

GIDE'S CONCEPT OF FICTION

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by

Valerie A. Underwood, M.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

September, 1971

MASTER OF ARTS (1971)
(Romance Languages)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Gide's Concept of Fiction

AUTHOR: Valerie A. Underwood, M.A. (Cantab.)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. E. Knight

NUMBER OF PAGES: 154

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: A study of Gide's theoretical ideas
concerning the nature and writing of fiction,
and his application of these in his fictional works.

"Pyotr Petrovitch:

'New valuable ideas, new valuable works are circulating in the place of our old dreamy and romantic authors. Literature is taking a maturer form, many injurious prejudices have been rooted up and turned into ridicule . . . In a word, we have cut ourselves off irrevocably from the past, and that, to my thinking, is a great thing . . .'

'He's learned it by heart to show off!'
Raskolnikov pronounced suddenly."

Dostoievsky, Crime and Punishment
(Heinemann, London, 1914, p. 133)

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INTRODUCTION

Since the appearance of the "nouveau roman" it has become difficult to establish any definition of fiction. The modern novel has taken on many characteristics which deviate from the conventions of the genre. At the time when Gide was writing the traditional concept of fiction was beginning to be questioned, as the nineteenth-century form was no longer appropriate to the new views and values of a radically changing society. For the purposes of this study the term "fiction" will be used with its traditional connotations, although these would not include everything which now comes under this heading. It will designate a work produced by the imagination of the author, presenting a narrative in prose. Gide's dramatic works will not be considered in this context. Fiction is often defined in opposition to "truth" or "reality". It is the relationship between reality and fiction that this study will examine, with reference to Gide's life and works.

This question is of particular interest in the case of Gide, for three reasons. The first is his view of reality: he was so uncertain of it that Jean Delay, in his biography of Gide's youth, analyses his attitude as a form

of neurosis.¹ This was bound to affect his fictional representation of the "real" world. The second is the connection between his own life and thought and his literary works. Gide often quoted² Oscar Wilde's remark that he had put only his talent into his works, his genius into his life. He was quick to recognize his own characteristics in others: the same might be said of Gide himself. The comments of many of the vast number of critics who have written on Gide can be summed up by Guérard's judgement of him: "André Gide, like Joyce and Mann and Lawrence, exists as a force".³ He is regarded by some as only incidentally a novelist. Paul West, for example, claims that "to consider André Gide as a novelist at all is partly to misapprehend him".⁴ His reputation as a "contemporain capital" for his generation, as a "démoralisateur" and "corruptor of youth" has made his name familiar to many who have only a slight acquaintance with his fictional works.

¹La Jeunesse d'André Gide. vol. I. Gallimard, Paris, 1956-8, pp. 147-8, 197-9, 239 ff., 532.

²Si le grain ne meurt . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, pp. 340-1; Journal I, Pléiade, Gallimard, 1948, p. 389; Cf. E. Knight, Literature considered as Philosophy, Collier, New York, 1962, p. 133.

³A. Guérard, André Gide. Dutton, New York, 1963, Preface, p. xvi.

⁴P. West, The Modern Novel. vol. I. Hutchinson, London, 1968, p. 178.

The last of these, Thésée, ends with the words: "J'ai goûté des biens de la terre . . . Pour le bien de l'humanité future j'ai fait mon oeuvre. J'ai vécu."⁵ Gide echoed Dostoïevsky's triumphant "I have lived!"⁶ Unlike Apollinaire he did not feel that he had "perdu son temps."⁷ This was because of the importance he attached to the works he left behind him, which brings us to the third reason for the particular interest of studying Gide's concept of fiction. He was a self-conscious artist, a critic as well as a creator, and left not only his works of fiction but his own commentaries on them and autobiographical writings. A comparison between these reveals a great deal about the genesis of the work of fiction, its relationship to life, and Gide's aims in writing it.

The creation of fiction was only one of the subjects which preoccupied Gide for a large part of his life: but it was one to which he constantly returned, whereas his excursions into the fields of politics and social problems were only intermittent and relatively incidental.

⁵ Thésée, Gallimard, Paris, 1946, p. 123.

⁶ A. Gide, Dostoïevsky, Secker and Warburg, London, 1962, p. 27.

⁷ Apollinaire, Alcools. Gallimard, Paris, 1920, p. 13.

For Gide aesthetics and morals were inextricably linked. He retained from his early associations with the Symbolist movement a belief in the supremacy of Art. He expressed his approval⁸ of Hytier's choice of a quotation from the Journal as an epigraph for his study of Gide:⁹ "Le point de vue esthétique est le seul où il faille se placer pour parler de mon oeuvre sainement".¹⁰ Yet later, in the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs,¹¹ he reproached the Symbolists for having formulated only an aesthetic, not an ethic. Gide's work is unique in its combination of "l'art pour l'art" and the approach of a "moraliste". For, although he insists that a work of art should never set out to prove anything, he does introduce ideas into his works of fiction. He wishes to disturb the reader, to shake him from his lethargy and convey the importance of certain problems. These are often concerned with the depiction of a problematical reality in a work of art: "D'une part, l'événement, le fait, la donnée extérieure; d'autre part, l'effort même du romancier pour faire un livre avec cela".¹² In this case,

⁸Journal, p. 1314.

⁹G. Hytier, André Gide. Charlot, Alger, 1945.

¹⁰Journal, p. 652.

¹¹Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, Gallimard, 1927, pp. 58-9.

¹²Les Faux-Monnayeurs, Livre de Poche, Gallimard, 1925, p. 49.

the work of fiction provides at the same time a theory of its creation.

Gide's fiction has been criticized on various grounds. On the one hand, it is not close enough to reality, compared to the conventional novel: it is too stylised and selective and at times too close to the roman à thèse. On the other, Gide is accused of depicting only his own life, of writing scarcely adapted autobiography, rather than inventive fiction. On both counts he is disparaged for not displaying the creative imagination of a Balzac or a Dickens. Yet Guérard classes Gide with novelists of undisputed stature -- Joyce, Mann and Lawrence. In a letter to Guérard¹³ Gide agreed that he would not place himself in the category of creative writers like Hardy or Conrad. He belongs with those mentioned before, whose importance lies in innovation and the projection of a powerful personality, rather than in a gift for story-telling alone.

Gide's influence as a writer of fiction lies precisely in what makes him different from his predecessors and contemporaries and links him more closely than most of them with the novel of today. The aim of this study is to show the importance of his contribution, both as a writer

¹³A Guérard, op. cit., p. 241.

of fiction and as a critic concerned with its theory. It will seek to do so by examining his concept of reality and of the work of art; the relationship between life and fiction in his works; and his development of different genres of fictional narrative, culminating in his one full-length novel, Les Faux-Monnayeurs. An analysis of this work in conjunction with the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs will elucidate his aims and methods in the writing of fiction, and indicate his originality and influence.

CHAPTER I

Reality and Art

Reality subjective and relative for Gide; his attitude to "objective realism" in the novel; the reality of the work of art; the relationship between Art and Nature; Gide's classicism and vitalism; the fantastic or supernatural element.

Gide was not, like Gautier, "un homme pour qui le monde extérieur existe". Reality, as it is generally understood, always seemed to him "quelque peu fantastique".¹ He recounts in his Journal a bomb incident in 1905 which confirmed his lack of involvement in actual events: "Impossible de prendre au sérieux ce que je voyais; il ne me semblait pas que ce fût de la vie véritable. Le tableau fini, les acteurs allaient revenir saluer."² Life seemed to be conforming to fiction rather than vice-versa, a theme to which we shall return.³ Almost twenty years later he was equally conscious of a 'certain sens de la réalité' which seemed to

¹Journal, p. 992.

²Ibid., pp. 162-3: Gide's italics.

³Cf. M. Robert, L'Ancien et le Nouveau. Grasset, Paris, 1963, p. 45.

be missing in his perception of the world: "je puis être extrêmement sensible au monde extérieur, mais je ne parviens jamais parfaitement à y croire".⁴ He experiences "un certain étonnement que les choses soient comme elles sont," and sees himself, in an unexpected situation, "comme à un spectacle en dehors de la réalité."⁵ Sometimes he feels that he could look behind the scenes,⁶ that if he turned round fast enough he would "voir du je ne sais quoi".⁷ The "real" world is no more present than that of fiction:

"Il me semble que nous nous agitions tous dans une parade fantastique et que ce que les autres appellent réalité, que leur monde extérieur, n'a pas beaucoup plus d'existence que le monde des Faux-Monnayeurs ou des Thibault".⁸

It is not only that things which happen do not seem real; conversely, things which did not happen, which he fabricated in his imagination, do seem real. He recalls his firm but mistaken belief that as a child he had seen

⁴Journal, p. 799; cf. p. 801.

⁵Ibid., p. 800.

⁶Pretexts, Reflections on Literature and Morality. Secker and Warburg, London, 1959, p. 309.

⁷Si le grain ne meurt . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p. 126.

⁸Journal, p. 801.

the Prussians enter Rouen.⁹ This was impossible, according to the facts, but he maintains that his own impression, though literally false, was in some way more "true" for him than what actually happened. In Ainsi soit-il he recalls another case in which his memory deceived him but his false impression seemed more true: "Le souvenir d'un fait peut rester (ou devenir) extraordinairement différent du fait lui-même et, pour ainsi dire, se substituer à lui."¹⁰ The event and the mental image retained of it are not the same, and it is the second which predominates, for Gide. Similarly, dreams were sometimes indistinguishable from reality for him: "Au point de vue pratique, cela peut devenir extrêmement gênant . . . Et puis cela encourage à l'excès certaine méfiance naturelle à l'égard de ce que l'on est tenu d'appeler la réalité . . ."¹¹ As a child, on seeing familiar people transformed for a ball, he concluded: "Il y a la réalité, et il y a les rêves; et puis il y a une seconde réalité".¹² This second reality is constituted by

⁹Si le grain ne meurt . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, pp. 24-5.

¹⁰Ainsi soit-il. Ides et Calendes. Paris, 1952, p. 112.

¹¹Ibid., p. 98.

¹²Si le grain ne meurt . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p. 27.

the stylised transformation of the first: it is the realm of fiction.

Gide's awareness of the subjectivity, in his own case, of the concept of the "real" or "true" is closely bound up with his desire to be "sincere" (honest with himself and his reader) and yet produce a work of art, which transforms the reality from which it derives. Holdheim points out that there is a dichotomy in Gide's concept of truth or sincerity:¹³ on the one hand veracity, or truth to the facts; on the other authenticity, the honest presentation of a subjective impression. In fiction the second is important, the first is not, as far as Gide is concerned.

The subjectivity and consequent relativity of any one person's view of reality was obvious to Gide, who was aware of the constant protean changes in himself. Already in his first work, les Cahiers d'André Walter, he saw that truth is "as diverse as there are minds to think".¹⁴ Any man can only see his world, and he is the only one to see it.¹⁵ Art and Literature are attempts to communicate this individual view. For Zola the work of art was a part

¹³W.W. Holdheim, Theory and Practice in the Novel: a study on André Gide. Droz, Geneva, 1968, p. 121.

¹⁴The Notebooks of André Walter. Peter Owen, London, 1968, p. 43.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 84.

of nature, seen through a temperament,¹⁶ that of the artist: this limitation was a flaw in the artistic representation of reality. Gide takes up his definition,¹⁷ but adapts and extends it. For him the value of the work of art lies in the uniqueness of the artist's view. In his fiction he goes one step further, and by the use of first-person narrative and "points of view" he attempts to depict, not a problematical "objective" reality, but the distorted perception of a person in a particular social situation and psychological state. The difference between his approach and the simple narration of fictitious (or real) events by an omniscient observer is pin-pointed in his summary of an idea for a novel:

"Un homme en colère raconte une histoire; voilà le sujet d'un livre. Un homme racontant une histoire, ne suffit pas; il faut que ce soit un homme en colère, et qu'il y ait un constant rapport entre la colère de cet homme et l'histoire racontée."¹⁸

The "absurdité de la méthode objective", which Gide remarks with reference to Flaubert in 1912¹⁹ forms the basis

¹⁶ Le Roman Expérimental, 1880.

¹⁷ Pretexts, p. 45.

¹⁸ Journal, p. 41. Cf. Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, pp. 30-31.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 358.

for his division of the novel, in 1927, into two sorts:

"L'une extérieure et que l'on nomme communément objective, qui voit d'abord le geste d'autrui, l'événement et qui l'interprète. L'autre qui s'attache d'abord aux émotions, aux pensées, et risque de rester impuissante à peindre qu'que ce soit qui n'ait d'abord été ressenti par l'auteur."²⁰

This basic distinction will be important to the discussion of Gide's concept of the novel. At this point it serves to illustrate his awareness of an illusory "objective" reality and an elusive subjective one. That his own allegiance is to the latter is evident, and colours his remarks on the established "realist" and "naturalist" writers. His criticism of them is, however, tinged with what appears at times to be almost envy. Consider, for example, his remark on Bourget:

"La vraisemblabilité (je crois que c'est son mot) chez Bourget est parfaite. Émule de Balzac, il est profondément enfoncé dans la réalité. Il ne s'y empêtre jamais, comme je ferais sûrement si j'essayais d'y réussir."²¹

Gide's choice of the second method is not entirely voluntary. He did not feel confident enough about "reality" to try to depict it. The remark just quoted leads him to reflect once more on what he still calls at the end of his life "ces apparences qu'on appelle réalité",²² and to define the artist,

²⁰Ibid., p. 829.

²¹Ibid., p. 992.

²²Ainsi soit-il, p. 87.

in opposition to Gautier, as "celui qui ne croit pas, pas tout à fait, à réalité."²³

In his early works this view is strengthened by his Symbolist belief, expressed in the Traité du Narcisse, that appearances conceal an ideal Truth, to which the artist must bear witness.²⁴ His cousin and future wife, Madeleine, in a letter to Gide, questioned this vague idea: " . . . tu ne me dis pas ce que tu entends par manifester la Vérité cachée sous le symbole. Quel Symbole? Quelle Vérité?"²⁵ He never did clarify the existence of this abstract Ideal behind reality. André Walter expresses the desire to attain a new form of "realism", which should arise from the conflict between materialism and idealism. The result would be: "Not a realistic truth, inexorably contingent, but rather a theoretical truth, which is absolute . . . a demonstration".²⁶ It is to be found in the work of art, which has an essential reality -- an immutability and universal application reflected in André Walter by his use of mathematical terminology. Gide

²³Journal, p. 992.

²⁴The Notebooks of André Walter, p. 32.

²⁵Jean Schlumberger, Madeleine et André Gide, Gallimard, Paris, 1956, p. 73.

²⁶The Notebooks of André Walter, p. 77.

returns to the idea of the autonomy of the geometrical figure later in his life, in the second part of the trilogy l'École des Femmes. Like the work of art, "ce monde, une fois créé par le savant, lui échappe . . . de sorte que cet univers né de l'homme rejoint un absolu dont l'homme lui-même dépend."²⁷ This absolute, independent existence of the work of art was taken up by Sartre in La Nausée,²⁸ in which he introduces a melody which can survive apart from the composer or the singer or the record of it, in contrast to the contingency and relativity of the material universe. The unchanging reality of Art is also brought out in Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author, in which one of the characters addresses the Producer: "That's the difference between us! Our reality doesn't change . . . It can't change . . . For ever it is this reality . . ."²⁹

This concept of an abstract reality in art is far from the attempts of the nineteenth-century novel to capture

²⁷Robert, Livre de Poche, p. 139.

²⁸J.-P. Sartre, La Nausée, Livre de Poche, pp. 248-250.

²⁹L. Pirandello, Six Characters in Search of an Author, translated by Frederick May, Heinemann, London, 1968, p. 58.

the reality of everyday life by depicting it in the form of fiction. This "realism" was seen by Gide to be doubly false. He quotes, in his fourth lecture on Dostoïevsky, Oscar Wilde's comment that nature copies art, rather than the reverse, because "we recognize only what Art has educated us to discern."³⁰ Marthe Robert points out that everyday imagery continually compares life to a preconceived idea of it, based on fiction.³¹ Like Emma Bovary, we try to live like characters in a book:

"We constantly behave as the characters we are -- or fancy we are -- ought to behave. The majority of our actions are dictated . . . by the seed of imitating ourselves and projecting our past into the future."³²

Society imposes an identity on us, to which we try to conform. Already, in his lecture on "The Evolution of the Theatre" (Brussels, 1904), Gide had traced the dearth of convincing characters in the naturalist novel to the fact that "our modern society and our Christian morality do their utmost to prevent them".³³ Like La Rochefoucauld, Gide saw that "Le monde n'est composé que de mines". There is no

³⁰ Dostoïevsky, p. 106.

³¹ Op. cit., p. 45.

³² Dostoïevsky, p. 101.

³³ Pretexts, p. 68.

point in presenting masked characters on the stage -- or in a novel -- when the real-life models are already "fausse-monnaie", effectively disguised. As has already been asserted, aesthetics and morals are inseparable for Gide.³⁴ Attempts at objective realism add a further dimension to "la mauvaise foi", rather than exposing it, as Gide seeks to do in his fiction. The only possible kind of realism is subjective authenticity: the depiction or projection of a state of mind experienced by the author.

Internal conflicts are in any case, for Gide, simply another aspect of Nature. He uses this argument as the basis for a plea on behalf of subjective, non-representational art: the external and the intimate are opposed, but it is the predominance of the latter which produces the work of art. The choice of subject alone belies any claim to "objectivity", and it is this process of selection by the artist, and his imposition of his own design on the formless raw material, which constitutes "the very affirmation of art, of art which is not in nature, of art which is not natural, art which the artist alone forces upon nature, and with difficulty".³⁵ Here he echoes Goethe, one of the literary

³⁴Lecture on "The Limits of Art", Pretexts, p. 45.

³⁵Ibid., p. 45.

figures he admired most, who said: "Die Kunst heisst eben darum Kunst, weil sie nicht Natur ist".³⁶ In nature, "man proposes and God disposes"; in art, the proposition is reversed.³⁷ God proposes, by providing the raw materials; man disposes, by the imposition of an idea. It is the tension between materialism and idealism advocated by André Walter which produces the work of art.

Both elements -- the external facts and the artist's idea -- are indispensable. In his third lecture on Dostoievsky Gide admires the way in which the Russian author "never observes for observation's sake."³⁸ The facts are of no interest as art unless the artist imposes his idea on them, in artistic form. The idea must be stronger than the facts; but it must not distort them: "Le bon observateur . . . s'applique constamment à voir les faits tels qu'ils sont en réalité et non tels qu'il désirerait les voir."³⁹ Gide blames most nineteenth-century novelists for accommodating the facts to fit a preconceived scheme: "La grandeur de

³⁶"Art is called Art precisely because it is not Nature". Quoted by H. Hatfield, Modern German Literature, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1966, p. 17.

³⁷Pretexts, p. 46.

³⁸Dostoievsky, p. 97.

³⁹Journal, p. 957.

Dostoïevsky vient de ce qu'il n'a jamais réduit le monde à une théorie . . ."⁴⁰ He goes on to add that Balzac was saved from mediocrity only by his failure to find the theory of the passions which he sought. The idea must be founded on the facts, before being applied to them. Gide's criticism of "realist" authors is largely based on their approach from the general to the particular. Flaubert's Éducation Sentimentale earns Gide's admiration, and a reprieve for the author, because of the question it raises: "Le moins particulier est-il le plus représentatif?"⁴¹

This problem is developed in the first Billets à Angèle of 1921, which propound Gide's adherence to the basic tenets of French Classicism. Not, that is, to a set of rules or formulae: he was aware of this danger, and in his fourth lecture on Dostoïevsky he denounces French novelists for their "unfortunate habit of keeping to formulae which soon became mechanical, and of resting content with them, instead of pressing onwards."⁴² He may have been thinking of his own récits, a form which he had abandoned at that time in favour of experiment. By "classicism" Gide

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 661-2.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 805. He adds: "Il y aurait encore des choses à dire sur Flaubert," an opinion confirmed by Sartre's latest monumental work.

⁴²Dostoïevsky, p. 108.

advocated the stylised presentation of reality found in

Racine or Corneille:

"Nombre de romanciers ou d'auteurs dramatiques ne parviennent jamais à faire rendre aux propos de leurs personnages un son authentique. Le tour de force de Corneille est d'amener l'auditeur à s'en passer . . . La grande erreur du tragédien serait dès lors de chercher à donner à sa déclamation l'apparence du naturel. Il ne s'en tire qu'à force de style: tout doit être transposé dans le surhumain; seules les proportions doivent y être maintenues, de sorte que tout y soit art et que rien n'y paraisse factice".⁴³

Art should be neither natural nor artificial. The characters and their manner of expressing themselves may be extraordinary, the setting remote, the events far from everyday: yet the audience should recognize the authenticity of the human emotions portrayed, and be able to identify with them.

Art transforms Nature: "j'embrasse mon rival, mais c'est pour l'étouffer".⁴⁴ Its source is the particular which, depicted in an intensified form, takes on a universal significance. "L'Art est l'Art. La réalité reste là, non pour le dominer mais pour le servir."⁴⁵ It is not by generalizing that Art achieves universal value, but by presenting the individual and specific in a stylised form which makes it both unique and representative: "l'art ne respire que dans le particulier."⁴⁶

⁴³ Ainsi soit-il, pp. 27-8.

⁴⁴ "The Evolution of the Theatre", Pretexts, p. 63.

⁴⁵ Journal, p. 164.

⁴⁶ Si le grain ne meurt . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p. 224.

Gide quotes from an article by Arnold Bennett:

"In our opinion there can be only one kind of true realism, as there can be only one art which is true -- which is classical; the criterion in both cases is intellectual and emotional integrity":⁴⁷

that is, the subjective authenticity of which we have already spoken. Bennett proceeds to an analysis of the rôle of moderation, harmony and order in classical and contemporary art. Gide had developed this theme in his "Reply to an Inquiry of La Renaissance on Classicism", in which he selected as the most important characteristic of classicism its "modesty". By this he means the submission (not suppression) of the individual: "His subordination, as well as that of the word to the sentence, of the sentence to the page, of the page to the work. It is a demonstration of a hierarchy."⁴⁸ Gide proved himself capable, as we shall see, of forming a work of art of this nature from his own intense personal experience. The récits are masterpieces of classical restraint and litotes. The effect is not, however, easily achieved. The tension and constraint which characterize it are produced only as the result of an inner conflict:

⁴⁷ Pretexts, p. 201.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 195.

"The classical work of art tells of the triumph of order and measure over inner romanticism. The greater the initial revolt of the object brought under subjection the more beautiful the work of art."⁴⁹

Gide's subsequent claim to be, himself, the "best representative of classicism today"⁵⁰ is not as immodest as it sounds. It is a recognition, not so much of personal superiority, as of the existence of the two opposing elements in himself: a desire for order and harmony, and an urge to lyrical self-expression and exuberant vitality. The triumph of the first, which can alone produce classical art, is especially French: "In France and in France alone intelligence tends to win out over feelings and instinct".⁵¹ Classical art avoids the Romantic over-expression of emotion (when it is not "recollected in tranquillity") and tends to understatement, one of the major characteristics of Gide's fiction. Yet the emotion must be there, to begin with: Gide's "vitalistic" side is not to be under-estimated. Indeed, Holdheim sees it as the more important of the two, and bases his thesis

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 195.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 197.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 199.

on this assumption. It explains Gide's admiration for not only French classical writers but also Shakespeare, Balzac and Dostoevsky. Their breadth of creative imagination may have appealed to him partly because he felt incapable of it himself: certainly in the case of Dostoevsky there is an element of emulation to which we shall return in the discussion of Gide's ideas on the novel. The dilemma posed by simultaneous tendencies to classicism and vitalism is illustrated by Gide's difficulty in deciding whether to include la Princesse de Clèves or le Roman Bourgeois in his list of the ten French novels he preferred.⁵² He appears to settle for the former but this brings his total to only nine books: the vitalistic element survives, but almost surreptitiously. His classical leaning is usually stronger, just as in his life the Puritanical love of the arduous overcame his occasional outbursts of hedonism. He generally prefers to "suivre sa pente" up rather than down. However, even at his most classical, he cannot wholeheartedly condemn writers that he enjoys reading as much as Balzac or Zola: "Je reconnais bien les défauts de Zola; mais, tout comme ceux de Balzac ou de tant d'autres, ils sont inséparables de ses qualités."⁵³ His comment on Zola

⁵²Ibid., p. 248.

⁵³Journal, p. 1137.

concludes however, significantly, with the recognition of a classical trait even in the Naturalist par excellence: "Il n'est pas de romancier français plus personnel ni plus représentatif."⁵⁴

Gide's classicism was expressed in the récits, his more riotous, fantastic and saugrenu side in the soties, as an analysis of the development of the different genres of fiction used by Gide will show. In les Faux-Monnayeurs he sought to produce, in the roman, a synthesis of the two, as well as something new. While being more "realistic" than his previous works, because of its larger scope, the novel also consciously sets out to include "un élément fantastique et surnaturel".⁵⁵ His desire to depict a mythical Luxembourg rather than the real one reflects his unwillingness to accept that reality lies in external appearances. He hoped to achieve the atmosphere attained in his early works by the use of legendary figures, as in Philoctète or le Prométhée mal-enchaîné: a device to which he returned in Oedipe and Thésée. The mythical settings and figures provide an opening for allegorical interpretation, as did the fairy-tale quality of la Tentative Amoureuse or El Hadj, which recall the atmosphere of Oscar Wilde's

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 76.

short stories. Gide makes an interesting comment on Wilde's resentment of the miracles in Christianity, which he saw as a trespassing of reality in the field of artistic fantasy: "All robust artistic unreality demands an assured reality in life".⁵⁶ Perhaps it was Gide's lack of an "assured reality in life", described at the beginning of this chapter, which undermined his attempts to add a supernatural dimension to les Faux-Monnayeurs by the introduction of the "démon" and the angel with whom Bernard struggles.

The desire to impart an epic quality to this book stemmed partly from Gide's aim of stylising reality in the novel, to give it the universal truth of classical art; partly from nostalgia for his earlier religious beliefs which enabled him to see the world in terms of opposing forces of Good and Evil. The work of art is one way of imposing a meaningful design on life; the religious hypothesis is another, which continued to attract Gide even when he no longer believed in it. Martin du Gard recalls his remark, when writing Si le grain ne meurt . . . , that:

"Si j'osais introduire dans mon récit le personnage de Satan, aussitôt tout deviendrait miraculeusement clair . . . les choses se sont toujours passées pour moi comme si le Diable existait, comme s'il était constamment intervenu dans ma vie" . . .⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Pretexts, p. 139.

⁵⁷ Notes sur André Gide, Gallimard, Paris, 1951, pp. 18-19.

In fact, Gide did bring the Devil into this work, as into so many of his others: "Il m'est récemment apparu qu'un acteur important: le Diable, avait bien pu prendre part au drame."⁵⁸ He examines the question of the Devil's existence in the appendix to the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs entitled "Identification du Démon", and finally confesses, in Ainsi soit-il that he does not really believe in him, but "J'ai parfois fait semblant d'y croire: c'est si commode!"⁵⁹ The dilemma of a Faust is much simpler to depict if one postulates Mephistophéles: Vincent's gradual identification with the Devil, in les Faux-Monnayeurs, and Bernard's temptation by him, are echoes of Gide's admiration for Goethe and Dostoïevsky, in whom Gide recognized a demonic element.⁶⁰ It was in his lectures on Dostoïevsky that he remarked that the Devil is a party to every work of art.⁶¹ A saint could not be an artist, since Art depends on the lust of the flesh or of the eyes, or, in the case of literature, the pride of life.⁶² The Artist, in a sense,

⁵⁸Si le grain ne meurt . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p, 285.

⁵⁹Ainsi soit-il, p. 83.

⁶⁰Dostoïevsky, p. 88.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 143.

⁶²Ibid., p. 147.

replaces God as Creator and Designer of his own Universe.

Gide rejected the values of the Realist novel by refusing to make the effects of environment and social pressures the main concern in his works of fiction. He is, like Dostoïevsky, more concerned with the relationship of the individual to himself or to God: therefore he wishes to retain a mystical element. He conveys the appropriate atmosphere in several works by using quotations from the Bible, with which he was so familiar. He manages to capture something of the Biblical atmosphere in André Walter, le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue, la Porte Étroite and la Symphonie Pastorale. The supernatural element in Gide can always be interpreted as an illusion; but he seems to have retained a sense of its importance, long after he ceased to believe in it, mainly because of his wife's influence: speaking of her, he says:

"C'est de l'avoir connue qui me fait si souvent étranger sur cette terre, jouant au jeu de la vie sans trop y croire, pour avoir connu par elle une moins tangible mais plus véritable vérité. Mon intelligence pouvait bien la nier, cette réalité secrète; avec elle je la sentais."⁶³

Gide's attachment to Madeleine was due largely to the fact that she represented, for him, an abstract reality based on absolute values, which provided an element of stability in a world which he saw as relative and contingent. As he

⁶³ Et nunc manet in te, Ides et Calendes. Paris, 1947, p. 70.

says in Ainsi soit-il, "elle était ma réalité".⁶⁴ On her death he felt completely disorientated. His only refuge was the work of art. He struggled to make his writing a solid support in the quagmire of subjective reality and values, by an effort "comparable à celui du baron de Münchhausen qui s'arrache du marécage en se tirant lui-même par les cheveux."⁶⁵

He adds: "L'admirable, c'est qu'il y parvient". Gide, too, succeeds in coming to terms with Reality by the projection of an imaginary fictional world which is based on that of life but does not seek to reproduce it. Yet Gide was accused of lacking imagination. He defended himself by citing Baudelaire as being accused of the same deficiency;⁶⁶ and by quoting Wilde's axiom that the imagination imitates, the critical spirit creates. His acute critical sense seized on the paradox that those writers are most often considered creative whose work is based on observation. He himself admitted, according to Martin du Gard, that he did not become interested in other people until the age of forty: "Je ne me suis jamais soucié

⁶⁴Ainsi soit-il, p. 15.

⁶⁵Et nunc manet in te, pp. 117-8.

⁶⁶"Baudelaire and Monsieur Faguet", Pretexts, p. 168.

d'observer ce qui se passait autour de moi".⁶⁷ In Si le grain ne meurt . . . he reflects that "l'ami qu'il m'eût peut-être fallu, c'est quelqu'un qui m'eût appris à m'intéresser à autrui et qui m'eût sorti de moi-même, un romancier".⁶⁸ At this time Gide had not yet formulated the theory of two kinds of novelists, "objective" and subjective to which reference has already been made.⁶⁹ In the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs he was to develop, as we shall see, the idea that the "romancier authentique"⁷⁰ creates his fictional world from the possibilities within himself, rather than from external stimuli. He speaks of "cet effort de projeter en dehors une création intérieure, d'objectiver le sujet (avant d'avoir à assujettir l'objet) . . . "⁷¹ Yet the rôle of external material in Gide's work is far from negligible, as the next chapter will indicate, and Martin du Gard records him noting down everything:

⁶⁷Notes sur André Gide, p. 29.

⁶⁸Si le grain ne meurt . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, pp. 260-1.

⁶⁹Journal, p. 829.

⁷⁰Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 96.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 27.

"Le seul but de sa vie: l'enrichissement de l'oeuvre: ou de l'homme, mais de l'homme pour l'oeuvre."⁷² In the case of Gide, the two are inseparable. Gide expressed his admiration for the way in which Arnold Bennett "notait tout et, plus tard, recourait à ces notations pour ses romans, de sorte qu'ils parussent directement calqués sur la vie".⁷³ This sounds like a refutation of his criticisms of "realist" novelists. Bennett's sources were not, however, apparent, because of his "dons de créateur". That is, he conformed to Gide's injunction, which applied to the use of both external reality and personal experience in fiction: "Ne jamais peindre d'après nature; faire d'après nature ses préparations; mais ne pas faire part au lecteur de ses préparations".⁷⁴

Gide was to ignore the last part of his own advice in les Faux-Monnayeurs, when he deliberately sought, as we shall see, to involve the reader in the creation of the work of art, and to analyse its relationship to the primary materials used. In doing so he was moving away from the

⁷²Notes sur André Gide, p. 81.

⁷³Eloges, Ides et Calendes. Paris, 1948, p. 53.

⁷⁴Journal, p. 771.

"creative" novel of imagination, into the realm of aesthetic experiment; not without some regret, for he had admonished Martin du Gard: "Ne vous désolerez pas de ne pas être un artiste. Nous le sommes infiniment trop . . ." ⁷⁵ He cites an author who had suppressed his "force créatrice" in his desire to be an "artist". It may be that Gide was providing an excuse for the lack of creative power which he felt in himself, compared to certain other novelists, for he adds:

"Dites-vous bien que les grands créateurs ne sont jamais partis d'un principe d'art préconçu; ils atteignent à l'art par leur création même, sans l'avoir voulu, sans le savoir; leur art est alors personnel, et neuf". ⁷⁶

In spite of his constant preoccupation with the desire to be spontaneous and sincere, Gide remained above all a self-conscious artist: "sentimental" rather than "naïve", to use Schiller's distinction. Even in his autobiographical works "le souci d'art" transformed what he expressed. ⁷⁷

His Journal and confessions are as much works of art as his fiction, and this must be remembered in assessing his sincerity; for there is no Art without hypocrisy, ⁷⁸ since Art cannot be the same as Life. It remains to be seen

⁷⁵ Notes sur André Gide, p. 29.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Journal, p. 39: "Le désir de bien écrire ces pages de journal leur ôte tout mérite même de sincérité.

⁷⁸ "The Importance of the Public", Pretexts, p. 56.

whether his fiction bears as close a relationship to life as do his personal writings: "Peut-être approche-t-on de plus près la vérité dans le roman".⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Si le grain ne meurt Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p. 282; cf. Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 30.

CHAPTER II

Life and Fiction or Who is Gide?

Gide's use of sources from his own life and "faits divers"; the influence of Madeleine; the Gidean dialectic; his "dépersonnalisation" in his characters; the dissolution of the identity and survival of the self.

Gide found the sources of his fictional world and characters in himself rather than in the observation of others and the world about him. Germaine Brée states that: "Gide a été longtemps hypnotisé par l'énigme de sa propre vie et y trouvait une matière romanesque exceptionnelle".¹ It was the richness of his own experience and the complexity of his thought, as much as his initial lack of conviction and interest regarding the external world, that led him to adopt this approach. It laid him open to accusations of writing crypto-autobiography rather than inventive fiction: Gide was conscious of this, and defended himself in several ways. One of these was to indicate the subjective element in writers whose creative powers were undeniable, such as Dostoïevsky, Stendhal or even Balzac. Another was to point

¹G. Brée, l'Insaisissable Protée, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1953, p. 194.

out that a panorama of society can be equally questionable in terms of value as "fiction". In a letter to Guérard he speaks of Proust,

"qui n'a jamais quitté les données fournies par la réalité; n'a pas, que je sache, inventé, créé, un seul personnage; à mon avis, mémorialiste, à la manière de Saint-Simon, et non pas précisément romancier . . ."²

The world of life itself, whether society or that of the personal, individual experience and conflict, must be transformed, not simply recorded, to become a work of art, as Gide understood the creation of a fictional world to be. Gide's avowedly autobiographical writings, and his journals, enable us to trace the use he makes of actual incidents in his life, and the degree of transformation involved.

There are examples of real people, described in Si le grain ne meurt . . . and the Journal, who reappear in his fictional works. Gide's visits to La Pérouse, the old music teacher, recur in his Journal,³ In the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs he expresses his feeling that La Pérouse is "râté" as a fictional character, because he is too close to reality: "Je n'ai pas su, pas pu perdre de vue mon

²16 May, 1947. A.J. Guérard, André Gide, Dutton, New York, 1963, p. 242.

³Journal I, pp. 129, 131, 160, 165, 210.

modèle . . . Le difficile, c'est d'inventer, là où le souvenir vous retient."⁴ As Ireland puts it: "the autonomous reality of the model will challenge the artistic reality of the character".⁵ It is, however, questionable whether the reader would be conscious of a difference in this presentation of a character from real life, if Gide had not informed us of it. The people and incidents which he records and then incorporates into his novels tend to illustrate the axiom that truth may be stranger than fiction. Who would surmise, for example, that Édouard's loss of the key to his case, containing his diary, is anything but a novelist's device to enable Bernard to open it? Yet this is one "petit fait vrai" which Gide had rediscovered in his Journal of 14 July 1905. Like Dostoïevsky, Gide is fascinated by the "faits divers" in the newspapers.

Dostoïevsky had written:

"Avid observation of everyday trivialities I have long since ceased to regard as realism -- it is quite the reverse. In any newspaper one takes up, one comes across reports of wholly authentic facts, which nevertheless strike one as extraordinary . . . "⁶

⁴ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 74.

⁵ G. Ireland, Gide, Oliver and Boyd, London, 1963, p. 64.

⁶ Letter to Nikolay Strachov, 26 Feb. 1869. M. Allott, Novelists on the Novel, Routledge Paperback no. 48, p. 68.

Such incidents support Gide's belief that the universal lies in the particular. He used cuttings from newspapers already several years old as the basis of the plot in les Faux-Monnayeurs: the false coins, the schoolboy crimes, the suicide of one boy -- all these sources are recorded in the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs.⁷ Other incidents such as the wreck of the "Bourgogne" were general knowledge: whereas the "banquet des Argonautes" was based on Gide's experience of literary celebrations, and incorporates Jarry, under his real name, while Passavent bears a close resemblance to Cocteau. It is even more surprising to learn that the plot of les Caves du Vatican, which postulates the possibility of a false Pope and seems the height of bizarre fantasy, was based on actual rumours circulating at the time. Money had in fact been extorted from real-life Fleurissoires; and Zola's cousin had, like Anthime, been dispossessed on his conversion from Free-Masonry to Roman Catholicism.⁸

Gide's lack of concern for events and people around him did not, then, prevent him from using these as basic material to be woven into his plots. The more significant episodes in the earlier récits (as opposed to the sotie

⁷ p. 20 and appendix.

⁸ P. Lafille, André Gide Romancier, Hachette, Paris, 1954, p. 84.

and roman which make use of the 'fait divers') are, on the other hand, founded on certain events in Gide's own personal life which left a deep impression on him. These centre on his relationship with his wife, Madeleine, which he attempts to explain in Et nunc manet in te: "Mon amour pour elle a dominé toute ma vie" . . . 'Chacune de mes pensées est née en fonction d'elle" . . . "Toute mon oeuvre est inclinée vers elle".⁹ The debate will never end to know whether Gide's life and work were enriched or impoverished by the restraint which her values and presence imposed on him. Most critics have followed the line of Schlumberger's study,¹⁰ and seen her as a sacrifice to Gide's "immoralisme": an attitude encouraged by his own self-incrimination after her death. The latest biography of Gide, however, adopts a different approach. The reviews of Pierre de Boisdeffre's Vie d'André Gide, of which the first volume appeared in December 1970 (Hachette), were quick to seize on this. Michel Tournier in le Nouvel Observateur (29 March -- 4 April 1971) stated:

⁹Et nunc manet in te suivi de Journal Intime, Ides et Calendes, Paris, 1947, pp. 84, 102-3, 110.

¹⁰J. Schlumberger, Madeleine et André Gide, Gallimard, Paris, 1956.

"c'est sans doute le jour dont il éclaire le mariage de Gide et la personnalité de Madeleine qui semble le plus nouveau . . . Il nous invite à rouvrir le dossier d'un vieux procès mille fois jugé déjà"

Boisdeffre describes Madeleine's position, on finding herself married to a Gide very different from the one she had known previously, as "de celles qui exigent impérieusement une étincelle de génie". Unfortunately for them both, "que Madeleine Rondeaux n'ait pas eu cette étincelle, c'est le moins qu'on puisse dire." Tournier wonders what would have happened if Gide had been attached, instead, to a woman like Lou Andréas-Salomé, "qui sut réaliser cet étonnant triplé: Nietzsche, Rilke, Freud". Madeleine, from this point of view, was a mill-stone around Gide's neck, preventing him from breaking free of the past and puritanism. She not only destroyed part of his life's work (his letters to her, which Gide considered "the best of himself"); one wonders what else he might have written but for her. Gide asked himself the same question, and concluded: "Il est bien vain de me le demander, et la question demeure forcément sans réponse".¹¹ He summed up later: "Si j'avais à recommencer ma vie, je m'accorderais plus de licence. Mais eussé-je laissé flotter les rênes,

¹¹ Journal I, p. 1052.

je n'aurais peut-être rien fait qui vaille".¹² In fact, he might never have written anything. The incentive, the sense of urgency, behind all his works up to les Faux-Monnayeurs sprang from his desire to convince her: "Tout cela n'est qu'un long plaidoyer; aucune oeuvre n'a été plus intimement motivée que la mienne -- et l'on n'y voit pas loin si l'on n'y distingue pas cela".¹³

At one point in the Journal¹⁴ Gide mentions that he has been seeking useful material for a novel in his correspondence with Madeleine, without success. Traces of his relationship with her are not, however, hard to find in his earlier fiction. His first work, André Walter, is scarcely dissimulated autobiography, and introduces Madeleine as "Emmanuèle", the pseudonym abbreviated to "Em" in Si le grain . . . Gide tells us that she also served as the model for the strange Ellis in le Voyage d'Urien and the unimaginative Angèle of Paludes. Her two most memorable avatars are as Marceline in l'Immoraliste and Alissa in la Porte Étroite. It is as Alissa that he portrayed her most closely: even the choice of this unusual

¹² Ainsi soit-il, p. 27.

¹³ Et nunc manet in te, p. 111.

¹⁴ p. 204.

name was to reflect the uniqueness of Madeleine. Yet Gide protests: "Ce n'est pas son portrait que j'ai tracé: Elle-même ne m'a servi que de point de départ pour mon héroïne et je ne pense pas qu'elle s'y soit beaucoup reconnue".¹⁵ One is reminded of his injunction to use nature in preparing the work of art, but not to copy it. He applies the same technique in the incorporation of events from his life in l'Immoraliste. He used his own honeymoon experience, his travels in North Africa, Oscar Wilde as Ménalque, la Roque for the farm scenes in Normandy, his own suspected tuberculosis and dramatic recovery and his discovery of Nietzsche. As Guérard shows, this book bears a close relationship, not only to the external events of Gide's life, but to his sexual and psychological conflicts (an aspect which Guérard is liable to over-emphasize). Certainly the discovery of his homosexuality and consequent attitude to his wife are reflected: the train journey during which he flirted with young boys in her presence is recorded in Et nunc manet in te.¹⁶ Marceline dies, and Gide may have subconsciously desired the death of Madeleine . . . Yet he was inconsolable

¹⁵Et nunc manet in te, pp. 8-9, cf. p. 85.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 41.

when it happened.

The scene in la Porte Étroite in which Gide describes Alissa weeping in her room on discovering her mother's adultery, and Jérôme's subsequent vow to devote himself entirely to her, is taken directly from an actual incident involving Madeleine, described in Si le grain . . . (pp. 128-9). The gate at which Jérôme and Alissa meet, and the garden, existed at Cuverville.¹⁷ The cross which Alissa wore was the one which Madeleine later gave away, to Gide's horror and dismay:¹⁸ he reproaches himself for having described it by mistake, in the récit, as amethyst, instead of emerald, as it really was: an example of the encroachment of real life on fiction ('Dès qu'il ne s'agit plus de fiction, je m'attache au vrai'¹⁹). It makes no difference to the reader what the cross was made of. It does, however, to Gide, for whom this small detail mars the subjective truth of his memory. That his memory could deceive him is illustrated by his account of the story of Domi, in Ainsi soit-il.²⁰ He completely confused the facts but, as with the Prussian soldiers referred to previously

¹⁷ Ainsi soit-il, p. 120.

¹⁸ Et nunc manet in te, p. 104.

¹⁹ Ainsi soit-il, p. 36.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

"ce que je n'avais pu inventer, c'était mon émotion".²¹ This is, after all, the essential to which Art should reduce the experience of life. His mind operates the Nietzschean "érosion des contours", "jusqu'à ne plus laisser dans mon souvenir que l'essentiel",²² as already advocated in André Walter.²³ The transference of Gide's impressions and emotions is even more widespread in his fictional work than the incorporation of events and characters from his life. Alissa's death, for example, was inspired by that of his mother's friend and governess, Anna Shackleton.²⁴ He does not know if this is how she died, but he conveys the intense sympathy for her imagined loneliness which he felt at the time. Gide's disturbing personal presence in his fictional works arises from this intensity of lived emotion and conflict, rather than from the simple introduction of real-life elements such as his walk with Jammes, which forms the frame to Isabelle, or the use of a real name, like "Vedel" in les Faux-Monnayeurs.²⁵

²¹ p. 112.

²² Ainsi soit-il, p. 135.

²³ Les Cahiers d'André Walter, p. 77.

²⁴ Si le grain . . . Gallimand, Paris, 1928, pp. 29, 226.

²⁵ Cf. Si le grain . . . Gallimand, Paris, 1928, p. 64.

The work of fiction was an opportunity, for Gide, to express himself less self-consciously than in the overtly auto-biographical first-person confession. The latter inhibited his spontaneity, since he was conscious of distorting the truth by the imposition of the "hypocrisy" of art and style, as we saw at the end of the last chapter. In the work of fiction he was free to present the opposing but simultaneous urges in himself²⁶ by projecting them in imaginary characters. Thus each of these characters, in the récits at least, incarnates one aspect of Gide in an exaggerated form. The most obvious case of this is the thesis-antithesis balance formed by the twin works l'Immoraliste and la Porte Étroite. Gide claims in the Journal²⁷ that: "les deux sujets ont grandi 'concurrentement dans mon esprit . . . tous deux se maintenant en équilibre", and in a letter to André Beaunier, 12 July 1914:²⁸ "Je n'aurais jamais pu écrire l'Immoraliste, si je n'avais su que j'écrirais aussi la Porte Étroite . . . " The over-indulgence of one urge leads, even before the book is finished, to a preoccupation with its counterpart, which also makes its claim on Gide. He states that he would

²⁶Si le grain . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p. 282.

²⁷Journal, p. 365-6.

²⁸Journal, p. 437. Cf. J.C. Davies, l'Immoraliste and la Porte Étroite, Arnold, London, 1968, p. 7.

have liked to produce both works simultaneously. "Si j'aurais pu, c'est ensemble qu'il je les aurais écrits".²⁹ Readers who rallied to the Gide who appeared in one were disconcerted by the subsequent apparent self-contradiction. He speaks of "cette diversité d'humeur qui me force, aussitôt, délivré d'un livre, de bondir à l'autre extrémité de moi-même (par besoin d'équilibre aussi) et d'écrire précisément le moins capable de plaire aux lecteurs que le précédent m'avait acquis".³⁰ They had not yet realized what critics since have emphasized; that the Gidean dialectic shows both sides of the coin. This image is in fact deficient, because there are even more than two sides. The two different, but equally intense and earnest récits are counterbalanced, in their turn, by a third work of a completely different nature -- the sotie, les Caves du Vatican: "j'avais besoin d'avoir écrit l'un et l'autre pour pouvoir me permettre les Caves".³¹ The latter caused the Surrealists to claim Gide momentarily as one of themselves: he was included in a special issue of the Nouvelle Revue Française devoted to them on the strength of it. They were

²⁹Journal, p. 437.

³⁰Si le grain . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p. 251.

³¹Journal, p. 437.

disappointed in their turn by a revival of his former tone and technique in la Symphonie Pastorale, that "debt to the past" which was as classical as les Caves was baroque, and served as a warning to those who thought the "real" Gide had emerged in les Nourritures Terrestres.

It is tempting to agree with the many critics who have contended that all Gide's fictional characters are projections, if not parodies, of himself. André Billy, for example, states in a review of Boisdeffre's biography (Figaro littéraire, 30th December 1970): "C'est toujours lui que nous retrouvons sous le masque de ses héros". Obviously la Pérouse and Alissa have their source in other people, but are the rest all Gide, more or less disguised? Some of his own remarks encourage this conclusion. In the Preface to la Tentative Amoureuse³² he declares that fiction does not give a truthful account of the author: but it expresses his secret desires, the longing for what he could be but is not, a "postponed temptation". In the same work Gide makes his hero afraid of love because of his education, and immediately reproaches himself for

³²The Return of the Prodigal, preceded by five other Treatises, Secker and Warburg, London, 1953, p. 20.

succumbing to "an absurd mania always to make the person one invents like oneself".³³ His tendency to the "Künstlerroman" -- to make a central character a writer or artist like himself -- can be traced from André Walter to les Faux-Monnayeurs through El Hadj, Paludes, le Prométhée mal enchaîné and les Caves.³⁴ In the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs he quotes a comment by Thibaudet: "le romancier authentique crée ses personnages avec les directions infinies de sa vie possible".³⁵ Gide is never only one of his heroes: "Si je n'étais que le héros . . . de l'Immoraliste . . . c'est pour le coup que je me sentirais rétrécir".³⁶ Nor does he go so far in any one direction as they do: he is saved by his "bon sens" from their self-destructive excesses: "Ce qui manque à chacun de mes héros, que j'ai taillés dans ma chair même, c'est ce peu de bon sens qui me retient de pousser aussi loin qu'eux leurs folies".³⁷

³³ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁴ This theme will be taken up later in considering Gide's "construction en abyme" and the rôle of ideas in the novel.

³⁵ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, pp. 95-6. Quotation from "Réflexions sur le Roman", Nouvelle Revue Française, August 1912, p. 212; cf. Davies, op. cit., p. 16.

³⁶ Journal, p. 276.

³⁷ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 81.

His identification with them terminates in detachment and condemnation: "At a given point the Gidean hero . . . no longer enjoys the confidence of the author".³⁸ The difficulty, as Ireland points out, is to know where this point lies. From then on, "Gide punit en quelque sorte celui qu'il eût pu être mais n'est pas devenu".³⁹ Since he gives vicarious life to his own potentialities in his characters, their variety depends on the complexity of his own personality. Speaking of the author who creates in this way, like Dostoïevsky, he states:

"La richesse de celui-ci, sa complexité, l'antagonisme de ses possibilités trop diverses, permettront la plus grande diversité de ses créations. Mais c'est de lui que tout émane . . . Ce n'est pas lui qu'il peint, mais ce qu'il peint, il aurait pu le devenir s'il n'était pas devenu tout lui-même".⁴⁰

Thus the work of fiction becomes cathartic, as for so many writers, such as Scott Fitzgerald, with whom Gide shared certain similarities. Lehan writes: "Fitzgerald always brought his personal experience to his best fiction, and he often wrote with a desire to relieve and to cope with his sense of hurt".⁴¹ This idea was already present in

³⁸G. Ireland, op. cit., p. 42.

³⁹G. Brée, op. cit., p. 257.

⁴⁰Journal, p. 829; cf. first lecture on Dostoïevsky, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

⁴¹R.D. Lehan, F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Man and His Works, Forum, Toronto, 1969, p. 49.

André Walter: "I will write some stories based on old memories . . . when memories are set down, my soul will be lighter".⁴² In a letter to Francis Jammes Gide made the much-quoted declaration: "Sans mon Immoraliste je risquais de le devenir. Je me purge. Et ce n'est pas la dernière fois".⁴³ Yet Gide also warned himself against the danger of using the work of art as an escape from life. "Lutter contre cette démangeaison de verser dans le roman les expériences personnelles, et particulièrement celles dont on a pu souffrir, pour l'espoir fallacieux de trouver quelque consolation dans la peinture que l'on en fait."⁴⁴ The writing of fiction had reconciled him to life in a different way when, on his return from North Africa, he suffered from such "estrangement" that only Paludes kept him from suicide.⁴⁵ Guérard emphasizes that Gide sought a solution to the problems of life in the harmony of fiction: but fiction proves a more reliable purge of ideas than of emotions. Speaking of the former, Gide explained: "Les assumant, je ne pouvais plus les pousser à bout, à l'absurde, ainsi que j'aurais su faire dans un roman, qui,

⁴²Op. cit., p. 21.

⁴³F.F., 1902. Introduction to l'Immoraliste, Macmillan, New York, 1963, p. 1.

⁴⁴Journal, p. 697.

⁴⁵Si le grain . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p. 322. One remembers the refrain of the fictional author: "moi, ça m'est égal, parce que j'écris Paludes".

tout à la fois les eût exposées, en eût fait le tour et la critique et m'en eût délivré."⁴⁶ In fact, Gide's apparent pre-occupation with himself and constant self-expression and depiction is not always so much a form of Narcissism, a "culte du moi", as the interest of an outsider in the debate between the conflicting elements in himself. He made this claim: "I can state that I am interested, not in myself, but in the conflict of certain ideas of which my soul is the stage, and in which I play the part less of an actor than of a spectator, a witness".⁴⁷

Here we come up against an apparent contradiction in Gide's attitude to his characters: On the one hand, they are images of himself, however distorted. On the other, he claims a power of sympathy for other people and ideas very different from his own: to such an extent that he can identify with these in turn, forgetting himself, and depict them in fiction, not because they are part of himself, but because he becomes them. Thus it is possible for other critics to refute all that has been said so far and state, as does Kaas-Albarda:⁴⁸ "chaque

⁴⁶ Journal, p. 1160.

⁴⁷ Pretexts: op. cit., p. 307.

⁴⁸ M. Kaas-Albarda, Gide et son Journal, Van Loghum, Arnhem, 1952, p. 78.

personnage d'un roman de Gide ne représente pas une partie de son âme. C'est avec des éléments essentiels d'autres hommes que Gide compose ses personnages" . . . or

Hytier: "La maîtrise de Gide me paraît avoir précisément consisté à utiliser tous ses pouvoirs de sympathie".⁴⁹

Gide did express a desire to "vibrate to the emotions of others as well".⁵⁰ He was also ready to admit the

influence of his friends and the writers whose books he read.⁵¹ In Si le grain . . . he quotes one of these,

Nietzsche: "Tout artiste n'a pas seulement à sa disposition sa propre intelligence, mais aussi celle de ses amis."⁵²

Gide sees himself as the meeting point of all his friends' ideas.⁵³ He speaks often of his gift for "sympathy", in

its literal sense of identifying with the thoughts and feelings of others. He wrote in a letter to Christian

Beck: "Je suis Protée . . . mon meilleur gît dans un don de sympathie profonde . . . Si je pénètre dans autrui c'est par le souterrain. De là, du reste, mon besoin de mettre

⁴⁹G. Hytier, André Gide, Charlot, Alger, 1945, p. 162.

⁵⁰André Walter, op. cit., p. 32.

⁵¹"Concerning Influence in Literature", in Pretexts.

⁵²Op. cit., p. 258.

⁵³Ibid., p. 259.

mes récits à la première personne. Ce "Je" est pour moi le comble de l'objectivité".⁵⁴ Even as a child he felt a desire to share in the experience of others. He pretended to be blind, to discover how a blind boy felt;⁵⁵ he was always more easily moved by the sufferings of others than his own.⁵⁶ Yet he notes, later, a diminution of this empathy,⁵⁷ and admits that feigned sympathy brought him unwanted friends.⁵⁸ This fellow-feeling seems to have been willed rather than spontaneous, as he would have us believe. He wishes to claim it as "la clef de mon caractère et de mon oeuvre",⁵⁹ because he wants the image others have of him to be "sympathique". However, he did not always find it easy to achieve, in life or in his fictional characters: "Dépersonnalisation si volontairement, si difficilement obtenue, que seule expliquerait, excuserait, la production des oeuvres qu'elle autorise et en vue desquelles j'ai travaillé à supprimer mes préférences"⁶⁰. . . His concern for his

⁵⁴ 16.8.1909, quoted by Lafille, op. cit., p. 49.
Cf. Journal, p. 759.

⁵⁵ Si le grain . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p. 14.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 367.

⁵⁷ Journal, p. 163.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 184.

⁵⁹ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 76.

⁶⁰ Journal, p. 358.

works influences his life, as much as vice-versa. For the sake of his fiction, he is willing to lose his own identity. He continues: "Ne plus être soi: être tous", and says elsewhere: "I am quite willing to have no well-defined existence if the individuals I create and draw from myself have one".⁶¹

Gide's main defence against accusations of depicting only himself is, therefore, that his characters are not simply aspects of himself in an exaggerated form; they acquire an autonomous life of their own. They are not Gide, but the people he might have been. By pouring himself into them he is becoming someone else:

"Une grande confusion vint de ce que l'on a voulu voir une profession de foi personnelle dans chaque déclaration de mes héros, si divers et discords fussent-ils. Et cela fut d'autant plus tentant que l'on avait commencé par me dénier tout génie créateur. Je n'étais point capable de me déprendre ou deséprendre de moi, disait-on, et dans chacun de ceux que je faisais parler l'on recherchait ma ressemblance"⁶² . . .

His answer to these critics is that he is capable of forgetting himself completely: "Dès que m'habite un personnage . . . Je suis avec lui. Je suis lui. Je me laisse entraîner par lui, là où je n'aurais pas été de moi-même".⁶³ In the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs he

⁶¹Pretexts, p. 322.

⁶²Journal, p. 984.

⁶³Journal, p. 985.

claims to have enjoyed writing most in the name of a "je" very different from himself, such as Alissa.⁶⁴ This is a means of escape from himself, and:

"Rien n'est fait si, ce personnage que j'assume, je n'ai pas su vraiment le devenir, jusqu'à me donner le change, et me dépersonnaliser en lui jusqu'à encourir le reproche de n'avoir jamais su peindre que moi-même . . ."⁶⁵

By a clever twist Gide turns this criticism, which he resented, to his own advantage.

As we have seen, Gide experiences, in identifying himself with different characters, a disconcerting loss of his own sense of identity: "C'est revenir à moi qui m'embarrasse, car, en vérité, je ne sais plus bien qui je suis; ou, si l'on préfère: je ne suis jamais; je deviens."⁶⁶ This pre-Existentialist dissolution of the identity marks Gide as a distinctly modern writer, while many of his contemporaries, including Proust, who was two years younger than Gide, seem to belong to a different age. Gide was not the only author in his generation to associate this loss of identity, or recognition that it does not exist, with the creation of fictional characters. Bernard, the

⁶⁴ Op. cit., p. 74-5; cf. Pretexts, p. 320.

⁶⁵ Journal, p. 829-30; cf. p. 359: "état du parfait romancier".

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 830; cf. Ainsi soit-il, p. 165.

writer in Virginia Woolf's The Waves (1931), has the same sense of fluidity, of being chameleon-like: "Who am I? -- he asks, . . . "I have to cover the entrances and exits of several different men who ultimately act their parts as Bernard"⁶⁷ . . . and: "which of these people am I"⁶⁸ . . . "to be myself I need the illumination of other people's eyes, and therefore cannot be entirely sure what is myself . . . the sunless territory of non-identity".⁶⁹ Gide, too, was conscious of the rôle of "le regard d'autrui" in self-definition: Peut-être est-il naturel, après tout, que chacun agisse et parle en fonction des autres".⁷⁰ Aldous Huxley's novelist, Peter Quarles in Point Counter Point, published (1928) three years after les Faux-Monnayeurs, to which it appears to owe a great deal,⁷¹ expresses similar ideas: "The essence of the new way of looking is multiplicity. Multiplicity of eyes and multiplicity of aspects seen . . . what I want to do is to look with all those eyes at once"⁷² . . . Better

⁶⁷V. Woolf, The Waves, Penguin, London, 1969, p. 64-5.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 99.

⁷⁰Ainsi soit-il, p. 196.

⁷¹Lafille, and Guérard, analyse other similarities in the two works.

⁷²A. Huxley, Point Counter Point, Penguin, 1971, p. 196.

to remain rigidly and loyally oneself. Oneself? But this question of identity was precisely one of Peter's chronic problems . . . not knowing among the multitude of rôles who was the actor. . . .⁷³ Or wasn't there a self at all?"⁷⁴

The complete non-existence of the self is difficult to reconcile with Gide's constant injunctions to be "true-to-onself": to "l'être authentique", the "vieil homme" behind the hypocrisies of social convention and conditioning. It would seem contrary to his constant praise of individuality and uniqueness, and to his lifelong effort to project and leave behind a substantial image of his own personality, though this might be construed as arising from the fear of not having one. It seems that the self continues to exist for Gide, but without any definite form: new selves are constantly dying and being reborn. "Si le grain ne meurt" . . . was one of his favourite Biblical quotations; another was "He who would save his life must lose it . . ." Even at the end of his life, Gide was prepared to change: his feelings and opinions were constantly shifting, like the kaleidoscope which he records playing with as a child. The only harmony, or synthesis, which he allows between the opposing elements in himself is that of "l'extrême milieu". Far from opting for moderation, he keeps one foot in both camps, however far apart they may be, preferring the tight-

⁷³Ibid., p. 197.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 198.

rope to the fence.⁷⁵ He refuses to "conclure" and commits himself only when forced to: "Ce n'est point que sur bien des points, je n'aie pris position, ou mieux, cette position, on ne m'ait forcé de la prendre"⁷⁶. . . He values above all his freedom, his "disponibilité". It is for this reason that he would rather "faire agir", in fiction, than act himself in life.⁷⁷ Action implies choice, and the rejection of all the other courses one might have taken. The creation of fiction is not only a cathartic comfort, by exteriorizing personal conflicts and laying the ghosts of the past: it is also an escape from living out one's ideas, from making decisions. Gide does identify with characters apparently very different. Yet "on ne saurait comprendre bien un sentiment que si on l'éprouve soi-même".⁷⁸ The paradox is possible, because, for him: "les jugements qu'il me faut porter quelquefois sur les choses sont aussi flottants que les émotions qu'ils soulèvent . . . Je vois

⁷⁵Cf. Journal, p. 364.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 984; cf. p. 647, on "le refus de conclure" and V. Woolf's Bernard (p. 65): "people who make a single impression are those who keep their equilibrium in mid-stream . . . You are all engaged, involved . . . In my case something remains floating, unattached".

⁷⁷R. Martin du Gard, Notes sur André Gide, p. 114; cf. Pretexts, p. 242.

⁷⁸Journal, p. 984. Cf. Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 59.

toujours presque à la fois les deux faces de chaque idée."⁷⁹

This is not, as he sometimes tries to make it appear, an unfortunate malady for which he is not responsible: it is conscious: "Par amour du combat, j'imaginais des luttes et je divisais ma nature".⁸⁰ He takes a delight in setting in motion the two sides of a debate, while he sits back and watches, like an umpire; like Valentin,⁸¹ he has no opinion of his own: "I always feel gathered within me a contradictory crowd. At times I should like to ring the bell, put on my hat, and leave the meeting. What does my opinion matter to me?"⁸² When he does appear to have one, it is not with great conviction: "Il n'y a personne qui pense plus différemment de moi que moi-même. Et je ne suis presque jamais de mon avis."⁸³ Gide sums up his own approach to fiction: "the creation of new characters becomes a natural need only in those tormented by an imperious complexity and not satisfied by their own acts".⁸⁴

⁷⁹Journal, p. 31.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 42.

⁸¹Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 51.

⁸²Pretexts, p. 297.

⁸³Letter to Christian Beck, 23.6.1900, quoted by Lafille, p. 21.

⁸⁴Pretexts, p. 305-6.

Gide himself remains mobile, like Montaigne, in a state of becoming, while his characters in the récits are "des êtres exemplaires, en posture une fois pour toutes devant la vie, qu'une éthique engage dans une aventure totale, celle que leur créateur refuse".⁸⁵ One is reminded of the Characters in Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author: "A character has life which is truly his, marked with his own special characteristics . . . And as a result he is always somebody! Whilst a man . . . can quite well be nobody". The Characters wear masks, which: "will assist in giving the impression of figures constructed by art, each one fixed immutably in the expression of that sentiment which is fundamental to it".⁸⁶ They are figures of art, and do not copy life: they have suffered an "érosion des contours", and are "réduits à l'essentiel", like Gide's memories. He has been accused of producing only lifeless "fantoques", and claimed at times that this was his aim, as if to defend himself in advance: but with les Caves and les Faux-Monnayeurs there is a change: "Mes personnages, que je ne voyais d'abord que fantoches, s'emplissent peu à

⁸⁵G. Brée, op. cit., p. 92.

⁸⁶Translated by F. May, Heinemann, London, 1968. pp. 56, 6.

peu de sang réel et je ne m'acquitte plus envers eux aussi facilement que j'espérais".⁸⁷ We shall examine later the way in which the characters of his one long novel seem to take over and have a will of their own, a process the author describes in the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs. They pass, in E.M. Forster's terminology, from being "flat" to "round" characters: they become capable of "surprising in a convincing way".⁸⁸ That is, they no longer have a fixed identity; like Gide they are "becoming". Once more, as we saw in the last chapter, a departure from the technique of the traditional novel leads to a greater closeness to life. With les Faux-Monnayeurs there is a change, too, in Gide's aim in writing, he is no longer trying to convince Madeleine,⁸⁹ exteriorizing an internal conflict, or paying a debt to the past, as in la Symphonie Pastorale. The time for innovation and for Gide's most original contribution in the realm of fiction was ripe.

Guérard claims that Gide was "a subjective moralist who longed to be an objective creator".⁹⁰ There is some

⁸⁷Journal, p. 377.

⁸⁸E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, Harvest Books, New York, 1927, 54, Chapter four; cf. Ainsi soit-il, pp. 138-9: Gide on Balzac and Dostoievsky's characters.

⁸⁹Et nunc, . . ., p. 111: "le premier livre que j'aie écrit en tâchant de ne point tenir compte d'elle."

⁹⁰Op. cit., p. 122.

truth in this statement, judging by Gide's own comments; yet his creative achievement cannot be denied, and its subjective sources are its strength. Any portrait tells something about the artist, as well as the model,⁹¹ and "c'est en soi que le poète expérimente ce qui fera l'objet de son tableau"⁹². . . To what extent Gide's novels and characters are governed by the ideas of a "moraliste" will be discussed in a later chapter, dealing with his fiction. It will be well to bear in mind Valéry's remark: "Ne jamais confondre le véritable homme qui a fait l'ouvrage, avec l'homme que l'ouvrage fait supposer".⁹³ Gide's work is certainly closely connected with his life, but it is not to be written-off as second-class fiction for that reason. He wanted to "assumer le plus possible d'humanité":⁹⁴ that is, to convey life, not simply his own life.⁹⁵ A more detailed study of his works before les Faux-Monnayeurs will indicate how far he succeeded.

⁹¹Journal, p. 344.

⁹²Ibid., p. 984; cf. p. 737.

⁹³Noted by R. Martin du Gard, op. cit., p. 90.

⁹⁴Journal, p. 156.

⁹⁵Cf. Ireland, op. cit., p. 105.

CHAPTER III

Order and Disorder or What is a Novel?

The attitude of the Symbolists to the novel; Gide's early works; the characteristics of the récit and sotie; freedom in life and fiction; Gide's use of irony; the movement towards the novel.

Gide divided novelists into two categories, as we have already seen, according to their concept of the "reality" they attempt to depict in their fiction. The first kind uses the world outside himself as his raw material: the second projects his own experience in his creative works. Dostoïevsky's novels and Wuthering Heights are given as examples of the fusion of both approaches,¹ and represent the type of novel which Gide admired most. In the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs² he made a further distinction, based on a comment by Thibaudet which has already been quoted. The second type of novelist, whose inspiration is mainly subjective, runs the risk of depicting himself, without effecting the "transformation" necessary to turn Nature

¹Journal, p. 829.

²P. 95-6.

into Art: in this case he is a "romancier factice". The authentic novelist, on the other hand, produces his fiction, not from real life -- his own or other people's -- but from the possibilities suggested by it. We have seen how Gide uses elements of real life, and especially of his own life, as the starting point for his fiction. It is because of the rich complexity of his own personality and experience that his works of fiction take such varied and apparently disparate forms. However, all his works, from les Cahiers d'André Walter to les Faux-Monnayeurs, reflect his concern with the form and nature of the novel, and its relationship to other genres of narrative fiction.

Gide's first works were produced at a time when the novel had fallen into disrepute in intellectual circles. The Symbolists had no regard for a form which was ill-defined and tended to be used with didactic intentions, or to present a picture of a dull reality far removed from their desire to "manifest" an ideal truth. Valéry's refusal to write "la marquise sortit à cinq heures"³ indicates their attitude. Breton, who records this remark

³André Breton, Manifestes du Surréalisme, Idées, Gallimard, Paris, 1967, p. 15; Cf. Michel Butor's commentary, Essais sur le Roman, Idées, Gallimard, Paris, 1969, p. 26.

in his first Manifeste du Surréalisme, adds: "Mais a-t-il tenu parole?" Certainly none of Valéry's work, even Monsieur Teste, approaches the form of the conventional novel. Yet Gide, in spite of the influence of the Symbolists, used the novel-form for his first work, the crypto-auto-biography, André Walter. His early attempts at self-expression in lyrical poetry were not successful. The novel was the next-best way of presenting his emotions and ideas in a thin disguise. The Gide who wrote under a pseudonym did not yet have the courage to write the open confessions which he later produced. However, he adopted the journal and notebook technique which he used so often in subsequent works. It enabled him to combine the novel of internal conflict and self-analysis with the novel of ideas. Reflections on aesthetic principles in literature, and the novel-within-the-novel, which reappear in les Faux-Monnayeurs, are already present in this early work.

The ideas in André Walter are closely bound up with those expressed in the Symbolist Traité du Narcisse, which he wrote in the following year, 1891. Le Voyage d'Urien of 1893 was planned as a Symbolist novel. Gide felt the lack of representation of the genre in the movement. In 1891 he wrote to Valéry: "Donc, Mallarmé pour la poésie, Maeterlinck pour le drame -- et quoique auprès d'eux deux je me sente bien un peu gringalet, j'ajoute moi pour le

roman".⁴ Few critics would think of describing le Voyage d'Urien as a novel, if only because of its lack of length. It is an enigmatic allegory notable mainly for its almost surrealist imagery. It is, however, a work of fiction: Gide soon allayed Mallarmé's initial fears that he was writing a travelogue. During this early period Gide used the term roman loosely, to describe the symbolic tale, in the manner of Wilde, which he also called traité. He was, at the time, under the influence not only of the Symbolists but also of the German Romantics. In 1893 he planned to translate Heinrich von Ofterdingen, by Novalis.⁵ He was familiar with the German Novelle, which bears certain similarities to the Gidean récit, the form which he brought to perfection. This could be substantiated by a study of similarities between Gide's récits and the Novellen of Thomas Mann, such as Tonio Kröger and Der Tod in Venedig, which also have a comparable autobiographical element. The tone and atmosphere associated with the récit can already be traced in the early tales, la Tentative Amoureuse, El Hadj and le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue. These also contain a mystical element which the author later

⁴Letter of 26 January 1891, referred to by Holdheim, p. 82.

⁵Journal, p. 39.

tried to recapture in les Faux-Monnayeurs, and a suggestion of the bizarre fantasy, more prominent in le Voyage d'Urien, which was developed later in the other particularly Gidean form of narrative, the sotie.

The récit is Gide's most widely-recognized contribution to French fiction. It is "realistic", in the sense that the setting is presented as real, not fantastic or mythical, and the characters are not allegorical figures or comic caricatures. In this Gide follows the principle of beginning from life. The view of life which he gives is, however, far from the social survey of the nineteenth-century realist novel. It is classical in that its aim is intensity rather than breadth. The setting is usually very limited (l'Immoraliste is an exception), and the number of significant characters can be reduced to two: the protagonist (an exaggeration of one of Gide's potentialities) and his counterpart, who often represents Madeleine. We find Michel and Marceline in l'Immoraliste, Jérôme and Alissa in la Porte Étroite, the Pastor and Amélie in la Symphonie Pastorale. The récit is, as the name implies, the account of a series of events, though these need not lead to a violent or extraordinary climax, as in the Novelle, typified by the stories of Kleist. It is generally told in retrospect, though in la Symphonie Pastorale events overtake the narrator. It is recounted in the first person

by the central character. Thus it comes close to the German Icherzählung, the Novelle told in the first person, which takes the form of a confession, such as Storm's Aquis Submersus, with its concluding "mea culpa". Gide felt the need to confess, himself, and recognized this urge in Dostoïevsky's characters. He imparted it to his own, in the récits.

The use of the first person is for Gide, as we have seen, "le comble de l'objectivité",⁶ since he is completely identified with the narrator, who is not himself, but someone he might have been. The author is not omniscient: he sees events only from the point of view of the narrating character. The picture is lit-up from this angle. In the Preface to L'Immoraliste Gide writes: "Je n'ai cherché de rien prouver, mais de bien peindre et d'éclairer bien ma peinture".⁷ He reproached Roger Martin du Gard for having no light and shade in his novels, which are floodlit from outside the picture:

"Chez vous rien n'est jamais présenté de biais . . . Tout baigne dans la même clarté . . . Pensez à Rembrandt, à ses touches de lumière, puis à la profondeur secrète de ses ombres. Il y a une science subtile des éclairages;

⁶Letter to Christian Beck, quoted by Lafille, p. 49.

⁷L'Immoraliste, p. 20.

les varier à l'infini, c'est tout un art."⁸

He noted the same difference between the works of Stendhal, in which there is no shadow, and those of Dostoïevsky, which are lit up from an angle.⁹ With Gide's method, different points of view can be conveyed by using two narrators, as in la Porte Étroite, or successive récits, as in l'École des Femmes. Otherwise, the reactions of other participants in the events are conveyed only through the description of their words and actions by the narrator, which reveals as much about him as about them.

This is most obvious in la Symphonie Pastorale, a récit which reveals the weaknesses of the genre. It is, at its best, satisfying in the same way as classical drama, fulfilling the classical ideal of pleasing by its perfection of form and instructing by the moral lesson to be learned from the events portrayed. It can, however, easily become a formula and appear brittle and contrived, artificial rather than artistic. The narrator in the récit must convey enough information for the reader to see that he is mistaken -- for the récit invariably presents a case of self-deception -- while making it appear feasible for him not

⁸ R. Martin du Gard, Notes sur André Gide, p. 36.

⁹ Dostoïevsky, p. 99.

to realize this himself. La Symphonie Pastorale becomes in the process, as Germaine Brée points out, an "immense jeu de mots".¹⁰ The play on the theme of blindness and the ambiguities on every page become too evident, especially at a second reading; and any Gidean récit needs to be read twice, for it is a "palimpsest" which needs to be decoded. L'Immoraliste and la Porte Étroite are more successful, as in the first the reader identifies with Michel's friends who are anxiously listening to his story, and knows from the beginning that all is not well: in the second Jérôme's narrative is counterbalanced by Alissa's journal. Gide's use of journals and letters has been criticized. Brennan, for example, maintains that Gide, like Mauriac, "never outgrew a weakness for letters and diaries as props".¹¹ However, these devices allow the use of the first person without recourse to the monologue intérieur, which presupposes omniscience on the part of the author just as much as a third-person narrative does. Gide retains the conventions which uphold the illusion of vraisemblance. That he was aware of their weakness is shown by his parody of his own use of them in l'École des Femmes.

¹⁰ L'Insaisissable Protée, p. 248.

¹¹ Three Philosophical Novelists, p. 80.

While the récit is in the French tradition of la Princesse de Clèves, Adolphe and Dominique it is fundamentally different from the novel of psychological analysis in that the character reveals himself directly, without being analysed by the author's commentary, or even analysing himself. However, it retains the singleness of contour, the reduction to the essential, of these "classical" stories. Nothing is gratuitous. Gide follows his precept that in art "tout ce qui est inutile est nuisible".¹² Already in la Tentative Amoureuse the lovers did nothing but make love, "pour l'unité de mon récit".¹³ As Hytier puts it: "chacun des récits est remarquable . . . par la pureté de sa ligne, par l'unicité élégante de sa courbe, par la sobriété de son développement et . . . par son unilatéralité."¹⁴ No digressions are allowed, and it is the intensity of the psychological interest which holds the reader. Guérard calls l'Immoraliste "a great realistic novel",¹⁵ but the only "realism" Gide is aiming at in the récit is that ideal reality which he attributed to the classical work of art.

¹²Journal, p. 157.

¹³The Return of the Prodigal . . . p. 29.

¹⁴Hytier, p. 166.

¹⁵Guérard, p. 117.

Isabelle, in which Gide was not personally involved, shows Gide's mastery of this form and technique. Lafille claims of this work: "Elle ravit le lecteur, surpris de lire un vrai roman écrit par Gide";¹⁶ Germaine Brée pays tribute to it as evidence of what Gide could achieve in "le conte pur".¹⁷ But he wrote it as an exercise,¹⁸ and in spite of its perfection of form it lacks the emotional intensity of the earlier récits, in which Gide was "purging himself" of one of his possibilities. There is something lacking in Isabelle and l'École des Femmes, of which Gide wrote: "A vrai dire, ce livre ne m'intéresse guère et ma pensée ne s'y reporte pas spontanément. Il ne se relie pas étroitement à mes préoccupations actuelles . . . "¹⁹: it is the sense of urgency which his personal involvement contributed to the earlier récits. As Gide maintained in his critical writings, classical restraint is most effective when it is achieved with difficulty, by controlling an intense emotion.

This controlled emotion produced a particular lucidity and tension in the early récits, reflected and supported by the style, which gained fame with them and survived into

¹⁶ Lafille, p. 70.

¹⁷ L'Insaisissable Protée, p. 215.

¹⁸ Lafille, p. 52.

¹⁹ Journal, p. 887.

his later works. It is remarkable for its discretion and precision, which are appropriate to the récit form. The litotes of the words themselves is in keeping with the restrained tone; the reader must constantly look between the lines. The sentences, like the récit itself, often assume a symmetrical ternary structure. Each character is given his own style: Alissa's is different from Jérôme's, and the Pastor's is punctuated with appropriate Scriptural references. Yet they are all recognizably Gide, in this respect.

The récit was Gide's most successful expression of the two qualities he admired most in classicism: -- modesty, in the sense of understatement, and rigorous restraint in form. The use of the first person gives unity of tone; that of two people gives a sense of harmonious equilibrium. Because the récit tells a story of psychological interest, these are also the most widely-appreciated of his works.

La Symphonie Pastorale was made into a successful film, and Paul West admires the trilogy l'École des Femmes because it offers more psychological analysis than the previous works. He comments: "These novels are written with compassion and tender logic, but . . . their economy seems to come as much from perfunctoriness as from the desire to be "classical" in restraint".²⁰ In fact, Gide completed l'École des Femmes

²⁰The Modern Novel, vol. I, p. 180.

mainly to fulfil an obligation to an American magazine,²¹ and was far from satisfied with it: he never finished the third part, Geneviève. The récit had been an ideal form in which to express the intense conflicts of his youth, even at some distance in time, but became mechanical when the initial impulse was an idea rather than an emotion. West explains the weakness of some of the récits as due to the fact that Gide was "too much aware of human possibilities, too fond of everything, to manage the deliberate limitations art requires."²² Yet he showed in the early récits that he could concentrate one aspect of his own complexity in a restricted form. That this form was not adequate to express all aspects of Gide is shown by the soties.

The French classical tradition was admired by Gide, and influenced him greatly. It shared these privileges, however, with works of a very different sort, typified by the Arabian Nights, to which there are many references in his early diaries. He admits that the creative vitality and imagination of Balzac, Zola or Dickens attract him, in spite of his criticisms of them. His preference in music is for the compact sonata, rather than the exuberance of

²¹Lafille, p. 259. Journal, p. 886.

²²West, p. 180.

Wagner:²³ Yet he noted in André Walter that the "immoderate" appealed to him as much as it repelled "Emmanuèle".²⁴ Schlumberger records that he was hurt and resentful at Madeleine's criticism of his Poésies d'André Walter, since: "Il a toujours eu un faible pour les décevants enfants de sa Muse".²⁵ He continued to think of himself as a lyrical poet, even after it had become obvious that he was more talented in other directions. His emancipation from Protestant restraint, in North Africa, led to a more successful lyricism in les Nourritures Terrestres, the expression of his joy in new-found freedom and the pleasures of the senses. The emphasis in this work on the primacy of each individual and separate moment as lived experience was in direct contrast to the linear development of the récit, in which chronological time plays an important rôle.

A certain timeless quality was later one of his aims in his one long novel, les Faux-Monnayeurs. The concept of development in time is parodied in the first of the soties, Paludes. Like André Walter, the nameless author who is himself writing Paludes keeps a diary, but it is of things

²³ Si le grain . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p. 260.

²⁴ André Walter, p. 48.

²⁵ Madeleine et André Gide, p. 75.

that he intends to do, but does not. The situation at the end of the book is the same as at the beginning: there has been no development. The projected liberating journey is reduced to a banal and boring weekend trip a few miles out of Paris. The book Paludes, far from producing a revolution in the life of the author and his associates, disappears into the tedium of their routine existence and is to be followed by a sequel, of a similar nature, Polders: Tityre remains "recubans". By writing Paludes, Gide succeeded in re-integrating himself into the Paris literary scene, satirized in the book, to which he had felt a complete stranger on his return from North Africa. Les Nourritures Terrestres, published the following year, is the book which the author of Paludes should have written to disrupt contemporary complacency.

Whereas the récit was a critique of a tendency in Gide's own life, the sotie is the critique of his attempts to write a book. In Paludes he broaches the question of form in fiction, returning to one of the themes of André Walter. The fictional author expresses Gide's concept of "classical realism": "J'arrange les faits de façon à les rendre plus conformes à la vérité que dans la réalité".²⁶

²⁶Paludes, Livre de Poche, Gallimard, 1926, p. 21.

He also speaks of the relationship of fiction to the writer's own life: "les événements racontés ne conservent pas entre eux les valeurs qu'ils avaient dans la vie. Pour rester vrai on est obligé d'arranger. L'important, c'est que j'indique les émotions qu'ils me donnent".²⁷ Paludes, unlike the early récits, bears no close relationship to events in Gide's own life: but it expresses his intellectual preoccupations and emotional dissatisfaction. In the Preface he claims: "Ce qui surtout m'y intéresse, c'est ce que j'y ai mis sans le savoir" -- an echo of Valéry's: "mes vers ont le sens qu'on leur prête". While still upholding the importance of form, and the idea that a book should be "clos, plein, lisse comme un œuf",²⁸ he leaves the clarity of the récit for a new kind of controlled confusion, foreshadowed in le Voyage d'Urien. The sotie is enigmatic and apparently inconsequential, but never completely incoherent.

The original medieval sotie was a satirical or allegorical farce played out by burlesque characters or sots. In his dedication of Paludes, Gide calls it "cette satire de quoi". He has his tongue in his cheek. This urge to laugh at himself, and to mystify and surprise his readers,

²⁷ Ibid., p. 45.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 60.

is present even when he is at his most earnest: "Je ne suis qu'un petit garçon qui s'amuse doublé d'un pasteur protestant qui l'ennuie".²⁹ The contrasting tone and form of the récit and sotie reflect these two sides of Gide's character. He admired Dostoïevsky because he was never gratuitous,³⁰ and Proust because he invariably was.³¹ On the one hand, "en art tout ce qui est inutile est nuisible", as in the récit; on the other, a spontaneous delight in the incongruous, inconsequential and comical, the source of the saugrenu humour of the sotie.

In his unpublished Journal Gide wrote: "J'imagine, à la façon d'un conte de Voltaire, un Prométhée mal enchaîné".³² The sotie does in fact, share several characteristics of the conte philosophique: gratuitous comic effects, satire, and the predominance of the presentation of ideas over the creation of a convincing plot and characters. "La sotie est avant tout un jeu de formes et d'idées à travers lequel Gide projette un certain schéma abstrait, intellectuel"³³.

²⁹Quoted by Hytier, pp. 27-8.

³⁰Dostoïevsky, pp. 97-8.

³¹Pretexts, p. 206.

³²23 December 1895. Quoted by Delay, vol. II, p. 567.

³³Brée, p. 95.

and: "À la façon cubiste, elle n'utilise de la réalité que ce qu'elle recompose selon une figure abstraite".³⁴ The setting of le Prométhée maî enchaîné is even further from life than that of Paludes, though the Parisian boulevards intrude surprisingly into the world of mythological characters. Although enigmatic, the second sotie is carefully constructed and suggests certain interpretations. Like Paludes it is a critique of the writing of fiction, though in a less obvious form. Zeus, the artist as God, acts arbitrarily to set his creatures in motion, in the manner of the omnipotent "objective" novelist. The waiter draws people together in order to study inter-relationships, in the manner of the psychological novel. Prométhée feeds his eagle, to the detriment of his own health. Like the writer of the roman à thèse his ideal, or his conscience, is all-important to him, and he indulges in discourses on ideas. He is also, prior to his change of mind, the artist who, given the choice between life and art, chooses the latter. The concept of an all-consuming Idea was already suggested in Paludes: "Chaque idée, dès qu'on la touche, vous châtie; elles ressemblent à ces goules de nuit qui s'installent sur vos épaules, se nourrissent de vous et pèsent d'autant plus qu'elles vous ont rendu plus faible".³⁵

³⁴ Ibid., p. 221.

³⁵ Paludes, p. 86.

Germaine Brée adds to her analysis of these three representative types of novelist that: "Gide écrira le roman des hommes qui tentent de vivre de façon morale et cohérente dans le monde amoral et incohérent que démonte la sotie".³⁶ The apparent meaninglessness in the form and content of the sotie reflects its theme: the problem of freedom and lack of pattern in life and the attempt of the writer or artist to impose order and harmony in his works. It is in the soties that Gide examines the motivation and limitation of human action and investigates the possibility of the "acte gratuit". In Paludes he introduced the "acte libre": "Un acte ne dépendant de rien . . . détachable . . . supprimable . . . sans valeur."³⁷ It is also "l'acte comme il faut responsable", the only expression of liberty. The problem of gratuitous action, and its consequences, and of human freedom in the face of "acts of God" is developed in Prométhée. It is of double interest to the writer of fiction, who knows that nothing in his book can be purely gratuitous, since it is the result of conscious decision and selection on his part: nor can the freedom of his characters be anything but illusory, since he decides their fate, and the

³⁶Brée, p. 118.

³⁷Paludes, p. 67.

characteristics which govern their choices.

The question of the "acte gratuit" is developed further in the third sotie, les Caves du Vatican. Drawing on his experience in the law-courts, Gide maintains (in the person of the novelist, Julius) that it is not necessary to motivate a crime, only the criminal.³⁸ The "acte gratuit" is not an unmotivated act, but one whose motives do not conform to the usual logic of self-interest: it is disinterested, which is not, in this case, a synonym for philanthropic. The motive may be simply to prove that a murder can be committed for no apparent reason. But the apparently free Lafcadio, who is tied to no family or moral code, finds himself nevertheless becoming part of someone else's plan. When Protos "touches up" his crime he demolishes what Lafcadio thought was a distinction between life and fiction -- the possibility of changing something once it is done.³⁹ The central theme of les Caves proves to be, as in the other soties, the relationship between life and fiction. Julius is dissatisfied with his fictional characters because of both their "excès de logique" and their "insuffisante détermination".⁴⁰ He realizes that he is

³⁸ Les Caves du Vatican, Livre de Poche, Gallimard, 1922, p. 209.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 191.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 178.

attempting to impart to them a consistency achieved in his own life only by living "contrefait", and therefore they also appear inauthentic.⁴¹ When he tells his idea for a new novel dealing with a motiveless crime to Lafcadio, who has just murdered Fleurissoire, life and fiction become inextricably entangled: just as Protos, who like Gide prefers to "faire agir", becomes entangled in his own web. The fictional world can affect its creator's life as much as the reverse. In les Faux-Monnayeurs Gide will return to this theme, which was already in his mind when he wrote la Tentative Amoureuse: "J'ai voulu indiquer . . . l'influence du livre sur celui qui l'écrit, et pendant l'écriture même . . . Nos actes ont sur nous une rétroaction".⁴² Lafcadio finds that this is so, in the case of his "acte gratuit".

The surprising effects and the constantly unpredictable developments in les Caves are reminiscent of the eighteenth-century novel, as also are the author's direct interventions and the picaresque nature of the hero. This kind of story began to appear at the time when Gide was writing, as a reaction against Symbolist ideas and the

⁴¹Ibid., p. 208.

⁴²Journal, p. 40.

accepted types of novel. It was advocated by Jacques Rivière in an article for the Nouvelle Revue Française entitled "le Roman d'Aventure"; Gide remarked, on its appearance in July 1913,⁴³ that it expressed what he himself would have liked to say. He was working on les Caves at the time. Rivière wanted action above all else, in the novel: "The novel we await will not have that beautiful rectilinear composition, that harmonious sequence, that simplicity of plot, which have formed the virtues of the French novel up to now."⁴⁴ He could have been referring to Gide's récits. Gide himself saw les Caves as a swing of the pendulum in his dialectic, away from the subjective inspiration and classical form of l'Immoraliste and la Porte Étroite.⁴⁵ Rivière maintains that the roman d'aventure will be different from the popular roman policier, while retaining its inventiveness. The importance Gide attached to this quality is reflected in his choice of Simenon as "notre plus grand romancier aujourd'hui, vrai romancier",⁴⁶ in a letter to

⁴³Journal, p. 391.

⁴⁴J. Rivière, The Ideal Reader, Selected Essays, translated by B.A. Price, Harvill Press, London, 1962, p. 67.

⁴⁵Journal, p. 437.

⁴⁶16 May 1947. Text given by Guérard, p. 242.

Guérard in 1947. He adopts some of the techniques of the detective story in les Caves and exaggerates them, parodying Marcel Leblanc's Arsène Lupin. The fortuitous coincidences and unexpected reappearances of characters almost forgotten are also in the manner of the eighteenth century novel, or the recent picaresque film Little Big Man. He also parodies the roman chronique in recounting the family history of the Blafaphas and the Fleurissoires, and the Realists' use of description:

"Malgré tout mon désir de ne relater que l'essentiel, je ne puis passer sous silence la loupe d'Anthime Armand-Dubois. Car, tant que je n'aurai pas plus sûrement appris à démêler l'accidentel du nécessaire, qu'exigerais-je de ma plume sinon exactitude et rigueur?"⁴⁷

He adds a jibe at the Naturalists: "Qui pourrait affirmer en effet que cette loupe n'avait joué aucun rôle . . . dans les décisions de ce qu'Anthime appelait sa libre pensée?" Once more the question of freedom and determinism is raised, and the rôle of the creative artist is analogous to that of God: "Cette mesquinerie, il ne la pardonnait pas au bon Dieu". It is, of course, Gide, the author, who destined Anthime, from his first conception, to be disfigured in this way: as far back as 1905 he had noted: "Je vois Anthime Armand-Dubois avec une énorme loupe sur le sourcil droit".⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Les Caves, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Journal, p. 153.

Gide satirizes a particular type of novel, as Jane Austen did the Gothic horror novel in Northanger Abbey: but for him this serves as another way of studying the creative process itself, the relationship between life and fiction.

This was also the theme of Isabelle, which was originally sub-titled l'Illusion Pathétique. This work, although a récit in form, is closer to the sotie in spirit. As in les Caves, the characters are "fantoques" which come alive almost in spite of the author. Germaine Brée considers that they have "une présence aussi concrète et aussi improbable que celle des personnages de Dickens".⁴⁹ This seems somewhat exaggerated, but the humorous description of the inhabitants of la Quartfourche was certainly a new element in Gide, when the work appeared, Published in 1911, the same year as Corydon, it reflects, like les Caves, a delight in amusing and surprising gratuitously, "in the manner of nature", whose rich abundance is presented in Corydon as strictly non-utilitarian.⁵⁰ In Isabelle, as in les Caves, Gide uses some of the techniques of the detective story. The narrator, Lacase, is a historian, but likes to think of himself as a novelist.⁵¹ Like that other historian,

⁴⁹Brée, p. 214.

⁵⁰Cf. Ireland, p. 61.

⁵¹Isabelle, Livre de Poche, Gallimard, Paris, 1921, p. 15.

Roquentin, in la Nausée, he would like life to take the form of meaningful "adventures". Adventures happen in the sotie, but it is difficult to see any meaning in them: the récit imposes a form on them, as does history, but since its aim is to "découvrir la réalité sous l'aspect",⁵² it exposes the meaning projected by the imagination as an illusion. The criticism in Isabelle is directed not only at the self-deception of the central character, as in the other récits, but at the discrepancy between what is and what might be, the two worlds of life and fiction.

Both of the works mentioned -- Isabelle and les Caves -- could reasonably be called "novels", and have caused critics to disregard as arbitrary Gide's distinction between the récit and sotie and the roman. He set out his reason for this distinction in a projected Preface to les Caves:

"Pourquoi j'appelle ce livre sotie? Pourquoi récits les trois précédents? Pour bien marquer que ce ne sont point là des romans . . . je n'ai jusqu'à présent écrit que des livres ironiques -- ou: critiques, si vous préférez".⁵³

He had already said: "Il me semble parfois que je n'ai présenté qu'ironiquement ma pensée",⁵⁴

⁵²Isabelle, p. 48.

⁵³Journal, p. 437.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 388.

and he comes back to the same idea later: "Toute mon oeuvre jusqu'à présent n'a été que négative".⁵⁵ In both the récit and the sotie Gide is sufficiently detached from his characters to criticize them, however great his initial "sympathy" for them. This criticism is, however, implicit, not explicit. The author disguises it by the ambiguity of irony: the reader must "rétablir", and draw his own conclusion. Holdheim points out that in the sotie wisdom is disguised as folly, while the reverse is true in the récit.⁵⁶ Germaine Brée expresses the same idea in more concrete terms, by imagining a game of football played according to basket-ball rules: the récit presents the point of view of one of the distressed players, the sotie that of the amused but somewhat puzzled spectators: "dans les deux cas il y a malentendu".⁵⁷ The character in the récit is explicitly pathetic and implicitly ridiculous: in the sotie the opposite is the case. Fleurissoire is Alissa seen from the outside. "L'absurdité de la sotie, la tension arbitraire du récit, sont signes que le miroir littéraire déforme, pour le plus grand plaisir sans doute du lecteur, qui doit en redresser l'image."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Journal, p. 432.

⁵⁶ Holdheim, p. 92.

⁵⁷ Brée, p. 234.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 257.

The roman then, according to Gide, should not deform the image of reality in the same way: it is not a game, in which the author can remain detached and amused. It is also larger in scope than either the récit or the sotie.

In a projected Preface for Isabelle he wrote:

"Le roman, tel que je le reconnais ou l'imagine, comporte une diversité de points de vue, soumise à la diversité des personnages qu'il met en scène; c'est par essence une oeuvre déconcentrée. Il m'importe du reste beaucoup moins d'en formuler la théorie que d'en écrire".⁵⁹

In fact the theory and practice of the novel were inseparable for Gide, as has already been seen by his preoccupation in the works themselves with the problem of creating fiction. It was on comparing his own works with those of other novelists that he became dissatisfied with them as novels and reclassified them as récits and soties. This led him to formulate a definition of the novel far removed from his initial idea, in André Walter of the "roman théorème". At that time he was still governed by Symbolist ideas of Art for Art, and sought perfection of form in restraint: but on reading Dostoïevsky, and returning to his "os de seiche", Stendhal, he felt something lacking in the short and elegant récit or sotie which disqualified them from being considered

⁵⁹Oeuvres Complètes, Gallimard, Paris, vol. VI, p. 361. Quoted by Brée, p. 251.

as novels on the same level as the works of these writers. In his lecture on "The Evolution of the Theatre" in 1904 he had already spoken of the novel as "multiform and omnivorous".⁶⁰ With his approval of Rivière's essay and his own extended length and scope in les Cayes he was moving towards his one attempt to produce a novel of this type: les Faux-Monnayeurs.

Gide wanted, in this one roman, to produce a work of large proportions, which would incorporate many characters and sub-plots, in contrast to the récit, and which would bear a closer relationship to life than the artificial and abstract sotie. Like the Expressionists⁶¹ he wanted a form, different from nineteenth-century Realism, which would convey instead of a stereotyped reality an impression of the abundance, disorder and contingency of real life. The subject of les Faux-Monnayeurs is, according to Édouard, "la rivalité du monde réel et de la représentation que nous nous en faisons":⁶² that is, the disparity between reality and the illusions one may have about it, as in Isabelle. By making his main character an author, Gide can add the dimension of art: "D'une part, l'événement, le fait, la

⁶⁰Pretexts, p. 60.

⁶¹See Guérard, p. 148 and Hatfield, p. 58 ff.

⁶²Les Faux-Monnayeurs, Livre de Poche, Gallimard, 1925, p. 255.

donnée extérieure; d'autre part, l'effort même du romancier pour faire un livre avec cela".⁶³ He pinpoints the paradox at the root of the problem of creating fiction to reflect reality: how to convey the formlessness of life by the use of artistic form?

Édouard attempts to define, as his solution, a "roman pur", on the lines of "la poésie pure" which was being discussed at that time.⁶⁴ Hytier points out the impossibility of this concept: "Le roman est le genre qui, par sa nature, se refuse à la pureté".⁶⁵ Édouard will not succeed in producing such a novel. In any case, a novel in which life would be completely stylised would no longer be a novel, but closer to the epic.⁶⁶ Gide realized this, and noted: "Seul, le ton de l'épopée me convient et me peut satisfaire; peut sortir le roman de son ornière réaliste."⁶⁷ The quest in Gide's works for a reality which, like Novalis' "blaue Blume" constantly evades him, has an epic quality:⁶⁸

⁶³ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 49.

⁶⁴ Les Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 93: "Dépouiller le roman de tous les éléments, qui n'appartiennent pas spécifiquement au roman . . ."

⁶⁵ Hytier, p. 292.

⁶⁶ Cf. Ireland, p. 63.

⁶⁷ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 59.

⁶⁸ Cf. Brée, p. 261.

a fixed Reality becomes for him an unattainable Ideal, as inaccessible as the sea in El Hadj. He recognized, as Lukacs does, that the novel is the only form of epic possible in modern society. Sainte-Beuve defined the novel as:

"Un vaste champ d'essai qui s'ouvre à toutes les formes de génie, à toutes les manières. C'est l'épopée future, la seule probablement que les mœurs modernes comporteront désormais".⁶⁹

Gide's attempt to introduce the epic tone into the novel was only one of his innovations in les Faux-Monnayeurs which is, above all, a "vaste champ d'essai", an experimental novel, in which Gide seeks to develop his theory and put it into practice at the same time.

⁶⁹ See le petit Robert, under roman.

CHAPTER IV

"Les Faux-Monnayeurs:" the Novelist and the Novel

The genesis of the novel; influences; innovations in structure and technique; Gide and Édouard; the place of ideas in the novel; the author and the reader; limitations and achievement.

In the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs Gide sets out his aims in his one roman and records his difficulties in achieving them. He wishes to write a work of larger scope than his previous récits and soties, as we have seen. He takes this principle to the extreme in hoping, at first, to include in it "tout ce que me présente et m'enseigne la vie". He realizes that: "Si touffu que je souhaite ce livre, je ne puis songer à tout y faire entrer",¹ but persists in persuading himself that this will be his last book,² in order to encourage himself to attempt the impossible.

His reading of English and Russian novelists had made him dissatisfied with his own previous works of fiction.

¹Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 11.

²Ibid., p. 33.

While writing les Faux-Monnayeurs he was also working on his lectures on Dostoïevsky, which were given at the Vieux Colombier in 1922.³ He admired the Russian novelist mainly because he recognized in him certain of his own characteristics and tendencies, some of which have already been mentioned: humility and a desire to confess; apparent contradictions; an unwillingness to be tied to any theory; a preoccupation with the individual and God, rather than society; the attitude of a "moraliste" who poses questions rather than solving them; a belief in the importance of art; and a desire to survive in the future rather than to achieve contemporary success. He saw the personal nature of Dostoïevsky's fiction, his projection of himself in his characters, as a justification of his own subjective approach. He also admired and sought to emulate Dostoïevsky's expression of ideas through characters, avoiding the abstract, and his presentation of inconsistent and self-contradictory characters very different from the "types" of the French Realist novel. Above all, Dostoïevsky succeeded in conveying conflict and chaos through orderly artistic form by the use of light and shadow, which always leaves room for an element

³Text in Dostoïevski, Idées, Gallimard, 1970.

of mystery and surprise. These were some of the qualities and techniques Gide hoped to incorporate into his novel.

As an epigraph to his collected writings on Dostoïevsky, published in 1923, he used a quotation from Nietzsche: "Dostoïevsky . . . le seul qui m'ait appris quelque chose en psychologie . . . Sa découverte a été pour moi plus importante encore que celle de Stendhal". Like Nietzsche, Gide was also indebted to the latter, and there are several references to him in the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, since Gide was preparing his Preface to Armance at the time. In Stendhal, it is his spontaneity and elegance that Gide admires, and the mobile nature of his heroes. Already in 1891 he had warned himself against attempting to imitate Stendhal.⁴ The Journal records his constant re-reading of the works of this author, especially his autobiographical writings, to "aiguiser son bec".⁵ The picaresque element in les Caves and les Faux-Monnayeurs certainly owes something to this influence, as much as to the eighteenth-century novelists admired by both Gide and Rivière. Many points of comparison between Gide and Diderot,

⁴Journal, p. 20.

⁵Ibid., p. 255.

especially the question of freedom in life and fiction, as presented in Jacques le Fataliste,⁶ are brought out by G.N. Laidlaw in his study of the two authors.⁷ The Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs records certain changes in structure and techniques which Gide decided to make on re-reading Fielding's Tom Jones, which shares many characteristics with the works of Stendhal and Diderot. It is clear that it was not only his own direct experience of life which Gide wished to incorporate and reflect in his novel, but also the lessons learned from his wide reading of other novelists, especially those mentioned.

Gide naturally compared himself not only to writers of the past, but to his contemporaries, particularly Proust, who shared some of his problems, both as a man (his homosexuality) and as a writer (the relationship between fiction and autobiography). Gide tells of a nightmare involving Proust which appears to represent his jealousy of the success of Proust's work.⁸ He did not forget that his biggest blunder as editor of la Nouvelle Revue Française had been to reject the manuscript of Du

⁶One of Gide's favourite books: Journal, p. 783.

⁷Elysian Encounter: Diderot and Gide, Syracuse University Press, 1963.

⁸Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, pp. 70-71.

Côté de chez Swann. In doing so he was consistent with his desire to see something new in the form of the novel: the originality of Proust's work lay elsewhere. Its subsequent recognition may have influenced Gide in his desire to write a novel depicting the whole of life, and expressing the whole of his personality, where his previous works had been selective.

The Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs indicates the enormous amount of ideas and material which Gide collected for inclusion in the novel. Some sketches of plots had been in his mind for many years, such as the study of the "décristallisation de l'amour" which finally formed the theme of l'École des Femmes. The stories of two sisters and of a seduction take a form in the novel very different from his first idea of them. He notes incidents from real life, some of which he uses, such as the boy stealing a book⁹ and the woman who never finishes a sentence:¹⁰ others he discards. Other elements from his own life can be traced in Si le grain ne meurt . . . which he was writing at the same time: for example, the Pastor Vedel and the friend who served as a model for Armand. His initial reason for beginning the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs was that he

⁹Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 38.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 78.

was afraid of trying to combine too many different themes: he had enough material for two very different books, one "andante" and one "allegro": "Je commence ce carnet pour tâcher d'en démêler les éléments de tonalité trop différente".¹¹ The rôle of the carnet changes as much as the novel itself, in the five years it covers (1919-1924). By publishing it, Gide was following up an idea he had already put into the mouth of Angèle, in Paludes: "Des notes, s'écria-t-elle -- ô lisez-les! c'est le plus amusant; on y voit ce que l'auteur veut dire bien mieux qu'il ne l'écrira dans la suite".¹² At times the carnet leaves the subject of les Faux-Monnayeurs for notes on Gide's current reading and activities, in the manner of the Journal, while many comments on the novel are included in the regular Journal. The constant communication between Gide's life and his work is revealed in a new way. The subsequent incorporation of a large part of the carnet in the novel itself adds a further dimension to this inter-relationship.

The central problem reflected in the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs arises from Gide's desire to introduce a wide variety of themes and several plots into one book which

¹¹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹² Paludes, p. 20.

should nevertheless satisfy his requirements of a work of art. His first impulse was to maintain unity by telling the whole story through the eyes of one central character, the Lafcadio of les Caves, using the first-person narrative with which he was so familiar. He realizes that this will not be possible if the book is to be as broad in scope as he would like it:

"Sans doute le point de vue de Lafcadio est-il trop spécial pour qu'il soit souhaitable de le faire sans cesse prévaloir. Mais quel autre moyen de présenter le reste? Peut-être est-ce folie de vouloir éviter à tout prix le simple récit impersonnel".¹³

He finally reconciled himself to the latter, though with modifications, as we shall see. He also considered using successive récits, giving different points of view, the form which he adopted for the trilogy l'École des Femmes, and which was used so successfully by Faulkner in The Sound and the Fury. Even in adopting the third-person narrative, he introduces the "multiplicity of view" which Huxley later advocated in Point Counter Point, by the use of notebooks and letters. He abandoned another idea for "un dossier d'avocat",¹⁴ but uses these devices to assure that the events are not "racontés directement par l'auteur,

¹³Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 24.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 24.

mais plutôt exposés (et plusieurs fois, sous des angles divers) par ceux des acteurs sur qui ces événements auront eu quelque influence."¹⁵ This is one reason for the importance of dialogue in the book, to which we shall return.

The difficulty of imposing some unity on the diverse elements in the book remains:

"Tout au plus ai-je senti d'une manière plus pressante le besoin d'établir une relation continue entre les éléments épars; je voudrais pourtant éviter ce qu'a d'artificiel une "intrigue". Mais il faudrait que les événements se groupent indépendamment de Lafcadio, et pour ainsi dire: à son insu. J'attends trop de l'inspiration; elle doit être le résultat de la recherche" . . .¹⁵

The solution indicates Gide's method of working on a novel. He keeps ideas and problems in his head, even for years at a time, so that when he finally comes to write them down they are already developed, hence his method of procedure: periods of prolific writing with apparent ease, interspersed with barren gaps of non-creativity and depression. He records in the Journal difficulties experienced in the production of several of his works.¹⁶ They occur also in the development of les Faux-Monnayeurs. He wishes to write spontaneously, like Stendhal, and feels, as he already did in André Walter, that "ferveur"¹⁷ is essential

¹⁵Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁶E.g., Journal, pp. 255, 1070.

¹⁷Si le grain . . . Gallimard, Paris, 1928, p. 246;
Cf. Ainsi soit-il . . . p. 173.

for authenticity. Yet he is always afraid that his source of inspiration may dry up:

"La phrase qui me satisfait est celle qui me vient comme du dehors et sans que je la cherche, ou qui surgit du fond de moi spontanément. Mais ce jaillissement n'est pas continu, et c'est précisément parce qu'il est spontané que je pense qu'il peut tarir".¹⁸

This ostensibly spontaneous flow is the result of a damming-up process, during his dry periods: "Selon ma méthode, j'use de patience et considère la touffe longuement avant d'attaquer".¹⁹ He realizes himself that sudden inspiration is only apparent: "Je consens que la solution d'un problème apparaisse dans une illumination subite; mais ce n'est qu'après qu'on l'a longuement étudié".²⁰

The problem of the composition of les Faux-Monnayeurs continued to occupy Gide for several years and was solved only by the transformation of the novel from his original conception of it. This seems to have happened almost without the author's realization since, unlike Martin du Gard, he had no plan. The latter comments, somewhat deprecatingly: "Il se refuse à s'assurer d'un plan préalable. Il ne sait pas lui-même où il va, ni très bien où il veut aller. Il écrit d'impulsion, selon la caprice de l'heure."²¹

¹⁸ Journal, pp. 730-1.

¹⁹ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 89.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

²¹ Notes sur André Gide, p. 68.

In this Gide was imitating Stendhal,²² who insisted that a plan was detrimental to his work.²³ Gide refused to "profiter de l'élan acquis",²⁴ and was determined to "repartir à neuf" for each chapter, to "oser écrire sans ordre"²⁵ in Stendhal's manner. When Gide attributes to Édouard a fear "de ne pouvoir jamais en sortir",²⁶ he seems to be expressing his own misgivings. For the classical side of Gide imposes a rigorous method even on his attempts to work without one, and he has moments when he regrets that: "le roman s'est toujours, et dans tous les pays, jusqu'à présent cramponné à la réalité"²⁷. . . that there is no "roman pur", which would be idealised, stylised, like classical drama or the epic.²⁸ He even forgets at one point that his aim is to leave the récit for the "roman touffu", and laments the fact that "quand le roman français s'élance, c'est dans la direction du Roman Bourgeois, rather than that of the Princesse de Clèves. He comes back, however to his

²² Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, pp. 28-9.

²³ Allott, p. 146.

²⁴ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 77; cf. Et nunc . . ., p. 93.

²⁵ Journal, pp. 387, 1271.

²⁶ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 59.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 63-4.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 59-60.

original criterion for the novel, in comparing Stendhal with Balzac: while Stendhal is the nearest to the "roman pur", Balzac "est peut-être le plus grand de nos romanciers", and he is "celui qui mêla au roman et y annexa, et y amalgama, le plus d'éléments hétérogènes"²⁹ . . . He concludes by expressing his admiration for the eighteenth-century English novelists, who achieved both a form of purity and a semblance of the disorder of life. While wanting to "tout y verser", Gide retains the conviction that: "Tout ce qui ne peut servir alourdit".³⁰ The structure of the novel remains all-important, since everything which he wishes to include must appear to be essential, to arise from the work, rather than vice-versa, which would produce a roman à thèse serving as a pretext to air certain ideas and theories.

We shall return to the place of ideas in the novel. Let us first consider the changing construction of les Faux-Monnayeurs. The problems appeared insoluble, as long as Gide had in mind "le type convenu du roman",³¹ even those of

²⁹Ibid., p. 64.

³⁰Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 18.

³¹Ibid., p. 28.

Dostoïevsky or Stendhal. He realized, after about two months' work on it, that

"nombre de ces prétendues difficultés tomberont du jour où je prendrai délibérément mon parti de son étrangeté . . . Pourquoi tant chercher une motivation, une suite, le groupement autour d'une intrigue centrale? Ne puis-je trouver le moyen, avec la forme que j'adopte, de faire indirectement la critique de tout cela? . . . Il y aurait des personnages inutiles, des gestes inefficaces, des propos inopérants, et l'action ne s'engagerait pas".

The novel is to become an anti-roman. It will not only parody accepted forms of the novel, as had already been done in les Caves: but its main subject will be the possibility of writing a novel. The theme present in a less obvious way in so many of Gide's previous works will be brought to the fore: the relationship between life and fiction. Sartre gives the following definition of an anti-roman, in his Preface to Nathalie Sarraute's Portrait d'un Inconnu:

"Les anti-romans conservent l'apparence et les contours du roman; ce sont des ouvrages d'imagination qui nous présentent des personnages fictifs et nous racontent leur histoire. Mais c'est pour mieux décevoir: il s'agit de contester le roman par lui-même, de le détruire sous nos yeux dans le temps qu'on semble l'édifier, d'écrire le roman d'un roman qui ne se fait pas, qui ne peut se faire . . ." ³²

Sartre mentions les Faux-Monnayeurs as an example of an anti-roman. As well as his indirect criticism through the form of the novel, Gide returns to a device he used before, in André Walter, Paludes and les Caves, in introducing a novelist

³² Situations IV, Gallimard, Paris, 1964, p. 9.

in the novel, thus providing a means of including also direct criticism of traditional forms. Huxley uses the same technique in Point Counter Point: "Put a novelist into the novel. He justifies aesthetic generalizations, which may be interesting -- at least to me. He also justifies experiment" . . .³³ Guérard maintains that: "Édouard's reasonings continue to seem important and central only to the person writing an essay on Gide".³⁴ This may be true to a certain extent, since the views of Édouard are so close to those expressed by Gide himself: however, he also plays an important part in the structure of the book.

Ironically, Gide's decision to give up the attempt to unify his story around Lafcadio, and to criticize the novel-form by the introduction of a novelist, solves his problem of construction. Édouard takes over from Lafcadio as the centre of the book. Gide recorded a similar instance in Dostoïevsky of a central character being ousted by another almost without the author's volition.³⁵ Édouard forms a bridge between the two age groups in the book, also between the three families represented -- the Profitendieus, the Moliniers and the Vedels. The story of Boris is linked to

³³p. 298.

³⁴p. 164.

³⁵Dostoïevsky, p. 141.

the rest of the book -- though rather tenuously -- through Édouard's contact with la Pérouse. His relationship with Laura and his professional acquaintance with Passavent, representative of another type of novelist, involve him in the affairs of Laura and her husband, Vincent, Lilian and Passavent. Even the mysterious Strouvilhau was at school with Édouard. The unstructured novel is an illusion: everything in its apparently uncontrolled universe is closely connected, through Édouard, who also links the discussion of the novel to the action. His notes even become part of the plot; the title of his book, les Faux-Monnayeurs, as well as being the same as that of the novel in which he appears (as in Paludes), facilitates the introduction of the false coins, which also play a part in the plot, as well as being of symbolic value.

Édouard obviously represents the author himself, to a large extent. Gide not only expresses his ideas on the novel and art through him: he also makes him a pederast. Through these two concerns the novel is linked to Gide's own life in the intimate way required for him to write successful fiction. The book is not ironic in the same way as the récit or sotie. This was Gide's intention, as we have seen. He is no longer writing with Madeleine in mind, and presents his views on homosexuality in a form very different from the insinuations of l'Immoraliste. Corydon had been published in 1911, and he was writing the second

part of Si le grain ne meurt . . . Brennan feels that Gide's depiction of homosexuality loses, artistically, because he no longer has the critical detachment from the character he is presenting which was part of the récit:

"The homosexual passages in les Faux-Monnayeurs are embarrassing not for moral reasons, but because they produce some of the most sentimental blushings, sighs and arm-squeezings this side of Dickens".³⁶

Gide was aware that Édouard would be a "personnage d'autant plus difficile à établir que je lui prête beaucoup de moi";³⁷ he introduces this problem into the conversation between Édouard and Sophroniska, when Édouard explains his intention of making his central character a novelist.³⁸

He sees the need to "reculer et l'écarter de moi pour bien le voir". This is relatively successful, as far as his aesthetic ideas are concerned, for Édouard is "un amateur, un râté", whose book will never be written. It is more difficult with regard to his penchant for adolescent boys. As Brennan points out, Gide lapses at times into a sentimentality reminiscent of André Walter, his one previous non-ironic work. However, this helps to save him from the roman à thèse. Hytier comments on l'École des Femmes (p. 192):

³⁶Brennan, Three Philosophical Novelists, pp. 104-5.

³⁷Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 65.

³⁸Les Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 233.

"L'ironie est morte, et le poète ne vient plus soutenir le moraliste". Gide's lyrical, "poetic" side tends to sentimentality: but the histoires de coeur in Les Faux-Monnayeurs form a counter-balance to the ideas and provide an element in the "counter-point" technique, which Huxley also took up. Sections in which action and emotion are uppermost -- and even melodrama -- alternate with intellectual discussion. Ideas which are introduced in passing reappear, to be developed, when one no longer expects them to, "comme un premier motif, dans certaines fugues de Bach".³⁹ Gide's familiarity with Bach's Art de la Fugue provided him with another structural device which reconciled his desire for order with his wish to escape from the conventional consecutive development and unity of tone and intrigue of the récit.

The introduction into the novel of a novelist, who is also thinking of introducing a novelist into his novel, illustrates the "construction en abyme" which Gide first considered in 1893, when he was writing la Tentative Amoureuse.

"J'aime assez qu'en une oeuvre d'art, on retrouve ainsi transposé, à l'échelle des personnages, le sujet même de l'oeuvre. Rien ne l'éclaire mieux et n'établit plus sûrement toutes les proportions de l'ensemble" . . .⁴⁰

³⁹Journal, p. 790.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 41.

He gives as examples of this the paintings of Memling or Quentin Metzys, in which a mirror reflects the scene, and the "play within the play" of Hamlet. However,

"Ce qui dirait mieux ce que j'ai voulu dans mes Cahiers, dans mon Narcisse et dans la Tentative, c'est la comparaison avec ce procédé du blason qui consiste, dans le premier, à en mettre un second "en abyme".

This is yet another idea taken up and carried further by

Huxley: "Why draw the line at one novelist inside your novel?

Why not a second inside his? . . . and so on to infinity" . . .⁴¹

The danger of monotony resulting from this Chinese-box technique is illustrated by the type of joke, which is never-ending, based on the same principle. In fact neither Gide nor Huxley attempts to carry it so far. Their aim is to examine the process of the reflection of reality in fiction and to indicate the perspective involved: the mirror reflects differently, according to where it is placed, the lighting, and the eyes of the person looking. The same is true of fiction. The impression of reality which it conveys depends firstly on the perception of the writer, and his projection of what he sees in his work, and secondly on the reaction of the reader.

Gide was aware of this last element, as we saw in his Preface to Paludes. In les Faux-Monnayeurs, instead of

⁴¹Point Counter Point, p. 298.

maintaining the reader's "willing suspension of disbelief" for as long as possible, as in the Realist novel, he makes the reader his accomplice. He wrote in his Preface to Armance that in Stendhal's novel the intrigue takes place, not so much between the characters, as between the author and reader.⁴² The same could be said of les Faux-Monnayeurs. Gide had already made direct interventions in les Caves. In the sotie the story was stylised to such an extent that the "vraisemblance" was not disrupted by this, since it never really existed: but les Faux-Monnayeurs is presented as a traditional novel in which the characters and plot purport to be real. The author intervenes, in the words of Paul West, "to demonstrate the silliness of the categories the reader is trying to apply",⁴³ to remind us, like Diderot in Jacques le Fataliste that this is "only a novel". In this respect Gide's book certainly conforms to Sartre's definition of the anti-roman. Whereas Diderot or Sterne step in to point out that the author is manipulating his characters and deciding the turn of events, Gide makes his "roving conductor" ostensibly ignorant of what is happening part of the time. Phrases like "je ne sais pas trop" and "j'aurais été curieux de savoir" . . . recur.⁴⁴ On

⁴²Préfaces, Ides et Calendes, 1948, p. 22.

⁴³The Modern Novel, vol. I, p. 179.

⁴⁴Les Faux-Monnayeurs, pp. 33, 44.

reviewing his characters in the manner of Fielding, Gide tells us that: "L'auteur se demande où va le mener son récit".⁴⁵ It may well be that at that point he was still in doubt, as Martin du Gard indicated. It was against the advice of the latter, and under the influence of Fielding,⁴⁶ that Gide decided on these interventions. They allow the author to appear in his own work in a guise different from that of Édouard: one which, like Édouard, is not to be confused with the real Gide, who has an artistic purpose for everything he includes in his book. In this case it is the creation of a complicity between the author and the reader, built up by asides such as "Lilian m'agace",⁴⁷ in which he expresses the reader's reaction, and injunctions in the "nous" form, which identify the author with the reader, such as "Laissons-le", "Quittons-les", "Suivons-le".⁴⁸ He hopes to involve the reader in the creative process by allowing him to "prendre barre sur moi".⁴⁹ While destroying the illusion that the fictional world is real, he creates another: that the reader knows as much about it as he does.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 274.

⁴⁶ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, pp. 79-80.

⁴⁷ Les Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 68.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 70, 32, 47.

⁴⁹ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 70.

It is difficult to know how much credit to give to Gide's claim in the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs that he does not know what his characters are going to do next.⁵⁰ We have seen how a new character, Édouard, introduced himself and ousted the original hero, Lafcadio, who suddenly reappears in Gide's notes as Bernard, and has also acquired a counterpart, Olivier. Having set out to provide the reader with a carnet which will enable him to study the development of his book, Gide inexplicably starts a second notebook,⁵¹ not for publication, dealing with ideas for the book and the characters, while the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs digresses completely from its original topic. His reason is that this carnet will become Édouard's Journal: in that case (in fact it did not, except for certain sections) there would be all the more cause to make his other notes available, since these which he gives us could also be read in the novel itself. As it is, we have no indication of how Lafcadio became Bernard, or of how Olivier came into the picture: only the sudden revelation of Olivier's suitability for Édouard, rather than Bernard's, is noted:⁵² also the

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 77, 84.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 35.

⁵²Ibid., p. 68.

change in Gide's attitude to Profitendieu.⁵³

The exceptional mobility of the characters in the novel seems to stem largely from the fact that Gide changed his mind about them. He confesses the difficulty he has in providing them with an identity. This is understandable, in view of his own reservations with regard to this phenomenon, which were discussed in a previous chapter. The characters are "des petites bobines vivantes".⁵⁴ He wants to make them appear free, yet knows that "le moindre petit geste exige une motivation infinie".⁵⁵ The question of freedom and determinism or predestination by an omnipotent God is raised again by La Pérouse, in the novel.⁵⁶ For Gide, the family ties and social background which condition a person's identity are only a mask, and cause the person to be a "Faux-Monnayeur": the "être authentique" can only be discovered when these false appearances are removed. He sees his characters in their "authentic" state and, conversely, has to provide them with the appearances which will make them seem ordinary, hypocritical, real-life people: hence his preference for Lafcadio or Bernard, "L'ennui . . . c'est d'avoir à conditionner ses personnages . . . Je vois chacun de mes

⁵³Ibid., p. 85.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 46.

⁵⁶Les Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 313.

héros . . . orphelin, fils unique, célibataire, et sans enfant . . ." ⁵⁷ In the Journal he records his "effort énorme pour vivifier et apparenter mes personnages", ⁵⁸ after discussing his book with Martin du Gard. Already in la Porte Étroite he had had to force himself to "accumuler des menus faits pour 'informer' les caractères". ⁵⁹ He is reluctant to describe them in any detail, partly because description is one aspect of the conventional novel which he considers unnecessary, but even more because he does not see them in his mind so much as hear them. ⁶⁰ Édouard questions the value of the description of characters, while conveying, indirectly, a description of Laura. ⁶¹ This is one of the elements he would suppress in his "roman pur", but which Gide cannot eliminate from his novel. Detailed description is, however, reserved for minor characters such as La Pérouse, ⁶² whom Gide did not have to imagine, but rather disguise, since he existed in real life.

The main characters reveal themselves directly, in their conversations. ⁶³ Dialogue also conveys most of the

⁵⁷ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, pp. 56-7.

⁵⁸ Journal, p. 727.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 200.

⁶⁰ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 84.

⁶¹ Les Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 92.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 146-7.

⁶³ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 31.

information which is not given in letter or journal form.

Gide notes later that:

"Dans mes Faux-Monnayeurs, je me suis quasi méthodiquement interdit les formules courantes auxquelles recourent les romanciers: 'Il pensa que . . .', 'Il ne pouvait croire que . . .', 'Il se dit que . . .'"

His reason was that: "Il y a ce que l'on voit, ce que l'on entend. Tout l'intime demeure un mystère".⁶⁴ He does not wish to appear omniscient, even when writing a third-person narrative. Gide's perceptive presentation of psychological processes has often been praised. It is, however, almost entirely conveyed by the characters' words, gestures and actions, rather than by analysis in a commentary by the author. The account of the first meeting between Olivier and Édouard after a long separation is a good example of this.⁶⁵ The lack of communication between them is indicated by their conversation and the parallel "sous-conversation" (to use Nathalie Sarraute's term) which reveals their hidden feelings.

The characters in les Faux-Monnayeurs do not only hold conversations which reveal their characters and events: they also indulge in long discussions on literary themes, such as the one between Édouard, Sophroniska and Laura, about

⁶⁴ Ainsi soit-il, p. 65.

⁶⁵ Les Faux-Monnayeurs, pp. 97-100.

the novel, or the argument between Olivier and Bernard based on the essay-subject for the baccalauréat. They express the debate which was going on in Gide, between his different sides:

"Ou eût dit que ma propre pensée me faisait peur et de là vint ce besoin que j'eus de la prêter aux héros de mes livres pour la mieux écarter de moi. Certains, qui refusent de voir en moi un romancier, ont peut-être raison, car c'est plutôt là ce qui me conseille le roman, que de raconter des histoires".⁶⁶

The characters and the story, are, to a certain extent, pretexts to air certain ideas. Does this make les Faux-Monnayeurs a roman à thèse?

The problem for Gide is that he wants his novel to represent life, and for him life is full of ideas: yet he does not want to be abstract;

"Le dialogue avec Édouard . . . entraîne le lecteur et m'entraîne moi-même dans une région d'où je ne vais pas pouvoir redescendre vers la vie. Ou bien alors, il faudrait précisément que je fasse peser l'ironie du récit sur ces mots: 'Vers la vie' -- laissant entendre et faisant comprendre qu'il peut y avoir tout autant de vie dans la région de la pensée, et tout autant d'angoisse, de passion, de souffrance . . .".⁶⁷

Édouard takes up the defence of the romans d'idées, as opposed to the roman à thèse. In answer to Sophroniska's objection that he may "faire un roman, non d'êtres vivants, mais d'idées", he affirms:

⁶⁶ Journal, p. 900.

⁶⁷ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 45.

"Et quand cela serait! . . . À cause des maladroits qui s'y sont fourvoyés, devons-nous condamner le roman d'idées? En guise de romans d'idées, on ne nous a servi jusqu'à présent que des exécrables romans à thèses. Mais il ne s'agit pas de cela . . . les idées, je vous l'avoue, m'intéressent plus que les hommes . . . Naturellement on peut dire que nous ne les connaissons que par les hommes . . ."⁶⁸

Gide did not go so far as Édouard; he makes this last point the basis of his presentation of ideas in the novel:

"Ne jamais exposer d'idées qu'en fonction des tempéraments et des caractères . . . Persuade-toi que les opinions n'existent pas en dehors des individus" . . .⁶⁹ In adopting this attitude, he was echoing Turgenev, who wrote: "I have never taken ideas but always characters for my starting point",⁷⁰ and emulating Dostoïevsky, whom Gide admired because: "He never approaches a question from the abstract, ideas never exist for him but as functions of his characters . . ."⁷¹ Gide's aim was to make his book a "carrefour de problèmes", but with each point of view represented by a character whose opinion will fit in with the characteristics assigned to him. Huxley takes up the the same problem in Point Counter Point:

⁶⁸ Les Faux-Monnayeurs, pp. 235-6.

⁶⁹ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Allott, p. 103. Cf. Huxley, Point Counter Point, p. 299.

⁷¹ Dostoïevsky, Gide's Preface, p. 16.

"Novel of Ideas. The character of each personage must be implied, as far as possible, in the ideas of which he is the mouthpiece . . . The chief defect of the novel of ideas is that you must write about people who have ideas to express -- which excludes all but about .01 of the human race. Hence the real, the congenital novelists don't write such books. But then I never pretended to be a congenital novelist . . ."

He could have been speaking for Gide.

These characters are not, however, to become abstract bores, or types. They must be able to surprise us, like Dostoïevsky's,⁷² and not be overconsistent, like those of the nineteenth-century novel or of Julius in les Caves.

Édouard echoes the latter's misgivings, when he says:

"On propose à notre admiration cette constance, à quoi je reconnais au contraire qu'ils sont artificiels et construits."⁷³

The problem is solved in the case of Édouard, since Gide lends him his own gift of "sympathy" and "la singulière faculté de dépersonnalisation qui me permet d'éprouver comme mienne l'émotion d'autrui".⁷⁴ Like Gide, he has no clear sense of identity: "Je ne suis jamais que ce que je crois que je suis -- et cela varie sans cesse".⁷⁵ He is even afraid of ceasing to exist when he is alone, and shares Gide's un-

⁷²Ibid., p. 101.

⁷³Les Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 421.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 123.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 89.

certainly with regard to "reality": "Ce à quoi je parviens le plus difficilement à croire, c'est à ma propre réalité",⁷⁶ and, speaking of his Journal: "C'est le miroir qu'avec moi je promène. Rien de ce qui m'advient ne prend pour moi d'existence réelle, tant que je ne l'y vois pas reflété".⁷⁷ Gide wants Édouard to have his own contradictory and paradoxical character, but succeeds in creating only a shadow of himself. Certainly, Édouard is not a "fixed" character, type-cast in the traditional way: but he remains abstract, like his own concept of reality. The creation of convincing, mobile characters is more successful in the case of the two adolescents, Bernard and Olivier. They are obviously and naturally in the process of becoming, and Bernard, in particular, changes during the course of the book. He does not simply become what he already innately was, like Eugène de Rastignac. He makes an experiment, like the Prodigal Son, or Lafcadio, and acts on the results, which were not predictable: one is surprised, at the end, to find him back in his family. From this point of view, les Faux-Monnayeurs is also a Bildungsroman, the new Éducation Sentimentale which Gide had hoped to achieve in André Walter.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 90.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 197.

Although Bernard returns to his family, Gide is far from pointing a moral in his novel: the family has been exposed for what it is worth. As with the ideas presented in the book, it is up to the reader to "rétablir" and draw his own conclusions. As he emphasized in his Preface to l'Immoraliste, Gide's aim is not to preach or teach but to produce a work of art and, again like Dostoïevsky,⁷⁸ to "inquiéter":⁷⁹ he presents problems but no solutions, apart from that of the work of art itself. Gide wanted his works to be judged from an aesthetic point of view. In this respect les Faux-Monnayeurs is undeniably important as an experimental novel.

Most of the criticisms of the book are based on comparisons with novelists such as Balzac or Tolstoy. As we have seen, Gide was influenced by certain writers, such as Dostoïevsky and Stendhal, but he did not seek to copy them systematically. His aim in les Faux-Monnayeurs was to innovate, from the technical point of view. We have established that his attitude to his characters and the question of identity and freedom was different from that of the nineteenth-century novelists, with the exception of the

⁷⁸ Dostoïevsky, p. 91.

⁷⁹ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 95; cf. Journal, p. 1224.

two mentioned above. His attitude to the rôle of ideas in the novel was in opposition to both those novelists who thought they should not be there and to the writers of romans à thèse, such as Bourget. His relegation of description to a subsidiary rôle was a departure from the conventions of "realism". He wished to leave more room for the reader to use his imagination in visualizing both the décor and the characters. Detailed description of the setting only occurs where explanation is necessary to describe something out of the ordinary, as in the account of the position of Olivier's bedroom. The third traditional element of the novel, the plot, is replaced by a network of sub-plots and themes linked, as we have seen, by Édouard, the counterpoint technique and the "construction en abyme". There remains one aspect to be considered: Gide's attitude to time in les Faux-Monnayeurs.

In the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs he recalls his hesitations as to whether to make his story pre-or post-war, or divided between the two.⁸⁰ The use of gold coins makes it definitely pre-war for those who know when they were taken out of circulation: few present-day readers would be aware of this. References to Barrès and the Action

⁸⁰ Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, pp. 16-17, 25-26.

Française are indications for those familiar with the period. However the social and political questions Gide originally intended to raise receded into the background as the aesthetic discussion became more important, and Bernard's short excursion into politics seems dream-like and almost out-of-place in the final version of the book. Like the rôle of the Devil and Vincent's demonisation, his struggle with the angel is left-over from Gide's first concept of the work. Both the social-historical and supernatural elements are retained in only a vestigial form. Gide wished to be "timeless", and he succeeds to a certain extent: but his characters tend, proportionately to be abstract, allegorical figures, rather than people "en situation". Yet they do not belong to a mythical world such as Gide thought of evoking:

"Il y a lieu d'apporter . . . un élément fantastique et surnaturel, qui autorise par la suite certains écarts du récit, certaines irréalités. Je crois que le mieux serait de faire une description "poétique" du Luxembourg -- qui doit rester un lieu aussi mythique que la forêt des Ardennes dans les féeries de Shakespeare".⁸¹

Les Faux-Monnayeurs is balanced somewhere between history and myth: in it one can see the seeds of several different novels which Gide could have written, using the same material.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 76.

In any case, the chronology of the well-developed linear récit is abandoned. Life does not offer meaningful "adventures" or "stories":

"La vie nous présente de toutes parts quantité d'amorces de drames, mais il est rare que ceux-ci se poursuivent et se dessinent comme a coutume de les filer un romancier. Et c'est là précisément⁸² l'impression que je voudrais donner dans ce livre . . ."

He returns to his central theme and problem: the representation of life in structured fiction. It is for this reason that he wishes the end of his novel to be a new "point de départ", to give the impression that it could be continued, like life itself. The same was already the case in El Hadj, le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue, Paludes, and la Porte Étroite (with the birth of another Alissa). By his concluding reference to Caloub, Gide conveys not only the continuity of life, but also that the only kind of pattern which may be seen in it is cyclical: the same kind of development will happen again. The book is not really open-ended: all the loose ends have been tied up (the fate of Lilian and Vincent, for example, and Laura's return to Douviers), although less obviously than by "happily ever after".

In fact, Martin du Gard records that Gide had several further chapters in mind, and ended on the spur of the

⁸²Ibid., p. 89.

moment.⁸³ He also quotes Copeau:

"André manque d'un don essentiel aux vrais romanciers: il est incapable de s'ennuyer . . . en général, vers la cent-cinquantième page, ses créatures commencent à ne plus l'intéresser; alors, il boucle vite un dénouement . . ."

Gide defended himself against criticism of the abrupt ending in la Symphonie Pastorale by claiming to have a preference for "les fins précipitées", as in a sonnet. This may be so, but Copeau was certainly right, in the case of les Faux-Monnayeurs, in implying that Gide was tired of it and already thinking of something else. Gide notes in his Journal, on the eve of a journey, that his trunk is hard to close: "Elle est comme mes livres, comme la moindre de mes phrases, comme ma vie tout entière: j'y veux faire tenir trop de choses".⁸⁴ This was true of les Faux-Monnayeurs, into which he wished to pour everything. When he realized that he could not, and that in any case it was not necessary since this would not, after all, be his last work, he was ready to "passer outre".

At the end of his life, in Ainsi soit-il, Gide mentions les Faux-Monnayeurs as "une oeuvre que tous (ou presque) s'accordèrent à considérer comme manqué au moment de sa publication".⁸⁵ He gives as the reason: "Elle ne

⁸³P. 30. We know also from the Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs (pp. 95-6) that the symmetrical division into three parts with a "plateau" in the middle was an afterthought.

⁸⁴Journal, p. 164.

⁸⁵Ainsi soit-il, pp. 17-18.

répondait pas à ce que les critiques ont décrété que devaient être les lois du genre", and adds: "Mais; ici, comme tant d'autres fois, j'ai gagné en appel le procès que l'on me fit alors". He was referring to the selection of this work as one of the twelve best contemporary novels, to be included in a new collection. Since then, no history of the French novel has been able to ignore les Faux-Monnayeurs. Gide's claim to write for the future proved justified: his work was a fore-runner of several major developments in the modern novel.

CHAPTER V

Gide and the Modern Novel: The Function of Fiction

Gide's relevance now; the writer, the reader and the work of art; Gide and the "nouveau roman"; the Existentialists and engagement; facing the future; the relationship between life and literature; conclusion.

The admirers of les Faux-Monnayeurs at the time of its publication were, as was the case with most of Gide's works, few but select. He noted this, not without a hint of resentment, in 1930:

"Parfois je me dis qu'un trop constant souci d'art, qu'un assez vain souci (mais spontané, irrépressible) m'a fait rater les Faux-Monnayeurs; que, si j'avais consenti à une façon de peindre un peu conventionnelle et banale mais permettant par là même un assentiment plus immédiat des lecteurs, j'aurais extraordinairement accru le nombre de ceux-ci, bref, que j'avais "tendu mes filets trop haut", comme disait Stendhal; beaucoup trop haut. Mais les poissons volants sont les seuls qui m'intéressent; et, pour capturer les bancs de sardines, merlans ou maquereaux . . . j'aime autant en laisser le profit aux autres. Je n'écris que pour ceux qui comprennent à demi-mot".¹

While expressing his contempt for the Passavents of the literary world (the choice of name is significant), Gide excused his own lack of popularity by claiming to write for

¹ Journal, p. 992; cf. p. 175 and Si le grain . . . p. 250.

an élite. At other times, as we have seen, he consoled himself by citing illustrious precedents such as Baudelaire, Stendhal, Dostoïevsky, all unappreciated in their own generation. Gide, in spite of his reputation as a "contemporain capital", wanted above all to write for the future.

"En désaccord avec son temps -- c'est là ce qui donne à l'artiste sa raison d'être . . . Il contrecarre; il initie. Et c'est pourquoi il n'est souvent compris d'abord que par quelques-uns".²

While he felt attached to his age, as Barrès was to his region, he reverses la Bruyère's remark that he had arrived too late, everything had been said already: Gide was convinced that he had arrived too soon, that he would "déborder son époque".³ We are now in a position to assess how far this confidence was justified.

Gide's influence has undeniably been enormous: most of the prominent French writers of the generation which followed his were associated with the Nouvelle Revue Française and could not escape reacting to his presence, whether for or against. Foreign novelists who had revolutionised the form of the novel -- Kafka, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Faulkner --

²Ibid., p. 1266.

³Pretexts, p. 100.

were becoming better-known in France, and the process spread to the French novel with the work of Proust, Valéry-Larbaud, who popularised the "monologue intérieur", and Gide's Faux-Monnayeurs, which was seen by some to be the "roman d'aventure" proclaimed by Rivière. Raimond, in his history of the French novel, records:

"Crémieux et Vogt, en 1930, lors d'un débat, estimaient que les formes romanesques n'avaient guère évolué. Pourtant ils accordaient une place toute particulière aux Faux-Monnayeurs de Gide, car ce roman, disaient-ils, était la synthèse harmonieuse de toutes les formes alors connues" . . .

They were not in a position, as contemporaries of Gide, to add, as does Raimond: "N'était-il pas chargé d'intentions nouvelles qui préfiguraient beaucoup de recherches ultérieures?"⁵ It was, as we have seen, an experimental novel and many of Gide's innovations have been developed further by present-day writers of the "nouveau roman". Yet Gide does not usually appear on the list of authors they recognize as forerunners. Before examining similarities between Gide's concept of fiction and theirs, it is interesting to note the way in which Gide has been criticized both

⁴M. Raimond, le Roman depuis la Révolution, vol. I, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1967, p. 169.

⁵Ibid., p. 170.

by these writers, who emphasize the importance of form in the novel, and another group of modern novelists, those who are "engag  s" politically, especially the Existentialists.

In any work of art or literature, three elements are involved: the artist, or writer, the work of art, and the person to whom it is addressed, in this case the reader. Different literary schools or movements have emphasized one of these elements at the expense of the other two. Literature may be conceived as written primarily for the benefit of the writer, as a means of self-expression, self-knowledge, or release: or its main aim may be perfection of form, "art for art's sake": or, since words have meaning, the content may be considered as of first importance, and the writer may have a didactic intention, hoping to convince or convert the reader. Gide is criticized from all sides, and cannot be classed with any group of writers, because his work includes elements of all three approaches to an almost equal extent. We have examined the subjective inspiration of most of them; his early association with the Symbolists left him with a veneration for Art and the conviction that accomplished form is essential for a work to survive; yet his work abounds in ideas and his political and social concerns caused him to be "engag  " for a considerable part of his life.

Many critics have concentrated on the first element and have adopted a biographical approach to Gide's works.

This is not surprising, since Gide's life was so full and varied: but some merit the criticism which Gide made of certain Communist writings: "Leurs auteurs ne me jugent point d'après mes livres . . . mais d'après la réputation que l'on m'a faite et dont peu leur chaut de contrôler l'exactitude".⁶ In any case, Gide never sought to conceal the subjective sources of his fiction, nor the fact that he spoke in the name of his characters: rather, he clarified the connections between his life and fiction, as we saw, in his personal writings. Impersonality in art did not seem to him a virtue, and "la Bovary, c'est moi" was as obvious to him as to the theoreticians of the "nouveau roman". This did not prevent criticism from those whose criterion for value as a novelist is the degree of imaginative inventiveness exhibited in the creation of a fictional world. Guérard maintains that: "Gide's purely creative gift was both intermittent and slight".⁷ A. Girard goes further: "Il avait le génie aussi peu créateur que possible",⁸ and Georges-Paul Collet is in agreement: "Peu de grands écrivains ont été au départ aussi peu naturellement doués que Gide".⁹ Gide may have been, as

⁶Journal, p. 1027; cf. p. 1113.

⁷Guérard, op. cit., p. 95.

⁸Entretiens sur André Gide, p. 192.

⁹Ibid., p. 205.

Brennan declares, a "Schriftsteller" rather than a "Dichter", an "homme de lettres" above all: nevertheless, he has maintained his position also as a first-rank novelist. The subjectivity for which he was criticized brings him closer to the writers of the "nouveau roman". According to their view of the novelist:

"Plus que sa "création", c'est sa vision personnelle qui nous importe, l'expression originale et vraisemblable que, par son oeuvre, il nous donne de l'univers et des rapports qu'il entretient avec lui. C'est même dans son oeuvre qu'il se révèle parfois le plus complètement: Joyce dans Ulysse plus que dans sa décevante correspondance, Kafka moins timidement . . . que dans les notes de son Journal intime".¹⁰

The same has been said of Gide.

Marcel Arland, speaking of the "nouveau roman", says:

"Le roman n'est pas seulement une oeuvre d'art; il l'est avant tout, mais il est aussi un moyen d'expression de l'individu et un moyen de réalisation de l'individu".¹¹

Like Gide, these writers give importance to both of the first two elements in literature mentioned above. Like Gide, they reject the nineteenth-century concept of fiction. The form should be "invention, et non recette",¹² or it will

¹⁰M. Nadeau, le roman français depuis la guerre, pp. 161-2.

¹¹Entretiens . . . , p. 238.

¹²Robbe-Grillet, Pour un Nouveau Roman, p. 53.

die: "Les formes romanesques doivent évoluer pour rester vivantes . . . le roman depuis qu'il existe a toujours été nouveau".¹³ The new novelists are constantly concerned with the form which they are using: their novels are illustrations of a theory which they simultaneously modify. In this respect les Faux-Monnayeurs was "l'archétype du roman moderne",¹⁴ and Robbe-Grillet recognizes Gide's contribution:

"Après les Faux-Monnayeurs, après Joyce, après la Nausée, il semble que l'on s'achemine de plus en plus vers une époque de la fiction où les problèmes de l'écriture seront envisagés lucidement par le romancier, et où les soucis critiques, loin de stériliser la création, pourront au contraire lui servir de moteur".¹⁵

The main ingredients of the nineteenth-century novel -- characters, plot, setting, chronological development -- are no longer appropriate for "une société dans laquelle l'individu comme tel, et, implicitement, sa biographie et sa sociologie, ont perdu toute importance vraiment primordiale" . . .¹⁶ One could object that Gide never abandoned

¹³Ibid., pp. 8, 10.

¹⁴A. Julien, "Les Faux-Monnayeurs et l'Art du Roman", in Hommage à André Gide, N.R.F., 1951, pp. 128-9.

¹⁵Pour un nouveau roman, p. 12.

¹⁶L. Goldmann, Pour une Sociologie du Roman, p. 188.

a belief in the individual's importance: but the problematic hero he portrays reflects his own attempts to establish an identity. His characters do not have a ready-made mould to pour themselves into: they are constructed, not revealed, during the course of the novel.¹⁷ The author is no longer an omniscient and omnipotent manipulator of puppets: "La théorie de la relativité s'applique intégralement à l'univers romanesque . . . dans un vrai roman, pas plus que dans le monde d'Einstein, il n'y a pas de place pour un observateur privilégié".¹⁸ Nathalie Sarraute selects Paludes as one of the first novels in which the central character is "un je anonyme qui n'est le plus souvent qu'un reflet de l'auteur lui-même".¹⁹ For her, the author has no choice but to talk of and for himself:

"Puisque ce qui maintenant importe c'est . . . de montrer la coexistence de sentiments contradictoires et de rendre . . . la richesse et la complexité de la vie psychologique, l'écrivain, en toute honnêteté, parle de soi".²⁰

He no longer has to disguise his own opinions, as Gide sometimes felt obliged to. Nathalie Sarraute's liking for

¹⁷E. Knight, A Theory of the Classical Novel, p. 37.

¹⁸J.-P. Sartre, "M. François Mauriac et la Liberté", text in Nadeau, op. cit., p. 193; cf. p. 84.

¹⁹l'ère du soupçon, p. 72.

²⁰Ibid., p. 86.

complexity and contradiction and her admiration for Dostoïevsky and Kafka are all reminiscent of Gide, who adapted Kafka's Der Prozess for the stage.²¹ Like Gide, she and the other writers of the "nouveau roman", tend to use the first person for their narratives. Butor devotes an essay to this subject. He cites Proust's Marcel as an example of an author insisting that this "je" is not himself, because, as Proust maintained, "c'est un roman".²² We have already referred to Gide's query regarding the status of Proust's work as a novel: present-day writers no longer fear that they may be disqualified as novelists if they write about themselves, since objective reality has been exposed as an illusion.

"Le roman de personnages appartient bel et bien au passé, il caractérise une époque, celle qui marqua l'apogée de l'individu . . . un univers où la personnalité représentait à la fois le moyen et la fin de toute recherche".²³

Thus Robbe-Grillet heralds a "new realism" which will present things in a different way; they acquire the importance previously given to human beings -- Lukacs' "reification": but it is always a person, the "je", who sees these objects, and his perception of them is coloured by his emotional

²¹ See Entretiens, "André Gide et Franz Kafka", by Reinhard Kuhn.

²² Essais sur le roman, p. 73.

²³ Robbe-Grillet, p. 33.

state, as in la Jalousie. The method is basically the same as Gide's: reality, as seen by a particular person in a particular situation, and determined by his view: "La subjectivité de mon regard me sert précisément à définir ma situation dans le monde".²⁴ Characters in the traditional sense are suppressed, to be replaced by things, plus "ce regard qui les voit, la pensée qui les revoit, la passion qui les déforme".²⁵ The theme is the same as that of les Faux-Monnayeurs: the problematic nature of the real world and the subjectivity of our perception and representation of it: "Chacun parle du monde tel qu'il le voit, mais personne ne le voit de la même façon".²⁶ André Walter expressed exactly the same idea.

In the nineteenth-century novel the story reassured the reader that his preconceived idea of reality still held good; but this was a fallacy, since:

"Ce qui fait la force du romancier, c'est justement qu'il invente en toute liberté, sans modèle. Le récit moderne a ceci de remarquable: il affirme de propos délibéré ce caractère, à tel point même que l'invention, l'imagination, deviennent à la limite le sujet du livre".²⁷

Once more one is reminded of the "anti-roman" nature of les Faux-Monnayeurs, and its central theme. Gide, as we saw

²⁴Ibid., pp. 82-3.

²⁵Ibid., p. 147.

²⁶Ibid., p. 172.

²⁷Ibid., p. 35-6.

in analysing this work, had set out to avoid a well-constructed intrigue, for he realized, like Nathalie Sarraute, that this would turn his characters into mummies.²⁸ Like Gide, when not using the first person she chooses dialogue, with as little commentary as possible -- none in the case of les Fruits d'Or -- as a means of avoiding third-person narrative and allowing the characters to reveal themselves.²⁹ Gide also introduced colloquial expressions into these dialogues, before Queneau experimented in this direction.

Nathalie Sarraute, unlike Robbe-Grillet, has not abandoned psychology: but, like Gide, she conveys the pressures and subtleties of the "tropismes" which form "la sous-conversation", without any direct analysis or commentary from the author. Guérard points out Gide's originality in recognizing the subconscious or pre-conscious elements in behaviour and motivation, before Freud's theories were well-known. Gide claimed to be a Freudian before Freud;³⁰ however he never over-estimated psycho-analysis and called Freud an "imbécile de génie".³¹ His critique of psycho-analytic

²⁸ l'ère du soupçon, p. 79.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 108.

³⁰ Journal, p. 729.

³¹ Ibid., p. 785.

method in Édouard's dialogue with Sophroniska in les Faux-Monnayeurs foreshadowed present-day misgivings: "Gide n'a été, au total, un "romancier psychologique" que pour déconsidérer radicalement la psychologie".³²

Gide's experimentation with the structure of the novel has been taken up and carried further by present-day novelists. Butor calls the mobile structure of the modern novel "polyphonique", as opposed to the traditional linear construction, and he cites the use of counterpoint technique, as introduced by Gide.³³ It is one possible compromise between conventional chronology and the "refus de tout ordre préétabli"³⁴ advocated by Robbe-Grillet. Gide's method of working without a plan and making a fresh start for each chapter successfully eliminated the "préétabli". His introduction of an anti-climatic incident, such as the collapse of Laura's chair during her interview with Bernard, was a foreshadowing of the "absurd" in the modern novel, as well as an echo of the picaresque tradition. The inconsequence of the soties reflected a consciousness of the contingency of life as opposed to the orderly procedure of traditional fiction. Nadeau includes Gide among those innovators in the realm of the novel who have "tenté de

³²Entretiens, p. 226.

³³Butor, pp. 106, 114.

³⁴Robbe-Grillet, p. 81.

mutiler le temps".³⁵ Like Nathalie Sarraute, he wanted to evoke "un présent démesurément grand",³⁶ what Robbe-Grillet terms "un présent perpétuel . . . ce présent qui s'invente sans cesse".³⁷ Butor was to carry experiment with time further in his novels, especially l'Emploi du Temps.

Nathalie Sarraute follows in the steps of Gide in giving little importance to description, preferring to evoke where possible, rather than narrate. Robbe-Grillet and Butor, on the contrary, devote a great deal of attention to this aspect of the novel. Gide did, however, recognize, before Robbe-Grillet, the danger of anthropomorphic imagery, the "demon of analogy".³⁸

Apart from innovations in structure, and his recognition of relativity and subjectivity, Gide has two main characteristics in common with the writers of the "nouveau roman". One is his development of theories about fiction, parallel to his writing of it, and the constant rapport between the two. Guérard remarks that: "In France,

³⁵Nadeau, p. 83.

³⁶Sarraute, p. 9.

³⁷Robbe-Grillet, pp. 165, 168.

³⁸Pretexts, p. 317; cf. Robbe-Grillet, pp. 59-60.

before Gide, only Flaubert had worked as consciously towards a theory and art of fiction".³⁹ Gide began a spate of theoretical writings in the twentieth century, many a great deal more systematic than his own. The preoccupation of the present generation of French writers with theory has led them, like Gide, to be accused of lacking creative imagination.⁴⁰ Their desire to innovate, like his, has caused their works to appeal only to a minority willing to make the effort to understand them. For they require the co-operation of the reader, which is the second area in which Gide set a precedent. Like him, Butor sets out to make the reader question his "idées reçues".⁴¹ Robbe-Grillet demands the participation of the reader, "un concours actif, conscient, créateur".⁴² This last element is emphasized by Nathalie Sarraute: the author no longer intends to convince the reader that he knows everything about his fictional world; he no longer needs the reader's trust. This has produced "l'ère du soupçon"⁴³ -- a suspicion of the author by the

³⁹Guérard, p. 198.

⁴⁰Entretiens, p. 225 .

⁴¹Butor, pp. 9-10.

⁴²Robbe-Grillet, pp. 168-9.

⁴³Sarraute, p. 72.

reader, who senses that the former wants to "reprendre au lecteur son bien et l'attirer coûte que coûte sur le terrain de l'auteur".⁴⁴ The reader is no longer an invulnerable observer. Fiction is transformed from a world to escape into, to a challenge to see reality in a new way -- someone else's -- and to share in the writer's problems of creation and communication. That is, precisely, what Gide hoped to achieve in les Faux-Monnayeurs.

The importance of the reader in this concept of fiction brings us to the third element in literature: the content or "message" which is communicated. Gide, like the writers of the "nouveau roman", insisted that literature cannot be used primarily to convey a certain set of ideas, and also remain a successful work of art. Robbe-Grillet states: "L'art ne peut être réduit à l'état de moyen au service d'une cause qui le dépasserait"⁴⁵. . . "Le seul engagement possible, pour l'écrivain, c'est la littérature".⁴⁶ This attitude was echoed by Nathalie Sarraute

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 90.

⁴⁵Robbe-Grillet, p. 42; cf. Gide, Ainsi soit-il, pp. 172-3: "Celui qui se demande . . . Quel service va rendre ce que je m'appête à écrire? n'est pas un écrivain né et ferait mieux de renoncer aussitôt à produire".

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 152.

in the lecture which she gave at McMaster University this year. If the writer is convinced that his prime concern is political or religious, he is wasting his time writing fiction; "celui qui s'intéresse à ces disciplines lira des essais, c'est plus sûr".⁴⁷ The reader who is seeking viable fiction is liable to find only abstract ideas personified in the characters -- the danger which Gide recognized in the "roman d'idées", as in the "roman à thèse". At the end of his lectures on Dostoïevsky Gide claims that fine feelings produce bad literature,⁴⁸ an opinion that was contested by an "écrivain engagé" of the time -- Mauriac.⁴⁹ To produce successful Art or Literature, according to Gide or the writers of the "nouveau roman", the writer must be convinced that works of art are worth producing as an end in themselves: they are "des actes qui durent",⁵⁰ not a second-rate alternative for those who are afraid of action. Art is all or nothing.⁵¹ We shall return presently to the question of the place of Art and Literature in life. It is

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

⁴⁸ Dostoïevsky, p. 143.

⁴⁹ Allott, p. 133.

⁵⁰ Les Faux-Monnayeurs, p. 339.

⁵¹ Robbe-Grillet, pp. 42-3, 49.

clear that for both Gide and the modern novelist writing is not an alternative to living: the two are not mutually exclusive. The refusal to produce a Littérature engagée does not imply that the author is not "engagé" in other spheres of his life; nor that ideas are absent from his work.

Gide's own collection of writings during the period in which he supported Communism, entitled Littérature Engagée, illustrates the impossibility, for him, of combining the two elements, littérature and engagement. His aim in writing fiction was primarily to produce works of art, secondly to express a problem in his own life, to which the ensuing work of art produces an indirect solution, and thirdly, in the process, to raise a question for the reader, but without providing a conclusive answer: to "inquiéter". He protested in 1931 against critics who wished to impart didactic intentions to his pre-communist works:

"Il est encore de nombreux critiques qui s'imaginent que, de tout temps, je me suis beaucoup occupé et préoccupé de mon influence et que j'écrivais dans le but d'incliner et me soumettre l'esprit de mes lecteurs. J'espérais avoir donné les preuves du contraire, mon unique désir ayant été jusqu'à ces derniers temps d'écrire des oeuvres d'art, non précisément impersonnelles, mais comme émancipées de moi-même et qui, si elles avaient une action sur le lecteur, ne pouvaient que l'aider à y voir clair, à s'interroger lui-même et le forcer à penser, fût-ce contre moi, à me quitter".⁵²

⁵²Journal, pp. 1026-7.

One is reminded of the injunction in les Nourritures Terrestres to throw his book away and go out and live: this was certainly a message to the reader, but differed from that expressed during his short association with Communism, since it did not adhere to any system. The same applies to Corydon, which he himself considered his most important work, although it is certainly a message rather than a work of art. This study is concerned, however, primarily with Gide's works of fiction. Ideas which were important to him do appear in these, for example the homosexual theme in les Faux-Monnayeurs. We have already seen how Gide's over-involvement in this theme detracts from the book's success as a novel: whereas in l'Immoraliste, in which it is subservient to the work of art, it contributes to its success.

Gide was, as has been mentioned before, against all systems, which seemed to him inevitably to ignore or attempt to suppress part of the rich complexity of life.

He admired Dostoïevsky for accepting the latter:

"Had he been a philosopher instead of a novelist, he would certainly have attempted to bring his ideas into line, whereby we should have lost the most precious of them".⁵³

Speaking of his pre-Freudian insights, Gide noted:

⁵³Dostoïevsky, p. 51.

"Il est nombre de mes idées qui, l'une ou l'autre, exposée ou développée longuement dans un livre épais, eût fait fortune; si seulement elle était l'unique enfant de mon cerveau".⁵⁴

The philosopher he admired most was Nietzsche, and: "C'est précisément parce qu'il est très difficile de réduire le nietzschéisme en système -- qu'on ne s'en débarrassera pas facilement".⁵⁵ It is in connection with Nietzsche's

Also sprach Zarathustra that Gide expresses his view that philosophical ideas are not to be expressed in fiction:

"Si ce livre est devenu plus célèbre que tous les autres de Nietzsche, c'est que, au fond, c'est un roman. Mais pour cela précisément, il s'adresse à la plus basse classe de ses lecteurs: ceux qui ont encore besoin d'un mythe. Et ce que j'aime surtout chez Nietzsche, c'est sa haine de la fiction".⁵⁶

As Robbe-Grillet remarked, those who are interested in philosophy will read it in undisguised form: and the work of fiction can only be valued in its own right, on its aesthetic merits. Nevertheless, since literature involves language, it also encroaches on the realm of thought: but "le roman . . . comme tout art, prétend devancer les systèmes de pensée et non les suivre".⁵⁷

Certainly many of Gide's "interrogations" expressed in his fiction predicted the Existentialism of Sartre and

⁵⁴ Journal, pp. 729-30.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 346.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 990.

⁵⁷ Robbe-Grillet, p. 181.

his followers. He himself realizes this: "Il arrivera peut-être, plus tard, que tel lecteur . . . à propos, de certaines déclarations . . . "existentialistes" . . . s'étonne et proteste . . . "Mais Gide l'avait dit avant lui".⁵⁸ Gide is "a man who has modified our ideas and our image of the modern world".⁵⁹ Sartre, on Gide's death, acknowledged his importance:

"Toute la pensée française de ces trente dernières années, qu'elle le voulût ou non, quelles que fussent par ailleurs ses autres coordonnées, Marx, Hegel, Kierkegaard, devait se définir aussi par rapport à Gide".⁶⁰

The basic elements of Existentialism are present, at least in embryo, in Gide: a contingent external reality perceived only relatively, by the individual consciousness; the continual redefinition of the self, according to the individual's situation and the surrounding consciousnesses -- that is, the exposure of "identity" as a myth; the complete freedom of the individual, who is therefore responsible for his actions, which are the only criterion by which he can be judged: these elements can be traced, expressed in terms immediately intelligible to the uninitiated reader, which is not always true in Sartre's development of them. They can be deduced from Gide's works of fiction, without

⁵⁸Quoted by E. Knight, Literature Considered as Philosophy, p. 129.

⁵⁹Guérard, p. XVII.

⁶⁰"Gide vivant", in Situations IV, p. 86.

any commentary from his theoretical writings; whereas Sartre's novels illustrate a body of thought and theory. Gide has been classified as "passe" by some Existentialist critics because of the importance which he gives to the individual: but he was recognizing the dilemma faced by Sartre or any Marxist-Existentialist in seeking to reconcile individual freedom and responsibility with collective effort and the party line:

"Comme il m'apparaît que l'individualisme lui-même, bien compris, doit servir à la communauté, il m'importe de préserver ses droits et je tiens pour erreur de l'opposer au communisme".⁶¹

When a choice between the two was forced, Gide chose to support the rights of the individual, whereas Sartre would choose the alternative. Gide was not entirely free from Christian and nineteenth-century values: his thought, like his works of fiction, forms a bridge between the old and the new.

The nature of perception was implicitly raised in Gide's concept of subjective Reality: he was also, without realizing it, delving into the realm of phenomenology. Butor writes that the novel is "le domaine phénoménologique par excellence, le lieu par excellence où étudier de quelle façon la réalité nous apparaît ou peut nous apparaître".⁶²

⁶¹Journal, p. 1113.

⁶²Butor, p. 9.

We saw that Gide's aim in les Faux-Monnayeurs, as in much of his other fiction, was to examine the perception of reality and its projection in the work of art. His preoccupation with the relationship between life and fiction is in the "donquichottesque" tradition which Marthe Robert develops in l'Ancien et le Nouveau.⁶³ Robbe-Grillet seizes on this theme as particularly prominent in the modern novel:

"Le vrai, le faux et le faire croire sont devenus plus ou moins le sujet de toute oeuvre moderne; celle-ci, au lieu d'être un prétendu morceau de réalité, se développe en tant que réflexion sur la réalité (ou sur le peu de réalité, comme on voudra)".⁶⁴

Like the hero of Paludes, whose fictional presentation of his week-end outing bears little relationship to the original, Robbe-Grillet maintains that the novel "n'exprime pas, il recherche"⁶⁵ . . . its reality is "invention du monde et de l'homme, invention constante et perpétuelle remise en question".⁶⁶ He depicted in a book some sea gulls which he actually saw: "elles s'étaient transformées, devenant en même temps comme plus réelles, parce qu'elles étaient maintenant imaginaires".⁶⁷ One recognizes the Gidean attitude described in the first section of this study. Gide acknowle-

⁶³Grasset, Paris, 1963.

⁶⁴Robbe-Grillet, p. 163.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 174.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 175.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 176.

dged the transformation that not only objects or events but also emotions undergo on being expressed in writing: he was ahead of his time in being aware of "le problème de la fonction créatrice du langage".⁶⁸ The words used to express an idea also modify it: the same is true in conveying a description or impression in writing.

The problem is further complicated, as Oscar Wilde recognized and Marthe Robert also points out, by the fact that our initial perception of reality is governed largely by pre-conceived ideas gained from the world of art and literature. We are all, to a certain extent, Don Quichotte or Walter Mitty. Gide, whose "patrie", as Germaine Brée says, was above all the world of books, realized this: in 1896 he wrote: "Je vois Rome à travers Stendhal, malgré moi".⁶⁹ Like Don Quichotte, the hero of what Lukacs terms a "roman de l'idéalisme abstrait", "le monde qui se présente à lui est riche, non seulement de vie, mais en même temps du faux-semblant de cette vie qui vit en lui comme la seule réalité essentielle".⁷⁰ It is this constant discrepancy between the ideal book and real life which constitutes the "donquichottisme littéraire"⁷¹ recognized

⁶⁸ Entretiens, pp. 232-3.

⁶⁹ Journal, p. 65.

⁷⁰ Lukacs, La Théorie du Roman, Gonthier, Geneva, 1963.

⁷¹ l'Ancien et le Nouveau, pp. 14-15.

by Marthe Robert in Kafka, and existent also in Gide. The relationship between life and fiction is a question "brûlante pour le donquichottisme et incompréhensible pour ses ennemis".⁷² Like Don Quichotte, Gide discovers that the "real" world on which fiction is supposed to be based is nothing but a conglomeration of objects and words, "brassé lentement par le langage au cours des siècles et maintenant indécomposable".⁷³ He is also disturbed by "la complicité qu'il démêle entre le fictif et le réel, sans savoir au juste de quoi elle est faite et à qui elle profite le plus".⁷⁴

If the values of "reality" are suspect, those of fiction are equally so. What is its function, or justification? "Quelle est la place des livres dans la réalité? En quoi leur existence importe-t-elle à la vie? . . . Si les livres sont vrais il ne peuvent l'être sans conséquence"⁷⁵ . . . Is literature "un simple objet de jouissance, un parasite, ou au contraire une instance supérieure, indépendante, ayant pour mission d'éclairer les choses, de les révéler à elles-mêmes, de les élever?"⁷⁶ These questions raised by Marthe

⁷²Ibid., p. 45.

⁷³Ibid., p. 46.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 45.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 11; cf. Fahrenheit 451.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 45; cf. Ernst Fischer, The Necessity of Art, Pelican, London, 1970.

Robert, or by Sartre in Qu'est-ce que la littérature? and Baumgart in Aussichten des Romans oder hat Literatur Zukunft? are of basic importance for anyone writing, studying or teaching literature. They were also implicitly central to Gide's thought. He consistently upheld the value of literature, but he also experienced the questioning of literary values shared by any writer aware of what is going on around him. In 1932, he asked himself:

"Comment peut-on encore écrire des romans? quand se désagrège autour de nous notre vieux monde, quand je ne sais quoi d'inconnu s'élabore, que j'attends, que j'espère, et que de toute mon attention j'observe lentement se former".⁷⁷

Nathalie Sarraute exposes the same problem in her image of the writer shut up in his "bocal" while men suffer and strive all around him.⁷⁸ At the end of his life, after the experience of the Second World War, Gide was not afraid to question the basic assumptions of his life and work:

"Que restera-t-il de tout cela? . . . de tout ce qui s'écrit aujourd'hui . . . Que va-t-il rester de notre culture, de la France elle-même, de ce pour quoi nous aurons vécu? . . . Persuadons-nous que tout est appelé à disparaître".⁷⁹

These fears were echoed by the American writer Hans Konningsberger in an interview in the Guardian Weekly (January

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 45.

⁷⁷ Journal, p. 1129.

⁷⁸ l'ère du soupçon, pp. 103-4.

⁷⁹ Ainsi soit-il, p. 197.

9, 1971):

"Novel writing is an indulgence completely out of touch with life today. I hardly have the patience to read, let alone write, a modern American novel. Novel writing is no longer something to discover reality through. It has become a sort of sideshow with which to entertain people".

It was as "something to discover reality through" that Gide found fiction justifiable. The changing novel reflects and at the same time creates a changing reality:

"Si le lecteur a quelquefois du mal à se retrouver dans le roman moderne, c'est de la même façon qu'il se perd quelquefois dans le monde même où il vit, lorsque tout cède autour de lui des vieilles constructions et des vieilles normes".⁸⁰

Gide abandoned the hope of achieving immortality through his works: but he trusted, at least, that they would survive into a period when their significance would be more widely recognized: "Je n'écris pas pour la génération qui vient, mais pour la suivante".⁸¹ We are that generation, and his hopes have proved well-founded:

"Il n'y a pas de chef d'oeuvre dans l'éternité, mais seulement des oeuvres dans l'histoire; et . . . elles ne se survivent que dans la mesure où elles ont laissé derrière elles le passé, et annoncé l'avenir".⁸²

⁸⁰ Robbe-Grillet, p. 147.

⁸¹ Journal, p. 744.

⁸² Robbe-Grillet, p. 11.

This remark of Robbe-Grillet's is certainly applicable to Gide who, like his *Thésée*, always looked forward, not back.⁸³ He might be amused or distressed to learn that his *Symphonie Pastorale* and *la Porte Étroite* are now considered suitable reading for unmarried girls in Japan:⁸⁴ one remembers his definition of a good book as one which does not leave the reader intact. He would undoubtedly be gratified to know that another important present-day novelist's criterion for recognizing "les oeuvres les plus originales et dont l'importance apparaîtra par la suite comme la plus décisive" could be taken for a description of Gide's own works of fiction: "Celles qui, à l'intérieur d'une génération montante . . . serviront de pierre de touche pour distinguer ce qui est dynamique de ce qui ne l'est pas, révéleront un clivage nouveau . . . s'écarterant délibérément, expressément, de telle direction pourrissante".⁸⁵

Gide heralded a new era. His relevance now demonstrates that the past is far from dead. It also encourages recognition of the Gides of our time: those whose importance will be established in the future. "All art is conditioned by time . . . but . . . art goes beyond this limitation and, within the historical moment, also creates a moment of humanity, promising constant development."⁸⁶

⁸³ *Thésée*, p. 21.

⁸⁴ *Entretiens*, pp. 252-3.

⁸⁵ Butor, p. 170.

⁸⁶ Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art*, Pelican, p. 12.

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