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par Wallace Fowlie

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James Agee, perhaps the outstanding talent in film criticism in America. And he might do well to forget his theories for a while, acknowledge the cinema as an art form, and treat it as such.

The "best buy" among current books on the cinema is Roger Manvell's *Film,* one of the Pelican Books published by Penguin in Great Britain. The revised edition (November 1946), emphasizes first principles: it contains an analysis of the film as an art form and comments perceptively on such aspects of the medium as editing, sequences, sound, and acting. Mr. Manvell's preference for realism in the cinema is not always convincing. But his discussion of documentaries, his analysis of the influence of movies upon society, his clear assessment of the contribution of such men as Pudovkin and Arnheim, his discriminating bibliography, and his intelligent sympathy for the medium make this book almost indispensable as an introduction to cinema criticism.

LEON REISMAN

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Hero Taking His Time

THE JOURNALS OF ANDRE GIDE. Volume I. Translated by *Justin O'Brien.* Knopf. $5.00

IN the summer of 1939, the publication in Paris of the Pléiade edition of Gide's *Journal* was the outstanding literary event of the year. The volume contained 1332 pages of journal writing, carried on during the fifty years span of 1889-1939. Already, by 1939, many theses had been sustained on the meaning and position of André Gide in our world: writer, aesthete, humanist, sceptic, prophet, individualist, sophist, hedonist, Christian. No contemporary writer has appeared in so many different rôles to so many different critics. The publication of the *Journal* confirmed all theses. In 1944, Gide published in *L'Arche,* which was then appearing in North Africa, new pages of his journal, which called forth a series of violent attacks on him, and in particular an unjust article of Louis Aragon who accused him of going over to the side of the enemy. Since 1944 his exalted position has been won back. He is the greatest figure, with Claudel, of contemporary French letters, and the appearance of Mr. Justin O'Brien's admirable translation of one third of the *Journal,* the years 1889-1913 (two other volumes are promised for early publication), will help the American readers of Gide to invent their own theses on his

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significance and value. Mr. O'Brien has provided in his edition a critical essay on Gide, and an index of name identifications, as well as a translation of the text, so competent, so sympathetic to the nervous and varied style of Gide, that it will rank as one of the finest translations into English of a major French book.

The exacting problem of what precise position the *Journal* occupies in the entire work of Gide is one of the most debatable. Has the *Journal* been written on the margin of the major work, or is it one of the fervent monuments in the work itself, the greatest perhaps? These would be the two extremes of viewpoint. Yet the majority of Gide's books are cast in the form of a journal: Alissa's journal in *La Porte Etroite;* Edouard's in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs;* the "journal de route," called *Amyntas.* The need of knowing and exploring himself has so motivated the writing of Gide that the concept of "sincerity" has been endowed with a new dignity because of his work. He has become the man in whom the modern world has taken on an exceptional and penetrating consciousness of its perils, its dreams, its destinies. Gide proposes in his *Journal* a familiarity which is unusual in the American or English tradition. He includes not only critical judgments on readings and the account of literary conversations, but everything that can be considered search or experience or adventure. His basic preoccupation is never informational. It would resemble more a warning.

Among all the great autobiographical documents (Cellini, Rousseau, Chateaubriand), Gide's stands out by its freedom from pose and artificiality. He is determined to write the truth about himself as he sees it, even if that involves, as it surely does, the formulating of contradictions. Some passages glorify desire and self-indulgence, but others appear to be apologies for an impoverishment of self, for an ascetic regimen. Pages devoted to the ethic of pleasure and expansion are counteracted by others on the belief in effort and constriction. Whatever inclination is apparent toward the gratuitous act, it is easily offset by an overwhelming abundance of good common sense. If one day Gide preaches "Be what you are," the next day he will demonstrate how impossible it is for us to know who we are.

In contradiction Gide has found a law and an abiding creed. He and Montaigne are the two French writers who practised a vocation of honesty, who are heroic in their willingness to reveal the contradictions of their nature. The *Essays* and the *Journal* teach that a human destiny is always

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complex and always on the verge of splitting apart.

The biographical value of Gide's *Journal* is doubtless very great, but the work can be considered as an authentic document only on certain limited aspects of his life and personality. He is silent on some of the most important problems. The secret drama of Gide is not manifested in the *Journal*, although it is faintly adumbrated there. To sense and to reconstruct a more complete picture of Gide, a reading of all his works, done with exceptional penetration and understanding, would be necessary. He is not best characterized by wisdom or by holiness. The sage and the saint are more coherent and more easily decipherable men. Heroism is a far more complicated quality to define. It indeed involves, in the case of Gide, attributes of wisdom and goodness, but it involves especially a knowledge of what this particular man is called upon to be heroic about. Heroism implies a starting point in fear and deficiency. More fervently and tenaciously than other themes, the writer's heroism emerges from the *Journal*, the will to write as a means of self-knowledge and as a means of constructing outside of oneself a work which by its nature is permanent, even if it reflects human nature in its changes and contradictions.

Gide's life seems to have been guided and dominated by the parable of the prodigal son, even if the parable usually appears in a revised and modified version. He has been consciously fearful at all times of attaching himself, of allying himself with a center or a focus. He has opposed Barrès and the doctrine of racial security, of sinking one's roots into the land of the native province. As a writer, Mauriac has deepened his vocation in an ever increasing knowledge and study of Les Landes and Bordeaux, but Gide is rebellious against geographical and intellectual alliances. He has never sought certainty or assurance. His mind is stirred and exhilarated best by search and curiosity. His *Immoralist* knows that the hardest of all goals is to remain free. To be able at any moment in one's life to give up what one is doing, to interrupt one's preoccupation and love, to detach oneself from the closest bonds, has assumed the proportion for Gide of a way of life. Happiness, when it comes easily and naturally, must be refused. The forces which educate us, from which we derive the maximum good, are those which go counter to our temperament and inclinations, those against which we revolt. Gide has a profound disliking for spiritual complacency, for anything that resembles spiritual assurance and comfort. His perpetual vow is to exceed himself, to admonish, reform, and re-educate himself. In his journal entry of

May 16, 1905, he writes: "Do we ever really seek happiness? No, rather the free development of whatever is newest in us." (The original French for "free development" is *le libre jeu,* less didactic in tone than the English.)

The entire work of Gide, from the early journal pages, to his recent *Thésée* (1946), is the most calculated, among contemporary writings, to disturb the reader, to startle and excite him. It is addressed to our innate and often obscured tendencies toward revolt, dissatisfaction, and desire. But the form of writing is so dextrously carried out, with such precision of vocabulary, such harmony and counterpoint of sentence structure and sentence variation, with such mastery of rhetorical resources, that the work, as well as stimulating thought in the reader, sets up in him at the same time an unusual sense of voluptuousness in language. The writings of Gide are always the confluence of adventure and order: adventure of thought and experience; order of form and expression. In them we are simultaneously freed from our habitual thought and drawn close to the exact form which so liberates us.

Despite the tremendous debt younger writers owe to Gide and the example of his *Journal,* he represents a uniqueness: a temperament, a life, a fervor, which is perhaps no longer possible in our world. Gide may well be the last instance of a certain kind of liberty, of leisure, of *largesse.* He was never without a sense of discipline, of inner spiritual discipline, but his development has been slow and meticulous. During these early years of the *Journal,* he was able and free to concentrate on his craft and his personal evolution, whereas the writers of the following generation, Malraux and Sartre, addressed their first works to a much larger public. Gide has little sense of the "tragic" which Malraux has, and little sense of the "absurd," so characteristic of Sartre. He is more purely the writer, above the limitations of the tragic writer or the philosopher. His writing is a perpetual state of dialogue: his *Journal* is a mirror for his other books, which, themselves, bear many reflections of the *Journal.* No matter what degree of sincerity is reached in the writing of a journal, it remains always, by its very nature, a compensation for life, the desire to live more deeply what was only partially or imperfectly experienced, or even more simply, to live what was never lived.

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