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It was the purpose of this thesis to determine the extent to which the major deaths in Les Thibault involved psychological crises.

In order to identify the context of any such psychological crisis, a preliminary discussion was included on the social implications of death. Oscar Thibault was presented as an archetype of the nineteenth-century bourgeois father in contrast with his two sons, Jacques and Antoine, who represent the twentieth-century spirit of France. A detailed analysis of the individual deaths of the three Thibaults was made, along with a parallel study of The Death of Ivan Ilych by Leo Tolstoy.

Results of the study showed that each of the characters analyzed experienced a psychological crisis in the face of death. This crisis served to either validate or invalidate the individual's value system. The overall effect of the individual crisis was characterized by a generally pessimistic outlook upon man's human condition.

Les Thibault was seen as making an early and significant contribution to the treatment of death in twentieth-century French literature.

APPROVAL PAGE

DEATH AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS:

AN ANALYSIS OF DEATH IN

LES THIBAUT

by

Faye R. Clayton

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

While many critics have alluded to and discussed generally Roger Martin du Gard's treatment of the death theme, few have done an extensive analysis of death in Les Thibault.

Schalk has analyzed the historical element of this saga novel, identifying Les Thibault as "superhistorical", which means that "...the novel offers insights into or intuitions about the real meaning of the historical epoch it treats, insights and intuitions which the work of history cannot provide."¹ Schalk views the major deaths in Les Thibault, along with Jean Barois, in terms of sociological significance.

Camus has written a preface to the Pléiade edition of Martin du Gard's Oeuvres complètes, in which he speaks of the author's preoccupation with death. Camus also focuses attention on the sociological importance of this theme at a critical age in history, the period from 1904 to 1918. He sees the major thesis of all Martin du Gard's works as a fundamental question: "La communauté des hommes, qui aide parfois à vivre, peut-elle aider à mourir? C'est la question au fond de l'oeuvre de Martin du Gard et qui lui donne son tragique."² Camus' remarks on Les Thibault seem to deal primarily

¹David L. Schalk, Roger Martin du Gard: The Novelist and History (New York, 1967), p. 7.

²Roger Martin du Gard, Oeuvres complètes (Paris, 1955), I, p. xviii. Hereafter cited as O.C. in the text.

with the existential consequences of death as each character searches for his true "raison d'être."

In a recent dissertation, Jean Guitton deals specifically with the death theme in Martin du Gard's chief novels. He views Les Thibault as a dual world, the opposing "worlds" of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The link between the two worlds is death: "...la mort, la pensée de la mort viendront souvent jeter des ponts permettant à ces deux mondes de communiquer largement."³ However, Guitton is chiefly interested in showing how Martin du Gard utilizes the death theme to express his conception of the role of the novel and novelist. He is referring of course to the author's statement concerning his choice of subject for his novels:

J'étais encore très jeune lorsque j'ai rencontré, dans un roman de l'Anglais Thomas Hardy, cette réflexion sur l'un de ses personnages: la vraie valeur de la vie lui semblait être moins sa beauté que son tragique. Cela répondait en moi à une intuition profonde, étroitement liée à ma vocation littéraire. Dès cette époque je pensais déjà (ce que je pense encore) que le principal objet du roman, c'est d'exprimer le tragique de la vie. J'ajouterais aujourd'hui: le tragique d'une vie individuelle, le tragique d'une destinée en train de s'accomplir.⁴

When one takes into account the fact that Les Thibault was written during the period from 1920-1939, the author's obsession with death is understandable.

While the majority of critics emphasize other aspects of Martin du Gard's treatment of death, a recent critic suggests its psychological importance. He conceives death as the dominating theme of Les Thibault and believes that

³Jean Guitton, "Roger Martin du Gard et la mort," Diss. Emory University 1969, p. 4.

⁴Roger Martin du Gard, "Discours de Stockholm," NRF (mai, 1959), p. 956.

"la prise de conscience de sa signification conditionne toutes les pensées et les actions des personnages."⁵ While such a statement may at first seem exaggerated, it is, in fact, supported by Martin du Gard's own admission: "Je m'aperçois que toute ma vie, tout le secret de ma vie (et aussi de ma vocation d'artiste, de ce besoin de survivre), le mobile de tous mes efforts, la source de toutes mes émotions, c'est la peur de la mort, la lutte contre l'oubli, la poussière, le Temps."⁶ One has only to examine the deaths of the three Thibaults to realize how Martin du Gard has transmitted these ideas to his characters.

It is the purpose of this thesis to analyze the deaths of Oscar, Jacques, and Antoine Thibault, with major emphasis on the resulting psychological crises. In order to identify death as a psychological crisis, it will first be necessary to include a preliminary discussion of its social implications. Because the period of history covered in Les Thibault is such a crucial one, and since the novel concerns three generations, the sociological factor cannot be overlooked. It will be seen that inspection of the ordered life of Oscar Thibault and his bourgeois household is essential to an understanding of his later psychological crisis in the face of death. In addition, insight into the sociological consequences of Oscar's death is needed to comprehend the subsequent directions of the lives of Antoine and Jacques, and their individual confrontations with death.

⁵Melvin Gallant, Le Thème de la mort chez Roger Martin du Gard (Paris, 1971), p. 11.

⁶Cited by Roger Froment, "Sa mort," NRF (decembre, 1958), p. 971.

Leo Tolstoy's short story, The Death of Ivan Ilych, will be used to further illustrate the idea of death as a psychological crisis, particularly in the case of Oscar Thibault. Such a choice is made not by mere chance, but because of substantial references to Tolstoy's direct influence upon Martin du Gard.⁷ The author himself attests to this influence: "La découverte de Tolstoï a certainement été l'un des événements les plus marquants de mon adolescence; et sans doute celui qui a eu sur mon avenir d'écrivain, l'influence la plus durable." (O.C., I, xlvi) Henri Peyre has gone a step farther in proclaiming that "The Death of Ivan Illitch, that extraordinary record of a man feeling himself dying of cancer, is the model, unconsciously perhaps, for the death scenes in Les Thibault...."⁸ Ivan Ilych and Oscar Thibault especially share mutual reactions toward their deaths. These similarities alone are sufficient to warrant a comparative treatment which promises to yield fresh insight into Oscar's death.

In a letter to his friend, Pierre Margaritis, Martin du Gard states his basic purpose as an artist: "...ma corde, propre, c'est d'exprimer non pas des idées, mais des sensations des caractères, des personnages, des êtres humains... je suis un romancier et non un penseur, ni un sociologue; un manieur d'émotions, et non un manieur d'idées."⁹ His treatment of death bears

⁷Martha O'Nan, "The Influence of Tolstoy upon Roger Martin du Gard," Kentucky Foreign Language Quarterly (Spring, 1957), pp. 7-14.

⁸Henri Peyre, French Novelists of Today (New York, 1955), p. 41.

⁹"Lettre de Roger Martin du Gard à Pierre Margaritis," NRF (décembre, 1958), p. 1119.

out the validity of his claim to be more a psychologist than a philosopher or sociologist in a literary sense.

It is hoped that a psychological analysis of death in Les Thibault will effectively reveal the inner struggle of these main characters against death, their inescapable destiny. The value of such an analysis may be seen in the universal fact that each individual must face, by and within himself, this phenomenon of human existence. But the crisis of death seems especially intense to these characters of the early twentieth century. Therefore it is essential that one observe the individual reactions, attitudes, and emotions as each encounters his own death. Only after an inward, psychological analysis can the reader have any knowledgeable understanding of the changes which result from this conflict.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The term "bourgeoisie" has generally been accepted as identifying a particular social class. In the France of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "bourgeoisie" normally referred to the middle class; a distinct, social class separated from the nobility and the proletariat. As Ponteil indicates, during the period from 1815 to 1914, there were three divisions within the bourgeoisie: "...le grand bourgeois...la moyenne et la petite bourgeoisie."¹⁰

In Les Thibault the principal characters belong to the "grande bourgeoisie" and the "moyenne bourgeoisie." Martin du Gard has presented a vivid portrait of the grande bourgeoisie, principally through his characterization of Mr. Thibault and his son Antoine. The Fontanin family perhaps best represents the moyenne bourgeoisie.

However, a more applicable and encompassing definition of this often misused term would be useful here. Nicholas Berdyaev, in "The Bourgeois Mind," refers to the bourgeoisie as "a spiritual state, a direction of the soul, a peculiar consciousness of being."¹¹ This involves a total outlook on life which governs the bourgeois' decisions.

¹⁰Félix Ponteil, Les Classes bourgeoises et l'avènement de la démocratie, 1815-1914 (Paris, 1968), p. 16.

¹¹Nicholas Berdyaev, The Bourgeois Mind and Other Essays by Nicholas Berdyaev, Countess Bennigsen, trans. (New York, 1966), p. 11.

In light of this broader concept, it is possible to identify Oscar Thibault as a symbol of nineteenth-century bourgeois values in France. Every aspect of his being—his personality, his conversations, and his acts—demonstrates "l'esprit bourgeois."

This spirit makes the Thibault household a microcosm of bourgeois society. Mr. Thibault is father and "maître" of his household, ordering almost its every move with his omnipresence. He is the ruling authority who assumes a God-like superiority over the conduct of his sons and over his entire household. In this respect, he represents the strong bourgeois sense of moral duty to preserve the family structure of the nineteenth century. The sanctity of the home was held in high esteem, parental authority was unquestioned; parents planned the lives of their children, and dowries and wills were a natural part of the social and moral institution of the home. Mr. Thibault is extremely proud of this institution to which he has devoted much time and effort. In conversation with his elder son Antoine, he proudly defends the continuing importance of the family:

Une famille, répéta-t-il. Ce mot, qu'il ne prononçait jamais sans emphase, éveilla en lui de confuses resonances, des fragments de discours prononcés naguère.

...si l'on admet que la famille doit rester la cellule première du tissu social, ne faut-il pas...qu'elle constitue cette...aristocratie plébésienne...où dorénavant, se recrutent les élites? La famille...Réponds: ne sommes-nous pas le pivot sur lequel...tourne l'État bourgeois d'aujourd'hui? (O.C., I, 1152)

This indestructible faith in the home, his bourgeois "amour-propre", and egotistical ambition provide the stimuli to produce a father committed to an ideology rather than to a personal relationship with his sons. As a father,

he operates on the theory of man's inherent evil nature which can achieve moral and social virtue only by the force of stern discipline. He is a relentless disciplinarian who does not flinch when confronted with the punishment of his wayward son Jacques:

Ce vaurien! Broyer sa volonté!... Je crois tenir la solution... Crouy.... Ainsi, mis à l'abri des tentations pernicieuses, purgé de ses mauvais instincts par la solitude, ayant pris goût au travail, il atteindra sa seizième année, et je veux espérer qu'alors il pourra sans danger reprendre auprès de nous la vie familiale. (O.C., I, 680)

Mr. Thibault believes that it is his duty to mold the character of his two sons, Antoine and Jacques; even if it requires extreme measures. Crouy is a penal institution established by Mr. Thibault and lauded by moral leaders of his day as an appropriate method of correction for delinquents. Mr. Thibault's use of the phrase "sans danger" implies the stern disapproval of any form of parental defiance. It was naturally assumed that children were obedient to parents, and infractions of this rule were met with an air of shock and disbelief. Thus Mr. Thibault reacts typically when Antoine visits Crouy without his permission: "Vraiment, mon cher, tu...tu me surprends! Il hésitait, choisissant des termes mesurés, que démentaient ses grosses mains fermées et ses coups de tête en avant. Cette méfiance, à l'égard de ton père...." (O.C., I, 721-22) Then follows Mr. Thibault's customary transition from disbelief to righteous indignation: "Est-ce que tu me prendrais pour un imbécile, par hasard? Est-ce que tu supposes que j'ai attendu tes renseignements pour savoir ce qui se fait à Crouy, où, depuis plus de dix ans, je passe tous les mois une inspection générale, suivie d'un rapport? (O.C., I, 722). This manifestation of egotism illustrates the dominant role

it plays in the bourgeois way of life. For the bourgeois, worldly achievement was a major priority. Life was a perennial fight to achieve position and wealth, and one's success or failure did not necessarily depend upon intelligence and industry, but was quite often attributable to a callousness of conscience. The "means" was subordinate to the "end."

At the outset of Les Thibault the central figure is an influential moral leader at the height of worldly attainment. He is a prominent member of the Institute of Moral Science, contributes articles regularly to a well-known periodical, Revue des Deux Mondes, and is concerned with the educational system of his day. It is with considerable pride that he speaks of the Oscar-Thibault Foundation, his major contribution to moral education and rehabilitation:

Voilà plus de vingt ans que je me dévoue à ces problèmes de la criminalité enfantine! Vingt ans que je lutte par des ligues de préservation, des brochures, des rapports à tous les congrès! Mieux que ça! Est-ce que je n'ai pas créé à ma colonie pénitentiaire de Crouy, un pavillon spécial, où les enfants vicieux lorsqu'ils appartiennent à une autre classe sociale que nos pupilles sont soumis à un traitement particulièrement attentif? (O.C., I, 597)

This monumental symbol of social achievement increases Mr. Thibault's egotistical desire to insure success for his two sons. Antoine seems to be "falling in line" by choosing the respectable career of medicine. Now the father urges Jacques to comprehend the significance of personal dedication to excellence: "Etre sorti premier d'une grande école, reprit Mr. Thibault, ... cela vous accompagne pendant toute la vie; partout où l'on se présente ensuite, on est sûr d'être considéré." (O.C., I, 904) One can almost hear the heavily emphasized "premier" in his statement. It is evident that Mr. Thibault is not

satisfied merely with his own success, but hopes that his good example will be followed.

Another characteristic of the nineteenth-century bourgeois system was a spirit of materialism; this in spite of considerable lip-service paid to religious values. Major emphasis was placed upon the tangible, the worldly, and the visible. Mr. Thibault typifies the materialistic father whose entire life gives priority to worldly ambition and accomplishment. He has a prestigious social position, wealth, inheritance for his sons, and lasting memorials to his benevolence. Yet his materialism is secondary to egotistic ambition, epitomized in his plan to secure a permanent place for the Thibault name in the annals of society. He proposes to have the family name changed from "Thibault" to "Oscar-Thibault", justifying this decision to his sons:

S'il advient, par surcroît, que cette distinction vous soit de quelque profit dans votre carrière, tant mieux, mes enfants. Est-ce qu'il n'est pas juste, en conscience, qu'un homme, qui n'a jamais rien demandé au temporel, fasse bénéficier sa descendance de la considération qu'il s'est acquise? (O.C., I, 914)

For Mr. Thibault, this will be his supreme gift to his sons, a legacy which represents the years he has devoted to building a foundation for their lives. He cannot be satisfied with an intangible heritage of fatherly love and guidance, but seems obsessed by a need to outlive himself. He is concerned that his good deeds will inspire others to continue, following his example. He personifies the bourgeois who "even when he is a 'good Catholic,' believes only in this world, in the expedient and the useful; ...who is incapable of living by faith in another world...."¹² His preoccupation with social status,

¹²Berdyayev, p. 12.

worldly success, and an influence that will live on—all seem motivated by his ego. This ego is like a mental cancer which spreads silently but with alarming rapidity to permeate every aspect of his life. Not even his involvement in religious affairs is spared this trait of his bourgeois personality.

Mr. Thibault is not only a prominent social leader, but exemplary also as a bourgeois Catholic. In this respect, "l'esprit bourgeois" is characterized by devout religious observance and strict adherence to the moral code as taught by the Catholic Church. The Thibault father appears to be a religious "giant." He is active on committees, gives generously to diocesan charities, and is faithful in attending mass and confession. He has endeavored to train Antoine and Jacques according to Catholic principles. However, religion to Mr. Thibault seems to be more a useful tool than a meaningful philosophy of life. He seems always able to justify selfish actions as an expression of religious piety; for example, his punishment of Jacques:

...j'ai toujours pensé qu'en m'inspirant l'idée de fonder à Crouy ce pavillon spécial, la Providence m'avait permis de préparer d'avance le remède à un mal personnel. N'ai-je pas su accepter courageusement cette épreuve? Est-ce que beaucoup de pères avaient agi comme moi? Ai-je quelque chose à me reprocher? Grâce à Dieu, j'ai la conscience tranquille. (O.C., I, 731-32)

Abbé Vécard's response to this boast is a jolting revelation of Mr. Thibault's religious hypocrisy. It is the Biblical parable of the publican and pharisee which dramatically illustrates Mr. Thibault's pride and prejudice.

The bourgeois prejudice was directed not only to those of lower social status, but perhaps just as intensely to the Protestant. Comical, yet common,

is the spontaneous, prejudicial reaction of Chasle, Mr. Thibault's secretary, to Mrs. Fontanin: "Quoi? La huguenote? balbutia M. Chasle en se reculant, comme s'il venait de poser le pied dans une flaque de la Saint-Barthélemy." (O.C., I, 601) The Protestant, or more specifically, "Huguenot", was considered an outcast or "heathen," and a devout Catholic protected his family from contamination.

The two principal families in this novel, the Thibaults and the Fontanins, represent opposing forces: Catholic and Protestant. In direct contrast to Mr. Thibault's domineering rule of his household, we see the relaxed atmosphere which pervades the Fontanin home. Mrs. Fontanin is a deeply religious Protestant who believes in the inherent goodness of man. She places no restrictions on her two children, Daniel and Jenny, but provides an atmosphere of individual freedom. Daniel is allowed to pursue his interest in art, a vocation highly unsuitable for the ambitious bourgeois.

Perhaps the best illustration of the Catholic-Protestant conflict in Les Thibault is the only face-to-face confrontation between Mr. Thibault and Mrs. Fontanin. She goes to the Thibault home to "join forces" in the search for the two fugitives, Jacques and Daniel. Mr. Thibault rejects her proposal with his characteristic form of rationalization:

Certes, il faut agir; mais est-ce qu'il ne vaudrait pas mieux que nos recherches fussent séparées?... Est-ce que je ne dois pas éviter, à tout prix, que, dans une si délicate aventure, un autre nom soit prononcé à côté du nôtre? Est-ce que mon premier devoir n'est pas de faire en sorte qu'on ne puisse pas, un jour, lui [Jacques] jeter au visage certaines relations...d'un caractère...préjudiciable? (O.C., I, 599)

The point is obvious: the "autre nom" is Daniel, an undesirable companion for a Thibault.

Mr. Thibault presents the evidence of the boys' guilt, the "cahier gris"; Mrs. Fontanin refuses to pry into her son's personal affairs. She is concerned over the personal safety of the two boys; Mr. Thibault is most anxious to prevent any scandal which might affect his respected name. She entreats him not to resort to police assistance, to which he angrily retorts:

...n'était l'esclandre que je veux éviter à tout prix—est-ce qu'il ne serait pas souhaitable pour l'amendement de ces vauriens, qu'on nous les ramenât menottes aux poignets, entre deux gendarmes? Ne fût-ce que pour leur rappeler qu'il y a encore dans notre malheureux pays un semblant de justice pour soutenir l'autorité paternelle? (O.C., I, 601)

Mr. Thibault's final appeal is for justice; Mrs. Fontanin's is for mercy.

It remains necessary to note the sharp contrast in the reactions of these two parents upon Jacques' and Daniel's return from Marseilles. Mrs. Fontanin embraces the two without a word of reproach, while Mr. Thibault receives Jacques with an air of cold indifference. Refusing to address the fugitive, he speaks only to Antoine: "Antoine, mon cher, rends-nous le service de t'occuper, pour cette nuit encore, de ce garnement... Emmène-le dans sa chambre. Ce scandale n'a que trop duré." (O.C., I, 669) Again the bourgeois insistence upon parental authority overrules natural parental emotion. Mr. Thibault assumes the role of bourgeois moralist who "judges severely; whose virtue weighs heavily upon everyone, who hates the sinners and publicans and is the guardian of his neighbor's morals."¹³

The striking differences between the Catholic "haute bourgeoise" existence of Mr. Thibault and the Protestant "moyenne bourgeoise" life of Mrs.

¹³Berdyayev, p. 19.

Fontanin are sufficient to create two separate worlds. It is Mr. Thibault's duty as parent, moralist, and protector to maintain this natural division. He does not intend for his son Jacques to be "corrupted" by a questionable relationship with Daniel. Unable to believe that Jacques would deliberately disobey him, Mr. Thibault tries to place all the blame on Daniel for the unfortunate, adolescent flight to Marseilles. He is convinced that Daniel has enticed his son to engage in immoral desires and to taste of forbidden fruit: "...nous levons le pupitre de Jacques: deux autres volumes: les Confessions de J. J. Rousseau; et, ce qui est plus déshonnête encore,...excusez-nous, Monsieur, un ignoble roman de Zola! La Faute de l'abbé Mouret." (O.C., I, 584) Such literature was strongly denounced by religious leaders of the nineteenth century. It is most probably this evidence which strongly affects Mr. Thibault's final decision to send Jacques to Crouy.

All of the attributes of the bourgeois value system in the nineteenth century: respect and support of the family structure, social prestige, materialistic ambition and pride in achievement, religious piety, and almost total exclusion of those outside Catholicism, tend to validate the claim that "bourgeois" is a spiritual designation as well as a social one. Mr. Thibault is totally committed to the bourgeois cause: perpetrating its "gospel" to future generations. It is his "raison d'être" and the compelling force of his life. He is the authoritative bourgeois, "a superior type which strives to be the guardian of the spiritual foundations of life, aspires to be the benefactor of mankind, to insure its happiness, to organize the world for it."¹⁴

¹⁴Berdyayev, p. 19.

With such a goal as the purpose of his existence, Mr. Oscar Thibault has made of his home the epitome of bourgeois society.

The physical illness and death of Oscar Thibault can be seen as symbolic of the decay and demise of the nineteenth-century bourgeois era. Prior to his death, seeds of disintegration had already been sown, but had lain dormant beneath his pharisaism. Slowly, as the veil is lifted, others discover this destructive hypocrisy. Mrs. Fontanin is quick to recognize that this bourgeois father's concern is primarily for his own selfish interests and not for the safety and welfare of his sons. Abbé Vécard is conscious of Oscar's problem of pride. More significant, however, is the fact that Jacques and Antoine have not been deceived by appearances. Neither respects his father's God; a fact so clear in Antoine's honest confession, "Je n'ai jamais vu Dieu, hélas, qu'à travers mon père." (O.C., I, 1389) Jacques is more vehement in his denunciation of the religious-oriented life. At the age of fourteen he writes to Daniel: "...il y a dans l'univers un homme qui n'espère rien, qui ne craint rien, qui déteste la vie et n'a pas la force de la quitter: cet homme, c'est CELUI QUI NE CROIT PAS EN DIEU!!!" (O.C., I, 624) Although this atheistic declaration comes from an adolescent, Mr. Thibault's hypocritical example of religion has made an indelible impression upon him.

Perhaps the most vivid illustration of bourgeois hypocrisy is the life-size bust of Oscar Thibault at Crouy, site of his penitentiary: "Un buste en plâtre de M. Thibault, grandeur naturelle, mais qui sur ce mur bas prenait des proportions colossales, décorait le panneau de droite; un humble crucifix

de bois noir, orné de buis, essayait de lui faire pendant sur le mur opposé." (O.C., I, 682) The visual effect is sufficient to convince Antoine that his father's charitable works are essentially for the purpose of gaining recognition and prestige.

Another sign of the impending destruction of bourgeois values is Antoine's and Jacques' refusal to accept their father's dominance. In Jacques' "nouvelle", La Sorellina, he boldly portrays his father's image through a principal character, Seregno: "...à son bureau, en famille, à table, partout, lucide, puissant, irréprochable, satisfait, immobile. Une force. Mieux, un poids. Non pas force agissante, mais force inerte, qui pèse." (O.C., I, 1176) It is ironic that Mr. Thibault, who has conceived himself to be a guiding force, is considered a "force inerte, qui pèse." That Jacques should consider his father not an active, creative, constructive force, but a meaningless weight or burden, indicates his radical rejection of all that Oscar Thibault represents.

When Antoine questions his parental wisdom, even Oscar Thibault is forced to recognize that the regime he represents shows signs of crumbling:

Alors, tes brochures, tes conférences! Toutes tes belles paroles! Dans le Congrès, oui! Mais devant une intelligence qui sombre, fût-ce celle d'un fils, rien ne compte: pas de complications, vivre tranquille, et adviene que pourra?

Imposteur! cria M. Thibault. Ah, ça devait arriver! Je te voyais depuis longtemps... Tout se tient: l'abandon des principes religieux, et bientôt l'anarchie morale, et la révolte pour finir! (O.C., 725)

It is a crushing blow to Oscar Thibault's pride that he has failed to inject bourgeois values into the lives of his sons.

Because Oscar Thibault has been the foundation of his bourgeois household, his death marks its fall. Almost immediately there is a total reorganization of the Thibault establishment. Antoine becomes the "maître", exerting his authority by a complete renovation of the physical structure. It is no longer a home, but a place of business. Jacques withdraws completely from the family unit, even renouncing his inheritance. Gise, the maid, returns to her work in London, and the other staff members disperse to find other places of employment. The contrast is complete: from a little bourgeois world to professional business quarters; from a family to a "one-man" operation. Antoine wastes no time nor spares any expense in asserting the long-awaited freedom which his father's death has made possible. Well-provided for through his inheritance, Antoine displays no bourgeois scruples, but squanders his small fortune. Wealth to him means power, his immediate goal. He places no value on wealth in itself, but upon what it can do for him.

It is after Oscar Thibault's death that Antoine's suppressed rebellion is revealed. On the return trip to Paris following his father's funeral, Antoine admits his religious agnosticism. His scientific approach to life which has always been in conflict with Catholicism is indicative of the basic conflict between Antoine and Oscar Thibault. The latter's death has resolved this conflict for Antoine. He no longer makes any pretense of religious belief, but chooses the way of reason and logic.

An indifferent optimism toward moral values is the effect of Antoine's guiding principle, logic. Like Jacques, he refuses to adopt the strict code

of right and wrong preached by his father, but substitutes a new morality: freedom to act as he wishes:

...la morale n'existe pas pour moi. On "doit", on "ne doit pas", le "bien", le "mal", pour moi ce ne sont que des mots; des mots que j'emploie pour faire comme les autres, des valeurs qui me sont commodes dans la conversation; mais, au fond de moi, je l'ai cent fois constaté, ça ne correspond vraiment à rien de réel. (O.C., I, 1123)

Morality for the Thibault sons becomes a flexible instrument, adaptable to the situation. Both reject bourgeois principles of sexual morality. Antoine scorns marriage as an unnecessary limitation to his freedom. Jacques rejects marriage because of his deeper commitment to another, more fulfilling cause, socialism.

With the death of the pivotal bourgeois figure, pre-existing values soon become obsolete. There is an almost immediate change in atmosphere. Following La Mort du Père, there is an overall tone of fatalism which settles down on the bourgeoisie. Oscar Thibault's concern with man's behavior is replaced by Jacques' and Antoine's preoccupation with man's fate. To a nation threatened by war, the nineteenth-century bourgeois value system is no longer relevant. Wealth, power, and prestige become useless to a people struggling to preserve life itself. Thus it is that time and events operating concurrently result in the inevitable disintegration of an outmoded way of life.

CHAPTER III

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Although there are major social implications to the death of Oscar Thibault, the importance of the individual reaction to dying is made evident by Roger Martin du Gard's extensive use of psychological analysis. This comprehensive study of a man in the process of dying involves not only dramatic physical changes, but progressive psychological changes as well. At the outset of his illness, Oscar Thibault is a powerful, influential man; at his death he has been reduced to a pathetic animal whose demise will be welcomed by those he "loved" most.

In spite of the physical degeneration, however, or perhaps because of it, a gradual evolution of lucidity in the face of death marks the psychological stages of Oscar Thibault's journey to the grave. At first he simply refuses to entertain the idea of death. During the early post-operative period, he insists on following as closely as possible his disciplined schedule of activities. For some time he succeeds in convincing himself of his approaching complete recovery. This hope makes possible his patience toward the nun who has taken responsibility for his physical needs: "Le souffle de la garde assoupie l'agaçait bien un peu; mais il se plut à rêver au jour où, guéri, il la congédierait, avec des remerciements, —avec une belle offrande pour sa communauté. Combien? On verrait... Bientôt! Ah, qu'il était impatient de revivre!" (O.C., I, 1158) This is still the Oscar Thibault

who acts as though he has a lease on life. Whenever doubt overshadows his hope of recovery, it only requires a little reassurance from Antoine, and Oscar is able to dismiss completely the unpleasant thought. Whenever the subject does enter his conversation, it is always in impersonal terms: "Vient une heure, mon ami, où l'on n'aspire plus qu'au repos... La mort ne doit pas effrayer un chrétien." (Q.C., I, 1137) There is a smugness and an air of calm assurance in Mr. Thibault's statement. On one occasion he amuses himself by shocking his secretary with the announcement: "Je suis un homme fini." (Ibid.)

But when Chasle thoughtlessly slips while confiding his future plans: "J'ai déjà ma petite idée, oui... Toute une affaire à mettre sur pied—dès que vous ne serez plus là...." (Q.C., I, 1142), Oscar's reaction betrays his previously concealed fear. This fear begins as anger and shock at the careless remark: "Que voulait dire au juste cet imbécile?" (Ibid.) Once the seeds of doubt are inbedded in Oscar Thibault's mind, however, there is a steady growth of fear. He becomes suspicious of those around him, unable to trust their reassurances. Doubt leads to unanswerable questions: "Qu'est-ce qu'ils pensent, tous? Est-ce qu'on peut être en danger sans s'en rendre compte?" (Q.C., I, 1145)

The growing conviction that all is not well is sufficient to humble Oscar, perhaps for the first time in his life. Feeling his inability to cope with the idea of his own death without assistance, he turns first to his nurse: "Je suis très malade, ma soeur, vous savez! Très...très malade! Il bégayait, prêt à pleurer." (Q.C., I, 1144) The tone is unmistakably

one of fear which has taken captive one who has always been able to handle unpleasant situations. When this anguish possesses him, his pride gives way to bitter recognition of the truth. Such is his reaction to his secretary's reference to the Oscar-Thibault "pénitencier": "Pénitencier? Pourquoi pas 'prison'?" (O.C., I, 1134) It is a humiliating confession for the proud Thibault to make.

From his first crisis experience there is a gradual but steady degeneration of Oscar Thibault, "homme puissant." As he descends the ladder of prominence, we see Antoine's rise as the man in control. There is a dramatic change in the relationship between father and son as their positions are reversed. Now it is Oscar who must depend on his son, the doctor—not just for physical care, but for moral support and comfort: "Il [Oscar] aurait voulu lui [Antoine] crier: Dis-moi la vérité! Est-ce qu'on me trompe? Est-ce que je suis perdu, dis?... Sauve-moi, Antoine! Mais il était retenu par une timidité croissante envers son fils...." (O.C., I, 1146) Certainly this directly contrasts with the authoritative bourgeois who ruled his household with an iron will. The radical manner in which fear of death has reversed father-son relationship is evident by the "timidité croissante" which Oscar feels toward his son. Antoine becomes the protector; Oscar, the protected. For a while Antoine is able to shield his father from the truth of the gravity of his illness. With childlike faith, Oscar accepts without question his son's deception, "un sentiment nouveau, une flamme de tendresse, embrasait son vieux coeur." (O.C., I, 1148) This developing love and respect indicate the first real attempt of Oscar Thibault

to communicate with his son. However, the nature of this communication takes first the form of a father's confession as Oscar laments his parental failures: "La mort de Jacques. Pauvre enfant... Ai-je fait tout mon devoir?... Je voulais être ferme. J'ai été dur. Mon Dieu, je m'accuse d'avoir été dur avec mon enfant... Je n'ai jamais su gagner sa confiance. Ni la tienne, Antoine." (O.C., I, 1153) Desperately, Oscar tries to find justification for his disciplinary measures toward Jacques. In a delirious state he cries out accusations:

Va-t'en, mauvais fils!... Tu as oublié tout ce que tu dois à ton père, à son nom, à son rang! Le salut d'une âme! L'honneur d'une famille!...

Puis la voix s'assourdit: Mon Dieu, je ne suis pas sûr de votre pardon... Qu'as-tu fait de ton fils? (Ibid.)

Yet it is only in moments of semi-consciousness that Oscar recalls memories of his son who, he believes, has committed suicide. When Jacques is found and brought to his father's bedside, there is only one indication that Oscar recognizes his son:

Ses lèvres remuèrent. Les pupilles s'agrandirent. Et soudain, dans cet oeil morne, Jacques retrouva un souvenir précis: autrefois, lorsque son père cherchait une date oubliée, un nom, le regard prenait cette expression attentive et vague, cette apparence décentrée. (O.C., I, 1272)

If Oscar seems scarcely to think of Jacques, he balances this lack with a growing concern for Antoine. He is particularly anxious about Antoine's disregard for religion, and attempts to procure a commitment from his son: "Élevé comme tu l'as été, vivant sous ce toit, ne devrais-tu pas?...une ferveur religieuse enfin! Une foi plus solide, plus pratiquante?" (O.C., I, 1152) However, Oscar is not interested exclusively in Antoine's

spiritual state, but is trying at the same time both to ease his conscience and to make sure of his influence upon Antoine's life after he is gone. Such assurance may render a little less frightening his fear of solitude.

From an independent, self-ruling, indestructible tower of strength, he has crumbled to a dependent invalid whose greatest fear is being left alone. It is precisely this state which initiates the major crisis of his illness. Waking suddenly from a nightmare, he overhears the nurse calling for a doctor to come immediately. His reaction is that of horror: "Que s'est-il passé?... Il ne s'est pas aperçu que son état empirait. Le docteur a été appelé. En pleine nuit. Il est perdu! Il va mourir!" (O.C., I, 1252) Following the initial shock, Oscar takes a giant step toward lucidity. No longer can he be so easily deceived about his fate: "Alors, tout ce qu'il avait dit—sans y croire—pour annoncer solennellement l'imminence de sa mort, lui revient à l'esprit,... Cette fois, cette fois, il n'y a plus de doute!" (O.C., I, 1252-53) The immediate psychological change is so dramatic that one cannot doubt the impact which his impending death has upon Oscar: "Un vide, tout à coup, se creuse à la place où, quelques minutes plus tôt, régnait cette sécurité sans laquelle vivre devient impossible; et ce vide est si soudain que tout l'équilibre est rompu." (O.C., I, 1253) Such a staggering blow not only upsets the well-ordered life of Oscar Thibault, but causes a chain reaction of overwhelming consequences. The gnawing fear which until now has been chiefly contained can no longer be suppressed:

La peur le galope. Il voudrait crier; il ne peut pas. Il se sent emporté comme un fétu dans une avalanche: impossible de s'accrocher à rien: tout a chaviré, tout sombre avec lui....

Enfin la gorge se déserre, la peur s'y fait un passage, jaillit en un cri d'horreur, qui s'étrangle aussitôt. (*Ibid.*)

Fear approaching a state of panic reduces Oscar's ability to reason. In this way Oscar Thibault represents any human being who has become accustomed to the idea of a continuous future. When all hope of any future is erased, the individual faces the formidable task of contemplating the end of his own existence. It then becomes necessary to include the fearful word "death" in one's vocabulary. This word has always seemed so natural when applied to others, but unnatural when Oscar must apply it to himself: "Pour les autres, la mort, c'était une pensée courante, impersonnelle: un mot entre les mots. Pour lui, c'est tout le présent, c'est le réel! C'est lui-même!" (*O.C.*, I, 1257) Thus the word which he has struggled not to pronounce, not to take personally, invades the entire framework of his thought. As his physical condition worsens, so does the uneasiness of his mind. His brief intervals of rest only allow the mind to "créer des images, à projeter un film incohérent où se succédaient, en désordre, des tronçons de sa vie passée: spectacle à la fois attachant comme un défilé de souvenirs et fatigant comme un cauchemar." (*O.C.*, I, 1252) Oscar reacts violently to these "dreams" which become increasingly haunting. His first impulse is to flee this phantom of death which stalks his conscience; rather, he resorts to profuse cursing. When Abbé Vécard appears, Oscar shows no surprise, nor feels any regret that the priest has witnessed such a scene. For one who

has carefully guarded his remarks for the sake of image, his outburst is unprecedented in its intensity.

But the disciplined mind of Oscar Thibault will not give way so quickly to utter despair. Oscar makes a conscious effort to accept his confessor's optimistic approach to death. Abbé Vécard's concept of death as a welcomed door to immortality seems at first inviting to the tormented Oscar. Simultaneously his mind reverts to his childhood, to the only acceptable conception of God: the "Bon Jésus" of his childhood devotion. Beyond this naive image of God, Oscar cannot accept the supernatural Being who, through death, delivers man from the suffering and sorrows of mortal life. Life becomes more attractive and desirable as he nears death. He whose life has centered around materialistic attainment cannot conceive of, nor envy, any future without "things." Even as the priest endeavors to paint a tempting picture of the life hereafter, Oscar's mind is clinging tenaciously to his material possessions:

Puis, lentement, ses yeux firent le tour de la chambre, se posèrent sur tous ces objets qu'il distinguait si bien malgré l'ombre, et qui étaient siens, et que, depuis tant d'années, il avait vus, chaque jour, et chaque jour possédés.

"Quitter tout ça!" murmura-t-il. "Je ne veux pas!" (O.C., I, 1258)

Oscar is becoming increasingly aware of death as an end to all the things he has labored so diligently to possess. This inward struggle renders him intolerant of the calm indifference of his confessor toward his death. The pitiful cry, "Oh là, là... J'ai peur..." (O.C., I, 1255), soon gives way to anger and contempt in a vehement denunciation: "Les scélérats! Les salauds! ...Et vous, vos histoires! Assez!...Je vais ...mourir, je vous dis! Au

secours!" (O.C., I, 1256) But the help Oscar wants so desperately is that which the priest cannot give. At Abbé Vécard's insistence that he seek God's help, Oscar responds with bitterness: "Dieu? Quoi? Quelle aide? C'est idiot, à la fin! Est-ce que ce n'est pas Lui, justement? Est-ce que ce n'est pas Lui qui veut?" (O.C., I, 1257) Incapable of believing that God can save him from death, Oscar implies that his death has been decreed by God. Further, when he diligently seeks to find consolation in the thought of this superior Being, he realizes the emptiness of his religious values. Thoughts of God and his "other world" have no meaning for this earth-bound creature: "La Vie éternelle, la Grâce, Dieu,—langage devenu inintelligible: vocables vides, sans mesure avec la terrifiante réalité!" (Ibid.) Suddenly aware of the inadequacy of his life of religious piety and good works, Oscar relinquishes in one moment the image he has worked a lifetime to create: "Taisez-vous, donc! Un chrétien? Non. Je ne suis pas un chrétien. Toute ma vie, je...j'ai voulu.... L'amour du prochain? Taisez-vous!" (O.C., I, 1260) This honest confession opens the way for additional soul-searching. But Oscar's confession of sins is not made to the priest; rather it is an "inward" confession, relayed by the author:

Il avait trompé là-dessus tout le monde. Et l'abbé. Et lui-même, presque toujours. En réalité, il avait tout sacrifié à la considération des hommes. Il n'avait eu que des sentiments bas, bas, bas—et qu'il avait cachés! Égoïsme, vanité! Soif d'être riche, de commander! Étalage de bienfaisance, pour être honoré, pour jouer un rôle! Impureté, faux-semblant,...mensonge!... Ah, ce qu'elle lui faisait honte, son existence d'homme de bien! (Ibid.)

Deprived now of religion, one of the mainstays of his life, Oscar experiences the heavy weight of absolute solitude: "Être seul, exclu de l'univers.

Seul, avec son effroi! Toucher le fond de la solitude absolue!" (O.C., I, 1257)

Ironically, Oscar Thibault has always been alone without being aware of it. Because of his arrogance, pride, and self-will, he has driven away those who might have been close friends. But it is not until he honestly faces up to his pharisaical pride and lack of love that he feels the impact of his deep loneliness. Obsessed by his isolation, Oscar's mind entertains metaphysical sensations, providing respite for the dying man's anguish and fear. It is only during these experiences of "other-world-ness" that he can free himself from the dread of his approaching death, and hope for a future world. Abbé Vécard initiates the first occurrence of this feeling of peace: "Non seulement il n'avait plus peur de mourir, mais ce qui l'inquiétait, à cette minute, c'était d'avoir encore à vivre, si peu que ce fût." (O.C., I, 1264-65) Mortal life becomes so distant that it takes on an air of unreality for Oscar: "L'air du monde ne lui était plus respirable...ses forces lui paraissaient dissociées, éparses et pour ainsi dire gisantes autour de lui. Qu'importait? Il ne leur appartenait déjà plus: elles étaient les débris d'un personnage planétaire..." (O.C., I, 1265) These "moments privilégiés" which release Oscar from a world consisting only of physical pain and mental anguish are eagerly anticipated. Within this exhilarating world of the unknown, he has no fear of death; he travels beyond the limits of death:

La vie continuait sans lui, comme continue à couler la rivière pour le baigneur qui a gagné la berge. Et il se trouvait non seulement hors de la vie, mais déjà presque hors de la mort: il s'élevait dans un ciel baigné de lumière surnaturelle comme certains firmaments d'été. (O.C., I, 1266)

Brief as the metaphysical experiences are, they seem to have a lasting effect on Oscar's attitude toward death. No longer is he deceived by the ingenious lies which have hitherto concealed from him the hopelessness of his condition. He has seen through the masks of those taking care of him, and realizes the farce played for his benefit. The "haut point" of Oscar's lucidity regarding death is reached when he can finally accept his own death with an air of indifference: "Impossible de rien croire... Au reste, que lui importait? Tout lui était égal: définitivement, totalement égal." (Q.C., I, 1267)

Ultimately Oscar's thoughts return to his total solitude, but instead of fear, there is almost a sensation of welcome for this isolation: "Il était seul. Seul avec Dieu. Et tellement seul, que la présence de Dieu même n'avait pas raison de cette solitude!... Il n'avait plus souci de distinguer la réalité du rêve. Il baignait dans une paix musicale." (Ibid.) It is as though he already belongs to another world—a world of peace and mystic excitement.

But this tranquility of soul will not continue to soothe the dying man. He who has dreamed of "dying like a saint," becomes subject to one physical and mental crisis after another, stripping him of all human dignity which remains to him. As his physical body rapidly degenerates, so does his ability to hold to reality. The conscious and the subconscious fight an almost constant duel, the latter gradually claiming victory. It is perhaps due to this state of affairs that Antoine finally resorts to mercy-killing. His decision is made after witnessing a humiliating scene:

Tout à coup, le vieillard émit un petit rire, étrangement net, enfantin... Ses yeux restaient clos. Alors, assez distinctement mais d'une voix que ses hurlements avaient éraillée, il chantonna encore une fois ce refrain de son enfance, que Mademoiselle lui avait ré-
appris:

Hop! Hop! Trilby trottime!
Hop! Vite! Au rendez-vous!
(Q.C., I, 1283)

In another context this scene might be comical, but under the circumstances it produces no laughter from either those attending Oscar or from the reader. Oscar's sons feel only embarrassment and shame at his childish exhibition, while the reader must feel pity for this helpless victim.

Oscar Thibault will die reconciled, but not the serene death he had hoped for. His death is preceded by screams of anguish and pain which betray the broken creature. In no way can the death of Oscar Thibault compare with the "grand bourgeois" life he had established for himself. Degeneration of his mental and physical abilities, along with a growing awareness of the disintegration of bourgeois values, result in a completely different Oscar Thibault. The mask he wore in health has been dropped and he is left without any covering for his hypocritical life.

Martin du Gard's portrayal of Oscar's death in La Mort du Père has been likened to Leo Tolstoy's short story, The Death of Ivan Ilych. Denis Boak observed: "...the intense psychological analysis of the idea of death; from the point of view of the dying man as well as of outsiders, is common to both."¹⁵ Several critics have noted the unmistakable similarity in the two

¹⁵Denis Boak, Roger Martin du Gard (Oxford, 1963), p. 91.

authors' presentations of death. But whether or not the similarities between the two are intentional, they are enough to merit comparison. An analysis of the death of Ivan Ilych should prove helpful in understanding the psychological crisis experienced by Oscar Thibault.

Ivan Ilych is an influential judge whose extended illness produces a psychological crisis. Noticeable changes occur in the good-natured, well-liked Russian leader. Without being able to prevent these changes, he becomes an irritable, selfish man who will drive away his family and reject their efforts of solace:

...and Ivan Ilych was left alone with the consciousness that his life was poisoned; and was poisoning the lives of others, and that this poison did not weaken but penetrated more and more deeply into his whole being.... And he had to live there all alone on the brink of an abyss, with no one who understood or pitied him.¹⁶

This craving for pity and understanding, though perhaps universal to all who face a harrowing death, seems especially strong in Ivan's case:

At certain moments after prolonged suffering he wished most of all...for someone to pity him as a sick child is pitied. He longed to be petted and comforted. He knew he was an important functionary, that he had a beard turning grey, and that therefore what he longed for was impossible, but still he longed for it. (DII, 138)

Ivan's illness exposes the insecurity he feels when facing such overwhelming reality. His pitiful but irreversible plight causes him to make desperate attempts to dispute the fact of his fatal illness. However, all his efforts to dispel the growing sense of fear cannot erase the constant pain, the bitter taste in his mouth, and an awareness of his fate. The idea of death

¹⁶Leo Tolstoy, The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories, Aylmer Maude and J. D. Duff, trans. (New York, 1960), pp. 126-27. Hereafter cited as DII in the text.

introduces disconcerting questions: "When I am not, what will there be? There will be nothing— Then where shall I be when I am no more? Can this be dying? No, I don't want to!" (DII, 130) Realizing his helplessness to prevent his death, "Anger choked him and he was agonizingly, unbearably miserable. 'It is impossible that all men have been doomed to suffer this awful horror!'" (Ibid.) Existing with this horrible fact foremost in his thoughts produces a life-and-death struggle for understanding of his fate: "In the depth of his heart he knew he was dying, but not only was he not accustomed to the thought, he simply did not and could not grasp it." (DII, 131) Ivan is unwilling to release his grasp on the tangible, material society to which he belongs and contributes.

Ivan's internal struggle succeeds in commanding his thoughts and he finds himself increasingly haunted by a phantom of death which surrounds him:

It would come and stand before him and look at him...and he would again begin asking himself whether It alone was true.... And what was worst of all was that It drew his attention to itself not in order to make him take some action but only that he should look at It, look it straight in the face: look at it and without doing anything, suffer inexpressibly. (DII, 133)

Unable to dismiss this ever-present Thing from his moments of consciousness and subconsciousness, Ivan's mental ability to stave off the dreaded idea decreases rapidly. He becomes more aware of his utter solitude and of his impending doom: "Left alone Ivan Ilych groaned not so much with pain...as from mental anguish. Always and forever the same, always those endless days and nights. If only it would come quicker! If only what would come quicker? Death, darkness...No, no! Anything rather than death!" (DII, 140) This

abhorrence of the reality of death is almost equaled by Ivan's feeling toward the deception maintained by the members of his household:

This deception tortured him—their not wishing to admit what they all knew and what he knew, but wanting to lie to him concerning his terrible condition, and wishing and forcing him to participate in that lie. Those lies—lies enacted over him on the eve of his death and destined to degrade this awful solemn act to the level of their visitings, their curtains, their sturgeon for dinner—were a terrible agony for Ivan Ilych. (DII, 137)

Ivan yearns for the assurance that his death will have significant impact upon those about him. What he really seeks is a purpose for his death, but he fails to find one. As a result, a cloak of despair settles on the sick man:

Always the same. Now a spark of hope flashes up, then a sea of despair rages, and always pain; always pain, always despair, and always the same. When alone he had a dreadful desire to call someone, but he knew beforehand that with others present it would be still worse. (DII, 140)

Facing the new experience of metaphysical solitude, Ivan is forced to admit his inability to find solace in a supernatural Being: "He wept on account of his helplessness, his terrible loneliness, the cruelty of man, the cruelty of God, and the absence of God." (DII, 146) With neither mortal man nor God to dispel his solitude, Ivan wrestles with the weighty problem of existence. He searches for some meaning to his death but can find none: "And whenever the thought occurred to him, as it often did, that it all resulted from his not having lived as he ought to have done, he at once recalled the correctness of his whole life and dismissed so strange an idea." (DII, 148)

But doubt soon conquers Ivan's smug assurance of his well-ordered life. He is seized with an insatiable desire to understand the meaning of his life

and approaching death. His total case of self-justification falls apart before the minute scrutiny of introspection. Left defenseless, Ivan submits to his wife's insistence that he make confession and receive the sacrament from their priest. Although this religious rite brings temporary comfort, Ivan does not receive the consoling force needed to calm his tormented mind.

When Ivan Ilych arrives at the brink of death, he enters a three-day period of almost constant screaming. Succumbing to the world of the subconscious, he wrestles "in that black sack into which he was being thrust by an invisible, resistless force. He struggled as a man condemned to death struggles in the hands of the executioner, knowing he cannot save himself." (DII, 154) But Ivan does save himself in the sense that he redeems himself in the eyes of his family and his God: "With a look at his wife he indicated his son and said: 'Take him away...sorry for him...sorry for you too...'. He tried to add, 'forgive me', but said 'forego' and waved his hand, knowing that He whose understanding mattered would understand." (DII, 155) Reconciled at last, Ivan concentrates on his final act which will release his family and free himself: the act of dying. Finding a real purpose in his death, Ivan suddenly is aware that all anguish has disappeared. Death has lost its terror:

And death...where is it?
 He sought his former accustomed fear of death and did not find it
 ...There was no fear because there was no death.
 In place of death there was light.
 "So that's what it is!" he suddenly exclaimed..."What joy!" (DII,
 155-56)

Such a miraculous transformation from a state of fear and dread to exhilaration in the face of death seems a little implausible. And his dying thought:

"Death is finished... It is no more!" (DII, 156), takes on an air of rhetorical eloquence which makes one almost forget the long hours of agony and anguish this man has endured. However, to those watching by his bedside, Ivan Ilych dies a horrible, agonizing death, gasping for breath.

The Death of Ivan Ilych was written by an author whose influence on Roger Martin du Gard is well established. This particular story by Tolstoy offers a point of close comparison which is very useful in identifying the various stages of the psychological crisis of death. In the case of Ivan Ilych, as well as Oscar Thibault, there is significant degeneration of the mental faculties. Both undergo crises which reduce them from proud, influential men to empty-handed, embittered victims of death until the last few moments. There is strong resemblance in the fear which paralyzes these two invalids and produces doubt, suspicion of the affections of others, and the frightening sensation of solitude. Both struggle helplessly against the relentless enemy of life, knowing their struggle is in vain, yet driven to fight until they can no more. The inherent desire to live wars constantly with the inevitability of death. The two become more dependent on others; not only in the expected physical sense, but also for moral support. As aging, shriveling, unloved men who face an inexpressible fate, they reach out in search of human compassion: Oscar to Antoine and Ivan to his servant, Gerasim.

Religion seems to have the same effect on both, even though their religious backgrounds are so different. Oscar's religion has been no more than a stimulant for his good works, with Ivan's concept of religion also relating

to living "a good life." They both have depended upon their exemplary conduct to assure them of an acceptable fate. But their first reaction toward religious acceptance of death is a feeling of disillusionment. Neither finds in his "faith" the panacea he expected. However, both are ultimately reconciled to death and welcome its arrival.

Oscar Thibault and Ivan Ilych experience the psychological crisis of death which completely reverses their former conceptions of the total meaning of life. For it is only through dying that they are able to see themselves for what they really are and to understand the purpose of their existence.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEATHS OF JACQUES AND ANTOINE THIBAULT

To fully comprehend the meaning of death for Oscar Thibault, one must be familiar with the deaths of his two sons, Jacques and Antoine. The measure of a man's worldly success or failure largely remains in the hands of his offspring. What Jacques and Antoine do with their heritage determines largely the extent of their father's influence. And the way each son faces death indicates acceptance or rejection of values taught in their formative years.

Jacques, Oscar's youngest son, has always been possessed with an unnatural fear of death. Images of the dead he has seen, both human and animal, stamp themselves indelibly upon his mind: the naked, distended body of an Italian suicide victim, the dead horse in Marseilles, the slain dog in the streets of Paris, and the corpse of his own father. Jacques is not only unusually affected by the visual, physical appearance of death, but is haunted by the idea of suicide. He flippantly uses the phrase "Je vais me tuer" in order to coerce Daniel to follow his suggestions. Much later he will hurl the same desperate threat at his father when he abandons home for his life of freedom. Finally, this obsession will cause him to choose suicide as the manner of his own death.

In his life and death, Jacques Thibault symbolizes the romantic idealism of pre-war France. In spite of the social orientation of his life—a result

both of his bourgeois training and, more importantly, of his dedication to socialist ideals—Jacques depicts the individual search for life's meaning. Like Michel in Gide's L'Immoraliste, Jacques rejects all established moral values in order to become an "être authentique." He is a natural rebel, characterized by solitude, the inevitable trait of individualism. In the eyes of his contemporaries, he has an exciting life of travel, association with leaders of the socialist movement, and involvement in a cause. But these privileges cannot erase the feeling of loneliness and "dépaysement" which follows Jacques to his death.

Death to Jacques is almost synonymous with war. As a faithful disciple of the Socialist doctrine, he fights for its pacifist position. When the organization fails to prevent war, his idealism is badly shaken, but he maintains his personal conviction against participation in war: "Plutôt mourir que d'accepter ce que je désapprouve de toute mon âme! Plutôt mourir que ce reniement!" (O.C., II, 619) Having made such a declaration of commitment, there remains only one course of action for Jacques—to die for his cause.

In order to redeem himself and make one last effort to save the Socialist anti-war cause, Jacques chooses to sacrifice his life. He is convinced of the power of the individual act of courage and faith; not only as it serves one's own need, but also in its universal significance: "La guerre, jugulée peut-être... La révolte, la fraternisation, l'armistice!... Etre fidèle... Fidèle, et utile... Utile, enfin! Racheter ma vie, l'inutilité de ma vie... Et trouver la grande paix...." (O.C., II, 715) Thus does Jacques

hope to reconcile himself with his ideal and to prove himself to those he loves.

In spite of Jacques' idealism, his "acte exemplaire" fails to achieve its purpose. Just when it seems that Jacques will succeed in making his mark on the future, his mission is a complete failure. Along with Meynestral, his socialist "father" and friend, Jacques meets death without accomplishing any of his mission. All the pacifist pamphlets intended for soldiers on the battlefields, are burned in the charred ruins of their small plane. Jacques faces a horrible death of excruciating pain, unable even to identify himself as an ally to the French soldiers who find him on the battlefield. Mental anguish accompanied with unspeakable physical agony torture him constantly:

Surtout, il est sans forces. Sans forces pour penser, pour sortir de son engourdissement. La gorge irritée par la poussière, les gencives desséchées par la fièvre, par la soif, la langue en sang, il est perdu dans ce piétinement innombrable, dans ce bruit d'armée en marche, perdu et seul, coupé de tout, de la vie, de la mort. (Q.C., II, 738)

Tormented physically and mentally, Jacques gradually understands that he will even be deprived of a spy's trial and execution. His hope of testifying for the socialist cause vanishes and totally alone, totally disillusioned, he waits for death: "La main fine; la main nerveuse de Meynestral, noircit, se recroqueville à vue d'oeil, devient une patte de poule, calcinée... Les tracts! Tous brûlés, perdus... Mourir... Mourir." (Q.C., II, 742) But death is in no hurry to deliver Jacques, subjecting him instead to physical torture and to the abusive, undeserved accusations of the French soldiers: "Un espion...un alboche..." Les mots courent de bouche en bouche. Autour de Jacques,

le cercle se resserre, hostile, menaçant. Il est seul, ligoté, sans défense. Il détourne les yeux. Une brûlure à la joue le fait tressaillir. On ricane." (O.C., II, 747) Jacques, a self-appointed hero of the socialist movement, is condemned to endure in silent humiliation the injustices paid him. Finally, after endless hours of agony, after being deprived of a stretcher for his mangled body, death brings release: "Un froid soudain, un froid qui vient des jambes, monte, avec une lenteur, mortelle, jusqu'au coeur." (O.C., II, 757) Jacques is mercifully spared the final act of cruelty committed against him, for he does not feel his executioner's bullet which labels him as a spy and traitor to his own country.

The death of Jacques Thibault fails to have universal significance except in a negative sense. His death exemplifies the failure of the individual effort against society, and in this case, the futility of man's efforts to combat the machinery of war.

Antoine also is "committed" to a social cause by virtue of his profession. However, whereas Jacques' dedication is to an idealistic philosophy, Antoine's life centers on spontaneous action. He has formed his philosophy of life upon personal freedom without thought of its effect on humanity: "Eh bien! Vivre, c'est agir, après tout! Ca n'est pas philosopher... Méditer sur la vie? A quoi bon? Faire son travail proprement,...et laisser la vie courir!" (O.C., II, 146-47) This selfish detachment from society is abruptly dissolved by the onset of World War I. Interrupted from his organized life, Antoine must leave all that is dear to him and enter the war. Two years later, while searching for wounded soldiers, he becomes victim of the effects of mustard gas which result in fatal injury to his lungs.

Confined to a hospital in southern France, Antoine still possesses his zest for living a useful life. He determines to be the conqueror, not a victim of his malady, by writing a case history of his illness and compiling data he had collected during his fifteen years in medicine.

Antoine's natural optimism meets the ultimate test when he returns to Paris for the funeral of one of his former servants. In Paris he pays a visit to his former medical advisor and co-worker, Philip. This visit marks the turning point of Antoine's condition following Philip's examination:

Et soudain, sur ce visage dont il avait, en dix années de collaboration, appris à déchiffrer les moindres nuances, dans les petits yeux gris, clignotants derrière le lorgnon, il surprit l'aveu involontaire: une intense pitié. Ce fut comme un verdict: ..."Tu n'échapperas pas, tu es perdu!" (O.C., II, 902)

No longer can Antoine ignore the awful truth. There remains the fearful task of finding an acceptable approach to his own death. For one accustomed to the sight of suffering humanity and the death of others, who has always maintained an air of indifference toward death, Antoine's immediate reaction is one of bewildered terror. Fleeing Philip's presence, alone in the Paris streets, he is overcome by a yearning for pity. For the first time in his life he is conscious of his own loneliness:

...il réfléchit à cette chose inexplicable: pas un ami! Il s'était toujours montré sociable, obligéant; il s'était acquis l'attachement de tous Ses malades; il avait toujours eu la sympathie de ses camarades, la confiance de ses maîtres; il avait été violemment aimé par quelques femmes—mais il n'avait pas un seul ami! Il n'en avait jamais eu! Jacques lui-même.... (O.C., II, 907)

As the weight of the hopelessness of his physical condition bears down upon him, Antoine realizes that his only salvation is to arm himself with a convincing

philosophy. He is determined to conquer the fear of death and all its accompanying "ghosts" and thereby recover his optimistic attitude. This intense struggle for such assurance passes through many stages of upheaval which even his rationalism cannot explain:

Ce calme relatif devant la fatalité...je ne l'ai pas atteint sans traverser une effroyable révolution intérieure.

Pendant des jours, d'interminables nuits d'insomnie, j'ai vécu au fond d'un gouffre. Les tortures de l'enfer... Comment la raison résiste-t-elle? Et par quel mystérieux cheminement finit-on par dépasser ce paroxysme de détresse et de révolte, pour parvenir à cette espèce d'acceptation? (O.C., II, 911-12)

Antoine finds himself fostering the hope that his scientific philosophy of life may prove sufficient in his time of personal crisis. He endeavors to achieve a state of apathy which will enable him to be resigned to his own death. However, such a state is not quite so easy to accomplish for a man preoccupied with living. He has always been surrounded by men of purpose with definite goals in sight. It is understandable that he will not succumb to an attitude of indifference in the face of death. Instead, Antoine resolves to make a mental inspection of his life thus far and of the possibilities for the future. This decision is based partly on his habit of organization and partly because, as he admits to Jenny Fontanin: "Quand on a été passionnément épris de la vie, on ne s'en détache pas facilement...et moins encore si l'on sent qu'elle échappe... Même chez un condamné, un mort en sursis, il y a un tel appétit de projets, d'espérances!" (O.C., II, 913)

This project to which he refers will be his last: organizing his death. Fully aware that he can never recover from his illness, he nevertheless cannot willingly submit to death:

Au cours de la guerre, je n'ai pas un seul jour accepté de mourir. Pas une seule fois, fût-ce durant dix secondes, je n'ai fait le sacrifice de ma peau. Et de même, maintenant: je me refuse au sacrifice. Je ne peux plus me faire d'illusions, je suis bien obligé de constater, d'attendre l'irréremédiable; mais je ne peux pas consentir ni être complice par la résignation. (O.C., II, 919-20)

This inner compelling force which forbids resignation, acts as a creative instrument in Antoine's plan for his death. The focal point of Antoine's organized death is Jean-Paul, the illegitimate son of Jacques and Jenny. This child takes first place in Antoine's plans and thoughts, for he is the only one who may possibly succeed where his ancestors have failed:

Quel miracle—pas d'autre mot—que l'apparition de cet enfant à l'instant précis où les deux lignées dont il sort, Fontanin et Thibault, allaient s'éteindre sans avoir rien donné qui vaille!

...Est-ce fou d'imaginer que ça répond à quelque chose, à quelque dessein de la création? Orgueil familial, peut-être. Et pourquoi cet enfant ne serait-il pas le prédestiné? l'aboutissement de l'obscur effort de la race pour fabriquer un type parfait de l'espèce Thibault? le génie que la nature se doit de réussir un jour, et dont nous n'étions, mon père, mon frère et moi, que les ébauches? Cette violence concentrée, cette puissance, qui étaient déjà en nous avant d'être en lui, pourquoi ne s'épanouiraient-elles pas, cette fois, en force vraiment créatrice? (O.C., II, 920-21)

Antoine is willing to entrust all that the Thibault name has ever represented to the one remaining heir. At first this appears to be a highly irrational decision for a logical, intelligent man to make. On the other hand, when one considers Antoine's alternatives, he seems to have no other choice. He has always acted with concrete, realizable goals in view. As he faces death, this habit is reinforced. The need for an ideal, a hope, a reason for having lived, intensifies. Antoine has no other object upon which to devote his attention, to leave what possessions he owns, and upon which to attach his name.

He seems obsessed, like his father, by the desire to live on after death.

His only way to accomplish this is through his nephew, Jean-Paul:

Cette vitalité d'autrefois—cette activité que je mettais à entreprendre, ce perpétuel rebondissement,—je l'attribue en grande partie au besoin que j'avais de me prolonger par la création: de "survivre." Terreur instinctive de disparaître... Chez moi, trait héréditaire... Besoin superbe de lutter contre l'effacement, de laisser son empreinte... Moi aussi, secret espoir d'attacher mon nom à une oeuvre qui me prolonge, à une découverte, etc. (O.C., II, 921)

Jean-Paul is this "oeuvre", the one to whom Antoine's diary is addressed, and the beneficiary of Antoine's discoveries during his self-analysis.

Antoine's lingering illness provides ample time for a steady evolution of lucidity with regard to himself, his life, and death. Certainly of major value to his new self-conception is the discovery of his place in the universe:

Je sais bien où seraient la raison, la sagesse, où serait la dignité: pouvoir de nouveau considérer le monde et son incessant devenir, en lui-même. Non plus à travers moi et cette mort prochaine. Me dire que je suis une parcelle insignifiante de l'univers. Parcelle gâchée. Tant pis. Qu'est-ce, en comparaison du reste, qui continuera après moi?...Insignifiante, oui, mais j'y attachais tant de prix! (O.C., II, 920)

The discovery of his own unimportance consequently results in his elevation of the importance of others. He who has never attached himself unreservedly to anyone is suddenly aware of a feeling akin to brotherhood toward the men around him who await his same fate:

D'où vient que cette sensation d'isolement peut fondre soudain, céder la place à un élan de fraternité, presque de tendresse, pour peu que je surprenne l'un d'entre eux au coeur de sa solitude? Tant de fois, il m'a suffi d'apercevoir...un voisin d'étage en train de faire un de ces humbles gestes auxquels on ne s'abandonne que si l'on est assuré d'être seul (penché sur une photo subrepticement tirée d'une poche; ou se signant avant de se mettre au lit; ou, moins encore:

souriant à une pensée secrète, d'un air vaguement égaré)—pour découvrir aussitôt en lui le prochain, le semblable, un pareil à moi, dont, une minute, je rêve de faire mon ami! (O.C., II, 937)

The maturation of Antoine's awareness is unmistakable—from an attitude of unconcern about others, he has become a perceptive individual genuinely interested in others. One has only to recall Antoine's former philosophy to realize the radical transformation. This is how Martin du Gard had explained his philosophy: "La vie...c'était avant tout un large espace découvert où les gens actifs comme lui n'avaient qu'à s'élaner avec entrain; et, quand il disait: aimer la vie, il voulait dire: s'aimer soi-même, croire en soi." (O.C., I, 1129)

War, sickness, and certain death have made the difference in Antoine's attitude toward life. No longer able to believe solely in himself, he faces death with the desire, perhaps universal, to believe in Someone. But this craving does not produce a faith by which he can reach any supernatural being: "Aucun Dieu n'a jamais répondu aux appels, aux interrogations de l'homme. Ce qu'il prend pour des réponses, c'est seulement l'écho de sa voix. Son univers est clos, limité à lui." (O.C., II, 971) Faced with no other support than himself, and convinced that death is simply non-existence, Antoine continues to search for a reason for having lived. This question is his "ghost" which refuses to leave without a satisfactory answer:

Impossible de se débarrasser intégralement de la question oiseuse: "Quelle peut être la signification de la vie?" Moi-même, en ruminant mon passé, je me surprends souvent à me demander: "A quoi ça rime?"
A rien. A rien du tout. On éprouve quelque peine à accepter ça, parce qu'on a dix-huit siècles de christianisme dans les moelles. Mais plus on réfléchit, plus on a regardé autour de soi, en soi, et plus on est pénétré par cette vérité évidente: "Ça ne rime à rien..." Et rien

n'a d'importance si ce n'est de s'efforcer à être le moins malheureux possible au cours de cette éphémère villégiature.... (O.C., II, 987-88)

The conclusions reached by Antoine fall considerably short of his former optimism about the worth of man. He seems to be approaching a state of indifference, of the "tout m'est égal" attitude of Oscar.

But such is not the case with Antoine. Lucid enough to accept his death and to "plan" it with the help of a simple injection, Antoine, through his diary, transmits his hope to Jean-Paul:

"Au nom de quoi vivre, travailler, donner son maximum?" Au nom du passé et de l'avenir. Au nom de ton père et de tes fils, au nom du maillon que tu es dans la chaîne... Assurer la continuité... Transmettre ce qu'on a reçu—le transmettre amélioré, enrichi.

Et c'est peut-être ça, notre raison d'être? (O.C., II, 989)

Antoine's message of hope is to Jean-Paul, offspring of a Protestant-Catholic union, who becomes a symbol of the post-war generation in France.

Antoine dies on November 18, 1918, at the end of World War I. His death, like that of his father, will mark the end of an era and the rise of a new generation. For Camus, the major significance of Antoine's death is that "Une société va mourir avec lui, aussi bien; mais la question est de savoir ce qui, par un individu généreux, peut se transmettre de l'ancien monde au nouveau...." (O.C., I, xxvi) While Antoine's death signifies a greater collective death, it also implies future possibilities and potentialities.

Although the crises Antoine faces during his illness may seem altogether different from those which Jacques and Oscar experience, there are several parallels which need to be drawn in order to give proper perspective to each individual death.

One needs to remember the forces of motivation during the lives of Oscar and his sons to understand the consequences of their deaths. Oscar was directed by tradition, Jacques by idealism, and Antoine by logic. Death renders inadequate the first two directives, and necessitates a reassessment of the third.

All three Thibaults manifest a fear of death in varying degrees. Oscar experiences this fear only after realizing his irreversible physical condition. Jacques is haunted by the idea of death to such an extent that it overshadows his personal relationships and shortens his life. Antoine knows the paralyzing sensation of this metaphysical dread just after having read his death sentence in Philip's eyes. But his fear subsides and is quite successfully concealed.

The "phantise" that each experiences to some degree is directly associated with the fear of disappearing from the field of action and being forgotten. Oscar does everything humanly possible to insure a form of earthly immortality by attaching his name to everything he has possessed and controlled. Jacques dies with only faint hopes that his act of courage will not have been in vain; while Antoine's aspirations of outliving himself rest upon Jean-Paul.

There is also a comparison to be made with regard to each one's lucidity toward the meaning of life and death. Oscar has given little thought to man's purpose of existence except in terms of transmitting bourgeois values to the following generation. His rude awakening to the brevity of life begins the process of probing for answers as to its meaning. This soul-searching results

in humiliating discoveries about his true self, and a lowering of his self-esteem. Jacques remains the least "aware" of the three, perhaps because his life is cut off before he has had time to concentrate sufficiently on the problem of life. It seems that he is on the verge of discovering both himself and his world when he impulsively makes the decision which will end his life. Thus Antoine is the one who comes closest to knowing himself, to resolving for himself the weighty questions concerning life and death.

Irony plays a significant part in the deaths of Oscar, Jacques, and Antoine Thibault. In the case of Oscar, death unmaskes the real Mr. Thibault and renders useless all the years of religious piety, strict discipline, and zealous works performed by the Thibault father.

The irony of Jacques' death lies in the futility of his sacrifice. The courageous act which is to make his life meaningful ends in pathetic failure, and negates all his idealistic dreams of self-fulfillment.

Antoine's death is also ironical by virtue of the fact that he succeeds in understanding his reason for living, only to be forced to relinquish his life.

The deaths of Oscar, Jacques, and Antoine are ultimately, humanly induced; that of Oscar and Antoine by an injection, that of Jacques by willful choice. Yet each one of the three, in different ways, and with different consequences, experiences death as a psychological crisis. Oscar is brought face-to-face with his disagreeable image, but is unable to do much to change that image except to attempt a last-minute hold on his religious faith. Jacques dies without really understanding himself, while Antoine's psychological crisis effects significant changes in his values and his total outlook on life.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

From the first volume of Les Thibault, Le Cahier gris, to the conclusion of L'Épilogue, there is a steadily increasing preoccupation with the theme of death. The first three volumes introduce the theme with the deaths of a few minor characters and some animals. The main characters are given the opportunity to react generally to the idea of death. For the most part, there is either complete refusal to consider the subject, or a stoic indifference toward it.

La Belle Saison, probably the most optimistic of the volumes of Les Thibault, nevertheless is a foreshadowing of the obsession with death which is to follow. The themes of sex and death are linked in this section which treats the budding romance between Jacques and Jenny, as well as Antoine's romantic affairs. The accidental death of a dog—a very minor incident—is significant because it results in the first intimate conversation between Jacques and Jenny. This relationship will ultimately carry the sex-death theme to a completed cycle in L'Été 1914: sexual union—Jacques' death—procreation.

In the case of Antoine, the sex-death theme is suggested rather than explicitly treated. Antoine's only satisfactory love affair ends in separation and on a fatal note. Rachel leaves Antoine to ponder the puzzling mystery of her despair: "J'ai pensé me tuer... Oui; en finir! Le suicide, seul issu à de telles angoisses. Un suicide sans préméditation, presque

sans consentement, simplement pour échapper, n'importe comment, avant qu'elle ait atteint son paroxysme, à cette souffrance dont l'état se resserre!" (O.C., I, 1050) For the first time, Antoine gives serious thought to suicide as a method of escape from life. The incident seems to purposely occur at the end of the third volume of Martin du Gard's "roman-fleuve." It signifies that the "belle saison" has literally ended for the Thibault family.

In the following volume, La Consultation, the theme of death is brought to the foreground. This volume narrates a day in the professional life of Antoine and provides a logical approach to the illness of his father, Oscar. Antoine's close association with illness and death has rendered him almost immune to any emotion except indifference toward this natural phenomenon of life. Only momentarily is he disturbed as he views senseless suffering and death, especially among the children to whom he has devoted his medical career. He is revolted by the injustice which fate deals to mankind.

Volumes four and five of Les Thibault gradually intensify the preoccupation with death. La Sorellina serves a dual purpose: the major crisis of Oscar's illness along with his acknowledgment that he is going to die, and the successful search for Jacques, the Thibault fugitive. With his return, Oscar's slow, agonizing death will be witnessed by the entire Thibault household in La Mort du Père. As he views the corpse of his father, Antoine feels a sense of despair at the destructive force of death. Death is beginning to have a personal meaning for him: "...au fond, la mort seule existe: elle réfute tout, elle dépasse tout...absurdement!" (O.C., I, 1305) Antoine's

expression of uneasiness illustrates the mood which will dominate the remainder of the novel.

While La Sorellina and La Mort du Père are restricted to the individual death of Oscar Thibault, L'Été 1914 broadens the scope of this theme. As a river relinquishes its individual characteristics upon emptying into the ocean, so does individual death as it is lost in the countless deaths of humanity. In this long, penultimate volume, death is associated primarily with war. The unpreventable World War I sweeps the Thibault family, along with Europe, into a period of unprecedented death. Within this universal sweep of death, however, the author deals specifically with two individual deaths of main characters. Jérôme Fontanin, father of Daniel and Jenny, commits suicide. And with the conclusion of L'Été 1914, Jacques' horrible death again focuses the theme on an individual level. This in turn prepares for the final individual death in Les Thibault: the death of Antoine.

L'Épilogue begins and ends with death—from the death of Mademoiselle de Waize, Antoine's former housekeeper—to his own. This last volume is divided into two sections: the first, a narrative account of Antoine's illness, followed by his personal journal kept until the date of his death. L'Épilogue contains the most thorough self-analysis of any of the characters in Les Thibault who are confronted with the inevitability of death.

The theme of death is the connecting thread which winds through the entire novel. It links the characters, the social and political events, and is the principal reality of Martin du Gard's masterpiece. Melvin Gallant points out that "tous les autres thèmes, tels la religion, l'affranchissement,

la maladie, l'amour, la souffrance, sont conditionnés par la mort."¹⁷ This assessment seems to be valid when one considers the fearful power death wields in the course of the lives of Martin du Gard's main characters. Death in Les Thibault is like a plague which encompasses not only individuals and individual families, but communities as well; in this particular case, most of the Western World. This death threatens to destroy not only human lives, but complete systems of morals and ideals.

Martin du Gard, with deep sensitivity and understanding of human nature, explores extensively individual reactions in the face of death. He does this by means of a psychological analysis of the characters involved. Maintaining for the most part a neutral omniscience, the author presents the death crises of his main characters either through the words and thoughts of witnesses, or directly from the character himself. The reader knows the psychological crises experienced by Oscar primarily through accounts of the witnesses. Jacques' encounter with death, though narrated, discloses the personal sensations, reactions, and thoughts of this suicide victim. But it is in the detailed analysis of Antoine's death that the reader becomes witness to the physical-mental examination. Antoine's death assumes a more personal, realistic quality since it is told in the first person. His intense desire to know himself and to justify his own existence gives lasting relevance to Martin du Gard's treatment of this essential problem of the human condition. Death without significance is the disturbing factor with which Camus and Sartre will struggle in their efforts to develop meaningful approaches

¹⁷Gallant, pp. 11-12.

to man's existence. And while Martin du Gard points out that death, to a large measure, does rob existence of its meaning, he offers guarded hope. Although Les Thibault is essentially pessimistic in its outlook, it ends on an optimistic note. Significantly completing his novel with the name "Jean-Paul", Martin du Gard projects the idea that humanity somehow carries on in spite of this omnipresent threat of death.

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