and art of a generation and of leaving their imprint upon generations to come. One need not be a Catholic to be able to perceive this. It is, perhaps, too much to expect that the ordinary commercial publisher in the United States today would be sufficiently interested in a treatise on esthetics to have it translated from the Portuguese, but one would think that some of the Catholic houses might be.—*Philadelphia.*

Two Books, Two Creeds

BY B. RENÉE LANG

THE French series of Pantheon Books, New York, has given us recently two books which represent par excellence two generations of contemporary French thought: the descending generation and the ascending generation—and two aspects of this thought; the ascending thought and the descending thought. The works are André Gide's "last writing," *Theseus,* a sort of intellectual will of a septuagenarian who persists in believing that "humanity can do more and better," and *The Stranger,* in which Albert Camus illustrates his philosophy of the absurdity of life.

In the disguise of Theseus, vanquisher of the Minotaur, Gide transmits to the coming generation the message of his unshakable faith in the potentialities of man. "Find yourself" is his device; "go beyond," his battle cry. All the themes, all the tones which have resounded in the complex work of André Gide reappear in his new *sotie* in succinct form; all the factors which have transformed his unrestrained individualism into "serviceable individualism" are here retraced. *Sotie,* we called it, for here we encounter again that fascinating mixture of gravity and buffoonery, that whimsical fusion of the sublime and the trivial which Gide first introduced in *Paludes.* But this is far from being the only mood prevailing. The lyrical pantheism of the *Nourritures terrestres* bursts forth in the very first pages of *Theseus:*

> Oh, first years lived in innocence! Carefree development! I was the wind, the wave. I was plant; I was bird. I did not stop at myself, and all contact with an exterior world did not so much teach me my limitations as awake in me voluptuousness. I caressed fruits, the bark of young trees, the smooth pebbles of shores, the coats of dogs and horses, before caressing women; all the delight which Pan, Aeus, or Thetis held out to me, I coveted.

And further on:

> With wild leaps my heart rushed to the fulfilment of my joy.
> What have I to do with security . . . and with paved roads?

Contempt for beaten tracks, hatred for stagnation, repose, and comfort, glorification of the senses, all the Nietzschean motifs which Gide had previously proclaimed reappear in the course of Theseus' exploits. Each deed, each encounter, is merely the symbol of another step in the evolution of Gide's thought. Can one fail to recognize the condemnation of metaphysics in the description of the labyrinth filled with narcotic fumes which "induce the brain to fruitless activity . . . to visions or inconsistent speculations"? Can one fail to discern in the mystical madness of Icarus the eternal human anguish which religions nourish and exploit? Can one fail to detect in the playful tone of a literary debate between the hero and Ariadne, his mistress, a weighty declaration of Gide's own esthetic principles? The passage is too significant not to be quoted. Theseus reprimands Ariadne for having rimed a noun in the singular with a noun in the plural. "You really should know that this is forbidden," he states, to which she retorts, "I would never have thought you a purist." And Theseus: "I am a purist all the more as I am free in my actions." All the strange and fascinating antagonism between the daring of Gide's thought (let us say even its romanticism) and the austere submission of his form to classic principles is illuminated in this sally.

Thus from adventure to adventure we see Theseus-Gide following his course to "found Athens, there to establish the reign of the spirit," for

> There is one time to . . . purge the world of its monsters, another time to cultivate and bring the purged earth to fruition; one time to free men from fear, another time to employ their liberty and make their freedom flourish.

This faith in progress, this persistence in the way of Voltaire, Goethe, Valéry, is not maintained indeed without downfalls and solitude: Theseus sees his companion yield to the intoxicating pleasures of the labyrinth; sees his friend Pirithous, weary of men, seclude himself in bitter temperance; sees his wife Phaedra deceive him and kill herself, while Hippolytus, his son, dies, the victim of his father's ruthless aberration. But his creed remains unchanged:

> I am a child of this earth . . . Willingly I approach lonely death. With delight I have tasted the fruits of the earth. The thought is sweet that after me and by my efforts men will be happier, better, and more free. For the good of future generations, I have fulfilled my destiny.

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Meursault, the pitiable hero of the novel of Camus, is "a child of this earth" also. In this account of an existence with neither dignity nor goal, of a senseless murder and an absurd trial, life does indeed appear as the only reality, deprived of a beyond, with no possible redemption, but a reality even more derisive than the execution of Meursault, "convicted of not having wept at the funeral of his mother."

"That is the whole picture of the trial: everything is true and nothing is true!" This exclamation made by the lawyer of the defendant could well be used as the motto for the whole novel, perhaps even for the whole philosophy of the author. Where Theseus is defiant and re-creates the scale of values, Meursault is indifferent and ignores all codes; where the Greek, scornful of any after-life, directs his attention toward the world of men and the battle for "the good of future generations," the Stranger remarks that after all "the whole world knows very well that life is not worth living." Career, love, death, smoking or drinking, false testimony, friendship, murder, God, all are on the same plane for this man of indifference whose apathy is nevertheless coupled with a supreme honesty. When his young mistress speaks to him of marriage, he reacts thus:

> I said that it made no difference to me and that we could do so if she wished. She then wanted to know if I loved her. I answered that it meant nothing but that I probably did not love her. "Why marry me then?" she asked. I explained to her that it had no importance and that if she wished, we could get married. Moreover, it was she who was asking and I was satisfied to say yes. She then remarked that marriage was a serious thing. I answered: "No."

Whether it is a decision of primary or secondary importance, he never abandons his honesty—unconscious honesty, however, rather than line of conduct—and it is in vain that his lawyer, anticipating that the prosecution may exploit his indifference at his mother's death, suggests to him a subterfuge:

> I said to him: "No, because it is untrue." He then looked at me strangely, as if I were somewhat arousing disgust in him.

Face to face with death, although terror-stricken, he rejects the Cross which the chaplain holds up to him. But while up to this time he seems to have gone through life like a sleepwalker, the approaching execution makes him conscious, lucid, defiant, sure of his truth:

> Nothing, nothing was of importance and I well knew why . . . What did I care for the death of others, for maternal love, what did I care for his God, the lives one chooses, the destinies one elects, since one destiny only had elected me . . . !

A whole page of recriminations follows, starting each one with "What

did I care?" since death itself was giving proof of the unquestionable absurdity of existence. And "so that all be consummated," the story ends with his wishing that on the day of his execution there would be a great many spectators to receive him with shouts of hatred.

Thus, according to Camus, man, like Sisyphus pushing his heavy rock to the summit of a mountain from which it unceasingly rolls down, accomplishes his gratuitous task.* In the lucid awareness of this absurdity and in the total liberty resulting from it, humanity may find a compensation for its hopeless fate. Man replaced in the greatness of his solitude, redeemed through the dignity of thought, all this takes us back to Pascal, to Jansenism. A Jansenism without God, that might perhaps be a new formula for the "philosophy of the absurd." But even more it reminds us of the bitter challenge of Rimbaud: "Life is the farce to be played by all of us. All aboard!"

We are grateful to Camus for his searching analysis of man and of society, for the propriety of his style which in its nudity reflects faultlessly the author's theme. We prefer indeed the austerity of his pitiless judgments to the sentimental optimism which so often prevails. However, the negation of a goal, the proclamation of a purposeless freedom, somewhat alarms us. We wish that our endeavors could contribute to make men better and happier. And thus we turn again to Gide and reread not without emotion and confidence these words of Theseus:

> I did not admit that man stopped at himself, in the way of the Boeotians, nor that he found his end in a mediocre happiness. I thought that man was not free, that he never would be nor that it would be good for him to be, for then he refers everything to himself and does not search beyond. I wanted to raise him, not admitting that he was satisfied with his fate and not consenting that he should bow his head. Humanity, I thought unceasingly, can do more and better.

—*Aurora, New York.*

* The myth of Sisyphus (1942) in which Camus sets forth his "philosophy of the absurd." The concept of the absurd is born of the antagonism between man's aspirations and reality.

"A new co-operative enterprise has been undertaken by Urban T. Holmes and George S. Lane of the University of North Carolina, namely, an account of all the languages of the world, more or less on the plan of Meillet-Cohen, *Les langues du monde*. It will contain a much fuller account of the Indo-European languages than is to be found in that work, and increases in our knowledge during these twenty-two years will make it possible to expand many other sections. Several chapters have already been completed, and the others are expected to be in hand by January 1948." —E. H. Sturtevant, in *Studies in Linguistics,* University of Oklahoma, June 1947.