GIDE IN MOSCOW (1936)
The climate was suffocating.

Immoral Moralist

THE JOURNALS OF ANDRÉ GIDE, VOL. II, 1914-1927 (462 pp.)—*Translated and annotated by Justin O'Brien*—*Knopf* ($6).

One day in 1881 a Paris schoolboy "fell convulsively sobbing into mamma's arms" and cried: "I'm not like other people . . . not like other people!" André Gide, at eleven, had found his career.

Gide's difference from other people extends to his extraordinary clothes, his inconsistencies (he has professed to be both an atheist and a Christian), his admitted homosexuality and a superbly polished literary style that makes most other contemporary prose seem sloppy. Gide has suffered more harsh cuffs from critics and more indifference from the reading public than any other major writer of his time. Now, at 78, he is France's literary lion, a member of the Royal Academy since 1924, a Nobel Prizewinner (1947). In many quarters he is regarded as the world's greatest living man of letters.

Few U.S. readers have even a page-flipping acquaintance with Gide's bulky literary output. Of his more than 50 books written in the past 57 years, only one, *The Counterfeiters*, is well-known in the U.S.—and mainly by esthetes and highbrows. It is a brilliant, difficult novel of good & evil, with plots and counterplots twisting through a choking fog of perversion. Gide himself intended *The Counterfeiters* to be his major work. Even so, only 45,000 copies of all its U.S. editions have been sold. Of the other 16 Gide books published in the U.S., only Vol. I of his intimate *Journals* (TIME, Sept. 22) has made any dent (10,000 copies sold) on U.S. bookreaders.

Vol. II, just published (the third volume will be out next year), is probably as candid a confession of a writer's moral and ethical anguish as ever got into print. Not even in Gide's own sensationally indiscreet autobiography, *If It Die* (a limited edition appeared in the U.S. in 1935), is the reader treated to a grimmer spiritual wrestling match than in this account of Gide *v.* his personal devil, Gide *v.* an inhospitable world, Gide *v.* his Puritan conscience.

"Some Sort of Craziness . . ." While many another writer (Poe, Dostoevsky, Melville) fought battles against poverty, André Gide did his struggling without ever missing a meal or muddying his boots. The only child of wealthy French

Interfoto—Rapho-Guillumette

GIDE IN PARIS (1948)
The torment is ceaseless.

2 et 3 (voir au verso)

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Protestant parents, he was free to indulge his moods and vices, and he indulged them. His family had two estates in Normandy and a luxurious Paris apartment. By his own account he was a singularly unattractive youngster and only five when he began to practice "bad habits." A picture taken of him about that time "represents me half hidden in my mother's skirts, frightfully dressed in a ridiculous little check frock, with a sickly, ill-tempered face and a crooked look in my eyes."

Nervous and shy, he was a poor student in school and made few friends. Once, told by his mother to kiss a cousin, "I went obediently up and she drew me towards her; but at the sight of her bare shoulder and its dazzling whiteness, some sort of craziness possessed me; instead of putting my lips to the cheek she offered me, fascinated by her dazzling shoulder, I gave it a great bite . . . My cousin screamed with pain and I with horror. She began to bleed and I to spit with disgust."*

Gide published his first book, anonymously and at his own expense, when he was 21. *The Notebooks of André Walter* (1891) was the thinly disguised story of his own neurotic love for his cousin Emmanuèle. Novelist-Critic Charles Huysmans promptly labeled it "a product of hideous vulgarities." Few people read it and fewer still bought it; but it admitted Gide to Paris' literary set. It brought him the acquaintance of Maeterlinck, D'Annunzio, Whistler, Gauguin, Rodin and Mallarmé.

Gide averaged about a book a year (poetry, fiction, drama or criticism); he also had a hand in half a dozen magazines. On the *Revue Blanche* he succeeded Léon Blum as literary critic. ("Blum has the precise kind of mind that congeals mine at a distance and whose lucid brilliance keeps mine muscle-bound as it were and reduced to impotence.") Trying his hand as a publisher, Gide pulled one of the greatest boners in literary history when he turned down a first novel by Marcel Proust: *Swann's Way*.

Nothing But Flops. At 23 Gide was a pale, thin neurotic who roamed the streets of Paris with brown beard, affectedly long hair and a spectacular cape. Timid and tongue-tied in public, he was constantly depressed about his work, his cousin Emmanuèle's refusal to marry him and the discovery that he had tuberculosis.

If ever a writer had reason to give up, it was young Gide. All of his early books were critical and popular failures (one sold ten copies in ten years). Gide wrote in his *Journals*: "I do not know where I am going; but I am making progress." His progress was imperceptible to other eyes. Critics lambasted everything he wrote; to French Roman Catholics, his *Corydon*, a frank defense of homosexuality, was the devil's own mischief.

Gide once subscribed to a clipping service to see what his critics were saying. Typical was the comment of the *Revue*

* Stendhal's autobiographical *Life of Henri Brulard* records a similar occasion: "My first memory is of . . . my cousin . . . 'Kiss me, Henri,' she said. I did not want to . . . and I bit her . . ."

2 et 3 (voir au verso)

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Française: "His work is the most flagrantly unpunished intellectual and moral scandal of the century." Thirty years after his first book, he lamented: "I have scarcely known, throughout my 'career,' anything but flops."

After his mother's death, Gide finally married Cousin Emmanuèle. She is the prototype of characters in several of his books, always as a devoted friend, with a long-suffering piety and a love of God that Gide sometimes found irritating. Em, as Gide refers to her, is an off-stage character in the *Journals*. Critic Georges Lemaître says of Emmanuèle that "when she came to understand his moral perversity, she shrank from him and 'took refuge in God.'" The *Journals* prove that she had unusual endurance. She died in 1938. On the last page of his autobiography Gide wrote: "A fatality led me . . . It was the marriage of Heaven with my insatiable Hell."

GIDE AT 16
The whiteness was dazzling.

Talk with the Devil. One thing the *Journals* make clear: Gide's "insatiable Hell." His daily antagonist is a very real devil. In 1914 he told a friend that what "kept me from believing in the devil was that I wasn't quite sure of hating him." Two years later he confided to his *Journals:* "When I say: the Evil One, I know what that expression designates just as clearly as I know what is designated by the word *God*. I draw his outline by the deficiency of each virtue . . . he is more intelligent than I, everything he thought up to hurl me toward evil was infinitely more precious, more specious, more convincing, more beautiful, more clever than any argument I could have brought up to persevere in honor."

Gide jots down one of his exchanges with the Evil One:

Devil: "Your inclination is I. In short, you give me such a wonderful role that I wonder if sometimes you do not confuse

me with God. The amusing thing, I tell you, is that henceforth you cannot believe in One without the Other. Just listen to the fable of the gardener . . ."

Gide: "By heaven! I knew it: you too know how to talk in parables."

Devil: "Oh, I'm not limited to just one form of expression."

Gide: "This is because you speak in turn to the mind, to the heart, to the senses; and since, while protecting myself on one side, I am always uncovering myself on the other, you, who keep moving around me, always address yourself to the unguarded side."

Devil: "How well we know each other! You know, if you wanted to—"

Gide: "What?"

Devil: "What good friends we should be! . . ."

Frightful Shadow. In spite of his lifelong preoccupation with moral struggle and theological terms, Gide has said that he is an atheist and expects to die as one. He has also said: "I am neither a Protestant nor a Catholic; I am simply a Christian." Like other devout atheists, he is deeply concerned with God, and an earnest reader of the Bible. His *Journals* and, indeed, almost all his books have religious overtones. Sometimes a Biblical text haunts him for hours at a time: " 'Except a man be born again.' All this morning I repeated these words to myself and I am repeating them this evening, after having measured all day long the frightful shadow that my past casts onto my future."

Gide spends many pages of the *Journals* trying to prove that the Church has become an obstacle between Christ and man. As for spiritual solace, each man, he thinks, must find it within himself, in his own way and in his own time. To converted Roman Catholic Philosopher Jacques Maritain, who once asked him to pray for Christ's guidance, Gide replied: "Understand me, Maritain, I have lived too long and too intimately, and you know it, in the thought of Christ to agree to call on him today as one rings someone up on the telephone. Indeed, it would seem to me unworthy to call on him without having first put myself in a state to hear him . . . There are some who would consult Christ to know how to lace a pair of shoes; I cannot; I will not."

"Wicked Old Man." Many of Gide's friends have been converted to Roman Catholicism, but Gide embraced another faith. In 1932, he announced that Communism was man's hope. He was promptly hailed by fellow travelers as the world's greatest writer. Then, in 1936, Gide and a party of friends were invited by the Soviet government to Russia. While thousands looked on, Gide stood in Moscow's Red Square with Stalin and Molotov (*see cut*), and delivered a funeral oration for Maxim Gorki. Almost overnight, Gide, the longtime champion of individualism, became the literary hero of a totalitarian state.

But the trip disillusioned Gide. Even before his Russian junket he had said: "The climate in the writings of Karl Marx is suffocating to me. There is something

lacking, I don't know what kind of ozone indispensable to my mental respiration." Gide's *Return from the U.S.S.R.* (his first bestseller, at 67) astounded and infuriated the Communists. He wrote: "I doubt whether in any other country in the world, even Hitler's Germany, thought be less free, more bowed down more fearful, more vassalized." The faithful, who had seen Gide treated like a hero, were now instructed to regard him as vermin. Soviet Propagandist Ilya Ehrenburg, who had led the cheering section for Gide, now denounced him as a "wicked old man."

The wicked old man abhorred dictatorships, left or right. When the Germans came to Paris he fled first to Nice, then to North Africa. Already past 72, he went on writing in an Arab village near Tunis, completed his translation of *Hamlet*. He

G. Doré

THE DEVIL
Listen to the fable of the gardener.

learned La Fontaine's fables by heart and later founded a literary review (*L'Arche*) in liberated Algiers. A stream of bigwigs came to his bedroom-study to pay their respects. Communists in the Algiers Consultative Assembly paid theirs by asking that he be tried and put to death. In the spring of 1945 he returned to Paris.

Chess & Cape. Still slender and erect, Gide has a leathery brown skin, sharp eyes and decisive gestures. His rambling Left-Bank apartment is shared with stout, 82-year-old writer Maria Van Rysselberghe, her daughter and son-in-law, Newspaperman Pierre Herbart. Gide's daughter, Catherine, now in her 20s, lives near Paris with her husband and two children.

Despite his weak heart (which caused him to cancel his announced U.S. trip this spring), Gide is still a prodigious worker. He is up at 6:30 every day, writes steadily until 9, works with a secretary until noon. After lunch and a nap he writes again until 5, has tea and receives friends. He hates to lose at solitaire or chess, loves the movies. A voracious reader, he rates

Dashiell Hammett with Faulkner and Steinbeck, was greatly impressed by the Kinsey Report.

Gide was once a gifted pianist but played badly when he thought anyone was listening (he has not played since his wife's death). Because of a morbid fear of strangers, he cries "I am at home for nobody" when the doorbell rings; then he peers from behind a door at the visitor, often ends by asking him in for a chat.

In a deep, musical voice he talks just as he writes, selecting his words carefully, crossing them out as he speaks and substituting better ones. His reputation for elegance is based on his numerous finely tailored smoking jackets and countless pairs of brightly colored socks. Even indoors, he often wears a scarf and a black beret. Wherever he goes in Paris he is followed by whispers of recognition. His sweeping black cape and high-crowned hat have been a trademark for years.

Insomnia & Denial. Gide can work anywhere and never wastes time. To fill five idle minutes, wherever he may be, he will fish in his pockets, come up with an edition of Montaigne's *Essais* or Pascal's *Pensées*. His notebooks are always with him, and he writes standing up or walking along—in trains, on subways, on country roads. He has never bothered learning to type.

In bed by 10, Gide reads several pages of Virgil's *Aeneid* in Latin to lull himself to sleep. Late at night, the lights of his apartment come on, he gets out of bed, prowls about his rooms, drinks milk and chain-smokes cigarettes until he is tired enough to sleep again. The *Journals* record a lifetime of insomnia—and the cause. Wrote Gide in 1892: "Shall I always torment myself thus and will my mind never, O Lord, come to rest in any certainty? Like an invalid turning over in his bed in search of sleep, I am restless from morning till night, and at night my anxiety awakens me."

Gide's ceaseless torment is almost the only unifying thread in the brilliant crazy quilt of his writing. Understandably, he prefers to avoid discussions of his work as a whole. Thirty years ago he wrote: "If I could be sure of living 25 years more, it seems to me that then I should have enough . . ."

Today, five years later than his own deadline, Gide still has not come to rest in any certainty. He still finds the devil appealing, persuasive, beautiful and clever—but not ever quite appealing or persuasive enough. And just as Gide has never made up his mind to yield wholly to the devil, so he has never quite decided to make a finish fight.

Long ago Gide himself clearly foresaw the hazards of his moral shilly-shallying: "If at least I could relate this drama; depict Satan, after he has taken possession of a creature, using him, acting through him upon others . . . Even I have only recently come to understand this: you are not only a prisoner; active evil demands of you a reverse activity; you must fight in the other army . . ."