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led Jacques BARZUN, Professor
to History at Columbia University, is
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30 Oct. 49
General Tribune Book Review
Gide Themes

THESEUS.
By André Gide. Translated from
the French by John Russell. Litho-
graphs by Massimo Campigli. 100
pp. New York: New Directions.
\$52.50.

Reviewed by
JUSTIN O'BRIEN

THROUGHOUT his career An-
dré Gide has shown a remark-
able predilection for Greek my-
thology; characters such as Nar-
cissus, Oedipus and Prometheus
figure as heroes of individual
works and many others enter oc-
asionally. As early as 1911, he
began reflecting on Theseus as a
subject, but did not write the story
of that virile hero who slew the
Minotaur until his North African
exile during the recent war. First
published in French by Pantheon
Books in 1946, the book was re-
worked and shortened before ap-
pearing in Paris later the same
year. Beautifully translated by
John Russell, it now appears in a
sober and handsome volume hand-
set in Garamond by Hans Mar-
dersteig at Verona and illustrated
in twelve lithographs by the Ital-
ian painter, Massimo Campigli.
The text deserves such special
treatment, for it is a gem of ironic
story-telling, which may well be-
come one of the classics of our
time. Written when Gide was in
his seventy-fifth year, it assembles
many of his favorite themes. As
Theseus narrates in the first per-
son his deeds of prowess in over-
coming monsters and dominating
women, one recognizes the early
"I" fervor of the "Fruits of the Earth"
and the insistence upon self-
knowledge in order to achieve self-
realization. It is equally character-
istic of Gide that the famous
labyrinth should be psychological
in nature and that Icarus should
have gone mad through attempting
to escape it upward.

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In his "Thoughts on Greek
Mythology" Gide sees myths as
and rational explanations of natural
phenomena. What, consequently,
is more logical than to point out
that Theseus forgot on purpose to
change his sail or that bulls are
not carnivorous or that, though
a native of Crete, Theseus was
out of his element in sophisticated
Crete?
After the Cretan adventure and
the rape of Phaedra, Theseus be-
comes the assembler of cities and
builder of Athens. At this stage

Attica