

Verbundkatalog Kalliope

Cocteau and Gide.

Mann, Klaus

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By K l a u s M a n n

When I first came to Paris, in 1926, André Gide and Jean Cocteau were by far the most spectacular figures of the literary world. Not that their positions were undisputed - quite the contrary. Cocteau was violently attacked by the Surrealists, ridiculed by the conservatives, and ignored by the Academicians. As for André Gide, the nationalistic and ultra-Catholic press did its utmost to vilify and denounce him. But even the rampant invectives darted against him by reactionary fanatics like Henri Massis could not mar or diminish his solid fame. After the publication of The Counterfeiters, in 1925, he was widely recognized as the leading French novelist since the death of Proust.

It is not an exaggeration to say that both Cocteau and Gide - each in his particular way - were instrumental in shaping the attitude and the vocabulary of the intellectual vanguard in France during a certain period. Their influence waned - Cocteau's more so than Gide's - when the political issues became predominant in the consciousness of French youth. About 1935, the literary scene belonged to activist and heroic types like ~~Malraux~~ Malraux, Aragon, and Saint-Exupéry (the last of whom is, incidentally, one of Gide's discoveries.) In 1925, however, the drawing rooms and cafés of Paris were teeming with juvenile characters molded according to Cocteau's playful fancy or to the complex vision of André Gide.

The salons I knew in Paris hardly differed in any essential way from those frequented and portrayed by Balzac, a hundred years before. The young men I met in the home of the Duchess de Clermont-Tonnerre, at Charles de Noailles, or at the Polignacs, were as slick and ambitious as are Stendhal's Julien Sorel or Balzac's dynamic dandies.

Yet a new shade seemed added to the repertoire of their gestures and intonations - a sort of problematical innocence ^{and} sensual compliance; something childlike and yet depraved. The adventurers of the Nineteenth Century tradition were dashing and purposeful, even when displaying a Byronic weariness. Their more fragile successors of 1925, on the contrary, maintained a quality of disarming and perturbing helplessness, for all their overstressed cynicism.

Those who tried to imitate the heroes of André Gide's books were in general more resilient and spiritual than the ones bewitched by Cocteau. His master novel, Les Enfants Terribles, ^{is} ~~was~~ a dangerous gospel for receptive and cellow minds. Dallying with narcotics and the risky anomalies of sex, those corruptible adolescents reveled in the dubious thrills of self-annihilation. Exclusively concerned with somatic problems and pleasures, they still appeared strangely lost and uprooted in this material world.

This pose and pathos - at once savage and subtle, saturnine and frivolous - was by no means reserved to any particular nation or social class. It was a type, an attitude to be found at any place from Oxford to Heidelberg, from Villefranche-sur-mer to Salzburg, Prague, and Warsaw. Just as a certain sector of a certain generation could be enthralled by the exuberant appeal of Goethe's Werther, a certain sector of a certain generation - my own - responded, for a while, to certain images and persuasions. It was this strange community of an idiom and an emotional climate to which Jean Cocteau referred when addressing me - in a preface he contributed to the French edition ~~to~~ of my Alexander novel - as one of his "compatriots": "je veux dire, d'un jeune homme qui habite mal sur la terre et qui parle sans niaiserie le dialecte du coeur."

I met Cocteau about one year after the death of Raymond Radiguet - the young poet whose precocious genius he ~~had~~ discovered and publicized. Jean had just recovered from a nervous breakdown, a disintoxication cure (he ~~had~~ stopped temporarily smoking opium), and his sensational conversion to Catholicism, which he described and analysed in a voluminous open letter to Jacques Maritain. He lived in his mother's ~~de~~ apartment, rue d'Anjou, where I was received by Maurice Sachs, the journalist and lecturer, all dressed up in a becoming soutane. Jean talked a good deal about the wickedness of big cities and the beauty of simple life.

Since then I have visited him in many a dwelling, but it always remained the same: only the young men and their costumes changed. Besides Jean, while moving from one building into another, never did leave the district around the Madeleine - fixated, as it were, to the sight of the basilica.

He lives in a world of his own - a bedeviled sphere full of secret sigils and allusions; at once glaringly artificial and of unquestionable authenticity. The magic apparatus with which he surrounds himself seems an integral part of his being. The sketches by Picasso and models of sailing boats, the plaster casts of male feet and female hands (the latter being dressed with crimson rubber gloves); the canvases by Marie Laurencin, Dali, and Chirico; the portraits of Sarah Bernhardt, Nijinsky, and Radiguet; the antique busts decorated with purple draperies; the Chinese pipes and yellowed sport magazines; the skeletons, mirrors, lamps, and diving bells - this whole inspired mess seems to grow out of his nervous, dexterous hands as the protoplasm emanates from the medium's body.

Cocteau, who looks troubled and bewildered when he has to walk from the Place de la Concorde to the Opéra, feels evidently at ease in the midst of his uncanny bric-a-brac. Nimble and brisk he capers

among the gaudy atrocities with which his apartment is crammed. And how strangely relaxed and concentrated appears his lean, ageless face when he sprawls on the pillows to prepare another "petite pipette" ^{for} ~~from~~ himself. A weird kind of peacefulness transfigures and hardens his features while he is occupied with sucking the spicy reek, whose fragrance Picasso has called "less stupid" than all other odours on earth. "Liquor provokes paroxysms of folly," Cocteau is wont to say: "Opium provokes paroxysms of wisdom."

Undoubtedly, he is one of the most gifted beings I have ever known and, perhaps, the most nearly perfect one. That is not to say that I think him the greatest character or the greatest mind or the greatest poet. (He has written great poetry, though.) He may be a morbid clown, a treacherous freak, and what not. But he is not to be equaled as a phenomenon - something irresponsible and irrefutable as are rainbows, peacocks, or shooting stars. Can a rainbow lie? Is a peacock unreliable? The display of their grace is their truth. Can a rope-dancer betray principles? He has none. Neither has Jean Cocteau.

He is neither a moralist nor a liar but, primarily and essentially, a performer. His only principle is, not to be a dilettante. Equally remote from the barricade and the ivory tower, he leads his risky life on the high trapeze - the most exacting and ingenious acrobat of his epoch.

You cannot afford to slouch or potter, up there, on the tight, vibrating rope. You have to be soulless and fearless to execute - year after year: with unabated alertness - the dazzling stunt of the Grand Ecart. The acrobat - almost heroic in his dogged conscientiousness - summons no alternatives but the one: to succeed or to break his neck. Cocteau always succeeds.

Whatever he performs or produces - it clicks. His nightmares and

hallucinations are composed with crystalline accuracy - always strictly in keeping with the respective medium employed. His cartoons are as brilliant as his poetry: in fact, he is the one writer able to illustrate his own works without blurring or dislocating his vision. His dramatic fantasies equal his novels in suspense and conciseness. The songs and sketches he wrote for the vedettes of the music hall are no less effective than his famous librettos for the opera or the ballet. I have watched him in the studio when he directed his remarkable film, Le Sang d'un Poète: he commanded the same briskness and bravura he displays in his conversation.

The hours spent in his company assume in my recollection a savour both of burlesque show and magic ritual. I visualize Jean Cocteau - a jesting wizard and bewitched jester. His feline, weightless body seems to be withered and impelled by intoxicating siroccos. The same glowing breath has dried out his hair, distorted his lips and eyebrows, parched and shriveled his skin. He has the eyes of a hypnotist and the hands of a pickpocket. His smile is that of a cunning infant or an infantile murderer. He adorns himself with feathers, scarfs, and daggers, as he impersonates birds, statues, and film stars. He lies whenever he opens his mouth. All his aperçus are as deceitful and as revealing as is the cryptic mot he chose as motto for his autobiography:

"Je suis un mensonge qui dit toujours la vérité."

Cocteau wants us to believe that there is a mystery hidden under his tinsel disguises. But, perhaps, there is no mystery? Maybe his masquerade is an aim in itself? He is, perhaps, Narcissus who pretends to be the Sphinx?

The real Sphinx does not indulge in arias and capricious. She is discreetly demoniac.

It was Cocteau who observed that "the mystery begins only when all confessions are made:" which is as truthful an aphorism as are all his lies. If Gide had coined this sentence, it would have been truly true.

"I don't like your lips," Oscar Wilde said to André Gide. "They are straight like the lips of those who have never lied. I will teach you the art of lying to the end that your lips become beautiful and voluptuous as are the lips of an antique mask."

And yet the meticulous confessions of that tight-lipped Protestant, André Gide, are more puzzling and iridescent than the most sparkling stunts of either Jean or Oscar. How harmless appear their antics compared with Gide's unfathomable candidness!

Cocteau, the embodiment of lie, says always the whole truth when he lies. André Gide, on the contrary, always lies when he says the truth; for he has too much truth: he can reveal but aspects of his complex, contradictory being.

Yes, he lied when he truthfully said: "I am the Immoralist"; for he also is a passionate moralist. His Christian pathos is authentic beyond any doubt; but so is his pagan fervency. The structure of his mind has been molded by Protestant traditions; but Catholic moods have played an integral role in his life. He is the legitimate heir of ^Mediterranean lucidity - with a penchant for the romantic confusions of the Germanic soul and the nebulous grandeur of the ~~the~~ Russian. Goethe meant almost as much to him as Racine; Dostojevski, more than Balzac. Among his great mentors and models are Nietzsche and Whitman, Shakespeare and the English novelists, especially Fielding and Dickens.

All potentialities of the European genius are integrated in the amplitude of Gide's spirit. His intellectual biography is involved and dramatic like a fugue by Johann Sebastian Bach (whom he admires most among all composers); whereas the experience of Jean Cocteau is essentially static, for all his quivering agility. Small wonder that the

immutable enfant terrible - at once erratic and sterile - is fascinated by the wide scope which his older and greater brother embraces and dominates. "How I envied him his Protestant childhood!" Cocteau exclaims, in the preface to one of his early books, Le Rappel à l'Ordre: "I visualized him skating with singular grace on the waters of Russia, with a Bible in his hands. In beautiful English style he wrote his name on the ice..."

I recall having asked André Gide how he liked the bizarre silhouette Cocteau presented of him. He produced a brief, nasal sound - rather a snuff than a laugh. "Ah! celui-là!" he said, with a sort of humorous exasperation, as if complaining about a naughty child. And - half-amused, half-irritated: "quel blagueur! Toujours des chinoiseries!"

~~How distinctly I remember the most minute details of my first meeting with André Gide!~~ I think it was Ernst Robert Curtius, the most eminent German student of Romance languages, who ~~had~~ introduced me to ^{André Gide.} ~~him~~ Gide asked me for luncheon. I fetched him at his apartment, rue Vaneau, near the Boulevard St. Germain. The young man who received me was Marc Allegret, - subsequently one of the most successful French film directors. The studio was crammed with books, papers, and pictures piled up on shelves, chairs, and tables - inundating even the floor.

Allegret told me that Gide and he were on the point of leaving for a journey to the interior of Africa. As for the books, they were to be sold at auction. I opened one of them at random, and was surprised to find it adorned with a cordial dedication autographed by the author. Wouldn't the writer in question be rather hurt - I dared ask - by such an obvious lack of esteem and delicacy? Marc's smile was wry and not without malice. Precisely this - he explained to me - was what his great friend was driving at. He meant to shock some of his dear colleagues and to teach them a lesson. For most of them had dastardly let

him down when he recently challenged the Philistines by releasing one of his early essays he had withheld up to that point. The scandalizing book was called Corydon - a series of Platonic dialogues dealing with the problem of homoeroticism. The vociferous indignation of all respectable people had to be expected, considering the provocative frankness of Gide's text. What disappointed him was the treacherous attitude of his fellow-writers: they chimed in the venomous chorus. Hence now his defiant gesture.

Curiously, I cannot recall the moment of Gide's entrance nor do I recollect what he said and looked like when I was presented to him. It is as though he had sneaked into the room, noiselessly, and spirited me away in the pleats of his loose, weather-worn pelerine. The first picture of him that looms up is that of a quaint, haggard wanderer by my side - vigorously striding towards the Luxembourg Gardens.

His face - nervous and changeable - wears a half-mask of shadow falling from the brim of his slouch hat. At the first look, you might take him for a faintly eccentric professor - the type of man who would spend his days between his laboratory and outdoor exercises. In reality, Gide has an admitted animosity to gymnastics. "Pas de sport!" was his succinct reply when friends inquired of him after the secret of his youthful appearance. I like to imagine the diabolic grimace he may have made when disclosing this anti-athletic credo. There can be an uncanny flash in his eyes - a momentary twinkl^e~~ing~~ altering, for one startling moment, the placidness of his brow.

It amused me to watch him askance while he lingered in front of a fountain or a fine old building to elucidate its architectural merits. He talked with scholarly elegance - his head bent slightly sideways, his eyes narrowed to two glimmering slits, the cigarette dangling from his lips. I expected him any moment to drop his cumbersome disguise

and appear in his true, or at least in a truer, form - as a faun-like shepherd, perhaps, or as one of those aging warriors whose lean and muscular thoraxes are presented in certain antique reliefs. But he remained the inconspicuous gentleman in a wide, colourless mantle - a sensitive wanderer with slit eyes, narrow lips, and admirably shaped temples.

We had our meal in a modest brasserie, whose terrace faces the Luxembourg. Gide talked mostly about German literature - dwelling on the particulars of certain products by Goethe, in whose works he seemed greatly interested at the time. His features brightened with an almost sensual joy when he praised Clavigo or Die Wahlverwandtschaften. "C'est très, très curieux!" he kept saying, as though discussing something utterly mysterious and a trifle risqué. "C'est prodigieux!" And he snuffed briefly, which was a nervous habit with him.

He smoked almost incessantly, but after the meal apparently forgot to light himself another cigarette. When I offered him one, he refused. "It's a terrible vice," he said, with an ambiguous grin. "Usually I am too weak to resist." And he added, while his eyes stared into space, for one pensive moment: "I suppose I am fairly strong in wanting things and getting whatever I want. But when it comes to rejecting a temptation - to resisting evil... alors, ça c'est une autre histoire..."

There is one other moment which presently jumps to my mind whenever I think of this luncheon. A young boy passed by and tried to sell us a bunch of lilacs - withered, colourless stuff. He was ten or eleven years old - an ugly little creature with large, intelligent eyes in a sallow face. Gide gave him a handful of change but renounced the flowers - a gesture which obviously impressed the lad but at the same time somehow hurt his feelings. Gide seemed extremely stimulated and intrigued by this ambivalent reaction: "Did you notice that wry glance

he gave me? He was very offended. Did you ever pay a prostitute and then spurn her services? She'll give you the same look - precisely the same puzzled, disapproving glimpse. The really amusing thing about it is that the boy would much rather steal the money than accept it as a charity... C'est bien curieux, ça! C'est prodigieux..."

It was the same accent of delight and curiosity he had had when raving about Goethe.

All this seems to have happened hundred of years ago.

It has happened yesterday. It remains alive in my heart - relevant to my daily problems. No phenomenon of real validity can ever become stale or obsolete. An authentic personality is indestructible. Both Gide and Cocteau are true personalities and true artists. I shall always be grateful for having known them.

Needless to say that my admiration for André Gide is infinitely deeper and purer than what I feel towards Jean Cocteau. Yet if I had to renounce the memory of either acquaintance, I am not sure which one I would choose to sacrifice.

No doubt, the friendship of a great man is more valuable than the spectacle of a great performer. But I would know André Gide - in fact, I would feel like his friend - even if I had never met him. I would still know him the way I know Stendhal or Hölderlin or Kierkegaard. But it means an irretrievable loss to have missed the personal contact with Byron or Wilde or Verlaine. Cocteau belongs to their spectacular ilk. Not to have seen Cocteau is like knowing Nijinsky or Sarah Bernhardt only through pictures or anecdotes.

Gide's psychological drama is completely inherent in his work. With inexorable probity he registers and analyzes the constant permutations and contradictions of his spiritual quest. His self-portrait is drawn with the religious conscientiousness of an Albrecht Dürer.

Every book he wrote discloses and elucidates one particular aspect of his intellectual physiognomy. A Proteus trained in the exacting school of Protestant morality, he never tries to please or to impress. His sole ambition is to scrutinize and formulate the truth.

Gide disdains, or even fears, sensational success. Like Stendhal and Nietzsche, he wants to be read and recognized by future generations. "I know perfectly well," he says, "that I have no chance to win my case, except at the court of appeal."

Cocteau's case is lost, unless he succeeds here and now. His posthumous fame - like that of the great dandies and criminals - will be but a pale reflection of his present glory.

Gide cannot afford one inexact or superficial sentence, lest he may spoil his future reputation. Cocteau cannot afford to waste one season: his legend compels him to remain visible and alert like a prize fighter or a prima ballerina.

Gide is willing to risk even ~~a~~ scandal, rather than ~~to~~ betray or falsify the truth. He scandalized the public with his erotic confessions because he would have deemed it dishonest to conceal so essential a part of his experience.

The same kind of extreme sincerity prompted him to come out with his much discussed conversion to Communism - that high-minded and naive attempt of an aristocratic intelligence to coordinate his views and divinations to the scheme of an organized and collective effort. The aging individualist tried fervently - and vainly - to conceive the Soviet experiment as the guarantee of man's coming greatness and intrinsic perfectibility. His Socialistic credo had but little to do with Marxism, but was admittedly derived from Christian tenets and promises.

His bold and childlike hopes were baffled by the imperfect reality of the Soviet Union. The Bolsheviks thought him ungrateful and treacherous

when he repaid their bountiful hospitality with loveless criticism. His anti-Soviet pamphlet, Retour de L'U.R. S. S., ⁽¹⁹³⁵⁾ was as violent a challenge to the Comintern as his pro-Soviet statements had been to the bourgeois^{ie}. From his pure and detached point of view he was right when he said, in the Preface to his famous pamphlet, that the lie, "if only the lie of concealment," may seem opportune under circumstances, but in reality plays always the enemy's game. Politically untrained, he forgot that in the dubious sphere of partisan polemics every acknowledgement of weakness or corruption in our own camp is likely to be exploited by a reckless and cunning foe.

"I didn't anticipate such a tiresome hullabaloo," Gide told me when the Soviet controversy was at its peak. "What's the whole fuss about, after all? I just described, as precisely as possible, what I've seen in Russia. It seems that we have either to lie, or else to face the scandal provoked by the truth."

As for Cocteau, he not only accepts scandal but actually seeks and incites it as the most thrilling form of applause. Even his conversion to Catholicism had a scandalous tinge. His mystic bonmots somehow sound~~ed~~ like blasphemies. It is at once shocking and touching when Cocteau suggests - in his Letter to Jacques Maritain - that Heaven sometimes employs gloves to touch us without dirtying itself, and that Raymond Radiguet was such a glove of Heaven. In the same context he admits expressly that he "never ~~avoided~~ ^{shunned} scandal:" "Je le crois indispensable." And he boasts that his ballets, Parade and Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel, caused "the last theatrical scandals on a large scale."

Some years later, in 1930, he decided that it was dull - or impossible - to shock the Philistines any more. La Voix Humaine - a one-act thriller first produced ^{at} the Comédie Française - was supposed to stir "un scandale de banalité," to challenge and annoy the snobs and the young, whom Cocteau calls "les pires snobs." The new formula he launched at that point

and followed for years to come, appears for the first time in Opium, Journal d'une désintoxication, and reads as foll: "C'est pas le public qu'il faut choquer, c'est l'élite."

According to this axiom, the former leader of the vanguard, the friend of and promoter of Picasso, Stravinsky, and Chirico, became almost a hack. He wrote series of articles for Le Figaro and made a trip around the world as a special correspondent of the Paris Soir. In the same period, however, he composed his finest, most poetic play, La Machine Infernale. Also, his newspaper articles - especially the autobiographical sketches, Portraits-Souvenir - are rich in engaging things. Cocteau's journalistic style is less tense, less pointed and epigrammatic than his narrative or essayistic prose. Writing for the ~~big~~ popular ^{press} ~~sheets~~, he commands a certain casual elegance, which is missing in his artistic tours de force. He relaxes, becomes chatty and unassuming.

It was André Gide who once reproached Jean Cocteau for his lack of ease and nonchalance. Consequently Cocteau made an effort to unbend. As usual, he succeeded - thanks to Gide's advice. Grateful by nature, he paid homage to his master whom he likes to call his friend: "C'est à Gide que je dois ces Portraits-Souvenir..."

And, one year later - in 1936 - he reaffirmed his gratitude in a dedication to André Gide, preceding the book edition of his traveling articles. This dedication featured on the front page of Mon Premier Voyage repeats almost literally the text of the cordial statement ~~as~~ included in the Portraits-Souvenir.

Cocteau, who seems inexhaustibly brilliant, at times repeats his fire-works - in his conversation as well as in his writings.

Gide never repeats himself. He would keep silence for years, rather than to say the same thing twice. But his painstaking honesty sometimes results in self-contradictions.

Cocteau is haunted by certain images and emotional fixations - early traumas, childhood memories, deadly snowballs, a whole set of magic and playful devices.

Gide is preoccupied with ideas. He is as essentially a moralist as Cocteau is ~~essentially~~ an aestheticist. Gide's work is dominated by certain dialectical tensions like the antithesis between Good and Evil, or between Freedom and Discipline. None of these issues has the slightest relevance to Cocteau's irresponsible vision.

Cocteau dwells in an artificial paradise, which is static and sterile - a barren, glacial Elysium. In his Letter to Maritain he recognizes opium as a kind of Ersatz religion: "L'opium ressemble à la religion dans la mesure où un illusionniste ressemble à Jésus."

Gide does not believe in dwelling anywhere, not even in paradise. To him, paradise is a problem, not a possession. Like Goethe's Faust, he conceives life not as a static being but as a perpetual becoming, an unending movement towards aims unknown. Both his religious and his social creed spring from this basic belief. Alissa, the pious heroine of The Strait Gate, formulates his own feeling when she writes: "I imagine the celestial bliss, not as a fusion with God, but as a continuous, infinite approach.... In fact, if I were not afraid of playing with words, I might daresay that I would sneer at a bliss that is not progressive."

Gide's word, "Le Paradis est toujours à refaire," connotes a complex moral and political philosophy - the concept and postulate of a perpetual evolution.

But, undeniably, Cocteau is at times admitted - if only for brief, transient moments - to the paradisiac region, which Gide keeps seeking with so much fervent persistence. Dexterous and daring like a wicked child or a childlike thief, Jean occasionally manages to sneak through the strait gate and to enter the sacred zone. Some of his early poems, like Plain-Chant (1923), and certain passages in Les Enfants Terribles and Le Machine

Infernale

confirm and echo a flighty but intense experience in otherworldly spheres from which Gide - less winged and less easy-going - remains inexorably excluded.

Small wonder that André Gide despises and at the same time envies Jean Cocteau. Gide's Journal - now published in its entirety, from 1889 to 1939 - contains only scarce and rather chilly references to the younger colleague. The most extensive entry with regard to Cocteau is dated from August, 1914. Gide gives a detailed and surprisingly loveless description of his meeting with Jean, "at an 'English Tea'." The paragraph opens with the following sentences; ~~which are most revealing as to Cocteau's shortcomings and mannerisms:~~

"I did not look forward to seeing him again, despite his exceedingly friendly nature. For he is incapable of being serious, and all his thoughts his puns, his feelings, this extraordinary flavor of his chatty talk was a shock to me like some luxury object on display at times of starvation and mourning. He is dressed almost like a soldier, and under the lashes of the day-to-day developments he looks much better. Otherwise he has not changed, and just ignores the martial atmosphere around him."

Gide then portrays, with merciless ^{minuteness} ~~naturalism~~, the mannerisms ~~and~~ of Cocteau's conversation and attitude. The cruelty of this sketch is all the more disconcerting as Cocteau - throughout this particular meeting as throughout his life - tried evidently his best to please and impress André Gide. It is odd and touching to see the rakish, elegant youth woo and court the grave, inaccessible master, who states dryly that he was "not amused."

The concluding remark of Gide's note, however, reveals the innermost reason for his coldness towards Cocteau. "He has that carelessness of the playboy," observes the older man, who certainly has no playboyish features: "And when I am with him, I always feel particularly clumsy, heavy,

downhearted."

Gide was irritated by Cocteau in 1914. It is unlikely that he could bear his company in 1942, when mourning and starvation reign in France once again. Neither Gide nor Cocteau wanted to leave their humiliated, tormented country. But what a difference in their attitudes!

Cocteau loathed and ridiculed the Nazis before they invaded France. In 1935, he said to me: "The Third Reich is a distasteful joke that lasts unduly long." I remember having heard from him many an irreverent remark of a similar kind.

He must have been very saddened and discouraged when he composed La Fin du Potomak - his last publication before the collapse of France. A loose conglomeration of narrative fragments, aphoristic notes, and poetry, it is undoubtedly lacking in that artistic élan he formerly commanded. Infinite melancholy resounds throughout the book. In parts it is nothing but a whimper and stammer alluring and anticipating death. Only in one grand and grisly chapter La Fin du Potomak proves the compelling intensity of Cocteau's traditional style. The uncanny hallucination, which forms the climax and heart of the book, is called, characteristically, The Ruins of Paris.

It seems, however, that Cocteau has meanwhile managed to settle down and to arrange his life, amongst the debris of his beloved city. A prodigious chameleon - faithless, soulless, indescribable - he adapted his poses and vagaries sufficiently to the barbarian standards of the ~~Nazi~~ invaders to make his living, to be tolerated. The alternative confronting him was, to commit suicide or to be a success, even in Nazi Paris. Suicide - as he once said to me - is, in his opinion, the most dreary triviality conceivable. Needless to say, he would make friends with ravenous beasts, rather than to do something trivial.

Cocteau is not a free ^aman but enslaved in a double sense - by his

vanity and by opium. Addicted to pipes and to publicity, he is at the ~~mercy~~ mercy of the Nazi governor, who could him deprive of both.

André Gide depends neither on drugs nor on the shoddy laurels of the Boulevards. He is free. "Me voici libre," he exclaims on the last page of his diary, "comme je ne l'ai jamais été; libre effroyablement..."

What a proud and bitter word to say for an aging, homeless wanderer! Seventy years old, he is more solitary and more independent than ever before in his life. During the ~~last~~ ^{last} five years, he abandoned or lost the last emotional binds and the last illusions. Soon after his ill-starred political adventure, he was grieved by the death of his wife. A meek and pious woman, she had spent most of her life in Cuverville, Gide's country estate. Only a few intimates knew her and were in a position to gauge the central and delicate role she played in her husband's complex ~~and~~ ~~erotic~~ biography. In his published Journal there are scarcely any allusions to what he calls "le drame secret de ma vie."

During the war he sojourned in a village, near Nice, mostly engaged in helping the anti-Fascist refugees harassed by the semi-Fascist French authorities. The German invasion found him at Vichy - not yet the capital, at the time, of a so-called unoccupied zone. A mutual friend - Annette Kolb, a writer of half-German, half-French extraction - told me ~~that~~ ^{that} she watched, together with André Gide, the Nazi troops enter Vichy. Gide carried a volume of Goethe's works to the promenade, which resounded with the rugged commands of Nazi officers and the frightening noise produced by thousands of marching robots. Goethe was intent on mineralogical studies when the Napoleonic armies swept his fatherland. His French disciple, Gide, was absorbed in Goethe's august and lucid prose, while Hitler's devastating gibberish reverberated throughout a paralyzed France.

Gide lived to witness the sordid conspiracy between Berlin and Vichy. Undaunted, incorruptible as ever, he refused to "collaborate."

He saw the unprecedented affliction, the utter disgrace and woe of his people. The grand old man of French letters - cloistering himself, once again, somewhere in the Midi - was silenced and insulted by the Fascist mob: the "Anciens Combattants" booed and threatened him as he tried to deliver a literary address, on the occasion of a writers' meeting.

He severed from his old publishing house, the Nouvelle Revue Française, when that meritorious firm began to acquiesce in Nazi philosophy. He was saddened by the betrayal of Marc Allegret, whom he had loved like his son. The ambitious youth valued his career more than anything he had been taught by his mentor. He made his peace with the Nazis. He turned out to be just a movie director.

The last time I had word from André Gide was in the summer of 1941. The letter came from the small town on the Riviera where he settled down when the war began. The text of his note refutes all rumours concerning his plans to come to the United States. Evidently he has no intention of leaving France at this point. He sent me wishes for the success of a magazine I was editing at the time, and added: "I shall try my best to forward an article to you before long. But I don't dare to promise anything; for I feel, four days out of five (if not nine out of ten) terribly remote from my work. Besides there are so many 'considerations' that slow down my writing..."

The quotation marks around the word "considerations" are more suggestive, alas, than anything he hazarded to say in his letter.

Cocteau's compliance in Nazi barbarism is a melancholy event but was to be foreseen and, therefore, should neither surprise nor hurt us. But it would have been almost unbearable to see Gide commit an act meanness or treachery. He has committed nothing of the kind.

Cocteau is a relic and a curiosity - a brittle remnant of Europe's

feverish
~~absolute~~

magnificence. Gide is a rocher de bronze of Occidental culture - the most trustworthy guardian of its lofty past, a guarantor of its future.

I visualize Jean Cocteau performing his magic gags in the snowy twilight of a chaotic hotel room. The air around him is imbued with the scent of the Chinese drug. While he prepares another "petite pipette," a portly gentleman on the couch helps himself to a little morphium injection. The jolly giant - massive and bedizened - is Herr Hermann Göring, who relaxes in Jean's boudoir. He guffaws - all vociferous cordiality - as his sprightly host produces some of his oft-tested clowneries. Jean imitates Marlene Dietrich, ^{a parrot} ~~his grandfather~~, and Adolf Hitler. Hermann has the time of his life. Convulsed with laughter, he even forgets to attend the mass execution scheduled for midnight sharp.

It is four o'clock in the morning when the monstrous Marshal finally retires - leaving Cocteau in a state of utter weariness and agitation. In the wan light of the early hour he looks like a nervous mummy - fidgety, withered, all corroded by his vices, vanities, and visions.

"Adieu!" he beckons - exhausted and yet coquettish, while withdrawing to the inner sanctum of his apartment - the place where he treasures his finest pipes, Radiguet's portrait, some pebbles Picasso gave him in Rome, and the rubber gloves by means of which Heaven touched him without dirtying itself.

"Adieu, lecteur. Je me couche.

"Je suis ~~un~~ ravagé par la poésie comme certains docteurs par l'emploi des rayons X."

If Cocteau's skin is parched by mystic, terrible rays, Gide's face is tanned by sunshine and salty breezes. I imagine him walking along the Mediterranean beach, somewhere between Nice and Cannes - slightly stooping but still elastic; an ageless wanderer in his dark pelerine.

His features - proud and sensitive under a worn slouch hat - are marked with the traces and scars of deep adventure.

What is he looking for, in the floating haze of the dawn? Which mystery puzzles him? What promise makes him smile? He continues his promenade - lonely but not forlorn. Sober and inspired, he seems all absorbed in the ~~auguries~~^e of ~~this~~ beginning day - the savage cries of the gulls, the meaningful, fleet formations of the clouds and ~~the~~ waves, the wondrous messages carried to him by the wind.

To him, it is not difficult to overcome the bitterness of past frustrations, to endure the gloom and misery of the present. For what ~~has been~~^{was} means less to him than what is: what is, less than what could be and will be.

He is confident, I don't doubt it. I know that he believes in man and in man's future. He loves man and his future. ~~He~~ A long, active life - rich in triumph and in suffering - has made him understand that Wisdom is not in Reason but in Love.

New York,

June, 1942.