidèlement le visage qu'exigeait notre joie ou notre peine. Elle s'est modelée selon notre coeur; elle a épousé sa forme. . . . La nature a été pénétrée de notre humanité, au point que ses épreuves deviennent physiquement nôtres (Journal, p. 33).

This passage, as well as the previous one, clearly demonstrates his belief in nature's "humanity." His early works serve as evidence that the above passages from his Journal are convictions, and not mere ideas incidental to the relation of a single event. Nature has been shown in the analyses furnished earlier as being penetrated with man's humanity and vice versa. Cormeau, too, feels that Mauriac's

¹François Mauriac, Journal (1932-1939) (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1947), p. 32.

works exemplify this belief:

On dirait volontiers que François Mauriac provoque une invasion de l'âme par la nature; il ouvre une brèche dans le drame intérieur et le vent, les eaux du ciel et de la terre s'y engouffrent pour s'y associer, y participer--bien mieux: pour que l'image se substitue au terme psychologique.²

In short, she is aware of the symbolic nature of many of his descriptions.

The major difficulty in accepting the statements from Mauriac's Journal as a key to his symbolic description arises when his later works are examined. These later novels, beginning with Thérèse Desqueyroux (1927), and continuing to his most recent novel L'Agneau (1954), show a progressive diminution of the use of symbolic description, though never to the extent of complete abandonment. Examples of this type of symbolism may be found in these later novels, but never is it used extensively enough throughout a single novel to allow an analysis of the type performed with the earlier ones. One question that immediately arises is: How can one explain Mauriac's progressive rejection of this technique?

One possible explanation is that his later novels are of a radically different type. The early ones reflect a strong Barrès influence, as noted by Brodin in his

²Nelly Corneau, L'Art de François Mauriac (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1951), p. 333.

discussion of L'Enfant chargé de chaînes: "La grande inspiration était celle de Barrès, le Barrès artiste du Culte du Moi et aussi des Déracinés."³ They usually treat one over-all theme, such as disenchantment in L'Enfant chargé de chaînes, or the conflict between religious and sexual love in La Chair et le sang; but they are not as complex as some of the later ones, such as Thérèse Desqueyroux. But a still more forceful reason for Mauriac's change of style can be uncovered from other articles in his Journal.

In July 1934, while watching children play along the seashore at the villa of Saint-Dominique, he writes: "Rien encore ne leur découvre le complot de l'eau, de la terre et du ciel pour faire croire aux enfants que le bonheur existe" (Journal, p. 157). His cynicism in supposing that the water, earth, and sky conspire to deceive the children into thinking happiness is obtainable in the same way as a material object, would seem to indicate that he changed his earlier way of thinking. He no longer seems quite as certain of nature's humanity as before. Though he had often described nature as being linked to man and reflecting his needs, he here adds a note of regret that nature

³Pierre Brodin, Présences contemporaines (Paris: Editions Debresse, 1954), p. 19.

should seem human while in reality it is otherwise. The implication is that the nature-man link of an earlier period is but a figment of a childish imagination.

In a still later article in his Journal, Mauriac refers to nature in these terms:

A vingt ans, le miroir double de la terre et du ciel réfléchissait notre coeur et nous aidait à le connaître. Nous ne lisions pas directement en nous-même: la nature seule, avait le pouvoir d'orchestrer nos voix intérieures, et le monde était à nos yeux le révélateur de l'homme. A cet âge où la tristesse est une passion, nous ne la goûtions pleinement qu'à certaines heures du déclin de l'été lorsque les sons, les odeurs nous la rendaient délectable.(pp. 163-164)

Again, Mauriac is describing the nature-man link as realized by youth and as interpreted by youth. Viewed in this fashion the link is a reality, a necessary medium for the revelation of feelings and thoughts otherwise beyond comprehension or expression.

A new outlook toward nature can be found in Mauriac's undated Journal article "Adieu Paniers." After defining the attitude of youth toward nature in the opening paragraphs, Mauriac makes the startling observation that "nous n'avons plus besoin maintenant de ce langage chiffré; la séparation de la nature et du coeur marque la fin de la jeunesse"(p. 164). He is referring to himself as among those who have ended their youth and evidently considers himself as having separated his heart from nature. He

continues:

Nous nous passerons d'interprète, désormais. C'est fini de croire que les nuits d'été sont à la mesure de l'amour, et que le vent transporte dans les branches le gémissement des hommes. (p. 164)

This statement categorically rejects Mauriac's earlier insistence upon the necessity of nature as man's interpreter. One might reasonably ask: Has he substituted anything for this now no longer favored technique?

Mauriac writes in "Adieu Paniers":

La nature nous est nécessaire comme le mensonge. Mais nous avons passé l'âge du mensonge; et la jeunesse est loin où nous avons recours à ces transpositions bucoliques, à ces prolongements de notre coeur dans le monde végétal, qui aidaient Maurice de Guérin à ne pas mourir." (p. 165)

He seems to have found a more convincing substitute for the sympathetic quality in nature which he now realizes is deceptive. His use of "mensonge" to characterize nature's purpose only hints at the deceptiveness which he defines more simply in another Journal selection entitled "Songes d'un jour d'été." He says there:

C'est nous-mêmes qui mentons à nous-mêmes. S'il n'y avait pas d'oeil humain pour contempler cet horizon, ni d'oreilles pour entendre la mer assoupie, son murmure ne serait pas un hymne à la joie; les apparences ne contiennent d'humain que ce que nous y avons mis. . . . Le paysage n'est qu'une toile tendue où nous projetons notre coeur. (pp. 157-158)

Here Mauriac is specifically explaining what he only hinted at earlier when he said that nature has become human only

from the time that man made it so. Here he returns to his earlier statement: nature is human only to the extent that it seems so in the mind of man. The lie or deception which it offers youth, then, is an enticement to believe that the humanity with which it is endowed is innate. Since Mauriac describes the ideas of youth using the plural "nous," it may be assumed that he was a party to their beliefs and that he changed his ideas only at maturity. The symbolic description found in the early works, it would now appear, is more the result of Mauriac's own youthful belief that nature was man's interpreter, than the result of an attempt to use a technique common to the early romantics who sought to personify nature. Another factor which would seem to emphasize that the early novels are a product of the time when Mauriac believed that nature was human is to be found in his insistence that age has enlightened his thinking.

In "Adieu Paniers," Mauriac speaking from the point of view of a mature man says, "La nature, pour l'homme mûr, est décidément hors d'usage: magasin d'accessoires qui ne serviront plus. Nous refusons de nous attendre comme autrefois à son propos"(p. 165). This remark, along with those relegating his earlier beliefs to a distant past, seems devastating enough when opposed to his first conviction that nature was indeed human. But Mauriac goes on to explain that he used to hate an old man who could see in

nature no beauty except in the form of its material potential. Mauriac claims that with maturity he came to sympathize with the old man who used to say, "Ce n'est pas le sang de Cybèle qui gonfle mes grappes. . . ."(Journal, p. 166) He too now could see nothing but the surface appearance of nature's forms and would no longer try to impart to it human characteristics.

But since Mauriac professes to have changed his ideas concerning nature, it might be asked why he continues to use symbolic description in some of the later novels. The Journal is once more useful in considering the various stages of his stylistic development. At one point in the selection "Adieu Paniers" Mauriac is describing his complete indifference to nature since his belief in its human quality has changed, when suddenly he exclaims: "Ecrirai-je ainsi longtemps contre mon coeur?"(p. 166) He then remarks that the evening during which he is writing is very beautiful, and continues:

Lorsque nous croyons nous être retirés du jeu et que depuis des années l'immense plaine n'est plus cette toile tendue où notre jeune coeur projetait ses passions, l'esprit n'en émeut pas moins les branches des tilleuls . . . Et vois: la lumière de six heures, ce soir, révèle dans la moindre feuille une éternité pressentie, que nos pauvres mains ne peuvent pas saisir. (Journal, p. 166)

Despite his supposed indifference, Mauriac is still influenced by his surroundings. He still is sensitive to

something in nature. But he explains its meaning as something quite different from "le mensonge" of his early years when he says, "La vraie nuit n'est pas cette nuit charnelle, interprète et complice du désir"(Journal, pp. 166-167). He continues: "Délivrée de nos passions, ne crois pas que la terre soit devenue ce limon aveugle, ni que les arbres ressemblent à des créatures sans visage"(p. 167). Age, he insists, can not completely change one's ability to find some sort of satisfaction from nature. He concludes that "Comme au temps de l'adolescence, septembre est toujours attente et pressentiment . . . mais ce n'est plus la pauvre aventure humaine que nous attendons"(p. 167).

The major value of these Journal selections lies in the fact that they reveal a logical explanation and development of his style with regard to symbolic description. They indicate that at one time he believed nature to be human and to reflect humanity's desires and needs. Then may be seen his marked change of tone regarding the essence of nature's human quality. He deemed it human only in so far as man sees it in that light. He used to feel that nature was necessary as an interpreter, later this was no longer so. The Journal shows Mauriac's replacement of his youthful need for nature by a capacity to embrace reality. Nature now represents something beyond human existence. His attitude appears to defy further explanation; but the

important point is the existence of this attitude rather than its essence. It is the result of his maturity, according to Mauriac, and the cause of a marked change in his style as seen in the gradual diminution of symbolic description in his novels.

The fact that traces of symbolic description are found in even Mauriac's later novels is probably indicative of his continuous efforts to define his attitude toward nature with exactitude. Since he writes principally of youth, he has understandably embodied his early beliefs in his characters. They move thus in a setting which reflects the link between man and nature as seen by youth. Significant as an illustration of this fact is Le Mystère Frontenac, written in 1933; for from among the novels of his later period, it most nearly equals the early novels treated in this study as far as its symbolic descriptions.

One might ask: why this one resumption of his early stylistic tendencies? Le Mystère Frontenac is principally autobiographical in nature and treats his early life in more detail than any of his other novels. It represents the period of time during which Mauriac himself lived in the type of world which he was later to create for his early novels. Yves Frontenac, the central character of the novel, reflects perfectly Mauriac's youthful belief in

nature's human qualities as described in his Journal:

car nous dormions contre la terre vivante, nous nous penchions sur son sommeil de la deuxième heure, et dans l'immense vibration des grillons, des sauterelles et des cigales, nous étions attentifs à ses balbutiements. . . . Ainsi mêlions-nous sans effort le plus secret de notre vie à la secrète vie du monde. (Journal, pp. 27-28)

Le Mystère Frontenac should be viewed more as an autobiography rather than as a sharp deviation from Mauriac's later period.

CONCLUSION

In this study an attempt has been made to point out and define the type of description used in Mauriac's pre-1925 novels. For the purpose of close scrutiny the descriptive material of these novels has been categorized under seasonal, time, atmospheric, and miscellaneous headings.

Mauriac repeatedly chose a particular season to accompany certain types of action or emotional development within his early novels. From the pattern of recurring symbolic usage found in these novels, it is clear that he uses each season in the following general situations: spring for youth, a beginning of a new experience, and hope; summer for the major crisis of a novel; autumn for imminent death or a decline toward a status quo; and winter for death, a time of isolation, and loneliness. Little variation is found in his adherence to the use of these seasons as descriptive accompaniment for the types of action mentioned above.

Further, Mauriac has given his own symbolic values, which coincide with certain themes, to the time descriptions which are found in his early novels. When the theme treats disenchantment and reminiscence, Mauriac emphasizes the twilight hours. When, on the other hand, the theme is tragic in nature, the time emphasized is evening. His use of the early afternoon hours is restricted to themes which

deal with domination and revolt, regardless of the type of revolt, and usually a domination of feeling over thought. With the exception of his first novel, L'Enfant chargé de chaînes, 1913, Mauriac's early novels fall into two distinct time groupings depending on which theme he wishes to develop. Most often his symbolic intentions are only implied, but occasionally they are stated clearly enough to arrest the attention of even a casual reader.

Throughout the early novels atmospheric descriptions recur in such specific patterns as to warrant the conclusion that Mauriac also attached symbolic significance to this type of phenomena when he wrote his early novels. Rain accompanies sorrow. Clouds accompany impending trouble, danger, or sorrow. Storms accompany surges of action and violent reactions in the characters.

Other types of description, though varied in nature, lend themselves to an interpretation as extensions of the character's feelings into the exterior setting. These descriptions often offer a key to the explanation of feelings and conflicts otherwise not clear.

Mauriac's use of symbolic description is essentially limited to his pre-1925 novels. This is true because these novels deal mainly with adolescents who are expressions of Mauriac's own early belief in a link between nature and man. The change in his style after this period is attributable

both to his maturity as well as to different heroes, different especially in age. The fact that he continues to use symbolic description to a limited extent is due to his lasting assurance that nature will always be of necessity to man even though man's needs may change with age.

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APPENDIX

Brief Resumes of the Early Novels Studied in the Dissertation

L'Enfant chargé de chaînes

The central figure of this novel is Jean-Paul Johanet who seeks to free himself from the listlessness and dissatisfaction with life from which he suffers. From the opening chapter, he senses that the rigid discipline of Catholicism to which he adheres and which he encourages his friends to follow, has become inane. He finds no joy in relating to others what he realizes has been a too easy victory over non-existent temptations. He can not concentrate on his studies any longer and seeks some more interesting pursuit. He tries in turn: affiliation with a social action group, total dedication to debauchery, and finally, love. At the conclusion of the work he is still "l'enfant charge de chaînes," all of his attempts having failed. His disenchantment remains, and to it has been added guilt for the abuses he has made of time and of friendships. However, Mauriac leaves the reader with the impression that Jean-Paul's recognition of failure is perhaps his first step toward the freedom which he seeks.

La Robe Prétexte

The adolescence of the narrator, Jacques, is the subject of the novel. His early life is described in some detail in order to contrast this period with his later

experience. Having been reared solely by women, and having as his principal companion his cousin Camille, whom he admires greatly, this was scarcely to prepare him for the banal yet crucial experience that occurred on his 15th birthday: He is allowed to walk home alone, that night, from the priest's residence. This is sufficient to make him realize the potentialities of liberty, liberty from his guardians and from the routine life to which he is accustomed. He is lured by the darkness of the city at night and longs to know the secrets he is sure are hidden therein.

After Jacques becomes aware of his inadequacies, boredom and restlessness increase. Until his sophisticated Parisian cousin, Philippe Ducasse, comes to visit, he suffers from extreme depression as a result of his stifling surroundings. Philippe, in competing with Jacques to make a favorable impression on Camille, makes him doubly aware of his immaturity. But when Philippe tries to kiss Camille, her similarity to Jacques becomes apparent, for she is bewildered and runs to the latter for comfort. From this time on, Jacques is intent upon gaining her affection. Unfortunately, his efforts are thwarted by the interference of well-meaning relatives, Catholic priests, and nuns.

However, when it would at last seem that Jacques is in a position to command Camille's love, she rejects him with finality, saying she will one day marry a mature man,

if she marries at all. At this point the sense of the title becomes clear: the "robe prétexte" is the Roman robe of adolescence which is eventually exchanged for the robe of adulthood. The novel concludes with the narrator a prey to his sorrow at Camille's rejection~~which~~ incident, he feels, has given him the true realization of the seriousness of maturity.

La Chair et le sang

Claude Favereau, after giving up his studies at the seminary, returns to the estate of Lur where his family has farmed as tenants for years. There, he meets Edward and May Dupont-Cunther, wealthy protestant children of a widower who has just purchased this estate. Though the newcomers are at first aloof, Claude soon becomes their close friend, and indeed falls in love with May. He realizes, however, the social and religious barriers that bar his path.

May, disturbed by her father's plot to deprive her of an inheritance, decides to become a Catholic and to marry a certain Marcel Castagnède, not because she loves him, but rather in order to have a refuge from the confusion of family problems with which she is faced. Claude is overcome with grief at this latter decision, which he feels will shatter her religious ideal of love. The crisis is centered in Claude's struggle to stabilize his emotions, to

resolve the conflict between his grief and his love, between his love and his training. He resigns himself to a life of physical labor at Lur, hoping to channel constructively the energy of his emotions.

Edward Dupont-Gunther, in the meantime had fled to Paris taking Edith Gonzales to be his mistress. She soon tires of Edward and leaves him. After a period of aimless drifting, he sends a note to Edith and to Claude threatening suicide unless they come immediately. Both hasten to his side, but he dies before they arrive, a victim of an ever increasing disenchantment with life.

Préséances

This novel is primarily a satire of the social climber, and of the ridiculous conventions to which social aspirants will adhere. The story is told by a narrator who describes how he intentionally deceived a childhood friend, Augustin, for the purpose of furthering his own social aims. Benefiting from the anonymity of Augustin's past, the narrator spreads rumors to the effect that Augustin is of noble birth. After having in this fashion, successfully created an aura of admiration around the orphan, the narrator adopts him for his closest companion and even invites him to spend the summer at Gravette in his company and that of his sister, Florence.

It is at Gravette that Florence and her brother

become the victims of their curiosity about Augustin's past. Realizing what they desire of him, he describes his sordid childhood, that of an illegitimate son of a Polish woman, who died from guilt over her adultery, and of a fanatically atheistic father. Augustin's story charms his interlocutors not only because of the exotic details involved, but perhaps more because of his sincere, almost naive recital. Shortly thereafter he leaves Gravette without warning and does not return for twelve years, at which time age has so disfigured him that Florence will not admit that she recognizes him.

The author and Florence never regain their former complacency amid their hypocritical attempts to succeed in society. The conclusion shows them the dejected victims of their struggle to overcome their betrayal of Augustin. Although they have received all of the prestige which society can bestow upon them, they have lost the one person who might have been a sincere friend.

Le Baiser au lépreux

Jean Péloueyre, who was born disfigured and deformed, is resigned to his role as a source of ridicule for the whole village. He goes out only during the siesta hours, and always seeks darkness to cover him from sight. But his parents chose the beautiful Noémi Artiailh to be his bride, certain that "on ne refuse pas le fils Péloueyre!" As the

wedding day nears, Jean's hopes waver for though he thinks of how lucky he is, he cannot forget he is unsuited to marriage. Noemi, subservient to her parents' wishes, is horrified at the prospect of marrying Jean.

The consumation of the marriage is an impossibility. Noémi's repulsion and his awareness of her feelings prohibit any physical expression of love. Noémi fulfills her domestic duties as a wife, but her life with her husband becomes merely coexistence. A trip to Paris for Jean is suggested by the village priest, supposedly for the completion of a history he is writing, and actually to improve Noemi's waning health. Slowly sinking into an oblivion of dissipation, he is recalled to reality by a letter from the priest who urges him to return. It seems that Noémi had confessed to some vague temptation. Specifically, she was guilty of feeling a certain attraction to a young doctor who made it a daily habit to pass her window and wave to her.

Jean's absence had improved Noémi's health and dimmed her memory of his ugliness. His return, therefore, is all the more cruel. There is no change in marital relations; on the contrary, their mutual suffering increases. Jean eventually strives to contract tuberculosis from a friend, and finally succeeds. After a long period of physical anguish, intensified by his awareness that Noémi is in love with the young doctor, he dies. His last days are doubly

painful because of Noémi's sudden display of affection toward him, affection he knows is solely pity, and from which he shrinks.

Three years after Jean's death Noémi has an opportunity to regain the interest of the young doctor, but when she sees him pass she runs down the road out of sight until, exhausted, she throws her arms around "un chêne noir qui ressemblait à Jean Péloueyre."

Genitrix

This is basically the treatment of a well known theme, the tyranny of a mother's love. Félicité Cazenave has unwaveringly ruled her son's life and jealously preserved his love for herself. As the novel opens we see her deliberately refusing to go to the aid of Mathilde, Fernand's wife, who is suffering from complications following a miscarriage. Mathilde dies unattended and unaided as Félicité walks by her room pretending not to notice that her breathing is becoming increasingly difficult.

Fernand's conflicting reactions to his mother are developed throughout the central portion of the novel. He only realizes his love for Mathilde, and his failure as a husband, when she is no longer alive. Mathilde's death also prompts him to consider for the first time the true character of his mother. He shows his outrage and resentment by fanatical devotion to Mathilde's memory and by

studiously ignoring his mother. Félicité, jealous and disturbed by this unaccustomed display of initiative on her son's part, wastes away and dies.

The final section of the novel treats the continuing influence of Félicité on Fernand's life. Not only can he not avail himself of his new found freedom; he is in addition paralyzed by his loneliness and by the new experience of being free to act. When placed in a position of decision regarding the protection of his inheritance, he shows the enduring effects of Félicité's tyranny. He assumes her character and tone and banishes even a life-long, faithful servant (Marie de Lados) from his home. Overcome with grief at the realization that he is a prisoner of the personality with which his mother endowed him, he sits upon the servant's bed in her deserted room and sobs over his absolute loneliness. Later, Marie de Lados returns to lay her hand upon his brow in a gesture which is apparently symbolic of his great need for womankind to guide his aimless life.

Le Mal

This is the story of Fabien Dézaymeries' early life from his childhood through the devastating consequences of his first illicit love affair. Both his early training as well as his later experience had one thing in common: their mysterious element. From the religious atmosphere in which his mother nurtured him, it was the mystery of religion

which attracted Fabien. Later, it was the mystery of love and of sin which attracted Fabien to Fanny Barrett, a woman he knew to be immoral and whom his mother had banished from the Dézaymeries home. Much more important than the central incident, Fabien's affair with Fanny Barrett, is the treatment given his psychological struggle to avert temptation, and his torture at yielding. Fabien cannot calmly reconcile his behavior with the religious ideals instilled in him from birth. As he recognizes no intermediate ground between Heaven and Hell, so can he not keep Fanny Barrett for his mistress and at the same time ignore the twinges of conscience due to his strict moral training. Although he ultimately leaves Fanny and returns to the setting of his childhood, he has achieved only a material victory, for spiritually he feels himself crushed by his guilt over his past actions: the betrayal of his mother's confidence, the betrayal of Fanny's love for him, and betrayal of the ideals he had been told would bring him happiness.

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