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CHAPTER NINE

The Figure of the Mother in May Fools, *Au revoir les enfants and* Murmur of the Heart

Justine Malle

> 'If I dared, I'd say my mother may be the most important person of my life.'
> – Louis Malle, *Parlez-moi d'elle*

Though it may have occupied a very important place in Louis Malle's work as well as in his life, the figure of the mother has not been explored critically. Is it one of those themes that are so obvious one no longer sees them? Is it that it weaves together the author's life and his work in too mechanical a way? A radio interview Malle gave in 1993 about his mother prompted me to investigate the way he represents her in three of his 'autobiographical' films where the figure in question plays a central part: *Milou en mai* (*May Fools*, 1989), *Le Souffle au cœur* (*Murmur of the Heart*, 1971) and *Au revoir les enfants* (1987). I discovered that there was a real opposition between the director's real mother, Françoise Malle, who was very much attached to a system of values that her son rejected early on, and the way she is portrayed in these films. In all three of them, even when she seems like a typical bourgeoise (in *Au revoir les enfants*, for instance), she is still, at heart, a child. Why such a hiatus between the 'biographical' mother and the paradigm of anti-conformism the mother incarnates in these films?

Three Autobiographical Works

Unlike *May Fools*, which its author never claimed to be a reflection of his personal life (despite some strong confessional elements), *Murmur of the Heart* and *Au revoir les enfants* clearly belong to an autobiographical vein.

The situation depicted in *Au revoir les enfants* is strictly the one Malle experienced at the time: in 1944, his father was living in the German-occupied north of France

taking care of the family sugar factory, while his mother was in Paris expecting, at 44, her last child. Louis, who had lived with his parents until then, was sent to the same boarding school as his brothers, near Fontainebleau. The headmaster was Père Jacques, a charismatic and spiritually demanding Carmelite who hid Jewish children and men fleeing compulsory work service in Germany. Père Jacques' radical sermon (censuring the wealthy as unfit to enter the kingdom of Heaven) in the presence of the visiting bourgeois parents is a reportedly exact transcription of the one he delivered at the time (see Billard 2003: 473). Malle represents with documentary precision the social group (*la grande bourgeoisie*) that sent their children to this kind of religious institution, the intensity of the cold, the (relative) lack of food, the rigours of the order. Julien Quentin, the main character, is a faithful portrait of the boy Malle himself was: sensitive, smart, curious and feisty. Julien's older brother also has the nonchalance, humour and sense of provocation shared by Malle's two elders, Bernard and Jean-François. Another important biographical element is the class opposition between Joseph, the young servant who is fired because of his black market shenanigans and ends up denouncing the Jewish children to the Gestapo, and the upper-class school kids with whom he deals. The last scene (Père Jacques and the three kids being taken away by the Gestapo) is also rigorously faithful to reality, as asserted in the last sentence of the film ('Forty years later, I can still remember every detail of that January morning'). What is completely fictional, however, in *Au revoir les enfants*, is the increasingly close bond between Julien Quentin and Jean Bonnet, as Malle himself always made clear. In real life, the director observed his new classmate from afar: they were much more rivals than friends.

As for the connection between the story of *Murmur of the Heart* and Malle's life, an anecdote says it all: at the end of the film's screening, his mother famously ran up to him, opening her arms wide and crying out: 'My dear Louis, this brings back so many memories!' which on a film about incest, was, to say the least, malapropos… The premise of the film is meticulously autobiographical: in 1946, when Malle was thirteen (in the film Laurent is fifteen), he started to suffer from a murmur of the heart due to scarlet fever and had to be home-schooled. His mother later spent a month with him at a spa in Burgundy, exactly as in the film. Pierre Billard emphasises the precision with which the family atmosphere and mores are reconstituted (2003: 65–7 and *passim*). Though Paris becomes Dijon, World War II the Indochina War and the sugar dynasty a more modest middle-class milieu (the father is a gynecologist), the film's family is very much like the director's; two provocative siblings who drive their Jesuit teachers crazy and initiate their younger brother into various forms of transgression; an absent, less-than-warm father who is completely outshined by the mother; an Italian nanny. The episode during which the brothers pretend to destroy the family's Corot painting (which they have replaced with a fake) is a true story, except that in Malle's case, it was a Cézanne that his brothers had asked a friend (Ghislain Uhry, painter and artistic consultant on many of Malle's films) to reproduce. Even the reference to Dien Bien Phu is close to home: a Malle cousin had almost died there and it had been a huge shock (see French 1993: 89). Like Julien Quentin, Laurent Chevalier has many traits of the young Louis: a passion for jazz (here Charlie Parker),

an intellectual curiosity, an interest in the question of suicide, an apparent perfection (altar boy, boy scout, brilliant student) hiding intense inner rebellion (he masturbates constantly, reads forbidden books, hates priests and religion in general). What is not autobiographical, of course, is the mother. In *Malle on Malle,* the filmmaker confides that he could not use his mother as an inspiration, as it did not seem very plausible to him for a woman of the upper Catholic French bourgeoisie in the 1940s to have a sexual relationship with her son (French 1993: 84–6). Instead, he used as a model the mother of a friend, a free, sensual Brazilian woman he would have loved his mother to be like. The incest theme came, not from his memories (as his mother's exclamation at the screening might lead us to believe), but from a Georges Bataille novel, *Ma mère* (1966; published posthumously), which he was trying to adapt. But as he was working on the adaptation, the memories of his stay at the spa in the same room as his mother came flooding back. He abandoned Bataille's radical and dark eroticism, and integrated the incest theme into his own biography.

In contrast *May Fools* is not generally considered one of Malle's autobiographical films, since it is a more or less explicit variation on a Chekhov play, *The Cherry Orchard* (1903), which he had wanted to direct for the stage a couple of years earlier. Moreover, the film's sociological frame (a ruined provincial bourgeoisie) is quite different from Malle's upper-class industrial family. Co-scriptwriter Jean-Claude Carrière has repeatedly asserted that most of the inheritance traditions and rules in the film were inspired by his own southern, provincial, petit bourgeoisie background. Personal references are nonetheless numerous in a film that was shot about six years after the director's mother's death, which, as it does in *May Fools*' Vieuzac tribe, spurred quarrels and resentment about the inheritance as well as the sale of the family house, Thumeries, where the Malle children had almost all been born and spent their childhood. In addition to what each member of the family must have felt individually, Françoise's demise signaled, for Louis if not all of them, the possible end of the family circle as such, Françoise Malle having been its core. In a posthumous letter, she begs her children to always stay close to each other (Billard 2003: 426–7). One finds an echo of this in the film when Milou protests: 'We can't sell the house, this house is what unites us, without it we're nothing, we're gypsies.' There is also a physical resemblance between the mother here played by Paulette Dubost and Françoise Malle: in *Parlez-moi d'elle*, Malle points out that this actress is the one – as opposed to the maternal figures in *Au revoir les enfants* and *Murmur of the Heart* – who physically reminds him the most of his own mother. Last but not least, a kinship between Milou and Malle is hard to miss, from a certain informal elegance to a way of being silent while observing things around him, and a huge sympathy for May '68 (which, if too 'old' to be an active participant in it, Malle was immensely curious and excited about).

Portrait of the Mother as a Child

As has been often stated, the distinction between the adult world, with its conformism, lack of imagination and hypocrisy, and a realm in which fantasy and playfulness rule is a *topos* of Malle's films. It is obvious in *Zazie dans le métro* (1960), where the fantasy

comes to an end when the little girl returns home with her mother; in *The Fire Within* (1963), where Alain Leroy cannot face reality and kills himself; or in *Lacombe Lucien* (1974), whose dream-like ending (with Lucien and France playing like children in nature) is brutally cut off by the spelling-out on screen of his sentence to death. Similarly in *Pretty Baby* (1978), where Violet lives a scandalously unorthodox life in a brothel with her prostitute mother before entering an orderly, bourgeois life with her now-married progenitor, or in *Vanya on 42nd Street* (1994), whose titular character must face a dreary daily life after Yelena's departure (putting an end to the mix of elation and despair her presence used to call forth), the movement invariably goes from fun, chaos and extravagance to the termination of all that, more commonly named 'end of innocence'. This division is very present in our three autobiographical films.

The end of innocence is the very subject of *Au revoir les enfants* whose title can self-evidently be read as a farewell to childhood itself. The inscribed coda refers not only to the tragedy that is taking place but also to a break in time. All that occurs between the Gestapo's arrival in the school and the farewell in the courtyard marks Julien's transition from childhood to adulthood. He is acquiring a sense not only of the injustice and absurdity of the world, but also, more subtly, of its complexity: the priests, whom he despises and considers part of the establishment, are those who risk their lives to help his Jewish classmates; the young man who is on the victims' side (Joseph) is the one who denounces them. The director of *Lacombe Lucien* suddenly starts to realise the impossibility, not of distinguishing right from wrong (as has so often been said about him), but of considering oneself on the right side, in a morally comfortable position.

Murmur of the Heart is entirely based on the notion of the end of innocence. The film's running gag, so to speak, is Laurent's continually interrupted sexual initiation: the first attempt, with the prostitute, is a disaster; when he starts to kiss a girl at a party, he is disgusted when she uses her tongue; a young woman he brings up to his hotel room will not have sex because she wants to wait for the right one. All this builds up to the incest scene which marks Laurent's first real sexual experience. Before that point, he is constantly being referred to as a child – by the nanny, the hotel's clients, the father, or the brothers, and even more so by the mother. In contrast to *Au revoir les enfants*, the ending is not brutal but solemn and beautiful, despite an air of melancholy, as exemplified by the mother/son conversation after the incest which can be read as a mutual goodbye: 'I don't want you to be unhappy, to be ashamed or even sorry about this. We will remember it as a very beautiful, very poignant moment which will never take place again.' The passage from childhood to adulthood is also made explicit by the last scene in which Laurent comes back to his mother's room, after spending the rest of the night with a girl his own age, and finds his whole family there waiting for him. One by one they all break into peals of laughter. The flippant and gratified manner in which the men in the family greet him is indicative of his new status as a legitimate member of society. Interestingly, in a previous draft of the script, after having sex with his mother, Laurent committed suicide in the bath, which was meant to represent an act of shame, but could also be seen, not unlike in *The Fire Within*, as a refusal to enter that other realm, a desire to remain a child.

For Milou, a sixty-year-old unpragmatic 'child' living with his mother who has never earned a cent and is only happy in a natural environment, it is obvious that his mother's death and the prospect of selling the family house constitute a traumatic break with this state of infancy, the passage from a life ruled by nature and poetry to a confrontation with solitude and bitter reality. 'I will not be deprived of my childhood', he insists. The house is not the mere repository of his childhood memories, but the metonymy of childhood itself. Its sale therefore entails the end of this state of withdrawal from the 'serious' world (personified by solicitors, doctors, and the like). Thanks to May '68, though, this passage from one realm to the other is momentarily postponed. With its famous slogan, *l'imagination au pouvoir* ('all power to the imagination'), May '68 refers to a state of childhood or utopia: no more rules, class divisions or 'strangers' (everyone talks to everyone else in the streets). This frame of mind contaminates the family itself: these very matter-of-fact bourgeois start dreaming of transforming the house into a commune with hundreds of people, of producing their own food, of free love. And then, suddenly, everything falls back into place: De Gaulle returns, family dissensions (about who will get the mother's jewelry) and money issues crop up again. This abrupt ending to a beautiful parenthesis is indicated by two typical administrative operations: the burial of the mother in the family vault (rather than on the property itself) and the sale of the house, followed by the family's dispersion. Each member of the family, except Milou, goes back to his life; the children leave. It's the end of the holidays, a theme very central to Malle's world. One of the films that galvanised his directorial ambitions was Roger Leenhardt's *Les Dernières vacances* (*The Last Vacation*, 1948), which depicts the last summer a family spends in their ancestral home and the way the children try to prevent the sale of the house (see Billard 2003: 76–7). Whenever the end of the holidays arrived in our house in the southwest of France, not far from where *May Fools* was shot, my father would become deeply melancholic. I remember him once murmuring to himself as he looked out the kitchen window: 'The end of the holidays, the end of the day, the end of life.' Such a sentiment is perfectly encapsulated by the eponymous protagonist at the very end of *Zazie dans le métro* when she tells her mother, after a crazy weekend in Paris with her uncle Gabriel: *J'ai vieilli* ('I've aged / grown older'). The party's over.

The Fictional Mother Belongs to the Realm of Childhood

Murmur of the Heart is the most obvious example of this. In the way she speaks, moves, touches people, Clara offers a stark contrast with her heavy, serious bourgeois environment. She is free, spontaneous, childlike – the polar opposite of her husband, who is reserved, critical, endlessly discussing politics and repeating what he's read in the newspaper. While Laurent despises his father (at the end he asks his mother if he really is his son) and loathes Jesuit hypocrisy or repression, he admires his mother's freedom and sensuality. For Laurent (and the spectator), Clara is on the side of simplicity, nature and childhood. Mother and son are on the same side against the adult world. As Clara says in the scene where Laurent is sick and the nanny storms off because she doesn't want him to get too excited listening to his mother sing to him in Italian: 'You see,

I always get scolded because of you, always.' The mother character in *Murmur of the Heart* thus has an entirely different set of values than the ones that govern her milieu: she is seductive (at the spa she is always letting herself be chatted up by Laurent's friends); she has a lover and cannot bear it when he becomes too possessive ('like a husband'); she walks around half-naked in the hotel room she shares with her son. At one point she leaves him at the hotel to spend a couple of days with her lover, which is instantly noted by all the clients at the spa who take pity on the young boy for having such a promiscuous mother. Laurent (whose surname, Chevalier, means 'knight' in French) takes her side. When a very respectable lady calls him 'my poor little boy', he replies: 'I'm neither poor, nor particularly little, and I'm certainly not yours.' Mother and son are together and alone in this rejection of social conventions. After she comes back from her escapade, there is a beautiful moment, before the incest scene, where she shares her feelings, her broken heart and her frustrations with him. They are no longer mother and son, but equals and friends.

In *Au revoir les enfants*, the mother is no longer a sensual Italian expatriate but a devoutly Catholic, upper-class bourgeoise. It is remarkable, however, that every time she appears on screen, she has a softness and a dreamlike quality that transform her, like her *Murmur of the Heart* counterpart, into an incarnation of youth. As opposed to the harshness of this world of young boys and priests, where survival of the fittest is the rule, the mother represents warmth, playfulness and charm. In the very first scene, at the train station, before Julien goes off to school, the humour, the complicity, the innocence which are an integral part of her character clearly stand out in opposition to the brutal and austere environment of the school Julien is heading towards ('What about me? Have you thought of me? I miss you every second. I'd like to dress up as a boy and go with you to your school. We could see each other every day. It would be our secret.') Another scene shows how the mother, in *Au revoir les enfants*, as much as the one in *Murmur of the Heart*, is always set apart from the rest of her milieu, even as she completely takes part in it, and more generally from the adult world, its seriousness and dread. In the restaurant scene, the mother's general attitude (towards Bonnet, the young Jewish boy whom she has invited to join them and whose relatives she thinks she knows because the bourgeoisie always thinks everyone is related; towards

Fig. 1: *Au revoir les enfants* (1987): Mother and son.

Fig. 2: *May Fools* (1989): Dying with her dolls.

Julien; even towards the Germans) is so naïve and playful that it becomes unexpectedly charming and innocent. Bonnet looks at her as if she were from another planet, not only because he is not from that social class at all, but because she is so vivid and lively, with her quick pattern of speech and her spontaneity. Even Julien, at one point, says tenderly: 'My mother? She's nuts.'

In *May Fools*, the mother's childlike quality is most obviously expressed by her physique: she is petite, has huge expressive eyes and a dreamy smile. It is probably not a coincidence that the actress who plays the role, Paulette Dubost, is most particularly remembered for playing Lisette, the adorable wide-eyed, innocent and mischievous maid in Jean Renoir's *La Règle du jeu* (*The Rules of the Game*, 1939). The scene, at the very beginning of *May Fools*, where the mother suffers a heart attack, is also a wonderful evocation of her undramatic, light-hearted reaction to approaching death. As she slowly walks up the stairs, trying to catch her breath, she sings a very gay, old-fashioned children's song. Typically, she dies looking into the eyes of a group of dolls. Though she does not appear explicitly in one of the most beautiful scenes of the film, her presence permeates it. It takes place just after her death, the same night. Milou is in bed and starts crying like a little boy. We hear an owl cry and then all of a sudden the nocturnal bird is there, on the windowsill, looking at him. The mother has come back to see him, reincarnated into this beautiful, otherworldly creature. The supernatural quality of the scene is, if not underlined, palpably there, like a scene out of the surrealistic *Black Moon* (1975). During the film, the mother's ghost returns twice. First, when Leonce, the property's jack-of-all-trades, is digging her grave in the garden at night. It is no coincidence that she would appear to him, who, just as much as she, represents, with his regional accent, his ancestral-looking face, his attachment to his dog and his bees, and to nature in general, the childlike, rebellious grace of this area of France Malle so loved for its permanence. And then, of course, there is the final scene. Everyone has left, including Françoise, Milou's ten-year-old granddaughter and the only person in the family he has a real rapport with. Milou enters the empty house. We hear music wafting from one of the rooms in the back: it is the mother playing a very vibrant ragtime and joining Milou for a dance. Again, the maternal figure is associated with fantasy and gaiety, a whole dimension of life that the sale of the house will force Milou to leave behind.

Though loving, kind and extremely intelligent, the 'real' Françoise Malle was a far cry from a carefree 'soixante-huitarde'. She was, for one, very much a product of her class and milieu. Heiress of the Beghin sugar empire, one of the big late-nineteenth-century industrial fortunes, she was part of what Malle, in *Parlez moi d'elle*, describes as an 'aristocracy', with the arrogance that goes with it, in a way which, he adds, his father – also from a very bourgeois background – was not. As such, she had certain standards for her children. She was the one in charge of their education and counseling them on their future.[1] She wrote innumerable and beautiful letters to Louis' older brother, Bernard, about his calling as a writer. Admittedly, she could also be quite unsentimental and tyrannical with her children.[2] When Jean-François, her eldest, joined the Leclerc division in 1945, which was a very perilous enterprise, Françoise sent him a letter telling him that it would perhaps knock some sense into him, or more disturbingly in the original French: *lui mettre du plomb dans la tête*, ('put some lead into his head').[3] She had perfectly mapped out Louis' future as first a prestigious 'Polytechnicien' and then future head of the Beghin factory, as she considered that he was the one who was the most like Henri, her father, the one who had brought the factory to its international level.[4] Malle claims the slap she gave him when he told her he wanted to make films determined his vocation. A letter she sent to his brother Bernard shows how pragmatic and direct she was where her children are concerned:

> I completely agree with what you say about Louis [he was thirteen at the time]. He thinks he is the center of the world. I hope he will soon get rid of this

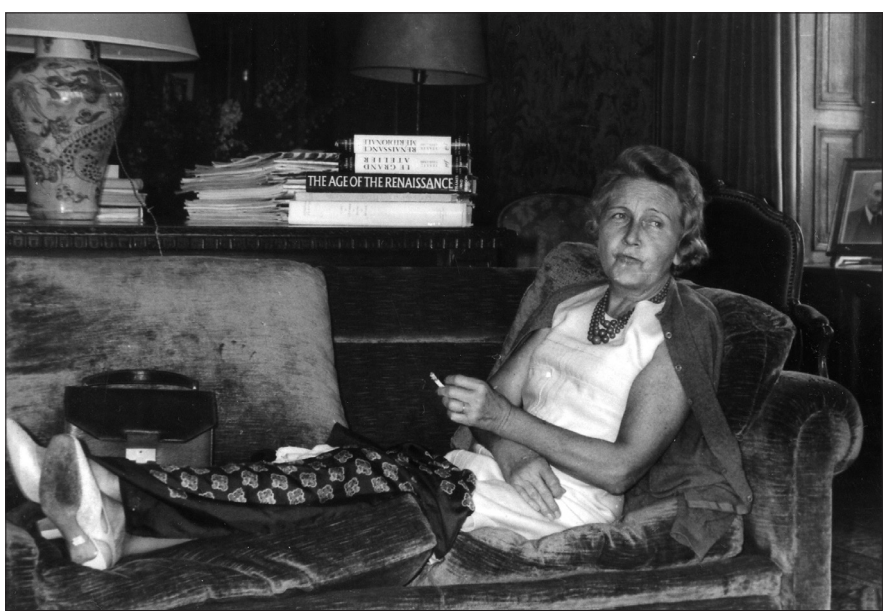

Fig. 3: Françoise Malle, the matriarch.

> unpleasant trait and discover how sterile it is to be constantly contemplating one's feelings. For the moment his mood is rather unstable. Every time he talks to someone new, he decides on a new career. His latest hobby is movies. We will not oppose this systematically, I mean writing scripts and directing, as he really doesn't have the looks to become a star, this said without any judgement on his anatomy. In any case, children are a source of great distress and parents will surely become more and more scarce, discouraged as they will surely become by the job's difficulty.[5]

Unlike the somewhat irresponsible and 'out of it' mothers in *Au revoir les enfants* and *Murmur of the Heart,* Françoise Malle was definitely the one in charge in her marriage. Her husband, Pierre Malle, is famous for having stated: 'I take care of my wife and my wife takes care of the rest of the world.'

She also seems to have been less close to her children, and in particular to Louis himself, than what she is portrayed to be in these films. In *Parlez moi d'elle*, Malle says it is precisely because she was otherwise 'never there' that he remembers his murmur of the heart period, the year during which she took him out of boarding school and devoted herself to him, so intensely. Normally Françoise was taken in a whirlwind of activities: charity work, political duties, mass attendance, social activities, manifold artistic interests, the education of seven children and an intense relationship with her husband, Pierre, which lasted throughout their whole life (as attested by a correspondence spanning over more than sixty years).[6]

Why, then, such a discrepancy between fact and fiction in works that purport to be autobiographical? My hypothesis is that what Malle understands by autobiography has less to do with biographical data than with an attempt to map out his own psyche and to explore the world of unconscious fantasies underlying his experience.

Diving into the Unconscious

It is important to note that Malle's very first film, *Crazéologie* (1953), made while he was still at the Institute for Advanced Cinematographic Studies (IDHEC), is very much influenced by surrealism and by Ionesco (Malle even helped to finance the first production at the Parisian theatre La Huchette, famous for playing Ionesco's *The Lesson/The Bald Soprano* in permanent repertory since 1957 [see Billard 2003: 112–15]), and that his last project, based on Maria Riva's book on her mother, Marlene Dietrich, which was in production when Malle became terminally ill, was to be a sort of frantic dance, a funny but threatening libido-driven spectacle. Though Malle is sometimes considered as a filmmaker who, while denouncing the bourgeoisie, films in a bourgeois, classical manner, one can safely say that his work constantly refers to a realm which neither logic nor reason have access to, in an attempt to liberate the unconscious fantasies that civilisation represses. His interest in India stems from the possibility his trip there offered him to put Western principles and taboos into perspective. The importance, for him, of a movement like May '68 also has to do with the questioning of bourgeois values, including the Western view of the family.

Black Moon is perhaps his most radical attempt at expressing his deepest unconscious fantasies.

In the case of the three films I have examined, it seems difficult to speak of such a hardcore endeavor. *Murmur of the Heart* and *May Fools* are relatively light-hearted comedies, and *Au revoir les enfants* is a classical evocation of one of the darkest pages of European history. Yet the process of creating these films seems, at least in the case of *Murmur of the Heart* and *Au revoir les enfants*, to have involved a good deal of unconscious elements. Right after he abandoned the idea of adapting Bataille's *Ma mère*, Malle wrote in a very short period of time a long treatment, which was the basis for the script of *Murmur of the Heart*. Discussing this process with Philip French, he evokes the famous 'automatic writing' of the Surrealists, something emerging from him as if it were being dictated to him (1993: 107). In his personal notes, he writes: '*Murmur*: this film, I didn't do it on purpose. So I can't talk about it (and yet !!!).'[7] It is interesting that this first draft of the film was written shortly after a ten-page text entitled 'The Mind as concentration camp', in which, in the summer of 1971, under the influence of some potent drug, Malle reflects at length on the reasons why Westerners chose to 'close the lid' on their unconscious processes, at the price of their relationship to the world around them.[8]

About *Au revoir les enfants*, Malle confesses that it is only when he saw the film on television that he realised how important the place of the mother was in it – as if it had emerged on its own, unconsciously.[9] While *May Fools* is arguably a more deliberate case, it was written with Jean-Claude Carrière, co-writer of many of Luis Buñuel's scripts, which is no coincidence given the early ambition to give the film a bizarre, oneiric quality.

If we look at these three films from the angle of the representation of the mother, it is obvious that all three, and not only *Murmur of the Heart*, stage a transgression of the most fundamental taboo of all: incest, which Malle always harbored a deep interest in. In *Parlez-moi d'elle*, he contrasts the 'primitive' nature of the father/daughter incestuous relationship with the tender, delicate mother/son fusion, which he calls, provocatively, 'the ideal relationship'. All three films, in their own way, enact the fantasy of such a rapport. In all three mother and son are, in a way, in a conjugal relationship, with a father who is either physically present but uncharismatic and not interested in the mother (*Murmur of the Heart*), barely mentioned (as a rival – *papa, je le déteste!*) but physically absent (*Au revoir les enfants*), or never mentioned at all (*May Fools*). In *Murmur of the Heart*, mother and son sleep in the same hotel room. She undresses in front of him and bathes with the door open. She mockingly calls him 'my little husband' and, when she comes back from an unhappy escapade with her lover, Laurent is the one who finds the right words to console her. The fact that this 'ideal relationship' is consumed sexually is almost secondary, a natural consequence of their mutual tenderness (these are the words Malle uses in *Parlez-moi d'elle* to describe their relationship in that film). In *Au revoir les enfants*, we have the same type of exclusive bond between Julien and his mother. They are apart from the rest, whispering to each other, hugging each other (Julien's older brother calls them 'lovebirds'). In the letters Mme Quentin sends Julien as well as in the words she says to him in the first scene,

there is a tenderness that always borders on sensuality (see the lipstick trace she leaves on his cheek after kissing him). In *May Fools*, Milou and his mother *are* a couple, in a way, since the father has died and Milou lives with her in the same house. He is the last person she calls before dying, and, when all the rest of the family go back to their life, she and Milou are finally left alone together.

In an interview with Jacques Chancel,[10] Malle said: 'I don't really know what I'm looking for but I'm looking for it tirelessly.' To me, it is this very search that made him exceptional as a man and as a filmmaker. In his work, he did try, tirelessly, to go deeper and deeper into his emotions, deeper than where words could ever bring him (which is why, in the same interview, he mentioned he would have loved, above all, to be a musician). Through the 'paradox' of the figure of the mother in these three autobiographical films, we see that, far from aiming for a simple, documentary-like reconstitution of the world of his childhood and of the experience of his mother's death, Malle attempted to dive into himself and to open the lid of his own psyche.

Notes

1 See her correspondence with the Jesuit fathers about Louis in the Malle archives at the Bibliothèque du Film/Cinémathèque Française.
2 See *Parlez-moi d'elle*.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Private Malle family archives.
6 Ibid.
7 Bibliothèque du Film/Cinémathèque Française MALLE 0376B94.
8 MALLE 0390 B96.
9 *Parlez-moi d'elle*.
10 Radioscopie cinéma, 'Jacques Chancel reçoit Louis Malle', France Inter 1972.

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