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The destructive influence of the past: a neglected
theme in the novels of Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly.

by

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of
Letters for the Department of French at the
University of Glasgow.

1980

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I declare that the following thesis on "The destructive influence of the past: a neglected theme in the novels of Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly" is entirely my own work.

SUMMARY

The destructive influence of the past

After setting Barbey d'Aurevilly in his literary context, then discussing the research that has been carried out on various aspects of his work, with reference to his waxing and waning popularity as a writer, the thesis will demonstrate that in the novels of Barbey d'Aurevilly, the personal past of the character - that is, some major emotional upheaval in his past - acts as a powerful destructive force which ruins the character's chance of present and future happiness, as well as that of those around him.

As Barbey progresses as a writer, this theme will be developed and enriched without being altered in any essential way: the earlier novels show the protagonists experiencing some passionate affair in their past which in the present renders them incapable of reciprocating the feelings of love they arouse in others and in turn, they "infect" these others with their own inability to love (Ce qui ne meurt pas - L'Amour impossible - Une Vieille Maîtresse). In the later novels, this idea is widened to include other passions: pride in L'Ensorcelée and in Un Prêtre marié; excessive patriotism in Le Chevalier des Touches, and the past, in the first novels a psychological burden within the characters, will develop into a malefic influence, with the underlying theme of fatality and this combination will lead to tragedy in the later novels.

Barbey's own attitude to the past is illustrated by reference to his letters and diaries; he sees the past as a necessary part of his artistic talent and in his later letters especially, admits the powerful influence

that his own past has had on him. Ties of friendship, for example, seem to have an almost sacred importance to Barbey. This is the positive side of the past for him, but he also sees it as something we can never be rid of, using words such as "chaîne" and "esclavage" to describe it. Memories are seen as a cause of deep pain, those which go furthest back being the most painful. His own unhappy love affair with his cousin's wife Louise marked both his fictional and non-fictional writings.

There is an interesting parallel between Barbey's novels and his private writings. Those letters written at the same time as Ce qui ne meurt pas show the same preoccupation with the personal past as does the novel; but when Barbey became involved with Madame de Bouglon in the early 1850s, he deliberately denied the influence of the past in his letters and diaries of the period, in an obvious attempt to please her; however, at the same time, the theme of the destructive past in his novels becomes more complex and psychologically richer. The impression is of Barbey consciously suppressing something that was vital to him, so much so that it inevitably emerged in his fictional writings.

All Barbey's novels express the same theme: upbringing and an emotional upheaval in the past of his characters invariably ruins their present happiness and that of those close to them. This reflected a deep preoccupation in Barbey d'Aurevilly himself, a preoccupation with the past, closely linked to his conception of his own literary talents.

The novels of Barbey d'Aurevilly which will be studied in the thesis:

<u>Title</u>	<u>Begun</u>	<u>Finished</u>	<u>Published</u>
<u>Ce qui ne meurt pas</u>	1833	1835	1884
<u>L'Amour impossible</u>	1837	1840	1841
<u>Une Vieille Maitresse</u>	1837/45	1849	1851
<u>L'Ensorcelée</u>	1849	1851	1855
<u>Le Chevalier des Touches</u>	1849/52	1863	1864
<u>Un Prêtre marié</u>	1855	1864	1865
<u>Une Histoire sans nom</u>	1880	1881	1882

INTRODUCTION

As far as the reading public is concerned, interest in Barbey d'Aurevilly as an author has had a curious history: Barbey has enjoyed bursts of popularity, alternating with long periods of total neglect. Though he was a well-known figure in the Parisian literary scene in the latter half of the nineteenth century, he is now a comparatively neglected name in French literature.

In modern works dealing with the nineteenth century, he is often dismissed in a few lines as:

"an ultra-Catholic and ultra-royalist writer.." ¹

or:

"..le romantique et catholique 'connétable des lettres'
dont l'imagination frénétique se donnait libre carrière." ²

In his capacity as a critic, he is given some credit by certain authors:

"Malgré ses partis pris, il fait souvent preuve de clairvoyance et toujours d'indépendance." ³

As a general rule, his critical writings are more highly acclaimed than his fiction and it is often pointed out that Barbey d'Aurevilly was one of the first to recognise the power and quality of Baudelaire's poetry. ⁴

In Barbey's own day, however, he was much admired; for example, by Léon Daudet:

"La méconnaissance de Barbey d'Aurevilly est, ainsi, un des exemples les plus saisissants de la stupidité du siècle..
Je répète ici que le grand romancier du second tiers du XIXe siècle, en France, c'est Barbey d'Aurevilly, et non Gustave Flaubert.." ⁵

Also by Léon Bloy:

"Barbey d'Aurevilly est un artiste, hélas! l'un des plus

hauts de ce siècle, et son indépendance est à sa
mesure"⁶

Interest in Barbey's novels also waxed and waned over the course of the years; they were apparently completely forgotten between the period immediately following Barbey's death until the early years of the twentieth century; similarly, they were neglected in the mid-twentieth century.

L'Amour impossible, originally published in 1841, was republished twice within Barbey's lifetime - in 1859 and 1884 - then between 1884 and the Lemerre edition of the complete works in 1907, it seemed to have fallen into oblivion, to be resurrected for the Bernouard edition of the Oeuvres complètes de Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly in 1927. After its inclusion in the complete works, there was no further edition of the novel until Jacques Petit brought out the first volume of the Oeuvres romanesques complètes in the Pléiade edition in 1964. The other novels suffered similar fates: Une Vieille Maîtresse was published four times within Barbey's lifetime, the last in 1874, then lay forgotten for fifty-two years until 1926. After a brief period of popularity - it was published six times between 1926 and 1928 - it too fell out of favour until 1964 and its appearance in the Pléiade edition. Again, Un Frère marié, published four times in Barbey's lifetime, was not then republished for forty-four years until 1925. After its appearance as Volumes VII and VIII of the Bernouard edition of the Oeuvres complètes, it was re-edited in 1929, but not again until 1960, a gap of some thirty-one years.

Une histoire sans nom too, was unpublished between 1889 and 1923, then again after the Lemerre edition of 1931, it was not republished until Jacques Petit resuscitated it for his second volume of the Pléiade edition of Barbey's works in 1966. Ce qui ne meurt pas had an even brief-

er publishing history - it appeared in Gil Blas in 1883, was published by Lemerre in 1884 and 1888, it was then unpublished for thirty-nine years until 1927, when it was included in the Bernouard edition of that year. It was then promptly forgotten again until Jacques Petit brought it out as part of his 1966 Pléiade edition, Volume II of the Oeuvres romanesques complètes.

L'Ensorcelée and Le Chevalier des Touches fared slightly better, appearing to be more popular with the general public than the other works. Although L'Ensorcelée was not republished between 1873 and 1912, since then it has been published nine times, finding favour particularly with bookclubs such as Les Cent Bibliophiles and Les Bibliophiles de France. Le Chevalier des Touches too, after a fallow period of some thirty years between 1893 and 1923, has been published seven times and like L'Ensorcelée, seems to have been popular with bookclubs, appearing in L'Amitié par le Livre and Le Livre Club du Libraire. Since Petit's Pléiade edition, these novels have been published several times in different paperback editions.

From the point of view of literary criticism too, there have been periods over the last hundred years when Barbey d'Aurevilly has seemed popular as a subject: in the decade 1882 to 1892, when Barbey had become a respected, if minor literary figure, many important critical studies appeared, including several by Paul Bourget⁷ and Rémy de Gourmont⁸ plus important references to Barbey in works by Léon Bloy⁹ and Charles Buet.¹⁰ After that, the critics seemed to lose interest in Barbey and the following thirty years produced little secondary literature on his works. Interest was not rekindled until the late 1930s with books such as Le Connétable des Lettres¹¹ and Le Dernier Grand Seigneur. Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly¹² and for its time a most detailed study of Barbey's life: Barbey d'Aurevilly by Jean Canu, which appeared in 1945.

Again there was a decline in critics' interest in Barbey in the 1950s, but since the early 1960s there has been an ever-increasing number of books and articles on Barbey d'Aurevilly. This recent revival of interest is principally due to Jacques Petit of Besançon University. His major achievement has undoubtedly been the publication in 1964 and 1966 of the two-volume edition of the Oeuvres romanesques complètes, the most accurate and complete edition of Barbey's fictional work, plus his Memoranda, poetry and an essay. Petit was also responsible for a special series of the Revue des Lettres modernes devoted to articles on Barbey, as well as to the publication of writings which had not previously appeared in print. This is the first attempt to bring together information and documentation on Barbey since the Cahiers aurevilliens which appeared in the 1930s. M. Petit has supervised many theses on Barbey in his capacity as professor at Besançon University and he is also involved in the ongoing task of collecting and collating all Barbey's available correspondence.

Since the renewal of interest stimulated by Jacques Petit, there has been much research work done into various aspects of Barbey's writings. Recent research has dealt either with very broad topics: The Novels and Short Stories of Barbey d'Aurevilly by Brian G. Rogers¹³ - Barbey d'Aurevilly Romancier by Hermann Hofer;¹⁴ this latter book is a thorough and detailed study of the fictional writings of Barbey d'Aurevilly with a discussion of particular themes from the works for example, love, death, Satan, as well as an attempt to show the influence of Barbey in twentieth century literature; or research has been concentrated on varied specific themes as in the case of the following theses supervised by M. Petit: "Walter Scott et Barbey d'Aurevilly" by Madame Kanbar; "L'image du feu dans les romans et la critique de Barbey d'Aurevilly" by M. Jean-Pierre Pintier; "La thématique du sang dans l'oeuvre de Barbey" by M. Yves Gressot.

However, one important theme in the novels of Barbey d'Aurevilly has been neglected in recent research: that of the tragic influence of the past on the lives of the characters in his novels - and it is with this particular aspect of Barbey's work, and with its evolution over the forty-five years of his literary writings that this thesis proposes to deal.

A deep preoccupation pervades Barbey d'Aurevilly's novels and becomes, in the later novels, almost an obsession: the destructive effect that the personal past of the characters has, not only on their own lives, but also on the destinies of the other characters most closely associated with them. By "personal past" is meant both the upbringing of the protagonists and events, experienced by them prior to the beginning of the novel, events which now, in the present, have started off a chain reaction against which the characters are powerless. The events in the past, usually a major emotional upheaval for the person initially involved, effectively rob the character of the ability to find lasting love or happiness in the present and in turn, ruin any possibility of happiness for the other characters who come into contact with him/her.

The past acquires additional characteristics as Barbey develops as a novelist and progresses in literary technique: superimposed upon the simple influence of the past, there can be discerned something which, in the later novels, is a malefic force, connected with fatality and superstition. In the novels from L'Enfer onwards, this force, linked to the past, will bring about not only the temporal ruin of the characters' lives, but will pursue them into Eternity, causing their spiritual ruin as well.

Critics dealing with Barbey's works in their entirety, normally examine his novels in published chronological order, beginning with L'Amour

impossible, which appeared in 1841. As, however, this thesis is a study of a particular theme, which will be shown to run consistently through Barbey's writings from his earliest literary efforts to his last, it would seem more logical for the purposes of this study to follow the chronological order of the writings and thus to begin with Barbey's first full-length novel Germaine, written in 1835, revised in 1843, but not in fact published until 1883 as Ce qui ne meurt pas.

A difficulty arises here since the original manuscripts which could have furnished definitive proof of Barbey's preoccupation with the theme of the past at the very start of his writing career, were destroyed in the Second World War during Allied bombings in the area of the Barbey museum at Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte. Partial testimonies do exist - in 1935, Pierre Artur and Jean de Beaulieu made a study of the manuscripts of 1835 and 1843 and compared many passages of the early texts with their final form in the 1883 manuscript. Much of their work is reproduced in Jacques Petit's notes on Ce qui ne meurt pas in the Pléiade edition.

It will be suggested that there is much evidence, in the form of letters etc., to show that in 1835 Barbey was already preoccupied with the past and that Ce qui ne meurt pas in its final published form is indeed the earliest extant novel of Barbey d'Aurevilly, since it is very little different from the original, now lost, manuscript.

This thesis begins with a detailed examination of Ce qui ne meurt pas - paradoxically, the last published novel by Barbey is the prototype novel, containing, in its concentration on the theme of the past, the seeds of Barbey's future novels.

Introduction - Notes

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Penguin 1954 p. 227
2. Abry, Crouzet, Audic: Histoire illustrée de la littérature française
Paris, Didier 1942 p.628
3. Castex, Surer: Manuel des études littéraires françaises XIXe siècle
Paris, Hachette 1966 p.301
4. In Les Poètes in 1862, Barbey writes:

"..la poésie de M. Baudelaire est moins l'épanchement d'un sentiment individuel qu'une ferme conception de son esprit. Quoique très lyrique d'expression et d'élan, le poète des Fleurs du Mal est au fond un poète dramatique .. M. Baudelaire est un artiste de volonté, de réflexion et de combinaison avant tout .. Après les Fleurs du Mal, il n'y a plus que deux partis à prendre pour le poète qui les fit éclore: ou se brûler la cervelle..ou se faire chrétien!"
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 Paris, Mercure de France 1939

12. Quéru, Hermann: Le Dernier Grand Seigneur Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly
 Paris, Ed. de Flore 1946

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 Berne, Francke 1974

CE QUI NE MEURT PAS

Barbey d'Aurevilly's first ventures into fiction were in the domain of the short story: Léa was published in 1832, by which time he had already completed Le Cachet d'Onyx (not published until 1919). Barbey then decided to try a full-length work of fiction and between 1833 and 1835, he composed Germaine - Barbey's original title for what we know as Ce qui ne meurt pas - but he was unable to find a publisher willing to invest in it.¹ Nor were the publishers any more enthusiastic in 1843 when Barbey had made some minor alterations to his novel, now calling it Germaine ou la Pitié, even though in his correspondence with his friend Trebutien, Barbey refers constantly to his novel as if it were about to appear in print,² but the novel was to remain unpublished until 1883, when it appeared as Ce qui ne meurt pas.

Ce qui ne meurt pas is the only one of Barbey d'Aurevilly's novels which was revised to any great extent, though even these revisions, done some 50 years after the original composition of the novel, are comparatively minor, according to those who were able to compare the two manuscripts at the museum at Saint-Sauveur-le-Vicomte before their destruction during the last war. Pierre Artur and Jean de Beaulieu's article in Cahiers Aurevilliens no.2 in 1935, which quotes extensively from the three versions of the novel indicates that the principal revisions are, first, a change in the novel's setting from Caen to the Cotentin to bring the novel into line with the later "Norman" novels such as L'Ensorcelée and Un prêtre marié, and, second, a difference in the treatment of religious matters: Barbey had been converted to Catholicism in 1855, so it was natural that he should suppress or tone down some of the expressions used by his younger, non-believing self.

Many of these minor changes are indicated by Hofer in his very thorough study of Barbey d'Aurevilly.³ The alterations would not seem to affect the

structure or the basic theme of the novel in any way and Barbey's description of his heroine as set out in his 1835 preface to Germaine, is remarkably similar to Yseult de Scudemor as we see her in the final published version. Here is the Germaine of the 1835 Préface, a quotation which, in itself, sums up the theme of the past in Ce qui ne meurt pas by its indication of how little life means to the heroine once the past has robbed her of the ability to love:

"Germaine n'est pas seulement un être de pure fantaisie et que l'imagination seule accepte comme possible. Si supérieure qu'elle paraisse au premier abord, ce n'est pourtant qu'une femme douée de facultés vives et non communes, qui a eu sa large part des joies, des douleurs et des souillures de la vie, qui a été passionnée de bonne foi avec tous les torts vis-a-vis d'elle-même que la passion peut donner, et qui .. achève négligemment de vivre, sans intérêt d'aucune sorte que celui de sa pitié pour les autres, l'âme vide mais bonne et les yeux secs, résignée à son destin et à elle-même, d'un calme morne plutôt que serein.." (ORC II,1370-71).

Yseult, when she makes her first appearance in Ce qui ne meurt pas, is seen by the local people to be a woman of mystery:

"tout cela l'entourait d'on ne savait quel mystère difficile à percer, car sa réserve pleine de noblesse, mais froide, ne permettait jamais à l'observation la plus attentive de pénétrer dans sa pensée et d'en surprendre les secrets."(ORC,II,391)

She is considered to be distinguished and witty, but disliked by other women because of her lack of emotion. In this she resembles Barbey's original creation Germaine. Yseult is:

" aussi désintéressée de cet esprit qu'on lui attribuait que de la vie, et elle n'en faisait pas une arme contre la

sienne, qui lui avait été peut-être cruelle." (ORC II,391)

Later, in the published novel, Barbey adds more detail to the description of his heroine, again confirming the links between Germaine and Yseult:

"L'âme de cette femme était close, cette destinée enfermée dans un cercle de fer:- tout fini!" (ORC II,422)

"Elle, moins que personne, ne pouvait se soustraire à cette pitié fatale." (ORC II,445)

"Femme réduite maintenant à l'indécomposable, n'ayant sauvé du grand naufrage de toutes choses que cette faculté de compatir.." (ORC II,508)

Pity is an important theme in all three versions of this novel, a fact which is clear from Barbey's choice of a second title for the 1843 version of the novel, a title giving equal weight to the heroine and her *raison d'être*: Germaine ou la Pitié. It is of course "la pitié" which gives us the final title, since pity is the one thing "qui ne meurt pas".

If pity is the dominant emotion in Yseult's life at the stage she has reached by the opening of Ce qui ne meurt pas, it is because the circumstances of her own past have robbed her of the ability to feel any other emotion. It is through this "pitié pour les autres" that Yseult gives herself to Allan de Cynthry and it will be shown later how her past will influence the lives of the protagonists of the story.

The novel, set in an isolated château in Basse Normandie, concerns three people, Yseult de Scudemor, her daughter Camille and her late friend's son Allan de Cynthry, whom she is bringing up, and their intricate relationships; the story culminates in the death of Yseult and the ruin of both Allan's and Camille's lives. The cause of this tragedy is ultimately Yseult's past and to stress its importance, Barbey has contrived a series of parallels in the story; the novel is divided into two parts, in each of which the past is a major theme - in part II, Camille's relationship to Allan is similar to Allan's relationship to Yseult in part I. What

then, is Yseult's past and what effect does it have on the action of the novel?

Yseult de Scudemor's past is shown in two stages - a distant past covering the period of her early schooldays up until the time of her marriage to Horace de Scudemor, and a nearer past which includes the period of her love affair with her husband's nephew, Octave.

By giving the reader a double depiction of Yseult's past, Barbey lays great stress on the devastating effect that the personal past can have not only on a person's own life, but also on the lives of those in closest contact with that person; in Yseult's case, not only her own life is ruined, but also that of her friend's son Allan and of her daughter Camille.

Yseult's distant past or "first stage", that is, her love for her friend Margarita at the convent and her marriage to Horace de Scudemor, brought her feelings of guilt when she fell in love with Octave. The guilt was to prove ultimately unbearable for Yseult and it conspired to destroy the happiness of her love affair with Octave. Her guilt arose from her strong feelings toward Margarita and from the physical happiness she enjoyed with her husband in the early days of their marriage:

"Cet amour (for Octave)..empoisonna le souvenir du passé..
Margarita,- le rêve, resté rêve..mon amour, trahi par Ho-
race qui n'avait pu l'épuiser, les délices savourées de mon
mariage, tout me fit horreur, tout me fit épouvante."(ORC II,435)

The guilt stemmed from the profound feeling within her that she has, by her pleasure with her husband, betrayed her present lover, Octave, in the past and her anguished description of this state which she is obviously powerless to alter, indicates clearly the influence which Barbey believed that the past has over all our lives:

"mais trahir un être qu'on aime, contradiction des contra-
dictions! Le trahir d'avance, se trouver avoir trahi dans

le passé celui qu'on devait aimer dans l'avenir.. ne lui donner que des restes d'âme et de corps, que des miettes tombées du festin mangé par un autre, c'est la pire des douleurs humaines, c'est des hontes ardentes la plus dévorante!" (ORC II,436)

Yseult's situation was made worse by the presence of her daughter Camille who was tangible evidence for Yseult, at a time when she was deeply in love with Octave, of the physical passion that had once existed between Horace and herself:

"Notre lune de miel fut un soleil dévorant et Camille porte sur son front, déjà passionné, les stigmates de la fournaise dont elle est sortie." (ORC II,431)

The painful realisation of her "betrayal", allied to the fact that Octave seemed unaware of the agonies that Yseult was suffering and displayed no jealousy whatsoever at the thought of her past, gradually combined to wear away Yseult's love for Octave. Her regret for her past actions prevented her from feeling fully happy in the second stage of her past, that is with Octave.

Yseult's nearer past or "second stage" - the passionate love affair with Octave - was to ruin her own possibility of present or future happiness, because, when the affair was finally over, Yseult was in a state of indifference to all that went on around her. This indifference even precludes suicide:

"Allez, mon ami, le jour où la pensée de la mort vous arrive n'est pas le pire des jours de la vie.. Mais quand on ne soupçonne même plus qu'il y a une ressource de repos et de paix dans la tombe, c'est qu'on dure affreusement encore, mais on ne vit plus." (ORC II,439)

At the point where the story of Ce qui ne meurt pas opens, Yseult is drained of the ability to experience any feeling whatsoever except pity -

pity which in the novel is evoked by Allan's hopeless love for her:

"La pitié, qui n'est peut-être que l'entente et le ressouvenir de nos douleurs à nous-mêmes, avait établi un lien entre elle et Allan."(ORC II, 445)

From the time of the end of Yseult's affair with Octave, her lack of real feeling begins to affect those around her; first, Camille, her daughter for whom Yseult has never felt much maternal affection. What little she might have had was swallowed up in the passion she experienced for Octave:

"J'ai commencé par aimer Camille. Elle ne fut point le fruit d'une volupté solitaire. Le père de Camille fut aimé de moi. Mais un dernier amour, plus dévorant que tous les autres, me fit maudire le jour où Camille était née." (ORC II, 646)

" Lorsque j'aurais pu aimer Camille, je n'aimais qu'Octave, et cette enfant qui venait perpétuellement se poser entre nous deux m'avait infligé de trop grands supplices!"(ORC II, 486)

So Yseult resented the child and neglected her during her early years. Then when the young girl needed her mother's affection most, she was practically ignored by Yseult, who by then was incapable of feeling any deep emotion, so Camille was thrown more and more into Allan's company. Thus - a further by-product of Yseult's past - was created in Camille a desperate need for affection on the one hand, and on the other an apparent fulfilment of this need in the person of Allan, who is almost the only other person Camille ever sees in their isolated château on the Cotentin peninsula.

Next, Yseult's indifference will have a tragic effect on Allan, who is deeply in love with Yseult: since she is incapable of returning his love because of her past, it is this past which ruins Allan's possibility of lasting happiness; the destructive power of a character's past is stressed by Barbey on the level of the plot, because Yseult's past (i.e. the affair with Octave) has been instrumental in Camille's early unhappiness before the beginning of the story, and now in Ce qui ne meurt pas, as the story

unfolds, Yseult's past, acting through the effect that it has on Allan, will contrive to ruin Camille's happiness permanently.

Allan is deeply in love with Yseult and makes a passionate declaration of his love for her in a letter (Première partie, chapitre V) in which we see him tortured by jealousy of Yseult's past - of which at this stage he knows nothing - but even at this early point in the story, the past is beginning to play its vital destructive role:

"J'ai dit que je laisserai là votre passé. Oh! souvent, en l'imaginant, j'ai senti mon coeur éclater sous les étreintes de la jalousie, - d'une jalousie niaise, absurde, mais implacable! (ORC II,413)

Yseult, understanding both that Allan's passion for her is very real and also that she can never reciprocate it, attempts to discourage Allan by recounting her past to him:

"J'ai torturé l'amour que vous avez pour moi, mais c'est la torture de l'art qui guérit. La réalité vient de toucher de son irrésistible souffle les rêveries de votre imagination et les illusions de votre coeur." (ORC II,440)

Allan's initial reaction is impulsive and romantic:

"Mon avenir, c'est d'être où vous êtes. Mon avenir, c'est de vous aimer, et, quand je serai las de cet amour en pure perte, de me brûler la cervelle à vos pieds!" (ORC II,441)

but Barbey in fact will show the reader, not some heroic, foolish gesture on Allan's part, but will demonstrate how the terrible weight of the past gradually and inexorably wears away the love that Allan thinks is eternal, until Allan begins to resemble Yseult in his indifference.

Yseult cedes to Allan physically - out of pity - an act totally meaningless to her, but which Allan takes as proof of her love for him:

"Vous m'aimez, puisque vous n'avez pas repoussé mes caresses!... Oui, tu m'aimes puisque tu t'es donnée!" (ORC II,460-1)

Again Yseult is obliged to make an effort to discourage Allan and writes to him explaining that her motivation was pity alone:

"Allan, vous voulez de l'amour en échange du vôtre. Aussi me niez-vous obstinément ma pitié. Vous ne comprenez pas que sans amour je ne vous aie pas repoussé, mais c'est que vous ne connaissez pas, mon ami, ce qu'est la pitié au coeur des femmes." (ORC II,464)

This pity even makes Yseult lie to Allan when she claims that she does love him, but Allan sees through the pretence (ORC II,516) and this episode advances him another step on the road to indifference. By Chapitre III of the Deuxième Partie, Allan does not love Yseult with the same all-consuming passion as earlier and we see that he is clinging to this love from habit as much as anything else:

"C'était par ce malaise de la faiblesse qu'Allan tenait à sa vie passée." (ORC II,546-7)

By the following chapter, Allan is slowly beginning to admit to himself that he no longer loves Yseult and in chapter V as well as acknowledging this openly, he glimpses the deadness to almost all emotion that is to be his lot:

"Ah! voilà le moment, voilà enfin le moment d'être heureux, Allan! Voilà l'instant venu de réaliser tous tes rêves. Mes rêves! Est-ce que mon amour pour Yseult en a laissé un seul debout?..Est-ce que je puis être heureux, maintenant?" (ORC II, 557)

The one-sided passion for Yseult becomes Allan's past and destroys his own future happiness; a fact which he half perceives:

"Aujourd'hui seulement il l'entrevoit, et il ne pouvait se défendre d'une terreur secrète." (ORC II,558)

After the unreturned love for Yseult, Allan's disillusionment leads him to an inability to feel any lasting reciprocal passion for anyone. This

disillusionment in several stages parallels Yseult's own development; now, as far as Allan is concerned, the circle is complete, for he has the same inability to love as Yseult, the same indifference to feeling. Allan's past (and Yseult's working through him) contribute to the destruction of Camille's future happiness, since Allan cannot reciprocate her passion for him. Even before their marriage, he has a presentiment that his feelings for Camille will founder as did his love for Yseult:

"L'idée que son second amour allait expirer comme le premier, qui n'était encore que confuse, prit à ses yeux une netteté souveraine." (ORC II,612)

After his marriage to Camille, Allan is in despair because of his profound indifference that he feels towards Camille and now even towards Yseult:

"mais souffrir de ne plus aimer, voilà le malheur de la vie! Mal bien grand, car on meurt d'aimer et on ne meurt pas de n'aimer plus!" (ORC II,633)

The final blow to Camille's happiness is her discovery not only that Allan once loved her mother, but that he is the father of her mother's child: Camille too is left devoid of all feelings except pity - pity evoked by the helplessness of the two babies, Yseult's and her own:

"cette inaliénable pitié qui, quand tout, sentiments et passions, est fauché dans le coeur des femmes, est la seule chose qui ne puisse jamais y mourir." (ORC II,666)

The destructive force possessed by the past which wreaks such havoc on the lives of the protagonists in Ce qui ne meurt pas is clearly presented on the level of the plot. However, in his novels, Barbey d'Aurevilly chooses to emphasise the importance of his themes in several ways, and in Ce qui ne meurt pas the devastation wrought by the past is conveyed through the repeated use of certain images.

There are two groups of images initially used to describe Yseult de Scudemor in this novel and which relate specifically to the past: the first group is concerned with withering and faded blooms and stresses the changes brought about in Yseult by the dramatic events in her past, namely the love affair with Octave; the second group, mainly images associated with coldness - marble, ice etc. - convey in a more indirect manner the effect of the past on Yseult's emotions, showing how dead she is to feeling and human warmth since the unhappy love affair.

All the images used are of a somewhat lugubrious nature and in this way, Barbey heightens the reader's awareness of the importance of the past by making its destructive effects more vivid. The imagery of the effect of the past then, underlines the theme by creating for the reader a frame of reference: by building up a pattern of images for one character, in this case for Yseult de Scudemor, and then by applying these images to another character, Barbey can show how the past is now affecting that person, even when the character himself is not yet aware of the change.

Barbey d'Aureville, as author describing his character, introduces in his early descriptions of Yseult the basic images which will be associated with her throughout the novel. As already indicated, these images reflect the negative influence of the past, for it is since the end of the love affair with Octave that Yseult has become so cold and indifferent to emotion. In her physical appearance she has become the faded bloom:

"La fleur fanée, ce ne sont plus que des feuilles vertes,
sur lesquelles le regard se pose à peine..." (ORC II, 393)

The initial image of cold

" mais à cette glace..à cette glace immobile, rien n'était
pied de mésange et le cristal plus solide ne s'entamait pas"

(ORC II, 392)

is retained in Barbey's later descriptions of Madame de Scudemor:

"en passant...sa main de neige sur les cheveux moites de la chaleur du front qui brûlait (Allan)" (ORC II,474)

Associated with this imagery is that of marble:

"il ne pouvait comprendre qu'elle fût devenue si bien la Niobé avec son éternelle impassibilité de marbre." (ORC II,491)

"grande Niobé qui n'avait qu'à l'âme le marbre éternel" (ORC II 601)

Marble has replaced emotion in Yseult's soul since the end of her great love for Octave. When Yseult speaks of herself in the novel, she uses the same images in an attempt to discourage Allan by showing him what the past has done to her both physically and emotionally:

"Ne vous flétrissez donc pas, jeune homme, à mes flétris-
sures." (ORC II,440)

"Rien ne fleurit.. dans mon coeur dévasté." (ORC II,456)

The emotional coldness is shown in her physical coldness:

"La reconnaissez-vous à sa froideur?..Hélas! vous ne la ré-
chaufferez pas dans les vôtres.."(ORC II,450)

Allan too, uses the same images when he describes Yseult and the effects her past has had on her:

"Parle-moi de cette Margarita qui enleva..le velouté des
fleurs de ton âme..de ton mari qui te les rejeta flétries."

(ORC II,499)

When the imagery associated with Allan begins to resemble that used of Yseult, it is clear that Allan himself, now also a prisoner of his own past, is taking on Yseult's characteristics. When first presented to the reader, Allan is shown in terms of youth and warmth in contrast to Yseult's coldness:

"Et l'implacable prit la main brûlante du jeune homme dans sa main de glace." (ORC II,390)

"De cette lèvre glacée et pâlie, jaillit une mer d'écarlate

sur les tempes dilatées du jeune homme" (ORC II,402)

Under the influence of Yseult, who has now become Allan's past, he is beginning to resemble her and Barbey underlines the change in Allan in the nature of the imagery used to describe him. Gradually Barbey begins to indicate that Allan is turning into the same kind of sterile being as Yseult by associating Yseult images with him. The first of these occurs in chapter XVIII of the Première partie, in which Allan, in an attempt to create some kind of "intimité" with Yseult, wishes to know everything about her. Yseult gives in to this wish in the hope that this will hasten the end of Allan's love for her:

"parce que se donner, se donner beaucoup, se donner tous les jours, c'est provoquer le vaste ennui qui clôt les passions et qui les achève." (ORC II,482)

Barbey has warned the reader of the danger of the excess of passion and when we read a few lines further on:

"Allan..encore plus flétri que les mères du village dont les enfants avaient son âge.." (ORC II,482)

the word "flétri", so often used in connection with Yseult, strikes a further warning note. However, Allan is still in love with Yseult and her inability to return his love has not yet created the same sterility in his soul as exists in hers. The first step is this premature ageing of the young man:

"Elle (la douleur) répandait sur cette forme d'ange qui n'était pas encore une stature d'homme, quelque chose de la fatigue des vieillards." (ORC II,493)

"Est-ce que je puis être heureux maintenant? Est-ce qu'au sein de l'amour partagé je pourrais oublier cet amour qui m'a vieilli avant l'heure?" (ORC II,557)

By this time in the novel, the fifth chapter of the Deuxième partie, Allan is experiencing what Yseult has already gone through - the deadness

to all emotion - Allan is struggling not to accept this and denies the growing resemblance between himself and Yseult:

"Je ne suis pas encore comme cette funeste Yseult! Je le sens, puisque j'aime sa fille." (ORC II,558)

But this love for Camille does not outlast their wedding night. After his marriage to Camille, the imagery used to describe him by Barbey is the same as that earlier used of Yseult:

"(Allan) essaya de réchauffer ses lèvres, froides encore du contact des lèvres d'Yseult." (ORC II,623)

Here the link between Allan and Yseult is clearly stated in a symbolic physical manifestation of the emotional indifference which their pasts have caused them.

By chapter XVI of the Deuxième partie, Allan himself has finally realised that he has now become like Yseult and uses the images of marble to describe his condition, an image previously used for Yseult:

"se débattre contre le marbre qui vous monte jusqu'à la poitrine et sentir le marbre plus fort que la vie.." (ORC II,633)

A similar process is involved in the imagery concerning Camille; at the beginning of the novel she is depicted as an attractive and lively girl:

"Et Camille.. se retourna fougueusement, comme elle faisait tout, cette fillette dont les sensations étaient si vives." (ORC II,404)

but as Allan's coldness begins to affect her, she too changes and in Allan's mind is likened to Yseult:

"Yseult et Camille lui faisaient l'effet d'être deux cadavres au fond de son coeur." (ORC II,612)

"ces deux femmes, écorces flétries qui lui étaient tombées de la bouche et des mains." (ORC II,630)

By the Epilogue to Ce qui ne meurt pas, Camille has come to resemble her

mother and the description of her on page 665 - "avec sa pâleur olivâtre et ses flétrissures prématurées"- are in complete contrast to the girl we first meet:

"Cette beauté, on la pressentait dans Camille. On la pressentait à l'ovale de son visage et à de grands yeux noirs, beaux et brillants.." (ORC II,386)

This contrast is all the more impressive when it is realised that by the end of Ce qui ne meurt pas, Camille is only twenty years old.

In Ce qui ne meurt pas the images of coldness and of withering convey the sterile atmosphere which surrounds Yseult de Scudemor as a result of her past; this has destroyed not only her happiness, but as has been indicated, both Allan's and Camille's chance of finding happiness, leaving them her heritage of indifference and of pity, since this is all that can survive in Allan and in Camille after the possibility of love has gone, just as it was the only recourse left to Yseult.

Apart from the types of imagery already discussed which convey the mood of desolation associated with the past, Barbey also uses the characters' surroundings to emphasise the devastated nature of their situation; here the characters' drama is played out against the background of an isolated château:

"Isolées en ces immenses parages, c'étaient deux demeures aristocratiques et solitaires.." (ORC II,382)

Attention is constantly drawn to the isolation of the three protagonists who seem totally alone in the novel.⁴ The past has isolated Yseult de Scudemor from normal human feelings and will do the same to the other two characters; this emotional isolation is thus paralleled in their physical situation and, as will later be shown, this is a device favoured by Barbey d'Aurevilly in his other novels as well.

During the period when Barbey d'Aurevilly was writing and revising Germaine, he was also contributing articles to the literary magazine that

he had founded with his friends Edelestand du Méril and Trebutien La Revue critique de la philosophie, des sciences et de la littérature, but more interestingly, he kept a diary intermittently, of which a few fragments remain and also kept up a lively correspondence with his friend Trebutien. The existence of these letters and the Memorandum - which in themselves indicate the extent to which Barbey, even at this early stage (he was in his late twenties) was dominated by his preoccupation with the past - because they show an identical use of the same imagery as that found in Ce qui ne meurt pas to convey the idea of the past, justifies the inclusion of Ce qui ne meurt pas here as the first of Barbey's novels.

In his other writings of this period there are particularly striking examples of similar imagery to describe the desolation wrought by the past. For example in the early poetry:

"O coupe de vermeil où j'ai puisé la vie,
Je ne t'emporte pas dans mon sein tout glacé!
Reste derrière moi, reste à demi remplie,
Offrande à l'avenir et débris du passé." ⁵

and again in 1843 in his poem "L'Échanson":

"Il verse;- et le baiser se glace aux lèvres pures;
Il verse;- et tout périt des plus fraîches amours!

.....

N'as-tu jamais senti se glisser dans ta vie
Le poison qui, plus tard, doit si bien la flétrir?" ⁶

Also in Barbey d'Aurevilly's private writings of this period, in the first two Memoranda written between 1836 and 1839, and also in the early letters to Trebutien, there is evidence of a constant preoccupation with his own past and with the disastrous effects he believes it to have had on himself; he is quite consistent in this concern with the past over the three years covered by the Memoranda:

"Les spectres de la vie sont les souvenirs." 5 décembre 1836 (ORC

24
"..dominé par les souvenirs, ces éternels adversaires." 27

décembre 1836 (ORC II, 801)

"Est-ce que je suis autre chose qu'un débris, une ruine?" 15

août 1838 (ORC II, 951)

"il n'y a plus que ruines dans mon passé et dans mon coeur."

31 décembre 1838 (ORC II, 1009)

He even uses the same imagery of himself as he had done for Yseult in Ce qui ne meurt pas:

"je crois que je me froidis intérieurement" 8 août 1837 (ORC II
837)

This imagery of despair and sterility would thus appear to be important to Barbey at this point in his life; the novel Ce qui ne meurt pas has been seen as an attempt on his part to exorcise his own past - Caen and the hopeless love affair with his cousin's wife - still very present in his mind. On the other hand, even at this comparatively early stage, Barbey had already realised the importance that the past had for him as a writer:

"et sentant une fois de plus qu'ou il n'y a pas de réalité
pour moi et de ressouvenir, il n'y a qu'aridité et poussière."
13 janvier 1837 (ORC II, 812)

The necessity of the past was a theme he was constantly to come back to:

"Les Artistes savent ce que valent les souvenirs...Sans les
souvenirs, nous ne serions que des sots." 25 juillet 1853
(LT II, 361)

"En dehors de la réalité et du souvenir, je n'aurais pas trois
sous de talent, Trebutien.." 2 avril 1855 (LT III, 233)

In the 1835 Préface to Germaine, as mentioned earlier, Barbey's interest in the past and its effects on people is already evident and will go on to become a dominant theme in the novels where it appears as a powerful destructive force. In the later novels, the protagonists will share Yseult's

inability to find lasting happiness and the malefic influence of the past will be shown to dominate and ruin their lives as well as the lives of those around them. Contemporary critics were not aware of the existence of this Préface in 1883 when Ce qui ne meurt pas was finally published. They knew that the novel had been revised, but were sure the revisions had been quite extreme; the Epilogue in particular they believed, could not have been drafted in such a form in Barbey's youthful version of the story. Had they known of the Préface of 1835, they would have been in a position to appreciate the continuity in Barbey d'Aurevilly's literary development.

Chapter I - Notes

1. 16 septembre 1835 : "... et je vous remercie de vos soins paternels pour ma fille, cette superbe et indolente Germaine dont l'aristocratie séduit peu la plèbe de ces faquins appelés libraires." (LT I, 44)
2. 21 mai 1845 : "... je publierais, dans le courant de l'été.. Vellini, Germaine.." (LT I, 238)
 - 11 mai 1846 : "... Germaine, la lente Germaine.. paraîtra immédiatement après Vellini." (LT I, 259)
 - 29 avril 1847 : "... ce qu'il y a de sûr, c'est que j'aurai publié pour octobre prochain quatre volumes de roman: deux de V, deux de Germaine." (LT I, 275)
3. Germaine: "... l'Athée Sublime en baissant... "

Ce qui ne meurt pas: "... Dieu! - répondait l'athée misérable, la grande morte à Dieu comme à la vie, en baissant ses yeux de marbre comme si elle avait voulu se soustraire à cette grande idée de Dieu, écrite dans les horizons infinis où le soleil lentement mourait."

Hofer: Barbey d'Aurevilly Romancier Berne, Francke 1974 p.41
4. ORC II, 383 : "Ceux-là qui l'habitaient (le château des Saules) pouvaient, dans ce désert de terre et d'eau, se croire au bout du monde!"

ORC II, 446 : "Ainsi dans ce château.. il ne resta plus que trois personnes: Allan, Mme de Scudemor et Camille."

ORC II, 481 : " Les Saules.. habités seulement par ces trois personnes, Mme de Scudemor, sa fille et Allan de Cynthry."
5. "Oh! pourquoi voyager?" 1834 ORC II, 1170
6. "L'Echanson" 1843 ORC II, 1174

Chapter II

L'AMOUR IMPOSSIBLE

After the completion of Germaine in 1835, the next work of fiction of any consequence to be composed by Barbey d'Aurevilly was L'Amour impossible, begun in 1837 and completed in 1840. This short novel - ninety pages in the Pléiade edition - is important in the development of Barbey's preoccupation with the past, since it continues the illustration of the theme already demonstrated in Ce qui ne meurt pas; that is, the destructive influence which one character's past can have over his or her own present and that of those people with whom he or she comes into contact. L'Amour impossible is in itself a slight novel and Barbey himself seemed to find it an embarrassment fairly soon after he had written it.¹

The theme of L'Amour impossible is basically that of Ce qui ne meurt pas transposed to the artificial world of the Paris salon. Bérangère de Gesvres, a well-known figure in the circles of society that frequent the salons, is overwhelmed by "ennui". Like Yseult de Scudemor in Ce qui ne meurt pas, Bérangère's personal past is shown to be ultimately responsible for her present inability to love. In the earlier novel, Barbey goes into considerable detail about Yseult's past, whereas here, in L'Amour impossible, Bérangère's past is dismissed in comparatively few lines:

"Et pourtant, oui! elle avait aimé. Au début de la vie, et peu de temps après son mariage, la trahison d'un amant lui avait brisé le coeur." (ORC I, 49)

Clearly this episode in her past has marked Bérangère deeply, even if not as deeply as Bérangère likes to claim,² and the event has turned her into a much more ruthless character than Yseult. In this novel Barbey stresses more the effects of the past on Bérangère, rather than the past itself:

"Tout est consommé, tout est fini; je m'agite encore, je me monte la tête, mais c'est inutile. Je retombe dans l'horrible sensation de mon néant." (ORC I, 88)

and the frequent references to Bérangère's ennui and lack of feeling emphasise the importance Barbey attached to this aspect of the past in L'Amour impossible.³

Bérangère de Gesvres determines, quite cold-bloodedly, to take her friend's lover, Raimbaud de Maulévrier, away from her. Bérangère has several motives in doing this: firstly, she is bored and decides to break up the liaison between Raimbaud and Madame d'Anglure in an attempt to alleviate her boredom;⁴ secondly, she has what Barbey considers a natural feminine desire to steal another woman's lover and hurt that woman;⁵ and thirdly, Bérangère has a great desire to see Maulévrier, the cool elegant dandy, in the grip of passion and she hopes that this might inspire love within her own cold self.⁶ Underlying all her motives, however, is an emotion unknown to Yseult in Ce qui ne meurt pas - revenge:

"Parce que l'on a été malheureuse une fois, parce qu'on a fait un choix indigne, on se croit hors du droit commun en amour. On se promet de la vengeance en masse, envers et contre tous. .. Madame de Gesvres parlait des tourments qu'on devait infliger aux hommes, et qu'elle paraissait résolue à leur en prodiguer sans compter.. " (ORC I,51)⁷

Bérangère does succeed in taking Raimbaud from Caroline d'Anglure, though Barbey makes it clear, in Bérangère's defence, that Raimbaud was already tiring of Caroline:

"..depuis quatre immenses mois il était lassé de cette beauté de camélia élané, mol et pur..de toute cette jeunesse virginale encore.. il était fatigué aussi de l'imperturbable tendresse qu'on lui montrait, et de cette bêtise pleine de charme." (ORC I,59)

Thus Raimbaud is predisposed to fall in love with a woman as fascinating as Bérangère and as different from the usual kind of woman to be found in the salons:

29

"Monsieur de Maulévrier était un peu blasé sur ce genre de figures mises à la mode par une certaine rénovation littéraire et de beaux-arts. Il aimait mieux que toutes ces langueurs hypocrites ou passionnées la physionomie de Madame de Gesvres, physionomie toujours nette et perçante." (ORC I, 69)

Madame de Gesvres, thus driven by the legacy of her past, ultimately brings about her friend Caroline's death; she also makes Raimbaud like herself by robbing him of the ability to love and find lasting happiness. Bérangère and Raimbaud go on living out their lives of boredom together in the trivial world they inhabit; at the end of L'Amour impossible, they are merely waiting for physical death to overtake them, since they are both emotionally dead.

Raimbaud de Maulévrier has much in common with Allan in Ce qui ne meurt pas, even though Allan is an innocent young man brought up in the country and Raimbaud is an experienced dandy from the world of the Paris salon; they each have a genuine passion for an older woman, whose incapacity to return their love thwarts their original passion and renders them incapable of true deep feeling, like both Yseult de Scudemor and Bérangère de Gesvres - only pity will remain in each case: in L'Amour impossible, Raimbaud's feelings of pity are directed towards Madame d'Anglure whom he once loved and who dies because of him. These two characters, Allan and Raimbaud, also share a trait common to many of Barbey's major creations; in the course of the novel, they in some way make a vain attempt to overcome the influence of the past by making a conscious effort to betray it or deny it in some way. Thus in Ce qui ne meurt pas, Allan tries to disregard his own past by denying to Camille that he ever loved Yseult,⁸ and in L'Amour impossible, Raimbaud too will betray his past by sacrificing his memories of his love affair with Madame d'Anglure to Bérangère's mockery:

"Ce fut de la part de cet homme..une complète apostasie...

Elle (Bérangère) lui designait tous ses souvenirs un à un pour qu'il marchât et crachât dessus." (ORC I,74)

The imagery used in L'Amour impossible to describe the principal character Bérangère de Gesvres, is similar to that used in Ce qui ne meurt pas about Yseult, with again imagery conveying the idea of coldness. In L'Amour impossible too, the rare imagery stresses the way in which Bérangère's past has destroyed her ability to feel the warm emotions of love and friendship. However, in this novel, the images of coldness are not so explicitly linked with time as they were in Ce qui ne meurt pas. We still have the striking comparisons, however, as for example when Barbey writes of Bérangère:

"Le temps, qui l'avait jaunie comme les marbres exposés à l'air.." (ORC I, 45)

or again:

"C'était réellement un abîme de glace, mais un abîme qui donnait le vertige." (ORC I,76)

In this novel, Barbey underlines Bérangère's lack of emotional warmth by direct reference to her coldness:

"..âme sauvée par la froideur des sens..de l'éclat funeste des passions." (ORC I,71)

and Bérangère too, when speaking of herself, recognises only too clearly her own emotional defects and in the same terms:

"Je suis froide, c'est la vérité." (ORC I,82)

and Raimbaud describes her in similar fashion:

".. elle dont la froideur est invincible et dont le coeur ne peut plus désormais être atteint." (ORC I,122)

In the course of L'Amour impossible, because of the unreturned passion Raimbaud has for Bérangère, which slowly weakens then kills the love he has for her, Raimbaud becomes like Bérangère.. in his inability to feel

love, and we see him gradually take on Bérangère's characteristics - as Allan did Yseult's - but there is not the same concentrated use of imagery in L'Amour impossible to convey this idea. Here the situation is made quite clear in a series of graded statements: the first stage in turning Raimbaud into the emotionless being he will become by the end of the novel, comes in Part II, chapter III:

"Ainsi, comme il arrive toujours, il était démoralisé par la résistance, et l'amour n'était plus à ses yeux que ce contact de deux épidermes." (ORC I,107)

Then the resemblance between Raimbaud and Bérangère is stated explicitly:

"Elle l'avait fatigué en trompant ses désirs sans cesse, en flétrissant un à un tous les espoirs qu'il s'était créés;.. et lui, comme elle, ne pouvait ressentir que l'amour comme le monde l'a fait." (ORC I,130)

Her past, which has rendered her incapable of true emotion is now ruining Raimbaud's present - this destruction caused by the past is stated in terms of a disease:

"On eût dit qu'en l'aimant il avait contracté, pour les autres, la cruelle impossibilité d'aimer dont il avait été la victime." (ORC I, 131)

The total sterility of the feelings of Raimbaud and of Bérangère is now obvious and is the main link between them. Whatever society may think, Barbey stresses that they are not lovers, merely friends, united by their common emotional aridity. As with Yseult, once love has gone, nothing can replace it in their hearts:

"Qu'aimons-nous? L'idée de Dieu nous laisse froids; la nature nous laisse froids; nous n'avons que l'esprit du monde, du monde qui n'a pas un intérêt vrai à nous offrir, et à qui nous n'avons rien à préférer." (ORC I,134)

Although imagery is used less frequently in L'Amour impossible to convey the powerful influence of the past, Barbey uses another device in this novel to illustrate his theme; objects which represent the past in some way.

The first of these is the portrait of Bérangère, painted when she was eighteen and which most strikingly shows the physical effects that her past has had on her, by the contrast that this painting presents to the Bérangère of L'Amour impossible:

".. comment cette tête de jeune fille, que les Italiens auraient caractérisée par le mot charmant de vaghezza, avait pu devenir cette autre tête..(ORC I,67)

Next, the portefeuille in ivory given to Raimbaud by Madame d'Anglure, from which Bérangère takes the pencil and traces the word "jamais" while Raimbaud is embracing her. (ORC I,79) This is a particularly significant object in the development of the theme of the destructive power of the past, since the incident conveys to the reader several different ideas: as the portefeuille was a love token from Raimbaud's former mistress, Caroline, she is thus symbolically present in the scene as a reminder of Raimbaud's own past. We are also reminded that, spurred on by a desire for revenge on her own past, Bérangère set out quite deliberately to ruin her friend's happiness by tempting Raimbaud away, and has now succeeded in supplanting Madame d'Anglure in Raimbaud's affections; the portefeuille represents Raimbaud's past which he has just betrayed in the scene by allowing Bérangère to mock his memories of Caroline d'Anglure and lastly, the fact that Bérangère traces the word "jamais", indicates that this one-sided love affair is destined to remain so and can only lead to unhappiness for Raimbaud who will never make Madame de Gesvres fall in love with him.

The final significant object in this novel is the box, described in

terms of a tomb, in which Bérangère keeps her old love letters and into which she places Raimbaud's, showing that his letters have as little effect on her as those of her previous lovers:

"..mystérieux coffret où elle les avait ensevelies, et où étaient venues s'engloutir dans du satin rose et sans espérance, tant de lettres d'amour depuis dix années: sépulcre parfumé dont le temps, hélas! allait bientôt sceller la pierre." (ORC I,82)

These objects then, tell us implicitly what Barbey has stated explicitly - that the past is a destructive force; we have the evidence of this in the objects: past suffering has destroyed Bérangère's charming youthful looks, shown by the discrepancy between the portrait and her present appearance, a chronological gap of only fourteen years. The portefeuille incident too, symbolises the past's destructive influence - it occurs at a moment of deep passion on Raimbaud's part, when Bérangère's inability to respond to his love is markedly obvious, so illustrating once again her emotional coldness, a result of her past. The letters are a symbol both of Bérangère's past and of the resulting indifference she has felt towards men's passion for ten years - ever since the incident which robbed her of her ability to experience deep and lasting emotion, for these letters are meaningless to Bérangère, they are merely put away in a "sépulcre parfumé" - this suggests too, the hopelessness of Raimbaud's love; it is evident that he will be no more successful with Bérangère than her other lovers have been, because his letters suffer the same fate as those of her earlier suitors.

There is less external drama in L'Amour impossible than in Ce qui ne meurt pas: Madame d'Anglure's death is calm and not unexpected - she has been ill for some time:

"..une toux déjà ancienne, mais aggravée, lui causait des

crachements de sang." (ORC I,111)

Yet Madame d'Anglure's fate again shows the power of the past to destroy: Bérangère's past, which has inspired her to steal Raimbaud from Madame d'Anglure, combined with Raimbaud's past in the form of his pride as a dandy and his ensuing determination to win Bérangère at all costs, lead directly to Raimbaud's desertion of Caroline for her supposed friend, Bérangère, this aggravates the former's illness and results finally in her death.

The conclusion of L'Amour impossible is all the more effective for its lack of drama, since it demonstrates the absolute futility of the lives that Bérangère and Raimbaud now lead. This futility is a consequence of Bérangère's past which has reduced the two of them to this state:

"Cela fait, ils montèrent en voiture pour aller, je crois, acheter des rubans." (ORC I,135)

L'Amour impossible provides an interesting link between Ce qui ne meurt pas and Une Vieille Maîtresse; it continues the theme of the past as presented in Ce qui ne meurt pas. The reader is offered two explanations by Barbey of Raimbaud's persistent love for Bérangère; after all, it is not until the second part of the novel that he too loses his capacity for love and comes to resemble Bérangère. Raimbaud's own past is responsible for his infatuation with Madame de Gesvres, for he is a dandy who has had much success with women and who is determined to succeed with Bérangère. Her past contributes too, since it has filled her with thoughts of revenge and makes her use all her wiles to keep Raimbaud in love with her. This past, in the form of Bérangère's indifference to Raimbaud's passion, will destroy Raimbaud's emotions in the long run and make him as empty emotionally as she is; this is the psychological explanation at the centre of the novel. But, for the first time, Barbey introduces a new element here - he offers another explanation for the outcome of the

story in the introduction of the theme of the influence of the supernatural. This theme is only lightly touched on here, but will become more important in Barbey's later novels. Raimbaud, it is suggested, could be "bewitched" by Bérangère:

"..il fallait être ensorcelé de cette femme.."(ORC I,79)

"Femme sans unité..le diable en personne.. Arrivé à cette intoxication de sentiment qui tenait du charme, il n'y avait qu'un moyen violent d'en sortir à son honneur: c'était de tuer la sorcière." (ORC I,118)

This theme is brought in fairly casually in L'Amour impossible and treated with humorous irony as the rest of the above quotation makes clear:

"Malheureusement, à une certaine hauteur sociale, on ne tue pas les femmes à Paris." (ORC I,118)

However, in the later novels, this theme of bewitchment will be associated more closely with that of the destructive nature of the past, which will be then seen in a more malefic light than in these early novels, with correspondingly greater destructive power. The use of this theme in L'Amour impossible, like other devices used by Barbey, again emphasises the power of the past over the characters; Raimbaud's passion for Bérangère remains unreturned in spite of efforts on his part to arouse some emotion in her even if only jealousy. In Ce qui ne meurt pas, the past was purely a psychological burden for Yseult, but in the case of Bérangère, it can be seen to be turning into an evil influence which will become predominant in the later novels.

L'Amour impossible is linked with Une Vieille Maîtresse quite closely, since it heralds the plot of Barbey's next novel:

"..la préférence qu'on accorde..à une vieille maîtresse qui suce vos cigares pour les allumer et devant qui on se permet tout sans qu'elle soit choquée de rien."(ORC I,94)

L'Amour impossible is linked too with Barbey's own life at the time of its composition; the despair and sterility found in the novel are echoes of Barbey's feelings as expressed in his Memoranda of the period. He began the novel in the late autumn of 1837 when he was in a mood of pessimism brought about both by his difficult financial situation at the time and by the gradual ending of his love affair with Louise. His diary entries show that he is constantly thinking about his own past and the power it still wields over him:

"La nuit tombée, regardé par ma fenêtre et chanté mille fragments tout en pensant au passé, la situation la plus découragée de mon âme et qu'elle a souvent." 26 juin 1838
 (ORC II,914)⁹

This is a continuing preoccupation for him. In December 1838 he writes that:

".. toutes les affections que j'avais et sur lesquelles j'ai vécu sont détruites et qu'il n'y a plus que ruines dans mon passé et dans mon coeur!" (ORC II,1009)¹⁰

One of the few stable elements in Barbey's life at this time was the Marquise du Vallon, on whom he based the character of Bérangère de Gesvres. In his diary entry for 8th November 1837, Barbey devotes almost three pages to a description of the Marquise, which he will later use in his description of Bérangère.¹¹ A week later he explains his motives in writing L'Amour impossible:

"Je veux y montrer l'amour dans les âmes vieilles, le manque d'Ivresse , la froideur des sens et cependant une passion souveraine, empoisonnée; l'agonie, sans doute, de la faculté d'aimer, mais une Agonie éternelle." (ORC II,859)

Though not one of Barbey d'Aurevilly's great novels, L'Amour impossible provides us with a cynical, fictionalised picture of his kind of salon

life in the late 1830s; it continues and extends the theme basic to all the novels - the destructive influence of the past - and it also forms a useful bridge between Barbey's first major work of fiction Ce qui ne meurt pas and the first of the great novels Une Vieille Maitresse. Probably its main interest now is as a marker along the path of Barbey's development as a writer. He was sufficiently clear-sighted about his own work to appreciate the weaknesses of this novel, which he analyses in the Préface to the 1859 edition. But as early as 1841, Barbey sees L'Amour impossible as a farewell to part of his own past and shows his preoccupation with the passage of time:

"C'est le dernier mot de mes prétentions de jeune homme;
un mélancolique adieu à cette vie de dandy qui a tant dé-
voré de choses dans la contemplation de ses gilets!" (LT I, 53)

This adieu is a rejection of the world of the salon, which, as will be shown, also meant Barbey's acceptance of his own childhood and of Normandy, where his finest novels were to be set.

Chapter II - Notes

1. "C'est, comme vous l'avez vu, une espèce de mauvaise plaisanterie."
(LT I,55)
2. "Elle avait souffert, il est vrai... C'était beaucoup moins souffrir qu'elle ne l'affectait." (ORC I,68)
3. "On le voit -----> comme une native infirmité" (ORC I,48)
"Vous n'êtes pas pour moi ----->l'ennui terrible de ma vie!"(ORC I,88)
"une dernière ressource contre l'ennui de sa vie!" (ORC I,98)
4. ORC I,64:"Grâce donc à ce misérable ennui ----->
5. ORC I,64:"grâce aussi peut-être à l'immense convoitise----->
6. ORC I,65:"Jamais elle ne sentirait mieux sa puissance ----->
7. See also ORC I,72:"D'honneur, elle aurait mérité de porter dans
ses armes la devise des Ravenswood ((i.e. J'attends le
moment)Elle attendit le moment de la revanche avec
une patience orgueilleuse."
8. ORC II,587-88:"Allan eut recours à l'imposture pour la calmer, Ah!
mentir encore! toujours mentir.."
9. See also ORC II,916 "...elle m'a été une occasion pour retourner, en souve-
nir, à cette époque de ma vie."
10. See also ORC II,1025:"..la même pensée me revient à cette heure comme
un spectre du passé."
11. ORC II, 853-55 and ORC I,45-48

Chapter III

UNE VIEILLE MAÎTRESSE

Barbey d'Aurevilly's original idea concerning Une Vieille Maîtresse was to make it seem that the Marquise du Vallon - the model for Bérangère de Gesvres in L'Amour impossible - had written it herself. The first reference to his new novel does not occur until February 1845 when Barbey writes to tell Trebutien of the literary joke "la conspiration des poudres" that he and the Marquise du Vallon are about to play on Paris society;¹ at this time he has already chosen what would later become the definitive title of the work Une Vieille Maîtresse. There is a possibility that Barbey used as a basis for his novel a story he had begun some eight years previously Ryno. This had been started in August 1837,² but was abandoned shortly afterwards, when Barbey had written only the beginning of it.³ The Marquise seems to have changed her mind about participating in the spoof and soon the references in Barbey's letters and diaries are to his novel Une Vieille Maîtresse.

This novel marks the beginning of Barbey d'Aurevilly's great period of writing; it was begun in 1845 and from comments in his letters to his friend Trebutien, it is clear that Barbey was working on it enthusiastically at first. It was finally published in 1851.

Elements of the earlier novels can be discerned in Une Vieille Maîtresse, but Barbey introduces new elements and new literary devices, perhaps tentatively here, but which will be exploited more fully in the major Norman novels as his technique as a writer develops. These elements all help to convey more powerfully this dominating theme of his writings - the influence of the past on his characters' lives.

The basic situation of Ce qui ne meurt pas and L'Amour impossible is retained in Une vieille Maîtresse with the hero Ryno de Marigny caught between two women; in this novel, an older woman - Vellini - who rep-

resents his past and a young woman - Hermangarde - who represents his present and possible future. In Ce qui ne meurt pas and L'Amour impossible, the male protagonists started off with the capacity to form lasting relationships and only during the course of the novel itself were they destroyed emotionally by the influence of the past, so that they each end their respective novels incapable of love, dead to all deep feelings. However, in Une Vieille Maitresse, the hero has moved on a stage further than either Allan or Raimbaud - Ryno de Marigny had been at this point ten years before the story of Une Vieille Maitresse opens. After an unhappy love affair, he too was convinced that he would never be able to experience love again,⁴ but unlike Allan and Raimbaud whose emotional lives were finished by the end of their novels and all was sterility around them, it is at this point, in Une Vieille Maitresse, when Ryno too believes his emotional responses are definitively dead, that the ultimate tragedy of Ryno's life begins, affecting those around him, for when he is at this stage, he falls in love with Vellini, the "vieille maitresse" of the title.

When the novel opens, Ryno has broken away from Vellini and has fallen in love with Hermangarde de Polastron, a beautiful young girl from a noble Norman family and whom he is shortly to marry. This marriage is criticised in many quarters, but goes ahead despite Ryno's reputation as a "libertin effréné" (ORC I,208). Ryno has apparently completely abandoned his former mistress for Hermangarde and the two appear set for an idyllic future. However, Vellini ultimately manages to win Ryno back and Hermangarde, the tragic young wife, is "sacrifiée à une vieille maitresse",⁵ that is, to Ryno's past.

Any discussion of the plot of Une Vieille Maitresse must include the new elements introduced in this novel by Barbey to enforce his main thesis about the power of the past. The treatment of the theme in Une Vieille

Maitresse is developed in two main directions, both of which will be enhanced and shaped to play an even more important role in the later novels. The first new element is the introduction of the historical past to lend more force to the personal past of the characters, since by setting the protagonists in a specific historical context Barbey adds depth to their fictional existence by fixing them firmly in time and space. In Une Vieille Maitresse, it is this latter aspect which Barbey concentrates on and here the place in question is Normandy, in which Barbey sets the second part of the novel. Like L'Amour impossible, the first part of Une Vieille Maitresse is set in the narrow world of the Paris salon, but after this Barbey was never to return to Paris in his major works, and instead set them in Normandy. This was the part of France in which Barbey had spent his childhood and which he knew particularly well, but it was also an area of France rich in its own traditions and in events of historical significance. These two features will later be developed fully by Barbey, but in Une Vieille Maitresse, where the idea is introduced, he concentrates on the traditional side of the historical past in the form of local legends and the patois spoken by the country people. This close identification with a particular region in France lends solidity to Barbey's creation.

The second new element is the use of the supernatural - in Une Vieille Maitresse in the form of superstition and fatality - foreshadowing especially L'Ensorcelée and Un Prêtre marié, where the supernatural dimension is of major importance. Ce qui ne meurt pas and L'Amour impossible are "realistic" novels in which the problems and tragedies arise from the characters' upbringing and from their pasts, whereas in Une Vieille Maitresse the new dimension - the supernatural - touched on in a slightly jocular fashion by Barbey in L'Amour impossible,⁶ comes into play, not only adding emphasis to the influence of the past by suggesting it involves the characters in a sphere over and above that of the everyday world, but also

by the introduction of the theme of fatality, stressing the powerlessness of the characters to fight against the influence of the past. As will be shown later, this is offered by Barbey as a possible explanation both of events and of characters' reactions, by apparently showing the protagonists as helplessly caught up in a tragedy which began much earlier and which, in some predestined way, will engulf them; however, Barbey always skilfully suggests an alternative explanation from within the personality of the characters themselves, so that the reader is allowed to choose which explanation of the tragedy - the psychological or the supernatural - he prefers. This is a new departure for Barbey, seen first in this novel but which will be used to even greater effect in L'Ensorcelée.

In Une Vieille Maitresse, fatality plays a major role, since all the principal characters are touched by it to a greater or lesser extent. From the first chapter onwards, hints are dropped about a sinister outcome to the love affair between Ryno and Hermangarde; a series of disquieting notes is struck by the secondary characters and by the author. Hermangarde is described as:

"..fière et tendre, combinaison funeste!" (ORC I,207)

There is an apparent fatality in Hermangarde's love for Ryno; she is in love with him before she ever meets him - perhaps this is indeed predestination:

"..elle l'aimait même avant de l'avoir vu, tant il y a des affections qui ont tous les caractères de la destinée!" (ORC I,221)

However, these premonitions are also accompanied by psychological warnings, for as Barbey is careful to point out, it is understandable that Hermangarde falls in love with the idea of Ryno, before meeting him: her past, in the form of her upbringing has conditioned her to fall in love

with a man so unlike the usual type to be found in the Paris salons. It must be remembered that Hermangarde had been brought up by her grandmother, the Marquise de Flers, a woman of strong personality herself, and had imbibed many of her grandmother's qualities. Hermangarde is thus drawn to Ryno first by his reputation and second, by his personality so much in contrast to the insipid young men she usually met. Barbey leaves the reader to choose which explanation he wishes of Hermangarde's love for Ryno - this ambiguity will become a common device in Barbey's major novels and is used here for the first time to effect.

The theme of fatality affects Ryno too; much is made of his past, his many liaisons with women in Parisian society and in particular his long relationship with Vellini, who is clearly quite different from the beautiful women Marigny might be thought to frequent:

"..assez laide, d'un caractère fort extravagant, et plus âgée que M. de Marigny.." (ORC I,213)

At the beginning of the novel, when Madame d'Artelles attempts to convince her friend, Madame de Flers, that Ryno de Marigny is not a suitable husband for her granddaughter, the Marquise realises that because of the long shared past that has existed between Ryno and Vellini, the latter could be dangerous for Hermangarde. The Marquise gives a warning on a psychological level:

"ou c'est une ancienne relation craquant de toutes parts, depuis le temps qu'elle dure..ou la créature est à craindre, et alors, si elle l'est, elle l'est beaucoup!.. une espèce de maîtresse-sérait.." (ORC I,213)

This idea of the long past affair between Ryno and Vellini having a fatal influence on the present and on the future, is taken up by the Vicomte de Prosnay writing to Madame d'Artelles about the verdict of Parisian society on the affair:

"Marigny est dominé depuis dix ans par une maîtresse qui sait son empire et qui le gardera, puisqu'elle l'a gardé.

Un si long passé est une hypothèque sur l'avenir." (ORC I,380)

The possibility of lasting happiness for Ryno and Hermangarde is undermined for the reader by these frequent references to the peril Vellini represents, because she symbolises the past for Ryno.

One of Ryno's former lovers, Madame de Mendoze, carries the stamp of fatality too; even her name, it is suggested, indicates that her fate will be tragic:

"..on l'avait appelée Martyre. Y a-t-il toute une destinée dans un nom? (ORC I,344)

She is also described as:

"le type d'un de ces genres de beauté évidemment prédestinés au malheur." (ORC I,222)

Madame de Mendoze does die in the second part of the novel; it is the fact, however, that her past, that is her affair with Ryno, has weakened her physical resistance to illness, which is the major factor in her death. Her passion for Ryno drives her to frequent the salons where he might be, hoping to catch a glimpse of him. Like Madame d'Anglure in L'Amour impossible, she is slowly dying of consumption. This sick woman will not cease her social life - her only opportunity now to meet Ryno; this kind of existence aggravates her already enfeebled condition and brings about her death in the course of the novel. Madame de Mendoze even undertakes the long journey to her property in Normandy so that she may be near Ryno de Marigny and may occasionally catch sight of him. Ryno's past - the affair with Vellini - is also responsible for Madame de Mendoze's death, for he appears unable to make a final break with Vellini and love another woman for any length of time; he seems to be constantly drawn back to Vellini.

Madame de Mendoze is also an example of the use of parallels favoured by Barbey: her fate is set before the reader as a further warning that, because of the past, the marriage between Ryno and Hermangarde can never succeed. Madame de Mendoze, like Hermangarde, is in love with Ryno - he did love her in the past and broke away temporarily from Vellini to take up with Madame de Mendoze, partially attracted by the contrast she made physically with Vellini: the former is described as:

"..cette patricienne blanche, blonde et languissante"(ORC I,330) a description that could also fit Hermangarde, for whom Ryno has again left Vellini and this time too, the break appears final. But in the earlier affair, Ryno's past was too powerful for him and he abandoned Madame de Mendoze to return to the woman who symbolised his past - Vellini, his former mistress. The reader is thus prepared for a similar fate to befall Hermangarde in spite of all Ryno's protestations that he has left Vellini for good.

It is suggested by Barbey, in a more direct way, that the relationship between Vellini and Ryno is predestined to dominate all others. Vellini is shown as fully believing that a fatal link unites Ryno with herself. Her upbringing has made her of a deeply superstitious nature, so that her action of drinking Ryno's blood and of making him drink hers, ensures for her that their destinies are inextricably linked. This mingling of their blood becomes for Vellini the absolute proof of the durability of their liaison, which is further confirmed by events in the past, since Ryno attempts to leave Vellini for Madame de Mendoze, but is ultimately drawn back to his former mistress. Vellini often refers to the blood link, even calling Ryno "mon uni de sang" as a term of affection.⁷ It is a symbol of their shared past whose influence on Vellini in particular is powerful and will not diminish until death:

"De l'influence terrible et sacrée de cette communion

sanglante, nous en avons pour jusqu'à la mort." (ORC I,322)

Vellini is confident in this power, the result of fatality for her, and predicts to Ryno when he comes to take his final leave of her before his marriage to Hermangarde, that he will come back to her as he has done in the past and that for them there can be no final outcome to their liaison:

"Tu me reviendras!.. tu passeras sur le coeur de la jeune fille que tu épouses pour me revenir." (ORC I,246) ⁸

and this is indeed what happens, apparently a confirmation of the fatality which taints the protagonists.

The most interesting example of the theme of fatality in Une Vieille Maîtresse is in the character of Ryno de Marigny: he seems to be especially vulnerable as far as the supernatural dimension is concerned. The Marquise de Flers, after listening to his confession of his past:

"..ne put s'empêcher de voir dans les paroles de Marigny la plainte d'une âme dominée par une espèce de fatalité."

(ORC I,261)

But Barbey makes it clear from Ryno's retelling of his earlier history, that initially this fatality, which might seem to emanate from outside the character, is psychological in nature and results from the influence of his own past experiences on him. Ryno is a man dominated by the past and the tragedy in the novel springs from the personality of Ryno himself, formed by past events in his life, in particular the long affair with Vellini.

For Ryno the past is Vellini and can be only her - he started his affair with her at a time in his life when, by his own admission, he was dead to all deep feelings. Having awakened him from the emotional sterility he had fallen into, Vellini is an accordingly more powerful figure in his life - where there was nothing, there is now Vellini, as

though Ryno's life was really only starting ten years before the opening of the novel, when he first met Vellini.

Ryno's confession of his past to the Marquise de Flers is enlightening both in showing the reader what kind of character Ryno has, and in issuing a further warning about the power that Vellini exerts over de Marigny. After the brief affair with Madame de Mendoze, Ryno goes back to Vellini, although he admits he is no longer in love with her. For Vellini this is proof of "fatalité", for she too, had several lovers, but has always been drawn back to Ryno. He sees part of Vellini's power over him as lying in the fact of her supreme confidence in her ability to win him back - she believes herself to be "un instrument du destin" (ORC I,334) but for Ryno, at least initially, it is the powerful influence of the past - "la brûlante domination du passé" (ORC I,334) - not any supernatural force that constantly brings them together again. Yet, as Ryno is slowly attracted back to Vellini after his marriage to Hermangarde, he gradually seems to accept Vellini's fatalistic view of their relationship in terms of the supernatural, even admitting the possibility that she had cast a spell on him.⁹ He uses expressions borrowed from the supernatural to refer to Vellini: "Fantôme vivant" (ORC I,515) .."ce succube" (ORC I,516) ... "spectre du passé" (ORC I,518)..until finally, in his letter to the Marquise de Flers, he states:

"Je me sentais prédestiné à Vellini." (ORC I,521)

However, Barbey d'Aurevilly states explicitly that it is Ryno's character combined with the circumstances of his past that create what Vellini interprets as destiny:

"Il n'oubliait pas. Quelque chose de triste comme le regret, d'exalté et de religieux comme la reconnaissance, consacrait dans son coeur d'invisibles mausolées aux amours qui n'existaient plus. C'était cette disposition d'une âme profonde..

c'était cette disposition tenue secrète qui créait à Vellini sa fatalité." (ORC I,456)

So Ryno's past, much more than Vellini's mystic powers, is responsible for the fatal outcome of the story. Barbey enlarges on this idea later in the novel: apart from any supernatural powers possessed by Vellini, she represents the past to Ryno, and his youth.¹⁰ Also, as his mistress, she puts no social constraints on him - he can be totally frank with her and perfectly at ease in her company, as he cannot be with his wife.¹¹

This novel is dominated by the theme of the influence of the personal past of the characters to a much greater degree than the two earlier novels. Here, the imagery of the past is less frequent, though still powerful, and it is replaced by constant direct references to the past and to its power. Ryno is the character in Une Vieille Maîtresse who is most deeply under the sway of the past and most susceptible to its influence. He is aware of the claims of his own past on him:

"Le passé, ce dieu de ma vie, m'a pris à poignées les entrailles de mon être et ne les lâche plus!" (ORC I,471)

hence his desire to avoid Vellini's physical presence, for she represents the past whose power he acknowledges,¹² and he knows he will be drawn back by the influence of this past to Vellini, if he does not keep a considerable distance between himself and his former mistress.¹³

The beginning of Ryno's gradual abandonment of himself to his past is heralded in Chapter VI of the second part of this novel; the Marquise de Flers leaves Ryno and Hermangarde in Normandy to return to Paris. Just after her departure, Ryno and Hermangarde see a coach in which are Ryno's two former mistresses, Madame de Mendoze and Vellini. The reader now realises that Ryno is no longer sheltered from his past, which has pursued him to the solitude of the Norman countryside. From the accidental, yet inevitable meeting the following day between Ryno and Vellini (in

the chapter significantly entitled "Le Diable est déchaîné") it is clear that Ryno is being slowly but surely drawn back to Vellini. She holds him because of their ten years of shared past, whose power over Ryno is more complete than any magic spell could be. Ryno even refers to his past in terms of magic:

"..l'inexorable sentiment du passé, cette magie à contre-sens de la vie.." (ORC I,471)

Ryno is, in fact, trapped by the past - "le tout-puissant passé!"(ORC I,514)- he has spent with Vellini; Barbey insists that Ryno no longer loves Vellini but is drawn to her by all the links formed in their ten year liaison. This past, by exerting such a strong influence over Ryno de Marigny, ruins Hermangarde's life, since she will live out the rest of her existence in unhappiness. Ryno's past also ruins his own possibility of happiness, as it is plain that the relationship with Vellini is not one of love, and it can never bring him the pleasure and contentment he knew briefly with Hermangarde.

The final chapter of Une Vieille Maitresse indicates what the two groups, amongst whom the tragedy has been played out, think about the reasons for the failure of the marriage between Ryno and Hermangarde: the Norman peasants choose the supernatural explanation - they believe Vellini to be a witch¹⁴ and it is the general opinion that the devil too was involved in the tragedy.¹⁵ This theme will appear in a more important role in Barbey's next novel, L'Ensorcelée, but it is interesting to note its initial appearance here in this novel. However, in Parisian society, represented here by the Vicomte de Prosnay, the belief is that Ryno had been tempted back by the sensual delights of the relationship he has had with Vellini and which Hermangarde cannot offer him. Interestingly enough, the Vicomte sees Ryno's return to his former mistress as proof of fidelity in Ryno, since he has kept faith with his past by returning to Vellini.

Barbey introduced a parallel idea in Chapter XI when Ryno's dog, Titania, a present from Vellini, leaves Hermangarde's side to join Vellini and refuses to obey Hermangarde's call. This is seen by Hermangarde as a betrayal, but Barbey calls it faithfulness to the past:

"Elle crut que ce qui était de la fidélité encore dans ce noble animal, toujours fidèle, se tournait pour elle en trahison." (ORC I,447)

This anticipates the later episode when it will be Hermangarde's husband keeping faith with his past who will return to Vellini, for both dog and Ryno their "ancienne maîtresse".

The power of the past is conveyed in several different ways in Une Vieille Maîtresse: the main technique used by Barbey here, as we have already seen, is a series of constant references to the past and to the effects it has or has had on the protagonists. He also uses two elements which have already been demonstrated in L'Amour impossible: firstly, objects linked with the past in some way. The dog, Titania, has already been mentioned; there is also Vellini's medallion, a portrait of Ryno, which symbolises the past of the happy days of their relationship and which Vellini burns when she learns that Ryno is leaving her for Hermangarde.¹⁶ Vellini also has a little pewter mirror, supposedly with magic properties,¹⁷ which had belonged originally to a gypsy, then to Vellini's mother. Vellini was thought to bear a close resemblance to this gypsy, thus the mirror links her to her mysterious superstitious background and to her strange origins. Vellini was the illegitimate child of a Duchess from a high-born Portuguese family and a toreador. The latter is disembowelled by a bull and Vellini's mother dabs the blood from her dead lover onto his daughter's clothes and skin; this can partly explain Vellini's firm belief in the power of blood, an important factor in her conviction about the enduring relationship with Ryno.

These objects play a less important role in Une Vieille Maîtresse, since the crushing weight of the past is conveyed principally in the character of Ryno de Marigny.

As in L'Amour impossible, the destruction wrought by the past is associated with disease, most importantly in the figure of Madame de Mendoze, whose death is precipitated by Ryno's abandoning of her - in itself a result of Ryno's past - and in the language Barbey uses to convey his interpretation of the past:

"N'était-ce pas du passé qu'il souffrait?" (ORC I,457)

and again:

"..ce mal enflammé du souvenir dont je suis la victime."

(ORC I,501)

Other new elements are introduced in this novel which will be exploited to greater effect in the later novels. There is the first hint of the power of the past pursuing the characters into Eternity - at the moment of Madame de Mendoze's death, she is rereading Ryno's old love letters as the priest is reciting the prayers for the dead. Vellini says:

"L'auras-tu damnée comme tu l'as tuée?..prends-tu aussi

la vie éternelle?" (ORC I,458)

Another important development in Une Vieille Maîtresse which Barbey seems to be experimenting with here and which will become characteristic of the Norman novels, is the length of the narration within the novel of Ryno's own story dealing with his past association with Vellini. In Ce qui ne meurt pas, Yseult's past is retold in a comparatively brief fashion, but as the past is treated in Une Vieille Maîtresse in a more detailed way, so the retelling of Ryno's own past is correspondingly more detailed. Ryno's confession of his past to the Marquise de Flers covers four chapters out of the eleven in the Première Partie, representing half of the first part in terms of pages. In this novel,

the story within the story goes back to a fairly recent past - only ten years before the opening of the novel - in the Norman novels, this "framework" technique will be used to relate a story from a more distant past. This is the first introduction of this structure in Une Vieille Maîtresse, a structure that Barbey would follow in the principal novels.

The period from 1845 to 1849 when Barbey was actively engaged in writing Une Vieille Maîtresse, was an important one in his development as a writer, since it was in 1846 that Barbey underwent his so-called "spiritual conversion". Barbey did not at this time return to the church as a practising Catholic, but he did return, mentally, to his sources and to his past in the choice of the Normandy theme. This was to be a vital feature of the major novels and indicates how profoundly his acceptance of his past was linked to his talents as a writer.

Barbey worked at first with apparent speed on his new novel, then by September 1846 he seems to have lost his initial verve for the writing of it. He then appears to have vanished from the social scene for several months between 1848 and 1849 and when he emerged from this period of work and solitude, he had completed Une Vieille Maîtresse and had already in preparation several projects for novels. This time of reflection and his consequent turning towards Normandy inspired Barbey with enthusiasm to finish the novel. He himself said of it:

"La Normandie y est peinte avec un pinceau trempé dans
la sanguine concentrée du souvenir." (LT I, 275)

Une Vieille Maîtresse is an introduction to the major Norman cycle of L'Ensorcelée, Le Chevalier des Touches and Un Prêtre marié. It contains elements of the earlier novels, but introduces several new themes which will be developed and exploited in the later works, such as the importance

of the historical past as an influential factor in the personal pasts of the various characters, and the whole domain of the supernatural - from superstition and legend right through to religious doctrine. Une Vieille Maitresse is therefore particularly important as the transitional novel in Barbey d'Aurevilly's oeuvre, standing as it does between Paris and Normandy, pointing back to the youthful works Ce qui ne meurt pas and L'Amour impossible and also pointing the way forward to the great novels of Barbey's maturity.

Chapter III - Notes

1. IT I p.220-1 22nd February 1845
2. ORC II,843: 19 aout 1837 - "Commencé Ryno."
3. The last reference to Ryno is 30th October 1837 (ORC II,849)
Barbey is then taken up with the theme of L'Amour impossible.
4. ORC I, 265: "Je ne doutais pas que ma vie de coeur ne fût finie.."
5. ORC I,549
6. ORC I,79:"..il fallait être ensorcelé de cette femme."
ORC I,118:"Femme sans unité -----> tuer la sorcière."
7. ORC I, 424
8. See also ORC I,349:"Oui,il me reviendra!... la chaîne du sang est
entre nous."
ORC I,471-2:"il faut que les tronçons des coeurs se rapprochent,
ne fût-ce que pour mourir ensemble."
ORC I,474:"Elle croyait au philtre qu'ils avaient bu dans
les veines l'un de l'autre."
9. ORC I,519:"Vellini parlait de sort .. En avait-elle jeté un sur moi?"
10. ORC I,502:"Vellini n'était pas seulement la femme de son passé.. le
Génie des ruines de sa jeunesse.."
11. ORC I,502:"Elle était aussi la femme avec laquelle il pouvait être
franc, à laquelle il pouvait tout dire."
12. ORC I,416:"Vellini, forte d'un passé qu'elle évoquait par sa
présence."
13. ORC I,524:"Alors je voulais m'éloigner-----> sur mon âme."
14. ORC I,538:"..qu'elle était un brin sorcière et qu'elle l'avait
ensorcelé."
15. ORC I,542:"..il fallait bien que le diable s'en mêlât."
16. ORC I,248
17. ORC I,472

L'ENSORCELÉE

The next three novels written by Barbey d'Aurevilly - l'Ensorcelée, Le Chevalier des Touches and Un Prêtre marié - are usually grouped together under the general title of "the Norman novels". Of the three, L'Ensorcelée is considered by many to be the finest of Barbey's novels in its harmonious blending of the various elements of which his writings consist; the supernatural and the natural exist here comfortably side by side, and the "Norman-ness" pervades the work in an unobtrusive fashion, resulting naturally from the plot and the setting.

L'Ensorcelée was planned during Barbey's self-imposed withdrawal from the social scene between 1848 and 1849, a time when Barbey, displeased with the situation in contemporary France and prompted by his intellectual return to the church in 1846, mentioned earlier in reference to Une Vieille Maîtresse, turned toward his past and his memories of local tales and legends. Barbey was not again to leave this Norman dimension in his principal novels and much of their effectiveness is due to the successful uniting of the two main elements:- on the one hand, Barbey's childhood memories of Norman stories and legends; the heroes of the Chouan rebellion; the ghost of a priest which haunted a local church etc., and on the other hand, Barbey's long-standing conviction that the personal past is a destructive force. These two strands are woven together into the fabric of the Norman novels and give them a unique depth and richness.

Barbey decided in the course of the months of solitude to write the great Norman epic. It was to be called l'Ouest and was to be for Normandy what Walter Scott's Chronicles of the Canongate had been to Scotland. This project was never realised in full - only the three Norman novels exist to give the reader a glimpse of what Barbey may have intended.

The historical past of Normandy at the time of the Chouan rebellion - a futile attempt to restore the monarchy after the French revolution - had always been a major interest to Barbey and was to be especially so in these novels. At the same time as Barbey was collecting background information for L'Ensorcelée from his friend Trebutien, he was also seeking details from him about the Chevalier des Touches, a local Chouan hero, whom he intended to use as the basis for a second historical novel in his epic l'Ouest. Interestingly enough, the latter novel was to take him until 1863 to complete, while L'Ensorcelée, started at the same time (in 1849), was finished as early as January 1851. With these three novels, his interest in the supernatural and his delight in writing about the fantastique henceforth superseded his interest in the purely historical novel. Thus, though the destructive influence of the characters' pasts is still one of the basic themes of L'Ensorcelée, here it is blended with, among others, the theme of the historical past, as seen in Une Vieille Maîtresse in the form of local legends and patois, but in L'Ensorcelée greater emphasis is put on the historical context of the novel.

The identification with a specific area of France adds to the reality of Barbey's characters and at the same time, the historical dimension adds force to the argument about the influence of the personal past on the lives of the protagonists by paralleling in a historical context what is shown to be happening in a personal one: that is, past events in history will be shown to have a powerful effect over present events and the characters will appear even more powerless to fight their own pasts against this background of historical inevitability.

The historical perspective in L'Ensorcelée is that of the immediate post-Revolution period when Normandy - with its unsuccessful Chouan rebellion - was one of the last outposts of Royalist support; this rebellion was still comparatively recent in the minds of his contemporaries when

Barbey was writing his novel. Recent history mingles with distant in the references to the Norman conquest and with distant legend in the mention of Rollon, the traditional local folk hero, all this helping to construct a solid fabric against which Barbey can depict his drama.

The historical strand in L'Ensorcelée is woven into the other important elements in the depiction of the power of the past almost imperceptibly, so that they form a whole in which all the aspects are mutually complementary - the past's influence is now seen to be more and more inescapable both in this world and the next.

In L'Ensorcelée Barbey has continued to use the basic pattern which we have already discerned in his earlier novels: the reader is presented with a group of people whose lives are ruined because of their pasts and who bring destruction to those with whom they come in contact. In L'Ensorcelée, the past's influence has become more wide-ranging in that it affects a greater number of the characters here than in the earlier novels and it is also seen as an increasingly malignant force with more destructive capacities than before, since the main characters all meet a tragic end.

In the novels we have considered in previous chapters, the protagonists have to go on existing after their particular drama has been played out; Yseult's death in Ce qui ne meurt pas is a direct consequence of childbirth, not an inherent part of the tragedy. However, in L'Ensorcelée, we have a series of spectacular events:- Clotilde -la Clotte - is stoned to death, Jeanne apparently commits suicide and is found drowned, Jéhoël is murdered during Mass by Thomas Le Hardouey who himself disappears after perpetrating this deed.

On the factual level of the plot, the importance of the historical past and its significance in the personal psychology of the characters, becomes clearer:

Jeanne is a victim of history - brought up in an aristocratic milieu, she nevertheless does not belong totally to the aristocracy. Her mother, the illegitimate child of a local noble and the wife of his gamekeeper, herself married an aristocrat, but of a decadent race. Jeanne too, would probably have married into a noble family had not the Revolution intervened, effectively destroying the noble classes as well as the other alternative previously open to impoverished daughters of aristocratic families - entering a convent. Instead of going into service, Jeanne has married Thomas Le Hardouey, a local farmer who is rarely presented to the reader in any but very unflattering terms. Jeanne is unable to forget her past, since her mother's old friend, Clotilde Mauduit, is constantly depicting to Jeanne the life she should have been leading.

La Clotte is an important character in L'Ensorcelée, for it can be argued that on the realistic level of the story, the tragedy which affects Jeanne is in great part her fault, because of her continuous harping on the past, on Jeanne's heredity and on her "mésalliance" with Thomas Le Hardouey. This is emphasised by the narrator:

"En effet, la Clotte avait profondément aimé Jeanne-Madeleine, mais son affection avait eu son danger pour la malheureuse femme. Elle avait exalté des facultés et des regrets inutiles..il n'est pas douteux..que cette exaltation, entretenue par les conversations de la Clotte, n'ait prédisposé Jeanne-Madeleine au triste amour qui finit sa vie."

(ORC I,715-6)

Maître Tainnebouy, the narrator, who is presented to the reader as a sensible, reliable character, also believes la Clotte to be responsible for Jeanne's downfall:

"Les femmes se perdent avec des histoires!..La vieille sorcière avait écopi sur maîtresse Le Hardouey le venin

de ses radoteries." (ORC I,643)

La Clotte always addresses Jeanne by her maiden name, never acknowledging the marriage to Thomas. La Clotte is Jeanne's only friend in Blanchelande, but also represents for the young woman an escape into the past - it is largely because of la Clotte's tales of the past that Jeanne is ever more dissatisfied with her present life and thus vulnerable to the attraction of a man like Jéhoël, himself a symbol of that past:

"Mais elle n'évita pas cet homme, à qui elle attachait un intérêt grandiose, idéal et passionné. Entre elle et lui il y avait... le passé des ancêtres, le sang patricien qui se reconnaissait et se lançait pour se rejoindre, des sentiments et un langage qu'elle ne connaissait pas dans la modeste sphère où elle vivait, mais qu'elle avait toujours rêvés." (ORC I,665)

Jeanne's upbringing and unsatisfactory marriage have made her susceptible to anything that represents the past to which she believed she belonged. Hence, when she finds out that Jéhoël not only has a noble background similar to her own, but that he also knew her mother, she feels a common link with him, as they seem to her to be the last representatives of a dying class.

Jéhoël's past too, has made him what he is: he did not choose to be a priest, but according to the custom of the time, as the youngest son of a noble family he was obliged to enter the priesthood. Barbey stresses that Jéhoël's sense of family is much stronger than that of vocation, so he immediately joins the Chouan rebellion to fight for the king. Jéhoël, dissatisfied with the present as it is in post-Revolutionary France, is devoted to the past in the shape of the French monarchy and when the Royalist rebellion had failed, he attempted to commit suicide. These two characters are developed along parallel lines: Jeanne also dissatisfied with

her present, falls in love with Jéhoël who represents the past to her, a golden age from which she is forever excluded. When she finally realises that she can never make him love her, and that he is merely using her for his political ends, when Jéhoël ceases even to use her once the Chouan cause is definitively lost, and abandons her, Jeanne commits suicide.

Thomas Le Hardouey cannot believe that the relationship between Jéhoël and his wife is anything but erotic in nature and gradually becomes more and more jealous of the priest. This instinctive jealousy is complicated by the fact that Jéhoël also represents a past which Thomas despises. His past has conditioned him to hate the Ancien Régime and the Church - he fought against the Chouans as a Bleu, and when the Revolution had crushed the Church, he bought up church lands and property. Both factors lead to Thomas' uncontrollable hatred for Jéhoël which ultimately drives him on to kill the priest.

These three protagonists are driven by passions largely created in and by the past: love in Jeanne's case, aristocratic pride in Jéhoël's and maddened jealousy in Thomas' case.

Over and above this factual level of the story, there is a supernatural dimension to this novel as there was in Une Vieille Maîtresse, where it was introduced in the shape of superstition and fatality to emphasise how impossible it was for the characters to struggle against the power of the past. These elements are also to be found in L'Ensorcelée, though here there is also a preoccupation with orthodox religion - the first full introduction of the Catholic theme in Barbey's novels.

The introduction of a supernatural element contributed to the growing importance of the theme of the destructive power of the past in Barbey's work, by enabling him to offer his readers a series of events which illustrate this power and which could be explained either on a rational level or by reference to the supernatural. On the latter level, as we

have seen in Une Vieille Maitresse, the characters were doomed by a fatality, by a predestined scheme worked out somewhere in the past. In L'Ensorcelée, with its stronger Catholic emphasis, the characters are seen to be not merely helpless playthings of Fate, but damned because of past sins they have committed.

Ambiguity permeates this novel and presents the reader with a choice; either the past in the form of the characters' personal experiences has brought about the tragedy, or else a power higher than the characters has punished them for actions in their pasts. The very title of the novel introduces this note of ambiguity - L'Ensorcelée - with its overtones of witchcraft, this suggests a supernatural involvement in the story, but la Clotte offers an alternative explanation when, remembering Jéhoël and talking about her past, she says:

"..je crois que les vices qu'on a eus vous ensorcellent.."

(ORC I,639)

The implication being that Jeanne is not the victim of an evil spell cast on her by Jéhoël, but that she meets her fate through her own fault.

The other aspect of the supernatural, the religious element, is especially strong in L'Ensorcelée. The novel has a Catholic background, the main character is a fallen priest (a type which was to intrigue Barbey in his later novels), much of the action takes place in and around the church at Blanchelande. At the time the novel was written, Barbey had not yet returned fully to Catholic practice and had undergone only an intellectual conversion to the religion of his childhood. As much as an acceptance of faith, this was an acceptance of his past and of himself, so it is not surprising that Catholicism is presented here in its more external aspects, and in a somewhat theatrical light. This attention to the outward show of faith, for example the affectionate descriptions of liturgy and of rite:

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"Rien n'est beau comme cet instant solennel des cérémonies catholiques, alors que les prêtres, vêtus de leurs blancs surplis ou de chapes étincelantes, marchent lentement, précédant le dais et suivant la croix d'argent qu'éclairent les cierges par-dessous, et qui coupe de son éclat l'ombre des voûtes dans laquelle elle semble nager, comme la croix, il y a dix-huit siècles, sillonna les ténèbres qui couvraient le monde." (ORC I,602)¹

links up with the theme of the past, since for Barbey the past of France is seen as Catholic and monarchical and is represented in this novel by such figures as Jeanne, la Clotte and especially Jéhoël, in contrast to the post-Revolutionary present, as symbolised by Thomas Le Hardouey, the "acquéreur des biens d'Église" (ORC I,624).

Religion gives the power of the past an additional dimension, since it indicates that, if we accept the supernatural level of the story at all, we must also accept that the past will pursue its victims beyond the grave. This is particularly well-illustrated in the case of Jéhoël, who has sinned against his calling both in taking up arms to follow the Chouan cause, then in attempting to commit suicide and finally in his false expiation, while he is secretly continuing to serve the rebel cause. These deeds condemn him in religious terms and it is clear from the account given by Pierre Cloud of Jéhoël's ghost's vain attempt to complete the Mass,² that the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan is damned for all eternity.

The past is also evoked in L'Ensorcelée in Barbey's use of parallels. In Une Vieille Maîtresse, a parallel involving Madame de Mendoze is used to warn Hermangarde of the devastating effect Ryno will have on her life. Here in L'Ensorcelée, the parallel is made use of in a slightly different way: certainly the story of Dlaïde Malgy,³ who was in love with Jéhoël in the past, is to serve as a warning for Jeanne, but Barbey uses the story

in a more complex way; the tragic story of D^laïde forms part of la Clotte's evocation of the past, a past in which J^éhoël figured largely - it could show Jeanne that to love this priest can only bring disaster. But this story, in fact, encourages Jeanne in her infatuation for J^éhoël. Before la Clotte's tale of D^laïde, Jeanne is merely fascinated by the strange figure of the priest⁴ and for quite comprehensible reasons - J^éhoël comes from similar origins to her own, he is horribly disfigured and has led an exciting existence in contrast to Jeanne's own dull life as the wife of Thomas Le Hardouey, coupled with her constant realisation (incited and fostered by la Clotte) that, given her family's elevated past, Jeanne has fallen shamefully low socially. After hearing the story of D^laïde, Jeanne is however convinced that she too is passionately in love with J^éhoël, and this will be the major contribution to her tragedy.⁵

When we begin to examine the devices used by Barbey d'Aurevilly in L'Ensorcelée to evoke the past, we find, for the first time that the narrative technique itself is one of the principal methods employed. There is a more complex series of links between past and present in L'Ensorcelée than in the earlier novels, conveyed by the so-called framework type of narrative. In Une Vieille Maîtresse, Barbey appears to have tried out this technique in a very hesitant way in the long autobiographical account given by Ryno of his past; in L'Ensorcelée, this has been developed into a regular structure, covering some fifty-two years and consisting of three chronological levels. (see diagram p.64) This technique provides a closer intermingling of different time levels and makes the reader more sensitive to the past, because it is connected so skilfully to the present.

Another device used in L'Ensorcelée for the first time and which will be a feature of the Norman novels, is the author's own presence in the story. He, like Maître Tainnebouy to a lesser extent, serves as a bridg-

<u>Approximate date</u>	<u>Chapter reference</u>	<u>Event</u>
1851	Chapter I (beginning)	The period in which the author is recounting the story of the meeting with Maître Tainebouy, rounded out by additional information from the Countess.
1838	Chapters I - II	The meeting with Maître Tainebouy and his narration.
1799 - 1806	Chapters III - XV	The period in which the tragedy took place: Jéhoël's attempted suicide-1799 to appearance of ghost-1806.
1838	Chapter XVI	Maître Tainebouy's narration of ghost episode.
1851	Chapter XVI (end)	The period of the writing of the novel.

ing character between past and present. The drama is recounted to the author, he finds out more about the story than Maître Tainnebouy knew and conveys a fuller picture of the tragedy to his reader. This again provides the reader with an additional, tangible link between past and present - Barbey, the author, knew personally Maître Tainnebouy, the narrator, who personally knew the protagonists in the drama at Blanche-lande.

In L'Ensorcelée the destructive nature of the past is evoked by the historical background Barbey gives to the novel: it is set in the time of the death throes of the Royalist rebellion against the Revolution and by the end of the novel, this cause is finally lost with the death of the Duc d'Enghien.⁶ This means the end for those with monarchist sympathies and symbolically, therefore, parallels the end of the major characters in the novel - Jeanne, Jéhoël and la Clotte, who have all had aristocratic connections and who are all now dead.

In earlier novels, reinforcement of the theme of the past had been provided by Barbey's use of images. In L'Ensorcelée, he also employs a supporting series of images to convey the desolation left by the past - this novel is particularly rich in ruins, both physically and figuratively. The main settings of L'Ensorcelée are ruins in some way: the abbey where much of the drama is played out:

"..c'était une ancienne abbaye que la Révolution de 1789
avait détruite.." (ORC I, 557)

"Ces vitraux..étaient des débris sauvés de l'abbaye dé-
truite." (ORC I, 599)

Jeanne's house too, is in decay:

"La maison du Clos qu'ils habitaient était un ancien
manoir un peu délabré vers les ailes.." (ORC I, 622)

The castle where much of the debauchery associated with Jéhoël's past

and that of Jeanne's mother took place, is also a ruin:

"..le château de Haut-Mesnil s'était écroulé, et la Révolution en avait dispersé les ruines." (ORC I,633)

A further contribution to the atmosphere of destruction is in the descriptions of ruined families. Barbey himself believed that the past was responsible for the downfall of races:

"..il y a des races qui tombent justement frappées par les péchés des ancêtres.." Décembre 1851 (LT II, 211)

Already in Une Vieille Maîtresse the past was evoked in this way by mention of the portrait gallery in the manor at Carteret (ORC I,452) where the pictures are seen as "revenants du passé"; in this case the link is with the de Flers family's past and the present in the person of Hermangarde, who will be its last representative. Much is made of ruined families in L'Ensorcelée - the Feuardent, Jeanne's father's family:

"Des fautes, des malheurs, des passions..avaient, depuis plusieurs siècles, poussé, de générations en générations, les Feuardent à une ruine complète. Avant que 1789 éclatât, cette ruine était consommée." (ORC I,608)

"..les anciennes familles éteintes, comme l'était celle des Feuardent." (ORC I,632)

The other noble family too is seen in similar terms; this is the family on whose estate Jeanne's mother was brought up:

"Sang-d'Aiglon..Dernier venu d'une race faite pour les grandes choses mais qui, décrépité.. finissait en lui par une immense perversité." (ORC I,610)

The family background is important in the unfolding of the tragedy, for Blanchelande blames Jeanne's heredity (i.e her Feuardent blood) for the drama that takes place there, as Maître Tainnebouy states:

"..et ce sang devait produire en elle quelque inextinguible

incendie, pour peu qu'il fût agité par cette vieille sorcière de Destinée." (ORC I,615)

La Clotte, who is the living reminder of the past to which Jeanne is too attached, is seen as a physical ruin:

"Vieille, pauvre, frappée de paralysie depuis la ceinture jusqu'aux pieds." (ORC I, 632-3)

The baleful influence of the past is suggested by the fact of setting suns. The more dramatic events of the novel take place at sunset:- Jéhoël's attempted suicide (ORC I,585), as well as his terrifying tortures at the hands of the Bleus (ORC I,592). The last time la Clotte sees Jeanne alive is at sunset (ORC I,666) and la Clotte, stoned to death at Jeanne's funeral, dies at sunset (ORC I,712).

L'Ensorcelée conveys by narrative technique and imagery a more desolate picture of the past than the earlier novels did. The past in this novel extends the scope of its power: it affects more of the main characters than in previous novels and this in a chain reaction; it devastates the small community at Blanchelande - Jeanne, Jéhoël and la Clotte are all dead, the latter two having met particularly violent ends.

On a supernatural level, the past can now be seen to possess the ability to stretch its destructive influence out into the next world - the vision of Pierre Cloud (ORC I,737 -741) clearly demonstrates that Jéhoël de la Croix-Jugan even as a phantom, suffers greatly in the next world, suffering caused by his past.

The theme of the past was becoming more important to Barbey d'Aurevilly himself at this time in his life and this is perhaps reflected in the greater power given to the past in L'Ensorcelée. Barbey believed that France had, with the Revolution, degenerated from the France which

he admired - that of the Ancien Régime. After the revolution of 1848, he was even more dissatisfied with contemporary France:

"Eh bien Trebutien, m'étais-je trompé sur cette assemblée nationale où j'aurais dédaigné d'entrer...Et Lamar-tine, et tous les autres? Quelle race, mon ami, que tous les hommes! et la dégradation d'un pays a-t-elle encore des bas-fonds à descendre après ceux que nous avons descendus?"

19 septembre 1848 (LT I, 314)

Thus with the first of the Norman novels, Barbey has anchored his story in a specific setting, one which was synonymous with his own past, and in a particular time, that of the Chouan rebellions after the French Revolution, an event he held in high esteem - to the extent of claiming to be related to Chouan heroes.

Chapter IV - Notes

1. See also ORC I, 728: "Entrevu à l'autel à travers la fumée d'azur ----->
 au point qu'il n'y paraissait plus."
2. ORC I, 739 - 741
3. ORC I, 640 - 642
4. ORC I, 630: "L'horreur y était toujours -----> noble pitié."
5. A further apparent parallel is offered at the beginning of Chapter IX in the story of the priest, Gaufridi, who allegedly cast a spell on a young girl. Barbey stresses that Jéhoél never had the least intention of inspiring love or hate in Jeanne, despite the superstitious view held by the local people ORC I, 651 - 652.
6. ORC I, 734

Chapter V

LE CHEVALIER DES TOUCHES

Barbey had been interested in the Chouan past of his region since boyhood, when he had been told tales of the brave deeds of these rebels by Jeanne Roussel "une espèce de bonne qui n'a jamais quitté la maison de ma mère." 27 novembre 1836 (ORC II,784). This Chouan rebellion appears to have been an event which stirred his imagination and his novel Le Chevalier des Touches was a more serious attempt at writing a historical novel for his proposed epic - l'Ouest.

The story of the novel is based on a historical happening - the daring release of the Chevalier des Touches from the prison at Coutances in 1799, but only loosely based, since Barbey did not keep close to historical facts if they did not suit his dramatic purpose:

"Du reste, je ne suis pas le terre-à-terre des détails dans ce roman que je projette. Il y a mieux que la réalité, c'est l'idéalité qui n'est au bout du compte que la réalité supérieure." (LT II, 295)

Barbey added and omitted material as and when it suited him, though he nevertheless set Trebutien to collect relevant documents and witnesses' accounts of the period. A striking example of Barbey's preference for "l'idéalité" rather than "la réalité" occurs in his description of the Chevalier:

"D'ailleurs, il n'était pas qu'un courrier infatigable et intrépide.. c'était un des Chouans les plus redoutables, l'effroi des Bleus." (ORC I,781-2)

But when Barbey met the real Des Touches in October 1856 at the asylum Bon Sauveur in Caen, he finds him quite different from the hero he had depicted in his novel:

"Nulle distinction que celle de la force.- Evidemment, cet

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homme n'est qu'un homme d'action, tout muscle, nerfs et
volonté.- Il devait faire de l'héroïsme de troisième main, -
ne pas commander.. ce ne pouvait être un chef." (ORC II,1057)

Still, Barbey does not alter any details in his portrait of the Chevalier des Touches.

Le Chevalier des Touches seems to have caused Barbey difficulty in the writing, in that he found it an effort to work up the necessary enthusiasm to finish the novel. Le Chevalier des Touches is the novel on which Barbey worked the longest; started in the period between 1849 and 1852, it was not completed until 1863 and yet it is the shortest of the Norman novels. Barbey experienced a certain unease with his subject matter, an unease which he himself was only too conscious of:

"Je n'écris pas vite ce Roman dans lequel je veux
ployer ma diable de nature rebelle à de certaines choses
pour lesquelles elle n'a pas d'instinct." (LT III,215)

The same basic situation is found in Le Chevalier des Touches as in the novels previously examined, but here the personal past of the characters coincides exactly with the historical past i.e. the events described in the story are historical, in that they concern the escape of Des Touches from prison, but these same events have led to the protagonists present dull existences. This common historical past, then, is even more clearly linked with the characters' destiny than in L'Enfermée, where the historical past formed one strand of the enrichment of the novel and did not dominate quite as completely as it does here.

The uniquely personal past - as opposed to this mutual historical and personal past - does intrude in one instance in the form it did in the earlier novels: there is an apparently romantic triangular situation in the novel linking Aimée de Spens, Monsieur Jacques and Des Touches - all three finish tragically; Monsieur Jacques is killed, Des Touches goes

mad and Aimée becomes deaf and slightly insane in her remoteness from everyday life. Though the main factor which ruins these lives is external - the Chouan rebellion - Barbey also hints at an internal factor which would have ruined Aimée's life even more drastically had the death of Monsieur Jacques not intervened. The narrator mentions the generally accepted rumour that Monsieur Jacques had already taken his vows as a Chevalier de Malte (ORC I,790) and was therefore vowed to chastity, so the marriage by which Aimée set such great store might have brought her greater unhappiness had Monsieur Jacques survived. It is noted that Monsieur Jacques goes through a form of marriage with Aimée on the eve of the second expedition to rescue Des Touches, after he has had a premonition that he will be killed the next day. As Monsieur Jacques dies heroically in the attempted rescue, Aimée is able to withdraw tranquilly into her happy memories of the past. These memories paradoxically appear to make the past more attractive and for Aimée, the Vierge-Veuve, they will be her sole consolation for the existence she leads in the present.

A similar situation occurs in Un Prêtre marié: Calixte, with whom Néel has fallen deeply in love, had previously taken her Carmelite vows, so could never have married Néel, even if she had not died when she did.

Le Chevalier des Touches shows the devastating effect of the past on a group of people who have this past in common; the novel opens with a long description of the characters as they are at the time when Barbey first overheard the story of Des Touches. They are all old and appear somewhat eccentric - the French Revolution was responsible for their present state, since they lost both status and fortune at that time. Barbey emphasises too, that this group represents the end of an era - one which he admired and regretted. Both the Abbé de Percy and Aimée de Spens are

the last of their respective lines:

"cet abbé, qu'on ne nommerait pas si, à cette heure, sa famille, dont il était le dernier rejeton, n'était éteinte, du moins en France." (ORC I,755)

"Aimée-Isabelle de Spens, de l'illustre famille écossaise de ce nom.. était le dernier rejeton de cette race antique."
(ORC I,769)¹

All the characters are Royalists who have suffered because of their support for the monarchy. The two sisters Touffedelys have experienced the harsh consequences of the Revolution:

"La Révolution leur avait tout pris: famille, fortune, bonheur du foyer, et ce poème du coeur, l'amour dans le mariage.. enfin la maternité." (ORC I,750)

Barbe de Percy, the narrator of the main story is presented in a comic light:

"..robustement et rébarbativement laide.. Cette femme avait un grotesque si supérieur qu'on l'eût remarqué même en Angleterre, ce pays de grotesques." (ORC I,751)

This is in sharp contrast to her heroic action at the time of the freeing of Des Touches:

"..elle avait, disait-on, fait le coup de feu du buisson avec une intrépidité qui eût été l'honneur d'un homme."
(ORC I,762)

The past, in which she had her role to play, has rendered her now, in the present, a figure of ridicule.

The Baron de Fierdrap fought for the king at the time of the Revolution, lost everything and was obliged to flee to England from where he returned as eccentric in his own way as Barbe de Percy. The Baron's main interest in the present is angling and the eccentricity of his per-

sonality is exaggerated by Barbey through constant use of exclamations from the world of fishing which he puts into the mouth of the Baron:

"Lignes et hameçon!" (ORC I,773)

"Hure de saumon!" (ORC I,808)

Again we are shown a rather ridiculous figure in the present who behaved bravely in the past. The characters who survived this past physically intact, are shown to have survived as oddities, out of time and out of place.

The final character present in this little group is one of the main figures in the story, Aimée de Spens. She is presented in more serious terms than the other characters, as having been a great beauty and still retaining much of her attractiveness:

"Mais parmi tous ces vieillards plus ou moins chenus, sur ce fond de chevelures blanchies étagées autour d'elle, elle ressortait bien et elle se détachait comme une étoile d'or pâli sur un glacis d'argent, qui en aurait relevé l'or."

(ORC I,769)

However, Aimée too, has been altered by the past - the devastation wrought by earlier events is less cruel to her physically than to the others, but is marked nonetheless:

"De belle qu'elle avait été, elle n'était plus que charmante;.. Tout ce qui avait été splendide en elle autrefois, tout ce qui foudroyait les yeux et les coeurs, était devenu, à son déclin, doux, touchant, désarmé, mais suavement invincible. Sidérale d'éclat, sa beauté, en mûrissant, s'était amortie."

(ORC I,769-70)

The past has made her absent in spirit much of the time; like the other characters, Aimée has truly lived only in the past, the time of her marriage to Monsieur Jacques celebrated in the chateau de Touffedelys. The

contrast between that one evening of happiness in the past and the rest of her life since then, is brought out very sharply by Barbey, speaking through his narrator, Barbe de Percy:

"Cette soirée paya toute sa vie. Toute sa vie a été le malheur, le veuvage, la surdit , un bout de feston derri re lequel on cache sa r verie et la pauvret  d'une violette au pied d'un tombeau." (ORC I, 828)

Aim e has withdrawn from the present into mild insanity, where the others have withdrawn into eccentricity; here too, for the first time, there is the suggestion that the past may be a consoling element, but paradoxically, it is a consolation against the effects of the harm it has itself engendered.

The principal character in the novel, the Chevalier des Touches, is also shown to be terribly altered by time. The daring "belle H l ne" of the past has become:

"Un visage d vast , barbu, blanchi, aux yeux  tincelants et hagards." (ORC I, 760)

It is in fact this change in the Chevalier which so shocks the Abb  and prompts Barbe de Percy to tell the story of the escape of Des Touches. All the people present in the Touffedelys salon believe the Chevalier to be dead, so his presence in Valognes "dans quel  tat de changement, de vieillesse, de d mence!" (ORC I, 760) starts them all musing on their shared past - the fact that the Baron de Fierdrap has never heard the full story of the escape, allows Barbe de Percy to relate to him what she knows of this episode.

As in L'Ensorcel e, Barbey d'Aurevilly uses here a series of devices to bind the past closer to the present and thus make the reader all the more aware of the destruction which the past has brought to the protagonists. The construction is a major factor in this linking of past to

present. It is, like L'Ensorcelée, a framework story and there are again three time levels:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Event</u>
1830	I-III	The group in the salon at Valognes
1799	IV-IX	The attempts to free Des Touches
1830	IX	The salon at Valognes
1850	IX	The author solves the mystery of Aimée's blushes.

As in L'Ensorcelée, the author's presence provides a direct and physical link between the past and the present; he is in the salon at Valognes, as a small boy when the story of the escape of the Chevalier des Touches is being recounted by Barbe de Percy,² and it is the author who, many years later visits Des Touches and learns the answer to the strange blushes of Aimée de Spens. The author's presence again gives the past more immediacy.

The use of these three time levels as another element enriching the past, is more complex than in the earlier Norman novel. They still emphasise the fact that past and present are inextricably linked and that the consequences of the past are to be found in the present. For ease of reference, these levels will be referred to as the distant past - the release of Des Touches in 1799; the middle past - the narration of the escape in 1830; and the present - the author's own researches - 1850. There is an important literary link between past and present in Le Chevalier des Touches conveyed by the use of two story lines which run parallel for a certain time; these stories are that of the Chevalier himself and that of Aimée, each of these characters being important in the other's

past.

The first narrative line linking the middle past with the distant past is the freeing of Des Touches from the prison at Coutances; in this episode, Aimée is initially a minor character, the dominant figure being Des Touches himself. When we come to the middle past, however, i.e. in Valognes in 1830, the Chevalier's story is told and completed, since we now know that he has become mad, but the mystery of Aimée's blushing is not solved. There is a suggestion made by the Abbé that perhaps Aimée was having an affair with Des Touches.

The second narrative line, Aimée's story, which begins in the distant past with her love for Monsieur Jacques, continues through the middle past with her presence in the salon in Valognes and into the present, that is, the time at which the author wrote the novel, since it is only after the author's visit to the mad Des Touches in the asylum in Caen that he discovers the true explanation for Aimée's deep blushes whenever Des Touches' name is mentioned. Here the Chevalier is merely an incidental figure, useful only for the information he provides to satisfy the author's curiosity.

A further link between past and present is Aimée's faithfulness to the memory of Monsieur Jacques; Aimée is there in the Touffedelys' salon when the narrative of the freeing of Des Touches is recounted, lost in her memories of that period in her life, and again in the present, when the author discovers the truth about the blushing, we learn that any suspicion about Aimée having an affair with Des Touches was completely unjustified.

The principal link between the past and the present is the characters themselves; their lives now are merely existences, they are shadows of their former selves. Their real lives were experienced at the time of the Chouan rebellion and this can be seen especially clearly in the

narrator Barbe de Percy who becomes livelier as the story unfolds and as all the characters seem to be reliving their past:

"..reprit la vieille Chouanne, animée de plus en plus, et montrant une verve qui fit prendre à l'abbé son frère voluptueusement une prise de tabac.." (ORC I,805)

At one point her brother even has to reprimand Barbe for her use of strong language in front of the Touffedelys sisters:

"..je suis obligé de t'avertir que tu n'es plus au temps de tes dragonnades au clair de lune, et que tu continues à jurer comme un dragon, mademoiselle ma soeur!" (ORC I,802)

Barbe herself is conscious of the change wrought in all of them by the past:

"..et le temps, qui a mis son éteignoir sur nos jeunesses, a si bien éteint l'éclat que nous avons eu et le bruit que nous avons fait dans les jours lointains.." (ORC I,849)

A new narrative technique used here by Barbey is most effective in drawing the middle and the distant past together: this is a constant movement back and forward again because of the way in which the story is recounted, with continual interruptions from other people present in the Touffedelys salon.³ This narrative form also makes the devastation caused by the past more vivid to the reader, since we see these people as they are now, and hear what they were like then. The poignancy of the change in the characters is underlined by the difference there is between Barbe de Percy's spirited account of their heroic behaviour during the attempts to free Des Touches and their monotonous pointless existence at the time of the récit.⁴

Again, as in L'Ensorcelée, imagery is used, though in a less important way than in the earlier novels, to confirm the ruin brought about by the past. The descriptions of the demoiselles Touffedelys:

"Toutes deux avaient été belles, mais l'antiquaire le plus habile à deviner le sens des médailles effacées n'aurait pu retrouver les lignes de ces deux camées, rongés par le temps et par le plus épouvantable des acides, une virginité aigrie." (ORC I,750)

and of their friend Barbe de Percy:

"..elle avait reçu le soufflet, l'alipan du Temps" (ORC I,751) indicate the changes time has inflicted on them. The Chevalier is seen as "un revenant" by the abbé (ORC I,748) linking him to the rest of this little group who are seen as "des spectres" (ORC I,825) and emphasising the fact that these people are the ghosts of their earlier, lively selves.

The specifically Norman contribution to the depiction of the past, found in Une Vieille Maîtresse and L'Ensorcelée, also plays its part in this novel, but as befits the subject Barbey was dealing with, this story is set amongst the Norman nobility, of which Barbey considered himself a member. There are virtually no peasants in Le Chevalier des Touches, so there is little of the patois and legend found in the other Norman novels.

The novel, originally to be entitled L'Enlèvement, gradually turns away from the purely historical event of the freeing of Des Touches to the story of the beautiful Aimée de Spens and her strange reaction whenever the Chevalier's name is mentioned - by the end of the novel, this has become by far the more important of the two episodes - demonstrating once more that Barbey was uneasy with the "pure" historical novel and much happier when he could tackle a subject closer to his own imagination.

A new aspect in the description of the past which appears to offer new possibilities in the treatment of this subject and which appears in

Le Chevalier des Touches for the first and last time, is the notion that although the influence of the past and events in the past have ruined these characters' lives in the present, there is perhaps some solace for them in their memories of the past. With the exception of Aimée de Spens, all the characters in Le Chevalier des Touches have become slightly comic - only the past lends them dignity, a past that has made them what they are and destroyed their lives. As in L'Ensorcelée, the culprit here is the French Revolution, which robbed these people of everything they held dear; this event has dominated them and turned them into ghosts. Yet, most of them have had their moment of glory - Barbe when she took part in the second expedition to free Des Touches, the Baron when he fought with les Chasseurs du Roi, Aimée when she celebrated her marriage to Monsieur Jacques and the Chevalier himself when he was performing daring deeds in the service of his King. This time of glory appears to have compensated these people to a certain extent for the terrible effects that the past has had on their lives.

Interestingly, Barbey d'Aurevilly does not pursue this theme in his future novels and it can be quite convincingly argued that this was because of his own personal circumstances at the time of writing this novel. The period from about 1852 until 1859 was one of the happiest and most stable in Barbey's life. He had become seriously involved with Madame de Bouglon, a woman of strong religious principle, and in 1852 he became engaged to her. Under her influence, he gave up his previous style of living and seemed ready to submit to her slightest whim concerning both his life and his writings. This did provoke a conflict in him as can be seen from his letters to Trebutien:

"Si mon mariage ne dépendait pas de la liquidation de mon
insensé passé.." 15 août 1855 (LT III, 306)

but he made an effort, on paper at least, to prove himself worthy of his

"Ange Blanc". In 1853 he writes to Trebutien:

"J'efface toutes les traces des pieds qui ne sont pas les siens..Chez les âmes très pures, la jalousie qui s'attache au Passé et qui vient du passé est une infernale douleur et d'autant plus cruelle qu'elle est insensée." (LT III,357)

Barbey then proceeds to write a Memorandum for Madame de Bouglon between the 26th September 1856 and the 8th October of the same year, in which he denies and rejects his past in order to please her:

"Tout ce qui est en dehors de mon sentiment actuel pour l'Ange Blanc, tout ce qui me rappelle un passé où elle n'était pas, est exempt de mélancolie." (ORC II,1031)

"Les souvenirs de quatre ans d'extrême jeunesse qui sont restés empreints en moi pendant tant d'années, n'y sont plus empreints..Un ange aussi, visible pour moi seul.. s'est promené avec moi dans les rues de Caen, et sur ces murs gravés des pensées et des sentiments de ma jeunesse, de son doigt de vie, a tout effacé!" (ORC II, 1074-75)

It would appear that Barbey was moving towards a different attitude to the past: his denials of his own past's effects on him in his private writings, characters in a novel actually deriving some, if very limited, consolation from the past...but this was but a momentary detour away from the theme that obsessed him - the destructive influence of the past. For, by 1864, when Madame de Bouglon's influence on him had waned, it is obvious from the Cinquième memorandum that Barbey is as caught up by his past as ever he was:

"J'ai battu le pavé et suis allé partout où j'avais senti et vécu fortement autrefois.⁵ Les rêves de ma jeunesse marchaient autour de moi.." (ORC II,1111)

"La grève magnifique de mélancolie au jour déclinant; et

pour moi plus triste encore du sentiment des jours passés."

(ORC II,1116)

It is undeniable, however, that Madame de Bouglon was an important factor in Barbey's literary life as well as in his personal one. Under her persuasion and that of Raymond Brucker, Barbey became a practising Catholic, taking communion again after many years. This occurred in 1855 and the following year Barbey went back to Normandy and was reconciled with his parents after a separation of some twenty years. Barbey was probably at this time more contented than he had been before or was likely to be later; he was having difficulties with the inspiration for Le Chevalier des Touches and as early as 1855 had become interested in a "sujet étrange" more suited to his temperament and which would become Un Frêtre marié. By 1860, Madame de Bouglon had lost much of her influence over Barbey's literary leanings at least, and after the indefinite postponement of their marriage, Barbey gradually began to pick up the strands of his old life. His writing returned to its former vigorous style, as is clear from the penultimate chapter of Le Chevalier des Touches with its violent episode at Le Moulin Bleu, far removed from the accurate historical novel he had set out to write under the influence of Madame de Bouglon, and as will be confirmed in the last of the Norman novels, originally to be entitled Le Château des Soufflets, later called Un Frêtre marié.

Chapter V - Notes

1. See also ORC I, 785: "Comme elle était une orpheline, et, malheureusement la dernière de sa race."
2. ORC I, 865
3. For example: ORC I, 783-4, 798-9, 813, 828, 835, 844, 857 etc.
4. She points out the contrast herself in her reference to the Touffedelys sisters ORC I, 780
5. Referring to Valognes.

Chapter VI

UN PRÊTRE MARIÉ

Un Prêtre marié occupies a special place in the sequence of Barbey's novels. It is the last of the series of Norman novels, and is arguably the novel that has provoked the most critical reaction, both in Barbey's own time and afterwards. Seen by some as:

"un roman vraiment catholique qui marque le terme de l'évolution religieuse de Barbey."¹

by others as:

"a lyrical, even sensual poem of blasphemy, sacrilege and apostasy, the most vivid projection so far, of the nightmarish world of a heated, unbalanced imagination."²

In spite of these diametrically opposed views of this novel, Un Prêtre marié can be seen to conform to the pattern already established in Barbey's earlier novels and to contain within it the same preoccupation with the effect of the past on the lives of the protagonists.

Barbey had the original idea for Un Prêtre marié - then known as Le Château des Soufflets - in 1855, and his letters to Trebutien contain fairly regular references to it until April 1856.³ At this time, Barbey was involved deeply in his critical writings and the projected novel was put aside. After the final break with Trebutien in 1858, there are virtually no details about the progress Barbey was making on his novel. It was finished in 1863 and published the following year.

At the period when Barbey began his novel, he was under the very considerable influence of Madame de Bouglon, his "Ange Blanc"; by about 1860, however, Barbey had realised that their often postponed marriage would never take place and his initial feelings for Madame de Bouglon had become muted to tenderness and affection. As her influence over him diminished, Barbey's writing gradually took on its former style - Un

Prêtre marié reflects this change in the increase in descriptions of violent incidents which occur in the latter half of the novel, as well as in the ending. The letters written by Barbey at the time of the conception of Un Prêtre marié, would seem to suggest that he was intending to write a great religious novel:

"L'idée du livre est la grande idée chrétienne de l'Expiation, qui, selon moi, dans aucun livre, n'a été touchée."

(LT III, 334)

In this novel as originally conceived, Sombreval would be saved through the sacrifice of his daughter. As Madame de Bouglon's influence waned, Barbey's natural taste for the fantastique took over, and Barbey, apparently seduced by the attractive character he had created in the fallen priest, gave the novel a more dramatic ending, in which the renegade Sombreval, is seen to be condemned to eternal punishment and his saintly daughter Calixte along with him.

With Un prêtre marié, Barbey returned to the pattern he had used in L'Ensorcelée - as Un Prêtre marié was originally conceived of as part of a great historical epic (cf p. 55) it does contain an important historical element, but this is a less vital part of the story than it was in Le Chevalier des Touches where historical past and personal past were inextricably linked. Barbey constructs a historical background for this story by references to family genealogies: the Néhou family is proud to be able to trace its ancestry back to William the Conqueror.⁴ However, unlike L'Ensorcelée and Le Chevalier des Touches, the French Revolution is not seen as a great destructive force, provoking the protagonists' tragedy:

"Cependant, il faut bien l'avouer, la Révolution, pour laquelle ce prêtre rénégat semblait si bien fait, ne le tenta pas.. L'insurgé contre Dieu n'apporta point son esprit de révolté à la révolte universelle." (ORC I, 892)

Sombreval's passion is science not politics, in contrast to the Abbé de la Croix-Jugan, the fallen priest of L'Ensorcelée.

The values which Barbey felt deeply about are closely linked to the theme of the past and also tie in with the central themes of Un prêtre marié. All that was good in the past was symbolised for Barbey by the aristocracy; complementing this view was his belief that there should be inequalities between the different social classes:

"Moi qui crois que les sociétés les plus fortes, sinon les plus brillantes, vivent d'imitation, de tradition, des choses reprises à la même place où le temps les interrompit; moi, enfin, qui me sens plus de goût pour le système des castes, malgré sa dureté, que pour le système de développement à fond de train de toutes les facultés humaines.." (ORC I,568)

The Revolution with its ideas of democracy and equality did away with these notions from the past; in Un prêtre marié the former noble owners of Quesnay have died out, enabling Jean Sombreval, who is of humble peasant stock, to buy the property. Class inequality is a recurring idea in Barbey's novels; in L'Ensorcelée, the theme of mésalliance had cropped up constantly with reference to Jeanne Le Hardouey, a girl of noble blood, married to a man from a peasant background. Mésalliance is also the term used by the Vicomte Ephrem, Néel's father, to describe the possibility of a match between his son and Calixte, but Sombreval justifies his daughter's fitness for such a match by claiming that Calixte is a special being sent to save the nobility from dying out:

"il semble que vous (Néel) et elle (Calixte) soyez de la même race..je dirais que ce sont là des noblesses vierges, tombées du ciel pour empêcher la noblesse éternelle de s'en aller de ce monde, dans la décrépitude des familles, usées par l'excès et le temps." (ORC I,1011)

Curiously, it is Sombreval, the modern man of science, who is against equality and who appears to speak for Barbey:

"Pour ma part, je n'ai jamais donné dans cette chimère de l'égalité entre les hommes, que tout dément, foule aux pieds et soufflette dans la société comme dans la nature."

(ORC I, 1008)

These ideas of a basic inequality in nature and the desire to preserve the old nobility are associated with faithfulness to the past - part of which is family solidarity and Catholicism. This is illustrated in the figure of Calixte who sees clearly that the sins of the past are visited on the present and that she bears responsibility for her father's sins; her life is dedicated to expiating Sombreval's guilt.⁵ Under the influence of his passion for Calixte, Néel shows that he is willing to disobey his father, a concept quite foreign to Calixte's nature:

"Mais ne faut-il pas obéir à son père, même quand il aurait tort?" (ORC I, 988)

In the earlier novels, it was demonstrated how the personal past of one character can ruin the present and future lives of the other protagonists. The personal past in Ce qui ne meurt pas, L'Amour impossible and Une Vieille Maîtresse was based on physical passion, but with the Norman novels, new elements were introduced to this theme. With Barbey's return to the religion of his childhood, came the use of new leitmotifs into his novels. This had first been seen in L'Ensorcelée where the religious element plays a vital role in the story and for the first time, the destruction brought about by Jéhoël's personal past is seen to pursue him into Eternity. The setting of this novel in Barbey's own Cotentin is also important; the secondary characters speak in the local patois and the Norman-ness of the main players is stressed.

In Le Chevalier des Touches, the historical emphasis is greater than

the religious one and again, the story of the Chouans' daring rescue of the local hero has a strong Norman stamp upon it.

However, by the time Barbey started the composition of Un Prêtre marié, he had returned to the Church, thus the predominating element in the novel is the religious one, with emphasis on the Catholic idea of expiation. In this novel, the event in the past which brings about such devastation in the present is Sombreval's passion for science which led to his apostasy, with the Paris of the Revolution playing its role in his downfall:

"Paris, ce gouffre de corruption, de science et d'athéisme, l'avait dévoré. Il s'était jeté tout vivant..dans le cratère qui allait vomir la Révolution française.." (ORC I,890)

It is made clear by Barbey that love plays no part in Sombreval's fall. It is also indicated that the coming tragedy is inevitable:

"Renversé de plus haut spirituellement que les autres hommes il est rare qu'un prêtre tombé se relève." (ORC I,899)

This apostasy of Sombreval's is an irretrievable act in the past which had set the tragedy in motion many years earlier - the tragedy which reaches its culmination in Un Prêtre marié. Sombreval's abandoning of the priesthood is responsible initially for his father's death;⁶ then when Sombreval marries and his wife finds out the truth about his past, she too dies, in shame and despair, giving birth prematurely to Calixte, who is weak, sickly and has a cross on her brow as a birthmark:

"..une croix, marquée dans le front de l'enfant - la croix méprisée, trahie, renversée par le prêtre impie.."

(ORC I,894)

This symbol underlines the fact that from her birth onwards, Calixte's life is ruined by her father's past, of which she bears the stigma, both figuratively and literally. However, in contrast to the characters

in the earlier novels, Calixte deliberately accepts her father's past and the suffering that must be her life, in order that she might expiate her father's sin and save his eternal soul. It is stressed that Calixte's strange illness is not entirely physical in nature and origin:

"..cette maladie.. est une névrose d'un caractère presque inconnu, due à l'état psychique de sa mère quand elle la conçut, et aux circonstances de sa naissance.." (ORC I, 1012)

"Elle est encore plus malheureuse que malade, ma pauvre Calixte et c'est par moi qu'elle est malheureuse.." (ORC I, 1020)

This illness, then, is a direct consequence of Sombreval's crime and Calixte believes that only her father's repentance can make her well again; Sombreval too is convinced that making Calixte believe in his change of heart will restore her to normal health, so he goes through a pantomime of repentance in order to give her a chance of happiness, but when the truth of the deception is brought home to Calixte, it precipitates her final coma, which will end in her death. Here, Barbey seems to be trying to solve the problem of the malign influence of the past through faithful adherence to Catholic beliefs, but the end of the novel demonstrates that Calixte's sacrifice has been in vain, since the past finally triumphs and Sombreval and his daughter are both eternally damned.

There is a strong echo from the earlier novels in the relationship between Néel de Néhou and his betrothed, Bernardine de Lieusaint. This marriage has been arranged by their fathers and the match appears suitable from many points of view: two old respected families, healthy stock, Néel the only survivor of a noble line dating back to the eleventh century... However, both Sombreval's past in the shape of his daughter and the tragedy in Néel's own past, make the final tragedy all the more powerful and combine to render the relationship between Bernardine and Néel quite meaningless. The destructive effect of the past is increased by

the tragic episode in Néel's life, as it predisposed him to his own ruin. This tragedy occurred about a year before the opening of Rollon Langrune's narrative: Néel persuaded his friend, Gustave, to attempt with him to cross a dangerous stretch of water on horseback - Gustave is drowned and Néel is haunted by remorse for his death. Barbey stresses the fact that this incident had changed Néel's character and had predisposed him to fall in love with Calixte:

"..l'espèce de remords gardé de cette mort dont il avait été la cause était une raison pour se jeter à corps perdu dans cet amour." (ORC I, 932)

Even the suffering involved in the relationship with Calixte he willingly accepts as deserved punishment for the death of his friend.⁷ Both Néel and Calixte see themselves as expiating a crime; in Néel's case, his own, temporal crime of recklessness and his responsibility for Gustave's death; in the case of Calixte, her spiritual crime of being the daughter of a priest and her belief in her responsibility for her father's sins:

"(Calixte) était trop chrétienne pour admettre l'irresponsabilité des enfants dans le crime ou la faute des pères..

le lien inextricable qui unit le père aux enfants." (ORC I, 937)

Néel is overwhelmed by love for the fragile Calixte and Bernardine is at once forgotten; she is the innocent victim of the destructive effects of two pasts - Néel's and Sombreval's. Néel and Bernardine do go through a form of marriage in order to respect Calixte's dying wish, but this marriage is a mockery; shortly afterwards, Néel, still under the spur of his guilt and driven by the cumulative effects of the past, leaves to fight for his country and is killed in battle and Bernardine "Veuve sans cesser d'être vierge",⁸ enters a convent taking the name of Soeur Calixte as a tribute to the past, which she, like the other characters, cannot escape.

As in L'Ensorcelée, the principal characters in Un Prêtre marié meet with a tragic end, brought upon them by the destructive influence wielded by the past; Sombreval and Calixte drown - though she has already been declared dead by the time her father comes to attempt to save her - and are pursued by the past into Eternity, since the implication of Calixte's final words is that they are both damned; Néel dies in battle, a death which he meets with eagerness after Calixte's death; and Bernardine dies to the world by becoming a Carmelite nun - all this as a consequence of Sombreval's past, which, before the opening of the novel, had already caused the deaths of his father and his wife.

The personal past is dealt with in a more complex way in Un Prêtre marié than in the earlier novels and its dramatic possibilities are further exploited by the introduction of a theme that the reader had already been made aware of in Une Vieille Maîtresse - la fatalité. Un Prêtre marié contains a multitude of remarks from the various characters on this subject i.e. on their destiny. The theme of fatality here follows two related paths - those of superstition and religion. The first and more impressive of the two, the slightly disreputable side of this fatality, consisting of visions and predictions, is embodied in the figure of la Malgaigne, believed locally to be a witch. She warns Sombreval throughout the story of the fate that is in store for him. What adds credence to her predictions is the fact that she had much earlier, when she was Sombreval's nurse, predicted his fate to him:

"..et elle dit à Jean 'qu'elle le voyait prêtre - puis marié - et puis possesseur du Quesnay (or, à ce moment-là, les Du Quesnay étaient encore dans l'opulence, et personne ne pensait à leur ruine) - enfin que l'eau lui serait funeste et qu'il y trouverait sa fin ' ". (ORC I,907)

there is a thunderbolt to emphasise the power of this prediction, and to

fix it in the reader's mind. When the narrative of Un Prêtre marié opens, most of her predictions had already come true and the rest will prove to have been equally accurate by the end of the novel. Later in the narrative la Malgaigne deliberately repeats to Néel these earlier predictions, which this time take into account Sombreval's past actions as well as stressing the fate in store for him.⁹

A further illustration of la Malgaigne's gifts of prediction in the past, is given in her story of "le Rompu",¹⁰ when she had accurately foreseen the fate of a soldier. This story serves to give the reader confidence in la Malgaigne's powers and to emphasise the inevitability of the influence of the past which will catch up with Sombreval in the course of the novel. The story of the soldier has another function in the narrative, in that it forms an intentional parallel to the fate of Sombreval:

"Toi aussi, tu rôderas comme lui, Sombreval!..Toi aussi tu viendras poser pour la rafraîchir ta tête lasse de l'enfer.." (ORC I,980)

This device of parallelism, as we have already seen, is one favoured by Barbey to reinforce the effect of the past: he had used it in Une Vieille Maîtresse, where Madame de Mendoze is living evidence of the havoc wrought by Ryno and a warning of the fate of Hermangarde; again in L'Ensorcelée, where la Clotte related the tale of Dlaïde Malgy as a warning to Jeanne - a warning again which is ignored. In this novel too, Sombreval ignores la Malgaigne's warnings. La Malgaigne is an important character in this novel, as she appears to be in touch with the world of the supernatural, both through her prophetic powers and also through her religious beliefs, for she has attempted to deny her past of foretelling the future and has turned to the Church - she accepts, as does Calixte, the doctrine of expiating the sins of others:

"Il faut bien que les bons, les innocents et les justes
payent pour les pécheurs dans cette vie.." (ORC I,969-70)

La Malgaigne also comprehends the terrible power of the past and the far-reaching consequences of its influence; this is conveyed in a strong image, reinforcing the idea of the malignant quality inherent in the past:

"(Calixte) meurt de son père comme on meurt d'un cancer
au sein, cette fillette; elle en meurt comme vous mour-
rez par elle aussi, vous!" (ORC I,969)

The supernatural atmosphere created by la Malgaigne's predictions is underlined in the descriptions of the Château du Quesnay as being "tragique" and "sinistre", as well as by all the superstitions that the peasants have about the chateau and its inhabitants. An important difference must be made here between la Malgaigne, who is credited with genuine prophetic powers, and the peasants, who are superstitious through ignorance. They especially note, for example, that the arrival of Sombreval and his daughter takes place on Friday the thirteenth.¹¹ A further instance of this kind of credulous attitude on the part of the local peasants, occurs when Sombreval's father dies; this death is the direct result of Sombreval's apostasy and on his death-bed, the father curses his son - at that time precisely, strange phenomena are noted in the sky -¹² to others in France, these signs are precursors of the ills that would follow the French Revolution, but the Norman peasants ascribe the odd happenings entirely to the dreadful crime of the Abbé Sombreval.

Apart from this build-up of supernatural atmosphere, there are constant direct references throughout the novel to the fact that one's fate is inescapable:

"..mais on ne fuit pas sa destinée" (ORC I,914)¹³

Hints of the tragedy to come are scattered generously through the novel;

in the initial description of the property which Jean de Sombreval has purchased:

"..l'étang du Quesnay avait ses mystères. On s'y noyait très bien, et très souvent à la brune. Étaient-ce des assassinats ou des suicides, que ces morts fréquentes?" (ORC I,884)

Also in the comparison made between Empedocles who threw himself into Mount Etna and Sombreval who:

"s'était jeté tout vivant..dans le cratère qui allait vomir la Révolution française, et ses sandales de prêtre, on ne les retrouva même pas au bord du cratère, tiède et menaçant" (ORC I,890)

This remark will be remembered at the end of Un Prêtre marié when the pond is drained at Quesnay, many years after the tragedy and not a trace is found of Sombreval, apart from a medallion. The love Néel feels for Calixte is contaminated by this threatening presence of fate:

"..menace inquiétante pour l'avenir, que cet amour qui ne pouvait être qu'une source infinie de malheurs." (ORC I,929)

Along with the supernatural predictions of la Malgaigne, there runs through the novel a strong religious thread. In Un Prêtre marié, there is the suggestion that fatality and religion are much more intimately connected than in L'Ensorcelée, for instance. God in this novel is seen by la Malgaigne as being an important part of the fatal nature of the tragedy¹⁴ - as Sombreval has renounced God (very much the vengeful God of the Old Testament in la Malgaigne's interpretation) so God will punish him.

Religion is associated with the past for Barbey - on a personal level, Catholicism was closely linked with his own childhood, and his return to religious practice is an acceptance on his part, of himself and his past. Catholicism also represented for Barbey the traditional

values that contemporary France, with its atheistic leanings, was trying to destroy. As mentioned earlier, Barbey had intended Un Prêtre marié to be the great novel of expiation and this theme begins with the birth of Calixte. Like Madame de Mendoze in Une Vieille Maitresse, her name is indicative, for Barbey at least, of her destiny:

"..nom triste et presque macéré de Calixte..dans lequel il y a comme de la piété et du repentir. Piété et repentir pour un crime involontaire, n'était-ce pas, en effet, toute la destinée de la mère de cette pauvre enfant? Comme sa mère, elle semblait, elle aussi, vouée à la mort." (ORC I,894)

The birthmark in the shape of a cross that Calixte bears on her forehead, symbolises the God Sombreval has denied in the past, and is a constant reproach to him. Though Sombreval tries to hide any mention of religion from his daughter, it is inevitable as la Malgaigne's predictions that Calixte will find out about Catholicism, as she is "prédisposée à la foi" (ORC I,898). Abbé Hugon brings the revelation of religion to the young girl and this becomes her main reason for living, since she sees the possibility of saving her father through her own suffering. Calixte becomes a Carmelite nun in secret and is allowed to remain at Quesnay for the express purpose of bringing Sombreval's soul to God - but even Calixte's prayers and sufferings are not sufficient to overcome the destructive power of the past; as Calixte's last despairing cry indicates that they do not even have the consolation of being saved in an eternal life - "Nous sommes condamnés!" (ORC I,1201) Even religious devotion cannot overpower the influence of the past.

As in the earlier novels, Barbey uses a variety of techniques to convey to the reader the extent of the destructive powers possessed by the past. The novel is again constructed - like the two previous Norman novels - in the framework style; the main story, set in the past, is

recounted to the author against a contemporary background. In Un Prêtre marié, the narrative told to Barbey by Rollon Langrune takes place some forty years before the time of writing the story, in approximately 1811. Like Le Chevalier des Touches, this novel maintains constant links between the past and the present; the reader is often reminded of the present in the middle of the story about the past by references to the narrator, indicating that this tale is being recounted orally:

"..comme nous ici sur le balcon de ce quai.." (ORC I,913)

and later:

"Moi qui vous raconte cette histoire.." (ORC I,940)

An additional physical link is provided between past and present by the use of an object - in this case the medallion bearing Calixte's portrait which is continually before the author's eyes as he listens to the unwinding of the drama of Sombreval and Calixte, since it is worn by the lady in whose house the story is narrated over a period of three or four days - not only is the subject of the portrait one of the principal characters in the story, but the medallion is also the only trace ever found of Sombreval after his death.¹⁵

The Norman element in Un Prêtre marié is quite striking and provides a further link between past and present; as in L'Ensorcelée, there are references made to the Viking origins of the Normans, to their earliest Duke, Rollon, and to William the Conqueror. The positive Norman qualities are embodied in the narrator Rollon Langrune, who is described in glowing terms by Barbey¹⁶. He fulfils a similar role in this novel as that of Maître Tainnebouy in L'Ensorcelée. Langrune is a "patoisant audacieux" (ORC I,882) and the fairly extensive use of patois in the novel is another way in which Barbey conveys the Norman-ness of his setting. This patois is a further link between past and present:

"..ces idiomes primitifs, tués et déshonorés par les langues,
leurs filles parricides et jalouses .. (Rollon) enchâssa

pour être plus vrai de langage et de moeurs, dans cette langue du dix-neuvième siècle que le temps a pâlie en croyant la polir, un patois d'une poésie sublime." (ORC I,882)

Barbey's admiration for the past is channelled towards Normandy in this novel, but not towards the lower orders - in Un Prêtre marié, the virtues of the Normans are to be found in the aristocracy, for example in the figures of the Vicomte de Néhou and the Seigneur de Lieusaint. Barbey's comments about the Norman peasants in general are critical:

"..l'immobilité du caractère normand, indifférent à tout, quand le gain n'est pas au bout de l'effort qu'il doit faire." (ORC I,884)

They are seen to be stolid and dull; they cannot comprehend Néel's desperate attempt to win Calixte's love at the risk of his own life; and they are ridden with superstition, for they believe Sombreval to be the devil - the disappearance of Sombreval's corpse in the pond at Quesnay convinces them that Satan has come to drag the renegade priest down to hell.¹⁷

The most unpleasant aspects of the peasants' characters are embodied in the person of Julie la Gamase, who is hideously ugly, both physically and morally, rotted with disease and who sums up all the hatred and fear that the local people feel for Sombreval and his daughter, who, it is rumoured, have an incestuous relationship.¹⁸ Julie la Gamase also demonstrates on the level of the minor characters, the physical devastation wrought by the past. She had led a dissolute early life and had given birth to a diseased child who died literally "du mal de sa mère" (ORC I,1069) - a prefiguration of Sombreval's case, for his child is sickly because of his spiritual dissoluteness in the past and she will die too, because of his spiritual disease of apostasy.

To counteract this heavily critical view of the Norman peasant, Barbey

created the figure of la Malgaigne, who embodies the better side of the local people; this is, however, a subsidiary role for her in the story, her importance having been indicated earlier.

Imagery is not used to reinforce the past in such a concentrated way in Un Prêtre marié as in the early novels, but, as in L'Enfermée, there are descriptions of ruins to evoke the destruction caused by the past. When Sombreval bought the Château du Quesnay from the owners, it was in a state of ruin:

"Ce délabrement était affreux. Les tapisseries déchirées pendaient le long de leurs lambris.. Les glaces encrassées de poussière et tachées ignoblement par les mouches ..Les plafonds s'écaillaient.. C'était enfin la poésie de la ruine et de l'abandon." (ORC I,911)

and it is later referred to as "ce château-cadavre" (ORC I,957). By the time the story of Quesnay is recounted to the author, there is no stone left of the Château, as la Malgaigne had predicted.¹⁹

Another indication of the harmful effect of the past is the reference to the family to whom the Château du Quesnay once belonged. The past has wreaked its worst on them:

"..la dernière génération de cette famille, tuée par ses vices comme toutes les vieilles races, qui ne meurent jamais d'autre chose que de leurs péchés." (ORC I884)

This is stressed later on in the novel in the description of the last owner of Quesnay:

"..le dernier Roi Fainéant de sa triste race, cloué et roulé par sa goutte et par la paresse dans son fauteuil." (ORC I,909)

Even when dealing with the peripheral characters, Barbey emphasises that the crimes of the past led to downfall in the present.

Un Prêtre marié was Barbey's last Norman novel and was not to be

followed by another novel for a further sixteen years, until his last full-length work - Une Histoire sans nom.

The personal past plays a major role in the lives of the protagonists in Un Prêtre marié; here the event in the past which brings about the series of tragedies which we witness in the present, is Sombreval's abandoning of his priesthood. The theme of fatality, particularly powerful in this novel, as it appears to encompass the idea of God, further develops the conception of the past as a supernatural force which malignly controls the destiny of the characters and can pursue them into Eternity.

Barbey expands his basic theme by his use of narrative technique; the framework construction, the author's continuing presence in the story, the medallion linking past and present. He also does this by the aspects of the theme which he chooses; superstition and fatality, the Norman setting and the emphasis on the contrast between values and principles in pre-Revolution times and the desolation in contemporary times, now that these values have vanished.

The development of the theme of the past underlines Barbey's preoccupation with it at the time of writing this novel - as indeed, he was preoccupied with this theme for all of his life - as well as his belief in it as the decisive factor in people's lives. As the fate of Sombreval and Calixte in Un Prêtre marié indicates, even sacrificing oneself to save another cannot quench the power of the past, which can condemn its victims to eternal damnation.

Chapter VI - Notes

1. Gautier, Jean: Barbey d'Aurevilly ses amours son romantisme
Paris Téqui 1961 p. 137
2. Rogers, B.G.: The Novels and Short Stories of Barbey d'Aurevilly
Geneva Droz 1967 p. 91
3. 14th March 1855, 2nd April 1855, 20th June 1855, 16th August 1855
21st September 1855 etc.
4. ORC I, 916: "Les Néhou se vantaient -----> de coutume séculaire."
5. ORC I, 992: "Je suis marquée pour la mort et pour le rachat de l'âme
de mon père."
6. ORC I, 891
7. ORC I, 932
8. ORC I, 1223
9. ORC I, 970
10. ORC I, 973-975
11. ORC I, 913
12. ORC I, 891
13. See also ORC I, 932 and 1014
14. ORC I, 904
15. ORC I, 1223
16. ORC I, 877-78
17. ORC I, 1223
18. ORC I, 1073
19. ORC I, 883

UNE HISTOIRE SANS NOM

With Une Histoire sans nom, the long writing career of Barbey d'Aurevilly draws to a close, certainly as far as fiction is concerned. After the publication of this work in 1882, the only further piece of fictional writing completed by Barbey before his death in 1889 is Une Page d'histoire which covers just eleven pages in the Pléiade edition. Barbey's attention in the final years of his life was concentrated on his non-fictional works - Les Oeuvres et les Hommes - and on critical articles which he contributed to various newspapers and magazines.

In the novels that have been studied so far, much interesting information has been available on the circumstances in which Barbey wrote his works, his intentions in writing them and the progress, or lack of it, being made on each novel, due to the continuing correspondence between Barbey d'Aurevilly and Trebutien. In the letters Barbey wrote to Trebutien, he asks for information, complains about editors' lack of interest in publishing his work, tells of his hopes and irritations in the world of journalism, and generally provides us with a fascinating account of his own creative processes:

"Le meilleur de moi est dans ces lettres, où je parle ma vraie langue en me fichant de tous les publics!" (ORC II,1048)

However, in November 1858, after an apparently deep disagreement about the publication of the works of Maurice de Guérin - a joint project undertaken by Barbey and Trebutien - Trebutien ceased corresponding with his former friend and brought to an end some twenty-six years of letter writing between the two.

The only non-fictional writings dealing in any way with Barbey's literary preoccupations after the break with Trebutien, are the Cinquième Memorandum of 1864 and some jottings in a final notebook - the Disjecta

Membra of 1871 and 1875. But, as far as Une Histoire sans nom is concerned, - written between 1880 and 1881 - there is virtually no information about Barbey's own thoughts on the writing of this novel.

After Un Prêtre marié, Barbey's fictional skills were devoted to the completion of the six stories in Les Diaboliques and indeed, Un Prêtre marié is Barbey's last full-length novel, since Ce qui ne meurt pas, published in 1883, was a reworking of a novel he had already finished in 1843, and Une Histoire sans nom is, in length, little more than a long novella.

The three preceding novels were originally conceived of as part of Barbey's great historical epic and the historical setting was either of major importance, as in Le Chevalier des Touches, or else it played a subsidiary, but nonetheless essential role as in L'Ensorcelée or Un Prêtre marié. However, in Une Histoire sans nom, the historical aspect is of peripheral importance and the French Revolution intrudes little on the plot, except, as in Un Prêtre marié, as being the moment that gave Père Riculf the chance (as it had done for Sombreval in the earlier novel) to abandon his priesthood. Also the social upheaval caused by the Revolution is of assistance to Madame de Ferjol in preserving her secret - the local people were too preoccupied with the coming Revolution to be over-inquisitive about the Ferjol family. Apart from these two instances, there is no sense of historical perspective in Une Histoire sans nom, and indeed the novel, like Ce qui ne meurt pas, could be set in almost any period.

Une Histoire sans nom, then, the last of Barbey's novels, continues the pattern established many years earlier with his first novel: the lives of the protagonists are ruined in the present and in the future because of events in the past of one or more of them. In this novel, only the innocent victim, Iasthénie, meets with a tragic end by commit-

ting suicide; those whose pasts have provoked Lasthénie's misery and death, each live out lives, the course of which is dictated by the events of the past. Père Riculf finally repents of his past and for the last years of his life attempts to expiate his sins. Madame de Ferjol becomes obsessed with the idea of the identity of her daughter's secret lover, and lives out her desolate existence thinking of little else.

There are two time levels in the story - the first covers the period immediately preceding the French Revolution, a period in which the destructive effect of Madame de Ferjol's own past brings about the drama which we witness in Une Histoire sans nom, that is the rape of Lasthénie, the birth of her child and subsequent suicide. The second time level which is much shorter, is some twenty-five years later at the time of the Restoration, when the events of the first part of the novel have become the past for the second part and their effect on the lives of Père Riculf and Madame de Ferjol is demonstrated.

The tragedy which Lasthénie experiences in this novel is traced back directly to the personal past of her mother, Madame de Ferjol: when still Mademoiselle Jacqueline d'Olonde, of a noble Norman family, she eloped with the Baron de Ferjol, with whom she had fallen passionately in love and by whom she was already pregnant. Her love for this man, who died three years after their marriage, is the event in her past which leads to the destruction of her own daughter, because for Madame de Ferjol this love is the dominant factor in her life, even fifteen years after her husband's death:

"La femme qui avait aimé, l'être qui, depuis quinze ans, cherchait à se rasseoir et à s'éteindre, mais qui brûlait et fumait encore d'une passion inextinguible pour un homme.."

(ORC II,304)¹

In this novel, Madame de Ferjol's two major preoccupations are her religion and her love for her dead husband, both now linked in her mind: this passionate love has robbed her of her ability to love her daughter in a maternal way - Barbey is at pains to emphasise that in this woman, the wife takes precedence over the mother:

"..cette mère, étouffée par l'épouse.." (ORC II,296)

and again:

"plus épouse que mère jusque dans sa maternité" (ORC II,276)

It is made clear that Madame de Ferjol loves her daughter, but is incapable of demonstrating any tenderness towards her; she loves her as much for her resemblance to her dead father as anything else:

"Sa mère l'adorait, mais surtout parce qu'elle ressemblait à l'homme qu'elle avait aimé avec un si grand entraînement." (ORC II,279)

Not only can Madame de Ferjol not express her maternal love for Lasthénie, she has also withdrawn into the memory of her dead husband and has little interest in anything outside that, except her religion. The result of all this, is that she pays little attention to Lasthénie and does not really know her daughter. A further factor which complicates the relationship between mother and daughter is Madame de Ferjol's worldliness: when she thinks her daughter might be in love with Père Riculf, all the signs that Lasthénie displayed of quite genuine loathing towards the monk, become for Madame de Ferjol, the experienced woman, indications of the opposite feeling. When she tries to draw Lasthénie out on the subject, she comes up against blank incomprehension on her daughter's part.² Thus when the tragedy of Lasthénie's pregnancy breaks on the Ferjol household, the mother's lack of understanding due to her earlier neglect of her daughter, leads to even greater incomprehension between the two women. Madame de Ferjol's strong religious beliefs have always made her feel

deep guilt for the love which she bore her husband; she is convinced that through Lasthénie, God is deservedly punishing her for having idolised her husband to the extent that she did:

"J'ai épousé ton père. J'épousais mon Dieu! Mais le Dieu du ciel ne veut pas qu'on lui préfère personne, et il m'en a punie en me le prenant et en faisant de toi une fille coupable comme je l'avais été." (ORC II,319)

When Madame de Ferjol has incontrovertible proof of Lasthénie's pregnancy in the masque of her face, her instinct is to blot it out with the crucifix, but in some subconscious acknowledgement of her own guilt in the whole affair, Madame de Ferjol strikes herself repeatedly with her crucifix, in a physical expression of her own past sins and those of her daughter:

"O mon Dieu, pardonnez-moi!..Pardonnez-moi son crime que je partage.." (ORC II,308)

Barbey constantly underlines the intensity of Madame de Ferjol as a wife in contrast to her negligence as a mother, a weakness that she herself recognises and thinks of as a sin:

"Elle s'accusa une fois de plus du péché de toute sa vie qui avait toujours été d'être plus épouse que mère." (ORC II,305)

In Madame de Ferjol's interpretation of events, her punishment for this offence began with her husband's early death - in a recurrence of the theme of expiation found in Un Prêtre marié, Madame de Ferjol believes that now Lasthénie is being punished for her mother's crime:

"Ta faute, à toi, ma pauvre fille, est, sans doute, une punition et une expiation de la mienne." (ORC II,319)

Belatedly, Madame de Ferjol attempts to take her daughter into her confidence and confesses that she too was pregnant when she married the Baron - this humiliating confession is made in the hope that it will, in

turn, draw a confession from Lasthénie as to the name of the child's father - a name, of course, which Lasthénie cannot give. This maternal affection on the part of Madame de Ferjol, however, comes far too late - her past has made her insensitive to maternal feeling; the damage has been done even before the novel opens and the tragedy set in motion for Lasthénie. Because of the continual lack of affection shown by Madame de Ferjol towards her daughter in the past, the episode of the pregnancy takes on exaggerated proportions: it is impossible for the mother to believe that Lasthénie is ignorant of the seduction. Madame de Ferjol's neglect of her daughter means that she is unaware of the latter's tendency to sleepwalk. Ironically, this too can be traced back to Madame de Ferjol's lack of interest in Lasthénie in the past - she had led a very lonely and unhappy childhood:

"..la petite Lasthénie, sans compagnes et sans les jeux qu'elle eût partagés avec elles, isolée de tout par le chagrin et l'âpre piété de sa mère.." (ORC II, 283)

In her loneliness, she could find some consolation in daydreaming and this disposition is aggravated once Lasthénie realises, against all her inmost convictions, that she is pregnant. The shock of this realisation, coupled with the influence of her mother's past, change Lasthénie from a child of a rather dreamy nature to a girl in a state of animal-like idiocy, from which she never recovers.³ Madame de Ferjol's lack of maternal affection has also robbed her daughter of the ability to experience any maternal feelings, this additional impairment of her abilities is also caused by Madame de Ferjol's past.⁴

There is an abrupt transition in the novel from the discovery of Lasthénie's slow suicide in Chapter X, to a period some twenty-five years later in Chapter XI. The events of the previous ten chapters have in their turn become the past, which has destroyed Madame de Ferjol's

life in the present. The secret her daughter kept to the end has now become the dominant feature of this woman's religious existence: she rarely thinks about anything other than the identity of her daughter's seducer and is remote and withdrawn even in society. This desperate need to know the truth about Lasthénie nags at Madame de Ferjol:

"Elle y portait stoïquement ensevelie dans sa poitrine
une idée qui était pour elle le cancer qu'on cache et
qui vous mange le coeur sans qu'on pousse un cri."(ORC II,348)⁵

and makes her quite indifferent to everything else in life. She is like the characters in L'Amour impossible who go on living, but with no meaning to their lives. The Lasthénie episode, which in the latter part of the novel has become the past, has not only ruined Madame de Ferjol's life in the present by reducing her to this state of despair, but will also destroy her last remaining support - her religious beliefs, once she learns the truth about Lasthénie's rape. It had been stressed throughout the novel how pious Madame de Ferjol was, even after her daughter's death:

"..plus sévèrement pieuse que jamais, presque une sainte".

(ORC II,348)

yet by the end of the story, we learn that she dies in "impénitence sublime" (ORC II, 364); as in Un Prêtre marié, the past has stretched out its evil influence into Eternity, since by this lack of repentance Madame de Ferjol is damned.

When Madame de Ferjol finally discovers, quite by chance, the identity of her daughter's seducer, she is overcome by remorse for her responsibility in the past: firstly, for having so easily accepted the fact of her daughter's guilt and secondly, for having contributed to Lasthénie's death:

"..le remords d'avoir cru Lasthénie coupable, et, sous cette

erreur, de l'avoir si lentement et si tragiquement
fait mourir." (ORC II,360)

This remorse is all the more intense for Madame de Ferjol, since she had half suspected Père Riculf, but had put the thought from her as blasphemous, because of her strict beliefs, preferring to accept the idea of her own daughter's lack of virtue.⁶ This remorse, created by the past, effectively destroys any Christian feelings Madame de Ferjol earlier possessed - by the end of the novel, she has changed from her previous pious attitude, so that, when she visits Riculf's grave, she is ready to leap down into it and trample his corpse underfoot, so filled with hatred is she for the man who had ruined her daughter's life and ultimately her own.

Une Histoire sans nom fits into the pattern already established by Barbey's earlier novels, and no new element of any major importance is introduced into it. The religious theme is strong in the novel - the theme of expiation, closely linked to that of the past in Une Histoire sans nom, is important here as it was in Un Prêtre marié. This theme is introduced in the first chapter, when Madame de Ferjol attempts to analyse her feelings towards the strange priest who is staying in their house; she thinks he would be more suited to being a Trappist monk rather than a Capuchin and as Barbey indicates, this order is thought of as particularly for sinners with major crimes to expiate:

"La Trappe, dans l'opinion du monde est surtout faite..
pour les pécheurs qui ont quelque grand crime à expier."

(ORC II,273)

Again in her attempt to persuade Lasthénie to reveal the name of her seducer, Madame de Ferjol introduces the idea of Lasthénie's pregnancy as part of the continuing expiation of her own crime in loving her husband to excess.⁷ It is Madame de Ferjol's apparently strong reli-

gious views which make her see her daughter's suffering as part of her own expiation and also allow her to believe that she herself is involved in Lasthénie's sin. The still-birth is seen as the climax of Lasthénie's expiation,⁸ and after this event, Madame de Ferjol shows more maternal affection towards her daughter; but again this impulse has come too late, for Lasthénie has already begun her slow suicide. Madame de Ferjol's belief in the power of expiation, however, lasts only as long as her faith persists - once she has lost her piety, as a result of her overpowering and unforgiving hatred of Père Riculf, she refuses to accept that the latter could have expiated his own sins in the years of repentance in the monastery. Expiation did not help Sombreval achieve faith in Un Prêtre marié - all Calixte's suffering was for nothing - and similarly, in Une Histoire sans nom, the interpretation of Lasthénie's misery as being a form of expiation is also seen to be useless, in that Madame de Ferjol dies totally unrepentant, still bearing her implacable hatred towards Riculf.

Though Madame de Ferjol's unbending Jansenist views are emphasised by Barbey,⁹ it is clear from the early chapters, that her piety developed only after the death of her husband; here religion is a substitute for passion and Madame de Ferjol is far from being the pure Christian figure represented by Calixte in Un Prêtre marié; Madame de Ferjol has sublimated her love for her husband into her religion and we see, in the dénouement of the novel, that her beliefs do not go really deep into her nature - she is unable to forgive Riculf, even though it would seem, from what the Révérend Père Abbé of the monastery says, that God has forgiven Père Riculf, since he lived for many years "dans la plus expiatrice des pénitences" (ORC II,362). Madame de Ferjol, whose own past has been responsible for the death of her daughter, is herself spiritually destroyed by this past, reinforced by the events of the more recent past,

that is, Lasthénie's dishonour and suicide.

In previous novels, Barbey had used various devices to reinforce the idea of the destructive influence of the past and several of these reappear in Une Histoire sans nom; one of the more important is the idea of fatality, which pervades the story right from the opening chapter. From the initial appearance of the priest, Barbey hints - with perhaps rather less subtlety than in the earlier novels - at some tragedy which Riculf will bring to the Ferjol household:

"L'austère capucin qui parlait alors de l'Enfer..ne paraissait pas fait pour semer dans les âmes autre chose que la crainte de Dieu, et il ne savait pas, et les deux femmes qui voulaient le voir ne savaient pas non plus, que l'Enfer qu'il prêchait, il allait le leur laisser dans le coeur." (ORC II,270)

Père Riculf's appearance is unlike that of other preachers to whom they have offered hospitality, and when Madame de Ferjol makes a remark to him to this effect, his only reply is a sinister smile (ORC II,273). A warning is sounded in Madame de Ferjol's reminiscence of another Capuchin monk she had known of in her youth who had led a secular and scandalous existence (ORC II,293).

There are continual references to impending disaster and one which will be inevitable:

"Sentaient-elles, d'avertissement intérieur..qu'il allait leur devenir fatal?" (ORC II,274)

Lasthenie's habit of daydreaming on the staircase is seen as menacing:

"..comme si elle avait vu son Destin monter et redescendre ce terrible escalier.." (ORC II,284)

and this is, in fact, where the rape will take place. Barbey builds up an atmosphere of antipathy and fear towards the priest - this confirms the impression of fatality - through the figure of Agathe:

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"Il ne parlait que de L'Enfer! Il avait toujours l'Enfer
à la bouche... Il nous damnait toutes.." (ORC II,290)

There is a significant incident too, concerning the priest's rosary, which he leaves behind when he departs from the Ferjol household. Instinctively, Lasthénie is unable to touch the rosary (ORC II,292) and Agathe believes, in her superstitious way, that the object is poisoned. No matter how ridiculous this may seem, the incident increases the feeling of unease towards Riculf.

The influence of the past is strengthened by this concept of fatality, by the idea that the characters can never escape the destructive power of events in their pasts.

The three previous novels were all set in Normandy, which formed in each case an integral part of the story; Normandy standing for past values that Barbey and often his main characters still clung to. In Une Histoire sans nom, however, Barbey has returned to the principle of Ce qui ne meurt pas, where it is the type of setting that is important, not the region itself. The Norman element in this novel is not vital; the harsh, menacing Cévennes setting is used to emphasise the terrible loneliness in which the Ferjols live, and the crushing impression conveyed by the mountains serves to underline the suffocating emotional atmosphere in which the women live;¹⁰ this is also a device to evoke the past in the novel, since the geographical setting is Madame de Ferjol's late husband's native region, which she accepts because of her love for him - the setting then, echoes her love for her husband, and the oppressive atmosphere in the house is directly traced back to Madame de Ferjol's exclusive passion for her late husband, and her consequent feelings of guilt at having loved him so deeply. Barbey calls the Baron her "Ange Noir" (ORC II,348) as his death has left her in mourning for the rest of her life; it is as if with his death, something has died in her:

"..cette femme imposante et morne, qui semblait vivre
dans le silence du tombeau de son mari refermé sur elle."

(ORC II,278)

Much of the striking imagery in Une Histoire sans nom is connected with death and disease: the past, that is, the events of the first part of the story, eats away at Madame de Ferjol like a cancer:

"..dans le rongement éternel du cancer qui lui mangeait
le coeur." (ORC II,353)

This image is used several times to stress what her life had become because of the malignant influence of the past.¹¹

The ruined lives of the two women are evoked in images of death:

"..le silence de deux mortes, mais deux mortes enfermées
dans la même bière, de deux mortes qui n'étaient pas
mortes.." (ORC II,333)

The birth of Lasthénie's child is described too, in this quite startling death imagery:

"Lasthénie accoucha comme un cadavre, qui se viderait
d'un autre cadavre." (ORC II,335)

This lugubrious imagery, which turns life into death and joy into misery, reinforces in the reader's mind the idea of a destructive and omnipotent past, which can take the lives of the protagonists in the present and render them empty of meaning.

A feature of the earlier novels also reappears here with the reference to decline, of one sort or another. There is the ruined property in Normandy to which the Ferjols travel to hide Lasthénie's shame:

"..ce vieux château presque délabré.. un château frappé d'un
abandon qui ressemblait à la mort." (ORC II,330)

This ties in with the images of death and reinforces the idea of the destructive powers possessed by the past:

"..ce château frappé de la mort,- pire que la mort, de l'abandon." (ORC II,344)

A further decline is seen in the person of Père Riculf: nothing is known about his personal past, we see him in terms of his calling as a monk. His order, the Capuchins, is now fallen from its once high reputation:

"Les capucins n'étaient plus alors ce qu'ils avaient été autrefois. Cet Ordre, sublime d'humilité chrétienne, avait perdu de sa sublimité." (ORC II,293)

In Une Histoire sans nom, Barbey has abandoned the framework construction of the Norman novels and returned to a straightforward narration of the story as in Ce qui ne meurt pas. This means a lack of immediacy in the conveying of the past, since the framework technique effectively linked the two time periods of past and present in the Norman novels. The links in this short novel are fewer than in the earlier works; one physical link with the past in Une Histoire sans nom is the ring, originally belonging to the Baron and given to Lasthénie by Madame de Ferjol. She believes that her daughter lost the ring - the supposed carelessness on her part with what is a sacred relic for Madame de Ferjol, adds an even more intense resentment to her feelings toward her dishonoured daughter:

"Elle était tellement épouse .. que cette perte d'une bague de l'homme adoré qui l'avait portée et que sa fille avait égarée, lui paraissait chose pire que de s'être perdue elle-même." (ORC II,322)

This ring is forgotten by Madame de Ferjol (and by the reader) until the penultimate chapter, when Madame de Ferjol is startled out of her customary remoteness by the sight of the ring. However, this ring is used, as a narrative device, more like the porte-feuille in L'Amour

impossible to recall the past and does not in itself trigger off the main narration, as did the tolling bells in L'Ensorcelée or the medallion in Un Prêtre marié.

Another link between past and present - again less successfully exploited in this novel than in the Norman novels - is made in human terms: the author speaks of himself in the first person on several occasions,¹² and mentions the fact that his grandmother had known the Baron and Madame de Ferjol before their elopement.¹³

Une Histoire sans nom, the last of Barbey's novels, demonstrates the continuing preoccupation of his literary life: the destruction wrought by the past on the lives of the protagonists. The theme of the past was a preoccupation of Barbey's personal life too, and continued to be as he grew older. His visits to Valognes in the late 1870s and early 1880s filled him with paradoxical feelings about his past: on the one hand, the memory of his dead friends is consoling to him now in his old age:

"Plus ce pays devient désert, plus les personnes qui m'y plaisaient, pour une raison ou une autre, y manquent et s'en vont dans l'absence ou dans la mort, et plus ce pays m'absorbe et s'empare de toutes mes pensées." 7 octobre 1880¹⁴

Yet the power of Valognes is not lost on Barbey - and he himself appreciates the hold his past still has over him, in the form of the place where he spent much of his youth:

"Diable de domination exercée sur moi par ce pays!...je crois bien que je n'en guérirai jamais, car c'est une espèce de mal que le sentiment que j'ai pour lui." 7 octobre 1880¹⁵

Barbey's last letters indicate a melancholy dwelling on people and places from his past; the predominant emotion is sadness, which is linked in

his mind with the ever-present memories of the past:

"Valognes est toujours pour moi la terre des êtres adorés
qui n'y sont plus. La ville des spectres qui me hantent
et avec qui je vis, au fond de moi." 7 mai 1877¹⁶

and again:

"Ce que je connais de plus vivant et de plus présent dans
nos coeurs, ce sont les spectres adorés de ceux que nous
avons perdus." 26 février 1886¹⁷

Barbey's poems from these final years echo these sentiments, as, for
instance, in "Les Spectres" of 1880:

"Ces spectres, revenant de la tombe transis,

...

Ils dansent dans les cimetières

Mais dans mon coeur ils sont assis.

Ils sont là, tous, assis avec mélancolie,

.....

.. croyant qu'on les oublie,

Ils ne se doutent pas qu'ils sont pour nous la Vie,

Plus puissants qu'elle et bien plus beaux! " (ORC II, 1194)

So Barbey d'Aurevilly, though by the 1880s he had at last won literary
recognition and the fame that had earlier eluded him, even in his last
writings still displayed the preoccupation with the past that is charac-
teristic of all his novels, from Ce qui ne meurt pas, through the great
Norman novels, to this ultimate flourishing of his talent, Une Histoire
sans nom; this theme, so important to his writings, was also of major
importance in his life, and, as we have seen, throughout his long
literary career, the one was reflected and echoed in the other.

Chapter VII - Notes

1. See also ORC II, 297,300 and 322
2. ORC II, 306
3. ORC II, 346
4. ORC II, 337-38
5. See also ORC II, 353 and 358
6. ORC II, 313
7. ORC II, 319: "Ta faute, à toi, ma pauvre fille, est, sans doute une punition
et une expiation de la mienne."
8. ORC II, 335: "Voilà votre crime et son expiation!"
9. For example ORC II, 284, 304, 308, 332
10. ORC II, 313
11. See also ORC II, 348 and 358
12. ORC II, 349, 360
13. ORC II, 274-75
14. Letter to Georges Landry on October 7th 1880
Lettres Intimes edited by Louise Read Edouard - Joseph 1921 p.279
15. Ibid.
16. Letter to Elysabeth Bouillet on 7th May 1877
Lettres Intimes p. 159
17. Letter to Armand Royer on February 26th 1886
Lettres et Fragments Aubier 1958 p. 48

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing chapters, we have attempted to show the continuing preoccupation with the past in Barbey d'Aurevilly's principal novels, but the same preoccupation can also be discerned in his other fictional writings from quite different periods in his writing career.

The fictional writings may be divided into three major periods, each with their own characteristics and each one of which is supported by personal material, such as diaries and letters.

- I 1830 - 1840 : Germaine-L'Amour impossible-start of Une Vieille Maitresse. This is the period of Barbey's early attempts at fiction. His interest in the past here is on a comparatively simple level: a romantic passion in the past which ruins the characters' present and future happiness. The personal material of the period includes Lettres à Trebutien I and the first two Memoranda.
- II 1840 - 1865 : completion of Une Vieille Maitresse- L'Ensorcelée - Le Chevalier des Touches-Un Prêtre marié. This is Barbey's great period of writing when the Norman novels were composed. It is also the period of Barbey's conversion to Catholicism and the return to scenes of his childhood. The novels now deal in greatest depth with the problem of the past; in his Lettres à Trebutien II, III, IV as well as the Memoranda, there are constant echoes of the past and the importance it has for him. This was indubitably Barbey's most prolific fictional period and arguably his happiest on a personal level.
- III 1865 - 1889 : Les Diaboliques-Une Histoire sans nom- Ce qui ne meurt pas. This is the period of the short stories and of

the reworking of Germaine. Barbey's fiction output was not particularly high during this time, though he contributed many articles to newspapers and magazines. Between 1871 and 1881 Barbey visited Normandy each year, and his letters of the period speak often of his nostalgia for the past.

If we look briefly at a work from the earliest creative period, the theme of the power of the past can be seen in embryonic form. One of Barbey d'Aurevilly's first short stories, written in 1832, is Léa, in which the idea of the past as a destructive force is touched upon.

The principal male character, Réginald, has led a life in which physical passion played an important part. He tries to transpose this past onto a sickly girl - his friend's sister

"Son passé était là avec ses poignants souvenirs. Il recon-
nut cet amour qui avait séché sur pied, étiolées et noircies,
les plus belles fleurs de sa jeunesse, ce simoun qui ravage
nos vies plus d'une fois et qui en tourmente longtemps le
sable aride, quand il n'y a plus que du sable à en soulever"

(ORC I,31)

When Réginald does finally kiss Léa, this act kills her. His past has made him a man of passion, a passion that will then ruin him in his chosen profession as an artist:

"Cette passion qui vient toujours troubler nos contemplations
avec violence s'était déjà emparée de Réginald. Elle devait
le tuer plus tard, le tuer comme artiste." (ORC I,24)

Here is the idea of a past which, having had a disastrous effect on the present will also have a deleterious effect on the future. The idea is not developed to any extent in this early story, but will be taken up later by Barbey and exploited fully in the mature works.

In stories written much later - in the third and final phase of Barbey's literary career, we see the theme of the past clearly stated, for example in the stories known as Les Diaboliques: in Le Rideau cramoisi, the event in Brassard's past, which is the subject of his narration has completely altered his life:

"..un événement, mordant sur ma vie comme un acide sur de l'acier, et qui a marqué à jamais d'une tache noire tous mes plaisirs de mauvais sujet.." (ORC II,24)

In Le Dessous de cartes d'une partie de whist, the narrator sums up the theme of the destruction that the past can bring about:

"..ces faits mystérieux de sentiment ou de passion qui perdent toute une destinée, ..ces brisements de coeur qui ne rendent qu'un bruit sourd.." (ORC II,132)

Again in A un dîner d'athées, Barbey returns to the theme of characters whose lives are ruined by the past:

"Son jeune homme..avait eu la vie brisée du même coup qui avait mis l'Empire en miettes.." (ORC II,179)

This man - Monsieur de Mesnilgrand - because of the events in his past, which form the main narration of the story, is seen as someone whose life is effectively over:

"..ce désespéré, et qui survivait à cette vie finie, enterrée, comme le soleil couché envoie un dernier rayon rose au flanc des nuages derrière lesquels il a sombré?" (ORC II,184)

Like Ryno in Une Vieille Maîtresse, Mesnilgrand has been reduced to a deadness to romantic emotion because of unrequited love for one woman:

"Mais je gardai l'idée qu'une seconde femme comme celle-là n'était pas possible; et de penser cela me rendit désormais fort tranquille et fort indifférent avec toutes les femmes."

(ORC II,217)

One of the last fictional pieces to be written by Barbey - Une Page d'histoire of 1882 - is much more deeply imbued with the theme of the past than even Les Diaboliques.

The first two pages of the account of the Ravalet story deal almost exclusively with Barbey's attitude towards Valognes and the powerful influence of the past on him. Here we find familiar imagery of death and ghosts to strengthen the deleterious effect of the past:

"vide et triste maintenant comme un sarcophage abandonné..

'la ville de mes spectres'.. les spectres de mon passé
évanoui.." (ORC II,367)

The brother and sister, Julien and Marguerite de Ravalet are doomed because of the past sins of their family.¹ The fatality attached to this family is stressed by Barbey:

"La famille qui vivait là portait sans le savoir un nom fatidique." (ORC II,369)²

In the different creative periods in Barbey's life, already referred to, different techniques are used by Barbey, as he developed his craft as a writer, to convey this theme of the past, a theme which is consistent in all three major periods.

I: Ce qui ne meurt pas - L'Amour impossible: these deal with the personal past in its basic form i.e an emotional upheaval in the past of the main characters which affects in a disastrous fashion, the lives of the other characters.

Une Vieille Maîtresse: this a key novel in the study of the past in Barbey's work. Here he introduces new elements to his description of the past:- fatality is dwelt on for the first time at any length. This allows the character to abandon his responsibility, for he is seen as being powerless to fight his destiny. The Norman element, which marked

his major novels, is brought in as a device to reinforce the past and there is a long narrative within the story which prefigures the framework narration of the "Norman novels", which, as has been shown, assists the author's evocation of the past.

II: L'Ensorcelée: here there is a superb mingling of the basic theme of the personal past with the elements touched on in Une vieille maîtresse. There is a strong historical flavour to this novel - again a device for underlining the destructive influence of the past to the reader. Religion, associated with both the Norman aspect of the novel and with fatality, point out that the past's influence can pursue the characters into Eternity.

Le Chevalier des Touches: the past is an overwhelming force that has swept over the characters. Here the themes of personal past and historical past are closely entwined, and in this novel the constant movement between past and present in the particular form of narration used by Barbey also help to underline the power of the past.

Un Prêtre marié: the basic elements common to all the earlier novels still apply - the personal past of the protagonists is shown to be a destructive force in the novel. Barbey has again used religion as an additional reinforcing device, with the Catholic doctrine of expiation especially strong.

III: Une Histoire sans nom: there is a movement of return to the basic theme of the personal past unadorned with new literary techniques and devices. Religion still has an important role to play, though the Norman element has become perfunctory here.

When these creative periods are looked at as a whole, Barbey can be seen to be experimenting with certain literary devices, rejecting some in favour of others which help him to convey his theme more convincingly. Imagery to evoke the past is used extensively in Ce qui ne meurt pas

and in L'Amour impossible, but to a much lesser extent for this purpose in the Norman novels. There are however, certain recurring settings used by Barbey:- ruined castles, as has already been indicated, often form the backgrounds for the characters. Marshes and pools too, are often used to convey a threatening atmosphere, especially in the Norman novels - in L'Ensorcelée, Jeanne drowns in the "lavoir"; in Un Prêtre marié, la Malgaigne's initial predictions about Sombreval are based on what she sees in a bucket of pool water and Sombreval himself drowns in the "étang du Quesnay"; there is a washing area in Une Histoire sans nom which is also seen as ominous.³ Barbey obviously saw these settings as important to his dramas:

"Certes! si les lieux ont une influence, et ils en ont une,
à coup sûr .. " (ORC II,284)

One of the many interesting aspects of Barbey's work is the way in which the novels reflect his preoccupations at the time when the novels were written; this is made clear from his diaries and letters of the same periods. The treatment of the past during the three creative periods in Barbey's writing corresponds to Barbey's own attitude to his past, either stated explicitly or, as during the time of Madame de Bouglon's influence on him, implicitly inferred from his other writings of the period.

The first period - 1830 to 1840 - was one of unhappiness for Barbey in different spheres of his life. In the Memorandum of 1837-38, the reasons for his negative moods are not difficult to find. Barbey had quite serious financial worries, no permanent job and apparently no possibility of finding one.⁴ Also, since his university days in Caen in 1830, Barbey had kept up a lively correspondence with his friend Trebutien. Trebutien had become a librarian in Caen and was thus Barbey's principal source of references and information on a variety of subjects.

He was also a link with Barbey's past, as he writes in a later letter:

"..mon ami des jours passés, cette chaîne qu'on brise,
mais qu'on traîne toujours et que nous, nous avons rescellée
au plus solide de nos coeurs." (LT I,178)

In March 1837, for some unknown reason, Barbey and Trebutien had quarrelled and this "rupture", which was to last for four years, made a profound impression on Barbey.

Apart from these sources of worry and unhappiness, there were also emotional problems for Barbey in the late 1830s. The period 1837-38 was decisive in Barbey's relationship with Louise, his cousin's wife, and from all accounts the great love of his life. In the Premier Memorandum he is alternately elated or depressed, depending on whether he had received a letter from Louise or not.⁵ Barbey saw Louise for the last time on 23rd August 1838 and after a letter in which she gives him his freedom, the liaison is definitively broken off by Louise in mid-September 1838.⁶ This love affair marked Barbey deeply. At the time he realises the importance of this episode in his life:

"Quoi que je devienne maintenant, je porterai les marques
de cette vie passée. À moins de m'anéantir, Dieu lui-même
ne pourrait pas l'effacer." (ORC II,776)

Even twelve years after the end of this affair, Barbey writes to Trebutien:

"Je viens à Mme T.. qui ose s'appeler Louise, un nom
bouclier de Diamants qui va m'empêcher de la voir ce
qu'elle est! C'est le seul mot de sa lettre qui m'ait plu
que le nom de Louise. Les femmes qui le portent, je n'ai
plus la force de les juger." (LT II,48)

Barbey's second major creative period - 1840 to 1865 - was the one during which his novels are deeply imbued with the theme of the past,

as has already been shown in the chapters dealing with Une Vieille
Maitresse, L'Ensorcelée, Le Chevalier des Touches and Un Prêtre marié.

This is the period when Barbey came under the influence of Madame de Bouglon, an influence which produced a paradoxical result in Barbey: he returned to the religion of his childhood and became a practising Catholic. This also entailed a return to his sources, to his family, and an admission that Normandy was where he was most comfortable as far as his writing was concerned. He knew the region and the people in a way he could never know Paris and the social set who frequented the salons; once he had accepted this fact and worked this strand into his writings, his novels became more complex in their technique and more masterful in their treatment of the theme of the past.

The particular historical past evoked by Barbey in these novels represents an important period for the region of Basse-Normandie where Barbey had been brought up. Here, at the time of the Chouan rebellion, was a region in turmoil - a struggle between the old order: the monarchy, Catholicism, tradition and the ancien régime, and the new order: democracy, atheism, innovation and Revolution. Although Barbey d'Aurevilly was living in a time when the new order had won, he still hankered after the old. As his disgust with the present grew, especially after 1848, he created his Norman world, peopled with characters caught up in this conflict between two worlds, past and present, like Jeanne Le Hardouey or the Chevalier des Touches. This is eloquently formulated by Bordeaux in his book Le Walter Scott normand:⁷

"Barbey d'Aurevilly a personnifié cette basse Normandie
au moment où se heurtent deux mondes, l'ancien régime et
la Révolution, religieuse et révoltée, façonnée par les
Rollon et les Guillaume, coureuse d'aventures et attachée
au sol, violente et volontaire, capable des plus furieuses

passions comme des plus sublimes vertus, convoitée par le ciel et par l'enfer, mais jamais lâche ni médiocre."

However, in order to please Madame de Bouglon, Barbey d'Aurevilly attempted to deny his own past - that is, the earlier romantic attachments - on a conscious level at least. At the peak of his relationship with Madame de Bouglon in the late 1850s, there are references, in the Troisième Memorandum written especially for her, to how little his own emotional past now means to him:

"Tout ce qui est en dehors de mon sentiment actuel pour l'Ange Blanc, tout ce qui me rappelle un passé où elle n'était pas, est exempt de mélancolie - De mon passé, je ne regrette qu'elle qui ne s'y est pas mêlée .." 28 septembre 1856

(ORC II,1031)

"..j'ai vécu ici impassible comme un homme qui voit son passé dans son intelligence, mais qui ne l'a plus dans son coeur."

8 octobre 1856 (ORC II,1075)

but this is the precise time at which he was composing the novels in which the characters are most deeply involved with their own pasts, as if what Barbey was repressing in his own life was emerging in the novels. He had stated on several occasions how vital his past was to him as a writer:

"Les Artistes savent ce que valent les souvenirs. Platon croyait que l'âme en était faite. Platon avait peut-être raison pour l'âme. Mais pour le talent, il n'y a pas de peut-être. Sans les souvenirs, nous ne serions que des sots." 25 juillet 1853 (LT II,380)

"En dehors de la réalité et du souvenir, je n'aurais pas trois sous de talent, Trebutien." 2 avril 1855 (LTIII,233)⁸

The final creative period of Barbey's life appears to have been,

latterly, a melancholy time for him; he had outlived most of his contemporaries and his friends and seemed preoccupied with thoughts of the past. Between 1871 and 1881, he visited Normandy each year and his letters of the period speak often of his nostalgia for the past:

"Ne croyez donc pas que les nouvelles amitiés soient pour moi plus chères que les anciennes. Ce que je connais de plus puissant, c'est le passé!" 6 juin 1879⁹

"Un temps où ma mère et votre père pêcheraient dans la Douve s'ils étaient vivants.. La Douve! il doit faire bon sur ses bords, à cette heure! Croyez-vous que je ne puis chasser son souvenir, et que, positivement, je la vois comme si elle était à mes pieds!

Ces Loups de souvenirs vous mangent le coeur quand il vous en reste, et les plus féroces sont les plus lointains!"

29 juillet 1885¹⁰

According to contemporary sources, Barbey himself was an anachronism, dressing still in the fashions of his youth when in old age:

"Il s'enveloppe du passé, et il continue, attentif à ressembler aux gentilshommes connus là jadis, à se distinguer comme eux par la tenue, et en gardant autant que possible leur mentalité!"¹¹

In 1883 a contemporary saw him:

"Dédaigneux des modes du jour, il se promène dans Paris avec jabot et manchettes de dentelles; une bande de satin rose tendre ou de satin vert pomme orne la ceinture de son pantalon; sa redingote, faite selon la coupe de 1830, serre une taille emprisonnée dans un corset; son chapeau à larges bords est unique à Paris et peut-être dans le monde entier."¹²

Barbey seemed to ignore the ever-increasing gap between the present and the past he chose to live in. In one of the obituaries published in 1889, this trend is emphasised:

"Son aspect était des plus bizarres; très grand, la tête haute, les cheveux longs tombant en boucles sur son col, et qu'il teignait avec un soin scrupuleux; ses manchettes et ses jabots de dentelles, ses cravates longues et ses redingotes toujours taillées à la mode de 1830.. "13

Barbey d'Aurevilly, then, a writer of considerable merit, has the theme of the past running through his fictional writings and through his letters and diaries. The latter indicate that for him, memory and the past are essential parts of the creative process. The past's destructive influence on people's lives became an obsessive theme for him: Barbey himself, dominated by his heredity and by memories of his childhood, was, in his clothes, his tastes and his politics a man of the past. This aspect of his personality coloured his writings, his depiction of place and character, and though neglected by critics, often in favour of more flamboyant themes, deserves to take its place as one of the dominant features of the novels of Barbey d'Aurevilly.

Chapter VIII - Notes

1. ORC II, 370
2. ORC II, 374: "une fatalité audacieusement acceptée."
376: " avec l'indifférence d'une fatalité contre laquelle elle ne s'est jamais révoltée."
3. ORC II, 284
4. ORC II, 861: " Hélas! les choses ont peu changé. Le besoin d'une position me poursuit." 7 décembre 1837
863: "Ce projet de journal se réalisera-t-il? Pourrai-je trouver position solide, c'est-à-dire some money quelque part cet hiver?" 12 décembre 1837
5. ORC II, 819: "Aujourd'hui je comptais sur une lettre de L(ouise) et il n'est rien venu, ce qui a noirci mon humeur pendant toute la journée."
ORC II, 862: "...et reçu une bonne lettre de L(ouise) toute ma vie, le reste n'est qu'apparences et mensonges!"
6. ORC II, 967: "La dernière chose que j'estimais dans mon âme y a été brisée et flétrie; je suis plus libre mais à quel prix?" 19 septembre 1838
7. Bordeaux, Henri: Le Walter Scott normand Barbey d'Aurevilly
Paris Plon 1925 p. 73-74
8. See also LT I, 264: written on September 16th 1846: "Pour moi le talent est un écho des plus grands sentiments qui ont passé dans ma vie."
9. Lettres Intimes edited by Louise Read. Letter to Elysabeth Bouillet on June 6th 1876. p. 172-73

10. Letter to Elysabeth Bouillet on July 29th 1885. Lettres Intimes
edited by Louise Read p. 207
11. Quéru, Hermann: Le dernier grand seigneur Barbey d'Aurevilly
Paris Ed. de Flore 1946 p. 217-18
12. Audouard, Olympe: Silhouettes parisiennes
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13. Quoted in a commemorative article on Barbey d'Aurevilly in
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LXXV

