

~~textuelle de novembre 1945. La Situation du Surréalisme entre les deux guerres de Breton, paru dans VVV en 1943 et le texte essentiel d'Eluard, "Evidence poétique" dans Donner à voir (1939) auraient dû être inclus dans l'utile liste d'ouvrages qui termine ce livre fort distingué, que d'autres désormais doivent suivre.~~

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*The Journals of André Gide.* Translated from the French, with an Introduction and Notes, by Justin O'Brien. Volume I: 1889-1913. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1947. Pp. xx + 390 + xix.

In recent months André Gide has had a good press in the United States. He has found himself spread on the first page of the *New York Times Book Review* at the same time that he has commanded a very respectable amount of space in other publications. This is a fitting tribute to the most profound writer, Proust not excepted, of twentieth-century French literature, and, for the literate American public whose ideas on contemporary French literature may have become distorted by the current existentialist smoke screen, this reintroduction to a powerful figure should have a salutary effect. The pretext and incentive for the dialogue on Gide is, of course, Professor Justin O'Brien's translation of the *Journals of André Gide* which critics have acclaimed as the work of an eminent English stylist.

This translation is also a work of scholarship. The annotations of the (originally) almost unannotated *Journals* are invaluable. Professor O'Brien has run down most of the literary references, and has pursued the purposely obscured references to individuals with great zeal. Gide himself aided in this enterprise and the Glossary of Persons which resulted runs to thirty pages of information precious to every student of Gide and to be consulted profitably by anyone working in contemporary French literature. Professor O'Brien, who regards the translation as preparation for an eventual study of Gide (*France-Amérique*, September 21, 1947), will doubtless concern himself with the problem of relating the *Journals* to Gide's other books. There is still work to be done in dating passages in the *Journals* more accurately than Gide has done and in studying the development of Gide's thought.

Undoubtedly translation is a costly method for studying the subtleties of an author's thought or style. But Gide himself has demonstrated that translation, properly practiced, can be both a creative process and a means to greater understanding. Probably Gide's own example inspired Professor O'Brien to undertake this task which he has so far had time to complete only through the first volume (equivalent to 383 pages of the 1320-page *Pléiade* edition which must still be augmented by recently published supplements). It is very likely that the French scholar will find occasional profit

1. Since this was written Gide has received the Nobel prize.

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in consulting the O'Brien translation;<sup>2</sup> but Professor O'Brien's service to the common reader is even greater; the translated *Journals* offer a chance to know a more authentic Gide than the one he may have encountered previously in the *Counterfeiters*. The twelve-page introductory essay on Gide, which is both informative and persuasive, will also be helpful.

In this essay, Professor O'Brien likens Gide's *Journals* to Montaigne's *Essays* and to Goethe's *Conversations with Eckermann*, and, on the jacket of the book, someone (I don't know whether it is Professor O'Brien) predicts that the *Journals* may one day become "the Montaigne's *Essays* of our age." The parallel is certainly apt. There is no doubt that the publication of the *Journals* has increased the moral stature of André Gide by revealing the more human side of his nature (his love of animals, his innate humility, etc.) and by disclosing his thought unadulterated by fiction, but all of Gide is not in the *Journals*, which seem to be largely a stylistic exercise (and how successful!) to overcome his inherent tendency to labor over style and to write with difficulty. Above all the *Journals* are rarely a confession and shed less light than the works of art on the vast inner struggle in Gide. Perhaps we should be thankful that the *Journals* maintain a humanistic dignity, but the gap is still there. Likewise the *Journals* do not seek to be, at least not essentially, a chronicle of events—many important events, personal and literary, are unrecorded: we learn little about the founding of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* except that correcting proofs took some time and that Gide himself had to copy the list of the five hundred or more subscribers. Nor are the *Journals* the raw materials of which Gide's books are made; they are not another *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* or a *Journal d'Edouard*. Rather we feel occasionally that Gide, when composing a work of art, is too busy to take us into his confidence; of the creative process we see only the insomnia and the headaches. With all these seeming gaps, however, the *Journals* are a powerful work because Gide used them frequently to explore his thought long before it crystallized in a work of art; the *Journals* register the thinking processes of one of the most subtle minds of our times. In fact, Gide is so essentially a thinker that he can seldom cut his works of art adrift; his characters are still gaunt abstractions who defy the usual laws of artistic creation. In many ways the works of art are more provocative than the *Journals*, but through the use of fiction, or as a result of distillation of the thought, they frequently cause Gide to be misunderstood. Gide himself has so many times insisted that his works are a whole (a reference to his 1946 *Thésée* as early as 1911 is only one instance of this) that it is essential to recognize the interdependence of the *Journals* themselves and the works of art. The *Journals* in themselves are so far

2. I have purposely avoided mentioning picayune discrepancies in the translation. But I cannot help being amused by Professor O'Brien's extensive use of the vernacular. By what stretch of the imagination, for example, does "parti-pris" become "sheer cussedness" (p. 156)?

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from being a whole that I wonder to what extent the uninitiated reader will be baffled by the gaps. At any rate, I am sure that his interest will not wane in spite of that because the *Journals* are a series of brilliant improvisations: the pursuit of a thought, a self-analysis, a chance encounter, an estimate of a person like Valéry, a visit to an exotic scene in Africa or Asia Minor, where Gide records his sensations with even more vividness than in the *Nouritures Terrestres*.

As Gide matures and as his *Journals* progress, the record of his thoughts and actions becomes even more interesting. It is to be hoped that Professor O'Brien will find the time in the next few years to complete this monumental translation which has already done so much to enhance the standing of contemporary French letters in this country.

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Andre Gide.