

Evaluate the  
importance of jean  
azevedo and anne in  
the novel thérèse  
desqueyroux...



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Mauriac uses the relatively minor characters of Jean and Anne to construct two essential relationships with Therese, which have an influence on the way in which we perceive Therese as a character, and how we feel towards her, whether it is sympathy or disdain. The important roles they both play is displaying two vastly constricting people, how they interact with Therese, and the way the two wildly differing relationships have an effect on the protagonist. Jean offers Therese an insight into life outside Argelouse: the life of the intellectual, the cultured man, the happiness that comes with acting on your desires. Sadly, this vision is fleeting for Therese, and, as the dream of Jean slips ever from her grasp, she is haunted by what Anne de la Trave represents: conformity to societal expectation, subservience and obedience, and the upkeep of family honour. Ironically, despite the fact that the relationships are so antithetical in appearance, both inevitably make Therese feel isolated and separate from her surroundings, and in this interpretation, we might understand the figures of Jean and Anne as Therese's desire and expectation personified.

Therese is tormented by the fact that she is averse to everything that constitutes her life. The restrictions society puts her under which means she cannot express herself fully, the fact that she lives in a provincial, parochial, isolated area of rural France, filled with people she cannot associate with or relate to, and the nature that she is confined to stay where she is, with little liberty to roam or explore. So when Jean Azevedo appears to her as a taste of everything she yearns for, she falls for what he represents. She first comes across Jean in order to discuss his relationship with Anne, which we begin to feel incredulous as to why it ever happened since we discover they

are such contrasting personalities. Jean carries a certain foreign charm, autonomy and liberty about him which Therese is fascinated by. He lives by the motto of "etre soi-meme" ("to be oneself") which would have been controversial in a society with such rigidly enforced restrictions, yet this liberty to construct your life how you want to it to be absorbs Therese. Indeed, Bernard makes very clear that due to the fact that Jean is Jewish and from a Portuguese background with tuberculosis in the family, he should be isolated and avoided. Yet, Therese, evidently not in concordance with Bernard in priorities, is drawn by these differences, seeing them as interests, whereas everyone else is repelled. Jean lives his life so that "chaque minute doit apporter sa joie" ("each minute must bring one's own joy") and Therese admires and is jealous of this in him, that he has the integrity to exist by this philosophy. Mauriac almost presents Jean as an innate part of Therese; her desires, dreams and ambition. Jean leaves Argelouse for Paris, and indeed Therese thinks of fleeing to Paris. Moreover, when Jean does leave, Therese says "Ce fut surtout apres le depart d'Azevedo que je l'ai connu, ce silence" ("it was especially after the departure of Azevedo that I knew it, this silence") and this melancholy is brought about by the fact that Jean made her realise that the only part of her which makes her persist on living, is the ambition to escape, to join the "elite nombreuse, ceux qui existent" ("numerous elite, those who exist"). This is an example of Jean being the desires of Therese: when he leaves, so does her energy and ambition, relationships worsen between Bernard and Therese, and it is the catalyst for the poisoning.

Jean also provides an intellectual opportunity for Therese, which she has found very little of in Argelouse. Jean reads books and discusses philosophy, much of which Therese finds difficult to follow. Indeed, she buys some book recommended to her by Jean and reads them after he has left for Paris, yet does not understand them and grows frustrated. It reveals to her how perhaps this vision of her being apart from convention and having her own governance is illusive and unrealistic. And this frustration at the realisation of not being able to achieve what she wants to is continued when she sees the happiness of Anne when she is with Jean. She is jealous of this pleasure and euphoria and pierces the photo of Jean in a moment of fiery unjust emotion; is she jealous of Anne, or rather jealous of Jean? I think we are meant to think Therese admires Jean's realistic outlook on life and human emotion. He comments on Anne's "seules heures de vraie passion" ("only hours of real passion" spent with him, and the fact he uses the word "passion" here suggests he is not in love, like Anne is with him, but rather this is a fleeting affair, like Therese's fleeting sight of her dreams. I feel that, through the presentation of Jean, Therese sees herself and, damningly, figures out the fine line between ambition and reality.

Whereas Jean plays an important role in the novel in illustrating Therese's desires, Anne plays a crucial one in portraying the expectations of her and the consequences of not conforming. She represents society in effect: what is required of her, the subservience women were expected to align to. If anything, her character merely heightens and makes more vivid the contrasts between Therese and the context within which she lives. She is depicted as a girl with little intelligence; "une ame tout simple" ("a

completely simple spirit”), and ditsy women, with little political opinion, were admired at the time as being suitable to bring up a family. Therese of course is the complete opposite of this: an educated, insightful, interested woman, and this contrast in character helps to emphasise how out of place Therese feels. Indeed, even when Anne has her fling with Jean, she is quickly manipulated by the family and has some “sense” talked back into her. She very rapidly falls back into line, into the customary expectation of formality, cordiality and obedience: “il n’avait pas fallu longtemps pour lui passer la bride et pour la mettre au pas” (“It did not take him long to take up the bridle and to put her in it”). Therese is in contrast to Anne when Anne offers the reader a stereotypical maternal figure towards Therese’s child, Marie. Therese is disinterested, lethargic and uncaring whereas Anne appears gentle, attentive and loving. Anne seems to be everything people want Therese to be; yet the reader is disposed to feel sympathy for Therese because the people who surround her are conformists, and incredulous to the characteristics of Therese. The fact that Anne and Therese used to be so close as childhood friends and now seem to be so distant, exemplified by the way in which Anne does not understand Therese’s inactivity when it comes to her child, is perhaps suggestive further of how time affects opinion, and opinion affects relationships. As I perceive Anne as Therese’s expectation to conform, seeing that Anne went to school in a Catholic Convent, very much a traditional place for girls to go, and Therese to an unfamiliar secondary school, was perhaps proleptic of the fact that Therese has always been straying from the expectations and what was normal. The differences to do with reading, for example, Anne “n’a pas la manie de lire” (“did not have the mania to read”), which was something perhaps supported by men as it <https://assignbuster.com/evaluate-the-importance-of-jean-azevedo-and-anne-in-the-novel-thrse-desqueyroux/>

allowed little opportunity for opinion and thought, thus maintaining the patriarchal society, whereas Therese as we know loved to read and think. These early divides, one to subservience, the other to rebellion, were perhaps not mere separate pathways, but clear indications about Therese's desire not to conform.

In conclusion, despite not playing huge roles in the novel, Anne and Jean both have vital roles in representing and illustrating the separate feelings of Therese's desire to escape and to fulfil her dream; portrayed by Jean, and the expectations and desire for conformity by society; conveyed by Anne. The effect of having these emotions personified and embodied into characters, makes us feel as though Mauriac is making the audience's experience of interacting with these emotions more intimate. Yet, the fact that they are characters, also means Therese can speak to them, and makes her interaction and questioning of these conflicting emotions all the more poignant, deepening and effective.