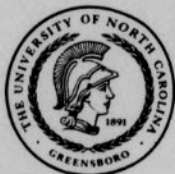


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SMITH, WILLIAM HENRY. Gide's Quest for Authenticity. (1970) Directed  
by: Dr. J.P. Couch. pp. 47

Throughout his literary career, André Gide was concerned with the problem of counterfeit existence, the blind acceptance of conventional values, versus an authentic existence based on an accurate understanding of one's desires and capacities. Because these desires and capacities differ from one individual to the next, Gide could not present a universal formula for attaining authenticity. Instead, he sought in his fiction to express the need for escape from the counterfeit, and to describe some of the pitfalls along the way to authenticity.

Because the quest for authenticity was a personal as well as a literary concern for Gide, much criticism has dealt with his own efforts, as expressed in autobiography and journals, and has treated his fiction in this light. Believing that the focus of criticism should be the literary work itself, I have approached Gide's quest from the standpoint of the works alone. I have examined the failures of Gide's heroes in order to find a formula whereby such failures could be avoided. This formula must be expressed in general terms, to allow for differences between individuals; nevertheless, a certain pattern is common to all of Gide's failures.

The Gide hero, if he succeeds in escaping conventionality at all, fails because he becomes trapped in a situation in which he has denied himself alternatives, and he can no longer advance. This situation is the result of an incomplete knowledge of himself, in particular a

failure to understand that there are both terrestrial and celestial sides to human nature. Having chosen one side at the expense of the other, he lacks alternatives and restraint, pushes his way of life to an untenable extreme, and figuratively destroys himself.

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The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of  
Dr. J. P. Couch, without whose guidance, and advice in matters of  
style, this thesis has been approved by the following committee of the  
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I The author also wishes to express his appreciation for the patient efforts of his wife and typist, Patricia A. Smith. . . . 1 4

III THE SUCCESSFUL . . . . . 12

    A. Theoretical Success--Manalque . . . . . 13

    B. Potential Success--Prométhée . . . . . 16

IV THE FAILURES . . . . . 19

    A. Failure Through Fear . . . . . 22

    B. Failure Through Negativity . . . . . 25

V POSSIBLE SUCCESS . . . . . 32

VI THE IRONIC SUCCESS . . . . . 35

VII THE BLISSFULLY IGNORANT . . . . . 41

VIII CONCLUSION . . . . . 45

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . . 48

of information be provided about the new life, and the fact that he achieved voluntary production that of him, comes with the very death of the Freudian psychology, was turning their attention to the psychology of creation, it is not surprising that this has been the subject of extensive bibliographical attention. . . . .

The danger in such criticism is that however much it may help to show the poet and the creative act, it tends to overlook the work itself, which should be the central part of the study of literature.

1945 ed., 1st Year, University of Toronto, Ontario, p. 112 (1945, 1947), p. 112.

I  
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part	Introduction to the Method	Page
I	INTRODUCTION TO THE METHOD . . . . .	1
II	AUTHENTICITY . . . . .	4
III	THE SUCCESSFUL . . . . .	12
	A. Theoretical Success--Ménalque . . . . .	13
	B. Potential Success--Prométhée . . . . .	16
IV	THE FAILURES . . . . .	19
	A. Failure Through Fear . . . . .	22
	B. Failure Through Negativity . . . . .	25
V	POSSIBLE SUCCESS . . . . .	32
VI	THE IRONIC SUCCESS . . . . .	35
VII	THE BLISSFULLY IGNORANT . . . . .	41
VIII	CONCLUSION . . . . .	45
	SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	48

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<sup>1</sup>André Gide, *Les Vies-consciences*, in *Coeuvres Complètes*, v. XIII (Paris, N.W., 1937), p. 173.

## Introduction to the Method

Songez à l'intérêt qu'aurait pour nous un semblable carnet tenu par Dickens, ou Balzac; si nous avions le journal de l'Éducation sentimentale ou des Frères Karamazof! l'Histoire de l'œuvre, de sa gestation! Mais ce serait passionnant...plus intéressant que l'œuvre elle-même...<sup>1</sup>

Edouard, the novelist in Les Faux-monnayeurs, seems to be speaking here for his creator in expressing a greater interest in the creative process than in the product of creation. In addition to a journal of the creation of Les Faux-monnayeurs, Gide kept and published his own private journal from 1889 to 1949, as well as three distinctly autobiographical works (Si le grain ne meurt, Et nunc manet in te, and Ainsi soit-il), and a defense of his own homosexuality (Corydon). Given his interest in the biographies of other artists, the abundance of information he provided about his own life, and the fact that he achieved literary prominence when critics, armed with the newly available Freudian psychology, were turning their attention to the psychology of creation, it is not surprising that Gide has been the subject of extensive biographical criticism.

The danger in such criticism is that however much it may tell us about the poet and the creative act, it tends to overlook the work itself, which should be the central part of the study of literature.

<sup>1</sup>André Gide, Les Faux-monnayeurs, in Oeuvres Complètes, v. XIII (Paris, NRF, 1937), p. 273.



An understanding of Andre Gide's feelings for Madeleine Rondeaux may help us to understand his vision of Alissa in La Porte étroite, but it adds nothing to our knowledge of Alissa's internal conflict that we do not learn from the "Journal d'Alissa". Likewise, a knowledge of Gide's homosexuality makes the marital relations of Michel and Marceline in L'Immoraliste more understandable, and helps to explain Édouard's failure to marry Laura and his sentiments toward Olivier, but these are side issues and not the central themes of those works. The works, although laced with incidents drawn from Gide's life, stand by themselves and have no need of assistance from autobiography.

Rather than study Gide to understand his characters, I shall study the characters in order to understand Gide's vision of the path to authentic existence. That this was a central concern of Gide's life and work could be shown from an examination of either the autobiography or the fiction; that it is true in the latter case will be seen in the course of this study.

It has been occasionally suggested that men seek in literature the answers to the problems of their own lives. If answers to the problems of life exist in Gide's fiction, they exist only in a negative sense. That is, he provides wrong answers that are to be avoided. He says, for example, of La Porte étroite: "Qui donc persuaderai-je que ce livre est jumeau de L'Immoraliste et que les deux sujets ont grandi concurremment dans mon esprit, l'excès de l'un trouvant dans l'excès de l'autre une permission secrète et tous deux se maintenant en

équilibre."<sup>2</sup> He indicates that neither work is to be taken as the true path, that both attitudes must be taken into account in seeking to define one's raison d'être.

More to the point, he writes in the Journal des Faux-monnayeurs: "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."<sup>3</sup> Bernard, in Les Faux-monnayeurs, clarifies this attitude:

Je me disais que rien n'est bon pour tous, mais seulement par rapport à certains; que rien n'est vrai pour tous, mais seulement par rapport à qui le croit tel; qu'il n'est méthode ni théorie qui soit applicable indifféremment à chacun; que si, pour agir, il nous faut choisir, du moins nous avons libre choix; que si nous n'avons pas libre choix, la chose est plus simple encore; mais que ceci me devient vrai (non d'une manière absolue sans doute, mais par rapport à moi) qui me permet le meilleur emploi de mes forces, la mise en oeuvre de mes vertus.<sup>4</sup>

Like Bernard, all of Gide's characters speak for themselves, not for the author. I shall assume, as a critical postulate, that all such statements are valid only for a particular attitude and within a particular work, unless they are repeated often enough in a sufficiently wide range of works and characters to indicate a more general validity.

<sup>2</sup> André Gide, Journal, 14<sup>e</sup> Cahier, in Oeuvres Complètes, v. VII, p. 530.

<sup>3</sup> Oeuvres Complètes, v. XIII, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Les Faux-monnayeurs, p. 285.

In spite of Strouvilhou's editorial advice, Gide the author sought to offer the true coins, to act as a Socratic gadfly to cause his readers to reject the false coins of convention and discover the true worth of their own existence.

II

Authenticity

But the discovery of one's authentic being is not so easy as it might seem.

Jocaste: Pourquoi veux-tu le savoir?  
Oedipe: J'ai grand besoin.  
Jocaste: N'auras-tu pas pitié de ton bonheur?  
Oedipe: Pitié de rien. Un bonheur fait d'erreur et d'ignorance, je n'en veux pas. Bon pour le peuple! Pour moi, je n'ai pas besoin d'être heureux. C'en est fait! Toute la nuée de cet enchantement se déchire.<sup>5</sup>

Gide shared this feeling with Oedipe; although he believed to the end that the chief goal of life is joy, had he been forced to choose between happiness and awareness, he too would have chosen awareness. In fact, happiness and awareness were inseparable for Gide; to be happy one must first discover and understand the true meaning of one's life, the path that will permit "le meilleur emploi de [ ses ] forces."

Strouvilhou, the counterfeiter, describes the opposite of this awareness:

Nous vivons sur les sentiments admis et que le lecteur s'imagine éprouver, parce qu'il croit tout ce qu'on imprime; l'auteur spécule là-dessus comme sur des conventions qu'il croit les bases de son art. Ces sentiments sonnent faux comme des jetons, mais ils ont cours. Et, comme l'on sait que "la mauveuse monnaie chasse la bonne", celui qui offrirait au public de vraies pièces semblerait nous payer de mots.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Andre Gidé, Oedipe, in Théâtre (Paris, NRF, 1942), p. 293.

<sup>6</sup> Les Faux-monnayeurs, pp. 466-467.

In spite of Strouvilhou's editorial advice, Gide the author sought to offer the true coins, to act as a Socratic gadfly to cause his readers to reject the false coins of convention and discover the true worth of their own existence.

But the discovery of one's authentic being is not so easy as it might seem, for what is genuine for one may be counterfeit for another. Ménélaque describes the situation in L'Immoraliste:

Des mille formes de la vie, chacun ne peut connaître qu'une. Envier le bonheur d'autrui, c'est folie; on ne saurait pas s'en servir. Le bonheur ne se veut pas tout fait, mais sur mesure. Je pars demain; je sais: j'ai tâché de tailler ce bonheur à ma taille.

The important thing, he tells Michel, is to choose the form of happiness appropriate to one's own capacity. It may well be that the appropriate form will lie within accepted values, but in order to find it one must first free oneself from the bonds of tradition in order to examine without prejudice the many possibilities available to one.

Here lies the key to the failure of the Gide hero; he is either unable to free himself from tradition, or is able to escape only by replacing traditional values by their opposites. With his vision thus impaired he makes a wrong choice, pushes his folly to excess and destroys himself. Before examining the particular characters it will be useful to look in general terms at the mistakes that lead to wrong choices. In doing this we shall seek to establish criteria for the choice of an authentic way of life.

<sup>7</sup> André Gide, L'Immoraliste (Paris, Mercure de France, 1902), p. 120.

While the history of French literature offers many examples of characters who flee tradition to find their own values, the works of three foreign writers of the nineteenth century will provide a good illustration of Gide's formula for success. Each of these foreign writers influenced Gide, and each offers a basic ingredient of that formula.

Goethe offers the example of Faust, a man whose thirst for knowledge could not be satisfied by conventional means. Not only does Faust defy tradition by turning to Mephistopheles, but, unlike his predecessors, he will not settle for a mere trade. Instead, he exerts his individuality by wagering his soul against the possibility of his being satisfied with a static situation. So long as Faust remains unsatisfied, so long as he wishes to move on, he is safe from damnation, and on that basis the angels claim his soul when he dies.

Gide expresses a similar dislike of stasis through two characters who are otherwise quite dissimilar. Alissa, the religious extremist, writes in her journal:

Je me figure la joie céleste non comme une confusion en Dieu, mais comme un rapprochement infini, continu...et si je ne craignais de jouer sur un mot, je dirais que je ferais fi d'une joie qui ne serait pas progressive.<sup>8</sup>

At the other end of the scale, the amoralist Ménalque uses like terms to describe his earthly pleasure:

J'ai l'horreur du repos; la possession y encourage et dans la sécurité l'on s'endort;

<sup>8</sup>André Gide, La Porte étroite (Paris, Mercure de France, 1959), p. 158.

j'aime assez vivre pour prétendre vivre  
éveillé, et maintiens donc, au sein de mes  
richesses mêmes, ce sentiment d'état précaire  
par quoi j'exaspère, ou du moins j'exalte  
ma vie.<sup>9</sup>

This refusal of stasis and emphasis on progression, coming from such different personalities, indicates that Gide assigned considerable importance to this concept. We may hypothesize that progression is one of the prerequisites of a successful way of life. This hypothesis will be tested during the examination of Gide's heroes.

In addition to the break with tradition and the hatred of repose, Goethe's Faust offers a third concept that is important in the works of Gide; the lack of unity in human nature:

Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach, in meiner Brust,  
Die eine will sich von der andern trennen:  
Die eine hält sich in derber Liebeslust  
Sich an die Welt mit klammernden Organen;  
Die andre hebt gewaltsam sich vom Dust  
Zu den Gefilden hoher Ahnen.<sup>10</sup>

These two sides of man's personality, the celestial and the terrestrial, exist in all men, particularly in Gide's heroes. If one side is chosen at the expense of the other, disaster will follow.

The concept of polarized human nature is developed more fully by the second of Gide's foreign influences. In the words of Georges LeMaitre,

[Dostoievsky] did not sacrifice to theoretical unity and simplicity the rich and sometimes disconcerting complexity of the human soul. In him

<sup>9</sup> L'Immoraliste, p. 110.

<sup>10</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust (München, Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1961), p. 44.

Gide found an example of conscience in distress, laden with a feeling of sin--of unavoidable sin--and yet at the same time a truly noble conscience longing for salvation.<sup>11</sup>

This internal conflict fills many pages of Gide's journals, and plays an important role in his fiction as well.

Dostoevsky, even more than Goethe, depicted characters who broke with tradition to find for themselves the true meanings of their lives. This break is often expressed through a gratuitous act, an act without other motivation than the desire to commit it. The gratuitous act becomes an important motif in Gide's fiction as he seeks to show that one is most sincere when he acts without external cause. The most famous of these acts is Lafcadio's murder of Amédée Fleurissoire, in Les Caves du Vatican. If this act is a demonstration of Lafcadio's true nature, it is certainly of the terrestrial, or selfish side. There is, however, earlier in the sotie, another gratuitous act, the saving of two children from a burning building, which demonstrates the celestial, or altruistic, side.

Lafcadio's murder, like that of Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment, is done as a proof of self-will. This act is carried to the extreme in The Possessed, where Kirilov kills himself in order to prove that God does not exist, and that all that remains is his own self-will. In this instance self-will is in conflict with will-to-live, in conflict, in fact, with reason. For Gide, according to LeMaitre, "absolute liberty is possible only when all rational motives are

<sup>11</sup>Le Maitre, p. 174.  
<sup>12</sup>Georges LeMaitre, Four French Novelists (Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 133.

eliminated; it is a manifestation of the original and genuine personality."<sup>12</sup> However, Gide's treatment of his "free" characters shows that he realizes that such unlimited and unreasoning freedom is meaningless. Michel, Alissa, Oedipe, and even Protos are trapped by their own freedom.

The need for restraint is voiced by the third of Gide's foreign influences, Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche is perhaps better known as the prophet of liberty and overflowing vitality--qualities expressed in the concept of the Urbensch--but he was nevertheless careful to make this observation in Beyond Good and Evil:

The singular fact remains, however, that everything of the nature of freedom, elegance, boldness, dance, and masterly certainty, which exists or has existed, whether it be in thought itself, or in administration, or in speaking and persuading, in art just as in conduct, has only developed by means of the tyranny of such arbitrary laws; and in all seriousness, it is not at all improbable that precisely this is 'nature' and 'natural', and not laissez-  
aller!<sup>13</sup>

Nietzsche hastens to add that through these arbitrary laws much has been stifled; nevertheless, without some such restraint freedom becomes aimless and meaningless.

Gide discovered Nietzsche while writing L'Immoraliste, and discovered in Nietzsche the expression of much of his own thought. Indeed, it would be difficult to decide whether the following passage had been expressed by Nietzsche, Ménilque, Bernard Profitendieu, or

<sup>12</sup>Le Maître, p. 174.

<sup>13</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, in The Philosophy of Nietzsche (New York, 1954), pp. 476-477.



even Julius de Baraglioul:

The great majority of people, whatever they may think and say about their 'egoism', do nothing for their ego all their life long, but only for a phantom of this ego which has been formed in regard to them by their friends and communicated to them.<sup>14</sup>

This statement, although by Nietzsche, underlies much of Gide's work, Les Faux-monnayeurs in particular. Similarly, Michel's decision to become an immoralist seems to be in response to Nietzsche's suggesting that: "An evaluation of our own, which is the appreciation of a thing in accordance with the pleasure or displeasure it causes us and no one else, is something very rare indeed."<sup>15</sup>

There was, without question, much more that Gide learned from these foreign writers. It is not, however, the subject of this study to trace the sources of Gide's thought, but to examine the expression of that thought through his fiction. To that purpose the examples given here will serve to illustrate the basic ingredients of Gide's recipe for authentic existence, ingredients which, if omitted, bring about the downfall of the Gide hero.

Briefly, the recipe of authenticity is as follows: One must throw off the yoke of convention in order to examine for oneself the path one is to take, without the incumbrance of prejudices. This path must allow a continuous progression, and must take into account both the celestial and the terrestrial sides of human nature. Although it

<sup>14</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, The Dawn of Day, in Reality, Man and Existence, ed. H. J. Blackham (New York, 1965), p. 57.

<sup>15</sup>The Dawn of Day, p. 57.

may find its best expression in the unreasoned, unmotivated acte gratuit, without some form of restraint it will soon become meaningless and perhaps even fatal.

The Successful

Before turning to examine the particular characters, one word of warning, in regard to Gide's universe, is in order. By "universe" I mean all those forces, either "natural" or "supernatural", which are beyond the control of the central characters and which are of importance to the work. These include acts of God or of the gods, fate, and the irony with which Gide treats some of his characters. Gide does not present a consistent universe; the degree of external influence differs from work to work. At times, when dealing with classical or Biblical subjects, Gide himself was limited by a determined system. In other works, especially the soties, his attitude toward the work forced him to interfere with the action. Freedom has one meaning in a universe in which man has free will, and quite another in a universe in which all is determined by external powers. Therefore, the nature of each particular work must be considered before determining the success or failure of the characters involved.

Armed with a hypothetical recipe for authenticity and warned against an inconsistent universe, we may now turn to an examination of those characters who succeed in finding an authentic mode of existence.

A better example of the

III

The Successful

As we have seen, Gide did not try to present a formula through which one could attain authentic existence. Rather, he sought in his fiction to demonstrate the wrong answers, the paths to be avoided. Consequently, one does not expect to find a Gide hero who makes a success of his life. Nevertheless, there are several means by which Gide suggests the way to success.

The first of such devices might be called the theoretical success. It is theoretical in the sense that this way of life is not put to the test in the course of the book. Theoretical success is seen in Ménélaque, who appears in three of Gide's works, each time acting as a sort of deus ex machina, or as a catalyst who initiates a revolt from convention, then disappears. We learn nothing of Ménélaque except what he tells us, and this consists more of general maxims than of specific examples. We thus cannot know exactly how he puts his theory into practice.

The second device might be called the potential success, the character who, when we leave him, seems to have found the path to success but has not as yet tested his way of life. Lafcadio, of Les Caves du Vatican, might be included in this group, but he belongs more appropriately to a special class. A better example of the potential success is found in Le Prométhée mal enchaîné where, at the

end, Prometheus seems on the path to authenticity.

The final device involves irony and the ambiguous success of Thésée and Oedipe. In each of these works the question of success or failure is entirely a matter of interpretation; the only definite conclusion is that if either one is indeed a success, the other must be a failure. This ambiguity constitutes a special case that will be examined in a separate section.

#### A. Theoretical Success--Ménalque

Ménalque first appears in Les Nourritures terrestres, where his function is to inspire the narrator to lead a life of hedonism and to rebel against tradition. He advocates a life of freedom and irresponsibility that may be summed up in two phrases:

La nécessité de l'option me fut toujours intolérable; choisir m'apparaissait non tant élire, que repousser ce que je n'étais pas.<sup>19</sup>

J'ai compris maintenant que toutes les gouttes de cette grande source divine s'équivalent, que la moindre suffit à notre ivresse et nous révèle la plénitude et la totalité de Dieu.<sup>20</sup>

He refuses anything that can bind him to a fixed mode of existence. He can take equal pleasure from feasting or fasting, from sleeping with a beautiful courtesane or with the ugliest cabin-boy. He hates possessions; he amassed great wealth only to dispose of it. He advises

<sup>19</sup>André Gide, Les Nourritures terrestres (Paris, Gallimard, 1917), p. 65.

<sup>20</sup>Les Nourritures terrestres, p. 66.

pure hedonism, finding joy in all of creation. Gide, with his usual irony, inserts beneath this overlay of sensual pleasure a suggestion of aimlessness and boredom that challenges Ménéalque's success. Ménéalque seems in fact to be seeking disciples in order to prove to himself that he is happy. His life lacks the restraint that Nietzsche found necessary and it lacks an upward movement, passing instead from one thing to another of equal value. This Ménéalque is at best an ambiguous success.

Ménéalque makes a second, brief appearance in Le Prométhée mal enchainé, where he serves the same function, and plays that role again in L'Immoraliste, providing a direction for Michel's break with convention. This time we are given but a brief outline of his biography. His life is similar to that of the first Ménéalque, but it is sufficiently different to change him from ambiguous to theoretical success. This Ménéalque, like the first one, advises a break with convention, the refusal of possessions, and a state of openness to experience. This time we learn even less of how he puts his theory into practice, but from what we do learn there is no reason to doubt his success.

The first Ménéalque was in the beginning nomadic, then sedentary, then again nomadic; the third is always on the move. The first spent years in gathering a fortune which he then got rid of; the third keeps objects only so long as he gets pleasure from them, then abandons them, but, as in the case of the fabrics in his room, he allows society to benefit from them. His hedonism is not dissociated from an interest in humanity.

The third Ménéalque usually abstains from tobacco and alcohol in order to maintain his lucidity, but during the evening with Michel he lights a cigarette and drinks Persian wine. He abstains so long as it serves his purpose, but does not allow abstention to become an inviolable rule. He thus remains open to both sides of an experience.

The first Ménéalque saw equal value in every choice, and made no effort to select those pleasures best suited to himself. He was thus faced with a confused array of possibilities among which he wandered aimlessly. The Ménéalque of L'Immoraliste welcomes options because they allow him to choose the best one: "L'important, c'est de savoir ce que l'on veut."<sup>21</sup> He, like Nietzsche, accuses men of choosing according to what they think they are expected to choose, with no real knowledge of themselves.

We have already seen that there is a touch of altruism mixed with the hedonism of this Ménéalque. A better example of this is seen in the attitude of the press toward him. It is through the newspapers, eager for the boost that a scandal gives to circulation, that Michel learns of Ménéalque's trial, but the same press informs him that Ménéalque's explorations are for the good of the nation, and of humanity. By having goals outside himself the third Ménéalque is able to make a vertical progression in his constantly renewed choice and not simply exchange one pleasure for another of equal value.

The simultaneous operation of hedonistic and altruistic motives allows Ménéalque to take into account both the terrestrial and the

<sup>21</sup>L'Immoraliste, p. 120.

celestial sides of his nature. It keeps him constantly striving and apparently guarantees his salvation, as it did for Faust.

B. Potential Success--Prométhée

The success of Prométhée is termed potential because we cannot learn what he will do with it. His success comes only at the end of the sotie, and it remains untested. The situation is rendered more complex by the fact that Le Prométhée mal enchaîné is a sotie, and, while it has a serious purpose, its correspondence to everyday reality is limited. Its serious purpose, and the success of Prométhée, are symbolic, and the relationship between symbol and practical existence is a matter of interpretation.

Prométhée, by virtue of his divinity, accomplishes what the narrator of Paludes failed to do: he demonstrates to men the meaninglessness of non-awareness. "Ils étaient très peu éclairés; j'inventai pour eux quelques feux, et dès lors commença mon aigle."<sup>22</sup> Not satisfied with giving men a consciousness of their being, he wished to give them a raison d'être. His metaphor of fire shifts from light to heat, and he finds the raison d'être in that which consumes man.

All of this is in retrospect. At the beginning of the sotie he has decided to ignore his eagle, has left the Caucasus and come to

<sup>22</sup>André Gide, Le Prométhée mal enchaîné, in Oeuvres Complètes, v. III, p. 132.

the same keys to success that we found in the latter. Both choose

Paris. Through the first part of the book he continues to feed the bird, but he does not benefit from it, and the eagle remains weak and ugly. In the second part he allows himself to be consumed by the eagle, which becomes healthy and beautiful while he declines. He has not yet learned to profit from his raison d'être, as is shown when the eagle refuses to perform at his lecture. In the final part of the sotie he eats the bird, symbolically incorporating it into himself, so that together they become healthy and beautiful. Prométhée has finally learned to understand his own life and measured his happiness according to his own capacity, making of himself what he can and no longer depending on external forces.

The story of Prométhée is contrasted to the story-within-the-story, the history of Tityre. Tityre, borrowed from the novel-within-the-novel of Paludes, is perfectly happy doing nothing. Ménalque comes by and plants the seed of an idea. The result of this idea is an entire civilization with Tityre happily at its head. At the bidding of Angélique, Tityre leaves his community to take care of itself and ventures to Paris where he loses Angélique to Moelibée. Tityre is left at the end as he was at the beginning. He, unlike Prométhée, depended on externals for his happiness, and was unable to control his own fate.

While Prométhée acts as a symbolic example, in contrast to the more realistic but more didactic Ménalque, we can discern in the former the same keys to success that we found in the latter. Both choose



their patterns of life on the basis of a thorough knowledge of the self, a self that includes goals beyond personal pleasure. They manage thus to escape both the counterfeit of slavish imitation and the equal danger of blind solipsism. Prométhée himself offers as

one interpretation of his eagle the belief in progress, the same belief that allowed Ménéalque to advance by his ever-renewed choice.

Neither of these is a truly "human" character in Gide's works. Although Ménéalque is physically present, he serves as the representation of an idea rather than as an actor. Similarly, Prométhée never quite descends to the level of the mortals. Both Ménéalque and Prométhée serve as contrasts to the human failures that Gide depicts, but neither presents a tested and guaranteed path to success; we do not know how they go about practicing their theories of authenticity.

and a particular solution to the ambiguity of life and then, in his own work, turning to examine a completely different attitude. In spite of this alternation he maintained an artistic distance between himself and his work. Through this alternation he was able to renew his own choice instead of adopting one and automatically repeating the same theme. He thus avoided the rigidity that brings about the downfall of most of Gide's characters, having freed themselves from the bonds of conventionality and rushing madly into prisons of their own making.

Gide, "Feuillets" in Œuvres Complètes, v. XIII, p. 439.

Rayne, French Novelists of Today (Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 85.

IV

The Failures

A la seule exception de mes Nourritures, tous mes livres sont des livres ironiques; ce sont des livres de critique. La Porte étroite est la critique d'une certaine tendance mystique; Isabelle la critique d'une certaine forme de l'imagination romantique; la Symphonie pastorale, d'une forme de mensonge à soi-même; l'Immoraliste, d'une forme de l'individualisme.<sup>22</sup>

Gide had to compose novels in order to escape from the pitfall of solipsism, to which not only his own physical temperament and his education but the example of many self-centered symbolists in the Paris cénacles exposed him.<sup>23</sup>

Gide avoided solipsism by examining in a work of art a particular attitude and a particular solution to the ambiguity of life and then, in the next work, turning to examine a completely different attitude. By means of this alternation he maintained an artistic distance between himself and his work. Through this alternation he was constantly able to renew his own choice instead of adopting one attitude and monotonously repeating the same theme. He thus avoided the rigidity that brings about the downfall of most of Gide's characters: having freed themselves from the bonds of conventionality they rush blindly into prisons of their own making.

<sup>22</sup>André Gide, "Feuillets" in Ceuvres Complètes, v. XIII, p. 439.

<sup>23</sup>Henri Peyre, French Novelists of Today (Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 85.

Some of Gide's characters do not even get this far. The narrator of Paludes does not even succeed in changing his subject from one novel to the next. Like Prométhée, he wishes to give people an awareness of their own existence, and he seeks to accomplish this through literature. He has little success, if we may judge from his friends, who do not bother even to read his books. Undaunted, he continues to try to show others the inanity of their lives:

L'émotion que me donna ma vie, c'est celle-là que je veux dire: ennui, vanité, monotonie--moi, cela m'est égal parce que j'écris Paludes--mais celle de Tityre n'est rien; nos vies, je vous assure, Angèle, sont encore bien plus ternes et médiocres.<sup>24</sup>

The narrator tries to escape this monotony by planning a voyage to Africa, which he is unable to carry out, and one with Angèle, which does not get past the suburbs. Like Tityre, he is unable to act except in response to external stimuli. His only recourse is literature, and even there he cannot avoid the monotony of Paludes--Polders.

The writer of the inner Paludes directs his attack against the emptiness of conventional life; the writer of the inner Les Faux-monnayeurs, Édouard, is concerned with the falseness of that life. In spite of the title, the counterfeiting of money is but a minor theme of this novel; the major concern is the counterfeit existence of which Ménéalque spoke. The true counterfeiters are those who define their lives according to what they think others expect of them. These include the magistrates Profitendieu and Molinier, whose concern for

<sup>24</sup> André Gide, Paludes, in Oeuvres Complètes, v. I, p. 377.

Les Faux-monnayeurs, p. 297.

law is second to their concern for their own images; their roles render them blind to the situations of their own families. Likewise, Pastor Prosper Vedel believes in God because, if for no other reason, he can no longer afford not to, and the first consideration of the society novelist, Robert de Passavant, is always for what his role demands of him. Every adult character of the novel is a counterfeiter, playing either a role of his own choosing or one forced upon him. Perhaps the only non-counterfeiter is Strouvilhou, the maker of false coins, and even he plays roles in life--roles that he chooses consciously in order to profit from the counterfeit lives of others.

Paludes, written in 1895, precedes those of Gide's works in which he explores a tentative solution to the problem of meaningful existence; by the time he wrote Les Faux-monnayeurs, in 1926, Gide had finished with all but two of those works. These works thus form, in a sense, the frame which surrounds Gide's quest for authenticity. In neither of these does he offer an answer to that quest; rather, he expresses in them the need for such a quest. Each presents a writer who thinks he can escape monotony and falseness by writing about that need, and each novelist is shown to be a failure. Paludes' narrator cannot get past the suburbs, and Édouard is unable to use "real" counterfeit money in a novel which is to explore "la rivalité du monde réel et de la représentation que nous en faisons. La manière dont le monde des apparences s'impose à nous et dont nous tentons d'imposer au monde extérieur notre interprétation particulière."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Les Faux-monnayeurs, p. 297.

Unable to escape a situation that he condemns, the best Édouard can do is to remain on the sidelines, an observer who does not involve himself. By occupying himself with writing, he does not have time to realize that he too is at fault.

The characters discussed so far have failed to achieve authentic, meaningful existence through an inability to act. Although perhaps aware of the need for escape, they cannot get past the confines of convention. More typical is the Gide hero who takes a first step toward self-determined existence and, through miscalculation, puts himself in a situation even worse than that from which he tried to escape.

#### A. Failure Through Fear

The great advantage of conventionality is security; one's life is defined from without, and one need not fear making a wrong choice. It is fear of being alone and responsible for one's acts that holds one within the confines of convention. Ménéalque sums it up in this way:

On a peur de se trouver seul: et l'on ne se trouve pas du tout. Cette agoraphobie morale m'est odieuse; c'est la pire des lâchetés. Pourtant c'est toujours seul qu'on invente. Mais qui cherche ici d'inventer? Ce que l'on sent en soi de différent, c'est précisément ce que l'on possède de rare, ce qui fait à chacun sa valeur; et c'est là ce que l'on tâche de supprimer. On imite. Et l'on prétend aimer la vie.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> L'Immoraliste, p. 115.

It is fear that prevents the freedom of a third of Gide's novelist-heroes, Julius de Baraglioul of Les Caves du Vatican. Afraid to seek sincerity in life, he seeks it in literature: "Les joies que je goûte en écrivant sont supérieures à celles que je pourrais trouver à vivre."<sup>27</sup> He is, however, unable to free himself even in literature, and his novels are very conventional and very mediocre.

Julius' opportunity for escape comes from without; he learns of the false Pope just at the time when he has despaired of winning election to the Academy. Without this symbol of absolutes he suddenly feels himself freed of all his former restraints. He re-evaluates his life and sets out to write a different type of novel, one that may be truly valid, about an unmotivated crime. But, like Édouard, he is unable to face reality. Lafcadio's gratuitous murder of Amédée frightens him, and he repudiates his new-found freedom and flies to the promise of a chair in the Academy. "Déjà s'éloignait de lui le souvenir de sa plus récente embarquée, et toute autre pensée qu'orthodoxe, et tout autre projet que décent."<sup>28</sup>

Julius had no difficulty in returning to the fold because his freedom never got past the planning stage. When the break is completed, as in Satll, return may be impossible.

Satll is not, strictly speaking, a study of the quest for freedom; it begins, in fact, with the failure of that quest. The situation

<sup>27</sup>L'Immoraliste, p. 115.

<sup>28</sup>Les Caves du Vatican, p. 238.

<sup>29</sup>André Gide, Satll, in Oeuvres Complètes, VI, II, p. 268.

is further complicated by the fact that, while Gide was free to apply his own interpretation to the legend, he could not do violence to the overall pattern as set forth in the Bible. The liberties that Gide does take only serve to cloud the issue, as far as the quest for freedom is concerned. Over the foundation of a man doomed to failure Gide lays a superstructure of homosexual flirtation. Because Saül's future is determined by God, this flirtation is only an additional torment, not the cause of his failure.

Saül's troubles began when God stopped speaking to him:

Il y eut un temps où Dieu me répondait; mais alors il est vrai que je l'interrogeais très peu. Chaque matin, le prêtre me disait ce que je devais faire; c'était tout l'avenir, et je le connaissais. L'avenir, c'est moi qui le faisais.--Les Philistins sont venus; je me suis inquiété; j'ai voulu interroger moi-même; et, dès lors, Dieu s'est tu. Comment voulait-il donc que j'agisse? pour bien agir, il faut connaître l'avenir.<sup>29</sup>

Saül requires external support in order to act, but that support comes from the High Priest, not from God. Frightened by the Philistines, he begins to doubt his ability to fulfill the prophecies, and God decides to replace him; the entire drama depicts the terror of the doomed man. Having separated himself from the mass to become king, he cannot abdicate his crown to return to the security of commonality.

The failures of Baraglioul and Saül are due to weakness and fear rather than to wrong choices. In the ironic or critical works Gide turns to those who succeed in escaping mediocrity and doom themselves by their own miscalculations.

<sup>29</sup>André Gide, Saül, in Oeuvres Complètes, v. II, p. 248.

### B. Failure Through Negativity

Michel does not learn to measure happiness according to his own capacity, but he does acquire from Ménélaque a hatred of repose. He is thus unable to be satisfied in his revolt; any violation of conventional morality soon becomes boring, and another pleasure must be taken into account the two sides of his nature, and his choice precludes any alternation between hedonism and altruism. Without these mutual restraints his life becomes negative, defined by what he refused

rather than by what he accepts. It becomes an inversion of conventionality, just as static and inflexible as the way of life that was abandoned. Afraid of being possessed by his possession, he discards her,

Michel, the immoralist, becomes aware of his own life through a brush with death in tuberculosis. This initial spark is enough to

make him aware that he is different from others, who have not known revolt. When Marceline accuses him of seeing only what he wants to see in others, he admits that the worst instincts seem to him the most sincere. Like Kirillov, he seeks proof of his freedom in gratuitous acts, but he feels that only an immoral act can be truly gratuitous and sincere. Because he feels them to be necessary, these acts are proposed to discard all acquired values, without first subjecting them to the test of his pleasure. He thus does not know whether or not certain of them might be proper to his own well-being. His quest for authenticity becomes totally negative, a rebellion simply for the sake of rebellion. Unlike Ménélaque, he cannot alternate or seek the best of each world. He denies himself all restraint in the system he has chosen, and his freedom soon becomes boredom.

The final irony, and the beginning of the end of his happiness, is his learning that his recovery from tuberculosis might have been due to something more than his act of will. When he boasts to Mar-



line that he cured himself alone, she answers that she had often prayed for him. With this doubting of his strength begins the process of disillusion that dominates the final part of the novel. His acquaintance about Switzerland reflects his own problems: "Some crises, tional morality soon becomes boring, and another pleasure must be found to take its place. When he can no longer find new pleasures he is trapped by his need for change.

His fear of possession becomes another liability in his system. He forgets that Marceline is a distinct person, capable of providing the restraint he needs, and begins to treat her as an object, a possession. Afraid of being possessed by his possession, he discards her, and is left with no defense against solipsism.

Michel is even further handicapped by his awareness of his revolt. When Marceline accuses him of seeing only what he wants to see in others, he admits that the worst instincts seem to him the most sincere. Like Kirilov, he seeks proof of his freedom in gratuitous acts, but he feels that only an immoral act can be truly gratuitous and sincere. Because he feels them to be necessary, these acts are something less than disinterested. Further, his wrestling with farmers, his poaching on his own estate, even his tacit sanction of Mektir's theft of the scissors, all are tinged with homosexuality. These "gratuitous" acts are partly results of his passion and partly dictated by the role he has chosen, and do not prove his self-will.

The final irony, and the beginning of the end of his happiness, is his learning that his recovery from tuberculosis might have been due to something more than his act of will. When he boasts to Marce-

line that he cured himself alone, she answers that she had often and prayed for him. With this doubting of his strength begins the process of disillusion that dominates the final part of the récit. His complaint about Switzerland reflects his own problems: "Sans crimes, sans histoire, sans littérature, sans arts, c'est un robuste rosier, sans épines ni fleurs."<sup>30</sup> By the time he reaches Naples he is becoming aware of the meaninglessness of his life: "Je marchais au hasard, sans but, sans désir, sans contrainte."<sup>31</sup>

After boredom, the last step in the decline is torment, both physical and spiritual. His homosexual pleasures are now disappointing; he sleeps under the stars with a group of Arabs and returns covered with lice. He no longer even recognizes the children whose beauty once gave him great pleasure, and when they find him he can only see ugliness. He prays for new beauties, but there are none. He now feels the full force of his own meaninglessness.

Donnez-moi des raisons d'être. Moi, je ne sais plus en trouver. Je me suis délivré, c'est possible; mais qu'importe? je souffre de cette liberté sans emploi. [...]

J'avais, quand vous m'avez connu d'abord, une grande fixité de pensée, et je sais que c'est là ce qui fait les vrais hommes; je ne l'ai plus.<sup>32</sup>

Protos plays for Lafcadio much the same role that Ménalque played for Michel, but his revolt against convention is like Michel's.

<sup>30</sup>L'Immoraliste, p. 157.

<sup>31</sup>L'Immoraliste, p. 163.

<sup>32</sup>L'Immoraliste, p. 179.

Unlike Ménélaque, Protos exerts his influence throughout the sotie, and takes part in the action as well as offering advice. His liberty exists only in negative acts, and he exceeds Michel in that he violates laws as well as social conventions. Protos is more adept at playing the game, using the counterfeits of others for his own amusement or profit. The constant pressure of the police keeps him always alert to the joys of life, but his crimes carry him too far and he is eventually trapped by a crime which, ironically, he did not have the pleasure of committing. Lacking both restraint and a positive goal, he is caught in a situation of his own making.

As Gide noted, La Porte étroite forms a sort of counterweight to L'Immoraliste. Michel is ruined by an excess of freedom, and Alissa by an excess of restraint. She herself remarks: "Oui, n'est-ce pas, ce qu'il faut chercher c'est une exaltation et non point une émancipation de la pensée. Celle-ci ne va pas sans un orgueil abominable. Mettre son ambition non à se révolter, mais à servir..."<sup>33</sup> In spite of what she says, Alissa chooses to rebel against convention. While Michel rebels against the restraint of conventional morality, she rebels against the laxity with which it is practiced. In refusing what she considers to be vice she is trapped as much as he is in refusing traditional virtue.

La Porte étroite also involves a relationship of master and disciple. Jérôme, the disciple as well as the narrator, seems to be the central figure through most of the récit. It is only in the

<sup>32</sup>La Porte étroite, p. 157.

<sup>33</sup>La Porte étroite, p. 94.

"Journal d'Alissa," which occupies the final part of the work, that Alissa moves definitely to the foreground. This situation is possible because Alissa and Jérôme are essentially one. His piety does not carry him to the same extremes, but the difference between them is one of quantity, not of quality. Alissa notes this fact in her journal: "Parfois, en l'écoutant parler je crois me regarder penser. Il m'explique et me découvre à moi-même. Existerais-je sans lui? Je ne suis qu'avec lui..."<sup>34</sup>

Jérôme does not feel that it is impossible for their spiritual love to co-exist with physical love. He accepts the restraints she imposes in order to merit her love, in order not to win sainthood. Thus, when she advises him that man is born for saintliness, not for happiness, his sign of agreement is a physical embrace. He recognizes both sides of his personality and does not suffer the anguish of her failure.

Alissa can envision eternal happiness only through the refusal of all earthly pleasure. Her anguish comes from the failure of her sacrifice, as well as from the conflict between corporeal desire and aspiration to sainthood. The first suggestion of this failure comes when she attempts to deny her love for Jérôme in order to leave him to her sister, and finds her sacrifice both refused and unnecessary for her sister's happiness. She thereby discovers a second defeat, for she learns that her sacrifice was in fact founded on pride.

<sup>34</sup>La Porte étroite, p. 157.

Her anguish increases as her journal continues. Not only does she begin to recognize the strength of the desires she has repressed, but she also begins to fear that her self denial has been for nothing. She realizes the irony of her situation, that she has sought spiritual perfection for Jérôme's sake, and that that perfection can only be attained without him. What meaning has her quest when the means preclude the end? She needs Jérôme in order to love God, but she needs him only in a negative way, so that she can sacrifice carnal desire to celestial aspiration. He has become for her an object, a possession that seeks to possess, and yet one side of her personality urgently wants to be possessed.

The last entry in her journal expresses the despair of her futility as she faces the final irony. Near the point of death, she writes:

Un frisson de la chair et de l'âme; c'était comme l'éclaircissement brusque et désenchanté de ma vie. Il me semblait que je voyais pour la première fois les murs atrocement nus de ma chambre. [...] Seigneur! puissé-je atteindre jusqu'au bout sans blasphème. [...] Je voudrais mourir à présent, vite, avant d'avoir compris de nouveau que je suis seule.<sup>35</sup>

She has chosen to base her life on refusing the terrestrial side of her nature, instead of accepting it. She has denied herself any alternation between these two aspects of her character and, paradoxically, failed to limit her restraint. Jérôme's physical love could have acted as a check to her piety and allowed her the possibility of renewing her choice of direction in life instead of wasting away in a

<sup>35</sup>La Porte étroite, p. 173.

static situation. Ironically, it is in this seemingly moral work that Gide advocates sexual love and suggests God's absence, while the seemingly immoral L'Immoraliste suggests a more general love and hints of God's presence.

The portrayals of Baraglioul, Saül, Protos, Michel, and Alissa represent Gide's major attempts to analyze and criticize the quest for authenticity. This question is also raised with regard to numerous minor characters, and even for major characters in works whose primary aim is not the examination of that quest. The Prodigal Son (Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue) rebels against conformity, but that rebellion serves primarily to initiate a theological discussion. This is also the case in La Symphonie pastorale, where the pastor exhibits the same blindness to himself that we saw in Alissa. The study of the false prophet, El Hadj, may help elucidate the situation of Saül's High Priest and that of Pastor Prosper Vedel, who continue to support a system because they cannot afford not to, but like Les Faux-monnayeurs it is a study of the counterfeit rather than the quest for the genuine.

In addition to the ironic cases there remain the possible successes, those who are never committed either to tradition or to revolt,

who in the end are faced with the choice of one or the other, and for whom one can only guess what that choice will be.

Of all the characters who fall into this category, only Lafcadio shows any real possibility of finding a meaningful existence. He has no need to rebel against convention because he never was actually a part of conventional society. He is not bound, either positively or negatively, to any externally imposed moral code. He is able to enjoy possessions, such as Carole Ventigues, without fear of being possessed

by them, and when they no longer give him pleasure he can abandon them

V

without being careless or inhuman. His only moral restrictions are

that he be indebted to no one and that he take no pleasure in necessity.

Possible Success

All that he asks of life is that it be interesting, and he scorns those

who do not realize that it can be so: "Tout ce bétail s'acquitte comme

Among the list of possible successes one must include the entire  
d'une corvée sans que de ce divertissement qu'est la vie, a la bien

younger generation of Les Faux-monnayeurs. They have not yet entered  
première... Anything unnecessary is potentially entertaining,

into the conventional world of adults and are still testing their  
whatever convention labels it as good or evil, and Lafcadio is equally

roles. Only after examining the possibilities available to them will  
prepared to save two unknown children from a fire or to push an

they be able to decide whether to accept or reject conventionality.  
unknown shades from a train. In short, he seems the perfect pupil of

At the end of the novel two of them, Bernard and Olivier, seem to be  
Monsieur, freed from convention without feeling constrained to refuse

intentionally postponing a decision in order to give society another  
it, ready to take his pleasure from any quarter. His life may lack an

chance, while the third, Armand, has chosen a role that will keep him  
external purpose, but in time perhaps he will find one.

within the security of convention.

Lafcadio seeks amusement in actions without motivation, for

One might also include Jérôme among those with the possibility of  
which he alone will be responsible, but Gide's irony makes such actions

success, but the extremes of Alissa are so far from his nature that  
impossible. Lafcadio saves the children for no reason, but thereby

he is actually unaware of any need to rebel against convention. Thus,  
seats his niece and future mistress. Likewise, the victim of his

it is her beauty that he remembers at the end of the récit, not her  
"gratuitous" murder is not a passing stranger, as Lafcadio supposed,

piety. Her revolt will probably serve only to scare him away from  
but his own brother-in-law. His carelessness in this act would have

any quest of his own.

brought a rapid end to his life of freedom if he were not saved by two

Of all the characters who fall into this category, only Lafcadio  
women, Carola, who wrongfully accuses Protos of Lafcadio's crime, and

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Genevieve de Paragiloul, who persuades Lafcadio to allow Protos, now

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so well.

negatively, to any externally imposed moral code. He is able to enjoy

possessions, such as Carola Venitequa, without fear of being possessed

by them, and when they no longer give him pleasure he can abandon them without being careless or inhuman. His only moral restrictions are that he be indebted to no one and that he take no pleasure in necessity. All that he asks of life is that it be interesting, and he scorns those who do not realize that it can be so: "Tout ce bétail s'acquitte comme d'une corvée monotone de ce divertissement qu'est la vie, à la bien prendre..."<sup>36</sup> Anything unnecessary is potentially entertaining, whether convention labels it as good or evil, and Lafcadio is equally prepared to save two unknown children from a fire or to push an unknown Amédée from a train. In short, he seems the perfect pupil of Ménalque, freed from convention without feeling constrained to refuse it, ready to take his pleasure from any quarter. His life may lack an external purpose, but in time perhaps he will find one.

Lafcadio seeks amusement in actions without motivation, for which he alone will be responsible, but Gide's irony makes such actions impossible. Lafcadio saves the children for no reason, but thereby meets his niece and future mistress. Likewise, the victim of his "gratuitous" murder is not a passing stranger, as Lafcadio supposed, but his own brother-in-law. His carelessness in this act would have brought a rapid end to his life of freedom if he were not saved by two women, Carola, who wrongfully accuses Protos of Lafcadio's crime, and Geneviève de Baraglioul, who persuades Lafcadio to allow Protos, now guilty of the murder of Carola, to take the blame for the other crime as well.

<sup>36</sup> Les Caves du Vatican, p. 223.



Lafcadio saves his life at the expense of his authenticity, for  
VI  
in refusing responsibility for his deed he renders meaningless his act  
of self-will. Other opportunities will be open to him; nothing binds  
him except the conservative influence of Geneviève. Whether or not

he can escape that influence through an act more suited to his own  
capacity is a matter of conjecture.

After *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, Gide wrote but two works of fiction  
that were of major importance. Although some fifteen years separate  
Gide's irony is even stronger in two of his last works of fiction,  
*Oedipe* from *Thésée*, they are companion pieces, just as are *L'Immora-*  
*Oedipe* and *Thésée*. It is so strong that a judgment of whether the  
character succeeds or fails is a matter left for the reader to  
interpret.

earlier pair of recits are clearly defined, but those between the  
later pair of works are so vague that some critics, such as Germaine  
Brée, see in *Oedipe* the epitome of failure and in *Thésée* a paragon of  
success; other critics, Justine O'Brien, for example, see just the  
opposite.

The legendary figures, Oedipus and Theseus, are actually quite  
similar. Both came to power through suspicious circumstances after  
battling supernatural beasts, and both enjoyed prosperous reigns. It  
is only towards the end that their stories diverge: Theseus died  
happily, while Oedipus, a victim of fate, wandered about blind and  
homeless, until Theseus permitted him to die and be buried in Athens.  
This is the framework within which Gide had to operate, and there can  
be no question that, on the surface, Theseus is the winner and Oedipus,  
the loser. It is Gide's manipulation of the myths that makes such a  
judgment questionable.

Oedipe is, like Lafcadio, illegitimate, and he too is plagued by  
the irony of fate. In fact, he seems to be a Lafcadio grown older,

more aware and more forceful. His opening speech reflects the same attitude that Lafcadio expressed: "Enfant perdu, trouvé, sans état civil, sans papiers, je suis surtout heureux de ne devoir rien qu'à moi-même. Le bonheur ne me fut pas donné; je l'ai conquis."<sup>37</sup> The

## VI

After Les Faux-monnayeurs, Gide wrote but two works of fiction that were of major importance. Although some fifteen years separate Oedipe from Thésée, they are companion pieces, just as are L'Immoraliste and La Porte étroite. The lines of distinction between the earlier pair of  récits  are clearly defined, but those between the

later pair of works are so vague that some critics, such as Germaine Brée, see in Oedipe the epitome of failure and in Thésée a paragon of success; other critics, Justine O'Brien, for example, see just the opposite. The Sphinx offers a question, which

Oedipe kills a stranger while on his way to learn from the Delphic Oracle the secret of his ancestry. Thereafter he loses faith in the gods; gods can only give answers, while he feels himself to be an inventor, a discoverer. Personne n'a qui ressemble, que moi-même.<sup>38</sup>

The legendary figures, Oedipus and Theseus, are actually quite similar. Both came to power through suspicious circumstances after battling supernatural beasts, and both enjoyed prosperous reigns. It is only towards the end that their stories diverge: Theseus died happily, while Oedipus, a victim of fate, wandered about blind and homeless, until Theseus permitted him to die and be buried in Athens. This is the framework within which Gide had to operate, and there can be no question that, on the surface, Theseus is the winner and Oedipus, the loser. It is Gide's manipulation of the myths that makes such a judgment questionable.

Oedipe is, like Lafcadio, illegitimate, and he too is plagued by the irony of fate. In fact, he seems to be a Lafcadio grown older,

more aware and more forceful. His opening speech reflects the same attitude that Lafcadio expressed: "Enfant perdu, trouvé, sans état civil, sans papiers, je suis surtout heureux de ne devoir rien qu'à moi-même. Le bonheur ne me fut pas donné; je l'ai conquis."<sup>37</sup> The knowledge that he was illegitimate was enough to make Oedipe stop imitating his elders and seek his own meaning in life: "Puis, soudain, le fil est rompu. Jailli de l'inconnu, plus de passé, plus de modèle, rien sur quoi m'appuyer; tout à créer, patrie, ancêtres... à inventer, à découvrir. Personne à qui ressembler, que moi-même."<sup>38</sup>

Oedipe kills a stranger while on his way to learn from the Delphic Oracle the secret of his ancestry. Thereafter he loses faith in the Oracle; gods can only give answers, while he feels himself to be an answer in search of a question. The Sphinx offers a question, which he answers, thereby winning the crown of Thebes. He is thus a self-made man who has won power, wealth, and happiness through the force of his own will. The movement of this play is, as it was in Saül, the systematic destruction of that success.

For Oedipe, as for Lafcadio, a man's value lies in his being responsible for his actions; during the course of the play Oedipe learns that he is responsible for nothing. Every act to prove himself, gratuitous or planned, is simply the fulfilling of his destiny:

<sup>37</sup>Oedipe, p. 253.

<sup>38</sup>Oedipe, p. 272.

<sup>40</sup>Oedipe, p. 301.

Oedipe: Et d'abord j'étais donc fils de roi sans le savoir. Je n'avais pas besoin d'un meurtre pour régner, mais qu'à attendre.  
Jocaste: Les dieux en ont autrement décidé.<sup>39</sup>

Free will has no meaning in a universe where every result is predestined, and man has no recourse but to submit to his fate. But

submit is just what Oedipe refuses to do. Tirésias demands that he repent, and he asks what meaning that would have? if his crime was fore-ordained, his repentance would be so as well.

It is, of course, possible that his refusing to repent was also predestined. However, whether free or not, Oedipe has always acted

as if he were free. He will continue to act that way, and by blinding

himself he will no longer have to see a world in which he is not free:

Tirésias: C'est donc l'orgueil encore qui te fait crever les yeux. Dieu n'attendait point de toi ce nouveau forfait, en paiement de tes premiers crimes, mais simplement ton repentir.

Oedipe: A présent que me voici plus calme et que s'apaise ma douleur avec mon irritation contre moi, je puis discuter avec toi, Tirésias. J'admire que cette proposition de repentance vienne de toi, qui

précisément crois que les dieux nous mènent et qu'il n'était pas en mon pouvoir d'échapper à ma destinée. Sans doute cette offrande

de moi était-elle prévue, elle aussi, de sorte que je ne pusse pas m'y soustraire. N'importe! C'est volontiers que je m'immole. J'étais parvenu à ce point que je ne pouvais plus dépasser qu'en prenant élan contre moi-même.<sup>40</sup>

Neither submitting nor despairing, he meets irony with irony. Fully

<sup>39</sup>Oedipe, p. 296.

<sup>40</sup>Oedipe, p. 301.

aware that even his self-punishment may be an act of the gods, he welcomes his suffering as the only means of exploiting his potential to the fullest. Pride it is indeed, for he refuses to repudiate himself, and, an absurd hero, he embraces the absurdity and dares it to do its worst. happy population that will enjoy the fruits of his

labor Thésée, like Oedipe, is a self-made man. He has vanquished the Minotaur by himself, and, by neglecting to change his sails, he

hastens his ascent to the throne. Once established, he devotes himself to being a good ruler, and builds the most powerful city-state in Greece. *Auf freiem Grund mit freier Volke stehn!* *Verweile doch, du bist so schön!* Faust's speech is full of subjunctives; he says, "I would have lived," while Thésée battles for the indicative and, "I have lived." Thésée

He seems to be the perfect figure of success. He has chosen his way of life and has gained his goal through the force of his will

alone. His devotion to the public welfare prevents his lapsing into solipsism, but it does not force him into false situations that will conflict with his pleasure. Nothing in the narrative, neither event nor speech, denies his success.

It is only in his last speech that one begins to suspect that things are not quite as

Thésée sees them. Even here there is nothing explicit, nothing concrete that one can cite as proof; merely a certain smugness in his tone that suggests that perhaps, just perhaps, Thésée has been deluding himself.

J'ai fait ma ville. Après moi, saura l'habiter  
immortellement ma pensée. C'est consentant que  
j'approche la mort solitaire. J'ai goûté des  
biens de la terre. Il m'est doux de penser qu'après  
moi, que par moi, les hommes se reconnaîtront plus  
heureux, meilleurs et plus libres. Pour le bien de

protect l'humanité future, j'ai fait mon oeuvre. J'ai vécu.<sup>41</sup>

Thésée's smugness becomes more obvious when compared to the last words of Faust. Faust too has devoted himself to the common good; he has reclaimed fertile land from the sea, and, as he grows old, he envisions the happy population that will enjoy the fruits of his labor:

Solch ein Gewimmel möcht ich sehn!  
Auf freiem Grund mit freiem Volke stehn!  
Zum Augenblicke dürft ich sagen:  
"Verweile doch, du bist so schön!"<sup>42</sup>

Faust's speech is full of subjunctives; he says, "I would have lived," while Thésée settles for the indicative and, "I have lived." Thésée is satisfied; he no longer wishes to "passer outre."

This complacency makes one reconsider Thésée's earlier accomplishments. His physical strength is due to his youthful habit of lifting rocks. But physical culture was not the purpose of this exercise; he lifted rocks to look for the armor that was said to be under one of them. This strength is not due to his own will, but to his father's ruse.

Prior to his battle with the Minotaur, Thésée learns from Dédale that the real secret of the Labyrinth is not the maze itself, but the intoxicating gases that destroy one's desire to escape. This fact seems to be forgotten until, just before entering the Labyrinth, Thésée casually comments that Dédale has given him a gas mask to

<sup>41</sup>André Gide, Thésée (New York, 1946), p. 123.

<sup>42</sup>Faust, p. 331.

protect him from those vapors. It is the gas mask, not his own strength, that enables Thésée to meet the Minotaure on equal terms and to return safely from the Labyrinth.

The Blissfully Ignorant

In Athens he settles down to governing and is a faithful husband to Phèdre. She, however, is not exactly a faithful wife; this adds yet another question mark to his success.

The final doubt comes in regard to the future success of the city he has founded. Is the grandeur of Athens really due to his efforts, or is it rather the result of something else? After meeting Oedipe he says: "De toutes parts, il avait échoué dans ses entreprises. J'ai réussi. Même cette suprême bénédiction que doit apporter sa dépouille à la contrée où elle repose ce n'est pas sur sa Thèbes ingrate qu'elle agira, mais sur Athènes."<sup>43</sup>

As the evidence mounts it becomes more and more apparent that Thésée is not at all the success he believes himself to be. He is rather like the Tityre of Le Prométhée mal enchaîné, who acts only in response to external stimuli, playing a role that he did not

choose himself but which was forced on him by others. His "success" is not due to his will, it is due to his never being disillusioned.

It is but a small step from Thésée, whose success is based on self-deception, to those who never recognize the lack of authenticity in accepting traditional values. These form the last group of Gide's characters to be examined in this study.

<sup>43</sup>Thésée, p. 117. 8-9.

He does not accept the advice of his friend, Barnabé the moralist, who reminds him that even if he succeeds he will have accomplished nothing for her, he will only have increased his own responsibility.

VII

The Blissfully Ignorant

Nor will he agree with Oedipe, that happiness based on ignorance is sufficient for the masses. He cannot admit that many, himself

In order for the Gide hero to revolt against convention, there included, are not strong enough to rebel against convention; revolt must be a large population of those who uphold conventional values. would only destroy them.

These people never see anything wrong with conventional values, never

Among the inhabitants of Gide's "juste milieu" one character, try to break with tradition, and do not seem any the worse for their Amédée Flourbaire, stands out as being particularly troublesome. ignorance. Among these are Jérôme, whom we have already examined,

He is, of all of Gide's characters, one of the least aware, and was Marceline, Ariane, Créon, all the women of Les Caves du Vatican, most

no doubt intended to be the most ridiculous of them. Gide's of the older generation of Les Faux-monnayeurs, and the group that

best acting; he certainly suffers the greatest physical torment at the surrounds the narrator of Paludes. They are the ones to whom Gide's

the hand of his creator. Yet his ignorance, or innocence, seems as if novelist-heroes direct their efforts, and who turn deaf ears to those

undeserving of this treatment that he begins to take on a sort of efforts. Why should they listen when they are happy as they are? mobility beneath his ridiculous exterior.

The narrator of Paludes tries to explain this situation, à propos of Angèle, to his friend Hubert:

Sanctified, Gide's crusader is simply dull. Although never awakened from his

--Mais elle n'est pas heureuse, mon cher ami; elle croit l'être parce qu'elle ne se rend pas compte de son état; tu penses bien que si la médiocrité se joint à la cécité, c'est encore plus triste.

--Et quand tu ouvrirais ses yeux; quand tu aurais tant fait que de la rendre malheureuse? dig into his pocket

--Ce serait déjà bien plus intéressant; au moins elle ne serait plus satisfaite;--elle chercherait.<sup>44</sup>

Most of his efforts, aside from writing Paludes, are directed toward making her recognize her unhappiness, which she refuses to do.

<sup>44</sup>Paludes, pp. 388-9.



He does not accept the advice of his friend, Barnabé the moralist, who reminds him that even if he succeeds he will have accomplished nothing for her, he will only have increased his own responsibility. Nor will he agree with Oedipe, that happiness based on ignorance is sufficient for the masses. He cannot admit that many, himself. After included, are not strong enough to rebel against convention; revolt would only destroy them. of his enemy, and fears he has contracted

Among the inhabitants of Gide's "juste milieu" one character, Amédée Fleurissoire, stands out as being particularly troublesome. He is, of all of Gide's characters, one of the least aware, and was no doubt intended to be the most ridiculous of the sots of Gide's last sotie; he certainly suffers the greatest physical torment at the hand of his creator. Yet his ignorance, or innocence, seems so undeserving of this treatment that he begins to take on a sort of nobility beneath his ridiculous exterior. the difference between his and Amédée is Gide's "Don Quixote", but while Cervantes' knight was demented, Gide's crusader is simply dull. Although never awakened from his ignorance, he is stirred to leave his monotonous, sedentary existence to go out and prove himself. Confronted with the kidnapping of the Pope, he does not, like a pious hypocrite, dig into his pocket to help finance the crusade. Instead, he abandons home, wife, and position to devote himself to the salvation of the symbol of right and order: "Qu'à moi soit réservé cela! plein d'une admiration et d'une reconnaissance attendrie: il avait donc enfin trouvé sa

raison d'être."<sup>45</sup> No doubt he does not understand the significance of the false Pope, but that does not matter. The important thing is that something must be done, and he is going to do it, whatever it may be.

On his way he becomes the victim of all kinds of torment. After surviving ordeals of fleas, bedbugs, and mosquitoes, he loses his virginity to the mistress of his enemy, and fears he has contracted syphilis as a punishment for straying from his holy mission. The unwitting dupe of the "kidnappers," he believes he is carrying out an important mission when he is thrown from the train, the victim of a gratuitous crime, and dies without ever learning his mistake.

On the surface the situation seems quite ridiculous, the extreme of unthinking, counterfeit existence. But if nobility can be found in the soul of Don Quixote while he battles barbers and windmills, can it not also be found in Amédée? Is not the difference between him and Thésée merely a matter of degree? If Oedipe can find meaning to life in acting as if he were free, Amédée can do the same in acting as if he had a mission. Within the limits of his intelligence he is as successful as Ménalque is within his limits. The key to his success lies in his not living long enough to be disillusioned.

Gide was not preaching the value of "ignorance is bliss." Such a lesson would in fact be impossible, for in order to learn it one must already understand that other possibilities exist, and by then a return to ignorance is impossible. What Gide does demonstrate in

<sup>45</sup> Les Caves du Vatican, p. 122.

VIII

Amédée is that each of us has his own capacity for life, and that authentic existence depends on our performing to the limits of that capacity. To underperform is to lead a counterfeit, meaningless existence; to misjudge one's capacity is to court disaster.

Conclusion

Quel que soit le livre que j'écris, je ne m'y donne jamais tout entier, et le sujet qui me réclame le plus instamment, sitôt après, se développe cependant à l'autre extrémité de moi-même. On ne trace pas aisément le trajectoire de son esprit; sa courbe ne se révèle que dans mon style et s'échappe à plus d'un. Et quelquefois, dans mon dernier écrit, j'ai des détails qui me ressemblent, qu'il se distingue à cet endroit de mon dernier-né que je suis le plus différent.

Gide made this entry in his journal in 1909, when critics were wondering how L'Immoraliste and Le Partisan could have come from the same author. Here he makes it clear that he did not intend, in any of his works, to propose a way of life that should be followed. Instead, his works are experiments of various approaches to life. He asked that each man examine his own life and find for himself the path best suited to his own needs and experiences, rather than merely accept what was offered to him.

At the beginning of this study we particularly sought for ingredients indispensable for a successful way of life. Three foreign writers who greatly influenced Gide all demonstrated the need to escape from conventional patterns of life; to examine one's life. We have seen this need expressed by some of Gide's heroes, even those who were usually so calm and great themselves. Those who

<sup>16</sup> André Gide, Journal, 1909, in Œuvres complètes, t. VI, p. 102.

VIII

Conclusion

Quel que soit le livre que j'écris, je ne m'y donne jamais tout entier, et le sujet qui me réclame le plus instamment, sitôt après, se développe cependant à l'autre extrémité de moi-même.

On ne tracera pas aisément la trajectoire de mon esprit; sa courbe ne se révélera que dans mon style et échappera à plus d'un. Si quelqu'un, dans mon dernier écrit, pense saisir enfin ma ressemblance, qu'il se détrompe: c'est toujours de mon dernier-né que je suis le plus différent.<sup>46</sup>

Gide made this entry in his journal in 1909, when critics were wondering how L'Immoraliste and La Porte étroite could have come from the same author. Here he makes it clear that he did not intend, in any of his works, to propose a way of life that should be followed. Instead, his works are examinations of various approaches to life. He asked that each man examine his own life and find for himself the path best suited to his own needs and capabilities, rather than merely accept what was offered to him.

At the beginning of this study we postulated certain basic ingredients indispensable for a successful way of life. Three foreign writers who greatly influenced Gide all demonstrated the need to escape from conventional patterns in order to examine one's life. We have seen this need expressed by many of Gide's heroes, even those who were unable to make that break themselves. Those who

<sup>46</sup> André Gide, Journal, 11<sup>e</sup> Cahier, in Oeuvres Complètes, v. VI, p. 402.

do escape conventionality and fail, do so because of failures to fully understand their own natures and the demands of life. We found in Goethe the need for progression in one's life, and found this reflected in the fear of possession on the part of many of Gide's heroes. The lack of progression is essential to the failure of two of Gide's major unsuccessful characters. Michel defines his life by defying conventional morality, so that change is not advancement, but mere substitution of equal pleasures. Likewise, Alissa's life is based on sacrifice, and when she no longer has anything to sacrifice it becomes static.

The source of this progress is found in Dostoievsky; it is the recognition of both the celestial and the terrestrial sides of human nature. By accepting these opposing tendencies, hedonism and altruism, one is able to advance instead of simply making a static substitution of pleasures, or of sacrifices. Ménélaque and Prométhée succeed in balancing these opposing tendencies, and Oedipe and Thésée do so also; such an equilibrium is lacking in Alissa and Michel.

This recognition of both sides of life also provides the restraint and discipline that Nietzsche demanded. As Gide himself commented, his "ironic" works examine approaches to life that take one attitude to excess. Such characters lack the restraint that is necessary for meaningful existence.

Not all of Gide's heroes are capable of breaking with tradition. The narrator of Paludes, Julius de Baraglioul, Édouard and Saül are aware of the need to make that break, but lack the strength necessary

for it. Still others never know that the need exists. The latter include the audience for which Gide intended his work. Like his novelist-characters, he wanted to awaken men to the fact of counterfeit existence. He did not claim to be able to lead them out of that counterfeit; he merely wanted to show them that escape was possible, and to demonstrate some of the pitfalls along the way out. Beyond that it is up to the individual to choose for himself the goals and values of his own life.

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