NATURE IN SELECTED NOVELS OF FRANÇOIS MAURIAC

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Betty Becker

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Minnie M. Miller

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B. B.

PREFACE

Born and schooled in Bordeaux, François Mauriac, one of the greatest among France's living novelists, is indebted to this region of southwest France for the settings and character types of his novels. The burning summer heat of the city, the vineyards of the surrounding countryside, the dunes and plantations of whispering pines of the Landes: these form the décor against which his somber stories are enacted. His accounts of the surroundings are not the lengthy passages of the Romantics but rapid vignettes whose purpose is to illuminate the inner conflicts and emotions of the characters themselves. He takes many images from the Bordeaux vineyards and summer sun and storm. This thesis has been written to present the settings of the novels and the atmosphere created by Mauriac's descriptions of nature; to examine the rapport between nature and the struggles and torments of the characters; and to explore and analyze some of the imagery taken from nature that is so characteristic of Mauriac's style. The novels selected for this study are: Le Baiser au Lépreux (1922), Génitrix (1923), Le Désert de l'Amour (1924), Thérèse Desqueyroux (1927), Destins (1928), Le Nœud de Vipères (1932), Le Mystère Frontenac (1933), La Pharisienne (1941), and L'Agneau (1954). These novels were selected either because of their prominence in Mauriac's work or because of their descriptions of nature.

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CHAPTER I

LIFE AND WORKS OF FRANÇOIS MAURIAC

François Mauriac was born on October 11, 1885, in Bordeaux. His family was of the provincial middle-class, living in town, but strongly attached to their landed property. He was the youngest of five children, four boys and a girl, and was only twenty months old when his father died. The children were brought up entirely by the young widow.

The father had been an unbeliever, but the mother was a devout Roman Catholic with Jansenist leanings. The evening prayer for the mother and her five children was a solemn rite. Afterwards, the children would go to bed to sleep with their arms crossed on their chests, a form they believed required by God.[1]

The four sons coming from this austere family atmosphere all entered public life and service. The oldest wrote a novel under the pseudonym of Raymond Houssilane; the second became a priest; the third a medical doctor; and the youngest, François, one of the great writers of his time and country.

This youngest child of the family was solitary and hyper-sensitive. At the school of the Sœurs de la

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[1]Henri Peyre, The Contemporary French Novel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 105.

Sainte-Famille, and later at the school of the Marianists, where he received his early education, he was terrified of not having his lessons correctly prepared or of being injured at play. The need to write and express himself came very early in his life. The evenings for Mauriac as a boy were the most precious part of the day because he practiced writing in a diary and composing his first verses.[2] Near his mother, he found the happiness and security he could not find in school nor with his classmates.[3]

During the summer holidays spent in the country, from the Bordeaux countryside with its pines, vineyards, sands, sun, and the stifling atmosphere before a storm, he discovered the sensual world. However, his strict religious education made him fear the beauty in nature.

Mauriac completed his secondary studies at the lycée Grand-Lebrun in 1903, and went on to receive his Licence ès lettres from the Faculté des lettres of the University of Bordeaux. At the age of 20, he arrived in Paris to complete his education. Because of an interest in paleography and

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[2]Wallace Fowlie, A Guide to Contemporary French Literature (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 141.

[3]André Maurois, De Proust à Camus (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1964), p. 149.

medieval archaeology, he entered the Ecole des Chartes in Paris but soon abandoned this in favor of a career in literature.

His first collection of poetry, Les Mains Jointes, appeared in 1909; his second, L'Adieu à l'Adolescence, in 1911. Both were highly praised by Maurice Barrès, an author whom Mauriac greatly admired at the time.

In 1913, Mauriac married. He was already the father of a son when he served as a hospital orderly in the First World War. The war, as a theme, left little influence on his literary works. In his publications after the war, he abandoned poetry in favor of the novel.

Mauriac has received numerous literary honors. In 1925, he received the Grand Prix du Roman for Le Désert de l'Amour. In 1932, he was chosen president of the Société des Gens de Lettres and in 1933 was elected to the Académie Française.

With the advent of the Second World War, Mauriac, who earlier along with the Catholic writer Bernanos, had denounced the cruelties of the Franco régime in the Spanish Civil War, took a position with the Résistance without hesitation. During the German occupation of France, he wrote articles for the secret Editions de Minuit. It became necessary for him and his wife to flee the Gestapo until after the liberation of Paris. Nevertheless, he knew how

to keep a generous attitude toward those who had not shared his patriotism and refused to take part in the purges after the war.[4]

In 1952, Mauriac was awarded the Nobel Prize, signifying his stature as a French writer and his influence on western culture. In 1959, he became an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.[5]

Since the Second World War, Mauriac has become well-known and highly respected as a journalist, "the best in France."[6] His articles, called "Bloc-Notes" appeared regularly in the conservative publication Le Figaro from shortly after the end of the war until 1956. At that time, Mauriac surprised his followers by supporting Mendès-France in his policy of de-colonization and complete independence for Morocco.[7] This was the issue over which Mauriac broke with the conservative group represented by Le Figaro in 1956. Mauriac's "Bloc-Notes" have since appeared in the more moderate publication, L'Express.[8]

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[4]Martin Jarrett-Kerr, François Mauriac (New Haven, Connecticutt: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 9.

[5]Editorial comments, The Saturday Evening Post, December 5, 1959, p. 40.

[6]F. Nourissier, "François Mauriac," Vogue, CXLIV (September 1, 1964), p. 178.

[7]Maurois, op. cit., p. 176.

[8]Nourissier, loc. cit.

Mauriac believes it to be the duty of a Christian to participate in political life. He has formed strong attachments for certain political figures such as Mendès-France and De Gaulle and shown disdain for those who oppose his heroes.[9] Mauriac admits that he finds De Gaulle fascinating as a political figure.[10] In 1964, Mauriac published a biography of De Gaulle.

The most profound influences from Mauriac's life on his works, other than his family and religious background, are the region and the people of his native city of Bordeaux. The forefathers of François Mauriac on both sides of the family were of the provincial bourgeoisie whose source of wealth was the cultivation of the vineyards in the valley of the Gironde and the forests of pines in the Landes. In this region of France, at the turn of the nineteenth century, a man was judged by the number of pines on his plantation. These people had to protect their vineyards and forests against fires and storms. Throughout his life, Mauriac himself, the landowner of the estate of Malagar near Bordeaux, would anxiously watch the storms

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[9]Maurois, loc. cit. See also Associated Press Dispatch, The Topeka Daily Capital, December 27, 1966.

[10]François Mauriac, "Enigmatic Fascination of Charles de Gaulle," Vogue, CXLIV (September 1, 1964), p. 174.

form over the harvest of grapes and the columns of smoke that rise over the pines.[11]

All of Mauriac's novels are laid in this setting. He has confessed to being unable to place his novels in any other setting than that of his native region.[12] Like Marcel Proust, he prefers "to rediscover in his own past rather than to observe immediately."[13] In La Province, he gives his reasons for this:[14]

> ...La province oppose à la passion les obstacles qui créent le drame. L'avarice, l'orgueil, la haine, l'amour à chaque instant épiés se cachent, se fortifient de la résistance qu'ils subissent. Contenue par les barrages de la religion, par les hiérarchies sociales, la passion s'accumule dans les cœurs.

The description he provides of this region is beautiful, but it is a disquieting beauty that creates disaster for his characters. Their only escape is to Paris, but they, like their creator, are never free from the influences of their native province and must always in the end return.[15]

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[11] Maurois, op. cit., p. 148.

[12] Peyre, op. cit., p. 104.

[13] Fowlie, op. cit., p. 144.

[14] Cited by Henri Peyre, Contemporary French Literature (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 75.

[15] Germaine Brée and Margaret Guiton, An Age of Fiction (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1957), p. 155.

The characters, modeled after the rich Bordeaux estate owners, show a lust for possession. To them, wealth and rank are more vital than spiritual and emotional health. "Cybèle a plus d'adorateurs que le Christ," he writes of them.[16] Mauriac's characters marry in order to gain additional lands and pine forests. The happiness of the children is sacrificed to money and landed property to increase the estate and social position of the family. The families are held together by "l'honneur du nom." The members of these families live isolated from each other. They rarely communicate, coming together only for meals or for the night's rest.

Mauriac thinks of himself as a "catholique qui fait des romans" rather than a Catholic novelist.[17] His novels have not received Church approval because he writes of sinners without extending to them or letting them accept grace. Mauriac does have a Catholic view of the world, however, in that he perceives of it as being divided between the forces of Good and Evil.[18] His characters are torn

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[16]Maurois, op. cit., p. 153. Cybèle, mythological goddess of the earth and animals, symbolizes the forces of nature.

[17]Pierre-Henri Simon, Mauriac par lui-même (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1953), p. 53.

[18]Peyre, The Contemporary French Novel, p. 117.

between desires of the flesh and fear of sin. Human love can only disappoint unless it lifts the individual to divine love. Mauriac writes of "l'homme tel qu'il est,"[19] and he describes in depth this conflict between the flesh and the spirit.

The structure of Mauriac's novels is that of Racinian tragedy. His novels can be called "des romans de crise."[20] Several of his most successful novels begin after the climax of the action has been reached. The characters are portrayed, not from their birth but in a tragic moment of their life, the past being evoked by allusions or flashbacks. In Mauriac's early novels, he attempted to tie them together to construct a Comédie humaine by establishing blood relationships between the families of the various novels, such as the Cazenaves, the Pélouеyres and the Desqueyroux. This ambition was replaced by what became his permanent ambition: to write a single novel, a masterpiece, that would express all he wanted to express and would relieve him of writing another. Therefore, each new novel was begun because the earlier novels had failed to fulfill this ambition.[21]

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[19]Maurois, op. cit., p. 178.

[20]Ibid., p. 173.

[21]François Mauriac, "My Novels" (translated by Frances A. Lippman), Commonweal, LVIII (May 15, 1953), p. 140.

His first two novels, L'Enfant chargé de chaînes (1913) and La Robe prétexte (1914), are generally considered to be immature works. At the end of his service in the First World War, Mauriac published La Chair et le Sang and Préseances, which were still unconvincing as novels but contained the themes which would dominate all his later works: passion, provincial life, and tragedy.

Le Baiser au Lépreux, which was published in 1922, was proclaimed as Mauriac's first masterpiece. After this work, Mauriac published a novel almost annually, weaker works alternating with others of great power: Le Fleuve de Feu (1922), Génitrix (1923), Les Coups de Couteaux (1926), Le Désert de l'Amour (1925), Destins (1927), Thérèse Desqueyroux (1926), Ce qui était perdu (1929), and Le Nœud de Vipères (1932).

At this time, Mauriac suddenly became threatened with a serious illness which was believed to be cancer. The kindness and love extended to him by his family and friends during this period caused him to regret having shown such pessimism in his novels and having painted such a dark picture of his fellow man.[22] In reparation, he composed Le Mystère Frontenac (1933), a novel in which he describes the bright side of family life.

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[22]Maurois, op. cit., p. 167.

His almost yearly publication of novels continued with La Fin de la Nuit (1935), Les Anges Noirs (1936), Plongées (1938), Les Chemins de la Mer (1939), and La Pharisienne (1941).

About this same time, Mauriac developed a new mode of expression by writing for the stage Asmodée (1938), Les Mal-Aimés (1945), Passage du Malin (1948), and Le Feu sur la Terre (1951).

Then, after an interlude of several years, a new novel appeared, Le Sagouin (1951), followed by Galigaï (1952), and L'Agneau (1954).

Mauriac's literary endeavors have not been limited to fiction. His critical essays include Le Tourment de Jacques Rivière (1927), another writer from the southwest of France; La Vie de Jean Racine (1928); Blaise Pascal et sa sœur Jacqueline (1931); and Du Côté de Chez Proust (1947).

Mauriac's writings include several direct expressions of a moral and religious nature: Dieu et Mammon (1929), Souffrances et Bonheur du Chrétien (1931), La Pierre d'achoppement (1951), and a Vie de Jésus (1936).

His autobiographical works consist of the Commencements d'une vie (1926), La Province (1926), Le Jeune Homme (1926), Le Jeudi Saint (1931), and the four volumes of his Journal, published between 1934 and 1950.

His publications on the technique of the novelist are Le Roman (1928), and Le Romancier et ses Personnages (1933).

The most outstanding novels of Mauriac are generally agreed to be Le Baiser au Lépreux, Génitrix, Le Désert de l'Amour, Thérèse Desqueyroux, and Le Nœud de Vipères.*

*The capitalization followed in this thesis for the works of Mauriac is that used by Pierre-Henri Simon, Mauriac par lui-même, op. cit.

CHAPTER II

SETTINGS AND ATMOSPHERE OF THE NOVELS

External nature plays an important role in the novels of François Mauriac. However, it is not through long, detailed descriptions that he evokes the landscapes, climate, and rhythm of the seasons of the Bordeaux countryside which serves as a setting for all his novels. Rather he creates his spatial world through rapid notations. Brief though the descriptions may be, their importance is such that it has been noted that each novel could be subtitled in such a way as to localize it in time and space:[23]

> Le Baiser au Lépreux ou l'été sur les Landes; Le Désert de l'Amour ou Talence sous l'orage; Destins ou le soleil sur les vignes; Thérèse Desqueyroux ou Argelouse dans la pluie.

Often in Mauriac's descriptions a sensation is used to evoke the image. The presence of objects in nature or an entire landscape is brought forth by the odor of pine, the sound of a bird, or the sensation caused by the touch of a pine needle.

The landscapes, seasons, and climate, as well as the sounds, odors, and tactile sensations of nature are combined by Mauriac to form the atmosphere for his novels.

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[23]Simon, op. cit., p. 38.

It is in the creation of the atmosphere of his native region that Mauriac excels.

The Landes is a triangular plain between the city of Bordeaux and the Adour river which winds from the high Pyrenees to the Atlantic Ocean. The coast is edged by dunes which form a barrier between the interior and the sea. On the other side of the dunes a huge plain extends where the sands stick together in a porous sandstone which forms marshes. These plains were once a wasteland but have been transformed by drainage methods and plantations of pines. Mauriac uses the Landes to evoke a state of mind. Here the men of Mauriac's novels come to hunt pigeons. In Le Baiser au Lépreux, it is Jean Péloueyre, outcast and unloved, who frequents the Landes. The following description of the Péloueyre estate, which borders on the Landes, is given:[24]

> Les pins de Jean Péloueyre forment le front de l'immense armée qui saigne entre l'Océan et les Pyrénées; ils dominent Sauternes et la vallée brûlante où le soleil est réellement présent dans chaque gaine de chaque grappe.

The description of the Landes is composed of sights, sounds and odors. There is thick bracken concealing the rough shelters constructed of heather which the people of the

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[24]François Mauriac, Le Baiser au Lépreux (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1922), p. 143. After each book by Mauriac has been given bibliographical description in the footnotes, it will be referred to only by name and page placed in parentheses in the body of the thesis.

area use as blinds when hunting pigeons. The pines whine under the force of the west wind. The odor of rye bread perfumes the twilight around the small farms (page 65). Another aspect of this marshy area is the silence which is such that on stormy nights one can hear the Atlantic striking the sands (page 77). The round lagoons reflect the long shafts of the pines, their peaks, and the sky above (page 108).

Sensations of sound and odor combine to form a description of the Pêloueyre estate. The lane is bordered with pear trees, heliotropes, geraniums, and mignonettes whose odor is not perceived because of the more powerful scent of the linden tree (page 23). The linden has the form of a round bouquet, and its sound is a rustle (page 23). The sounds of the country are a fly buzzing, a rooster crowing, and the brief trill of a bird (page 22).

The climate of the region and the change of seasons also is background for the story. For example, there is "un jour fauve de juillet" (page 43); on the September wedding day of Jean and Noémi, the dawn sweetly lights the world (page 57); however, later in the day the heat spoils the food for the wedding feast (page 59). December means short, rainy days when the rustle of rain on the tile roof awakens Jean (page 144). In spring the furze brings

touches of yellow to the thick layers of dry bracken. The oaks, with dead leaves trembling, still resist the south wind while the cuckoo sings (page 108). In May, "le mois de Marie", lilacs tumble over the garden walls; at twilight there is the odor of seringas and the humming sound of the June bugs (page 122). There are sudden summer storms when the silence of the birds stills the leaves on the trees. Large drops make creases in the dust bringing out an odor of evening storm (page 124). After the brief storm, Mauriac describes the mugginess which follows: "un vent poussiéreux bousculait de lourdes nues" (page 125).

Many of the descriptions of estates used in the novels of Mauriac are taken from properties belonging to various members of his family. Calèse in Le Nœud de Vipères is Malagar, the estate southeast of Bordeaux where Mauriac himself still returns each autumn. The home of Mauriac's grandmother becomes Argelouse in the novel Thérèse Desqueyroux. Langon in Génitrix, which lies on the railroad line between Bordeaux and Sète, is the property of Mauriac's grandfather.[25]

The Cazenaves (mother, son, and daughter-in-law) are the principal characters of Génitrix. Their home is the desolate old house standing so near the railroad tracks

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[25]Peyre, The Contemporary French Novel, p. 105.

that it trembles as the trains go by.[26] The peaceful descriptions of spring in the opening passage of Génitrix contrast sharply with the cruelty and ugliness of the characters, creating an atmosphere all the more terrifying. As Mathilde lies dying, she hears the nocturnal music of the world. The night sighs in the leaves. A fresh, pure breeze from the ocean blows through the pines and vineyards bringing the scent of lime blossom from the garden (page 23). Her room is filled with the odor of seringas and of the carbon smoke from the train (page 10).

In this novel of extreme passions, the extremes of climate are also indicated. The summer heat is treated first. Mauriac describes the noonday sun which bears down on the garden, the lanes are cinder-colored; it is "un juin fauve" (page 73). The sun scatters the fog. No bird, not even a locust, makes a sound. The south wind carries a scent of burning pine. Near the Landes, the sky is red and smoky. The vineyards are deserted (page 82). Surrounding the setting for the novel are huge trees: tulip trees, poplars, plane trees and oaks (page 106).

In late autumn the rains begin. The leaves on the trees seem eager for the first drops (page 105). The wind

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[26]François Mauriac, Génitrix (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1923), p. 10.

which blows from the Landes, across the pines and vineyards, making every tree in the garden at Langon tremble (page 108), adds to the atmosphere.

Le Désert de l'Amour furnishes a description of the city of Bordeaux. The city is rocky and "pauvre en arbres", where the only green in the world seems to be in the Jardin Publique.[27] Summer in Bordeaux is torrid and waterless. The hills on the north of the city prevent the wind from cooling the city. The pines and the sandy ground which extend up to the outskirts of the city hold and accumulate the heat (page 37).

The plot of Le Désert de l'Amour is a sensual one: the story of the adolescent, Raymond Courrèges, and his father who are both enamoured of the same woman, Maria Cross. The atmosphere created by descriptions of nature is sensual also. The sounds are nocturnal: chirping of crickets and grasshoppers, "une mare coassante", two toads, and "les notes interrompues d'un oiseau qui n'était peut-être pas un rossignol" (page 140). The odors are perfumes: the scent of lilacs (page 101), acacias (page 132), and the bitter almond perfume of the hawthorne in bloom (page 107).

Considerable description is given of summer storms. The rain falls so heavily that no other sound can be heard

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[27]François Mauriac, Le Désert de l'Amour (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1925), p. 37.

(page 149). A strong south wind blowing from the sea not only bends the tops of the pines but also draws with it "tout un pan ténébreux de ciel" (page 154). The silence the storm imposes is unusual:

> L'étrange, dans l'orage, ce n'est pas son tumulte, mais le silence qu'il impose au monde et cet engourdissement (page 163).

Even the birds are silenced by the storm (page 154).

Of the home of the Courrèges family, little is given. The trees cover it with leaves (page 119), and in spring there are fuchsias planted alongside (page 20). It has a peaceful garden (page 32).

A completely different atmosphere is created for the novel, Thérèse Desqueyroux. The setting for this novel is the estate of Argelouse. The creation of the atmosphere of Argelouse begins before the setting of the novel moves there. The novel opens in a small town as Thérèse is being released from custody for the attempted murder of her husband.[28] The only physical description of the small town is an odor of fog and the wall of forest along the route taken by Thérèse to the station as she starts for home (page 12).

As she journeys homeward, her thoughts of what awaits her include the family estate. She recalls the deserted

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[28]François Mauriac, Thérèse Desqueyroux (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1927), p. 9.

house, the watchdogs, and the solemn silence (page 15). The remoteness of Argelouse is evidenced by the distance Thérèse travels after leaving the train. "Argelouse est réellement une extrémité de la terre" (page 29); twenty-five kilometers from the ocean. Between the estate and the ocean are only swamps, pines, and the Landes (page 29).

The climate at Argelouse is as oppressive as its remoteness. In summer the "feu du ciel" besieges the people who are barricaded in their homes, and at twilight the heat remains stagnant under the oaks (page 35). In autumn, one must search a long time in the sand to find the source of the Hure, a small stream of the region (page 35). During the winters at Argelouse, there is a continuous rain (page 104). In spring, the dead leaves on the oaks still soil the sky as the earth is pierced by new sprouts of acid green (page 40).

Upon arriving at Argelouse, Thérèse learns from Bernard that she will virtually be his prisoner. She contemplates her prison from the window. Her guards will be the pines which encircle the house. Between the house and the pines is a little white gravel, which Thérèse can see, and chrysanthemums which she cannot see but whose odor betrays their presence. Black oaks hide the pines from her sight. She is aware of their presence because, like the chrysanthemums, their odor fills the night (page 130).

In the novel Destins, the only season described is summer. The sudden summer storms materialize quickly in the Gironde. The setting for Destins is Viridis, the estate belonging to old Jean Gornac, his daughter-in-law Elisabeth, and his grandson Pierre. A convalescing neighbor, Bob, frequently visits Elisabeth on the terrace of Viridis. There is a row of hornbeams between the terrace and the house.[29]

The summer heat is insupportable. Mauriac writes: "Le soleil avait enchanté le monde, l'avait frappé de stupeur; pas même un chant de coq: il régnait seul" (page 64). During the hottest part of the day there are no sounds of life. There is no human word, no cracking branch to break the silence (page 67).

The excessive heat brings the danger of fire in the plantation of pines. Elisabeth checks the horizon for fires and recognizes the thin column of smoke which a city dweller might take to be a storm. The smoke column is narrow at the horizon and spreads to a fan-shape in the dirty sky. The wind carries to her "le parfum des pins consumés" (page 69). Later, the smoky column diffuses into the sky and she knows that the fire has been brought under control (page 74).

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[29]François Mauriac, Destins (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1928), p. 43.

The evening brings relief from the heat. Now sounds are heard in the hills and the meadow: "Des rires, des appels, des abois montaient de la terre encore chaude, mais délivrée" (page 81). A late moon arises over the sleeping routes. A rooster crows to alert the other roosters (page 82).

The summer rains are as hazardous for the vines as the fire is for the trees. Lightning flashes in the stormy sky, which is dark enough to be "un ciel du fin du monde" (page 127). When the drops start to fall they make creases in the sulfate on the leaves of the vines. The sulfate has been placed there to protect the vines from blight. As the rainfall increases, hail mixes with the drops (page 128).

Calèse, the estate where the aging and miserly Louis composes his diary in the novel, Le Nœud de Vipères, is really Malagar, Mauriac's own estate. On the estate itself, there is a lane of roses and a Carolinian poplar tree. It is two kilometers between the house and the first pine woods.[30] The air at Calèse is filled with the perfume which Louis loves from long association, the odor of ashes in the wind caused by the burning pines beside the sea (page 56).

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[30]François Mauriac, Le Nœud de Vipères (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1933), p. 98.

The Landes are described once again. This time an account is given of their appearance in the extreme heat at four o'clock on a summer afternoon. The sky is afire; the plain lies in silence. The Landes form an immense black arc toward the horizon where the metallic sky rests. There are no signs of life. The flies buzz in a stationary place, as motionless as the smoke in the plain (page 102).

The storms at Calèse are violent. The sudden beginning of an August storm is one of the numerous storm descriptions given. Calèse has been quiet under the stars. Suddenly again comes a gust of wind, the rumbling in the sky, the heavy icy drops. They sound on the tile roof (page 127). Later, the sound of hail on the tiles is like a handful of gravel thrown there (page 130). The meadow is lighter than the sky. The earth, gorged with water, steams; and the ruts, full of rain, reflect a troubled sky. The storm ruins the harvest, for Louis hears, "...le bruit de la pluie, la nuit, sur la vendange pourrissante" (page 206). The sudden August storm over, the sensation is that of silence. It is thick, almost solid (page 233).

In September, Louis looks again on a quiet scene. He hears the awakened flies buzzing. He sees the thick, round linden tree. The sky, dark-colored at the zenith, is paling against the sleeping hills (page 209).

In the semi-autobiographical work, Le Mystère Frontenac, it is not the Frontenac town house that receives the greatest descriptive attention but the estate of Bourideys where the family of five children with their widowed mother spend the vacations. The vacations are so similar that the children wonder if anything has changed:[31]

> Les vacances successives s'ouvraient sur les colonnes profondes des pins à Bourideys.... Etaient-ce les mêmes cigales que l'année dernière?

The estate has a pavilion which opens on the river, the hills, the vineyards, and the meadows. There is a nightingale in the catalpa where there has always been a nightingale (page 19). The atmosphere of this novel, created by references to what has always been, such as the "vacances successives" and the nightingale in the catalpa, is one of timelessness. The rhythm of the seasons is strong in this novel; the eternal change from season to season with each year repeating the changes in the same order at the same time.

As the family arrives at Bourideys, spring is in the air but invisible. Under last year's leaves the oaks appear dead. A cuckoo calls over the meadows. It is a

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[31]François Mauriac, Le Mystère Frontenac (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1933), p. 43.

"faux jour d'hiver". The four-o'clock light caresses the trunks and the needles of the pines, shining like scales. Suddenly all darkens. The west wind pushes the heavy clouds which scrape the peaks of the pines and extracts a long wail from the forest (page 44).

With summer come the storms. Mauriac recounts that, in the forest country, one does not see the storms originate. They remain concealed by the pines; only their sigh gives them away. The fresh wind makes the children say it must be raining somewhere (page 92).

The Hure, a stream whose source is in the Landes, is a favorite place of the children. Because the Hure connects with the Ciron, the Ciron with the Garonne and the Garonne with the ocean (page 91), it adds to the atmosphere of timelessness. Mauriac expresses this timelessness thus:

> La Hure continuerait de couler dans les siècles des siècles. Jusqu'à la fin du monde le nuage de cette prairie monterait vers cette première étoile (page 124).

Mauriac describes the Frontenac country by night. The moon shines on the Landes full of water; the only sounds which interrupt the wail of the pines is the nocturnal <u>sanglot</u> of a bird and the creaking of a cart. The atmosphere created is peaceful and eternal.

There are three different settings for the action of La Pharisienne. One is Bordeaux during the winters where Louis Pian, who narrates the story, attends school. The other two are outside Bordeaux: the Pian country estate of Larjuzon, and the parish house where Jean Mirbel, a school friend of Louis, comes to live as the ward of the village priest.

The estate and the lands of Larjuzon are crossed by a river, the Ciron. The narrator leans against an enormous pine growing so close to the river that the water bathes its roots.[32] Between the two country settings lie a row of alders and a marshy meadow (page 27), which the boys, Jean Mirbel and Louis Pian, must cross to visit one another.

Again, the only season described is summer. "C'était un pâle été sans cigales" (page 39). A summer storm is described which, without rumbling, rose above the pines (page 30).

The parish house is described as being surrounded by a garden where potatoes, beans, tomatoes, and other vegetables are grown (page 21). Outside the garden, the parish house is encircled by pines (page 52). The only

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[32]François Mauriac, La Pharisienne (Paris: J. Ferenczi et fils, Editeurs, 1937), p. 28.

sound of the summer night there is the wail of these pines. There is no sound of the sea to break "la houle végétale" (page 52).

The scene of L'Agneau is also the Pian estate of Larjuzon. It is fifteen years later, and Jean Mirbel is now married to Michèle Pian, the sister of the boy who narrated La Pharisienne. The purely descriptive passages of the novel treat the woods, the pines, and the fields of the estate. In one passage, Mauriac describes the twilight mist moving over the fields thus: "La brume du crépuscule montait de la prairie, gagnait le bois."[33] At night, "la lune voilée s'épandait sur les espaces vides que la mort des vieux pins multipliait dans le parc de Larjuzon" (page 141). And again, Mauriac describes the silence. Even the pines, which are seldom silent, are now stilled. So great is the silence that Xavier, the young priest who is the house guest of the Mirbels, can hear the water in the distant stream trickle between the alder trees (page 190).

The use of the same external setting for each novel serves to tie one novel to another. The reader recognizes

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[33]François Mauriac, L'Agneau (Paris: Flammarion, 1954), p. 128.

landmarks from one novel which reappear in another. The Hure, a stream which crosses the estate of Argelouse in Thérèse Desqueyroux also crosses the country of the Frontenac family in Le Mystère Frontenac. Another stream, the Ciron, mentioned in this latter novel also waters Larjuzon, the estate of the Pians in La Pharisienne and L'Agneau. Langon, the setting of Génitrix, is mentioned as a landmark in Destins and Thérèse Desqueyroux. The sudden storms and the intense Gironde heat are present in each novel. The total effect gives a sense of unity to Mauriac's works.

CHAPTER III

RAPPORTS BETWEEN THE CHARACTERS AND NATURE

The characters in Mauriac's novels experience a close rapport with their surroundings. Because their senses are over-stimulated by their inner passions and turmoils, the details of nature seem all the more lucid to them.

Nature seems often to represent the passionate side of the characters and to be in direct conflict with their spiritual urgings and commitments. Mauriac asks, "Que ne pouvons-nous aimer à la fois Cybèle et le Christ?"[34] Elsie Pell states that nature is not a passive mood-producer in the novels of Mauriac, but rather actively and intentionally reproduces its moods in man. "The sun wills to manifest its joy through us; the rain wills to manifest its sorrow."[35] Whether the moods originate with nature or with man, there is a great parallelism between the soul of his creatures and the décor of his novels. Fowlie

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[34]François Mauriac, Journal (III). Cited by Peyre, Contemporary French Literature, p. 61. For Cybèle, cf., p. 7.

[35]Elsie Pell, François Mauriac: In Search of the Infinite (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), p. 40.

speaks of this parallelism:[36]

> In each of his stories, Mauriac achieves a remarkable harmony between the characters and the landscape which they seem to reflect. The storms which descend from the skies over Bordeaux are closely related to the inner storms of the heart. The same wind stirs the tops of the pine trees and the deepest parts of the soul. The fires which so often sweep through the forests and the Landes resemble the human passions.

Mauriac's primary concern is with the passions and souls of his characters, but his treatment of this reflects the wildness and solitude of the Landes.

Jean Péloueyre, the principal character of Le Baiser au Lépreux, is an unattractive but rich young man. When he learns he is to be married to the beautiful but poor Noémi, he thinks there will be an earthquake or some other phenomenon of nature to prevent it. However, the wedding day dawns and: "La terre ne trembla pas; il n'y eut pas de signes dans le ciel et l'aube de ce mardi de septembre éclaira doucement le monde" (page 57).

Previous to the marriage, the feelings of Jean and Noémi about the future are illuminated by the moonlight and the stars. Jean, who can scarcely believe his good fortune, looks from his window where he "regardait les mondes et les appelait par leurs noms" (page 27). Noémi,

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[36]Fowlie, op. cit., p. 147.

who is less happy about the prospect of their union, "récitait sa prière devant les étoiles" (page 52) and offers herself to "l'apitoiement de la nuit" (page 53).

After the wedding, Jean escapes to the Landes each day. He purports to be hunting pigeons but actually is leaving the house so Noémi will not be forced to look at him all day (page 69). The loneliness and rejection Jean feels is best shown when framed by the deserted region of the Landes. Jean feels he physically resembles the desolate Landes (page 77).

Jean is encouraged by the village priest to go to Paris to do research and write. He goes, believing Noémi wants to be rid of him. As he leaves his home region, he watches the familiar pines pass the window of the train (page 85). They alone seem loathe to see him go. He comments:

> A Langon, il dit adieu aux derniers pins comme à des amis qui l'eussent accompagné le plus loin possible et s'arrêtaient enfin (page 85).

In Paris, Jean wastes away, longing for home. On the Champs-Elysées, the moon is his link with home; for, as he looks at it, he takes solace in thinking it also is shining over the southwest of France (page 95).

At the estate, Noémi makes her obligatory tour of their small farms in the Landes area with an attractive young man-servant. She enjoys herself, remembering pleasant

times before she was married to the unfortunate Jean. It is a sound of nature that evokes her memories: "Le chant du coucou rappelait d'autres printemps" (page 109).

Jean returns home, ill. His illness brings into the home a young doctor who is strongly attracted to Noémi. Jean watches from his bed, pretending to be asleep, as they speak, supposedly of the weather. But, when the doctor speaks of the storm which is coming, he is not speaking of the weather. "L'orage, c'était ce garçon pâle et furieux de désir" (page 140). The earthiness of the young doctor has been evidenced earlier, as he travels through the pine woods. Mauriac explains: "le jeune homme...ne savait pas qu'il y eût, au-dessus des pins, les astres. Son nez ne se levait pas plus de la croûte terrestre que le museau d'un chien" (page 134).

Jean has willed himself to die. But, as he is close to death, he remembers the beauty of the dawn when he used to go hunting in the Landes and regrets his decision (page 142). Nature alone does not reject Jean in life. It is only his love for the Landes that gives him any desire to live.

During the winter rains Jean dies. All that is left to him of life are the sounds he hears: "les chants des coqs...ce ruissellement indéfini sur les tuiles et, la nuit, des sanglots de rapaces oiseaux, des cris de bêtes

assassinées" (page 144). Dying, his last sensation is one familiar to him: "...cette haleine des pins incendiés" (page 145).

As the novel Génitrix opens, Mathilde has been defeated in the struggle with her mother-in-law, Félicité Cazenave, over Fernand, a struggle which began when Fernand and Mathilde were married. Now Mathilde lies dying, alone and unattended, burning with fever. The external beauty of the night contrasts sharply with her condition. She listens to the sounds of the spring night (page 10); and, delirious, believes she is stretched out on the sand near the sea (page 13). She recalls how she met Fernand. She was living on property adjoining the Cazenave estate. Through a row of privet she observed Félicité and Fernand (page 27). Her memory of the beginning of the unhappy marriage is closely associated with the grove of medlars, hazelnut trees, and privet where she overheard the mother and son quarrel and first decided to try to meet Fernand (page 35).

The relationship shown between nature and Félicité Cazenave is a unique one. So unnatural is this woman in her consuming passion to dominate and possess her son that nature recoils from her. As Félicité walks into the garden, she frightens a nightingale and even the crickets become silent as she passes (page 54).

Mathilde's death arouses in Fernand a morbid adoration for her. He rebels against his mother and spends the night in Mathilde's room with the body. Restless, he opens the window to look at the night. Of Fernand it is said, "Il n'était point de ceux qui sont accoutumés à lever la tête vers les étoiles au lieu de dormir" (page 58). Rather than taking consolation from the night, he feels all the more alone because the stars, like the corpse, are dead: "Entre ces mondes morts et cette chair morte, il était debout, pauvre vivant" (page 59). Unaccustomed to spending the night anywhere except on a cot near his mother's room, Fernand becomes frightened at the night sounds. He imagines there might be a frégasse, a mysterious bird of the region that points out those who are to die (page 60). Unable to experience anything in the night except fear, Fernand deserts the watch he is keeping over the dead body of his wife.

Fernand is not yet reconciled with his mother. Now it is she who fears nature's sounds in the night (page 79). Félicité's attitude toward nature is that of the pagan. She has a worshipful, superstitious awe. Mauriac explains:

> Elle était née dans le temps que seuls des chemins de sable reliaient la Lande au reste du monde.... Les enfants landais, à l'aube du dernier siècle, n'adoraient que le soleil implacable, ne connaissaient que cette toute-puissance du feu dévorateur des pignadas--dieu rapide et qui court, insaisissable, allumant derrière soi une foule immense de torches (page 79).

Numa Cazenave, the deceased husband of Félicité, was one of those "jaloux amants des pins et de la vigne" (page 88). This love was not a love of nature, but of property. For him, the pines and vineyards represented only wealth and rank.

The estrangement of mother and son continues. Fernand lies on the bed where Mathilde died and now it is he who recalls "les troènes bourdonnants" which he associates with meeting Mathilde (page 89). Félicité, who could not be broken by Mathilde's hatred, now is broken by Fernand's alienation. This woman of violent passions becomes meek. Mauriac explains: "Dans les pays du feu, les passions des hommes s'accordent à la violence du ciel, mais quelquefois s'apaisent avec lui" (page 105).

Le Désert de l'Amour is so entitled because each of the three principal characters, Maria Cross, Dr. Courrèges, and his adolescent son, Raymond, find in life and love only the solitude and barrenness of a desert.

The summer Raymond becomes seventeen is torrid but he thinks he may have confused the "feu du ciel" with the interior flame of his newly-aroused passions (page 37). When he meets Maria Cross later that year, he finds an object for these passions.

Raymond's father, Dr. Courrèges, also is obsessed with Maria. She is flattered by the doctor's attentions but does

not return his love. One Sunday as the doctor hurries to Maria's house, the streets are crowded with people going to the Bordeaux bullfight. His emotion builds up as he thinks about seeing Maria. At the same time a summer storm is building up in the atmosphere around him. It has been sunny, but suddenly there is a dark cloud in the sky. The rain has not yet begun. The doctor exclaims: "Non, l'orage n'éclaterait pas avant que le dernier taureau eût fini de souffrir" (page 92). As he nears Maria's house, the rain drops start to fall and he thinks: "Le dernier taureau devrait saigner sous ce ciel sombre" (page 96). During his brief visit with Maria, during which he loses all illusions of any prospect of finding happiness with her, the rain continues. He readies himself to leave but Maria persuades him to wait until the downpour is over. He uses the minute the rain gives him to rid himself of all desire of Maria (page 100). On the way home, he no longer suffers but enjoys the ending storm (page 101).

Between father and son, each of whom suffers because of the same woman, there is little communication. They speak only of the weather. The father asks his son: "Pleut-il encore?" and the son replies: "Non, il ne pleut plus" (page 106). One evening, while walking in the garden, they finally discuss Maria, although the father does not know that his son is in love with her, too. Each has a

different view of her. Their disagreement leaves each dissatisfied. The doctor finds himself alone under the thick leaves of the trees of the garden, "attentif au cri d'ardeur et de tristesse que vers le ciel jetait la prairie" (page 132). He puts his arms around a chestnut tree to gather strength to go back into the house (page 132). Raymond leaves the garden kicking a pine cone, unaware of the stars and the odor of acacias, interested only in that which can satisfy his desire (page 133).

Now it is Raymond who hurries to keep a Sunday appointment at Maria's. Again it is raining. The rain gives Maria an excuse not to leave and thereby avoid seeing Raymond. During the visit, Raymond tries to force himself on Maria but she escapes him. Alone again, Maria hears an occasional call of a bird, then silence. It is not an exterior silence, but one which comes from within her, spreads to the room, the house, the garden, the city, and the world (page 175). Childless and friendless, Maria at last realizes the extent of her solitude. As the moon comes into view, she reaches out to the night, not to drink it in but to lose herself in it in order that "enfin son désert intérieur se confondît avec celui de l'espace,--pour que ce silence en elle ne fût plus différent du silence des sphères" (page 181). Maria finds the coldness within herself has made her as unattainable as the stars.

Much of the novel Thérèse Desqueyroux is presented as flashbacks through Thérèse's memory. With each memory Thérèse associates the weather, the season, or a particular setting. In the opening passages of the novel, Thérèse is being released from prison. It is a foggy evening but the odor of fresh bread from a nearby bakery and the fog is to Thérèse the perfume of life restored to her (page 9). As she reminisces on the way to Argelouse, her fondest memories are those of her childhood friend, Anne, sister of her husband. She thinks of the times they spent together as "ces beaux étés" (page 27). These happy summers symbolize to Thérèse her girlhood innocence which now is lost. She feels her happy childhood was an omen of the troubled adulthood to follow, and she compares this to an afternoon storm which follows a lovely morning: "Matinées trop bleues: mauvais signe pour le temps de l'après-midi et du soir" (page 27).

Thérèse's engagement to Anne's brother, Bernard, was announced in the spring. Therese was lulled by nature's promise of spring into a false sense of faith in the future. They were married in the summer. The spring warmth had changed to summer's heat. She recalls that the wedding day was hot: "le jour étouffant des noces" (page 43). The intense heat represents to her the sexual passion which only Bernard felt.

It was some months afterward that heat began to symbolize passion on Thérèse's part. However, her passion was hatred, rather than sensuality. Thérèse recalls the summer drought following the birth of her daughter. Bernard lived in terror of fires in the pines (page 110). Thérèse, too, feared for the pines and wondered why the villages never burned. She found it unjust that it was always the trees that burned and never the people. Thérèse had "l'amour des pins dans le sang; ce n'était pas aux arbres qu'allait sa haine" (page 111). It was the day that fire actually broke out that she conceived the idea of poisoning Bernard. Her memories of watching him accidently give himself a double dose of medication are intermingled with memories of that torrid day, of the sun which was as if soiled, and the odor of burning resin (page 112).

The return journey from prison to Argelouse and her reminiscing over, Thérèse learns from Bernard that she will virtually be a prisoner of the family at Argelouse. The remoteness of Argelouse, the silence, and the pines which shut it off from the rest of the world make the estate a veritable prison for Thérèse. The silence encircles the house as if solidified in the mass of forest (page 96). The pines which surround the house seem to Thérèse to be l'armée ennemie, gardiens, and témoins to her imprisonment (page 130).

Thérèse considers suicide but, looking out of the window at the countryside beginning to lighten at dawn, she realizes she cannot give up life. She thinks of death as eternal darkness and wonders: "Comment renoncer à tant de lumière?" (page 139)

Bernard leaves Thérèse in the care of servants while he takes a trip. The winter rains keep her from going out; her solitude and depression make her ill (page 149). The bars of her prison are the pines. The continuous rain is another bar to Thérèse's prison (page 104). Bernard returns and, finding her ill, takes pity on her and relieves his restrictions on her. When the rains cease, Thérèse "n'avait plus peur d'Argelouse" because the pines seem to signal her to take her freedom (page 148).

At last, Bernard tells her she is free to leave. Thérèse is unable to sleep that night because of her joy. The roosters crowing at dawn seem to express this joy (page 169). Bernard accompanies her to Paris. However, she knows she would go back to Argelouse with him if he would but ask her. She pictures the route he will take home and imagines the wind which carries the odors of marshlands, grass fires, and fog which will bathe his face. However, Thérèse denies that she misses Argelouse, saying: "Qu'importe d'aimer tel pays ou tel autre, les pins ou les érables, l'Océan ou la plaine?" (page 184) She tells

herself she is interested only in the forest of people in Paris, not in the forest of pines at Argelouse (page 184).

The opposite is true for Jean Gornac, the father-in-law in Destins. His only interest is a place, his estate of Viridis. Second in importance to him is the weather. He worries about the intense heat and the threat of fire it brings to the pines (page 68), but also fears the damage rain can cause to the vineyards (page 68). The year 1893 stands out in his memory because the burning heat of that summer still seems to glow in the bottles of wine bearing that date (page 11). A religious love of the pines, the vineyards, and the land is the tie which unites him with his widowed daughter-in-law, Elisabeth. To Elisabeth, the very concepts of life and death are related to their property, for she conceives of death as being separation from her vineyards and forest (page 71). Even when her son, Pierre, whose religion is more orthodox, at last decides to leave his home and become a Catholic missionary, he feels a last pull toward "Ces pins qui ont toujours été dans la famille, ces vignes que grand-père a plantées" (page 184).

The love which Elisabeth observes between her neighbor, Bob, and his fiancée, Paule, is unknown in her own experience. The day Paule comes to visit Bob, Elisabeth is out investigating a possible fire in the Landes and is

suddenly aware of the fire of love between the couple in the garden. She imagines that, if it were not for the wind which carries the scent of burning pine, she would be able to hear them (page 70). Paule tells Elisabeth later that she will never forget that she and Bob became engaged under the hornbeams at the Gornac estate (page 77).

The course for the engaged couple is not to be without complications. The calm Paule feels in looking across the trees to the moonlit house where Bob is sleeping (page 103) is shattered by the accusations Pierre makes to Paule about Bob. Upset by what Pierre has told her, Paule leaves. The following day Bob has only the note she left and for him "le ciel était bas, livide" (page 188), and "l'horizon morne" (page 122). The countryside now seems to Bob silent and empty (page 122). The depressing atmosphere of the day represents to Bob his entire future:

> Il mesura d'œil désolé ses jours futurs, aussi déserts que cette plaine livide et endormie sous un ciel de ténèbre, un ciel de fin du monde que des éclairs, à l'horizon, brièvement déchiraient (page 127).

As the rain commences, he lets himself be soaked by it. He is indifferent to water and fire; he thinks he has lost his humanity and has become a thing (page 128). He cries out Paule's name against the sounds of nature (page 129).

Elisabeth's attachment for Bob is stronger than that which she has for her own son. After Bob leaves, she finds

the countryside suddenly deserted. The plain seems to have become an ocean floor (page 145). Nature gives her no advance warning of Bob's death, which comes about in an automobile accident (page 154); but, the night of his funeral, the rain and wind bemoan with her the loss of her young friend. Elisabeth wonders: "Comment distinguer une plainte humaine et la détacher de ce gémissement universel?" (page 182) Days later, as she passes the route where she used to see Bob playing as a child, she thinks of him. However, she also notices a blight on the vines and her thoughts turn to protecting the harvest (page 191), and her love for the land returns.

Another novel in which love for the land is significant is Le Nœud de Vipères. As the novel opens, Louis is composing his diary in the form of a letter to his wife to be read after his death. As he begins writing, he looks out on the grounds of his estate and on the Carolinian poplar tree. He thinks he is lucky to await death in the only place in the world where everything is unchanged from the way he remembers it.

He recalls where he first met Isa, his wife. It was in the spring at Luchon, a mountain resort in the Pyrenees. He remembers the odor of the lime blossoms and says, that when he smells lime blossoms now, it is always the same ones of so many years ago (page 31). He recalls a night

when Isa was unhappy and he was able to comfort her. The warm and humid night in the Pyrenees resort, which usually smelled of wet grass and mint, took on the odor of the young girl in tears (page 38).

The happiness which he felt with his young wife was short-lived. When Isa confided in Louis about an earlier love, his happiness was shattered. He still remembers the night. It was warm. There was a linden tree whose leaves fluttered against the house. The only sounds were that of the wind and the murmur of the meadow. The moon was fading as Isa began her confession (page 50). As Isa described how refined the other man was, the moonlight fell on Louis' large, knotty, peasant hand. The next morning, Louis watched a new day dawn, the first day of his new life, a life in which he would no longer feel love for his wife (page 56).

There were only two people whom Louis loved after that. Both now are dead. One was his daughter Marie who died in childhood. He recalls now the summer she became ill: "...cet été implacable! Le délire de cet été, la férocité des cigales" (page 109). The other person Louis loved was his nephew, Luc. Luc was in such harmony with nature that he had no love for nature. He was nature itself. Louis writes in his diary of Luc's departure as

follows: "Il quittait le pays, en octobre, avec les autres oiseaux" (page 121). Luc was killed in war and never returned to Calèse.

To the children of the Frontenac family in Le Mystère Frontenac, who come each spring and summer to Bourideys to spend their vacation, rapport with nature is happy and idyllic. In the early spring, Jean-Louis, the oldest, thinks he is chasing a squirrel but really he is chasing spring. At last, in the meadows watered by the Hure, he catches the essence of spring in the already thickening grasses. During the Pentecostal holidays, Jean-Louis and Madeleine, the girl with whom he has fallen in love, walk through the thick grass full of buttercups and daisies. Later, when Jean-Louis recalls these spring mornings, he remembers the supreme joy he felt (page 59).

For the children's uncle, Xavier, the Frontenac estate brings memories of his brother, the children's father. A nightingale singing in the catalpa reminds him of his brother who used to get out of bed to hear a nightingale (page 19). When Jean-Louis and his youngest brother, Yves, look at the moon together they do not know that, thirty years earlier, their father and uncle Xavier walked under the same pines, heard the same stream, spoke of the same moon, and felt the same fraternal love (page 52).

Yves, the poet of the family, is the most sensitive to nature. He reads his poetry to the night as if to another person whose flesh and breath he can feel (page 93). For José, the one who is the most animal of the boys, "le plus proche de l'instinct" (page 127), and therefore the least sensitive to nature, taking it for granted as do the animals, it suffices to make him happy to know where he can catch fish in the Hure (page 86).

Jean-Louis wishes to study philosophy, but his mother and uncle feel it is his responsibility as the eldest son to take charge of the family business. They convince him of this one rainy evening. Jean-Louis goes to the window to watch the rain so the others will not see his tears (page 103).

One day while watching an ant trying to escape from an ant-lion, Yves ponders the meaning of life. He realizes the ant-lion must capture ants in order to live; it is part of nature's system. He rescues the ant, thinking that this act of succor symbolizes the role of love in the world; to interfere with nature's fatal order of things (page 120).

Yves moves to Paris to further his studies. The first time he returns to Bourideys, he has the impression he is visiting in a dream. He dreams of the pines rather than seeing them (page 197). When he returns to Paris,

the oaks of Bourideys live a second life in his thoughts (page 250). Even though his mother and his brother José are now dead, Yves believes that their family love has united them all so that, although they will no longer walk between the bases of the pines, they will pass together high above the peaks (page 253).

Louis Pian, in La Pharisienne, recalls the strongest emotion of his childhood as being jealousy. He relates his first experience with jealousy. It is a summer afternoon. The three children, Louis, his sister Michèle, and his friend Jean Mirbel are crossing the meadow between the Pian estate and the parish house where Jean lives. Jean and Michèle begin to whisper to each other. Suddenly, Louis realizes that he is losing his sister to his best friend. Louis recounts: "...j'ai commencé de souffrir à treize ans, dans cette prairie mouillée" (page 28). For Louis, this is the day when he becomes a man. Later, standing by the stream watching water spiders swim, surrounded by the perfume of water plants and mint, he says goodbye to childhood summers, knowing that Jean and Michèle are in love. He recalls: "Je souffrais d'une souffrance de l'homme" (page 29). Another day, Jean and Michèle escape into the rain, but Louis is kept indoors. Again jealousy overcomes him: "Ainsi je souffrais devant la campagne pluvieuse" (page 39).

When Jean's mother at last comes to visit him, it is he who suffers from jealousy. Unaware of the real reason she insists on spending the night in a hotel, he goes to see her just before dawn. There he sees his mother with a man. The couple come out from a hotel room onto the balcony to look at the fading moon. In spite of his suffering, Jean remembers noticing a lark singing above his head (page 59).

The Pian estate again serves as décor for the suffering of another young man, Xavier, the seminary student in L'Agneau. Jean Mirbel met Xavier on a train and insisted he come to the Pian estate of Larjuzon. There Xavier meets and falls in love with a young girl, Dominique. For the first time, Xavier notices the tall pines which seem to him to form a dark circle around his happiness (page 80). But Xavier believes himself designated to be a priest and not for this kind of happiness. He goes alone into the autumn night. The wind twists the tree tops. The thought that he is a young man like any other turns and twists in his mind like the dead leaves which rise and subside with the wind at his feet (page 89). When Xavier realizes there is no way left for him to turn, his most pleasant memory is of a fallen log because it was there that he and Dominique embraced. He wonders, now that he has a premonition of

death, if that log will rot before or after his own body (page 190). His death soon follows.

In the novels of Mauriac, the description of nature is essential to the protrayal of emotions in the characters. Passion, solitude, hatred, whatever the emotion may be, is presented in relation to a particular landscape, or a description of season or climate.

CHAPTER IV

IMAGERY TAKEN FROM NATURE

Since childhood, Mauriac has loved the mysteries and symbols of nature.[37] His literary style is composed of many metaphors and symbols taken from the vineyards and the pine trees, from the hot summer sun and sand of his native Gironde. His imagery often seems to contain a confusion of terms. Elsie Pell writes:[38]

> For him to speak of the "odor of a soul" is as natural as to speak of the odor of a pine-tree. A pine tree thinks, feels, suffers; why can a soul not give forth its own peculiar perfume? According to Mauriac, it does.

Often nature is given characteristics usually attributed only to man and man takes on those of nature. Nelly Cormeau says of Mauriac: "Il est intimement accordé avec la nature."[39] He does not separate the attributes of man and nature because he conceives of them as one and the same.

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[37]André LaGarde and Laurent Michaud, XX^e Siècle (Paris: Editions Bordas, 1962), p. 459.

[38]Pell, op. cit., p. 41.

[39]Nelly Cormeau, L'Art de François Mauriac (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1951), p. 289.

In Le Baiser au Lépreux, it is the imagery taken from the forests of the Péloueyre estate that is most significant. The pine, chestnut, and oak trees are often given human or animal traits. The sound of the wind in the pines is described as the wail "que leur enseigne l'Atlantique" (page 65). When Jean Péloueyre leaves for Paris, the pine trees outside the train window extend their branches to give him their blessing (page 77). In Paris, Jean thinks with longing of the "troupeau de sombres cimes" that is his forest of pines (page 95). In another comparison, Mauriac says that, when Jean leaves, Noémi is saved from the oppression of his presence "comme la campagne se délivre de l'hiver" (page 84).

Near the end of the novel, as Jean is dying, he looks back on "l'eau grise de sa vie" and exclaims, "Quelle stagnation!" (page 130) After Jean's death, Noémi, who is bound by her promise never to remarry, surveys the innumerable pines which will forever keep her a prisoner. Running through the forest, she is stopped by a stunted oak tree, "un chêne noir qui ressemblait à Jean Péloueyre" (page 151).

In the novel Génitrix, where fires are a constant threat to the pines, Mathilde suffers with fever and "brûlait tout entière comme un jeune pin" (page 39).

The isolation of the Cazenave estate creates such a silence that even the meadows seem to sleep as in the following passage: "De la prairie même ne venait plus que le murmure endormi d'un rêve végétal" (page 60). Rather than speaking of a night breeze, Mauriac writes, "comme un être familier la nuit respirait" (page 87). The plantations of pines are called the tristes forêts and the river is la Garonne heureuse (page 132). A bird sings "avec sa voix de printemps" (page 133).

After the death of his mother, Fernand Cazenave thinks of his life as a walk through the forest and reflects that his over-protective mother "ne marchait plus devant lui en écartant les branches" (page 142). This corresponds to the following description given of Fernand who appears in another novel, Le Baiser au Lépreux: "Sa mère lui frayait la route, brisant les êtres comme des branches" (page 31).

In Le Désert de l'Amour, Raymond Courrèges and the other adolescents at his school are referred to as "la jeune forêt humaine" (page 38). Later under the regard of Maria Cross, Raymond undergoes a metamorphosis from ungainly adolescent to young man. The change in his neglected body, which feels an inner stirring, is compared to the gnarled tree trunks of a forest of antiquity where a sleeping goddess suddenly stirs (page 71). Raymond's family, who remain unaware of the change in him, are described as being

able to observe a chestnut blossom for hours without understanding anything of the mystery of its blossoming (page 71).

The house of the uncommunicative Courrèges family is "l'épaisse prison de feuilles où les membres d'une seule famille vivaient aussi confondues et séparés que les mondes dont est faite la Voie Lactée" (page 119). The only two of the family who communicate well are Raymond's sister and her husband. Their communication is almost extra-sensory, for Madeleine, with an animal-like instinct, knows her husband is returning and goes to meet him before he comes into visual range as if

> ...elle eût appartenir à une espece différente des autres animaux où le mâle et non la femelle eût été odorant pour attirer la complice à travers l'ombre (page 21).

A similar analogy is made of Raymond and his father who are both in love with Maria Cross. The attraction the two males feel for the female is instinctive. They are described thus:

> Comme deux papillons séparés par des lieues se rejoignent sur la boîte où est enfermée la femelle plein d'odeur, eux aussi avaient suivi les routes convergentes de leurs désirs, et se posaient côte à côte sur Maria Cross invisible" (page 124).

However, Maria Cross is completely unaware of Raymond's physical passion for her. She perceives him as angelic: "elle ne discernait pas l'âge de l'impureté, ne savait pas que le printemps est souvent la saison de la boue" (page 119).

In the novel Thérèse Desqueyroux, Thérèse reviews her innocent and happy childhood in search of the cause of her present unhappy circumstances. Mauriac states that it is an "Incroyable vérité que dans ces aubes toutes pures de nos vies, les pires orages étaient déjà suspendues" (page 27).

After her marriage to Bernard, whom she does not love, Thérèse is awakened to the possibility of conjugal love "comme devant un paysage enseveli sous la pluie, nous nous représentons ce qu'il eût été dans le soleil, ainsi Thérèse découvrait la volupté" (page 45). Bernard, who is unaware of her coldness toward him, is "comme ces jeunes porcs charmants qu'il est drôle de regarder à travers la grille, lorsqu'ils reniflent de bonheur dans une auge" (page 46). Thérèse adds: "c'était moi, l'auge" (page 46).

Thérèse has great difficulty finding her place in her husband's family. When she is expecting their child, she thinks of herself as only a vine and says, "le fruit attaché à mes entrailles comptait seul" (page 75).

To Thérèse the pine trees surrounding the family estate are the guards of her prison (page 130).[40] The forest is usually silent but sometimes "se plaînt comme on

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[40] cf., p. 38.

pleure sur soi-même, se berce, s'endort" (page 170). Free at last to leave Argelouse, Thérèse, in a confusion of terms, thinks of the pines she is leaving as "la foule des arbres" (page 170), and the crowds of people in Paris as "la forêt vivante" (page 184).

The novel Destins contains many references to the heat and the sun. Mauriac often refers to the sun as "le feu du ciel" or "l'incendie du ciel." In Destins, he calls the out-of-doors "la fournaise extérieure" (page 64). The term incendie is also used in this novel in reference to the love between Bob and Paule (page 70).

In Le Nœud de Vipères, Louis had married Isa, believing she loved him. Finding later that she did not, he writes to her in his diary: "Je t'étais uni comme un renard au piège" (page 60). To Louis, his family is "le troupeau chucotant" (page 75). Louis says of Isa's attachment to his estate of Calèse that she has taken root in his ground (page 79). Later, he speaks of the unhappy family relationship saying that the majority of humans do not choose to be together any more than the trees choose to grow together in the forest (page 105).

The daughter whom Louis loved is frequently compared to a bird. He says: J'entendais battre son cœur d'oiseau" (page 80). Later: "elle s'envolait dans le jardin" (page

80). Many years later with his great-grandaughter he says: "je retrouvais dans ses cheveux, l'odeur d'oiseau, de nids qui me rappelait Marie" (page 231).

The abundant vineyards are described as "cette cuve immense où la vendange future fermentait dans le soleil des feuilles bleuies" (page 103). The vines are so vulnerable to the summer storms that they are like young animals put out as bait by the hunter. The rumbling clouds are the wild animals (page 127). When the storm threatens, Mauriac writes that "la vigne a peur" (page 167). When peaceful weather returns, Louis, in the last autumn of his life, looks out on the vines which now seem to be sleeping quietly (page 213).

Mauriac often writes in his novels of "un jour fauve d'été." In Le Mystère Frontenac summer is "la saison fauve" (page 83).

When Yves Frontenac wants to escape some unpleasant visitors at lunch, he goes into the forest where "les arbres ne savaient plus qu'il avait eu du monde à déjeuner" (page 118). Another of the brothers, José, spends so much time in the forest he is referred to as "ce petit renard qu'on aurait pu suivre à la piste " (page 127).

Mauriac prefers metaphor to a direct comparison. Rather than stating that the young girls singing in church at Bourideys look like chickens he says only that they

group themselves "autour de l'harmonium comme au bord d'une vasque et gonflaient leur gorge qu'on eût dit pleine de millet et de maïs" (page 56).

In La Pharisienne Mauriac makes less use of nature than in any of the other novels included in this study. The most interesting example of imagery is a description of the people at the funeral of Louis Pian's father. The crowd is described as "le troupeau bourgeois et paysan" (page 87). Louis is looking for his friend Jean:"Entre toutes ces figures animales, ces nez de furets, ces museaux de renards et de lapins, ces fronts de ruminant, ces yeux, vifs, brillants, stupides comme ceux des oiseaux" (page 87).

In the novel L'Agneau, the imagery of the pines often takes on a religious connotation. The significance of the burned trees in terms of the crucifixion is evoked by the young priest Xavier, who sees them as "ces pins dont les membres noirs était crucifiés au vide" (page 80). Another passage describes the priest as remaining motionless like a young pine tree in the night (page 133). When Xavier, as a priest, refuses to abandon his vain attempt to save Jean and Michèle Pian spiritually, Dominique, who loves him, accuses him of sacrificing her to the trees of the Pian estate (page 184).

While not every novel is rich in imagery taken from nature, this kind of comparison does occur with sufficient frequency to conclude that nature and, in particular the pines and the vineyards of the Gironde, have provided Mauriac with considerable material for developing his characteristic literary style.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The settings and nature descriptions used by Mauriac for his novels are not varied. The setting is always the region of Bordeaux and the Landes. The natural phenomena described are limited to the variations of season and climate which occur in the southwest of France: intense heat and sudden storms of summer and the continuous winter rains. Yet the repeated descriptions are not monotonous. The repetition of setting serves to connect and unify the various novels. Because the reader of Mauriac knows what the setting will be, Mauriac need not furnish long, lyrical descriptions of nature but can, with a brief note, evoke in the reader's mind the whole region of the Landes.

Of the novels used in this study, the earlier novels contain more descriptions of nature and rely more on these descriptions to set the atmosphere for the story and to present the emotions of the characters. It would seem that, as his style as a novelist developed, Mauriac no longer felt so intently the need to involve nature's elements in order to describe human emotions. The later novels, La Pharisienne and L'Agneau, are concerned more

with character study or, as in the case of L'Agneau, with nature in a purely symbolic sense.

It is part of Mauriac's classical style that he does not indulge in lengthy or irrelevant descriptive passages but that each reference to nature is vital to the portrayal of a character, of an emotion, or to the creation of atmosphere for the novel.

The conflicts and torments of the characters are inextricably tied to their surroundings. Certain emotions are invariably related to a particular phenomenon of nature. To those characters who reminisce over their lost but happy childhood, in their memory it is always summer, "ces beaux étés." As adults, the intense heat, the blazing, merciless sun is reflected in the violent passions which may, at any time, burst forth from these tortured beings, devastating them as do the fires in the pine forests. The rains which announce the coming of winter to the Landes symbolize solitude. The pines, which are the only other living beings to share this isolation, are sometimes perceived by the characters as enemies who keep the imprisoned character from escaping, as in Thérèse Desqueyroux and L'Agneau, and other times as friends who wave their branches in blessing as in Le Baiser au Lépreux.

Not only is nature essential to the atmosphere of the novels and the emotional protrayal of the characters but also to Mauriac's style. The interesting metaphors and symbolism his sensibility to nature provides him are an integral part of the literary style that characterizes François Mauriac as one of France's greatest contemporary novelists.

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APPENDIX

SUMMARIES OF NOVELS STUDIED

LE BAISER AU LÉPREUX (1922)

Jean Péloueyre, unloved and unattractive, has never received any favorable attention from women. Because the Péloueyre line must have heirs to keep the estate intact, the village priest arranges a marriage between Jean and a beautiful but poor young girl, Noémi.

Jean realizes Noémi is repulsed by him. Each day he goes out to hunt to relieve her of his presence. When the opportunity arises for him to go to Paris to work on a research project, he leaves. In Paris, away from the province he loves, he becomes ill.

On his return, Jean finds Noémi has been happier during his absence. Spending his time with a friend who has tuberculosus, he too contacts the disease and dies. The doctor who treats Jean during his illness is attracted to Noémi but she remains faithful to her husband's wish that she not remarry after his death.

GÉNITRIX (1923)

Mathilde Cazenave is dying. She is unattended, although her husband and mother-in-law, Fernand and Félicité, are in the house. Fernand's mother has resented his marriage and hated his wife. Now that his wife is dying, she expects to regain her hold on her fifty-year-old son.

After Mathilde's death, Fernand realizes he has loved her and blames his mother for her death. He moves into Mathilde's room, although during their marriage he had continued to sleep on a cot near his mother's room.

Now it is the mother who suffers. Confused because her son has turned against her and powerless to fight the dead wife, she becomes ill and dies. Fernand now reverts to worshiping his mother and imitating her way of life.

LE DÉSERT DE L'AMOUR (1924)

In a Paris bar, Raymond Courrèges sees Maria Cross, who is from his home town of Bordeaux. She had humiliated him by refusing his adolescent advances many years earlier. He sought a means to avenge himself on her and, finding this impossible, has avenged himself on other women.

Raymond's father, Dr. Courrèges, also suffered torment because of this woman. He had considered divorcing his wife to marry Maria, but she did not return his love.

Raymond remembers how he became acquainted with Maria as they rode the same tramway each evening. She was attracted to him because of the innocence and purity which she thought she saw in him, but his attraction to her was neither innocent nor pure. One evening Raymond made advances, and she repulsed him. For years he has not seen her.

In Paris, Raymond helps Maria get her ill husband out of the bar and back to their hotel. He calls his father who also is in Paris. Seeing the doctor again, Maria proposes to begin corresponding with him, but he refuses. The doctor and his son leave Maria's hotel together. Raymond is encouraged by his father to begin a more responsible life; and, for the first time, Raymond seems to wish to change.

THÉRÈSE DESQUEYROUX (1927)

Thérèse is traveling home after having been acquitted of the attempted murder of her husband. As she returns, she plans what she will say to her husband, Bernard, that will enable him to understand and forgive her.

Thérèse reflects on her childhood friendship with Bernard's sister, Anne. She recalls how financially advantageous her marriage to Bernard has seemed because of their adjoining properties. She recalls her jealousy when Anne fell in love because she herself has never loved. Even motherhood gave Thérèse no concept of love.

One day, Thérèse watched silently as Bernard inadvertently gave himself a double dose of medication. His ensuing illness gave Thérèse the idea of how she could free herself of him. She began to double his medication each day. When Bernard became ill again, the doctor started an investigation which led to Thérèse's arrest. At her trial, Bernard falsified his testimony in her behalf in order to save the family honor.

Home at last, Thérèse realizes that Bernard is incapable of understanding her. He tells her she will not be free to leave the house. When Bernard goes away on vacation, Thérèse nearly dies because she has lost the will to live. Bernard returns and pities her. He relaxes the restrictions he has placed on her.

Thérèse is permitted to leave the family estate and live in Paris. If Bernard had forgiven her, she would have stayed with him but he was unable to do this.

DESTINS (1928)

Bob is recuperating from an illness at his grandmother's estate. He is an attractive young man; in fact, so attractive that people are willing to do so much for him that he has never learned to do anything for himself. His grandmother's neighbor, Elisabeth Gornac, a widow in her fifties with a son the same age as Bob, is also attracted to him.

Bob engages Elisabeth's help in arranging for his fiancée Paule to visit him. Elisabeth observes the young couple's indiscretions without interfering, although she feels jealous of the love they share. Elisabeth's son Pierre is shocked by their behavior and advises Paule of other indiscretions of Bob. Paule becomes upset and leaves without seeing Bob again.

Bob is depressed for a time, drinks a great deal, and even makes advances to Elisabeth. Other friends of his arrive to take him away on vacation. He is killed in an automobile accident on the trip.

Elisabeth mourns the death of Bob. When her own son tells her of his plans to leave to become a missionary, she is less concerned than she was when Bob left.

LE NŒUD DE VIPÈRES (1932)

Louis is composing his diary. He has spent his life neither loving nor being loved but in accumulating a fortune. At one time he loved his wife but her confession of a previous love shattered his confidence in her and in himself. The wife has devoted herself to the children; Louis has dedicated himself to his career.

Louis has since loved only two people: his daughter Marie and his nephew Luc. Luc was killed in war, and Marie died in childhood. Louis is hated and feared by his other children.

Louis is determined that his children shall not profit by his death and tries vainly to leave his fortune first to Luc's father, then to an illegitimate son. Thwarted in his plans to disinherit his family, he gives everything to them. They do not change their opinion of him. He dies lonely and broken, trying to reach God and a state of grace.

LE MYSTÈRE FRONTENAC (1933)

The Frontenac family consists of the widowed mother, Blanche, her five children, and her deceased husband's brother, Xavier. Although Xavier's chief concern in life is for the welfare of his brother's children, he cannot move to Bordeaux to be near them because he does not want the family to know that he keeps a mistress.

The daily life in this family is happy. The children look forward each spring to spending the vacation at the family estate of Bourideys. Here Jean-Louis, the eldest, meets his future wife. Here also, the youngest, Yves, embarks upon the writing career he will always follow.

Jean-Louis wants to study philosophy but is prevailed upon by his mother and uncle to assume the responsibility of head of the family business. José, the middle son, is killed in war. Yves goes to Paris to continue his writing career.

Even after death takes the mother, uncle Xavier and José, Yves knows that the love which held this family so closely is eternal. This bond of love which has prevailed

throughout life and continues after death is the mystère of the Frontenac family.

LA PHARISIENNE (1941)

Louis Pian and Jean Mirbel are friends at school. During the summer, Jean is sent, as a disciplinary measure, to live with a priest near the Pian's estate. Louis and his sister, Michèle, spend many hours with Jean. Louis is jealous of the love which develops between his sister and Jean and tells his stepmother. The stepmother, Brigette Pian, forbids both children to see Jean and sends Michèle away to school. However, Michèle writes to Jean through the priest, Abbé Calou. When Brigette learns that the priest has encouraged the romance, she complains of him to his superiors and has him removed from his position.

The character of Brigette is revealed by her interference in other people's lives. She tries to keep M. Puybaraud, one of Louis' teachers, from marrying another teacher. When the couple marries anyway, both of them lose their teaching positions. The wife becomes ill in pregnancy but does not know Brigette is paying their bills. Brigette insists the wife be told of her charity. When the wife later dies with a miscarriage, M. Puybaraud blames Brigette for having upset her by her unkindnesses.

Jean Mirbel and Michèle Pian plan to be married. Brigette finally begins to repent and ceases to oppose the marriage. She finds the only person to whom she can confess her sins is the Abbé Calou. She helps him regain favor with his superiors in the Church and the two remain close friends until his death.

L'AGNEAU (1954)

The characters of L'Agneau are the same family portrayed in La Pharisienne. Fifteen years have passed. Jean Mirbel and Michèle Pian are now married and, as the novel opens, are parting at a railway station. A young seminary student, Xavier, watches from the train and is attracted to the couple because of the unhappiness Michèle's face reveals as Jean gets on the train. On the train, Jean and Xavier talk and Xavier persuades Jean to return home. Jean, however, insists that Xavier accompany him.

When the two men arrive at the estate, Brigette Pian, who is now Jean's mother-in-law, and her young female secretary, Dominique, are also there. The subtle conflict begins as each person tries to influence Xavier. Brigette wants Xavier to return to the seminary and become a priest; Jean wants him to leave the priesthood; Dominique wants to marry him; and Michèle wants Xavier to leave so she will have Jean to herself again. The final solution is brought about by Xavier's death. While riding a bicycle, Xavier is killed by an automobile driven by Jean. Legally, the death is dismissed as accidental, but Jean and Michèle will never be certain. The death brings the couple closer together and closer to God.