

A CHARACTER STUDY OF MAURIAC'S THERESE

By

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PREFACE

The character delineation by which François Mauriac is best known and highly respected in the world of letters is Thérèse Desqueyroux. It is felt that Thérèse played no small role in helping this contemporary novelist merit membership in the Académie Française, a most distinguished and enviable literary position for French authors. An examination of her story reveals his complete mastery of his own style, his skill as a creator of character and his expertness in the matter of modern novelistic technique. The most important element, however, is that of character, which being faithfully drawn is substantially effective. Thérèse is simultaneously great and small, strong and weak, lovable and contemptuous, and almost always enigmatic.

One of the most prominent features in her portrayal is the purpose and intent with which Mauriac fashions her. His style is so subtle that the reader is hardly aware of Thérèse being a religious advocate. The theme of her existence is best set forth by the comparative but lesser treatment of another character, her husband, who bores her incessantly with his uneventful life and his self-interest. In fact, his very manner drives her to drastic action which is followed by incidents and discoveries about herself that result in life-long speculation.

The writer wishes to record here the pleasant obligation of acknowledging, with deep and sincere thanks, all who have made it possible for her to make this study, and especially her advisers, Dr. Richard E. Bailey and Dr. William Newton

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G.H.G.

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A CHARACTER STUDY OF MAURIAC'S THÉRÈSE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

François Mauriac tells us that every intelligent man as well as every critic wishes to know something about the author whose works he reads. As this study is concerned primarily with tracing the life, from its youth through its decline, of a character found in five of Mauriac's works, it is imperative that one be conversant with his life in order to fully appreciate and understand or even gain a synoptic comprehension of the character to be studied. If not provided with this information, one might easily overlook the underlying significance of the Thérèse novels or fail to perceive the results produced thereupon by the author's religious and environmental restrictions and the introspective disclosure in his masterful psychological treatment.

As we follow the heroine, Thérèse, through several emotional crises and a series of activities, we see her evolve genuinely humane as she experiences successively temptation, sin, renunciation, confession, humility, and possible conversion. Thérèse has been called criminal, sinister, degenerate, monstrous, and certainly, one of the most evil of all François Mauriac's characters, one by which he will be long remembered. She is admirable (in the hands of Mauriac) as the prey of God, parading her sin across the pages of the first novel entitled Thérèse Desqueyroux, and wandering aimlessly across the pages

of the last four works, three of which represent attempts to "sound" the obscure periods in her life, Ce Qui Était Perdu, Thérèse et le Médecin and Thérèse à l'Hôtel, and the last, La Fin de la Nuit, where we see her aged, frustrated, tormented, subsequently seeking the solace which (according to Mauriac) issues only from God, His mercy, eternity, or death.

Further, it is the purpose of this study to reveal the Mauriacian philosophy, to expose the techniques of expression peculiar to him, and to point out these aspects as far as they are applicable to and affect the character of Thérèse. By no means is it an easy task to ascribe to Mauriac a specific point of view, so multifarious are the factors that may be attributed to his artistic talent. That which imparts his superior strength and importance as an artist to the researcher is (1) his attachment to his environment and his admitted rebellion against this milieu, (2) his religious convictions, (3) the psychological treatment of his subjects, (4) his use of the raw and bitter truth as a tool, (5) his natural inclination toward pessimism and the exposure of evil, (6) his desire to remedy social corruption, and (7) his deft prescription for the remorseful and restless sinner.

François Mauriac was born October 11, 1885 in the city of Bordeaux, France, the youngest of five children of a family of wealthy landowners and vinters. He had the misfortune of not having known his father, a free-thinker, who died when Mauriac was twenty months old. Thus four boys and one girl were left to be reared by the widowed mother who sought refuge

with her own mother, and François was brought up by these two pious women in a rigid Catholic atmosphere. His youth was passed in the country of the Landes of Gascony, a region in the southern part of France near the Pyrénées, amid rich pine forests, vineyards, and under a blazing sun.

All his formal education was directed by the church. At the age of five, he was given into the charge of the Marianists at the institution of Saint-Marie and later he attended the Catholic College of Grand-Lebrun. The Catholic doctrine has been profoundly and permanently impressed upon his mind and spirit; that is, it became apparent in his early life.

" Le terrain était préparé, d'ailleurs, chez l'enfant, par une sensibilité fondamentale; une sensibilité pointilleuse, susceptible, sans cess alertée, à la fois réfrénée et jaillissante, irritable et contractée, ombrageuse avant tout. Le grand romancier catholique est resté, dans une large mesure, le chrétien anxieux qui, dans le vestibule de l'institution des Frères où il faisait ses études, s'appliquait à éviter les lozanges noirs du carrelage, signes de perdition, pour ne mettre ses pas que dans les carreaux blancs, indices de salut." ¹

Religion, then, is the first major limitation with which the author must reckon. The Catholic faith has certain exigencies which ordinarily would limit the artistic activity of its novelists. The truths that a novel supports or expresses must conform to its dogmas. Although one is safe to say Mauriac is chained to his religion and that he probably will never be entirely divorced from its doctrines, he has

¹ Pierre Brodin, Les Écrivains Français de l'Entre-Deux-Guerres, p. 207.

an amazing freedom of thought which is manifested throughout his writing.

" I belong to that race of people who, born in Catholicism, realize in earliest manhood that they will never be able to escape from it, will never be able to leave it or re-enter it. They were in it, they are in it, and they will be within it for ever and ever. They are inundated with light; they know that it is true. But for myself, I remained attached to the church as narrowly as a man to this planet; fleeing from it would have been as mad as trying to flee from this planet. I remember with what ardour I set about, at the age of sixteen, proving to myself the truth of a religion to which I know myself bound for all eternity."²

Although he may be categorized as a Catholic novelist, his position is nevertheless unique in that he is not pietistic. He does not resort to didactic methods or proselytism. He is an artist and in the true sense of the word loses and finds himself in his art.

" His books testify to the effortlessness and disinterestedness of true art: the appearance of effortlessness which is the final stamp and achievement of labor; the stark value of disinterestedness which is unmeasurable and which assures life to a work of art in making it independent of the artist and of the artist's philosophy."³

It is, indeed, in his works we find the author, and this is to be expected with a man who believes that writing is a method of making oneself obvious. He substantiates his contention that fiction does not lie. " It half opens on a man's life a tiny door, through which glides, free from all control, his hidden soul ".⁴ Perhaps this is why his memoirs

² Matthew Hoehn, Catholic Authors, Contemporary Biographical Sketches, p. 518.

³ Wallace Fowlie, Clowns and Angels, p. 51.

⁴ Hoehn, op. cit., 519.

cease with his youth, a youth which was sad and uneventful, a little pathetic perhaps. He tells us of his solitary childhood that was never gay or carefree like that of other children of his age. Religious preoccupation did not cause his disposition for melancholy.

"Pourquoi donc, écrit Mauriac, " étais-je un enfant triste?" Ce serait fou d'incriminer la religion: elle me donnait plus de joies que de peines... Bien loin que la religion ait entenebre mon enfance, elle l'a enrichie d'une joie pathétique."⁵

That he paints himself in his works however obscurely, is comprehensible. What doubt can there be that a gloomy childhood, definitely religious, could influence his future literary efforts? The real questions to be answered are: To what extent and how could such a background affect his ability to produce? Could he avoid inserting a superfluous amount of it in his works? Not having been able to weigh conflicting religious beliefs and opinions and consequently arrive at positive conclusions, not having experienced conversion, his faith being imposed on him since birth, would he be able to surmount his subjective position, to conceal his penchant for the ideal?

Environment is the second major factor which imposes its limitations on the author. "More so than any other single influence, or at least equally with that of religion, Bordeaux is in his bones."⁶ Early in his literary career, he went

5. Brodin, op. cit., p. 206

6. Elsie Pell, In Search of the Infinite, p. 13

to Paris where he has spent much of his time since. But he does not pretend to be Parisian or to enjoy living there. He retains moral contact with his native Bordeaux, the province that continues to be the primary source of his observation. This confinement to local area contributes greatly to the unity of action in his Therese novels, yet it has its disadvantages. When his characters move from the region he knows best they become mere shadowy creatures. His observation of Paris is frequently insufficient; his Parisians are usually superficial. But this proves to be of some value, for his urban characters, young women avid for pleasure, gigolos, frequenters of the grand bars, make more valid the provincial figures, plainly etched, solid, crude, and of a tenacious veracity. He has studied the world of the bourgeois, the country squires, the small farmers, large and small families, folks simple or complex and mixed in life. This gives depth and substance to his work. He has remembered his origin and has evoked the countryside of his Gascony. He has acknowledged that no drama remains in his mind if he does not imagine it to be in the places he has known and lived. That is why he does not condemn himself to describe an environment which he does not know well. This fidelity to his environment has its counterpart in a willful ignorance of the exterior world.

The thread of evil is securely woven in the pattern of his novels. However, one is lead to believe that it exists because it will reveal more clearly and beautifully the rich-

ness of the promised contrasting good which goes to make his work more effective in its appeal. Evil prevails for him in every phase of life. This noticeably does not exclude sacrosanct institutions. It should be noted here that he studies evil solely for the purpose of strengthening the church. And evil is easy to disclose since it is easy to see; not so easy to understand because its primary source is in the possibilities of one's own nature.

Mauriac wields the needle of truth, human truth, to pierce the fibers of decadent society. Here lies the depth of his intellectual research: his desire for the truth. He is concerned with the essential problems of life. By laying bare, frankly and immodestly, the interior workings of the character, he succeeds in portraying the underlying human truth of mankind, not as civilized society would prefer, but as it really exists. Mauriac believes that we are conditioned to appreciate the high and noble only after we have experienced life at its lowest level and known its harshness. He does not visualize life through rose-colored glasses which cast a bright hue over the dark side of situations, or which frankly cast aside the dark; he leaves that to the second-rate novelists. A realist, he concerns himself with the dark and essentially with the veracity of it. Truth is brutal at times, often cruel. Mauriac's truth makes of him a great master of bitterness. He related that after he had published one of his works, he received a photograph from a boy with this startling message: " To the man who almost made me kill

my grandmother." ⁷ He writes for those who can bear to face the truth and they alone should read his works. As a realist in a moral sense, he believes that man acts for the sake of convention, but his true thoughts are concealed in the innermost regions of his soul. He leads us into the mysterious regions where souls dwell and cannot tell the strange tales that occur there. Thus, he studies a sentiment, a situation, a crisis -- not abstractly, like a treatise on philosophy or morals, but pointedly.

The novelist relives his ideas in human beings and makes them revolve in the framework of daily life. He is endowed with sufficient talent to make his characters live and we believe ourselves to be there. He paints what he sees after getting to the core of the matter. A static position would not commit him to anything; there must be revolt. Thérèse revolts, and she must, eventually, against the one thing that could spell her doom, the evil in her nature. Her revolt offers a scheme for possible solution, cure, or a path that will prove beneficial to the sinner, a method that may be used to cleanse, to heal, or better said, to reach God's outstretched hand.

Mauriac smarts at the reproach that he paints only the reprobate, his wickednesses and miseries, especially, since the accusation accords poorly with his professed affirmation with the Catholic faith.

7. Sister Jerome Keeler, Catholic Literary France, p.115

" Wealthy, successful, talented in verse and prose, ...and immortal at not yet fifty, how could such a rosy destiny lead Mauriac to write his gloomy stories...? Misers, leechers, profligates young and old, men and women, Mauriac unleashes the seven capital sins in his novels and exposes the secret life under a facade of traditional decorum inThérèse Desqueyroux..." 8

That he is considered by many a pessimist may be attributed to the fact that he lays stress on morbid, dark, and sorrowful subjects. He defends his choice of subjects: "In the world of reality, you do not find beautiful souls in the pure state." 9 That which we call beautiful has become so at the cost of a struggle against the noblest part of ourselves against that part in us most God-like.

Now that we have learned that he labors under two major handicaps, religion and environment; now that we have considered the factors that allow him to expand his talents uninhibitedly, let us see to what duty he is bound as a novelist. He sees the unwholesomeness of man and feels compelled to uncover it. To ignore it, to fail to tell the truth about it, would be doing an injustice to mankind. He uses his talent to efface it. By recognizing it for what it is, understanding it and applying the only efficacious remedy, he serves a worthy purpose. He is bound not to distort life and proceeds cautiously in order to avoid giving that certain moral literature which nearly always falsifies life.

"Je suis romancier, je suis catholique, c'est la qu'est le conflit. Je crois en effet, qu'il est heureux

8. Régis Michaud, Modern Thought and Literature in France, p.51.

9. Hoehn, op. cit., p. 519.

pour un romancier d'être catholique, mais je suis sûr aussi qu'il est très dangereux pour un catholique d'être romancier." 10

He realizes that a story must evoke grief if it is to be important, if it is to live. He realizes that a censored book, one criticized from every angle, leaves an indelible impression on the minds of the public, especially those religious. Must he, a Catholic novelist, assume greater responsibility for the mental disturbance his books may cause? Must he, the creative artist, avoid writing novels that would bring about revolt? He would rather run the risk of spreading confusion and misery among his fellow creatures in preference to falsifying life.

Now in his sixty-sixth year, M. Mauriac appears solemn from every angle, not only in his works but in his countenance as well. Of him one author writes:

" François Mauriac est le grand romancier de l'inquiétude. Son visage triste, familier au grand public depuis son élection à l'Académie Française (1935), semble refléter cette inquiétude: ses traits sont tourmentés, son regard fiévreux, son attitude désolée. Sa voix étouffée, émouvante, rend des sons pathétiques, tragiques. Qu'il écrive un roman, une nouvelle ou un simple article, son expression est véhémence. Il n'est que de lire Mauriac pour trouver ces "supplices" sous une forme ou sous une autre tout au long de son oeuvre romanesque." 11

It seems doubtful that a smile could twist upwards the corners of his severe mouth even on the rarest happy occasions. The eyes seem to hold some sorrowful inner secret, some power-

10.J.M. DeBuck, " Le Pessimisme religieux de Mauriac", *Révue Générale*, CXXIX (1933), p. 325.

11.Brodin, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

ful ability to penetrate, some clairvoyant quality. They are a direct contrast to the broad and open forehead which would seem rather to indicate a frankness of nature. Indeed, one would be inclined to dub him tranquil for the ascetic quality that pervades his mien. And yet there is something appealing about Mauriac who is unconcerned about this corporeal world of ours. Seemingly distant from and unperturbed by the bustling activity of humanity around him, he is not as serene as he would lead us to believe. The deep silent waters constantly running in the recesses of his soul are disturbed from time to time. We become aware of this disturbance when we encounter such a character as Thérèse Desqueyroux whose troubled wanderings give us the key to the personality of the author. Nothing could render him more accessible. The story of her life told in the next chapter will open new vistas for our consideration.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF THÉRÈSE

For convenience, the term "Thérèse novels" has been applied to those works of Mauriac's in which the principal heroine, Thérèse Desqueyroux appears, or which serve to unify her otherwise fragmentary life story. This episodic treatment of her life is the most complete that Mauriac offers any of his characters, furnishing a rather compartmented version of a full length novel. The unusual feature of the interrupted presentation is that each phase of her life is an entirety and none are in any way dependent on the others for significance. The author, driven by the impulse to give new force and activity to Thérèse, has over a period of years resorted to calling her back on the scene at various times so that her readers have been able to construct for her a "piece-meal" continuity.

An introductory account of her life is given in Thérèse Desqueyroux, the novel written in 1927. This is the story of a young woman who has unsuccessfully attempted to poison her husband and has been brought to justice but escapes its rigidity because the would-be victim purposely withheld facts pertinent for the conviction in order to retain his family prestige and no action is taken, or more accurately, the case is dismissed. Subsequently, the heroine is abandoned by husband and his family, ostracized by society and left alone to brood behind the bars of a mental prison. What

recourse is her lot is left to the imagination when she is given a chance to pursue a new life in the great French metropolis of Paris, away from the overwatchful step-family and the prying curiosity of townsfolk of the small town in which she lived. We see her for the last time at the Parisian sidewalk cafe where her husband has abandoned her and we do not feel that she is especially alone, though it is obvious she is.

By virtue of the fact that she appears in another novel, Ce Qui Était Perdu, 1930, as a mere shadow, we are made aware of her continued existence and the trend of her affairs by her erratic actions and constant disquiet. She does not seem charged with a mission of proving that there is ultimate relief for the sinner but she seems rather to commence along the course of those damned to temporal unrest and misery. She is seen on the Champs Élysées one evening with a country lad who, thinking her to be ill, offers to aid her. As he helps her to a taxi, she tells him that she does not suffer from "something" but from "someone" and inquires if he is yet old enough to know the discomfort of suffering from "someone". Answering negatively, the nineteen year old youth appears to her to be an enfant but with some constraint she offers him her calling card; from now on most of her victims are going to be young men.

Two stories written in 1933, Thérèse et le Médecin and Thérèse à l'Hôtel attempted to sift her from obscurity. We rely solely upon the authenticity of the translations by

Gerard Hopkins for these works not immediately available in the original to this researcher. Thérèse et le Médecin, depicts the life of Thérèse at least eight years after we saw her at the sidewalk cafe and is concerned mainly with revealing the pattern her actions have traced and the shape her thoughts have taken as a result of her one great criminal act. She pays a visit to a psychiatrist friend who had previously promised to aid her at her bidding and to whom she had already divulged her great secret, prompted to do so because the latest youthful object of her affections had almost persuaded her to engage upon a second crime, a duplication of the first, proposed to annihilate an enemy of the youth.

The predominating function of being a poisoner is given added zest in Thérèse à l'Hôtel, but in quite a different aspect. This continuation of the episodes in Thérèse's later life points up the attempts she makes to find the one thing of which she has been deprived throughout her youth; reciprocated love. At a hotel resort, a sort of refuge at which she chose to "regain her wits" after the suicide of the youth last victimized by her, she meets another youth that fails to be caught in the venomous web because he does not recognize in her the "flame" or the possibilities of sincere passion which he himself feels for her. She owes her manner to a guilty past. Over her outward protestations of his ability to analyze her, she realizes that, in truth, she really has never known love and any hope of ever knowing

it is negligible. She is still imprisoned by the crime of former days. Quick scrutiny of her situation reveals the utter hopelessness of escape. The loneliness that is hers and which she endures seeks outlet in the continuous attachment of her affections to whatever it may feed upon.

La Fin de la Nuit, 1935, is not a sequel to either of the preceding works but rather a portrait of a woman at her decline whom the author had already painted at the time of her criminal youth. The Thérèse of this novel is a much better character, much more able to support or withstand the rigors of the role she plays than she was previously. By becoming more miserable she is also more tolerable, more veracious. This wretched woman who can no longer lay claims to youth or good health, is the symbol of consolation, of hope to the young girl, replica of herself, the daughter who solicits her aid in winning the man of her choice. The proclivity to poison once again takes shape and arises in Thérèse when she herself is attracted to the young man only to find that she is tempted to rival the affections of her own flesh and blood. The ensuing entanglement is sufficient to press her derangement. She is compelled to seek refuge in the homestead she had left fifteen years before, amid the same surroundings and persons with the consolation that the end is near.

Her story begins with the termination of the court room scene and the temporary but unofficial dismissal of the case announced by her lawyer to her and her father who discuss the

possibilities of discrepancies which could mar the final and official dismissal. She was not desirous of returning to Argelouse to her husband who, with their small daughter Marie, was expecting her. Often her mind's eye would visualize their first meeting after the trial. She had decided that she would be frank with him, and give the confession that was necessary for a reasonably peaceful existence with him for the rest of their lives. The only issue that was between them was what should be said hence forth and not what had been said or done in the past. It was true that they had been closer than they ever had before since the trial had begun for they had collaborated on concocting a defense that was proof-positive against any subtle attacks of logic that the opposing lawyer might use.

Thérèse entered the carriage that was to start her on the long journey back to Argelouse. She relaxed on the dank and musty seat exhausted yet somewhat relieved that she had not been condemned by her fellowmen. But she was lonely and intuitively suspected that this feeling would be prolonged, eternal. On the train she found her compartment and at once withdrew into a corner and with head pressed against the window, tried with effort to go to sleep. The contemplation of Bernard was once again before her. It would not be too difficult to make the matter intelligible to Bernard. Certainly he would understand if she led him step by step to the crucial moment. She would have to start from her childhood if even she were ever to see clearly what had happened.

Two of the dwellings of Argelouse were still inhabited by gentlefolk, the Larroques and the Desqueyroux, though many had moved on to other points. Jérôme Larroque, mayor of Bordeaux and member of the town council, inherited property at Argelouse from his wife who died in childbirth. Each summer the daughter, Thérèse, would spend there in the house under the care of his sister, Clara, a deaf spinster who liked its remoteness because it sheltered her from other peoples "silently moving lips". M. Larroque liked the arrangement because it threw his daughter in contact with wealthy and handsome Bernard Desqueyroux. He had inherited a home at Argelouse but went there only at the shooting season or in the summers in order to spend as little time as possible with his mother and her new husband, M. de la Trave, who unnerved him considerably. His winters were spent in law school and travel for he was anxious to be well educated or better so than his future wife (an arrangement made by mutual consent of the families) for it was generally conceded that Thérèse from an early age was remarkably brilliant. She was an emancipated young woman, quite the opposite of Anne, Bernard's sister with whom she spent a great deal of time. Though the two shared very little in common they knew a great deal of happiness just from being together. Thérèse derived avid pleasure from reading and Anne from sewing or chatting. They spent many lazy afternoons under a tree escaping a blazing sun or often having taken to the marshland in an attempt to abate the heat would seek shelter in one of

the armory huts used by duck hunters.

Thérèse adored Bernard with the naturalness and simplicity of a child. She delightfully anticipated becoming related to Anne and unashamedly admitted that she was not indifferent to the land Bernard had inherited. She had a genuine capacity for business affairs and was overwhelmed with the idea of controlling such a vast amount of forest, a position for which she seemed destined. Marrying Bernard meant security and she found peace in thinking about such an alliance. Their marriage took place on a stifling day. It was then, as if prompted by the heat that she realized that she had relinquished the freedom so much a part of her and which she valued so highly. Her isolation from the world was confirmed first by this acceptance to be buried in the substance of a new family and secondly by the activity in the realm of the flesh where the carnal desires exacted a new skill, demanded a different game-- compulsion and surrender.

That portion of the honeymoon spent in Paris brought Thérèse three travel-weary letters from Anne who revealed the deep love she had for a newcomer to the vicinity, Jean Azévédo who was to live in the deserted estate Vilmeja, away from everyone because he was consumptive. Anne's family had prohibited such a romance obviously because of his health and more so because it had already been arranged that Anne would marry the Deguilhem boy. But Anne, who had met Jean Azévédo quite by chance (she had a great fear of consumptives) was sure that he was not consumptive at all. She was awed by his

intelligence and his love of books which reminded her of Thérèse. Her reaction to the family's disapproval was manifested in a strong determination to continue it and make it a sacrificial matter. This Anne, Anne the woman, Thérèse did not know. Anne had been such a demure and simple child. Bernard and his family were counting on Thérèse to help her span the chasm on the basis of their deep friendship and of course the influence that she had on Anne. The plan was set into action once Thérèse had convinced Anne that she must take a trip with her parents to get an objective perspective of this affair and Thérèse promised that she would see and talk to the young man in question.

After Anne's departure with the de la Traves, Thérèse and Bernard moved into Thérèse's own home at Argelouse where she could be spared the cares of housekeeping and could devote her time solely to the arrival of her child. She became increasingly irritated with Bernard, a fact that he attributed to her condition. He, though only twenty-six, had developed symptoms of illness rare at his age, rare in a person as sturdy as he. When advised to see a doctor, he assumed an air of indifference preferring uncertainty to possible consignment to death. His fear of death was rather inconceivable. But often in the night they were suddenly awakened by his rattling cough and Thérèse would pour a drop or two of tincture of valerian into a glass of water and marvel that such a draught could provide him relief. She would marvel, too, that he should be afraid of the one

thing that would bring him peace and quiet. He had begun to shirk his responsibilities, too, for fear of undue strain to his heart. Thérèse welcomed however, a respite from indulgences that for some reason disgusted her. She sought the open spaces and would pass many hours on the heath where she and Anne had once played. It was in the old shooting hut that she had been obliged to seek shelter one day, from the gunfire of the hunters. On opening the door of the hut, she saw a figure she recognized forthright. It was Jean Azévedo and he had recognized her too. He appeared embarrassed and when she started to leave he insisted that she stay. They began to talk of Anne and when he reminisced about their meetings in that hut he gave Thérèse an opportunity to tell him of the discord he had brought into a highly respected family. He said he had not aspired to marriage with Anne whom he considered a child. He could not help yielding to her charms. He had never gone too far with her but -- he asserted -- she had at least known real passion which she could hoard up in her old age, a preventive dosage against despair and an unimaginative future. The conversation which ensued was devoid of its original purpose and intent. They discovered a mutual satisfaction and understanding in each other by virtue of their intellectual equanimity. They could appreciate the mental expansion afforded by the other's ability to exchange information or to listen. They agreed to meet again to compose a letter to Anne. Bernard was waiting to tell Thérèse that he had finally visited the doctor who said that he

suffered only from anemia and prescribed the Fowler treatment which consisted of a certain amount of arsenic. He ignored Thérèse's complete disinterest in his new lease on life. How was he to know that a woman of her sort could be irritated with the life they led, the aversion she had for him those evenings, while seated at the dining table, he rabbled in the rich patois about the commonplace affairs of the day and counted out his Fowler drops into a glass of water. She had hated the silence of that place, the silence of the deep still nights. She and Jean Azévédo too. She knew not if he had come to adore her just because she was his only audience, but the fact that he was leaving caused a vacuum in her which was appalling. But if Jean Azévédo suffered from the pains of silence it was by choice. It was not a compulsory suffocation such as she endured. Jean went to Paris and rejoined his friends just prior to Anne's return to Argelouse.

Thérèse wanted to straighten out the confusion of her soul. She could not find a common level of communication with those around her. Their words were void of meaning for her, her answers foreign to them. The discontentment grew and Thérèse choked under the heat of pretense. She cringed from associations and became completely detached from everyone, everything, even her child aroused no maternal compassion in her. She wanted only to be released from this horrible, boring existence. There was nothing to admonish her against the action she would take for her escape.

It had happened the day that the neighboring forest fire had broken out. Bernard in the excitement had held his Fowler prescription over a glass of water and poured his drops without due attention (for he took twice the necessary amount before Thérèse could speak up). She did not tell him. He rushed out in the smoke filled air and left her wholly undisturbed by the pending drama. When he returned he said that the fire was quite a distance away and there was little need to become alarmed. He asked if he had already taken his drops. She did not answer before he had again poured and had drunk the usual amount. Why she did not concern herself to warn Bernard against this second overdose was not a deliberate scheme. But if she were too tired or lazy to speak, certainly she must have been aware of the impending disaster which would befall him who misused this potent drug that required the strictest care in its use. What snake lay coiled in her breast attending the least nudging to spring into a lashing ferocious offensive serpent? Did she know herself? Had it not taken first form that afternoon at the luncheon table? As he lay retching and pained on his bed, why did she refrain from calling the doctor's attention to the arsenic that he had been taking? She compromised herself by thinking that there was no proof that it was that. The doctor had difficulty in diagnosing the symptoms, although, it looked to Thérèse as though it were the arsenic. Nevertheless, she wanted to be sure. If she poured some drops into his glass before he came into the

room on the first occasion, it was only for curiosity's sake. She would not attempt it ever again.

Aunt Clara had a rheumatic attack and Thérèse was obliged to shoulder the accustomed responsibilities of the older woman. Aunt Clara's charitable nature often extended itself to purchasing the necessary medicines for the sick and poor of Argelouse. On marketing days she would send old M. Balion, the caretaker of the Larroque estate, to the chemist in Saint Clair with various prescriptions.

That fall Bernard had a relapse, one which required the services of a consultant from Bordeaux. The specialist was silent after the examination until his conference with the family physician; then, Bernard was rushed immediately to the hospital in Bordeaux where he began to recover at once. The chemist explained that Balion had brought in two forged prescriptions with several others; all had the doctor's signature. He had been terrified because he had issued such powerful doses of the dangerous drugs and in order to calm his fears had asked the doctor to verify the prescriptions.

M. Larroque begged Thérèse to clear herself of suspicion since the family physician had agreed not to proceed with the charge (there had been no traces of the drugs in the victim). The defense that she and Bernard had prepared for court was the one she gave her father. She explained that she had met a stranger on the road who said he owed money to the chemist and did not wish to go to him, but knowing Aunt Clara's kind nature, had asked her to consent to send in the prescriptions for him with the others. He later returned for them but no one

else had seen him enter or leave the house.

At the station, Thérèse realized at once that she would never be able to explain the matter to her husband. He never understood her. His mere approach reduced her hope of throwing herself at his mercy. The most logical solution was to disappear from his life. She had not thought of that before. Having once uttered what was in her mind, Bernard burst with the desire to unleash his fury on her as he had premeditated. He had always feared her intellectual hold over him. Now she was in his hands and liable to him. She was to obey the wishes of the family which he had carefully drawn up on paper, or be threatened with the introduction of new evidence. He outlined her activities in this way: for the family's sake (Anne's marriage was in jeopardy) they were to be seen together at church; she was to have her meals in her room and was to be confined to its limits inside, although she was free to walk in the woods; the weekly visit to Saint Clair on market day was to continue as usual; everything was to appear as though he, Bernard believed implicitly in her absolute innocence. The daughter, Marie, however, was to be taken from the unwholesome atmosphere by his mother somewhere in the South. To this Thérèse had one answer, one way of escape. The small packages that would have meant death for Bernard, the prescriptions, were still in her old coat pocket... or were they? Fear seized her at the recollection of Bernard's intimidation in regard to some additional secret evidence. Having found the small

packets of poison, she was in the act of breaking the wax on them when old Mme. Balion announced Aunt Clara's death. Would Thérèse be accused of that too? What play of circumstances had fate played upon her? She had almost as much fear of death as Bernard. They moved back to the old uninhabited Desqueyroux house where she was to spend those endless days and nights that Bernard had set out for her. One evening, when restless with the silence that surrounded her, she ventured into the kitchen where Bernard and the Balions were eating. Bernard sharply reproached her and advised her that since they had sympathetically impressed the villagers, there was no longer a necessity for pretense: the charge had been filled and the desired end had been achieved. From that time she might live entirely alone if she preferred. She had somehow refrained from telling him how bored with that existence she had become and resigned herself to this dominance from which he derived such pleasure. He had martyred himself and he was master. His daughter and mother were to leave the following day and he was to join them later at their destination.

The days that followed were especially empty for Therese. She took to her bed and consequently became very morose and unkept in her person. Arrangements for her care had been made with Mme. Balion but when she became too weak to get out of bed, too heavy for the old woman to move, she would lay there day in and out imagining a life in Paris, seeing Jean Azévédo again and meeting his friends, being on her own,

living again... but she soon felt the satiety of her imagined pleasures and sank into listlessness. Then one day a letter arrived from Bernard asking that she prepare to meet Anne and her fiance on their return. The meeting was a great surprise for Bernard and his family. Thérèse had striven to make a satisfactory appearance, but her face was only a painted mask and her body was wasted and haggard. The whole atmosphere was one of embarrassment. Bernard was sincerely astonished because he felt that he alone was responsible for her condition and there and then he resolved to "bring her back".

In his intense devotion to the recuperation of Thérèse, they knew a familiarity they had only recently known before. They discussed matters with little awkwardness. Not infrequently did their conversations turn to her future plans for he had to get rid of her. All he wanted was Anne's marriage; then she could do as she pleased. They would not be divorced nor legally separated and he would explain that her health made it necessary for her to seek new locations. Everything would be forgotten that way. Having accompanied her to Paris, he brought himself to ask why she had attempted to take his life. She could not find an answer adequate to substantiate any of the reasons that toyed in her mind. She did not know why she had done it. She would have liked nothing better than to make it understandable to him. But she did not want him to think her innocent. She felt she had been cruel only when she had hesitated or prolonged what she was doing to him. She apologized at the sidewalk cafe and looked about her at

the surging mass of humanity and no longer felt alone.

After he had gone, she walked away confidently and knew that this new Thérèse was as real, as true as the old Thérèse, the good and the bad rolled up into one.

One night in Paris, several years after her encounter with the young stranger on the Champs Élysées, Thérèse calls a psychiatrist whom she had met some two years before in a night club and goes to his apartment-office. The doctor asked Thérèse about the old "gang" Zizi, Jean Azévédo, and of the others. On mentioning Jean, he offered some apology which she quickly brushed aside. She didn't mind discussing him at all. The little love she still held for him was due perhaps to the pain he had caused her. He had pushed her further in the mud. But even he had not cured her of love. Jean had returned all her letters when they broke. What pain those letters contained. There was one she had written one day from Cap Ferrat when she was about to take her life. But the game of love which she played, seemingly with constant awkwardness always seemed to irritate the loved one instead of touching his heart. The doctor, now conscious of the new romance in Thérèse's life heard her say that Phil had been avoiding her the entire summer on all sorts of pretexts. He was really looking for a rich wife. But as the summer wore on, he began writing more and more frequently until his letters began to arrive daily. She had detected a note of increasing care in the letters. To know that Phil would be waiting for her on her return from the week she

was allowed to spend with Marie once a year had made her happy and human and less frightful to her daughter even though the child seemed reticent at times. And she knew nothing of the arrangement that Thérèse was never to pour her drinking water (Bernard had said on the day of the dismissal of the case that she would stop at nothing to liquidate the child since she was to inherit the estate at twenty-one). Phili's definite interest in the resin, pine trees, and vineyards at Argelouse betrayed momentarily his new interest in Thérèse. As she reported that the resin market was at rock bottom and the pine trees were absolutely valueless, his concern was diminished considerably. She failed to exist in this man's world... this boy-man. He was the only one in her own. She would do anything to have him completely. She retaliated by telling him of her past...of everything in her past. He became so interested in what she told him that at first she feared that he was planning to use it against her although she knew her case was closed. This information could be beneficial to him only if she wanted to help save him from being blackmailed or even arrested. If she would perform this deed for him and it would be simple to do, having once done it, he would marry her once it was all over. His enemy lived in the country and had a reputation for his alcoholic indulgence from which he had suffered more than one stroke. Once Phili had visited him there and they had sipped from the same glass in his wine cellars. There would be no risk since no post-mortems were made in the country.

She implored the doctor to save her from disaster. He told her that since she had told her story and relieved herself of its burden that she would be able to master her difficulties without falling in with the plans of Phili, that he had done more than enough by letting her sort out her troubles to him. She lost her temper at this and called him a thief and said that he only pretended to cure the soul, that he didn't even believe in the soul and threatened his life by pretending to hold a revolver inside her purse. She held tightly a small packet which was sealed with a chemist's label, and offered no resistance to the doctor's wife (summoned by his distress) who showed her to the elevator.

It was Phili's suicide that took her to the hotel at Cap Ferrat where she could be in peace, not as a mourning lover, for Phili's death left her indifferent. Not only was she relieved of the one-sided affair but spared of the inquiries that might have come about if the police had been successful in tracing the forged check he had written. His past would have been ferreted out and her own part in it would have been mercilessly aired by the pens of ruthless scribes. It would have been too much to bear. But she consoled herself all the while that the man was merely an excuse. She had told herself that each new experience of that type was the last but she seemed destined to pass from one affair to the next with only a bare interval separating one from the other.

So it was that the torch she carried for Phili was hardly extinguished before she had let herself be attracted to the young man and his family who had come there for the Easter

holidays. He couldn't have been more than twenty years of age. Thérèse had observed the family with skillful eye as they ate in the dining area, she, alone, read a book as she ate. The boy liked to read too, she had noted, for he had often to be scolded at the table about the magazine he would take from his pocket during a meal. Until then he had not shown any interest in her and she had watched with great intensity his every move careful, though, not to be detected. Then by a reflection of mirrors she saw that he was quite absorbed in staring at her with obvious passion. Once again she knew the power of her charms. This child, with the body of a man, brushed against her on his way out of the room. Something foreboding warned her of the impossibilities of this friendship. Yet she followed him into the foyer and found some pretext about the magazine (the one she had left on a table and found him glancing through) to strike a conversation with him. That was the first step. The others would follow and it would cost him much to be rid of her.

The anxiety she felt was hardly controllable but she managed to use one of her daring "effects" which he found disgusting and said as much. She retorted that she did not want him to have any illusions about her to which he parried he didn't. He was not taken in by faces. He had never misjudged people who were no longer young, he said quite naturally. Her heart grew heavy for this was directed at her. No matter what opinion he held of her, she was comforted by the passionate expression on his face. He had

been profound in his observation of her. He supposed her soul was immeasurably ill but alive. He was haunted by the contrast of what her life must have been and the possibility of what it could be. Impatient, she walked from him stating that she would like to further their conversation that evening and added that he could do a lot for her.

That evening on the steps of the terrace, Thérèse smarted under the chagrin of not being able to arouse a flame in this solemn young man. They spoke of the most ordinary things and he searched her face for what lay there invisible. She said that he must try to imagine that she were young in order that they might find the happiness that could be theirs. She said that he must not refuse the opportunity for happiness for some day he would be haunted by the memory of lost opportunity. She assured him that many people spent the rest of their lives looking for happiness that had in their youth gone unnoticed. He had lapsed into silence but she urged him to talk, though even as he did she thought he resorted to mere words. He told her that she had everything to learn; that she didn't even know what love was. Age, he said, was not an important factor since some found it at twenty, some after deep suffering, some only in the light of death. This statement was challenged with admission of a "guilty past" which left very little room for learning. She had had her life she cried out in fury, adding that she hated him. He was sure that absolution would make her as guiltless as a child. He loved her and wanted her to feel that mad thing that consumed him.

Thérèse knew she had not had her life. It had been taken away from her before it began. She had never known love and never would. There was nothing to hope for in it anymore. All she was certain of was that she wanted it more than anything else and when he had gone she knew love had once again been cruel to her, once again had stomped her further into the mud.

Thereafter, Thérèse's world was closed in by the walls of her small Parisian apartment. Her only link with the outside was her maid who was quite attentive and afforded a companionship which was treasured as light in a darkened cell. On Saturday's, the girl had the evening off and Thérèse often found herself wanting to keep the girl in the apartment to know the comfort and security of her presence. She could not accustom herself to that feeling of being alone. One deserted evening, reduced to the companionship of the apartment fire, she studied herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece and beheld her denuded brow, the brow that might have belonged to a man. It was her only sign of age, one which could be disguised with proper arrangement of the hair. The lines of her face were no more deeply etched than they had been twenty years ago. It would have been impossible to tell her age, except for the loss of hair on her brow. She might have gone to the movies that night but she retained the expensive habit of spending money like water and she was not in the mood for any carousing although it took rather rare strength of mind to tolerate such narrow limits. She

went to the window, flung it open and leaned out to measure the distance to the sidewalk but she lacked the courage to throw herself down. How odd to be able to plot the death of someone and to fear it so much for oneself. It had been fifteen years ago that the case had been dismissed and she had thought herself free. She did not know then that she was to enter a prison narrower than the grave, the prison that her act made around her and which would close in on her tighter and tighter with time until it would finally choke her to death. It was early and she decided as she sat by the fire that she would not take the sleeping pill for another hour since she did not wish to run the risk of waking up in the middle of the night. Sleeplessness did not guard her against the whims of a vivid imagination. She might be overwhelmed by the surge of silent faces whom she had threatened with dissolution.

The ring of the door bell broke the silence of the night. She heard a young voice answer her query. It was Marie, her daughter who had come to visit her without her father's permission. The girl had her prominent cheek bones, voice and laughter. What had brought her there? Was this child of hers going to say she could get on no longer with her father and had come to her for shelter? Wasn't it possible that this modern girl could be stifled by the people who had stifled her years ago? What sweet revenge! Her daughter had sought her, preferred her to all of them at home. Marie did explain that her father and grandmother were terrified of poverty

since the resin market was down. She added that family life was seriously irritating. Thérèse assured her that the conditions of home were not enough to precipitate this visit and asked precisely what had induced her to come. Was it a young man as she had suspected? Therese was inwardly hurt. The girl was not interested in her after all, only in what she could do for her. She tasted again the bitter gall, the jealousy, the resentment that the one she loved was inevitably consumed with a passion for someone else. She urged her daughter to tell her story. Marie drew Thérèse into the network of her romance with the Filhot boy and the ensuing dispute with her father and grandmother. The Filhots were very rich in spite of the market slump. She had followed George to Paris where he was reading for a degree in Political Science. Because he was young she pointed out, he would have to be primed often in her behalf, for when he was out of her sight he might easily forget her even though he loved her. At this, Thérèse asked the girl to leave; she was only a compromising ally to her daughter and at best could only jeopardize her happiness. Had her criminal past escaped Marie? It was inconceivable that Bernard had not painted her in her darkest hues. Thérèse was miserable. She was sure that she was doing the girl irreparable harm. Marie wanted to know what had been kept from her all these years. Often she had been aware of some embarrassment running through a group of classmates if her mother's name was mentioned and once she had received an anonymous letter which gave her no

little concern, especially since the article attached, a defense to a jury, had mentioned that the children of the poisoner would suffer most from the crime. The girl had never associated her mother's actions with crime. No member of the family had ever been murdered or condemned on criminal charge. The girl suffered. Had her mother ever killed some one not connected with the family? No. The categorical answer did not clarify the matter. Was she convicted in a court of law? No. Evidently she was innocent? No. But the quibbling only brought on more confusion. Who was the victim, if any? Was it one of the family, Aunt Clara, her father? The accused woman made no effort to keep her from knowing that she had guessed. She did not want to know more. Whatever it was did not concern her. She did not think children should sit in judgment on parents. She would stay for the night and leave the next day for Saint Clair. That night Therese slept as though nature had exacted of her what remaining energy there was.

Marie left early the next morning before her mother had awakened. The maid had supposed that her mistress had had a hilarious night judging from the tumbled room and the empty champagne bottle. Therese had lost the confidence of the maid, thus breaking her last link with the world. She sought to relieve her anguish by going outside and found herself at a sidewalk cafe ordering something to drink. On her return, Marie had also come back. She needed more money and had telegraphed her father that she would return next day.

She and Georges had lunched together. She told him that she had found out the truth about her mother's past. Georges had said that his family had become increasingly opposed to the marriage since they had learned of Thérèse's recent way of living. Thérèse knew that there must be some discrepancy in this since this family knew perfectly well her mode of living when they had accepted the idea of the marriage. The Filhot's thought that the Desqueyroux were sufficiently rich to overlook any uncomfortable facts, but now that both families were near ruin the Filhot's needed finance. This prompted her next idea. Why not make her Larroque money over to Marie? What satisfaction she would know to turn over her personal fortune, to sacrifice it for her daughter's dowry. A sort of recompense for the old act. Thérèse should see and talk to Georges, explaining her proposal. The thought gave her immense pleasure. She kept telling herself that this was the thing to do. Probably she did not think that she would really be expected to keep her promise. It was no certainty that the marriage would take place anyway. Her arrival was a disappointment to the young man on the fourth floor who waited for the "lady" to come up. She assured him there was nothing to worry about, that she had come to say that if he and Marie should make a decision he would know what she proposed to do and that he was free to inform his father. She said she would be happy to convey a message to Marie if he felt disposed to send one. He replied frankly that the idea of marriage was still appalling to him at twenty-two, but he accepted an invitation to dinner and to accompany

Marie to the train.

Back in the apartment, it was rather difficult to relay the exact conversation to Marie though she was sure he did not use the word love; he had said he would marry Marie if it came to making a choice. When dinner was over she was able to relax. She had done her part in helping the romance along. Though as she thought of it she no longer felt her former gesture quite as munificent as before. Georges returned to the apartment to tell her that Marie had left safely. He was surprised to see that Thérèse was quite impartial about her daughter's chances with him. He was not sure that he loved her.

In the following days, illness forced Thérèse to look for an apartment either where an elevator was available or where she could be on the ground floor. Her physician had told her she was seriously ill but one never really knew in cases concerning the heart. If she took the necessary precautions her pain at least could be less intense and less frequent. One day, while on such a mission, she passed in front of the "Deux Magots", a cafe frequented by Georges and recognized him beckoning to her. He introduced his friend M. Mondoux, who was evidently not the least bit impressed with her, or so it appeared, with women in general. Thérèse, thoroughly ill at ease, behaved quite unnaturally trying to reduce this young man to lowest social terms and succeeded only in being more ridiculous herself. She accomplished one thing in making Georges thoroughly jealous.

She suffered a slight heart attack and asked Georges to call a taxi. She gave her consent for him to call on her the next evening to speak further of Marie. That would give her time to pull herself together. She could see that she had only poisoned Marie's chance for happiness those last days. But she didn't really know Marie. What did blood ties matter? Each of them would have to take a chance. She felt ashamed that she had attached so much significance to Marie's young man. But Thérèse could not deny that surge of happiness that came over her when she saw Georges the next evening standing in her doorway. She began talking of Marie and thanked him for writing her. He positively had written only because Therese had asked him to do so. He didn't really care the least for Marie. For him, Thérèse was the only person in the world; he loved her. Thérèse felt a keen agony go over her body. But she was at the same moment profoundly calm. He will see me as I really am. A pitiful old woman who now had a new power - to kill at long distance, she was a threat to her own daughter's happiness. She asked him to go away, assuring him that she had nothing to offer him and the best proof of her affection for him was her efforts to steer him clear of her wretched life. In a painful effort to dissuade him, she uncovered her brow so as to appear as she really was. But no amount of ugliness can smear the splendor of the loved one in love's eye. Her hands covered the boy's eyes with the intention of effacing the wild look they possessed. She said that she was poisoning him and as if to

drive her point, she repeated it. She thought she might be able to save him, though not Marie. She asked him not to go out of Marie's life and made him promise that he wouldn't. She heard him say not until his death. No sooner had he left than a wave of pain ran the gamut of her body. She sat up in a chair that night supported by pillows. She could hardly breathe and dozed off for brief intervals. Georges was there before her. He had promised that he would stay true to Marie. He had worded it "as long as he lived". The oath rolled over and over in her brain as she struggled for consciousness. What had he meant? Would only death itself release him from that promise? Could there have been a threat in those words? She decided that Georges must be released from his engagement to Marie. She rushed up the stairs of his hotel knowing that she would pay dearly for the effort later on and knocked at his door. The bed was either made or had not been slept in. She decided to wait. Suddenly she was aware of a note on the table. It was from Mondoux who had waited for him all morning at the Deux Magots. Georges had been out all night. She was alarmed.... she was going mad. If he had killed himself it was she who had caused it. Mondoux entered the room; he, too, decided to wait. Later Georges did appear, but stepped from the room when he saw her and told Mondoux to ask her to leave. He never wanted to see her again. She left a letter for him. Mondoux's ire was turned on Thérèse in vehement terms. He accused her of having no interest in her daughter, and of

having played a cheap game to win the affection of her friend. If she had believed that Georges was in love with her, she had had her chance with him and had lost. She thought he enjoyed humiliating her but retorted that he had failed to touch her because men were capable of hurting only those who loved them. She quickly asked him to forget what she had said; she only wanted to hurt him. He rather forcibly ushered her to the steps and watched her descending the long flight. He went back into the room and sat down, deeply disturbed. Mondoux and Georges collaborated on writing the letter to Marie. The note Thérèse had left released him from his promise of engagement and it was enclosed in his letter to Marie for added emphasis of finality.

Thérèse had captured the vision of her latest victim and she basked in the radiance of her power. From now on she would chain herself to her prison and leave it only at night when the possibility of making contact was reduced to nothingness. The concierge said that someone had asked for her that morning and had asked many questions: of her activities of the previous night, if she had had any visitors, but Thérèse was indifferent for she knew that her inquiring visitor had been Mondoux. She recognized an uneasy feeling as she bolted the door of her apartment. Conjured torments and fears seized her. The concierge and her maid had noticed that Therese looked quite ill and thought her family should be notified. Thérèse misconstrued their conversation which took place behind the closed kitchen door as a plot. Thérèse refused to

eat for three meals and finally she implored her maid to tell her enemies nothing at all about her. She confessed that she had once committed a crime for which she should have been sentenced. Her other crimes did not come within the limits of the law but because of this previous crime they would manage to destroy her defenses. Her condition continued to grow worse and the mental relapses were interpolated by a confused jumble of words. She exhausted herself trying to stay awake. The least sound awakened her suspicions. She was convinced that her maid was engaged in some subterfuge against her. She would go to the police and tell everything.

Marie had rushed to Paris as soon as she had received Georges letter. What had her mother done? It was this question she directed at Thérèse on her arrival at the apartment. The calm detachment with which her mother answered her questions was at first misleading; then she knew. Thérèse was ill. She mentioned that she had kept Georges from committing suicide. Marie preferred to hear that from Georges. She put her mother to bed. Thérèse felt the comfort of Marie's presence and had a deep sense of happiness, although she thought Marie was collaborating with her enemies or that she was being used by them as a means of access to her. Georges had checked out of the hotel before Marie arrived. She returned to Thérèse's apartment to find a telegram from her father summoning her to Saint Clair. Thérèse did not want her to go, did not want her to leave her alone to be stalked by the enemy. So, as if she were a child, she insisted that she was to go wherever Marie went. The idea was plainly

fanciful to Marie at first but she realized that she could use her mother's illness as an excuse for having come to Paris. Bernard, now bald and thinner, met them at the station. Thérèse would not have recognized him in any other setting. He greeted her with as little enthusiasm as was possible to muster under the circumstances. It was just unfortunate that divorce, no matter how condemned, could not have been an instrument to spare him the final responsibility of this insane creature that he was forced to take into his charge. Time at least had defeated the hate that existed between them.

They arranged the guest room for her where nothing could remind her of the past. On the evening of the same day she arrived, she had two attacks and nearly expired from the second gasping for breath in Marie's arms. Marie was sincerely fond of her and took complete charge of her administrations. The sick, demented Thérèse surrendered to this filial care which she trusted implicitly. Only once did the fear of the old act arise to frighten her. Marie had stood beside her and poured out her medicine, clinking the spoon against the glass, just as she had done fifteen years ago. She saw how restless Marie had become and noticed that she spent longer periods away from her. She could not want to poison her now. Now that the end was so close.

The Christmas holidays Georges returned to Saint Clair and Marie sent him a note to meet her at their old rendezvous. She was surprised to learn that Georges did not know of her mother's return to Saint Clair. He became quite pensive when

she told him of her mother's condition. It was paradoxical to think of the world without Thérèse. Marie thought it odd that he should feel obligated to reassure her that he existed for Thérèse only where Marie's happiness was concerned and it had become an obsession with her. So much so, that at Georges first visit to Thérèse, she took Georges' and Marie's hands and joined them in her own, a gesture symbolic of her wish. When, a few days later, Bernard came in to relieve Marie, Thérèse knew that the engagement had become official. Bernard had once more entered her life. And he weighed down her entire being with his presence; she had the same desire to be free of him as she had fifteen years ago. Since she had failed in her attempt, it was his turn to watch her slowly and painfully ebb away and he could not be rid of her quickly enough.

The family called the maid to spend the time with Thérèse. She came but she planned to be married within two weeks and would have to be leaving. Thérèse set out to maneuver a position for the new husband in order to prolong her maid's stay. Bernard was adamant in his refusal to employ him so her last resort lay in Georges for whom life meant nothing without her. He said that he was sure that his father would find something for the man to do.

Just how she had harmed this youth that he should gaze at her in that manner, she was uncertain, but as if reading her mind, her admirer said that she had never harmed him. Therese shook her head negatively to his query if she wanted to sleep. She had great difficulty in breathing now and any

attack might be fatal. There was nothing he could do for her. She only sat and waited for the end of the night and the end of life.

CHAPTER III

A CHARACTER SKETCH OF THÉRÈSE

Some critics have called Mauriac's Thérèse his masterpiece of characterization. She is, by far, the most complete if not the most poignant portrait he has painted. His other characters pale considerably beside her. Yet her life is not exceptional. An appraisal of it binds one to categorize those features which have a direct bearing on the character of the protagonist. Her life is typified first by sin, then suffering, and at last, a search for God. Allowed to descend into the pit of her inner self with the spotlight of truth focused upon the destructive evil that gnaws at her soul so that she may view and understand the disorder there; to experience the anguish of a struggle to regain the vision of salvation, she brings a formula singular and noteworthy to contemporary human drama.

It is unequivocally clear that the author's concept of modern woman as evidenced in Thérèse embraces the democratic ideal. And Thérèse is an exponent of freedom and liberty, the representation of modern woman, a product of social reform, emancipated in intellect and volition. As a child, she experienced the desire to unfold intellectually through the medium of books. "Thérèse dévorait du même appetit les romans de Paul de Kock, les Causeries de Lundi, l'Histoire du Consulat, tout ce qui traîne dans les placards d'une maison de campagne".¹

1. François Mauriac, Thérèse Desqueyroux, p. 46.

In young womanhood, her aspirations in this regard were satisfied and developed in one of the colleges where reading for a degree was still a luxury rarely afforded or enjoyed by women. The resulting expansion placed her on a level that could not be paralleled by her small town associates of either sex. A non-conformist, Thérèse was the target of many scandalous attacks even by the insignificant step-family aimed at her habit of smoking. Mme. de la Trave told all who spoke of Thérèse, " Elle n'a pas nos principes, malheureusement; par exemple, elle fume comme un sapeur.." ² During the honeymoon when she would lie stretched across the bed smoking cigarette after cigarette, Bernard would gently reproach her in his mind " Mais elle avait tort de tant fumer: elle s'intoxiquait ! " ³ and her manner of smoking was quite sophisticated for his simple taste. "Elle alluma une cigarette, d'un geste qui toujours avait choqué Bernard..." ⁴

Wealth gives a certain freedom and the right to inherit, own, and dispose of property was another privilege enjoyed by Thérèse. She lived comfortably in her later years in Paris from the profits furnished by the resin and pine tree holdings she had inherited from her mother. She had not brought herself to evaluate her freedom for its intrinsic worth until the day of her marriage to Bernard. Then did she realize that

2. Ibid., p. 51

3. Ibid., p. 71

4. Ibid., p. 75

the conscious submission to be tied and to share curtailed the expression of the one thing supreme in her life. She had no other reason to have been so stifled by that country-bred lad for whom the social graces remained an irrelevant matter, or his family whose commonplace chit-chat bored her and who could not comprehend her loquacious ramblings or her mere musings for that matter. This was the clue to her desire to be eternally rid of that person who fenced her within the circle of finite human love. It is a natural occurrence for her to hate the one that suppresses her and equally so for her to strive to be freed as the larva from its cocoon. This woman could not endure the smothering affection of her husband nor was she prone to typical maternal passion for her child.

" Elle ne voulait pas que Marie lui ressemblât. Avec cette chair détachée de la sienne, elle désirait ne plus rien posséder en commun. Le bruit commençait de courir que le sentiment maternal ne l'étouffait pas." 5

Either would deprive her of free movement and she wished no shackles. Another factor that served to deprive Thérèse of her freedom was the drab environment, the provincial humdrum, where one could easily draw on desolate surroundings and make them justifiable settings for murder. She anticipated her crime as a method of escape from whatever kept from her the realization of the freedom that was innately and inalienably hers. Though the crime that Thérèse commits is more shocking than the subsequent and ordinary pattern her

5. Ibid., p. 143

life takes afterwards, the characterization is quite valid. The author has recognized the universality of human nature and has pictured it truthfully, conveying Thérèse's character by the simple and compact scheme of her activity. She gradually becomes aware of the element of corruption existent in her nature.

" sin "

From her own complexity of nature, Thérèse is unable to perceive clearly why she could deliberately and slowly dispense death to an individual, simultaneously watch that individual suffer intense physical pain, and remain indifferent to the act or the result of the act. She seemed compelled only to end his agony. "Je ne me sentais cruelle que lorsque ma main hésitait. Je m'en voulais de prolonger vos souffrances. Il fallait aller jusqu'au bout, et vite! Je cétais à un affreux devoir."⁶ If she had been more merciful in destroying her husband, her reasons for wishing to be rid of him might possibly have been more acceptable. If she, in a fit of ire or temper, had chosen to end his life quickly, momentarily, she might have evoked a degree of sympathy from her admirers. But this relentless strength that harboured in her and that induced her to sit idly by, without emotion and wait for death, placed her, in truth, among the rank and file of monsters. "D'ailleurs, le premier geste accompli, avec quelle fureur lucide elle avait poursuivi son dessein! avec quelle ténacité!"⁷

6. Ibid., p. 232

7. Mauriac, loc. cit.

To think that she only wanted to help him to be freed from his suffering would have made us feel more compassionate toward her, but would have been erroneous. She was interested in his death only as a means of freeing herself from all the stuffy ties that he imposed upon her. Her first crime takes all its sense now. But as if she wasn't vile enough already, she set about poisoning all the young persons that approached her. She continued to sow destruction about her with a more subtle poison than the chemist's mixture. It was her function and her sin to poison. If she could not explain her reasons for jeopardizing her husband's life, reasons dormant in the depths of her being, her new victims, Phili, Georges, Mondoux, Marie, and even the maid rendered her understandable to herself. She finally knew why she could poison without the slightest effort. It was because she was evil, because she was consumed with sin and had a prodigious capacity for it. It was as much a part of her as the pain that racked her body. She was as degenerate and immoral as the most unmerciful murderer: contagious creature, by a twist of circumstances loosed to stalk the earth and contaminate and victimize helpless youth that fell prey to her paranoic whims. That she succumbed each time to the fascination of toying with the prey before dealing the final stroke exposes her feeble ability to cope with the demon of her being. Her expert technique of combining exquisite charm with unique intellect enabled her to know the precise moment to force an issue and spelled the success of her evil undertakings. Thérèse is shown the

squirming varmint that she must destroy for the sake of her peace of mind. Undeceived, she must oust the thing that has doomed her to a life of loneliness...the thing that has deprived her of ever knowing the ecstasies of human love. Penitence and self-chastisement cause her to replace her vices with small virtues. The reader can instantly identify them. She seeks to move her latest victims from her vicious path by such acts as lifting the shock of hair to reveal her aged brow to Georges.

" En vain Thérèse montrait-elle à cet enfant son front dévasté, il détenait le privilège de la contempler en dehors du temps, desincarnée. " 8

or to implore her daughter to return to her father before she has harmed her,

" Va-t-en...Tu parlais déjà; j'en avais assez dit; et voilà que tout est à refaire, à cause de ces larmes... Idiote que je suis! Marie, ne me demande plus rien. Crois-moi sur parole." Elle détachait chaque syllabe: " Je ne suis pas une femme avec laquelle tu puisses demeurer. Tu me comprends?" 9

or the tapering off of the defense she gave Mondoux to mislead him about her tactics,

" Elle était sûre d'avoir découvert l'endroit où il fallait frapper son ennemi; elle le sentait souffrir avec une jouissance profonde. Et plus venimeuses étaient les paroles qui montaient à ses lèvres, sans effort, d'un flot continu, plus sa voix prenait de suavité. L'assouvissement la rendait douce. La certitude d'avoir le dernier mot, de donner le coup de grâce, lui restituait la paix. Elle était tranquille tout à coup. Il ne faut pas me croire, reprit-elle à mi-voix. Je cherchais à vous blesser. J'ai inventé n'importe quoi..." 10

8. François Mauriac, La Fin de la Nuit, p. 138.

9. Ibid., p. 42.

10. Ibid., pp. 180-182.

or the assurance she gives Marie that she will succeed in her attempt to get Georges.

" Puisque je t'ai dit qu'il reviendrait! Et même, ajouta-t-elle, avec son rire d'autrefois, à certains jours tu auras assez de lui. Ce sera un homme comme un autre, un gros homme ordinaire." 11

" suffering "

The temporal damnation of Thérèse is readily observed in the solitude of her frustration. She lives with her crime from the day her case is dismissed. It walls her in to the point of suffocation. She cannot liberate herself from its strangle hold by her own efforts. She confesses it to every stranger that will listen. Her every thought seems to be flavored with the salt of the act that took place years before. Even in her sleep, she is never free from it; her dreams are constantly threatened by the re-enactment of the horrible scenes in which she had once taken a dramatic role. During the night, when she is unable to sleep, she is plagued by a vivid imagination that sets in motion the parade of victims who taunt her in her dismal existence. Another torment manifests itself in the retiring of everything toward which she moves. There was Phil, who consumed by the need for money had not the slightest love for Thérèse. He saw in her a possible accomplice in crime. She seemed drawn inevitably into these situations that held little promise of love or happiness. And yet, because she was so susceptible to a

11. Ibid., p. 217.

desire for passion she failed to discriminate sufficiently for the realization of this end. The irregularity of the alliance of youth and age did not preclude her disastrous escapades. Time and time again she snatched at the fragments of an impossible romance. This immoral wantonness warranted a strictness of discipline that she was unable to apply.

The one Mauriacian character trait outstanding in Thérèse is her inability to feign complacency. She knows the confusion of a disordered soul and for it she substituted pleasure that she never mistook for happiness. Pleasures helped to cover up the unhappiness but never answered the void in her. The restlessness of Thérèse drives her to an endless search for she knows not what, but we know that it is not to be found on earth-----it is what no human being can give another, the mercy of God.

" salvation "

The abominable fate of being able to discern one's inner confusion and yet have no solution appears to conflict sorely with the author's renunciation of the Jansenist doctrine. Mauriac really did at one time write how Thérèse reached the finality of death, but he was displeased and destroyed the work because he had not painted a priest capable of hearing her confession. Later he found a suitable priest in Rome and promises that someday he will let her have a Christian end.

The refined egoism of Thérèse is residual. She feels that no other woman could have endured the loneliness that enslaved her. Her salvation lay in her ability to steer clear of

boring herself with her own company. That curiosity of herself made her more human. Which Thérèse was the real one? The one that had been forced into a certain routine of life because of one act long passed or was there another more essential, more honest and sincere? Which Thérèse raised a hand in defense of her heart? Which one was afraid of losing her life while the other pushed lives closer to the precipice? Which Thérèse took the initiative, which one reacted? Had she been poisoned too? Didn't her admirers, all young men, stretch her ego? Which Thérèse envied the happiness, first of Anne de la Trave, then of Marie and sought to prove that she after all, transcending all, deserved what happiness she could get even at their expense? She could not be ripe for saintliness, some would say, this adoration of herself would prove it. The researcher believes that she is reduced to a state of humility which would make her readily acceptable to God. Subjected to mental wanderings and physical agonies she has been delivered to the Divine doorstep. At least we do not leave her feeling that what remains to her of life is entirely hopeless. Led here to the portal of conversion, she has only to knock and she will be received. She will be saved whether she wills it or not. Her absolute escape lies in the world beyond, in death, where there are no fears, no torments, no frustrations, no limitations. We are sorry that her strength of character does not spare her the fear of death.

CHAPTER IV

THE HUMAN TRUTH OF THÉRÈSE

Each day justice is meted out in the courts of law where both criminals and innocents are erroneously sentenced and liberated and the dismissal of Thérèse's case is not surprising or particularly unjust in our view, nor is the subsequent moral imprisonment that her liberty brings upon her. Quite frequently, actual guilt will drive the unconvicted to return and confess a crime, an act which brings release from an aching conscience. It was perfectly natural for Thérèse to become a demented creature. By having strength of wisdom for support, she could struggle with God, but only as long as the power of selectivity was hers. The mental vacillation humiliates her, puts her in His reach, and makes her susceptible to His grace.

In a sense, Thérèse was born of memory, not created of imagination. The origin of her principal traits takes root in the memory of the author who at eighteen years of age witnessed the trial of a small thin-lipped poisoner in a court-room scene where cruel women harassed her more than the ruthless lawyers who attacked her every word. He remembered the mention of forged prescriptions used to obtain poison. That is her only association with actual life. Her vividness may otherwise be attributed to the artistic intuition of the novelist. He has made her as alive as the living and we evaluate her by the position she takes in the memory

of her readers.

Thérèse has that quality of excellence that results from valid characterization. To doubt her forcefulness would amount to an inability to read. She represents the instability and fallibility of human nature and she remains dramatically unresolved among many contemporary heroines. She is not converted on the final page, nor is she consigned to Hell. Usually the moralist will show the ultimate success of righteousness but Mauriac has no intention of prostituting his talent. He is aware of life and the freedom of choice exercised by human beings and considers this factor serious and fundamental. Thus this refusal to leave the character intact is a protective measure.

At the moment we realize that Thérèse is no longer a criminal and is only a sinner, there is a prevailing wish for her to repent hurriedly before death seizes her. As long as a part of her continues to resist God, she is truly natural, but we wish for her at least submissiveness to establish her nearness to Him. No matter how long human beings hold out against Him, however, they are unable to endure what God's patience imposes upon them. Compassion for Thérèse? Yes, for there are few among us who have not at sometime of our lives wished the dissolution of someone. All the reasons stem probably from that which the person in question had kept us from doing or had done to us.

Thérèse is comparable in many ways to Hermione and Phèdre, as Racine portrays them. The researcher finds that

there is greater similiarity between Hermione and Thérèse than between Phèdre and Thérèse. However, all are unhappy heroines and evoke our pity because they lack the experience of love; that is, they do not ever find that love is returned in the same degree that it pours from them. Hermione and Thérèse naively believe that they should be loved simply because they love. The basis for this perhaps lies in the fact that love was taken from them before they had an opportunity to know or enjoy it. In Hermione's case, Pyrrhus' attention was directed toward another person; in Therese's situation, her youthful admirer's attention was always directed at her wealth, lost youth, or her inhibited expression of love, as well as to other persons. Whereas jealousy led Hermione to order the death of someone, a thirst for freedom led Thérèse to do the same thing. With the same eyes we see Hermione, of royal lienage, proud, haughty and spoiled, forsaken in love, riled by wounded pride, ruled only by the law of flesh and blood, spring to rash impetuosity; we see too, Thérèse, wealthy, young, spirited, restless, chained to a world too small for her, bored, reduce herself to cold-blooded tactics; both, we say, are incapable of knowing what they wanted. Hermione had at least the courage to die for her love, but Thérèse, though tempted more than once to take her life, never succeeded in repressing the greater desire to live.

The one thing that distinguishes Phèdre from Thérèse is Phèdre's Christianity. Phèdre's guilt is inward and the pos-

sibility of incestuous love living in her horrifies her and she detests it. She proves this by her remorse and terror of the beyond and the chastisement that she imagines she deserves. And finally, she confesses voluntarily all her shame and takes her life. Thérèse, anti-religious, aware of her guilt, is only curious to know further the propensities habitating within her, and the void in her soul as a result of her crime. Her first desire to confess was overruled by the attitude of her husband, incapable of understanding her and indifferent to her world: thereafter, she confessed at every opportunity. Neither Thérèse nor Phèdre is entirely guilty nor entirely innocent. In that, they are alike. There could not be an affair between Phèdre and Hippolytus unless the death of his father were certain; perhaps this is why Phèdre postponed her death, so her conflict was entirely in her conscience and nothing took place. Thérèse's attempt to poison Bernard was not fulfilled. The desire for wrong existed but in neither instance did it arrive. Thérèse and Phèdre are both likeable. Phèdre is liked because she is humiliated and does not try to defend herself. Thérèse is liked because she is humiliated and guilty but defends her heart as much as her life. All her crimes have only been gestures of reaction and defense and it is that which excuses her and at the same time condemns her. It is interesting to note that Racine inspires more pity for Phèdre, guilty, than for Hippolytus, innocent, and Mauriac inspires more pity for Thérèse, guilty, than for Bernard, innocent.

We are disgusted with Hippolytus and we hate Bernard. One reason for the divergence in the Racinian character and the Mauriacian character is the fact that Racine was more of a Jansenist than Mauriac. Phèdre and Hermione could not find a remedy for their troubles; Thérèse seems at times to have no remedy but it is not established that she will not be pardoned before or after death, hence a spark of hope lies dormant in the background.

CHAPTER V

MAURIAC'S ART OF CHARACTERIZATION

The character Thérèse is so like a real person that we think of her as such. Great vision had to be exercised in bringing her to the reader. In her, the author has captured many universal attributes of character. Through her, he has used his capable pen to raise a voice in the campaign against corruption. He appeals for freedom of thought and conscience in his analysis of Thérèse's inner conflict. He selected an anti-religious character who necessarily lacked sufficient liberty or resolve to refrain from bowing to sin and holds her up for the world to see. One fine compliment to his ability to picture character vividly and memorably is his acumen for the dramatic. All men, according to him, suffer from the incurable malady, sin, and have desperate souls. But sin itself is not dramatic; it is rather the temptation of sin and especially victorious temptation.

It is unlikely that Mauriac could be classified as belonging to any particular literary school. His style in the Thérèse novels is impersonal and classic, not in a scholarly sense but because of its naturalness, truth, and depth. We see Thérèse's inner self and we learn the entire truth about it. It is a risk to take, for his passionate painting of Thérèse might prove dangerous for the fragile beings who could not face the nakedness of the soul. In soliciting her disorder (keep in mind the artist's own pessimistic nature) his style waxes sober and restrained. Even when he

rises to a feverish pitch, we are never deceived by his un-failing instinct for the pathetic. Many of his critics feel that his style is his most outstanding feature. "Son style consume son sujet" ¹ It is true that his gift for creating atmosphere which harmonizes with the lives of his subjects is quite powerful. But his characters are the nuclei of his themes. The morbid settings, the deep self-analyses, the tormented conflicts, are only adjuncts directly responsible for their perversity. The reader experiences a certain pleasure from his stories even if he is not attuned to the melancholy of the presentation. This is due to the perfection of the poetic expression, sometimes caught in vigorous and agitated, sometimes, soft and humble language. Heed the deep solemnity expressed in the following passage:

" Incroyable vérité que dans ces aubes toutes pures de nos vies, les pires orages étaient déjà suspendus. Matinées trop bleues: mauvais signe pour le temps de l'après-midi et du soir." ²

Mauriac amplifies the character of Thérèse without resorting to long descriptive or expository passages, relying upon his artistic power to reveal her personality. Monologues and self-analyses are short, evoking inner conflicts which are persistent and opportune. He includes only what is essential to the revelation of character and this he pursues relentlessly. The appearance and reappearance of Thérèse over

1. J. M. DeBuck, "Le Pessimisme religieux de Mauriac," *Révue générale*, CXXIX (1933), p. 322.

2. François Mauriac, *Thérèse Desqueyroux*, p. 37.

a period of years keeps her public abreast of her progress down the road of life and we feel as though we are renewing old acquaintance. At each encounter there is a change in her circumstances but not in her aspirations. She either fails or refuses to profit from her experiences and grows older and lonelier. There is intellectuality shown in this gradual but consistent and believable character development. Since the Mauriacian characterization determines its dramatic course, it dominates, and the plot becomes mere framework for the portrayal. Thérèse is a product of her environment and Mauriac paints it in such a way as to make us aware of the great influence it held over her and her desire to escape the boredom of it. He puts all the sensory organs to work and does so by sounds,

" Le heurt de l'assiette sur le marbre de la commode, le flacon débouché, une cuiller remuée dans une tasse....." 3

and

" Le rythme du petit train se rompt; la locomotive siffle longuement, approche avec prudence d'une gare. Un falot balancé par un bras, des appels en patois, les cris aigus des porcelets débarqués..." 4

by sights,

" Du côté de la grand'place les volets en sont toujours clos; mais a gauche, une grille livre aux regards le jardin embrasé d'héliotropes, de geraniums, de petunias." 5

3. Francois Mauriac, La Fin de la Nuit, p. 234.

4. Mauriac, op. cit., p. 38.

5. Ibid., p. 84.

and

" Argelouse est réellement une extrémité de la terre; un de ces lieux au delà desquels il est impossible d'avancer, ce qu'on appelle un quartier: quelques métairies sans église, ni mairie, ni cimetière, disséminées autour d'un champ de seigle, à dix kilomètres du bourg de Saint Clair, auquel les relie une seule route défoncée." 6

by touch,

" ...et sous le ciel commençait à ronfler la fournaise de la lande." 7

and

" Les tiges coupées du seigle, à travers les sandales, me faisaient mal." 8

and

" Quand elle ressentit dans son corps la fraîcheur des draps propres,..." 9

by smells,

" Cette odeur de cuir moisi des anciennes voitures, Thérèse l'aime..." 10

and

" ...ce vent qui sent le marécage, les copeaux résineux, les feux d'herbes, la menthe, la brume." 11

and

" ...ce goût de graisse l'écoeurerait à la fin!" 12

Mauriac has remained true to French philosophy: that everything must stand the test of accuracy. Thérèse possesses a spirit of universality, too, though veiled somewhat by the vivid portrayal of regional scenes. But in an effort to re-

6. Ibid., p. 39.

7. Ibid., p. 45.

8. Ibid., p. 118.

9. Ibid., p. 202.

10. Ibid., p. 25.

11. Ibid., p. 236.

12. Ibid., p. 194.

solve social evils it is not feasible to disassociate the sins of an individual or a region with the sins of the world. The sentiment of an immense and universal deception found in Thérèse, gives her lasting consequence. Since the author proposes to remedy the moral ills of the world by taking the source and cause of them and destroying them, since our would-be poisoner is only an enlarged image of our universal secret corruption, this release of Thérèse cannot leave us indifferent. We are all involved with her. We must not ignore the torch of lofty ideals and sentiments which are hidden behind the dark and gloomy character he paints and tries so earnestly to make us understand. Thérèse must be judged from a religious and Christian point of view. The pitiful tormented psychology of this character may not touch the reader from the outside; he would have to penetrate into its essence.

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