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HORIZON

She didn't know, but she . . . 'What' it mean a collection?'
 at, after . . . turn out to . . . n nigger-
 les, or pol . . . yry sideboards of the
 . . . Didn't you know, the Wors
 'rtin
 'Ol . . . se I'll look in . . . B . . .
 V . . . collecti . . . I must . . .
 . . . t . . . gs were big . . .
 . . . and . . . kissed him.

'And what about Clare?'

'Come to that, I could see her in London. Anyway, the change
 will do me good,' he said. 'All the good in the world,' she
 replied, oh so tenderly.

*voir lettre de
 John Russell
 à Gide
 le 10 Dec 1947
 Corresp. Gide
 (Dessing)*

JOHN RUSSELL THE OLD AGE OF ANDRÉ GIDE

MONTESQUIEU inhabits, one might say, a climate of ideal lucidity. The politest of combatants, he would seem to have little in common with the idea of a resistance writer. His conditions of work were almost comically unlike the stealth and penumbra habitual to Paulhan and Eluard. Dictating at ease in the gigantic room above the winding staircase at La Brède, drawing upon a library graded with infinite nicety from Apollonius to Gregory of Tours, and reposing his weak eyes upon a landscape planned in the English manner, Montesquieu had every reason to do well. Perhaps it is even remarkable that he should not have slumped into a routine of learned enjoyments, and should instead have perfected what Valéry called his 'brisk and rather diabolical' command of expression. Style is the best of preservatives; and when, in 1941, Bernard Grasset published the *Cahiers 1716-1755* of Montesquieu, these put fresh heart into many who read them. More than one published diary has borne witness to the movement of pride, the recall to dignity which they provoked. Some of the book's lessons were absolute, as when Montesquieu says: 'Moi, je n'ai pour régime que de faire diète quand j'ai fait des excès, et de dormir quand j'ai veillé, et de ne prendre d'ennui ni par les

chagrins, ni par les plaisirs, ni par le travail, ni par l'oisiveté'. Others were relative, and bore directly upon the misfortunes of Europe. Not all were apposite; few readers, for instance, can have been struck with the truth of the remark that 'the English, being accustomed to happiness, kill themselves when the slightest thing goes wrong'. More apt, and couched in a perfection of language which is in itself the emblem of a great nation, were Montesquieu's lines upon the astounding resilience of France, and her power to survive all that defeat, bodily sickness and loss of population could do to destroy her.

André Gide was among those who fell with pleasure upon this discreetly roborative volume. The 'tranquil and radiant optimism' of Montesquieu was a condition to which Gide himself has always aspired, and none could gauge better than he the difficulty of maintaining it. Perhaps the most pertinent, for Gide, of Montesquieu's comments was that in which he attributed France's powers of resistance to the extreme diversity of her peoples; this offered a natural barrier to the percolation throughout France of any one brand of evil. Himself the most various of men, Gide, in a lifetime of work, has offered in his own person the image of a diversity which dates from before his birth. Just as Victor Hugo had borne the double mark of Breton and Lorrain strains, so Gide united within himself two abruptly contrasting breeds of Frenchman. As he wrote just fifty years ago, 'Né à Paris, d'un père Uzétien et d'une mère Normande, où voulez-vous, Monsieur Barrès, que je m'enracine?' Both landscapes pleased him—thyme and lavender in the deep woods of Normandy, and the scorched *garrigue* of Provence; the white apple-trees of the north, and in the south the white almond. Two tongues, the Oc and the Oil ('l'épais jargon normand, le parler chantant du midi'), awakened his sensibility to language; in religion the Catholic blood of his mother tugged one way, and his father's Languedocian Protestantism the other. From the moment of his conception, Gide was in the 'état de dialogue' which he has turned to such memorable account. A great collector of contradictions, he is too often remembered merely for the perverse or terrible aspects which he has detected in characters of seemingly unblemished virtue; but although no one could surpass him in the discovery, within ourselves, of the forger, the coward, the self-murderer and the felon, these are simply the lowest, blackest reaches of his

universe. He has created with equal art, and for nearly sixty years has pursued under one form or another, the image of an attainable happiness. Gide is not a teacher in the sense that Claudel and Wells are teachers; no author is more indifferent to personal dominion over his readers. *Les Nourritures Terrestres* this year celebrates its jubilee; and Gide is still saying, as he said in the epilogue to that extraordinary work: 'Throw away my book; do not let it satisfy you. Do not suppose that *your* truth could be discovered by somebody else; of that, more than of anything else, you should be ashamed.' Gide has always told his readers to look within themselves for deliverance; perhaps this is why he has aroused the hatred of so curious and so revengeful a rabble of ushers, functionaries, heads of families, and dons.

Gide's recent visit to this country gave the signal for a number of courteous tributes to the man who, more than any other, has sustained in our time the antiquated notion that an artist's first duty is to his art. These tributes, however, did not always betray any close acquaintance with Gide's work. In the pages, indeed, of that great newspaper which most of us regard as the last sanctuary of the cultivated daily journalist, there appeared the statement that *Les Nourritures Terrestres* was 'Gide's best-known novel'. So egregious a bloomer may be attributed in part to the general decline of literary culture. It could not have occurred fifty years ago, and it would not have occurred, I think, in the case of Valéry or Kafka or von Hofmannsthal, were these writers still living. 'Living' is, indeed, the operative word; for Gide, at seventy-eight, is writing better than ever. In England we are unused to writers who write equally well at all periods of their lives. Gide is, however, the type of the giant professional, the man whose life is organized exclusively in terms of writing. We have, of course, our assiduous workers; and we have our minor, but authentic, masters of literary art; but there is a diligence beyond the dreams of Arnold Bennett, and a perfection beyond the Chinese restraints of Sir Max Beerbohm, and these find their incarnation in André Gide. This author is, after all, a master of language; but he is also a master of life, and it is this double power which gives him, in a distracted age, the stature of a universal doctor. Since 1939 he has written, or contributed to, about a dozen volumes; resolute scavengers will also discover (in *L'Arche*, *Le Littéraire*, and *Les Cahiers de la Pléiade*, for example)

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smaller articles and fragments not yet reprinted. With the exception of *Thésée*, none is a major work; but all disclose some new aspect of a great illuminant.

Formality compels us to regard Gide as an old man; but formality alone would betray his age to an innocent reader of, let us say, the essays on Poussin and Goethe, the autobiographical fragment 'Jeunesse', or the passage in the *Journal 1939-42*, which relates to his rediscovery of the concise and wilful mastery of Tacitus. His translation of *Hamlet*, again, may at times fall strangely upon English ears; but the continuous effort of fidelity, the struggle to reproduce in workable French the extravagances of Elizabethan syntax—these are the work of no ailing intelligence. Gide's object in the last eight years has been to caulk and clew up as many as possible of the researches which a lifetime of universal curiosity has led him to undertake. Readers of his earlier journals will know something of their variety. Gide is, for example, one of the many writers in whom the framework of a Protestant inheritance continues to vibrate, however incongruously, within the structure of a very different outlook upon existence. In itself, this fact is a commonplace; but he has been able to prolong, even to perpetuate, this discrepancy, and to make it the subject of an endless ambulatory debate about man's relation to God. Perhaps the management of this *état de dialogue* is Gide's central contribution to human happiness. What might elsewhere be merely an enervating restlessness is here a principle of life; painful disquiet, in Gide's view, becomes a state of grace. No aspect of life is hidden from Gide; from Mallarmé to Lenin, from Chopin to colonial administration, from the alcoves of Laclos to the growth of the elm and the gentian, everything touches him; and he gives to everything that same fixity of regard which, two generations ago, made him unsurpassable as the portraitist of d'Annunzio and Stefan George. In certain respects, his work could even be seen as a triumph of prophetic intelligence. In the stout volume of his *Morceaux Choisis*, for instance, there occurs a short passage, dated 1904, in which the whole problem of Germany is rehearsed. Gide has not, in the highest degree, the gifts of a novelist, but he has the faculty of attracting in his direction characters from real life who have the symbolic power of Turgenev's Rudin or Bazarof. The young German in *Conversation avec un Allemand* had excellent qualities; among them a

prodigious capacity for work. But, quite simply, he cannot tell the truth; the truth is not for him, in any sense, a steadying magnetic pole. From this there proceeds his complete collapse as a moral being. He cannot conceive the truth—even as a point from which he would necessarily wish to diverge. From such a tiny nucleus (though Gide expressly remarks that the incident need not be representative) great upheavals follow. It is precisely this involvement in his age which repeatedly gives Gide the quality of a precursor. It is he who supported Kierkegaard in 1911, Malraux in 1927, and Sartre in 1937; who, foreseeing the importance of Blake to the twentieth century, translated *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* into French; and who said, between 1933 and 1937, everything that need be said, in 1947, about Stalinism. André Malraux, with the equipment of a young Tolstoy and the experience of a T. E. Lawrence, is the only other living author to have penetrated so deeply and so imaginatively into the causes of our distress. In the autumn of 1946 he spoke at a UNESCO meeting in terms which, in their context, were original and provocative. I do not think I shall be forcing my case if I suggest that Malraux's moving rebuttal of the collective illusion could be summarized in a line, written six years earlier, from Gide's *Journal*: 'Le monde ne peut être sauvé que par quelques-uns'. All this could be true, however, and Gide could still be no more than a supremely intelligent man. Other writers are sometimes right about international affairs (some, indeed, are never right about anything else), but there is no department of life in which Gide has not something valuable and arresting to say. For professional writers, moreover, there is the fascination of a style which can encompass every variety of statement—from a Stendhalian directness to the poetic prose which, from *Thésée* back to the *Nourritures*, has realized at any rate some part of Baudelaire's dream of an ideal prose idiom.

Small wonder, then, that Gide is among those masters who (as he recently wrote of Goethe) 'offer themselves to our admiration, to our devotion, and even to our hatred, in a multiplicity of ways; our minds hesitate upon the threshold of their work, or for a long time ramble delightedly, as if in some spellbound Broceliande'. Arthurian analogies apart, Gide's work has added to human dignity, and he must henceforward be one of those luminous figures by which a whole period is judged.

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In the autumn of 1940 he was invited by the *Figaro* to describe the sort of literary effort which he believed to be most useful and appropriate to the stricken state of France. His reply defined, as it was meant to do, the work in which he himself was engaged. 'I hope', he wrote, 'that our stricken France will never relinquish her master-quality: criticism. I speak of criticism not so much as a *genre*, but as one of the rarest of qualities, and the most indispensable to any true culture. In this France shows herself incomparable; the quality revealed itself as much in the tragedies of Racine or the poems of Baudelaire, as in the *Caractères* of La Bruyère or the novels of Stendhal. It is not a quality which gets in the way of poetry, but one which coaxes it slowly towards perfection. Criticism is in great danger, these days, and . . . we should strive, be it only in silence, to recapture the qualities and virtues of the critic.' Gide began to compose for the *Figaro* a sequence of imaginary interviews. These were not so much true dialogues, in the tradition of Fénelon, Landor and Fontenelle, as simply ways of keeping a writer's mind in motion, and of presenting to readers of the *Figaro* ideas in pemmican form. Sometimes they deal with topicalities; sometimes with problems of language—for, as Gide remarks, 'un peuple qui tient à sa langue tient bon'; and sometimes one senses that, just as a frost-bitten explorer must revive his stricken parts with the warmth of his hands, so Gide is trying to revive, in his readers, the idea of national dignity. Sometimes he returns the Medusa-like gaze of Victor Hugo—baffled, as all modern writers must be, by the limitless fecundity, the astounding verbal sureness of this confounding master; or the centenary of Mallarmé prompts him to exalt, after Balthazar de Castiglione, the value of a prose style which, by evoking the subtleties proper to even the most commonplace words, 'gives in some way an additional authority to the style, and forces the reader to go more slowly, to raise himself above his normal level, to think more carefully about what is being said to him, and . . . by tiring himself a little, to taste the pleasure of doing something difficult'. (Readers of *Thésée* will be able to annotate this passage.) And sometimes he indulged the impulse to encouragement which has made him one of the godfathers of French writing from Signoret to Michaux; and in December 1941 he could say 'Patiencez! patientez encore. Votre heure viendra, futures valeurs de la France. . . .'

Of the other longer pieces, *Jeunesse*, though written a decade ago, was not given to the public until 1945. Its story dates from the time, more than half a century ago, when Gide was mayor of a small town in Normandy. As often elsewhere, Gide has written the history of a contradiction: more explicitly, of the fact that the most alert and engaging of his tenants, the only one with whom he could talk with profit, was also the perpetrator of one of the most abhorred of crimes. *Jeunesse* is a Gidian subject, and Mulot, the handsome culprit, with his downy glance and mutton-chop whiskers, is a very Gidian figure. This fragment is written in a less alembicated style than *Thésée*, but with the art by which a paragraph on comparative land drainage becomes as compelling as the Venetian nocturne in the *Nourritures Terrestres*.

Convinced admirers of Gide will wish to possess, along with *Jeunesse*, another Swiss venture: *Le Retour*. This consists of a short essay on Raymond Bonheur, some letters which Gide wrote to him at intervals over forty years, and one act of the libretto of a comic opera in which it was once proposed that Gide and Bonheur should collaborate. Enthusiasts will cherish this tribute of friendship, which discloses, moreover, an unexpected gift for the *répliques* of operetta. In belauding the climate of Assouan, Gide's Horace is perfectly in character with his creator; but with couplets such as these we are on new ground:

Eh bien moi, pour l'attendre,
Je crois que je mettrais une robe plus tendre.

Toi dans ta robe bleue et blanche,
Moi dans ma veste du dimanche.

These are the ceremonious salutes of an old friend; to the public at large, Gide has made gestures of a larger, but more formal kind. In some *Feuillets*, written just after the war of 1914-18, he remarked that Goethe, Racine and Poussin were artists of the rarest sort, in that they had brought all their parts to perfection. With others, such as Balzac and Baudelaire, there was always imperfection; and it was upon the imperfections of a great man, rather than on his daunting perfections, that disciples thrive. Thus, from the *Fleurs du Mal*, imitators had carried off the macabre and voluntary strangeness, but not the perfection of style. Nobody copied *Ursule Mirouet* or the *Curé de Tours*, but rather those novels

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in which Balzac lapsed below his best. With Michelangelo it was the same. In contrast, there were a few immaculates—Goethe, Racine and Poussin among them. These three were the object of sustained essays by Gide during the years of war.

In all these essays the English reader, and still more the English translator, must master the private vocabulary of Gide. Though there is in them little of the grammatical acrobacy of *Thésée*, there are certain nouns ('valeur', for example, and 'affirmations') which come to us encrusted with the deposit of a lifetime of individual usage. When Gide says, for instance, that for Goethe 'tout est instruction, édification, moyen de culture; tout conspire à mener à perfection l'affirmation de soi-même et de tout être', the seasoned reader will recognize behind the last phrase an exceptional thrust; no dictionary can give it its full weight, for Gide is one of those writers who create their own language. When, again, he says that 'son génie est fait d'ingéniosité à tirer parti représentatif et symbolique de sa perpétuelle expérimentation', it is possible to divine, though with no malicious intent, a correspondence between this sentence and Gide's own practice as a writer. It is not that he regards the great men of the past as a hall of mirrors, but rather that, now as always, he strives to plot his own course by their example. In the *Journal* 1939-42 there is an admirable objective judgement on *Hermann und Dorothea*—a book which reaches, 'towards the end, a sort of half-bourgeois, half-epical grandeur, of an extremely individual sort. . . . An exemplary book, accessible to every age and every class of person, to every form of intelligence, of fine teaching and fine example, and of wise counsel; after it, the literature of edification is no longer a thing of ridicule.' In the long essay (written as a preface to the *Pleiade Théâtre de Goethe*) Gide envisages the person of Goethe rather than his work. Goethe, as we can learn from the *Journal* of 1893, is one of the artists on whom Gide based his conception of the classical idea. By 1921, Raphael, Goethe and Mozart seemed to him isolated examples of what was essentially a French tradition. For Gide, the classical artist is one who renounces himself, tends always towards discretion of statement, achieves indeed a certain 'superior banality' of utterance, and modestly submits his own individuality, allowing intelligence to prevail over instinct and feeling. In 1941 other aspects of Goethe presented themselves—perhaps in answer to other preoccupations of Gide: his splendid, defensible egoism;

his indifference to the ideas of redemption and original sin; his complaisance before worldly homage; his scientific curiosity. And, as in 1893, there were the endless sacrifices by which Goethe worked to perfect himself as an artist. There were also other traits which we shall later find reflected as permanent symbols in an imaginative work by Gide.

Goethe scholars might have technical comments to make on Gide's essay; and Professor Blunt might wish to remark on the preface to Poussin, though this artist also has been both compass and sextant to Gide since the turn of the century. Poussin's early flight to Rome put him among Gide's favourites—the men of double schooling, double loyalties—as against the passionate provincialism of Barrès. Like Descartes, Poussin thrived on foreign soil. The pondered and durable serenity of this great picture-architect, and the persuasive delight which he avowed to be the chief object of his work, find here their best memorial. Even so, the essay on *Phèdre* is a different matter. All French writers must acknowledge *Phèdre* as the supreme character-creation of their theatre; French life is itself permeated with her terrible voice, and her case ('deplorable', as Valéry noted, 'rather than exceptional') has become one of those aquarium-specimens (others are labelled Hamlet, *Œdipus*, Faust, *Æneas*, Stephen Dedalus) in which a whole civilization can watch itself in miniature shape. The role itself is called by Gide 'bulky, various, complicated and rich in contradictions'; but, like his collaborator and admired friend J. L. Barrault, Gide does not take *Phèdre* out of the play, but rather seeks to re-engage her in the elaborate mechanism which Racine has designed for her destruction. Though written in the form of injunctions to a young actress, the essay on *Phèdre* is much more than a manual of stage deportment. Implicitly, Gide puts Racine among the great pagan authors. Venus and Neptune, he suggests, are the ruling powers in this play, and *Phèdre* herself has none of the elegiac helplessness which has often been ascribed to her. The half-fainting *Phèdre* of the first scene becomes, in the second act, a resourceful and voluptuous intriguer, still not convinced of her failure, and Gide requires her to generate an amount of heat which can only be plausible, as he prudently remarks, where Hippolyte's beauty of person is itself sufficiently evident. The purity of Hippolyte's love for Aricie should in its turn set off the impure passion of *Phèdre* for Hippolyte. 'And how timid,

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prudish and in a small way *human*,' remarks Gide, 'will the first appear beside the Panic grandeur of the second!' And so, to the end, Gide pursues the argument that the tragedy of Phèdre, like the personality of Goethe, is one of the great impieties of our race—the gestures of indifference to Christian law. 'No doubt Racine is pious; but his gift as a tragedian is impious; and that is perhaps the chief reason for the silence which immediately follows Phèdre.'

Gide's translation of *Hamlet* is also, in its way, a memorable interpretation. In May 1942 the insistence of Barrault persuaded him to resume a task to which, in the summer of 1922, he had devoted many harassing and unsatisfactory sessions. The full *souffle* of Shakesperian verse cannot be reproduced in French. The two languages are not evenly matched; and everything which Gide then wrote about *Hamlet* could be repeated now by aspiring translators of Gide. 'It's not my job here to write well. . . . It's against that that I must struggle most.' The most sedulous of translators will sooner or later impose upon his original a spurious brilliance or suavity, a smoothness which, while it reads well in his own language, does no justice to the practised and savoury violence of the original. 'To write good French, one must go too far away from Shakespeare.' The translation of *Hamlet* represents a sustained effort of fidelity and intelligence such as few of our senior authors would pay to any French text. It is not Shakespeare, not Gide. The original has a variety of tone and attack, and with these a purely verbal resource, such as no other writer in any other language has ever possessed. Gide is himself a master of grammatical *tour de force*, but there are things which cannot be done. When, for example, Hamlet says

For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ,

the lines simply are not rendered by 'Car le crime, sans recourir à des paroles, s'exprime avec une merveilleuse éloquence'. Nor does 'ce spectacle sera le traquenard où prendre le conscience du roi' reproduce one of the most sinister jingles ever spoken on a stage. But though this *Hamlet* must in some ways be accounted a curiosity, it will remain, like Gerard de Nerval's *Faust, Part I*, of great value to students of language; and it gave rise to a remarkable stage performance.

Gide has never lacked critics, and of these Julien Benda, spitting fire and revenge from his hermitage at Carcassonne, is the liveliest to read. *La France Byzantine* is a superlatively malicious work; readers accustomed to the dozing urbanity of English criticism may even be startled by Benda's free employment of his fangs, for these, though elderly, are still undrawn. Long use has concentrated their venom, and the apes of Gide, though rarely Gide himself, are badly mauled in the course of the book. Because it is easy to accept Mallarmé, Valéry and Gide as great masters, without paying them the tribute of close attention, Benda has done us all good service. His argument, put briefly, is that readers too readily adopt an idolatrous attitude to literature; in collusion with their most admired writers they applaud an art which, being founded upon unintelligible verbal subtleties, can lead only to the extinction of true literature. 'Alexandrian' is his favourite name for these writers, and he takes Mallarmé's frugal chantry in the rue de Rome to have been the original seat of the cult. A comparable decline led, in Latin times, from the male perfection of Tacitus and Caesar and the philosophical grandeur of Lucretius to the imbecile niceties of Parthenios of Nicea. Assuming the mantle of St. Jerome, Benda deplores that, now as in Roman times, obscure gallantries and overtures to sensibility find more readers than the *Phaëdo* or the *Timæus*. He adds a reference to the time when, immediately after the Macedonian conquest, Athenian fashionables turned from Euripides and Thucydides, and from Aristotle and Demosthenes, to cool their delicate palates with Callimachus and his peers.

Within this general indictment, individual offenders are arraigned. Valéry's intellectualism is found to infect feeble-minded readers with the view that all conventional intellectual processes are futile. Similarly Gide's readers regard his own painful hesitations as a permanently desirable state, rather than (as in Descartes) a position of doubt which a wise man will adopt in order to site himself for some new leap. Benda likens the false admirer of Gide to a eunuch in the harem of ideas; aimlessly he paws one after another of his charges, but cannot possess and fecundate any one of them. Most hot and bitter, too, is his assault upon the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. This magazine, perhaps the most brilliant and various in literary history, enjoyed between the years 1910-40 the services of every good writer in France—Benda himself not

least among them. Yet he finds in it mainly the clan spirit, a determination to dispense final and exclusive judgements, a general smugness and self-sufficiency, and in questions of language an affected difficulty of manner.

To all this Gide has replied, perhaps involuntarily, in a lecture which, though written for delivery in the Roxy Cinema at Beirut, has a more than Levantine importance. 'Souvenirs Littéraires et Problèmes Actuels' is, as its title would suggest, at once a fragment of reminiscence, in the palatial style of 'Si Le Grain Ne Meurt', and a series of those apostrophes to young listeners which make Gide, now as always, an incomparable, if at times baffling, invigorant. Benda receives (and with what melodious courtesy) his answer in the homage to Mallarmé, who raised 'notre vers classique à un degré de perfection sonore, de beauté plastique et intérieure, de puissance incantatrice qu'il n'avait jamais atteint encore et, je pense, n'atteindra jamais plus'. As for their indifference to anything but subtleties of language—the friends of Mallarmé included three of Dreyfus's most valorous defenders, and at no time did Mallarmé advocate the policy of *la littérature engagée*, which, cradled by Barrès, has now reached squawling maturity in the pages of *Les Temps Modernes*. The portrait of Barrès which follows is of a Benda-like mischief; and when Gide records how, while visiting Barrès, he stretched out his hand to take down a volume of Byron, only to find that the set was a false one, and masked a drawer full of brushes and scents, one might be back in the pages of the *Goncourt Journal*. As for the N.R.F., Gide points out that this, so far from being the playground of a self-intoxicated clique, was in fact open to the most varied points of view, and was, if anything, too severe to its own members. In it, one could watch the eternal dialogue of French thought—between the spirit of submission to received authority and that of doubt and the free examination of beliefs.

This short lecture, 'Souvenirs Littéraires et Problèmes Actuels', would tell casual readers quite a lot about Gide—the good fortune which placed him, from early youth onwards, among writers of extreme and irrecoverable brilliance; the *état de dialogue*, so natural to himself, which he sees to have been the essential form of French intelligence since Abelard first disputed with the Church; and his devotion to the idea of style, which alone, in his view, has preserved and ennobled even such writers as Bossnet,

who regarded it as their most profane, most perishable quality. If they were not habitual readers of French, they might be surprised at the heat and permanence of French literary disputes. (Beside these, our own controversies are like the summer games of unformed boys.) They might also infer that Gide has always regarded it as the writer's duty to be helpful to his readers. His direct interest in social problems is by no means recent; even as a spellbound tourist in North Africa he took notice of such things, and the problem of Franco-German relations is perhaps the oldest of his non-literary preoccupations. Nevertheless, the journey to the Congo, and his brief conversion to Communism, did represent a more serious complication, and one to which his years of silence (in the early 1930s) bear best witness. If he had come earlier to the social question (so he tells us in his *Journal 1939-1942*), the whole of his career would have been altered. To all this, the short *nouvelle* *Thésée* is the oblique answer.

Thésée is nearest, in form, to *Le Retour de L'Enfant Prodigue*, and nearest in substance to *Le Prométhée Mal Enchaîné*. As so often with Gide, the subject had lain in his mind for quite thirty years before he pushed himself to the point of beginning. Once begun, it took on a panoramic aspect, as if Gide were out to display every resource of art and language, and to rediscover his own spiritual history in the story of Theseus, the founder of Athens. *Thésée* is, first of all, a grammatical *tour de force*. Rare or obsolete usages are jammed close to phrases from vulgar contemporary speech. Poetic limpidities disclose, if one gazes long enough, the bluntest of improper suggestions. Puns and allegories lie one within the other. Theseus himself swings from metaphysical speculation to the language of a stable-boy, and is by turns elder statesman, nature-poet, and self-infatuated gymnast. An English reader, hot from thumbing his dictionary, may realize only after some time that this book is also a masterpiece of straight narrative. Not merely does every word take on its fullest load, but the placing of each word, the devices of rhythm and syntax, represent the searches and researches of a lifetime. In the *Figaro*, Gide has applied himself to minute points of language which might seem too childish for so great a writer; but on the contrary the scrutiny of such points has made possible the language of *Thésée*.

The first pages of the book describe the boyhood of Theseus, the first trials of his manhood, and the earlier of his summary but

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appreciative sexual experiments. Once ashore at Crete, however, Gide launches out upon a full-scale evocation of antique grandeur. Flaubert and Sir Arthur Evans have had some hand in this, but the essentials of tone and pace, the golden sensuality and the pondered detail, are Gide's alone. These pages give off, no less than the Labyrinth itself, a voluptuous gas. They would be hard to equal for sensuous enjoyment. The complaisance of Ariadne gives place to the constructive intelligence of Daedalus, builder of the Labyrinth, and the philosophical illusions of his son Icarus, whose mind has been unsteadied for ever by the delights of the maze. For this is an ordeal of pleasure, not of endurance. Daedalus has built a maze more beguiling than life itself, and the Minotaur, so far from being a man-eating monster, is a flower-struck beauty, lulled into hebetude by the delights of his surroundings. We find him asleep among jonquils—an echo perhaps of the Sudanese negroes whom Gide had watched, long ago in Tunis, stuffing flowers into their nostrils. After an equivocal combat, Theseus with difficulty retrieves the rest of his party from the Labyrinth. The abduction of Phèdre leads to the passages which may lie nearest to Gide's heart. Theseus sets himself to found a great city, governed by an aristocracy not of birth, but of intellect. The book ends with Theseus an old and lonely man, secure in his glory, reflecting upon the memory of a talk with Œdipus. These last pages resume the dialogue between Christian and non-Christian laws which has always been, for Gide, at once brake and accelerator.

Thésée, then, is nearly everything—a 'good story', a prose-poem, a series of philosophical dialogues, an allegory, and an unblemished feat of language. No work of Gide's has been felt more deeply by its author, and an attentive reader will descry in it many other preoccupations than that of composing a work of literary art. Wraith-like, other heroes of Gide's, and sometimes Gide himself, compose some part of this Theseus. When Theseus says, 'Je n'ai jamais aimé la demeure, fût-ce au sein des délices', it is possible (while admiring the recondite usage of 'la demeure') to recall that Gide has written of his old friend Valéry that, 'Fût-ce dans les délices, il ne lui plaisait pas de s'attarder'. And Valéry has always been, for Gide, the symbol of an ideal, undistractable vigour; for no one, more than Gide, has sought for what Valéry himself described as 'une vie de volonté intellectuelle,

et ma résistance personnelle aux actions de dissipation, d'abrutissement, d'amollissement et d'insenséisme exercées sur le moderne par la vie qu'il faut mener, par l'université, par le journal, les modes, le chiqué, les extrémistes, les opportunistes, les clergés, les artistes, et généralement par tous ceux qui font croire et par ceux qui croient'. The grand individualism of this sentence is a prime trait, with Theseus and also with Gide. When, again, Theseus dedicates himself to the salvation of Athens, and forswears private enjoyments, he remarks that 'il ne s'agissait plus de conquérir, mais de régner'. One cannot but remember the lines from *Titus*, which Gide quoted in 1941 in order to show that sometimes in Racine there were instances of heroic decisions in which higher interests overruled the claims of love. Theseus here echoes Titus:

Je sens bien que sans vous je ne saurais plus vivre.
Mais il ne s'agit plus de vivre, il faut régner.

Olympian Goethe takes his place, beside Valéry and beside Racine's Titus, on the committee. In politics, Theseus pursues a modified Stalinism; in the life of the senses, he has the uninhibited power of enjoyment which Gide has tried to transplant from the Tunis of 1895 into the western Europe of our own epoch. In religion and personal morality he derives from the Goethe of Gide's preface. Even his motto, 'Passer Outre', which clangs like a bell-buoy throughout the story, is attributed also to Goethe. Theseus, as much as Goethe, valued love as a liberating force; and, like him, knew when to have done with it. 'Après . . . avoir tiré d'un bonheur tout le parti qui convenait à l'art, Goethe ne s'y attardait pas, mais passait outre; il ne gardait l'amour au cœur qu'aussi longtemps qu'il en avait besoin pour son œuvre.' Theseus's dialogue with *Œdipus*, again, puts explicitly the conflicts which Gide for sixty years has sometimes nourished, sometimes endured; but when Theseus has the last word, and rejects absolutely the mystical point of view, one cannot but feel behind him the outline of a later illuminant. As Gide wrote a year or so earlier, 'Goethe . . . n'attaque pas le christianisme, comme avait fait Voltaire ou Diderot, comme fera Nietzsche; simplement il passe outre; ou plutôt: il passe à côté. De péché originel, de contrition, de rédemption, il n'a cure'. One could multiply such examples, for *Thésée* represents, on Gide's part, an act of confidence; Gide's

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life, as much as Theseus's, is recounted in its pages—from the radiant sensuality of the beginning to the long-pondered meliorism of the last few lines. No palpable city bears witness to Gide's long effort; but he has passed on to some of us his conviction that man has not yet spoken his last word, and that 'l'humanité', in Theseus's phrase, 'peut plus et vaut mieux'. In the last few years he has gathered up the ends of a lifetime of work; his language has taken on a definitive grandeur; and it is only just to acclaim him, as he has acclaimed Goethe, as 'le plus bel exemple, à la fois souriant et grave, de ce que, sans aucun secours de la Grâce, l'homme, de lui-même, peut obtenir'.

SHORT BOOK LIST

The following are the principal publications of André Gide since 1939:

Thésée (Gallimard).

Journal 1939-1942 (Gallimard).

Attendu Que... (Charlot).

Jeunesse (*Ides et Calendes*: Neuchâtel).

Le Retour (*Ides et Calendes*: Neuchâtel).

Souvenirs Littéraires et Problèmes Actuels (Les Lettres Françaises).

Feuillets (Charlot).

Poussin (Le Divan).

En Découvrant Henri Michaux (Gallimard).

Paul Valéry (Domat).

Hamlet (Gallimard).

The style of *Thésée* is the subject of a remarkable article by Etiemble in *Les Temps Modernes* (March 1947); and Gide's use of language is analysed with all possible authority by 'M. St. Clair' in her book of portraits, *Galerie Privée* (Gallimard). *André Gide*, by Jean Hytier (Charlot) should also be consulted.

Poussin has been translated by Dorothy Bussy for publication in *The Arts*.

Messrs. Secker & Warburg have in hand an English translation of Gide's *Journal 1889-1939*.