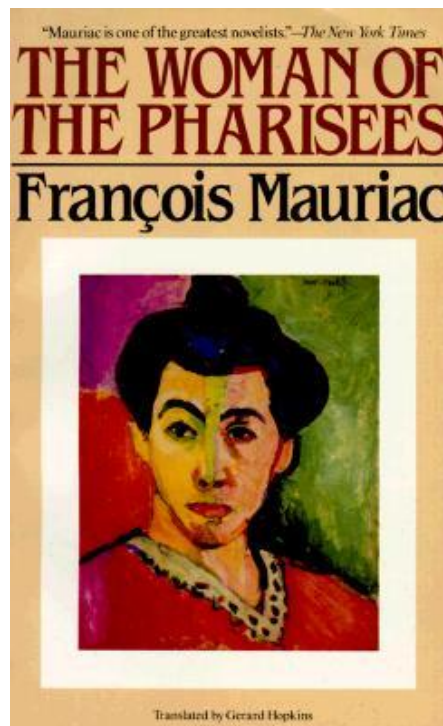




The Woman of the Pharisees

François Mauriac , Gerard Hopkins (Translator)

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"A deeply impressive novel by an author whose growth has been continuous and whose stature makes so much contemporary fiction seem sadly thin by comparison." --*The New Yorker*

François Mauriac--who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1952--is famous for his subtle character portraits of the French rural classes and for depicting their struggles, aspirations, and traditions. *The Woman of the Pharisees*--one of Mauriac's most accomplished novels--is a penetrating evocation of the moral and religious values of a Bordeaux community. In Brigitte, we see how the ideals of love and companionship are stifled in the presence of a self-righteous woman whose austere religious principals lead her to interfere--disastrously--in the lives of others. One by one the unwitting victims fall prey to the bleakness of her "perfection." A conscientious schoolteacher, a saintly priest, her husband and stepdaughter and an innocent schoolboy are all confronted with tragedy and upheaval. But the author's extraordinary gift for psychological insight goes on to show how redeeming features inevitably surface from disaster. The unfolding drama is seen through the discerning eye of a young Louis--Brigitte's stepson--whose point of view is skillfully blended into the mature and understanding adult he later becomes.

The Woman of the Pharisees Details

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From Reader Review *The Woman of the Pharisees* for online ebook

Abbi Dion says

not necessarily flattering to women, but maybe that's not important. the femme bitch is a terrific holy terror. the piano playing scene is a secret fear.

Jill says

I almost want to give this one five stars because of the incredible depth of Mauriac's unfolding of this woman, Brigitte - her development, her complex intent, her almost imperceptible change, etc. Though I've only read a bit of Mauriac's work, I consider what I have read of the very highest quality. He writes outstanding prose, highly-developed characters, utterly believable, very moving, and most of all, he teaches such important concepts through the flaws of his characters. He is quickly becoming a favorite author of mine.

booklady says

Unless you're talking about a member of an ancient Jewish sect that emphasized strict interpretation and observance of the Mosaic Law, a Pharisee is a hypocritically self-righteous person; in *The Woman of the Pharisees* François Mauriac meant the latter. Her name was Brigitte Pian and she was second wife to Edouard, and step mother to his two teenagers, Michèle and Louis. The younger boy, Louis is the narrator of the story. Through Louis's eyes we watch Brigitte and the effects her actions have on those around her.

But to imply *The Woman of the Pharisees* is a hopeless or depressing story would be a great injustice. In fact, Mauriac's Brigitte is as vulnerable at times as she is disagreeable at others. I found my sympathies not altogether comfortable in any one place, with any one person for very long. In fact, all the characters and situations they struggled with were of types as real and relevant the story could have happened today though this book was written over 60 years ago.

In fact the story made me (and perhaps Louis too?) painfully aware of the lurking Pharisical in myself.

Kristy says

Mauriac's deft descriptions of the Pian family in early 20th century Bordeaux comes to us through Louis, the young son, but centers on his tragically pious step-mother, Brigitte Pian. Every character (even the narrator) is pulled apart for the reader, with their best and worst characteristics equally spread out on the page, and their physical and mental flaws held up for laughter and judgement. However no character is given as thorough a treatment as the easy to see through, but impossible to understand, Brigitte. A dark (but sometimes funny) novel that Mauriac wrote during the German occupation of France in the 1940s, this work hits on family, religion, education, love, passion, hypocrisy, and class issues in equal measures. Best of all, however, is the voice of our narrator, bringing these stories to us from his vantage point as a grown,

embittered man, who realizes how deliciously untrustworthy his narration is and who comes to us with his receipts. Pretty impossible to put down.

Helynnne says

This is a novel where Mauriac is really at his best describing something that he hates most of all--religious hypocrisy. This vice is embodied in Brigitte, an overbearing and self-righteous zealot who interferes in the lives of those close to her. The process of how she meddles, creates chaos and finally learns to be a little less virulent in her piety is an interesting process. This is a very good novel for a discussion on the ironies in Christianity.

Zachary says

This is my first reading of Mauriac's work, and it's a gem. The author has achieved the singular feat of creating a female character who is simultaneously protagonist and antagonist, told from the perspective of an old man (the "Pharisee's" step-child) looking back on his childhood. The book is dark, and even though the French-existentialist school has deep inroads in the narrative, I believe it has interesting and poetic insights into the spiritual struggle with the self, as well as into the alienation that hypocrisy can force on those around the self-righteous.

The melancholy tone of the narrator makes him a beloved and unique character. The poor man has suffered much, and the reader empathizes even before he knows what he's empathizing about. The theme of alienation and loneliness (imports from the French-existentialist school) touch a deep chord. Still, it is ultimately a story of redemption, with beautiful passages regarding the fallibility of humanity in the face of the mercy of God.

Quotables:

"No man can bear a child's cross."

"I did not realize then the full horror of the torment that they inflict upon themselves, those servants of God who do not know the true nature of love."

"Those who live by the light of divine love find it hard to understand that the majority of mankind are complete strangers to it."

Andrew Weitzel says

This is one of the best things I have ever read.

Anna says

Couldn't put it down. Like Mauriac's style

Michel Van Goethem says

La pharisienne
by François Mauriac

Noce says

Dietro un'apparente cattiveria può nascondersi, a volte, una persona davvero malvagia.

Così diceva Giovanni Soriano in *Maldetti. Pensieri in soluzione acida*. E non aveva tutti i torti.

Ci sono un sacco di cose che mi rendono nervosa e irascibile, ma poche mi fanno veramente imbestialire. Oltre ai soprusi su chi non si può difendere, oltre all'accanimento della malasorte su chi ha già le reni spezzate dalle proprie sciagure personali, oltre alla violenza gratuita, una cosa che mi fa infuriare è l'invidia cattiva dei sentimenti.

Quindi non l'invidia di cose, che quella la conosco bene anch'io. Alle elementari mi sarei ammazzata per avere il righeglio cangiante della compagna di banco, da adolescente avrei pagato per passare un fine settimana senza genitori, adesso potrei regalare un mignolo del piede (di quello sinistro, dove l'unghietta è meno carina di quella del piede destro), per avere una Nikon D3, insomma state parlando con una professionista dell'invidia di cose.

Però poi c'è anche una categoria intermedia, quella dell'invidia di attività, e anche in quello sono un'espertona, non mi faccio mancare niente. Per dirne una, tipo quella che mi fa rodere il fegato quando vedo gente che col mio stesso percorso di studi ed esperienze, è già arrivata. In questo caso mi spingo a labirintici sogni di realtà parallele, dove gli invidiati vengono sbugiardati davanti a un pubblico dove io campeggio in prima fila, dove scivolano su bucce di banane mentre tengono conferenze importanti – è notoria la presenza di bucce di banane alle conferenze- , ecco insomma, la fantasia malevola la faccio galoppare anche io, ma mai mi spingo ad esempio ad augurare loro la morte. Anche quando si passa a scenari ben più raccapriccianti, come le notizie serie del Tg, i pedofili che distruggono la vita di bambini innocenti, gli attentati terroristici, gli omicidi ingiustificati eccetera, ecco, anche in quel caso, la prima cosa che mi viene in mente è una lurida gattabuia di cui non si trova più la chiave, e se nei casi peggiori, arrivo a immaginarmi la morte dei carnefici, non mi soffermo mai sulla modalità, ma su un vago: "persone del genere dovrebbero sparire dalla faccia della terra", ma detto quasi come un Padre nostro alla comunione dei figli degli amici, detto a memoria, il significante senza il significato.

E poi c'è l'invidia cattiva dei sentimenti, che è proprio un'altra cosa. È vedere l'esternazione della beatitudine altrui, invidiarla, e quindi adoperarsi per distruggerla. E non fermarsi davanti all'abbattimento dell'esternazione, ma procedere oltre e distruggere la causa di quella serenità felice. Questa cosa mi atterrisce e allo stesso tempo mi manda in bestia. Primo perché non arrivo proprio a concepire l'invidia CONCRETA di una cosa astratta come può essere la felicità, la serenità, la gioia. Insomma, è una cosa che fallisce per

inesistenza dei presupposti. Perché non è mica detto che ciò che rende un individuo felice, sereno e gioioso, su di noi sortisca lo stesso effetto. Quindi ok, si può sospirare e dire “Ah, beato lui, ah, che vita misera la mia, ah, la nequizia dei tempi!!!”. Però poi basta, ci si ferma lì. Passare allo stadio successivo ed escogitare macchinosi piani per distruggere quell’individuo, ha il sapore dell’insanità mentale. Non parliamo poi del dispendio di energie per elaborare un piano di cui non si possa dire successivamente che siete voi i responsabili. Eppure di gente del genere ce n’è. E non così poca come ci si augurerebbe.

La Farisea di Mauriac non solo è una di quelle persone, ma è molto peggio, perché giustifica la propria cattiveria spacciandola per la messa in pratica di ideali elevati e religiosi, e nasconde il proprio egoismo dietro una falsa devozione che irriterebbe anche il più buon cristiano. Un misto tra la cattiveria cristallina della matrigna di Biancaneve, e la sensibilità castrata dell’ispettore Javert dei Miserabili.

E quindi, cara la mia Brigida Pian, a me la tua redenzione finale non mi scompiffera proprio un bel niente. È vero che è accompagnata dall’espiazione, ma hai tirato troppo la corda. E secondo me neanche Mauriac ti ha perdonata del tutto. Il tuo peccato di presunzione sfocia in un ammissione di colpa solo alle ultime pagine, troppo tardiva per farmi credere che l’autore prenda le tue difese, e troppo esigua per esigere dal lettore un perdono pieno. In compenso Mauriac è l’amico che vorremmo avere: un autore umanissimo, cupo nella descrizione del dolore, ma delicatissimo nell’aprire piaghe e ferite che potrebbero essere di tutti. Non è un libro che colpisce per perfezione, ma per spontaneità. Per quanto ne so io, potrebbe essere persino autobiografico, di certo è una cosa “sentita”. E quindi capace di dare e lasciare qualcosa a chiunque lo legga.

Robert Tessmer says

This was my first Mauriac novel and I was very impressed.

What an understanding of the human heart.

Doris says

Wow. This book, though short, started off very slowly for me. I guess the whole book is kind of slow; it's not about events so much as psychological and spiritual changes in people. I think this would make an excellent book club discussion book. Brigitte's religion and development lends itself to a great deal of analysis, much of it introspective. This really makes you analyze your own motives for judgments and behaviors.

Andrea says

This book impacted me significantly the first time I read it (as a college assignment), and I thought I'd go ahead and read it again this year. I was impressed all over again. It's a little on the dark side, with some kind of heavy moments, but explores the meaning of I Cor 13 love in a pretty inspiring way.

Päivi Brink says

In Finnish this was Täydellisyyden kudos. Mauriac writes about the true faith of the heart and pretentious faith. The opposing pair is an old priest, whose faith is real, and a middle aged woman (The Woman of the Pharisees), whose main goal is to point out other people's failures and sins in life. The novel was surprisingly interesting even if the subject matter sounds old fashioned. Mauriac is interesting when he writes about our values and morals. There is also a love story, since the woman's step daughter falls in love with "a bad boy" and the woman tries to stop their love affair. The book was published first in 1941.
