A comparative analysis of Le Noeud De Viperes by Francois Mauriac and Le Journal D'un Cure De Campagne by Georges Bernanos

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LE NOUD DE VÎPÈRES BY FRANÇOIS MAURIAC AND LE JOURNAL D'UN CURÉ DE CAMPAGNE BY GEORGES BERNANOS

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH

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ABSTRACT

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A Comparative Analysis of Le Nœud de vipères by François Mauriac and
Le Journal d'un curé de campagne by Georges Bernanos

Adviser: Professor Benjamin F. Hudson

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The principal aim of the paper is to analyze one novel by François
Mauriac, and one by Georges Bernanos. After analyzing the novels, the
writer desires to compare the character development, the plot, the style
and the themes of each novel. The results should reveal certain sim-
ilarities and differences in each of the novels studied.

The study consists of four chapters. Chapter one, the introduction,
is devoted to a presentation of the social, cultural and political milieu
in which Mauriac and Bernanos lived. It includes a brief biographical
sketch of each author. An analysis of Le Nœud de vipères is given in
Chapter two, and in Chapter three, an analysis of Le Journal d'un curé
de campagne is presented.

The fourth chapter is the major part of the study. In this chapter,
the writer seeks to compare the similarities and differences of the
novels under consideration. It is observed that Mauriac and Bernanos
used religious hypocrisy, marital or family discord, pride and avarice
as a basis to discuss sin and evil in the society of their times. While
the major themes in these novels are similar, the main characters are
different. Further comparisons disclose differences in the portrayal of
minor characters in the development of the plots and in style. Selected
passages are quoted where feasible to verify the similarities or dissim-
ilarities stated. The conclusion is that Le Noeud de vipères and Le
Journal d’un curé de campagne represent personal manifestations of dis-
quietude or apprehensiveness about the social, economic, and religious
climate surrounding the lives of the authors.
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The writers of twentieth-century France are producing a literature which is perhaps more cosmopolitan than that produced by any one preceding century. Equally diverse is the genre through which these writers convey their points of view. The novel, however, tends to remain one of the favored forms for even the most polemical of ideas. It is difficult to establish a distinct classification for twentieth-century French novels, but for practical purposes three fundamental groups are perceivable: the Chronicle Novel or Saga, the Philosophical Novel, and the Psychological Novel.

François Mauriac and Georges Bernanos can be placed in the latter category. Or more specifically, they are identified as Catholic Novelists in that their novels treat the questions of evil, love and sin in the Catholic tradition, criticizing severely fallen humanity. In his novels, Mauriac frequently stages the heart's tragic solitude as it awaits Grace, and in so doing depicts his own psychological nature. For Bernanos, a priest and his parish scrimmage with Satan in a drive toward the act of death which alone completes and expresses life. Both authors' positions


can be better understood through a comparative study of one of each author's works.

Toward this end the writer will endeavor to analyze Le Noeud de vipères by François Mauriac and Le Journal d'un curé de campagne by Georges Bernanos. Such an analysis must include not only discussions of the factors influencing the authors' points of view, but also it must include discussions of plots, character development, major themes and styles of the novels.

This study will consist of four chapters. Chapter one will be devoted to a presentation of the social, cultural and political milieu in which Mauriac and Bernanos lived, followed by a brief biographical sketch of each. An analysis of Le Noeud de vipères will be made in Chapter Two and in Chapter Three an analysis of Le Journal d'un curé de campagne will be presented. In Chapter four the writer's intention will be to specify similarities and dissimilarities in the novelists' treatment of human suffering and weakness as revealed in the two works. A comparison of the style and technique of each writer will also be presented, followed by the writer's judgements and conclusions.

The writer recognizes the value of the guidance of Professor Benjamin F. Hudson in writing this thesis, and is sincerely grateful for his untiring assistance.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The literary currents manifested throughout the nineteenth century in France represent an evolution that extended from romanticism early in the nineteenth century to symbolism by the end of the same century. This evolution evolved into a multiplicity of literary and artistic forms and continued well into the twentieth century.

Since François Mauriac and Georges Bernanos were born near the close of the nineteenth century, it is fitting that this study treat the social, cultural and political climate of the latter part of the nineteenth century, as well as the literary climate of the early twentieth century. An examination of the formative years of Mauriac and Bernanos is also needed, because the authors' lives relate directly to the two novels to be studied in subsequent chapters.

During the early nineteen twenties the social, cultural and political mood in France was unstable and subject to frequent changes. There was also a general diversity of spirit among the people. Such diversity of spirit was in all probability a sequel to the social and political unrest of the latter part of the nineteenth century in France. On the literary side, the writers of the early twentieth century reflected the mood of this division in their works. The basis of the transitional mood in literature can be traced from the reaction against romanticism near the middle of the nineteenth century to the influence of symbolism in twentieth century French literature.

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Around 1850, the literature of the romantics was replaced by that of the realists. A change was made from emphasis on the interior, subjective world of sentiments and emotions to emphasis on the exterior world. The realists were content with observing and describing the physical universe. They were especially occupied with describing the bourgeoisie. Contemporary as well as historical sources were used by these writers. Realism was established as a recognized literary school in France when Gustave Flaubert published *Madame Bovary* in 1857.

In poetry there was also a reaction against the exaggerations of romanticism. Some of the new tendencies in poetry were similar to the tendencies of realism in the novel. Others were similar to the classical tradition. This poetry was similar to realism in its objective and impersonal emphases. It was similar to classical poetry in its emphasis on purity of form and clarity of style. The choice of words and the images were united to form a variety of harmonies and rhythms. This reaction was known as Le Parnasse. Its preoccupation with exterior reality corresponded to the acute positivism immediately following the recognition of the theories of Auguste Comte. Two eminent poets of this school were Théophile Gautier and Leconte de Lisle.

The next reaction was that of the naturalists. The naturalists, like the realists, were interested in exterior reality. Naturalism, however, was devoted to studying lower classes of French society. The naturalists wanted to show that physical laws could be used to explain human emotions and actions. Moreover, naturalism might be said to

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represent an application of positivism to literature. The most typical examples of naturalism were given by Émile Zola. In his *Rougon-Macquart* series, he attempted to demonstrate the influence of heredity and social milieu on individuals.

The most original writers in the last part of the nineteenth century were not the novelists but the poets. Around 1885, the symbolist movement in poetry was established as a literary school. The symbolists were united by a common intention—to express the interior world and the entire realm of subjectivity: impressions, dreams, desires and imaginations. They were not interested in simply describing visible reality. These poets wanted to show that there is unity in all elements which correspond to a reality greater than that of the physical world. Their task was to discover the correspondences between the symbols of visible reality and invisible reality. To do this these poets used intuition as a source of inspiration rather than rely on their intellect. The masters of symbolism in France were Stéphane Mallarmé, Henri de Régnier, Albert Samain, Paul Valéry and Paul Claudel.¹

By 1890, French authors had begun to realize that symbolism limited their means of expression. Different forces began to influence their literary production. Foreign writers whose works dealt with the realities of life influenced French novelists and poets who showed, as a result, a keener sense of social responsibility in their works. The political and to some extent the religious issues were new sources of inspiration for the French writers. A discussion of the social and political situation

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in France at the close of the nineteenth century will help to clarify
the position taken by many writers between 1890 and 1914.

The outstanding figures of French literature whose works were pub-
lished between 1890 and 1914 reflected a diversity of political and so-
cial problems and concerned caused, in part, by the conflicts between
Church and State. Many factors combined to contribute to this diversity.
Among the most important are the Dreyfus Case, the clerical and anti-
clerical conflict, and the Catholic revival. Perhaps the most decisive
in its impact on the social and political atmosphere was the Dreyfus Case.

Around 1890 France experienced a strong wave of anti-Semitism.¹ It
was this anti-semitic sentiment that led to the arrest of Alfred Dreyfus,
a Jewish captain in the French army in 1894. He was accused and con-
victed of selling military secrets to Germany.² Anti-semitic feeling
was so strong that those who thought that Dreyfus was innocent were vi-
olently criticized. Several efforts were made to obtain a new trial for
Dreyfus who had been sentenced to life imprisonment. Emile Zola, the
novelist, succeeded in getting the case re-opened. After a long con-
flict, Dreyfus was finally pardoned and ordered released in 1906.³ The
Dreyfus Case is politically and socially significant for a number of
reasons. In the first place it divided the Frenchmen into two groups:

¹ F. Lee Benns, Europe 1870-1914 (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts,

² Ibid., p. 108.

³ Ibid., p. 109.
the Dreyfusards and the anti-Dreyfusards. Next, it weakened royalists and clerical influence, but strengthened the republican forces. All of these factors point to the intensity of the clerical and anti-clerical conflicts in France at the close of the nineteenth century.

Near the end of the nineteenth century the Catholic church denounced Republicanism. Allied with the monarchists they contributed to and perpetuated a bitter struggle between the clerical and the anti-clerical forces during the third Republic. There was also a drive by militarists and clericals to exclude Jews and protestants from military and administrative positions. The political issue soon became a struggle between Church and State. In 1904, France broke off diplomatic relations with the Vatican. The following year the Law of Separation of Church and State was passed. Now the Pope could appoint bishops and parish clergy without governmental confirmation. As a result, priest of modest origin, priest who understood both the condition of the peasant and that of the working class were appointed. With the decline of clerical interference in politics, there was also a decline in the violence of anti-clerical sentiment.¹

The first and foremost task of the Church, then, in the beginning of the twentieth century was that of reconciliation for the sake of Catholic tradition. Movements were organized expressly for this purpose. Among the first was Le Sillon organized in 1902 by Marc Sangnier. He contended that Catholicism contains the moral and religious forces which democracy needs. Le Sillon, addressing itself to the elite, drew from

students and the lower middle class as well. Its aim was to reconcile
the Church and the Republic. Unfortunately, this movement was condemned
in 1910 by the Vatican.¹

One of the influential leaders from the right in the decades 1890-
1910 was Maurice Barres who emphasized patriotism and nationalistic
spirit among the people of France. He headed La Ligue de la Patrie
Française which intended to resist the anti-nationalistic tendencies of
the Dreyfusards.² In 1902 La Ligue gave place to a more positive polit-
ical movement L'Action Française.

L'Action Française was found by Charles Maurras. Recruiting its
support from social and political discontents, its leadership often
catered to the noble families, professional men, lawyers, and patrons of
the lower middle class. L'Action Française used daily newspaper articles
to expose the corruption of politicians. Although L'Action Française
never became a viable political party, it did win the sympathy of many
French Catholics.

Most historians agree that in spite of the animosities between the
clericals and the anti-clericals, and in spite of the social and polit-
ical instability, there existed throughout France a firm sentiment of
nationalism during the Third Republic. The social and political insta-
bility and the strong sense of nationalism influenced many French writers
between the Dreyfus Case and the First Great World War. It was also

¹ Robert Gayet-Lacour, La France au XXe siècle (New York: Dryden

² Alfred Cobban, A History of Modern France, Book III (New York:
into this state of change, turmoil, conflict and uncertainty that Mauriac and Bernanos were born and became of age.

It is difficult to establish a distinct chronology of literary evolution between 1885 and 1939. It is more practical to mention the most prominent French writers who produced their major works before or around the same time as *Le Noeud de vipères* and *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* were published.

Around 1890 French writers began to differ with the positivist in their concept of reality. Points of difference can be seen in the writers' concern for political and social problems, and in their participation in the revival of Catholicism. These French writers were also influenced by foreign writers and philosophers. The philosophy of Henri Bergson contributed to unifying the writers and confirming the position of symbolism. In *L'Evolution créatrice*, he postulated the existence of an *élan vital*, which he said inspired all life. Reality, he proclaimed, is discovered not by intelligence but by intuition. He attempted to demonstrate or prove the inadequacies of the late nineteenth century scientific conceptions. By his theories of intuition, of time and memory, by his insistence on the permanent, present reality of all our past, Bergson is a major influence on Proust.

Pour Proust, comme pour Bergson, il est une réalité, des plus significatives pour nous qui échappe à l'empire de l'intelligence. Cette réalité c'est l'art seul qui la restitue et la communique. ... L'Art pour Proust est donc

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'vision', totalité et unité, dessin matériel qu'organise l'esprit, et double révélation: la réalité objective 'redessine' témoigne de la présence d'une conscience individuelle, libérée de sa solitude. Proust résout ainsi le problème de la relation entre ces deux réalités ennemies, la réalité intérieure subjective, la réalité extérieure objective.1

In keeping with the tendency toward an occupation with present day realities, the writers at the end of the nineteenth century became interested in social, political, moral and even religious problems. Two of the first so-called Catholic writers were Maurice Barrès and Paul Bourget who were converted to Catholicism during the final years of the nineteenth century. Reacting against the positivist, Barrès recognized the importance of traditional sentiments in the social group to the full development of the individual while Paul Bourget recognized the importance of social responsibility.2 A vicious attack on the prevailing cult of science was made by Paul Bourget in Le Disciple. In this novel, Bourget attempted to demonstrate that scientific and philosophic ideas are not neutral but can, when they take possession of unstable minds, become implements of disaster.3

Two other writers who have been classified as Catholic by conversion are Paul Claudel and Charles Péguy. The work of Claudel is a

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3 Ibid., p. 90.
glorification of the greatness of God. According to this poet and playwright the whole world participates daily and eternally in the drama of salvation. Another writer who was converted to Catholicism is Charles Péguy. He was considered a militant non-conformist, who focused intensely on political events and in the years before the war appealed to the patriotism of all parties.

This literature stimulated or inspired by religious considerations did not dominate or monopolize the literary scene. Political and social pressures caused by the unstable conditions of the Third Republic were responsible, in part, for the emergence of a literature committed to political action, or the discussion and analyses of political problems. Anatole France and Romain Rolland were the two most prominent writers of this category. For Anatole France and many others, the Dreyfus Case was the catalyst which brought literary and political life together.

It is to Romain Rolland that we owe the first roman fleuve, a sort of realistic study of social reality. This genre was continued by Roger Martin Du Gard, Jules Romains and Georges Duhamel. The writers mentioned above are representative of the most important French authors of the early twentieth century. In many instances their works show how they were affected by the political rivalries, the social reforms and the Catholic revival. Mauriac and Bernanos were contemporaries of these writers, and their works were influenced and stimulated by the same problems, concerns and pressures.

The extensive influence of political, religious and social activity on early twentieth century French literature led to the use of a wider range of subject matter, and to the formation of new literary groups.
These innovations contributed to the decline of symbolism. Around 1890 French writers began to admit that the complete denial of external reality was impractical, and looked to philosophers and foreign writers for new sources. For other writers a keen sense of patriotism was the motivating factor. After the Dreyfus Case many French writers began to use the novel as a vehicle to promote social, political or religious ideas.

From around 1905 a reaction against the militant literature of the 1890's was manifested. This reaction led to the formation of a group of young artists and future authors who were opposed to the obscurity of symbolism. Their concern was the social responsibility of writers in modern times. In agreement with these young artists, Jules Romains formulated his own theory, Unanimisme.

Par unanimisme, a expliqué Romains, entendez-vous simplement l'expression de la vie unanime et collective. Nous éprouvons un sentiment de la vie et qui nous entoure et qui nous dépasse. ... C'est l'âme de l'individuelle, écrivait-il, que nous considérons (jusqu'ici) comme le chef-d'oeuvre de la vie, comme le sommet de la terre.

According to Romains, the task of the modern writer was to express modern reality with a minimum of artifice.

In 1909, another group was formed under the direction of André Gide, not for political, religious or social purposes, but for the purpose of making known foreign as well as French literary works. They began to publish La Nouvelle revue française. There was a reaction to this

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1 Raymond, op. cit., pp. 93-94.

review, and to other twentieth publications which presented traditional or conventional literary works.

One of these reactions was begun in Zurich in 1916 when several writers met and founded a movement called dadaism. "Dada appeared as a desperate skepticism leading directly to total negation."¹ In Paris from 1919 to 1924, the dadaist made organized attacks against some of the most respected men of letters. Several of the poets and artists abandoned Dada to follow Andre Breton who founded surrealism, one of the foremost literary and artistic movements in France between 1924 and 1939. Surrealism has often been referred to as a continuation of symbolism. Surrealism, like symbolism, gives great importance to the subconscious. The emphasis placed on the subconscious by the surrealists is one example of the influence of Sigmund Freud in French literary thought. The surrealist did not recognize the value of reason or of logic. They relied upon dreams and psychological manifestation, instead of upon moral or esthetic inspiration. These poets were concerned with expressing a dictation of thought, unaffected by reason.² They asserted that the irrational was the true path to human salvation and offered immense revolutionary possibilities for the liberation of life.³ While surrealism was prominent during the period preceding World War II, many traces of surrealism can be found in present day French literature.

¹ Raymond, op. cit., p. 270.
² Ibid., pp. 283-284.
³ Guthrie and Diller, op. cit., p. 286.
An examination of the evolution of literary movements in France from romanticism to surrealism reveals how the progression of rejections and of reactions to established traditions has led to the practical disappearance of distinct literary schools in French literature.

Un des traits les plus curieux de ces quarante derniers années et qui oppose au XIXème siècle est l’absence de maîtres et la disparition des écoles. Il y a bien eu des groupements très actifs le surréalisme, l’existentialisme, mais sans chefs véritables.

Le bergersonisme a agi quelque peu sur les auteurs qui avaient atteint leur maturité avant la guerre. Les grands influences philosophiques sont venues de l’étranger. La plus importante a été celle inconstablement de Freud, dont la psychanalyse et le vocabulaire spécialisé se sont inscrits dans la littérature d’imagination et parfois dans la critique.

Les littératures étrangères ont trouvé un large accueil en France. Mais les auteurs qu’on fait connaître n’ont pas sensiblement modifié l’inspiration et l’art de nos écrivains.

Mauriac and Bernanos are two writers who have remained essentially French in their thought and inspiration. A brief biographical sketch of these authors will support this opinion. Since Mauriac precedes Bernanos by three years in age, his life and works will be presented first.

Born in Bordeaux in 1885, Francois Mauriac is the youngest of five children. He was twenty months old when his father died and was reared by his mother, a very pious Catholic. Most of Mauriac's ancestors on both sides, belonged to that rural bourgeoisie who derived their wealth from cultivating the vineyards in the Gironde and from the pine trees in the Landes. Religion, closely tied to politics was often a constant source of discord among these southwest bourgeois families.

Growing up in a strictly Catholic atmosphere, Mauriac received

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intensive religious instruction which instilled in him a keen sense of devotion to Catholicism. One of his earliest memories, to which he often refers, is a prayer that he and his brothers would offer together at the close of a day. It began:

Prosterne devant vous, ô mon Dieu Je vous rends grâce de ce que vous m'avez donné un coeur coupable de vous comprendre et de vous aimer, et dont la dernière phrase était: Dans l'incertitude ou je suis, si la morte ne me suprendra pas cette nuit, je vous recommande mon âme, ô mon Dieu. Ne la jugez pas dans votre colère.¹

During his childhood, Mauriac was sad, fearful and insecure. At school he was a timid child rarely joining in games with his classmates. On this point Mauriac writes: "J'étais l'écolier puni parce qu'il refuse de jouer aux jeux communs et préfère en dépit du règlement les conversations particulières."² He was always defeated in debates between himself and his comrades. Threatened by the terror of lessons not learned, of assignments not completed, of being hit in the face while playing ball, young Mauriac found peace and happiness only beside his mother.

At the age of five Mauriac was taken by his mother to le jardin d'enfants directed by soeur Adrienne. Two years later, he attended the Marists school. When he became twelve, he was sent to Ecole Grand Lebrun where he remained until he passed his baccalaureate. After his baccalaureate, Mauriac entered the University of Bordeaux where he obtained the Licence ès Lettres. In 1906 he continued his studies at


When not in school, Mauriac stayed in Bordeaux, among the beloved pine trees and vineyards. He both loved and hated Bordeaux. From his earliest years, he lived there close to the bourgeoisie observing the vices and virtues which disgusted him as a boy. Later, the pine trees the vineyards and that same bourgeoisie would inspire many of his pages.

Mauriac acquired a love for reading at an early age. Although he spent most of his time reading, he was always at the bottom of his class. Two of his favorite authors were Racine and Pascal whose works contributed to his jansenist outlook on life. Of the many works he was required to read in school, he admired the works of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Verlaine. Because of his inferiority complex, introversion and fears, he spent most of his time alone and with his books. His loneliness and near isolation created in him a need to write, thus affording him an opportunity for self-expression. His evenings at home, safely away from his teachers and classmates, became the most precious part of the day for him.

It was then that Mauriac acquired the taste for solitude:

It is this fear of physical expression of love that may be responsible

for the tragic fate of several of Mauriac's heroes in whom religious aspiration or training often conflicts with sexual desire.

In Paris Mauriac participated in the activities of Catholic organizations which were concerned about social problems. Although he became president of a Catholic group, he decided to devote himself to literature. In 1909 he published a small collection of poems titled *Les Mains jointes*.

In *L'Enfant chargé de chaînes* (1913), in *La Robe prétexe* (1914) and in *La Chair et le sang* (1920) Mauriac decided to probe man's inner self, analyzing the eternal struggle of man's soul with the desires of the flesh. With *Le Baiser au lépreux* (1922), followed by *Le Fleuve de feu* (1923), *Genévrier* (1923), *Le Désert de l'amour* (1925) and *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (1927) Mauriac continues the same analytical probe of man's inner conflicts.  

Commentaires which deal with Mauriac's total works often refer to the publication of *La Vie de Jean Racine* (1928) as the work which shows that Mauriac has begun to resolve his own inner conflict. Yet he published two other works of importance which reveal personal conflict and despair, *Souffrance et bonheur du chrétien* (1929) and *Le Nœud de vipères* (1932). It was not until after a serious illness, near middle age, that his Catholic conversion was completed. This experience is transposed into the life of Louis, the protagonist of *Le Nœud de vipères*.

An increasing optimism can be seen in the works which followed the publication of *Le Mystère Frontenac* (1933): *La Fin de nuit* (1935), *Les

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Anges noirs (1936), Plonges (1938), La Pharisienne (1941). Since 1936, his novels have dealt with those problems posed by his faith.

Although he wrote several plays of considerable merit, such as Asmodee (1937), Les Mal aimés (1945), Mauriac is best known for his novels, his essays and his articles of literary criticism. His literary career did not prevent his participation in contemporary political events. During the Spanish War, he sided with the Loyalist against Franco; in World War II, he was active in the Resistance and continued to express his displeasure with the cold war in articles which appeared in Le Figaro and L'Express. François Mauriac was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1952 in recognition of his long, distinguished literary career.

Bernanos represents a considerable contrast to his contemporary, Mauriac. Though both authors have been classified as Catholic novelist, their approaches to the questions of sin and to the problems of evil are different. Many reasons contribute to these differences. First, they were reared in different regions of France. Then, there is their involvement in the movements of the day. Aside from this, each author has his own particular ideas that he has sought to promulgate. Whereas Mauriac focuses on personal and spiritual evolution, Bernanos is concerned with broad changes in the social structure, particularly in regards to the church.

Georges Bernanos was born into a middle-class family in Paris on February 20, 1888. His father was a devout Catholic with strong nationalistic tendencies. His mother, Hermance, was of peasant stock from Berry. Bernanos spent most of his childhood in Artois, a small village
in northern France. The imprint made on him by that flat landscape and rainy climate was so intense that nearly all of his novels are situated there.  

As a youngster he studied under the Jesuits in Paris and in Bourges. In 1901 he enrolled in Le Petit Séminaire de Notre Dame des Champs de Bourges where he excelled in literature, except for Greek, and did poorly in mathematics. After one failure, Bernanos passed his baccalaureate in 1906. Having completed his secondary education, Bernanos returned to Paris to study law. During these formative years, he had read and admired the works of Balzac, Hugo, Zola and Drumont. He had also read works by the writers of L'Action Française.

Like many of the other nationalistic minded young people, Bernanos was attracted to the ideas of the influential right-wing leader Charles Maurras. Bernanos became the leader of a small group of students. Between classes they attended political meetings, especially those held by their adversaries: republicans, socialists, and Freemasons. During this time Bernanos obtained the Licence ès droit and the Licence ès lettres. In 1908 he joined the Camelots du Roi, an organization under the auspices of L'Action Française, forming a sort of shock-troop for street riots.

His participation in the activities of the right wing groups led to his imprisonment, and subsequently to the publication of his first

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1 Ibid., p. 67.
2 Ibid., p. 68.
article in *Soyons Libre*. This was not, however, the beginning of his literary career. As early as 1907, Bernanos began to contribute short stories to a magazine. Thanks to the intervention of Leon Daudet, Bernanos obtained an editorial position with a small nationalist weekly at Rouen in 1913. There he met Jeanne Talbert d'Arc, a direct descendant of a brother of Joan of Arc, and later married her.\(^1\)

When war was declared in 1914, Bernanos volunteered as a private. The war years were a spiritual trial for him and for many others of his generation. He not only saw death and suffering in mud filled trenches, but he also knew the joy of true comradeship and witnessed many acts of heroism. After several citations for bravery he was discharged. Bernanos did not re-align himself with the forces of *L'Action Française*, but accepted a position as inspector for an insurance company.

After an unsuccessful attempt to publish a novel in 1923, Bernanos completed *Sous le soleil de satin* which appeared in 1926. The book, an immediate success, drew praise from many influential critics. According to Thomas Molnar, the publication of *Sous le soleil de satin* was a long awaited literary event:

> Inspite of the conversion of many writers of his and the previous generation, Catholics had still been waiting for the Catholic novelist who would renew both religious and literary inspiration in France. The novels of a Paul Bourget were stilted and pedantic; in them the religion was confused with the religious issue, with middle-class conservatism and with attacks on official Sorbonne Philosophy. Two promising writers, Psichari and Alain-Fournier, were dead. Mauriac was thought to be disturbingly soft towards sin of the flesh, so that Maritain even warned him not to connive with his sex-tormented heroines. And the non-Catholic had Proust to

It is interesting to note that *Sous le soleil de satan* represents for Bernanos a defiance born out of the political fury of his generation. In the first place there was the defeat of the Bloc-national in 1924 by the Leftist coalition. Then, there was the growing Communist Party giving shelter to a de-christianized working class. As for the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, their interests were protected by conservative politics and for a while by *L'Action Française*. Bernanos was caught between two poles—Communism on the Left, which he rejected, and conservatism on the Right which disgusted him. Failure of *L'Action Française*, thought Bernanos, was due to a lack of faith in its leaders. He continued, however, to take an active part in political and spiritual debates, and despaired when his friends did not heed his plea for spiritual and patriotic rapprochement.

Encouraged by his first literary and financial success, Bernanos gave up his position as insurance inspector to devote all of his time to writing. Two more novels followed the first: *L'Imposture* (1927) and *La Joie* (1929), which won the *Prix Femina*.1

Bernanos passed the years 1930 to 1935 in Toulon and in Balerares, living less expensively than he could in Paris. There he began to write *Un Mauvais rêve* and *Monsieur Ouine*. A motorcycle accident in July of 1933 left him a semi-invalid and in a precarious financial situation.


To remedy his increasingly serious pecuniary difficulties he began to write detective novels.  

The years from 1934 to 1937 were probably the most productive of his career. He completed _Un Crime, Un Mauvais rêve_ and composed _Le Journal d'un curé de campagne_, undisputably his most successful work. The circumstances surrounding its publication have been most adequately described by Louis Chaigne.  

Il faut souvenir des circonstances dans les quelles il fut composé. Depuis 1933 le romancier, victime, d'un accident ne peut plus aisément se mouvoir. Il s'est installé dans l'île Majorque. Ses meubles ont été vendus. La guerre y a multiplié les horreurs. Il connaît la réalité de la misère. La Société des Gens de Lettres lui paie page par page, en accord avec son éditeur. Les chapitres de ce roman, l'un des plus beaux parus depuis le début du siècle.  

Neither the financial nor the literary successes afforded by the publication of _Le Journal d'un curé de campagne_ endured for any considerable length of time.  

With the publication of _Les Grands cimetières sous la lune_ (1937), Bernanos became a polemical pamphleteer. The bulk of his pamphlets were to be written between 1938 and 1945. In the course of these seven years the following polemical articles appeared: _Scandale de la vérité_,  

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2 Ibid., p. 91.


4 Bégin, _op. cit._, p. 91.
Nous autres Français, Lettre aux Anglais, Le Chemin de la croix des âmes, et La France contre les robots. Finally, Bernanos completed Monsieur Ouine, and wrote an auto-biographical essay Les Enfants humilisés. His last years were characterized by intense journalistic activity interspersed with one play, Dialogues des Carmélites. Bernanos died on July 5, 1948.

The diversity in the social, political and cultural events and attitudes that surrounded the lives of Mauriac and provided each of the authors with ample materials and inspiration for many interesting works. Although Mauriac and Bernanos come from different backgrounds, they have both been concerned with treating the problems of human suffering and weakness. These two French writers have recorded their concerns in many of their works of which Le Noeud de vipères and Le Journal d'un curé de campagne are striking examples. A study of these novels will be presented in Chapters two and three.
CHAPTER II

AN ANALYSIS OF LE NOEUD DE VIPÈRES

Le Noeud de vipères by François Mauriac is a novel telling the life story of Louis, the narrator and protagonist. The major part of the work is a long, confidential letter written in the form of a diary. The letter-diary began in 1885 and ended in 1930, the year of the hero's sixty-eighth birthday. It is addressed to his wife, Isa, whom he expects will survive him. The letter-diary deals with Louis's hatred and avarice on one hand, and with his family's indifferent attitudes and actions on the other. Although the main characters have already lived the lives retold in this account, the letter-diary gives us glimpses of what is supposed to have taken place. The novel, divided into two main sections, begins with a quotation from Saint Theresa of Avila, followed by the author's prologue. Both of these give the reader clues to Louis's character and appeal to the reader's sympathy for Louis.

The action in this novel is centered around Louis, his wife, his children and his grand children. Louis was a very wealthy, elderly man, suffering from heart trouble and severe bronchitis. Louis had been jealous of his wife because she took so much interest in the children. He was indifferent toward religion, and endowed with an intense love of money. Above all he had set out to revenge himself against those whom he felt should have loved him most, but had failed to do so. Happiness for Louis was short lived. In childhood he succeeded in his academic pursuits. As a young man his courtships were few, and his marriage
lasted only because of family honor. His unhappiness began about a year after the wedding, when he sensed that Isa still loved the man to whom she was previously engaged. Thereafter, Louis's anguish was evidenced in his whole family life of forty-five years. He reminds Isa of his anguish in the following passages:

... Rassure-toi Isa, je te ferai grâce de ce qui te fait horreur. Ne redoute aucune peinture de cet enfer ou je descends presque chaque jour. Tu m'y rejetais, toi qui m'en avais tiré.¹

It is interesting to note that Mauriac provides the reader with an overview of the story in chapter one of the novel. He also tells us that Louis has overcome his desire for revenge as well as his hatred for his family.

... Si je l'avais voulu, vous seriez aujourd'hui dépouillées de tout, sauf de la maison et des terres. Vous avez eu de la chance que je survivie à ma haine. J'ai cru longtemps que ma haine était ce qu'il y avait en moi de plus vivant. Et voici qu'aujourd'hui du moins, je ne la sens plus. Le vieillard que je suis devenu a peine à se représenter le furieux malade que j'étais naguère et qui passait des nuits, non plus à combiner sa vengeance (cette bombe à retardement était déjà montée avec une minutie dont j'étais fier), mais à chercher le moyen de pouvoir en jouir. J'aurais voulu vivre assez pour voir vos têtes au retour de la banque. Il s'agissait de ne pas te donner trop tôt ma procuration pour ouvrir le coffre, de te la donner juste assez tard pour que j'aié cette dernière joie, d'entendre vos interrogations désespérées: "Où sont les titres?" Il me semblait alors que la plus atroce agonie ne me gâterait pas ce plaisir. J'ai été un homme capable de tels caculs. Oui, Comment y fus-je amené, moi qui n'étais pas un monstre?²

Now Louis's purpose for writing is to triumph over Isa's silence.


... Plus j'étais enclin à croire à mon importance, plus
tu me donnais le sentiment de mon néant... Mais non, ce
n'est pas encore de cela qu'il s'agit, c'est d'une autre
sorte de silence que je veux me venger: le silence ou tu
t'obstinais touchant notre ménage, notre désaccord profond.
Pendant ces quarante années où nous avons souffert
flanc à flanc, tu as trouvé la force d'éviter toute parole
un peu profonde, tu as toujours tourné court.

There were several persons in the novel whom Louis trusted. The
most important of these were Marie and Luc. Marie was his youngest
daughter, and Luc was his nephew. Both of them died young and left a
void in Louis's life. These two children were able to like a man who
was disliked by so many others. Speaking of Marie, Louis recalled:

Elle seule ne m'irritait pas. Alors que ses deux
aines s'installaient déjà dans les croyances que tu pra-
tiquais, avec cet instinct bourgeois du confort qui leur
ferait, plus tard, écarter toutes les vertus hero'iques,
toute la sublime folie chrétienne, il y avait au con-
traire, chez Marie, une ferveur touchante, une tendresse
de coeur pour les domestiques, pour les pauvres.

Louis admired Marie because of her personal charm. His admiration
for Luc was different. In the following passage, Louis compares Luc
with Isa and with himself.

La pureté, chez lui, ne semblait acquise ni con-
scient: c'était la limpidité de l'eau dans les cailloux.
Elle brillait sur lui, comme la rosée dans l'herbe. Si
je ne m'y arrête, c'est qu'elle eut en moi un retentisse-
ment profond. Tes principes étalés, tes allusions, tes
airs dégoutés, ta bouche pincée n'auraient pu me donner
le sens du mal, qui m'a été rendu, à mon insu, par cet
enfant; Je ne m'en suis avisé que longtemps après. Si
l'humanité porte au flanc, comme tu l'imlies, une bles-
sure originelle, aucun œil humain ne l'aurait discernée
chez Luc: il sortait des mains du potier, intact et

1
Ibid., p. 13.

2
Ibid., p. 85.
d'une parfaite grâce. Mais moi, je sentais auprès de lui ma difformité.

The second portion of this diary reveals, more so than the first, the attitude of the family toward Louis. Louis learned of the family's position when he heard his wife, children, and grandchildren discussing the Estate and the fortune. Louis described what he heard as follows.

Je m'éveillai en sursaut et regardai ma montre. Il était une heure après minuit. Je fus effrayé d'entendre plusieurs voix: ma fenêtre était restée ouverte; ... C'était là que la famille, contre son habitude, s'était attardée. A cette heure avancée, elle ne se méfiait de personne: seules, les fenêtres des cabinets de toilette et du corridor donnent de ce côté-là.

... Ils ne discutaient pas. Une réflexion d'Isa ou de Geneviève était suivie d'un long silence. Puis soudain, sur un mot d'Hubert, ils parlaient tous à la fois.

-- Es-tu bien sûre, maman, que le coffre-fort de son cabinet ne renferme que des papiers sans valeur? Un avare est toujours imprudent. Rappelle-toi cet or qu'il voulait donner au petit Luc... Où le cachait-il?

-- Il n'y a là que des papiers qui concernent les immeubles, je m'en suis assurée.

-- Mais enfin, maman, on dirait, parfois, qu'il t'aime un peu. Quand vous étiez petits, il ne se montrait pas gentil quelquefois? Non? Vous n'avez pas su le prendre. Vous n'avez pas été adroits. Il fallait tâcher de l'entourer, de faire sa conquête.

Isa listened attentively, offered no major suggestions and protested at the children's harsh remarks. After she departed, the conversation continued; first Geneviève spoke, then Hubert spoke.

-- Au fond, ce n'est pas sa femme qu'il déteste le plus, c'est nous, Quelle chose inimaginable! On ne voit pas ça, même dans les livres. Nous n'avons pas à juger notre mère, conclut Geneviève, mais je trouve que

1 Ibid., p. 120.

2 Ibid., pp. 138-139.
maman ne lui en veut pas assez. 1

--C'est une question de justice, une question de moralité qui domine tout. Nous défendons le patrimoine, les droits sacrés de la famille. 2

Before returning to bed, Louis recorded his reaction to what he had heard.

Je comprenais, j'avais compris. Un grand calme régnait en moi, un apaisement né de cette certitude: c'étaient eux les monstres et moi la victime. L'absence d'Isa me faisait plaisir. Elle avait plus ou moins protesté, tant qu'elle avait été là ...

Louis made several attempts to give away his money. In one attempt he wanted to give Luc's father power of attorney over his possessions after his death. In another attempt, he went to Paris to arrange to will to his son, Robert, all of his bank holdings and investment profits.

While in Paris conferring with Robert, Louis received one telegram which announced his wife's illness and another telling him of her death. He returned home immediately. Louis fainted when he saw Isa's casket.

The death of Isa was a disaster to Louis because she had died without

1 Ibid., p. 145.
2 Ibid., p. 148.
3 Ibid., pp. 148-149.
having read the letter-diary. At this point, he decided to distribute his money to the children.

Mauriac used two letters to form the last pages of the novel. In the first letter Hubert wrote to Genevieve after he had read Louis’s diary. He maintained that his father’s diary should be concealed and submitted to a psychiatrist, to prove the old man’s delirium. On the contrary Janine, in a letter to her uncle, compared the shortcomings of her elders to the sincerity of Louis.

Le Nœud de vipères is basically a psychological study. The technique used by the author enables the reader to acquire a deep insight into the narrator’s character. Many critics contend that there is a spiritual evolution in the life of Louis which is comparable to that in Mauriac’s own life. Other critics say that the novel is a testimony to the problems posed by Mauriac’s faith. The essential facts of the plot in the story are given in the first few pages of the novel. What follows is a retrospective account of Louis’s life. Louis held to his wealth and was determined to keep it from his family. He never seemed concerned about his salvation. The causes of his maladjustment can be found in his younger life.

... Ma jeunesse n'a été qu'un long suicide. Je me hatais de déplaire exprès par crainte de déplaire naturellement.

A tort ou à raison, j'en voulais à ma mère de ce que j'étais. Il me semble que j'expiais le malheur d'avoir été, depuis l'enfance, exagérément couvé, épié, servi. Je fus, en ce temps-là avec elle, d'une dureté atroce. Je lui reprochais l'excès de son amour Je ne lui pardonnais pas de m'accabler de ce qu'elle devait être seule au monde à me donner, — de ce que je ne devais connaître jamais que par elle. ¹

¹ Ibid., pp. 24-25.
From the first few pages of the work one learns that as a youngster Louis was very shy, rather sensitive, sometimes jealous, and even envious of classmates or associates. He was reared by his mother who instilled in him a love of money as well as a keen sense of responsibility regarding family property, which later made him rich. In secondary school Louis was very studious, and preferred reading to physical recreation. Hence he enjoyed many academic successes.

Louis excelled as an orator and debator. These talents won for him many friends and admirers while in law school. Instead of appreciating and accepting his newly found friends, he envied them because they were from wealthy and socially prominent families.

Although the son of a devout Catholic mother, Louis was indifferent to questions of religion for many years. His mother seldom discussed religion with him because of his attitude and indifference. Louis did not begin to consider religious questions seriously until he became involved in political organizations at law school in 1880. These considerations had an adverse effect upon him; he developed an animosity towards religion which was to affect his marriage in later life.

Courtship for Louis was limited to two girls. His first love affair was of short duration because Louis was not interested in the girl, and because she had a contagious disease. The all important love affair for Louis was with Isa Fondaudege. Isa's acquaintance, company and presence revitalized him. Overwhelmed by her tenderness and affection, Louis had the feeling that he was no longer displeasing to others. The courtship itself was one of self-discovery, writes Louis.

... L'amour que j'éprouvais se confondait avec celui que j'inspirais, que je croyais inspirer. Mes propres
sentiments n'avaient rien de réel. Ce qui comptait, c'était ma foi en l'amour que tu avais pour moi.\footnote{Ibid., p. 35.}

Louis's mother did not share his enthusiasm for Isa, and did not think well of his proposal to marry. She felt that Isa was plotting to take financial advantage of Louis, and conducted an extensive investigation on the financial status of the Fondaudege family. This investigation revealed that their fortune was stable. When her objections were found baseless and the marriage contract agreed upon, Louis's mother examined every detail of the marriage contract and demanded Isa's dowry in cash.

Louis and Isa were compelled to spend the first year of their marriage in the house of Louis's mother. At first things were rather pleasant. For the first time he learned to like his mother, and found joy in Isa's company. As time passed the situation changed. Isa showed little interest in housekeeping chores, but would frequently mock her mother's-in-law provincial idiosyncrasies. The situation was further aggravated when Isa made the awful mistake of telling him about a previous love affair.

One night she accidentally calls Louis by the name of Rodolphe. When questioned about this, Isa spoke in a low, hurried voice and told Louis of the events which would create a life long chasm between them. This Rodolphe, whom she had unconsciously mentioned, was the son of an industrialist and had attended Cambridge. Isa had met him less than a year before she met Louis. When his family learned that Isa's two brothers had died from a contagious disease, their love affair was ended.
From the way Isa related this story, Louis felt that she still loved Rodolphe. Isa's account of these events shocked Louis out of the happy state which he had experienced from the time he met her. His reaction went far beyond jealousy. He was convinced that Isa had not married him because she loved him, but because she was rejected by Rodolphe. This was a blow to his pride. All of the unfavorable personality traits which he had exhibited prior to meeting Isa, and which he had suppressed, once again rose to the surface. It was then that his hatred of Isa was born, a hatred which was to endure for forty-five years. This deception did not break up his marriage. They remained together and had children who grew up in this hostile atmosphere.

Louis's hostility was manifested not only toward Isa but also toward his children. As a father, Louis hardly talked with his children and was frequently away from home. When he did attempt to talk confidentially with the children, Isa intervened for fear they would be influenced by Louis's indifferent attitudes toward religion. Louis had been able to talk to Marie with greater freedom since she feared him less than the others. The children considered Louis a rich, old man who lacked love, sympathy and understanding.

Professionally, Louis proved to be a very successful civil and criminal lawyer. His professional success brought him more wealth, but it did not bring him happiness. Because of his unhappy home life, he acquired a mistress.

His mistress was a young lady whom he had saved from the reformatory. This escapade was short lived because of Louis's demands on her and because of his jealousy. Added to this, he kept her in near poverty.
When she became pregnant, this mistress moved to Paris where their son, Robert was born. Later Louis would try to will his fortune to Robert.

Isa did little to stimulate her husband to seek higher positions, and flatly refused to move from the Gironde provinces to the city where he could have become more famous and much richer. Isa did nothing to revive the happiness that she had once created in Louis. He complained that after the children were born he ceased to exist for his wife.

Isa turned her attention completely to the children and taught them that Louis was a "non-believer," for she feared that he would take them away from the Christian faith.

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1 Ibid., p. 61.

2 Ibid., pp. 83-84.
caused them to grow up not knowing their father well. Consequently, when Hubert became a stock broker, he did not seek the advice of his father, who had made a lot of money from investments. Throughout the novel Hubert never understood his father. Even after Louis's death, and after reading the diary, Hubert did not change his attitude towards his father. Geneviève as well as her daughter, Janine, were regarded by Louis as carbon copies of Isa. He characterized them as lacking in imagination and understanding in general conversation as well as in business matters.

Neither religion nor wealth were positive forces for improving relations between the wife and the jealous husband. In the first place Louis never developed strong religious sentiments as a child. Rather, he regarded religious practices as social functions. Commenting on attending mass, he wrote:

Il ne me coûtait pas de vous accompagner, le dimanche, à la messe d' onze heures. Aucune idée métaphysique ne se rattachait pour moi à cette cérémonie. C'était le culte d'une classe, auquel j'étais fier de me sentir agrégé, une sorte de religion des ancêtres à l'usage de la bourgeoisie, un ensemble de rites dépourvus de toute signification autre que sociale.¹

In addition to his religious indifference, Louis had many times criticized his wife and children for practicing their faith, and he also criticized the formalities of the Catholic church. To prove his point Louis often thought of paradoxical scriptures and events to point out the contradictions between what his family preached and what they practiced. Several entries in the diary substantiate this conclusion; for example,

¹ Ibid., p. 35.
Ma pauvre Isa, aussi bonne chrétienne que tu fusses, avoue que j'avais beau jeu. Que charité soit synonyme d'amour, tu l'avais oublié, si tu l'avais jamais su. Sous ce nom, tu englobais un certain nombre de devoirs envers les pauvres dont tu t'acquittais avec scrupule, en vue de ton éternité. Je reconnais que tu as beaucoup changé sur ce chapitre: maintenant, tu soignes les cancéreuses, c'est entendu! Mais à cette époque, les pauvres -- tes pauvres -- une fois secourus, tu ne t'en trouvais que plus à l'aise pour exiger ton du des créatures vivant sous ta dépendance. Tu ne transigeais pas sur le devoir des maîtresses de maison qui est d'obtenir le plus de travail pour le moins d'argent possible. Cette miserable vieille qui passait, le matin, avec sa voiture de légumes, et à qui tu aurais fait la charité largement si elle t'avait tendu la main, ne te vendait pas une salade que tu n'eusses mis ton honneur à ronger de quelques sous son maigre profit.

Another ideological conflict between Isa and Louis followed the death of their daughter, Marie. Louis argued that Marie was only physically dead and that Isa's faith did nothing to help her accept this fact. Louis ridiculed his wife for her continued mourning and lamentation. Just as Louis derided the Christians around him, he was more severe with them where money was concerned. Seldom, if ever, did he discuss this fortune, investments or possessions with the members of his family.

Louis wrote to Isa that his wealth served as a safeguard for him against his family.

Si aujourd'hui ma fortune est nettement séparée de la tienne, si vous avez si peu de prise sur moi, je le dois à ma mère qui exigea le régime dotal le plus rigoureux, comme si j'eusse été une fille résolue à épouser un débauché.
... j'aime l'argent, je l'avoue, il me rassure. Aussi longtemps que je demeure le maître de la fortune vous ne pouvez rien contre moi. ... En bien! Oui, j'ai peur de m'appauvrir. Il me semble que je n'accumulerai jamais assez d'or. Il vous attire, mais il me protège.1

Louis felt that Isa should have helped him overcome this desire for money.

La tare dont tu m'aurais guéri, si tu m'avais aimé c'était de ne rien mettre au-dessus du gain immédiat, d'être incapable de lâcher la petite et médiocre proie des honoraires pour l'ombre de la puissance, car il n'y a pas d'ombre sans réalité; l'ombre est une réalité. Mais quoi! Je n'avais rien que cette consolation de "gagner gros," comme l'épicier du coin.2

While Louis admitted his insatiable desire for wealth, he also accused Isa for helping to bring about his present state of mind. She had deceived him early in their marriage. Later, she taught the children to dislike him. Isa had also refused to move from the provinces to the city where Louis could have made more money. Apparently Isa lacked the warmth, the willpower, the perseverance and the interest to counteract the coldness which Louis displayed.

Although Louis was obsessed with his wealth, harassed by his family, and was indifferent towards religion, there were times when he sensed the nearness of salvation. He made the following confession near the end of the first section in the diary:

Ecoute, Isa. Tu découvriras après ma mort, dans mes papiers, mes dernières volontés. Elles datent des mois qui ont suivi la mort de Marie, lorsque j'étais malade et que tu t'inquiétais à cause des enfants. Tu y trouveras une profession de foi concue à peu près en ces termes:

1 Ibid., p. 44.
2 Ibid., p. 73.
"Si j'accepte, au moment de mourir, le ministre d'un prêtre, je proteste d'avance, en pleine lucidité, contre l'abus qu'on aura fait de mon affaiblissement intellectuel et physique pour obtenir de moi ce que ma raison reprouve."

Eh bien! je te dois cet aveu: c'est au contraire quand je me regarde, comme je fais depuis deux mois, avec une attention plus forte que mon dégoût, c'est lorsque je me sens le plus lucide, que la tentation chrétienne me tourmente. Je ne puis plus nier qu'une route existe en moi qui pourrait mener à ton Dieu.¹

The older Louis became, the more he realized that he was neither master of his fate nor of his fortune. Addressing God in direct supplication, Louis said:

... Il y a les "Oeuvres," les bonnes œuvres sont des trappes qui engloutissent tout. Des dons anonymes que j'enverrais au bureau de bienfaisance, aux petites sœurs des pauvres. Ne pourrais-je enfin penser aux autres, penser à d'autres qu'à mes ennemis? Mais l'horreur de la vieillesse, c'est d'être le total d'une vie, -- un total dans lequel nous ne saurions changer aucun chiffre. J'ai mis soixante ans à composer ce vieillard mourant de haine. Je suis ce que je suis; il faudrait devenir un autre. O Dieu, Dieu... si vous existiez!²

Once Louis realized that he would never dispose of his millions, his avarice diminished and so did his desire for revenge. Then, Isa's untimely death removed his last hope for being understood. Writing near the end of the diary, Louis reflected:

Si j'étais plus jeune, les plis serait moins marqués, les habitudes moins enracinées; mais je doute que, même dans ma jeunesse, j'eusse pu rompre cet enchantement. Il faudrait une force me disais-je. Quelle force? Quelqu'un. Oui, quelqu'un en qui nous rejoindrions tous et qui serait le garant de ma victoire intérieure aux yeux des miens; quelqu'un qui porterait témoignage pour moi, qui m'aurait

¹ Ibid., pp. 127-128.
² Ibid., p. 184.
déchargé de mon fardeau immonde, qui l'aurait assumé... 1

From this confession one can assume that Louis had taken a decisive step toward seeking personal salvation by admitting his sin. There is also reason to believe that he was sincere in his reference to "someone" to assume his burden. It appears that Louis was on the verge of achieving salvation near the end of his life. He had agreed to take communion in December, but died in November.

An analysis of the character of Louis in Le Noeud de vipères, seems to indicate that the main faults of Louis lay in the character himself. Louis was selfish and aloof from all civic, religious, and social involvement. He had lived a life of seclusion and indifference. Though victim of a childhood of loneliness and solitude which carried over to his marital and professional life, Louis appears to have also had an inferiority complex and a low opinion of himself. This was evidenced by his inability to cope with the sincerity or insincerity of his wife when she referred to her previous lover. Further, the break-down in communications contributed immensely to prolonging the silence between Louis and his family. What Louis wanted, desired and needed was someone to take an interest in him, in his activities, someone to pity him, to shower him with attention and affection alike. His diary reveals this feeling of personal inadequacy:

... On ne peut tout seul garder la foi en soi-même. Il faut que nous ayons un témoin de notre force: Quelqu'un qui marque les coups, qui compte les points, qui nous couronne au jour de la récompense... 2

1 Ibid., p. 217.

2 Ibid., p. 72.
The technique used by the author to develop the plot in this novel contributes to the unity of the work. In the first chapter, Mauriac introduces Louis, the hero, and his wife Isa; he also tells the reader the conditions of their relationship. The reader learns of the dilemma in Louis's life as well as the present state of his condition. From there a story, which began as a letter, develops into a personal diary, narrated by Louis. Through this first person narration the author can become closely associated with the main character. Thus, Mauriac was able to inject his ideas conveniently. The novel ends with two letters written by Louis's relatives after his death.

Mauriac is very consistent in his style. The language he used in the novel corresponds to the temperament of the main character. The sentences are usually short, direct, statements. The powerful vocabulary conveys a sense of suffering:

Le vent du Sud brûle l'atmosphère. J'ai soif, et je n'ai que de l'eau tiède du cabinet de toilette. Des millions, mais pas un verre d'eau fraîche.¹

The author often used striking metaphors:

...des nuées grondants tournent autour des vignes offertes. Que m'importent à présent les récoltes? Je ne puis plus rien récolter au monde. ² Je sais seulement me connaître un peu mieux moi-même.

The most important metaphor in the novel is the title itself, Le Noeud de vipères, which is mentioned several times in the text. In one of the references to the title of the novel, Louis records his

¹ Ibid., p. 117.
² Ibid., p. 127.
reflections after having heard the family discussing their expected inheritance:

L'ennemi avait campé là, cette nuit; il avait tenu conseil sous les étoiles. Il avait parlé ici, chez moi, devant les arbres plantés par mon père, de m'interdire ou de m'enfermer. Dans un soir d'humilité, j'ai comparé mon cœur à un noeud de vipères. Non, Non: le noeud de vipères est en dehors de moi; elles sont sorties de moi et elles s'entouraient, cette nuit, elles formaient de cercle hideux au bas du perron, et la terre porte encore leurs traces.

It is also interesting to note how Mauriac used this image to recapitulate Louis's character near the end of the novel:

...Je sentais, je voyais, je touchais mon crime. Il ne tenait pas tout entier dans ce hideux nid de vipères: haine de mes enfants, désir de vengeance, amour de l'argent; mais dans mon refus de chercher au-delà de ces vipères emmêlées. Je m'en étais tenu à ce noyau immonde comme s'il eut été mon cœur même, -- comme si les battements de ce cœur s'étaient confondus avec ces reptiles grouillants.

Descriptions in Le Noeud de vipères are limited. One does not usually find detailed descriptions of places nor of the characters' physical traits. One of Mauriac's techniques in describing his characters is to compare one character with another character:

Et soudain, parmi la foule qui coulait entre les trottoirs, je me suis vu moi-même: c'était Robert, avec un camarade d'aspect miteux. Ces grandes jambes de Robert, ce buste court comme est le mien, cette tête dans les épaules, je les exécute. Chez lui, tous mes défauts sont accentués. J'ai le visage allongé, mais sa figure est chevaline, -- une figure de bossu. Sa voix aussi est d'un bossu. Je l'ai appelé. Il a quitté son camarade et a regardé autour de lui d'un air anxieux.

1 Ibid., p. 158.

2 Ibid., pp. 212-213.

3 Ibid., p. 160.
Descriptions are sometimes presented to prepare the atmosphere of a new or significant event in the story. The description below occurs just before Isa tells Louis about her previous lover:

Elle était si chaude que nous n'avions pu laisser les persiennes closes malgré ton horreur des chauvessouris. Nous avions beau savoir que c'était le froissement des feuilles d'un tilleul contre la maison, il nous semblait toujours que quelqu'un respirait au fond de la chambre. Et parfois le vent imitait, dans les frondaisons, le bruit, à son declin, éclairait le plancher et les pales fantômes de nos vêtements épars. Nous n'étendions plus la prairie murmurante dont la murmure s'était fait silence.¹

While Mauriac does not emphasize physical descriptions, he is interested in presenting psychological details which suggest the state of mind and emotions of the characters.

La prairie est plus claire que le ciel. La terre, gorgée d'eau, fumée, et les ornières, pleines de pluie, reflètent un azur trouble. ... Rien n'est plus à moi et je ne sens pas ma pauvreté. ... J'ai été prisonnier pendant toute ma vie d'une passion qui ne me possédait pas. Comme un chien aboie à la lune, j'ai été fasciné par un reflet.²

Several themes are developed by Mauriac in Le Nœud de vipères. One theme is the misunderstanding between Louis and Isa which resulted in a disastrous lack of communication. Mauriac also showed how parental influence can determine the children's character. Two examples of such influence are identifiable and relative to the themes in the novel. In the first case, Louis's mother instilled in him an intense love of money. Mauriac then describes how money alone cannot bring or insure happiness to an individual or to a family. In the second case, Isa turned the

¹ Ibid., p. 50.
² Ibid., pp. 206-207.
children against their father. The author tends to point out that love and understanding are essential to happiness. He also stresses the necessity of religion to a man in trouble, but cautions us of religion's inadequacies in solving human problems. In view of these things, we can conclude that Mauriac's purpose in describing how a man attains real salvation is to attack bourgeois values and morality.

In conclusion, Le Noeud de vipères is a tragedy of human suffering and personal salvation. Mauriac does not appear to suggest a solution nor does he offer a particular philosophical message through this novel. The author seems to point out that the sinner is probably closer to being saved than many practicing Christians. There are two letters at the end of the novel written by Louis's relatives after his death. These allow the reader to draw his own conclusions about Louis's salvation. This ending also provides a good departure for comparing Le Noeud de vipères with Le Journal d'un curé de campagne by Georges Bernanos. Like Mauriac, Bernanos deals with the problems of sin, suffering, and evil in his novels. Chapter three presents an analysis of these problems as viewed by Bernanos in one of his major works.
CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF LE JOURNAL D’UN CURÉ DE CAMPAGNE

Le Journal d’un curé de campagne is a novel which depicts the experiences of a young, lonely priest in a parish of seemingly complacent Catholics. As indicated by the title, the story is presented in the form of a diary written by the priest of Ambricourt. In this diary he records what happens to him each day as he strives to improve his min-

istry. Throughout this novel, the sickly priest struggles to combat despair in children, in families, and in the parish at large. The priest appears to be very sincere, and genuinely committed to his work, but he lacks the know-how to accomplish his goals. Thus he blunders helplessly from crisis to crisis.

The dull state of the parish was immediately recognized by the new priest:

Ma paroisse est dévorable par l’ennui, voilà le mot. Comme tant d’autres paroisses! L’ennui les dévore sous nos yeux et nous n’y pouvons rien. Quelque jour peut-être la contagion nous gagnera, nous découvrirons en nous ce cancer. On peut vivre tres longtemps avec ça. ¹

Many ideas came to his mind as he pondered the best way to begin the job of administering to his parish. He was in doubt about a course of ac-

tion and went to seek the advice of his friend, the priest of Torcy.

The priest of Torcy told him that he should expect to find serious prob-

lems in his parish but warned him not to try to solve all of them.

... Un peuple chrétien, voilà ce que nous aurions fait tous ensemble. Un peuple de chrétiens n'est pas un peuple de saintes nitouches. L'Eglise a les nerfs solides, le péché ne lui fait pas peur, au contraire. Elle le regarde en face, tranquillement, et même, à l'exemple de Notre-Seigneur, elle le prend à son compte, elle l'assume. ... Tiens, je vais te définir un peuple chrétien, c'est un peuple triste, un peuple de vieux. Tu me diras que la définition n'est pas trop théologique. D'accord. Mais elle à de quoi faire réfléchir les messieurs qui baillent à la messe de dimanche. Bien sûr qu'ils baillent! Tu ne voudrais pas qu'en une malheureuse demi-heure par semaine, l'Eglise puisse leur apprendre la joie?

The young priest listened calmly, and made plans to get acquainted with the members of his parish.

From the beginning of his pastoral mission, the priest did not make a favorable impression on the people in his parish. He displayed a naive simplicity in managing the parsonage, as well as in teaching catechism classes. Because of his inexperience and his over-zealous fervor, he made tactless accusations against some business men and small shopkeepers. Consequently, his parishioners soon began to consider their new priest as a meddlesome busy-body because of his direct intervention into personal family matters. These mistakes were not made because of lack of interest or initiative; they were the results of inadequate education, and the lack of proper preparation.

These shortcomings are vividly illustrated in his actions. He obtained some wine from Mr. Pamyre and assumed that it was a gift. When Mrs. Pamyre learned that the priest was patronizing another grocer, and had not cleared his indebtedness with them, she reported it to his Superior. Le doyen de Blangermont had received other communications

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The young priest was just as concerned about sins as he was about economic injustice. He was especially horrified by the lust which he observed in his parish.

One example of this sin attracted the priest's attention and in his misguided zeal, he was compelled to combat it. He was misled by the suggestive glances of Séraphita Dumouchel, one of his catechism pupils.

In his diary the priest described Séraphita as a precocious young girl:

Je n'ai donc pas parlé souvent de Séraphita Dumouchel, mais elle ne m'en a pas moins donné, depuis des semaines, beaucoup de soucis. Il m'arrive de me demander si elle me

\[1\]

Ibid., pp. 60-61.
The priest explained to Mme Dumouchel that while Seraphita was intelligent, she sometimes seemed coquettish. This accusation angered Mme Dumouchel and damaged the priest's image in the parish.

In a more serious and direct involvement, the priest had become acquainted with the only noble family of the village the Count of Ambri-court, his wife, the Countess, and their daughter Chantal. After observing Chantal at mass, the priest concluded that something apparently was troubling her. When he talked to Chantal she told him that her mother was going to send her to England. Chantal felt that she was being sent away because she protested the love affair of her father and the governess, Mlle Louise.

The priest thought that it was his duty to go to the chateau and investigate the situation. At the chateau he was greeted by the Countess. He learns from her that as a young child Chantal was very close to her father, and became jealous when her younger brother was born. Her brother lived only eighteen months. The Countess had tried to keep his memory alive by having commemorative services bi-annually. She also wore a locket bearing his picture. Over the years, Chantal had become obstinate and demanding, especially of her father. Presently, Chantal


2 The family name is never given. It is assumed that it is Count d'Ambricourt.
is angry because she knows that her mother is aware of the love affair of her father but does nothing to stop it. Chantal wants them to fire Mlle Louise. The priest concluded that the family was trying to prevent a scandal by sending Chantal away. Before he left the chateau, the priest attempted to get the Countess to pray but was not successful. The Countess died the same day the priest came to talk with her about her daughter. Unfortunately, the Count was inclined to believe that her death was hastened by the interview. The Count asked the priest not to talk to Chantal anymore and admonished him to mind his own business.

As the condition of his health was not improving the priest decided to visit Dr. Debendle. During the examination, Dr. Debendle talked freely about the failure of the church to help the poor, and about the injustices which the church tolerated or overlooked. After the examination the doctor made an appointment for him to see a specialist in Lille. Later, Dr. Debendle committed suicide. His death was another source of dismay for the priest. In spite of all his problems and self-imposed difficulties, the Ambricourt priest persevered. He wrote in his diary:

Non, je n'ai pas perdu la foi! Cette expression de "perdre la foi" comme on perd sa bourse ou un trousseau de clefs m'a toujours paru d'ailleurs un peu niaise. Elle doit appartenir à ce vocabulaire de piété bourgeoise et comme il faut légué par ces tristes prêtres du dix-huitième siècle, si bavards.¹

The priest continued serving his parish and visiting his members at home. While making his visits one evening, he fainted near the Dumouchel home, and was discovered by Séraphita. When she found him he was semi-conscious; he smelled of wine; and his cassock was stained with blood.

¹Ibid., p. 108.
She washed the blood from his mouth and helped revive him. Shortly after this incident, he decided that he would go to Lille later that week to consult a specialist.

Before the priest left for Lille, Olivier, a soldier, and nephew of the Count offered the priest a ride on his motorcycle. When they returned from this dazzling adventure, the two discussed the role of Christians and their mission in the world today. The priest compared Christians to soldiers like Olivier. Olivier refuted such comparison and held that Christians have become impious and mainly interested in material things. He went on to say that the last real soldier died May 31, 1431. When the priest asked Olivier what he had against the church, he replied:

... -- "Moi? oh! pas grand-chose. De nous avoir laïcisées. La première vraie laïcisation a été celle du soldat. Et elle ne date pas d'hier. Quand vous pleurnichez sur les excès du nationalisme, vous devriez vous souvenir que vous avez fait jadis risette aux légistes de la Renaissance qui mettaient le droit chrétien dans leur poche et reformaient patiemment sous votre nez, à votre barbe, l'État païen, celui qui ne connaît d'autre loi que celle de son propre salut -- les impitoyables patries, pleines d'avrice et d'orgueil."¹

Another event which affected the priest prior to his departure was the visit of Chantal. She helped him to tidy the parsonage. Their conversation revealed the hate she had built up for her mother. She also stated that she hated the priest for having the conference wherein her mother was saved.

... "J'étais cachée sous la fenêtre lorsque vous parliez à maman. Tout à coup sa figure est devenue si... si douce! A ce moment, je vous ai haï. Oh!

These last two conversations are illustrations of the spiritual opposition which constantly confronted the Ambricourt priest.

Several days later, a replacement came for the priest of Ambricourt who was going to keep an appointment with the specialist in Lille. Once there, he was told that his case was terminal. Death came to him in the apartment of his old, defrocked friend Louis Dupréty. The reader learns of the death of the priest through a letter from Dupréty to the priest of Torcy.

The interest in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne is centered around the priest of Ambricourt with his inefficiencies, his illness, and his concerns. His conversations with friends and parishioniers help us to better understand his actions and thoughts. Like the priest of Ambricourt, nearly all of the characters in the novel face despairing situations. The priest of Torcy and Olivier and possibly the doyen de Blangerment appear stable in facing the problems presented by modern society. Most of the novel is devoted to the tenue of the priest Ambricourt. It also relates a few of the events in his early life which contributed to his intellectual and religious formation:

... C'est vrai que, par l'extrême modestie de mon origine, mon enfance miserable, abandonnée, la disproportion que je sens de plus en plus entre une éducation si négligée, grossière même, et une certaine sensibilité d'intelligence qui me fait deviner beaucoup de choses, j'appartiens à une espèce d'hommes naturellement peu disciplinés dont mes supérieurs ont bien raison de se méfier.¹

¹ Ibid., p. 218.

² Ibid., p. 66.
For a young priest he had very little conception of authority, and no idea of money management. Poor from birth, he was also an orphan. He entered the seminary at the age of twelve after living about two years in a tavern while under the care of an aunt. In the seminary the training he received did not prepare him to deal with people. Besides the inadequate formal training, the priest of Ambricourt acquired a puritanical outlook on life at an early age:

... J'ai vu trop tot le vrai visage du vice, et bien que je sente réellement au fond de moi une grande pitié pour ces pauvres âmes, l'image que je me fais malgré moi de leur malheur est presque inttolérable. Bref, la luxure me fait peur.1

The incidents related in the diary are the direct results of his unfortunate childhood, inadequate education and preparation for the priesthood. It begins with the priest's arrival at Ambricourt and relates his actions and reflections from the time of his arrival to his death. At the beginning of the novel the priest is making home visitations on a drizzly, November day. He senses a loneliness and a kind of boredom in his parish:

... C'était ma paroisse, mais je ne pouvais rien pour elle, je la regardais tristement s'enfoncer dans la nuit, disparaître... Quelques moments encore, et je ne la verrais plus. Jamais je n'avais senti si cruellement sa solitude et la mienne. ... Et lui le village, il semblait attendre aussi -- sans grand espoir -- après tant d'autres nuits passées dans la boue, un maître à suivre vers quelque improbable, quelque inimaginable asile.2

The newly appointed Ambricourt priest was not able to establish a mutual rapport with his people. The priest of Torcy suggested means by

1 Ibid., p. 88

2 Ibid., p. 6.
which the young priest might minister his parish and win the cooperation of his people:

... Avec l'idée d'exterminer le diable, votre autre marotte est d'être aimés, aimés pour vous-même, s'entend. Un vrai prêtre n'est jamais aimé, retiens ça. Et veux-tu que je te dise? L'Eglise s'en moque que vous soyez aimés, mon garçon. Soyez d'abord respectés, obéis. L'Eglise a besoin d'ordre. Faites de l'ordre à longueur du jour. Faites de l'ordre en pensant que le désordre va l'emporter encore le lendemain parce qu'il est justement dans l'ordre, Nélas! que la nuit fiche en l'air votre travail de la veille -- la nuit appartient au diable.1

It was difficult for the priest to understand the complacency and the boredom of his people. He could not counteract these conditions because of his own loneliness and ineptitude. He decided to keep a diary as a means of evaluating his daily actions and thoughts and as an extension of prayer:

... Tandis que je griffonne sous la lampe ces pages que personne ne lira jamais, j'ai le sentiment d'une présence invisible qui n'est sûrement pas celle de Dieu -- plutôt d'un ami fait à mon image, bien que distinct de moi, d'une autre essence... Hier soir, cette présence m'est devenue tout à coup si sensible que je me suis surpris à pencher la tête vers je ne sais quel auditeur imaginaire, avec une soudaine envie de pleurer qui m'a fait honte.2

In the following days the priest thought that he saw in his position an opportunity to bring joy into his own life. He became very attached to the pupils in his catechism classes and gained some consolation in preparing them for their first communion. He was especially interested in Séraphita Dumouchel, and was concerned about her conduct. The causes of her misbehavior were made known later. He hesitated to

1 Ibid., p. 14.
2 Ibid., p. 25.
discuss the matter with her parents. It was only when Mrs. Dumouchel questioned the priest for detaining her daughter that he explained his impressions of the mischievous little girl, whom he described as coquetish. While the children attended catechism classes regularly, participation in daily mass by adults was poor. Thus the priest found it difficult to get to know his people.

One of the few persons to attend daily mass frequently was Mlle Louise. She was the governess of Chantal, daughter of the Count and Countess who lived near the presbytery. One Sunday after mass Mlle Louise invited the priest to visit the chateau. The priest accepted the invitation reluctantly, but saw in it an opportunity to establish good rapport with the chatelains.

The priest grew uneasy about going to the chateau during the week before his scheduled visit. He feared that he would make a bad impression. In the first place the young man considered himself a poor conversationalist. Secondly, his cassock was worn and patched. Next, he had received a letter from his former classmate, Dupréty, asking him to come immediately to visit him at Lille. The urgent plea made by Dupréty lingered with him as he prepared to visit his neighbors.

The Count and the Countess were hospitable and respectful to their new priest. They joked about his patched cassock, and the guest presented his plans for a sports club for the village. The Count did not show great enthusiasm for the project. He suggested to the priest that he let the people come to him, and not to try to do too much for them nor seek them out. The priest was disappointed that the Count did not respond favorably to his proposals. When the visit ended, he departed
with a kind of confidence which gave him a joyous feeling:

J'ai quitté le château très tard, trop tard. Je ne sais pas non plus prendre congé, je me contente, à chaque tour de cadran, d'en manifester l'intention, ce qui m'attire une protestation polie à laquelle je n'ose passer outre. Cela pourrait durer des heures! Enfin, je suis sorti, ne me rappelant plus un mot de ce que j'avais pu dire, mais dans une sorte de confiance, d'allégresse, avec l'impression d'une bonne nouvelle, d'une excellente nouvelle que j'aurais voulu porter tout de suite à un ami. Pour un peu, sur la route du presbytère, j'aurais couru.¹

The priest of Ambricourt became very concerned about Chantal's depression. He noticed that each time they would talk, she expressed extreme bitterness towards the governess and towards her father. He also observed that other people cared not to discuss her. Mlle Louise warned him to be on guard against Chantal because she was known to be malicious. His eagerness to understand Chantal led him to visit the chateau again.

His conversation with the Countess proved to be both profitable and later tragic. He persuaded her to talk about the family and her personal problems. His suspicions as regards to the love affair of the Count and Mlle Louise were confirmed. He was also successful in getting the Countess to realize the futility of cherishing the memory of her dead son to the detriment of her husband and daughter. She became so excited that she threw a locket bearing her son's picture into the fire. The Countess died that same night. Her death was the cause of more disappointments, reprimands, and criticisms for the priest.

The priest gained more insight into the lives of the Count and the Countess when the family members came to the presbytery to make plans for the funeral. He was visited first by the Canon, La Motte Beuvron,

¹Ibid., p. 38.
an uncle of the Count and then by the Count himself. He learned from
the Canon that Chantal had given her father her version of the conversa-
tion between her mother and the priest. The Canon asked the priest to
write a report of what took place. The Count told the priest that he
was not pleased with his meddling in his family affairs and requested
him not to talk to Chantel again. To complicate the matter the Count
found a letter that Chantal had written to her father threatening suicide.

After the funeral of the Countess, the Ambricourt priest became
more and more cognizant of what the people in the parish thought of him.
Arsene, the sacristain reported that everyone was aware of his diet of
wine and bread, and many spoke unfavorably of his catechism classes.
Others held that he was catering to a social misfit by allowing Suplice
Mitonnet to do odd jobs around the presbytery and the church. Suplice
was not considered bright and was unemployed. To make his life gloomier,
the priest found a note asking him to leave Ambricourt. This discovery
confirmed his sense of inadequacy and added to his physical and mental
dejection. His health was weakened by fainting spells and continuous
hemorrhaging. For these reasons he decided to go to Lille where he pass-
ed the last days of his life.

Because of his humble origin, the priest of Ambricourt is badly
placed to act at this social level. He does not seek out the problems
which confront him. He writes that his ambition is to be able to cope
with the challenges of his parish:

Je ne crois pourtant pas que je sois lâche. J'ai seule-
ment beaucoup de mal à lutter contre cette espèce de torpeur
qui n'est pas l'indifférence, qui n'est pas non plus la
resignation, et ou je recherche presque malgré moi un remède
à mes maux. S'abandonner à la volonté de Dieu est si facile
lorsque l'expérience vous prouve chaque jour que vous ne
In spite of his inefficiencies, the priest of Ambricourt possessed un-usual pride which was manifested throughout the story. Hence, he responds to the sacrifices called for by his vocation.

The priest of Torcy is presented as having good health being seasoned with experience, and skillful in his job. He is compared to the priest of Ambricourt who is the exact opposite. The priest of Torcy is consistently objective and impersonal in his views. He has a sense of authority and organization. Apparently his preparation was solid. Although these two characters differ in abilities, they do not oppose each other in the novel. The vital force of the priest of Torcy tends to compensate for the weakness of the priest of Ambricourt.

The relationship of the priest to his parish is clearly established and well developed throughout the novel. And one gets the impression from reading the novel that Ambricourt is not essentially different from any other parish. The author's purpose here is to present some of the types of problems that confront a priest in his work. The conflict which occurs between the Count and his family is typical of the discord which is prevalent in many families, in many communities, and which concerns a conscientious parish priest.

Omer, the Count, seemed content to maintain the status quo.

Ibid., p. 163.
Although he was wealthy, he refused to help the priest carry out his projects. The priest wrote the following description of Omer in his diary:

Je ne le tiens pas pour plus intelligent qu'un autre, et on le dit assez dur envers ses fermiers. Ce n'est pas non plus un paroissien exemplaire car, exact à la messe basse chaque dimanche, je ne l'ai encore jamais vu à la Sainte Table.  

Each time the Count made a visit to the presbytery, he offered advice to the priest. On the first visit the Count spoke of Suplice Mitonnet:

Il s'est excusé d'aborder son sujet tout de suite sans détours, avec une franchise militaire. Suplice passerait dans tout le village pour avoir des moeurs, des habitudes abominables. Au régiment il aurait, selon l'expression de M. Le Comte, "frisé le conseil de guerre." Un vicieux et un sournois, telle est la sentence.  

The last meeting of the Count and the priest of Ambricourt took place after the death of the Countess. At this time the Count showed concern about the influence the priest could have had on Chantal, and about the image of the priest in the parish. Their conversation showed that the Count actually considered the young man a danger to the parish.

Tout le monde, et vos supérieurs eux-mêmes, conviendraient qu'un prêtre aussi jeune que vous ne saurait prétendre diriger la conscience d'une jeune fille de cet âge. La religion a du bon, certes et du meilleur. Mais la principale mission de l'Eglise est de protéger la famille, la société, elle repousse tous les excès, elle est une puissance d'ordre, de mesure. ... -- Votre caractère autant que vos habitudes me paraissent un danger pour la paroisse.

1 Ibid., p. 42
2 Ibid., p. 106.
3 Ibid., p. 168.
The Countess was quite a contrast to the Count. She was tactful and considerate of others. She attended mass frequently, but admitted that she had not prayed since the death of her son. Her most essential character traits are revealed when the priest goes to the chateau to inquire about Chantal. According to the Countess Chantal was jealous of her governess. She described Chantal as having been very demanding since the age of five. In relating the death of her son, she also told how Chantal had developed her negative attitudes towards her family. The Countess finally admitted that she too hated her husband, but had never previously revealed this hatred. She said that by sending Chantal away, she was following the instructions of her husband. The longer they talked the more the priest strived to convince her that this would be a grievous error. The day following the interview, the priest received a letter, written by the Countess just before her death. In her letter the Countess wrote that the memory of her dead son no longer dominated her thoughts:

"Monsieur le Curé, je ne vous crois pas capable d'imaginer l'état dans lequel vous m'avez laissée, ces questions de psychologie doivent vous laisser parfaitement indifferent. Que vous dire? Le souvenir désespéré d'un petit enfant me tenait éloignée de tout, dans une solitude effrayante, et il me semble qu'un autre enfant m'a tirée de cette solitude. ... Que le bon Dieu vous garde tel, à jamais!"¹

It is in the atmosphere described above that Chantal came to hate her parents and to develop negative attitudes towards life.

When Chantal first went to the church, she did not intend to confess. She went to discuss her dilemma with the priest. The young girl was suffering from humiliation because of the loss of attention and because of

¹Ibid., p. 151.
competition from the governess. Her anger against Mlle Louise is exemplified in the following passage:

Elle sait que je suis venue au presbytère, elle sait tout. Rusée comme une bête! Je ne me méfiais pas jadis: on s'habite à ses yeux, on les croit bons. Maintenant je voudrais les lui arracher, ses yeux, oui! je les écraserais avec le pied comme ça!¹

Chantal reproached her mother not only for neglecting her but also for not retaliating against her father. To get revenge, Chantal pretended that she would run away.

Tant mieux, a-t-elle dit. Je ne respecte plus mon père. Je ne crois plus en lui, je me moque du reste. Il n'a trompée. On peut tromper une fille comme on trompe sa femme. Ce n'est pas la même chose, c'est pire. Mais je me vengerai. Je me sauverai à Paris, je me déshonorerai, je lui écrirai: voilà ce que vous avez fait de moi!²

The priest found it difficult to calm Chantal. She was so bitter that she had refused to kneel for confession. Chantal exhibited little remorse after her mother's death. She spoke more willingly with the priest, but her attitude had not changed very much.

Seraphita Dumouchel is another important character in the novel because she is a good example of the priest's horror of childhood sins. Her lying, capriciousness and jealousy are born out of childhood fantasy and mischievousness. She is characterized by an astonishing sense of perception. In catechism classes she watched the priest constantly and did many things to attract his attention. One Thursday Seraphita left class during the recitation of the last prayer, and returned, limping as

¹ Ibid., p. 115.
² Ibid., p. 120.
she walked, looking for a handkerchief. It was then that she told the priest how she had lied to Chantal about him:

-- "Mlle Chantal m'a d'abord forçée..." -- "Après tu as parlé volontiers? Que veux-tu, les filles sont bavardes."
-- "Je ne suis pas bavarde..." -- "Et pourtant, vous n'êtes pas beau, à-t-elle dit entre les dents. C'est seulement parce que vous êtes triste. Même quand vous souriez, vous êtes triste. Il me semble que si je comprenais pourquoi vous êtes triste, je ne serais plus jamais mauvaise." -- "Je suis triste parce que Dieu n'est pas aimé."
-- "Moi aussi je suis triste. C'est bon, d'être triste. Cela rachète les péchés." -- "Tu fais donc beaucoup de péchés?"

Seraphita answered the last question with a decisive yes. She then explained how she used to stretch out on the ground, cover herself with sand, and pretend that she was dead. She did this to punish herself for having told Chantal lies about the priest. Unlike most girls of her age, Seraphita seldom cried or prayed. When she departed the priest saw a string that she had tied around her thigh to make her limp. Such voluntary suffering by a child could possibly be compared to the innocence and suffering of the Ambricourt priest.

The technique used by Bemanos in this novel is simple. He invented an innocent character and allowed him to compose a personal diary. Three principal parts are identifiable in the diary. In the first part the priest tells us why he decided to confide his reflections to his notebook:

Ce n'est pas un scrupule au sens exact du mot. Je ne crois rien faire de mal en notant ici, au jour, le jour, avec une franchise absolue, les très humble, les insignifiants

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1 Ibid., pp. 195-196.
secrets d'une vie d'ailleurs sans mystère. Ce que je vais fixer sur le papier n'apparaîtrait pas grand-chose au seul ami avec lequel il m'arrive encore de parler à cœur ouvert et pour le reste je sens bien que je n'oserai jamais écrire ce que je confie au bon Dieu presque chaque matin sans honte.  

In the second part he attempts to carry the word of God to the people in his parish. This is the longest and most important section in the diary because it describes the confrontations of the priest with the Count, with Dr. Debendle, with the Countess, with Chantal, and with Olivier; it also relates his conversations with the priest of Torcey. In the final section the humble servant leaves his parish to go to Lille where he passed his last days.

The paragraphs within each of the three parts are unequal in length, and separated by points of suspensions or deleted sentences, deleted paragraphs and sometimes entire pages. Instead of writing in the first person constantly, the priest quotes verbatim conversations which he has had in the form of dialogues. This procedure breaks the monotony of long discussions written in the first person.

The language used in the novel tends to correspond to the social level and position of the particular character. A typical example of the language used by the priest of Ambricourt in his notations can be found in the following passage:

Je ne suis pas un supérieur de moines. J'ai un troupeau, un vrai troupeau, je ne peux pas danser devant l'arche avec mon troupeau -- du simple bétail -- à quoi je ressemblais veux-tu me dire? Du bétail, ni trop bon ni trop mauvais, des boeufs, des ânes, des animaux de trait de labour. Et j'ai des boucs aussi. Qu'est-ce que je vais faire de mes boucs? Pas moyen de les tuer ni de les vendre. Un abbé mitré n'a qu'a passer la

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Ibid., p. 10.
Jean Scheidegger has observed that the characters in the works of Bernanos are often placed in unusual circumstances. He adds that the choice of adjectives have significant value to the development of the supernatural atmosphere that Bernanos creates. These observations are applicable to *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne*:

> Dans les romans de Bernanos, les faits et les événements se situent hors de l'expérience commune et nous demeurent partiellement inaccessibles. L'auteur insiste là-dessus. Les adjectifs surnaturel, mystérieux, étrange, singulier, surprenant, indicible, ineffable, inexplicable, inefinissable, inimaginable et quelques autres de sens voisin reviennent sans cesse sous sa plume. ...

> Les adjectifs a valeur superlatite comme énorme, immense, extrême, absolu, infini sont presque aussi fréquents chez Bernanos que ceux qui impliquent une idée de mystère ou d'étrangeté.

> La encore se révèle le gout de Bernanos pour l'extraordinaire, le demerue. L'auteur élève ses personnages au-dessus du commun. Leurs sentiments et leurs passions ont certes de l'analogie avec les nôtres ... mais ils dépassent en intensité et en étendue tout ce qu'un homme ordinaire peut éprouver.

From the beginning of the novel there is a resemblance between the priest and his parish:

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C'était ma paroisse, mais je ne pouvais rien pour elle, je la regardais tristement s'enfoncer dans la nuit, disparaître... Quelques moments encore, et je ne la verrais plus. Jamais je n'avais senti si cruellement sa solitude et la mienne.

The misery he sensed in his parish is described:

On dira peut-être que le monde est depuis longtemps familiarisé avec l'ennui est la véritable condition de l'homme. ... Mais je me demande si les hommes ont jamais connu cette contagion de l'ennui, cette lépre? Un désespoir avorté, une forme turpide du désespoir, qui est sans doute comme la fermentation d'un Christianisme décomposé.

Throughout the novel the images help to maintain the tone announced in the first pages:

Le monde du Mal échappe tellement, en somme à la prise de notre esprit! D'ailleurs, je ne réussis pas toujours à l'imaginer comme un monde, un univers. Il est, il ne sera toujours qu'une ébauche, l'ébauche d'une création hideuse, avortée, à l'extrême limite de l'être.

One example of the solitude of the priest is his inability to pray:

Oh! je sais parfaitement que le désir de la prière est déjà une prière, et que Dieu n'en saura demander plus. Mais je ne m'acquittais pas d'un devoir. La prière m'était à ce moment aussi indispensable que l'air à mes poumons, que l'oxygène à mon sang. Derrière moi, ce n'était plus la vie quotidienne, familière, à laquelle on vient d'échapper d'un élan, tout en gardant au fond de soi même la certitude d'y entrer des qu'on le voudra. Derrière moi il n'y avait rien. Et devant moi un mur, un mur noir.

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1 Bernanos, op. cit., p. 6.
2 Ibid., p. 6.
3 Ibid., p. 127.
4 Ibid., p. 92.
The descriptions in *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* are not precise. Bernanos does not describe the places where the action takes place, nor does he present his characters with the aid of detailed physical portraits. What he tells us about them usually denotes a psychological mood. He frequently refers to facial expressions and to the color or movement of the eyes. When recording his conversation with the Countess, the priest wrote:

Elle m'a regardé de nouveau, cette fois en face. Les yeux semblaient sourire encore, tandis que tout le bas de sa figure marquait la surprise, la méfiance un entêtement inexprimable.¹

............................................................

J'ai craint qu'elle ne perdit patience, m'injuré. Ses yeux gris, si doux d'ordinaire, semblaient noircir. Mais elle a finalement baissé la tête, et de la pointe du tisonnier, elle tracait des cercles dans la cendre.²

As for the priest himself we are given only a general idea of his appearance.

Mon Dieu, je sais parfaitement que l'héritage pèse lourd sur des épaules comme les miennes, mais ce mot d'alcoolisme est dur à entendre. En me rhabillant, je me regardais dans la glace, et mon triste visage, un peu plus jaune que jour, avec ce long nez, la double ride profonde que descend jusqu'aux commissures des lèvres, la barbe rase mais dure dont un mauvais rasoir ne peut venir à bout, m'a soudain paru hideux.³

Bernanos treated many themes in this work. He appeared generally concerned about the conditions of sin which prevailed at the writing of

Le Journal d'un curé de campagne. His emphasis on suffering supports this conclusion. Along with the broad themes of sin and evil Bernanos treated problems such as economic injustice. He used illnesses and deaths to illustrate the agony of the human condition. The cancer of the priest of Ambricourt and his short life, the suicide of Dr. Debendle, the sudden death of Mme la Comtesse are all examples of this agony. According to William Bush, Chantal's distress led her to commit a moral suicide.

Chantal veut aller à Paris et déshonorer sa famille. ...Mais la mort subite de sa mère lui offre une vengeance plus douce: elle peut faire renvoyer l'instructrice et faire souffrir son père. Cette vengeance est, peut-être, un suicide moral, mais dans l'acte même d'humilier son père devant le curé, celui-ci remarque dans la manière de la fille quelque chose de noble. ... Car le suicide chez Chantal reste l'acte de l'innocent, de l'innocence bafouée.¹

Another theme treated by Bernanos in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne is the failure of the church to ameliorate the condition of the poor. Many references are made to show the causes of poverty and the church's responsibility for the poor. In a conversation with the Ambricourt priest, Dr. Debendle remarked:

Après vingt siècles de christianisme, tonnère de Dieu, il ne devrait plus y avoir de honte à être pauvre. Ou bien, vous l'avez trahi, votre Christ! Je ne sors pas de là. Bon Dieu de bon Dieu! Vous disposez de tout ce qu'il faut pour humilier le riche, le mettre au pas. Le riche a soif d'égards, et plus il est riche, plus il a soif. Quand vous n'auriez eu que le courage de les foutre au dernier rang, près du bénitier ou même sur le parvis -- pourquoi pas? -- ça les aurait fait réfléchir. Ils auraient tous louché vers le banc des pauvres, je les connais.²


² Bernanos, op. cit., p. 75.
Bernanos also criticized the bourgeoisie for creating unpleasant economic conditions:

"Car enfin la justice entre les mains des puissants n'est qu'un instrument de gouvernement comme les autres. Pourquoi l'appell-t-on justice? Disons plutôt l'injustice, mais calculée, efficace, basé tout entière sur l'expérience effroyable de la résistance du faible, de sa capacité de souffrance, d'humiliation et de malheur. L'injustice maintenue à l'exact degré de tension qu'il faut pour que tournent les rouages de l'immense machine à fabriquer les riches, sans que la chaudière n'éclate. Et voilà que le bruit a couru un jour par toute la terre chrétienne qu'allait surgie une sorte de gendarmerie du Seigneur Jésus..."

In spite of the criticisms of modern society in this novel, the drama of the priest of Ambricourt is a spiritual one with universal implications. It seems rather obvious that Bernanos was profoundly disturbed about the role of the church and of the Catholic society in an unstable world. His portrayal of the priest, who on his death bed utters "Tout est grâce," asserts the importance of God's grace as a means of saving a dying civilization.

From the analyses of Le Noeud de vipères and of Le Journal d'un curé de campagne definite conclusions can be made on the philosophies and attitudes of Mauriac and Bernanos towards the Christians and Christianity of their times. Before making these conclusions, a comparison of the two works will be presented in Chapter Four.

1 Ibid., p. 208.
2 Ibid., p. 254.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Both Mauriac and Bernanos are widely acclaimed Catholic novelists. There are definite similarities and differences that are recognizable in their works and especially in the novels of this study. One similarity is immediately obvious. Like many other twentieth century writers, they chose to present these two works in diary-like form. The intimate diary necessitates a first person narration. Since the stories in such works are usually told by one person, the author is able to delude the reader into thinking that he is witnessing and judging, approving or condemning the most intimate thoughts, actions and reactions of the narrator. This technique creates an impression of authenticity and realism that is often lacking in the conventional form of novel written in the third person. From this point similarities in *Le Noeud de vipères* and *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* become less apparent. In order to be able to justify further conclusions of similarities or differences, each other's treatment of plot, character development, technique and themes of the works must be considered.

There are important differences in the plots of these two works. For Mauriac, the main character is writing a letter which is designed to explain to his wife the reasons for his behavior over the forty-five years of their married life. As Louis relates how he had believed himself to be victim of his family's antagonism's, he exposes the accumulation of his character traits. This combination of episodes and Louis's
reactions to them gives the reader the impression that he is reading a
diary rather than a letter. On the contrary, the priest does not tell a
story that has already taken place nor is his diary written for someone
else to read. He uses his diary as a personal testimony of his own
daily experiences in the Ambricourt parish.

It is interesting to note that these writers selected many of the
characters in their novels from similar social classes. They are, with
the exception of the priest of Ambricourt, conservative, rural bourgeois.
Each author sought to portray a family plagued by domestic misunderstand-
ings, caused and perpetuated by the selfishness of the father. Louis is
the culprit in Le Nœud de vipères, and the Count is responsible for the
discord in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne. The members of these bour-
geois families were careful not to make known the problems that exist in
their homes. As catholics, Louis's family, like the Count's family, was
dutiful in attending mass weekly. It seems significant also that mem-
bers of these families die, and that the deaths affect or influence the
action of the novels. Let us consider now some of the differences be-
tween the characters of Mauriac and those of Bernanos.

Louis, the principal character of Le Nœud de Vipères and the priest
of Ambricourt are representatives of different social, educational and
economic backgrounds. Louis was an excellent scholar, a successful
lawyer, and by means of his family inheritance and hard work, he became
a millionaire. On the other hand, the priest of Ambricourt was a me-
diocre student who received insufficient education and training which
did not adequately prepare him for his life's work. He received no in-
heritance from his family, but was forced, by circumstances, from early
childhood to live a life bordering on abject poverty. The childhood and adolescent experiences of these two major characters affected their thoughts and actions with disastrous effects on those who were closely associated with them. Louis, through selfishness, wounded pride and intellectual arrogance, ruined almost deliberately, the lives of members of his family. Because of his superior intelligence and experience, he was able to create the unhappiness and the dissention in his family. He was completely lucid, and aware of what he was doing at all times. In spite of his wealth, his superior intelligence, and his social position he was unhappy and determined to make those around him as miserable as he was.

The priest, by contrast, through ignorance, his hatred of vice and sin, and his desire to eliminate these evils, and through an ineptitude born of limited intelligence and lack of experience, wrought havoc in the lives of those whom he desperately wanted to help. He did not, like Louis, want to cause suffering, but desired fervently to alleviate it. Unlike Louis, he was unaware of his short comings, and when his words and actions were detrimental, they were so by accident, and not by design. The priest, like Louis was also unhappy, and in many instances miserable. But his unhappiness stemmed not from his lack of wealth, or hatred of people, but rather from the frustration growing out of his inability to accomplish the goals which he so ardently desired for the people of his parish. He wanted to be a force for good, whereas Louis was intent upon being an instrument of hatred and vengeance.

Another point of similarity is the fact that both Louis and the priest are sick men. There is, however a difference in the effect or
influence of their illness on their actions and attitudes. Louis was old when he wrote this long letter to his wife. He knew that he was going to die, and his letter is a means of explaining his actions, blaming his wife and family for much of what had happened. His letter could be considered as a document of self justification. The priest, on the other hand, is very young. Although his health is precarious, he does not contemplate dying and his diary is not a means of self justification, but rather an attempt to assess his efforts to carry out his priestly mission. The self revelatory writings of the protagonists of the two novels serve to give the reader an intimate insight into their character and personalities, just as their creators had intended. It is also through the eyes and reflections of the two major characters that we are introduced to and follow the words and deeds of the other characters.

Similarities and differences in the roles of the secondary characters are just as varied as those of the major characters. Isa and the Countess are well educated, skilled in household management and concerned about the image of their families vis-à-vis the community. Thus, they see that their children attend church often and receive good education. These two wives are partly responsible for the negative attitudes that their children held toward their fathers. Throughout their lives these wives catered either to the wishes and demands of their children or of their husband. Similarly, Isa and the Countess became indifferent to the needs of their husbands and even were hostile towards them. Isa took sides with her three children, teaching them that Louis was a sinner for whom they had to pray. She also joined them in their request for money from Louis. Isa did not communicate with Louis and prevented the
children from establishing a close rapport with him. By contrast, the Countess did not take sides with Chantal. Rather, they became distant as the Countess silently sanctioned the Count's infidelity. She did not object to his taking a mistress, and even agreed with the Count to send Chantal away when she violently expressed her displeasure of her father's love affair with the governess. The death of Isa and of the Countess are important events in both novels; Isa's death changed the entire course of action for Louise. After her death, he had no reason to continue to nurture his hatred towards his wife. One can detect a radical change in his attitude toward himself after Isa's death. Unlike Isa's death, the death of the Countess did not determine the outcome of the story. The death of the Countess added to the existing complications of the priest. This incident gave the priest's opponents more reasons to attack him for his incompetence.

The roles of the children of these families are somewhat similar. Their negative attitudes were largely fostered by their mothers. Herbert, Geneviève, and Janine were guided away from their father at an early age, and are often seen planning to counteract Louis's selfish schemes. They considered their father demented. Chantal's relationship to her parents was slightly different. She had at one time been very close to her father. At the birth of her younger brother, she became very jealous. Her jealousy continued and as she became of age, she never won back the place she once held in her father's life. The Countess's tacit approval of the Count's love affair, and her insistence upon cherishing the memory of the family's youngest child disgusted Chantal. This was the source of her hatred for her mother.
The principal characters in Le Noeud de vipères are Louis and his immediate family. The principal characters in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne go beyond those of one family. Hence, through a series of lengthy conversations with the priest of Ambricourt, we are introduced to the priest of Torcy, Dr. Debendle, Séraphita Dumouchel, Olivier and others. These characters are important because they represent different levels of society, different age groups, and different professions and afford the author opportunities to express his views on various subjects.

The priest of Torcy is a contrast to the priest of Ambricourt because of his ability in his work, his physical stamina, and his experience. He possesses qualities of leadership that the priest of Ambricourt lack.

It seems evident that the contrast between the two priests is indicative of the author's dismay over the lack of influence and control that priests now exert over their people. Dr. Debendle, like Olivier, spoke critically against economic injustice and the plight of the poor in a society of rich bourgeois. Olivier tended to express the opinion that the position of the soldier had degenerated with the decline in the authority of the church. In a different way, Séraphita focused attention on the daily struggle of the youth in society, by illustrating how children too can be unhappy, lonely, and depressed.

In Mauriac's novel the characters are stereo-typed and function as a group of devout catholics, except when plotting against Louis. Atypically, Bernanos allows us more insight into the lives of his characters. A few exceptions can be found in either group. As stated in Chapter Two, Isa, Geneviève and Hubert never attempted to establish a mutual understanding with Louis. Only Janine and the grandchildren succeeded in
getting to know their father and grandfather. Bernanos not only portrayed a family, but also a parish. The priest of Torcy, Dr. Debendle, Seraphita and Olivier, more or less, convey the opinions of the author. Bernanos allows the reader to examine in depth the Count, the Countess, and Chantal through their conversations with the priest as he relates to them in his diary. The reader can evaluate their roles by what they said and by what they did. Mauriac, on the other hand, leaves Louis to tell us what the other characters did and said. Hence, the reader has a narrow view of their roles, and not enough information to appraise each of them individually.

In all probability, Mauriac and Bernanos differ more in technique and style than in any other area. The reasons for these differences are due to each author's purpose. Mauriac is interested in analyzing the motives, passions and actions of one individual. Bernanos places more emphasis on the causes of the conditions in which his characters operate. Hence, the settings, the time element, and the development of the plots are not alike. In order to portray Louis's character, Mauriac situates the old, semi-invalid within his family, in one room, or in another specific location. Louis witnesses every event throughout the novel. It is in this way that the author makes it possible for the reader to obtain detailed facets of Louis's character, and at the same time learn enough about those around him to evaluate their relationship to him. In Le Journal d'un curé de campagne, Bernanos sends a young, ill-prepared, inexperienced priest on an impossible mission to a parish of conservative catholics, who never show trust or support for their new priest. Consequently, the priest is confronted by many adverse situations which
he relates and comments upon in his diary. This diary is, therefore, the summation of a series of unforeseen events and his uncontemplated reactions to economic injustice, class and personal pride, suicide, death, illicit love affairs and selfishness.

The quality of style in *Le Noeud de vipères* and in *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* adds to the interest of these two novels. Aside from the narrative aspects of the stories, and the accordance of the language with the temperament and social level of the characters, the stylistic techniques of Mauriac and Bernanos are not the same. Louis uses short, direct statements in relatively short paragraphs. Such style denotes that Louis is well educated and expresses himself in a clear and logical manner. In a different style, the priest uses relatively long sentences, in extremely long paragraphs. This indicates that the priest is ignorant, and becomes emotional and lyrical in his diary. Thus his writings are verbose and unclear. Both authors are masters of the art of conveying the sentiments of their characters. There is in the work by Bernanos a variety of conversation and narration which is absent in the work by Mauriac. To amplify the suffering experienced by Louis, Mauriac elected to use vocabulary that conveyed a sense of conflict. The vocabulary of the diary of the priest exemplifies the supernatural and brings out the priest's confusion as well as his passion for his work. His attachment to his parish accounts for the personification in the following passage:

Mais je voudrais que le bon Dieu m'ouvrit les yeux et les oreilles, me permit de voir son visage, d'entendre sa voix. Sans doute est-ce trop demander? Le visage de ma paroisse! Son regard! Ce doit être un regard doux, triste, patient, et j'imagine qu'il ressemble un peu au mien lorsque je cesse de me débattre, que je me laisse entraîner par ce
grand fleuve invisible que nous porte tous, pôle-mètre, vivants et morts, vers la profonde Eternité.\textsuperscript{1}

The language of Louis is completely different from that of the priest.

As he writes to his wife, he intends to reveal his personality:

\begin{quote}
Je relis ces lignes écrites hier soir dans une sorte de délire. Comment ai-je pu céder à cette fureur? Ce n'est plus une lettre, mais un journal interrompu, repris... Vais-je effacer cela? Tout recommencer? Impossible: le temps me presse. Ce que j'ai écrit est écrit. D'ailleurs, que désirai-je, sinon m'ouvrir tout entier devant toi, t'obliger à me voir jusqu'au fond?\textsuperscript{2}
\end{quote}

The descriptions in these two works are equally as different as other points of style. Neither Mauriac nor Bernanos describes with precision the milieu in which the action takes place. They do not tell the reader what the characters are wearing or how they look. Mauriac, however, sometimes prefaces an important event or action with minute sensual descriptions, for example:

\begin{quote}
J'étais à Luchon, avec ma mère, en aout 83. L'hôtel Sacarron de ce temps-là était plein de meubles rembourrés, de poufs, d'isards épailles. Les tilleuls des allées d'Etigny, c'est toujours leur odeur que je sens, après tant d'années, quand les tilleuls fleurissent. Le trot menu des ânes, les sonnailles, les claquements de fouets m'éveillaient le matin. L'eau de la montagne ruisselait jusque dans les rues. Des petits marchands criaient les pains au lait. Des guides passaient à cheval, je regardais partir les cavalades.\textsuperscript{3}
\end{quote}

A typical example of a description by Bernanos associates a physical state with the mood of the character.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Ibid., p. 29.
\item \textsuperscript{2} Mauriac, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 30-31.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Ibid., p. 31.
\end{itemize}
Il est une heure: la dernière lampe du village vient de s'éteindre. Vent et pluie.

Même solitude, même silence. Et cette fois aucun espoir de forcer l'obstacle, ou de le tourner. Il n'y a d'ailleurs pas d'obstacle. Rien. Dieu! je respire, j'aspire la nuit, la nuit entre en moi par je ne sais quelle inconcevable, quelle inimaginable brèche de l'âme. Je suis moi-même nuit.

Several similar themes are developed by Mauriac and Bernanos in the works of this study. The two authors show how a misunderstanding between husband and wife, when allowed to continue for an extended period of time can be dangerous for the whole family. They further agree that the selfishness of any one member of the family will eventually ruin his life and very likely have adverse effects on the life of someone around him. To develop these topics Mauriac and Bernanos chose bourgeois families and explained how the parents' shortcomings caused their children to become negative, self-centered, and revengeful. The two authors also discussed hatred, greed, family pride; they severely criticized the economic and social injustices, as well as the religious hypocrisy of the bourgeois of their time. The question of religion is of great concern to both authors, but their approach to the question differs. Mauriac, minutely examines Louis's life, carefully allowing him to overcome his hatred, avarice, and allowing him to detach himself from his earthly possessions as he prepares for salvation. A similar experience is evident in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne with the Countess. In comparison to Louis, her salvation comes sooner and her suffering is not as extended. Of course the priest is the principal representative of

1 Bernanos, op. cit., pp. 94-95.
the religious problem for Bernanos. He is ineffective in handling the injustices, pride, suicide, lust, and illness in his parish. The basic difference in the themes of *Le Noeud de vipères* and *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* is that Mauriac portrayed and criticized the individual passions and narrowmindedness of Louis and his family. But Bernanos described and condemned the same passions and narrowmindedness of an entire parish. Thus we see the priest, a noble family, a doctor, children, and other characters. Through these characters, Bernanos refers to the conditions of the poor, and to the church's responsibility to the poor. Bernanos felt that the church is responsible for mankind and should respond to its needs.

The works of Mauriac and Bernanos treated in this study are constructed so that the authors can stress the circumstances responsible for the conditions of their character's maladjustment, and thereby depict some of the problems facing man and mankind. In many instances their approach to the problems of sin and evil are alike. They both discuss marital problems born out of infidelity, conflicts between parents and children, hatred, selfishness, adultery, loneliness, illness, bourgeois religious hypocrisy and greed. Through the background of a parish, Bernanos succeeds in portraying a wider scope of the ills of humanity. His themes also include social and economic injustice, suicide, lust, pride, inadequate leadership and boredom. All of these topics were introduced and explained in a religious context.

From the discussion of these themes, it is evident that Mauriac and Bernanos succeeded in presenting and developing novels on the themes of sin and evil. Both of the authors portrayed the family, the primary
unit of society. The two authors emphasized trust, love and mutual interest in one another as paramount factors to a successful marriage and family life. By the same token, the novelist showed disdain for marital infidelity. Neither Mauriac nor Bernanos seems to promulgate a particular doctrine in these novels. In *Le Noeud de vipères* the death of Isa and Louis's salvation have theological significance. It is the death of Isa that eliminates the object of Louis's hatred, and frees him to seek and attain salvation. Mauriac appears to suggest through the salvation of Louis that the sinner is closer to being saved than many christians. He points out that one must overcome the evils of the flesh and passions before he can be saved. For this reason, we see a theological element in Louis's conversion which is essentially the resolution of a private emotional crisis. In *Le Journal d'un curé de campagne* there is no stated philosophical or theological principal involved. One might wonder, nonetheless, whether or not Bernanos intended to leave us with the impression of a symbolic comparison of the death of the priest to that of Christ, since both of them suffered and died to save their flock.

In conclusion, the themes in both of these novels are clearly presented and thoroughly developed. The reader can reasonably conclude that both Mauriac and Bernanos were distressed and even apprehensive about the social, economic, and religious climate of their times. Because of the permanence of sin and evil as detrimenti to humanity, these two novels contain a great deal of realism. It is not difficult for the reader to sympathize with the suffering of Louis and the priest; nor is it difficult to find, today, circumstances comparable to those expressed by each author in his work. While both of the writers excelled in their
novels, one difference remains apparent and pertinent: Mauriac sought to portray problems of the individual in society by concentrating on the maladjustments, misfortunes and maneuvers of one character, whereas, through the long conversations recounted by the priest of Ambricourt, Bernanos was able to comment upon and criticize various aspects and levels of society. The individual reader must decide whether he prefers the restricted study of the problems of society as presented in Le Noeud de vipères, or if he favors the panoramic view of the ills of society, as treated in Le Journal d'un curé de campagne.
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