

GIDE IN THE FIRST PERSON: THE 'I' OF RELIGION AND SAME-SEX SEXUAL DESIRE

by

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## Abstract

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by

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André Gide's works are marked by a continual struggle what he perceived as the incompatible nature between his homosexuality and the religious morality that excluded it. This dissertation examines the ways in which André Gide deals with this struggle, and how through his fiction, he negotiates the lines between a belief in God and his personal sense of sexual otherness, while trying to achieve an authentic voice that mitigated the two.

Drawing from a range of theory and criticism from Gide studies and Queer studies, this work analyzes the themes of sexuality and religion in a range of Gide's works from the mid 1890s through 1925, including *Les Nourritures terrestres*, *Paludes*, *Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné*, *Les Caves du Vatican*, *L'Immoraliste*, *Le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue*, *La Porte étroite*, *La Symphonie pastorale*, and *Les Faux-monnayeurs*.

Within the corpus of Gide's work, a timeline is revealed of the fluctuation between Gide's exaltation and his disenchantment as he contemplated – either in the first person or through his characters – issues of God and sex, of pleasure and suffering. Sexuality and religion are inter-reliant factors that work sometimes to negate each other, other times to

reinforce each other, revealing a complexity both of the author and his texts. This dissertation explores the relationships between religion and same-sex desire and finds the links that exist between his religious thought and the “I”/“je” of his desire, as Gide, throughout his body of work, negotiates the uncertain landscape of creating a queer “discourse” and finding within it a sense of personal authenticity both with regard to his religious beliefs and his same-sex desire.

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Finally to my mother, Marie Sorrentino, to whom I dedicate this work.

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## Introduction

André Gide was born in 1869, incidentally the same year that the word “homosexuality” first appeared in print. Karl Maria Kertbeny, a Hungarian translator of literature, deployed the word in German in two anonymous pamphlets “in the course of an unsuccessful political campaign to prevent homosexual sex from being criminalized by the newly formed Federation of North German States” (Halperin *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* 130-31). Up until that point, the act of sodomy (also referred to as buggery) was simply considered aberrant behavior, codified by biblical teachings and treated as a crime within legal jurisdictions, but not assigned as an *identity* for any individual who committed the act.

A year later, in 1870, in *Archiv für Neurologie* (Archives of Neurology), Carl Westphal published an article on “contrary sexual sensations” from which “the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was characterized,” rendering the homosexual as a person with an identity that was separate and distinct from those who engaged in “normal” sexual behaviors. The homosexual’s identity was based not only on the fact that he engaged in sexual intercourse with a person of the same sex, but also on same-sex sexual attraction: the phenomenon of homosexuality became part of the larger conversation of human sexuality, although it was considered a perversion if not a mental illness: “Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (Foucault *History of Sexuality I* 43). André Gide’s works are marked by this newly identified

and burgeoning “institution” of homosexuality, and he spent much of his literary career negotiating the discourse of same-sex sexual desire as he attempted to define and legitimize his own homosexual existence.

His first book, *Les Cahiers d'André Walter*, was published in early 1891. Although only few copies were distributed, the book's significance of being the first of his writings in print is not to be underestimated. There are no major plots to speak of; *André Walter* is more of a critical and philosophical reading journal that reflects the somewhat immature author's “state of mind in his late teens. More specifically it is about the young author's relationship with Madeleine and his mother” (Sheridan 60). What is revealed in the work are not only contemplations of literary and biblical quotes, but more importantly an early indication of his homosexuality and a foretelling of what was to be his platonic relationship to his future wife, Madeleine. He first asserts to her the fraternal and friendship bond he feels for her: “Lorsque tu me disais « mon frère » et que je répondais « soeurette » notre coeur tressaillait aux involontaires tendresses de la voix amicale” (62) (“When you said to me ‘my brother’ and I responded ‘little sister’ our hearts trembled with the involuntary tenderness of a friendly voice”). Later, he avers “Aussi bien je ne te désire pas. Ton corps me gêne et les possessions charnelles m'épouvantent. Nous ne nous aimons pas comme il faudrait qu'on s'aime avec raison. Tu ne pourrais m'appartenir : les choses que nous voulons ne s'appartiennent pas” (70) (“As well I do not desire you. Your body embarrasses me and carnal possession appalls me. We do not love each other as we rightly should. You would never be able to belong to me: that which we each love does not belong together”).

In 1891, shortly after publishing his *Cahiers d'André Walter*, Gide published his first, and arguably only, symbolist novel, *Le Voyage d'Urien*. The book, although not widely read

at the time, was still one that was well received by the literati, and Mallarmé honored it as “unique” and one of “the most beautiful ever written,” holding it in as high esteem as he held the works of Edgar Allan Poe, securing it within his personal library (Sheridan 87). The title of the work implies not only the narrator’s name, Urien, but is also a homophonic nod to the term *du rien*, “nothingness.” Additionally, the title also evokes the nineteenth century term “Uranism,” a synonym for homosexuality. The book might not be considered one of his more significant works, but the themes that he explores in it have a particular value in terms of understanding the creative mind of a same-sex desiring young man. Early in the Urien’s journey, the ship that he and his companions are on encounters elaborate mirages that have been conjured up by sirens, causing the men to flee in fear. When they arrive at the city of Haiatalnefous, all but twelve of his companions are seduced by beautiful women, fall victim to a plague, and perish. As in *André Walter*, the woman’s flesh is portrayed as appalling, even dangerous, and, as Sheridan indicates, “the homoerotic bond between the young companions and the fear of women as diseased and fatal temptresses is evident” (60). These indications of the author’s attitude toward male-female love indicate the literary beginnings of Gide’s “coming out” as a same-sex desiring man.

I apply the terms homosexuality and same-sex desiring somewhat interchangeably – albeit carefully – throughout this dissertation, although, as Michael Lucey points out in his introduction to *Never Say ‘I,’* terms such as “homosexual,” “gay,” and “lesbian” do not “function as historically neutral designators of some given sexual identity” (7), but they do in any case function as a means of describing culturally identifiable terms for same-sex sexual desiring individuals. Gide referred to himself as a pederast because he desired teen-aged (sometimes younger) boys, and considered his pederasty as a function of

homosexuality (although this too becomes problematic, as pederasty is generally considered in modern times as a separate and distinct *condition* and perversion). Furthermore, the current discourse of homosexual advocacy repudiates and distances itself from pederasty because it is considered not only a form of mental illness (pedophilia) but also a crime. Nonetheless, I must tread lightly in this area, as my goal is neither to judge nor to pathologize the ways in which Gide experienced same-sex desire, but rather examine the way he navigated it on a literary level throughout his career.

Gide sums up the conundrum he faced as he attempted to reconcile God with his own sexual otherness most clearly when, in *Si le grain ne meurt*, he states: “Au nom de quel Dieu, de quel idéal me défendez-vous de vivre selon ma nature? Et cette nature, où m’entraînerait-elle, si simplement je la suivais?” (550) (“In the name of what God, what ideal, do you forbid me to live according to my nature? And this nature, where would it take me if I simply followed it?”). Gide’s gradual revelation of his same-sex desiring nature (or homosexuality) was one that nonetheless faced numerous hurdles and challenges. Not only was it problematic because of the very nature of sexual otherness in a world that not only did not accept it, but also exhibited fear of non-normative sexuality, and many countries, Germany and England in particular, had strict anti-sodomy laws in place. But there was a second challenge, and one that was perhaps greater than the societal difficulties: Gide was raised in a world of religious austerity by a mother who was a strict Protestant, and he spent much of his life reading scriptures and analyzing the bible. These religious themes come across in his works as commonly as does his treatment of homosexuality.

In fact, religion was a significant cultural issue at the turn of the twentieth century. Roger Martin du Gard wrote to Marcel Copet, “La question religieuse est en somme la grande question intellectuelle et morale de notre époque” (qtd in Cabanis 14) (“The question of religion is in sum the great intellectual and moral question of our time”). This assertion by Martin du Gard plays itself out in *Jean Barois* (1913), a work in which the eponymous protagonist, after struggling with a crisis of faith, ends his marriage and sets off to found a political magazine at the dawn of the Dreyfus Affair. Certain autobiographical allusions aside (the work shows some resemblance to the real-life drama of Hélène and Roger Martin du Gard: the struggle between her extreme piety and his atheism), this same theme of religious and moral crisis is recurrent in Gide’s works of the same period. Where Gide and Martin du Gard diverge is that Barois returns to the faith by the end of his book, and nearly all of Gide’s characters are left disillusioned not only with questions of religion, but also with their marriages and relationships, be they with women or with the young men with whom the protagonists had hitherto formed their bonds.

Therein lies the theme of my dissertation. I shall examine the ways in which André Gide negotiates the lines between God and his personal sense of sexual otherness, which he avers is ultimately his sense of self. In 1951, shortly before his death, he reflected on this very subject: “Mon hérité, puis ma formation protestante inclinaient mon esprit presque exclusivement vers les problèmes moraux. En ces premiers temps, je n’avais pas encore compris que les devoirs envers Dieu et les devoirs envers soi puissent être les mêmes. A présent, j’ai grande tendance à les confondre trop complètement” (*Ainsi soit-il* 1176) (“My inheritance, thence my Protestant formation inclined my spirit almost exclusively to moral problems. In those early days, I had not realized that the duties towards God and duties

towards oneself could be the same. At present, I have great tendency to confuse them too completely”).

Essential therefore to understanding Gide’s dilemma, since Christian traditions and societal morality were both critical and condemnatory of homosexuality, I must take into account how he, in an effort to reconcile his beliefs regarding Christianity and homosexuality, portrays – and explores the meaning of – God in alternate forms, and how his vision often conflicts with that of the standard Biblical understanding of the Divine Being. Raised Protestant in a Catholic country, he was in many ways marginalized both by his affiliation with what was essentially a religious minority and by his homosexual desires in a heterosexual society. His challenges and criticism of religious traditions and dogmata throughout his literary career, and indeed in his personal life as well, were in a way a part of his Protestant spirit, but at the same time we must consider how the influence of Calvinism, whose rigid obsession with predestination and salvation would have haunted him and shaped his thinking. Having lost his father at the age of 10, he was then raised by his mother, “whose stern, straitlaced Protestantism caused Gide – who recognized early on that he was homosexual – to spend much of his young manhood battling a profound internalized sexual moralism” (Bawer 390).

The Bible, along with Greek philosophy and poetry, was a bit of an obsession for him during his formative adolescent years at the time that he was preparing for his confirmation, as he describes in his autobiography *Si le grain ne meurt* (1926): “Étrange! c’était au temps précisément de ma préparation chrétienne que cette belle ferveur païenne flambait. J’admire aujourd’hui combien peu l’un gênait l’autre; ce que l’on pourrait à la rigueur expliquer si je n’eusse été qu’un tiède catéchumène; mais non! je dirai tout à l’heure

mon zèle et jusqu'à quels excès je le poussai" (497-98) ("Strange! It was precisely at the time of my Christian preparation that this beautiful pagan fervor was burning. It wonders me today how little one hindered the other, which one might conceivably be able to explain were I a lukewarm catechumen, but no! I shall soon tell you of my zeal and to what extent I shall push it"). He goes on to describe how he methodically read the Bible from beginning to end, and, in a later passage, how his obsession for the Greeks coincided both with his confirmation into the Christian faith and for his appreciation for the Gospels as literary texts: "[L]'émotion que j'y puisais n'était sans doute point d'ordre uniquement religieux, non plus que n'était d'ordre purement littéraire celle que me versait *L'Iliade* ou *L'Orestie*" (*Si le grain ne meurt* 499) ("The emotion that I drew from them was not only from a purely religious point of order any more than it was a purely literary one that I derived from the *Iliad* or the *Oresteia*").

Thus a range of critical, spiritual and intellectual thought is found in the works of André Gide: the exultation of *Les Nourritures Terrestres*, the pessimism of *l'Immoraliste*, and the drawn-out meditative character of his *Journaux*, his *Feuillets* and literary criticism. Whereas Martin du Gard's *Barois* struggles with the scientific theory against religious dogma, Gide's *Numquid et tu...?* (from 1916-1919, written at the same time he was writing *La Symphonie pastorale*) bears witness to Gide's intense contemplation of faith, philosophy, and his desire to reconcile spirituality with morality. In an effort to reveal the divinity of the individual through close readings of the Scriptures (there is a sense of literary criticism in his reading of the Bible), *Numquid* was written over a three-year period, and the reader witnesses the evolution of the author's spiritual (un-) development, while leaving to God the *dernier mot* (the final word). He calls into question the actions and philosophies of his

own literary creations, and his protagonists and secondary characters are often held up to scrutiny for their religious beliefs, frequently rendered disenchanted with the belief systems they had heretofore held dear. When he concludes that “on attend l’âge et la maturité de l’esprit ; on espère cette maturité toujours plus grande ; mais ce qui vient, c’est la fatigue, et cette sorte de soumission à la règle et aux conventions établies, faite moins de modestie, peut-être, que de peur, de faiblesse et de lâcheté,” (603) (“one waits for age and maturity of spirit, and hopes this maturity will be still greater. But what occurs instead is fatigue, and this sort of submission to the established rules and conventions are less a result of modesty than of fear, weakness or cowardess”) he is speaking as much about his own personal revelation as well as that of many of the characters he creates in his oeuvre.

We can only imagine how for Gide, or for any other person for that matter whose budding sexual desire runs counter to what is considered socially or religiously acceptable and is taught by educators and by family members, would be affected by a strict Christian upbringing where expressions of desire are often categorized as sinful. During Gide’s formative years, he was instructed that sexual desire outside of marriage is aberrant, that sexual desire or practice between two members of the same gender is not only a grave sin but also an abomination, and that same-sex desiring people would be excluded from entering into the kingdom of heaven. If a person’s sexual desire were for those of the opposite sex, his or her desires would not be perceived as troublesome; on the contrary, they are revered, normative, normal. But those who have been taught and who accept these teachings as truth, but who are nonetheless still sexually desirous of others of the same sex, would no doubt find themselves deeply conflicted between what they think is “right” and what they feel is “right for them.” Gide would have surely found himself in this latter

category.

What Gide's oeuvre seems to reveal is the ways in which he navigated the "morality" of religious righteousness he grew up with as a means of coping with his awareness of the otherness of his sexual "nature" while developing a personal philosophy or moralism in which he could locate his own sense of liberation from both a religious and sexual standpoint. In 1893 he writes in his journal, "Tous mes efforts ont été portés cette année sur cette tâche difficile : me débarrasser enfin de tout ce qu'une religion transmise avait mis autour de moi d'inutile, de trop étroit et qui limitait trop ma nature; sans rien répudier pourtant de tout ce qui pouvait m'éduquer et me fortifier encore" (*Journal* 41) ("All my efforts have been directed this year toward this one difficult task: to rid myself finally of everything transmitted to me by religion that has been useless, too narrow or too limiting to my nature, yet without repudiating everything that could educate me and strengthen me yet").

Gide's goal therefore was to dedicate himself to breaking free from the Calvinist ethics in which he was raised while challenging the bourgeois and Catholic morality of his native France. In his books, novels, *récits*, and *soties*, his main characters as well as his secondary characters and interlocutors grapple with their sexual and spiritual authenticity as they ultimately reveal the "otherness" of their desires, both religious and sexual. Through these works, Gide continually thwarts established moral ethics and conventions of marriage, inheritance, duty and sexuality through the subjects he addresses and the plots he weaves. He even subverts traditional modes of novel writing, both by participating in the fin-de-siècle decadent movement of literature that challenged the conventions of the novel, and by creating, exploring and challenging modes of narrative structure as he

addresses questions of faith and desire. What therefore occurs within the pages of Gide's works is the continual attempt at how, through the written word, one liberates his or her sexual self while meditating on questions of religion and what would be considered as condemnatory religious teachings.

In order to attempt to understand where Gide was coming from in this regard, one might consider the religious teachings that would have influenced him during his formative years, most specifically those biblical teachings that supposedly condemned same-sex sexuality and desire as depraved and abominable. In an effort to understand what these condemnatory biblical references are, I turn to Gareth Moore OP who specifies that:

The texts most often cited in this connection are Genesis 19 [story of Sodom and Gomorrah], Leviticus 18:22 ["Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable"<sup>1</sup>] and 20:13 ["If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.,"], Romans 1:26-7 ["Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.,"], 1 Corinthians 6:9 ["Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders."] and 1 Timothy 1:10 ["for adulterers

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<sup>1</sup> Translation from the New International Version (NIV). All Biblical quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine”]. (*A Question of Truth* 57).

But Moore also contends that “there are exegetical problems with some of these texts; sometimes it is just not clear what they are saying” (57). One major issue is that the translation from the New International Version (NIV) uses the word “homosexual” somewhat incongruously to what the intent may have been in the original Latin texts. The King James Version, for example, uses the word “effeminate” instead of “homosexual”; the traditional French Louis Seconde version employs the word “efféminés,” but “homosexuels” is the choice in the more modern *La Bible du Semeur* version. Indeed, the term “homosexuality” itself, along with our contemporary conception of it, did not exist during the time of the biblical authors, and therefore when references are made in the Bible to two members of the same gender “lying together” or “knowing each other,” it is too simplistic for the modern reader (or modern translators, for that matter) to assume that the reference in question is describing a homosexual act in the present-day sense, nor would it be logical to accept unquestioningly that it would articulate to the contemporary construction or understanding of homosexuality. If we are to take our cues from Foucault, we could ascertain that homosexuality is both a political and a cultural phenomenon within a system of power (see *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*) in addition to being a sexual one, and to be a homosexual implies more than simply a sexual act that a same-sex desiring person engages in. Moore goes a step further to explain that since there are no Hebrew or Greek terms that are the equivalent of “homosexual,” attempts at an exegesis in terms of same-sex sexuality begin to undermine themselves:

If there is no biblical word which can correctly be translated as ‘homosexual’,

then no biblical description of an act as homosexual is possible; but that seems to mean in turn that no biblical condemnation of an act under the description 'homosexual' is possible; and that means that, while some of the acts the Bible condemns can be correctly described as homosexual (by us who have the word), no biblical text can condemn any act *as* homosexual. (66)

Moore cautions us however that just because a word did not exist, that there was not in fact a place for it within the public consciousness. Throughout history, as he describes it, a culture's vocabulary might have an empty slot for a word that did not yet exist, pinpointing an idea or concept that could only be described in a roundabout way within the lexicon that it had at its disposal, making it "possible to have the *concept* 'homosexual' without having the word itself" (66). But this argument does cut in both directions, as one could assert that the fact that the Bible does not have a direct, equivalent term for "homosexual" despite the centuries throughout which and different languages in which it was written, that the writers in all actuality were not discussing homosexuality in a way that we understand it today. We might therefore conclude that "the biblical writers had no need for it and therefore did not think about sexual behaviour in such a way as to make the word useful, so that the absence of the word would after all indicate the absence of the concept" (67).

I do not intend to provide a point by point examination of the confusion presented by the condemnatory biblical passages in question, but I do wish to discuss in a more general sense the ways in which biblical translations (both from a literal and a cultural sense) might be challenged and shed a different light on the ways in which one might

approach or understand these readings. According to many modern theologians and apologists (Moore among them), the behaviors that reference homosexuality in the condemnatory Old Testament passages are not referring to *relationships* between members of the same gender, but rather behaviors of a sexual nature that either assert social dominance (via penetration, i.e. rape) over an invader, over an outsider (as in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah), or over someone conquered in battle. In these cases, “sex is seen in terms of penetration, the act of penetration becomes a symbol of power, and to be penetrated is a sexual expression of social weakness” (204). To commit this sort of act upsets the order of male hegemony within a society, and the admonitions against it is done so in order to maintain ancient male-centered social orders where a man was not to behave “as (with) a woman” and penetrate a man – or for that matter allow himself to be penetrated by another man – in any kind of consensual or nonconsensual act: “It is about what it is permissible for men to do to men and with men; what it forbids is [...] a man treating a man sexually as he would a woman. What is at stake here is not a supposed divine plan of heterosexuality, but a supposed divine plan of male dominance” (80). In other words, the intent of the passages is different from a direct admonition of homosexuality; these admonitions are actually prohibitions against anything that would undermine men’s superiority over women within a divinely ordained social order. Essentially, it is the act of penetration among men that is forbidden in these texts rather than “homosexuality” per se; thus where the Bible specifically prohibits a particular act between men, we should not assume that *all* sexual expression among members of the same gender (especially with regard to female homosexual behavior) could be included. Arguably, this explanation might be considered a stretch in terms of biblical endorsement

of same-sex relationships, but it does highlight the fact that the concept of homosexuality is neither by necessity nor with absolute clarity what is being addressed in the Old Testament biblical passages in question.

Gide turned his readings away from the passages in the Old Testament, and focused mainly on the New Testament, where he took his cues from Nietzsche's *Antichrist* and criticized the thwarting of Christ's teachings by St. Paul through his Epistles. The lessons he learned and the faith he followed came from a purer and direct belief in the words of Christ, and he disavowed not only the teachings of Paul, but also of Calvin himself. In his *Journal* in 1910, the time when he was writing his *Aveugle* (later *La Symphonie pastorale*), for example, he writes: "Mais mon christianisme ne relève que du Christ. Entre lui et moi, je tiens Calvin ou saint Paul pour deux écrans également néfastes. Ah! si le protestantisme avait aussitôt su rejeter saint Paul ! Mais c'est à saint Paul, non au Christ, que précisément Calvin s'apparente" (J1 300) ("But my Christianity is that of Christ. Between him and me, I proclaim both Calvin and St. Paul as two equally detrimental obstructions. Ah! If only Protestantism had immediately been able to reject St. Paul! But it was precisely to Paul, and not to Christ, whom Calvin resembles"). In other words, through ignoring the words of the Old Testament and its condemnatory teachings, and disavowing those of Paul, Gide concentrated on Christ's words of salvation and his preaching about the Kingdom of God, ultimately allowing him not to focus on biblical readings that discussed same-sex sexual acts in any way.

My thesis, therefore, will be to examine the corpus of Gide's work, and reveal the struggle between his "nature" (his sexuality) and his Christ-centered religious beliefs. I assert that the atheism that he proclaimed later in life was merely a rejection of Judeo-

Christian dogma than it was a lack of belief in a Supreme Being. His works create a timeline of the fluctuation between his exaltation and his disenchantment as he contemplated – either in the first person or through his characters – issues of God and sex, of pleasure and suffering. Accordingly, I will show in what ways sexuality and religion are inter-reliant factors in the complexity of the author and his texts.

This will involve a study of how Gide's experimentation within conventional literary genres becomes itself an exploration of his search for a new or organic nature of writing, and affirm my argument that the tension between religion and same-sex desire is what drives Gide's creative force. As a writer of prose, he considered only one of his works (*Les Faux-monnayeurs*) to actually be a novel; all other prose works he categorized as either *récits* or *soties*. He experimented with literary conventions, interweaving different literary devices, including epistolary elements and fictive journal entries, thereby expanding the limits within the different genres, subtly challenging them and redefining them. In a way, he was calling traditional means of expression into question, as if searching for a solution to a problem that he could not tangibly define. As theorists of Structuralism have asserted, we are "slaves" to language, caught up in a discourse that we did not create but to whose laws we must adhere, and language inhibits our ability to express ourselves authentically because we are "prisoners" of its structures. An interesting illustration of this phenomenon comes from Nabokov's *Lolita*. In his introduction, he describes a newspaper article he read about a gorilla in a cage in the Jardin des Plantes who was coaxed by a trainer to make a drawing. The animal's creation showed the bars of his cage. Language in a way serves as the bars of the writer's cage, with his means of expression always filtered through the constraints of the discourse available to him. We are thus unwitting participants in a

discourse that appropriates all the history and cultural baggage, all the preoccupations and ideals pertaining to sexuality and religion, of generations past.

The problem before the writer, therefore, is how to find a way around the obstacles of language that permits the author to “write himself” in a way that achieves true clarity and reveals a true personal history that would preclude these limitations. In other words, the writer must push his efforts as he attempts to create his works beyond the bars of his linguistic cage. By calling various literary norms into question, Gide was not necessarily attempting to break new literary ground, but was rather seeking new means to reveal suppressed societal truths through revealing “himself.” After all, Gide’s whole life was *written* (one need only look at his extensive body of journals, correspondence and criticism to see how he “wrote” his life), and it is my contention that he was at the same time trying to express and thwart his “I.”

One participates in society through language; the discourse of the dominant order takes over and a curtain is drawn between the conscious and the unconscious. When Gide attempts to derail the conventions of language and of literary structure, he reveals the internal struggle between his Subject and his lost Self. He is attempting therefore to reconnect and to express that which evades him: this conflicted sense of self that is both spiritual and sexual. Same-sex desiring individuals are caught up in a linguistic and cultural system that specifically excludes them, reducing them to a series of gender labels and cultural obligations (man as ruler, husband, provider, and above all, desiring of women and progenitor). What Gide does is find alternative means to achieve his voice, to search out a new means of expression within a system of language that has its own cultural implications. Therefore, one of my goals in this dissertation will be to explore the idea of

religious politics and power and how they relate to sexuality in the social structure. This idea gives rise to several themes, which when considered by negotiating queer studies through the lens of religion, revealing the ultimate notions of justice, liberation, and often defeat within Gide's literary corpus.

I refer to the "I" in the title of my dissertation, since most of the works I've chosen are written, in some way, as first person narratives. Concurrent to this discussion, however, is also a consideration of the biographical context in which Gide wrote these works, and his life becomes almost inextricable from the books he has written. Within them, I will examine the ways in which his own attitudes toward religion and homosexuality are continuously at play, and how his own life, particularly his travels, his marriage to Madeleine, and his relationships to young men (such as Marc Allégret) are played out and reimagined within the context of the stories he tells. Although I will refer to his autobiography, journals and correspondence – the true evocations of his "I" – as a means of contextualizing the themes he treats, I do not intend to do a full analysis of these writings, as I feel that it would be an entirely different sort of study. Instead, I will be focusing on his fiction (his *récits*, *soties*, and *romans*) and determine in what way Gide's personal belief systems inspired and influenced his fictional works.

Although my list is far from comprehensive, I have nonetheless carefully selected a range of works from the mid 1890s to the mid 1920s that I feel demonstrate the tension that exists between religious belief systems and same-sex desire. In Chapter 1, my discussion of *Les Nourritures terrestres* will examine the ways in which Gide attempts to rid himself of traditional Western Christian thought as a means of exploring the notion of God from a pantheistic point of view, while dealing with a burgeoning same-sex desire. In this

work, God is revealed within the act of desire itself. In the following Chapter, I focus on two “desert stories,” *l’Immoraliste* and *Le Retour de l’Enfant Prodigue*, two books that counter the exaltation of *Nourritures*, and demonstrate a disillusionment with the freedom that comes from having philosophically denuded oneself of traditional beliefs, societal conventions, and institutions such as religion, family, and marriage. Set primarily in the desert, these stories reveal the author’s challenges to common morality within a patriarchal society, and affirm the ultimate isolation (if not bitterness) of his protagonists as they set out on their own, “free” from the constraints of relationships and commitments to family. In Chapter 3, I examine Gide’s three satires, or *soties*: *Paludes*, *Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné*, and *Les Caves du Vatican*, where he in different ways destabilizes established norms and structures of religious institutions, friendships, families, and novel writing itself. Chapter 4 provides me with the opportunity to examine the fictionalized “imagining” of Gide’s marriage to Madeleine within *La Porte étroite* and *La Symphonie pastorale*, two works in which the bitter struggle between religion and sexuality renders the fiancée/wife as nothing more than collateral damage of the desires of the first person narrators. Finally, I conclude with *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, where religious discussion has all but disappeared, and the novel itself becomes at once the ultimate Supreme Being and the structure of closeted sexual desire.

The aim of my dissertation will not necessarily be to reveal queer themes in the works Gide and his contemporaries, as it would seem redundant considering the exhaustive work that has been done in this regard. Nor will I look simply to analyze the religious themes in the works of Gide, as many scholars too have quite competently covered these. It is my argument, as stated before, that Gide faced the conundrum of

reconciling his sense of religious “morality” with his sexuality, and that his works are a testament to his struggle to find a balance between the two. I intend to explore more fully how the tension between these two elements is continually at play in Gide’s literary œuvre. I propose to fill the gap that I believe exists in the current scholarship of Gide, in which critics tend to choose *either* a “queer” *or* a “religious” point of view regarding sexuality and religious morality, but rarely a comprehensive assimilation of both.

In terms of religious themes, one most notable critical work is H. J. Nersoyan’s *André Gide: The Theism of an Atheist*. This book takes a comprehensive look at Gide’s works from the different perspectives of religion and spirituality including Catholicism, Calvinism, mysticism and atheism. Among the goals of the author is to demonstrate how Gide’s atheism is not something to be taken at face value – that there is a series of secular codes within Gide’s discourse (journals and correspondence included) that divulges his sense of “religiosity” at the same time as it establishes his philosophy of finding God for oneself by breaking free of dogmatic constraints. Although *Theism of an Atheist* is a valuable source in the examination of the many aspects of religion (e.g., the destabilizing of Christian law, matters of salvation and the discovery of God through the individual), it falls short of fully exploring how his homosexuality plays a major role in this search. When questions of morality are addressed, his “nature” is not adequately factored in as part of the equation, where it is my contention that it should be.

A source that does bring homosexuality to the forefront of the issue of morals is Patrick Pollard’s *André Gide: Homosexual Moralist*. This author contends that Gide’s sexual non-conformity was philosophically deployed in his literary works as a means of “advocating the individual’s right to live an authentic life in accordance with his own

desires" (xiii), and that authenticity was an essential element in his quest for a creative life. Pollard's take is, however, to avoid when possible the inclusion of Gide's real life, focusing instead on his literary creations, applying social theory and the classics more so than religion. Whereas Pollard seems for the most part to be analyzing the question of homosexuality as one of rationalization/justification, I believe that we must go a step further to understand in what way Gide's authentic self was being revealed (successfully or otherwise). This extensive work is a valuable resource when studying the homosexual issue in Gide's work. My dissertation will differ greatly from Pollard's study by virtue of its application of modern Queer Theory and a deeper focus from a psychological, theological, and religious standpoint.

As for works within the scope of Queer/Gay and Lesbian studies, the field is extensive. Critics that are of most note, such as Michael Lucey and Lawrence Schehr, who call for new (queer) ways of reading Gide, have themselves "subverted" the traditional critics of André Gide, such as Jean Delay, Justin O'Brien, Roger Bastide and Alain Goulet. Schehr does much to reveal semiotic codes within the gay discourse of major French authors, including Gide's. Two of his major works, *Alcibiades at the Door* and *The Shock of Men*, which do not address the religious question, will nevertheless assist in the process of "decoding" Gide's system of discourse. Michael Lucey's *Gide's Bent* provides an analysis of Gide's major works with a queer "bent," employing at the same time other theories of alterity, in particular Colonial Theory, but does not go the way of theology or religion. Lucey in particular criticizes authors such as Delay and Goulet for limiting their investigation of the homosexual question to one of deficit and weakness. Most importantly, however, is that he challenges the traditional view of "sincerity" in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*,

replacing it with more of a view of “finding one’s inherent truth.” In his volume *Never Say I*, Lucey examines the ways in which the first person narratives of Gide, Proust, and Collette represent the evolution of same-sex desire in early 20th century French literature as he examines the discursive problems and challenges with these authors’ deployment of the “je.”

Naomi Segal, author of *André Gide: Pederasty and Pedagogy* among many other works within the scope of Gide studies, is a particularly important critic in the current field of Gidian scholarship overall. Her works tend to provide a feminist point of view to the gender and queer issues that are at stake in Gide’s works. *Pederasty and Pedagogy* examines the way the phantasms of the Gide’s narrators negotiate the problems of masculine sexualities in what she dubs the “male chains” of pedagogy and how they are interrupted by the feminine voice. Her works as a whole are an invaluable source in understanding the problematics within Gide’s works particularly as they pertain to same-sex desire. Similarly, Charles O’Keefe’s *Void and Voice*, among his other works, provides an important perspective on narrative reliability within Gide’s literary corpus.

My intent with this dissertation is to continue the conversation that these scholars have begun, and to contribute to Gidean scholarship by exploring the relationships between religion and same-sex desire and find the links that exist between his religious thought and the “je” of his desire, as Gide, throughout his body of work, negotiates the uncertain landscape of creating a queer “discourse” and finding within it a sense of personal and authorial authenticity both with regard to his religious beliefs and his same-sex desire.

A final note on translations: unless otherwise noted, all translations of Gide's texts from the original French are mine. Despite the important work accomplished by Dorothy Bussy (and later Richard Howard, who provided an updated translations into English of *l'Immoraliste* and *Corydon*) in this regard, it is my contention that, given the cultural and legal differences among France, the United States, and England in the early part of the twentieth century, some of the homosexual subtext of his works was effaced. One most notable example is a paragraph from *Si le grain ne meurt* that was omitted from the 1935 Random House (New York) edition and the 1951 Secker and Walberg (London) version with the simple notation that omissions were made "with the consent of the author" (Sheridan 94). This paragraph, found on page 561 of the Pléiade edition describes Gide's sexual encounter with a young porter while in Sousse, Tunisia, in 1893. Sheridan describes that "The omitted paragraph is not some expendable detail. It is quite central to Gide's account of his emancipation from his puritan upbringing; it is the first time he makes love to a boy" (95).

Another perhaps subtler example comes from *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, when Edouard describes his relationship with Laura: "par un étrange croisement d'influences amoureuses, nos deux êtres, réciproquement, se déformaient." I have chosen to translate the reflexive verb "se déformer" as "to deform ourselves," whereas in Bussy's official translation, she uses the term "to alter our natures." Her use of the word "nature" can certainly not be ignored since it references, perhaps directly, Edouard's homosexuality, and Gide himself frequently referred to his own homosexuality as "his nature." But my feeling is that the term "to deform" is closer to the original French text and describes more accurately the effort required by a homosexual man to love a woman, and, conversely, for a heterosexual

woman to be loved by a homosexual man.

I do not make these assertions to impugn Bussy's translations in any way, but my belief is that she was writing for an English-speaking audience that at the time was less tolerant of homosexuality (not to assert that French speakers were necessarily *more* tolerant of it, but rather that the legal proscriptions against same-sex sexuality in the Anglophone world were much stricter than those in France) and made choices that either deliberately or subconsciously thwart the homosexual subtext within Gide's works.

### Chapter 1 – *Les Nourritures terrestres*

Tu ne soupçonnes pas, Myrtil, toutes les formes que prend Dieu ; de trop regarder l'une et t'en éprendre, tu t'aveugles. La fixité de ton adoration me peine ; je la voudrais bien diffusée. Derrière toutes tes portes fermées, Dieu se tient. Toutes formes de Dieu sont chérissables, et tout est la forme de Dieu.

You do not suspect, Myrtil, all the forms that God takes. By looking too closely at one and fancying it, you are blinding yourself. The fixity of your adoration causes me great pain; I should like it to be diffused. God is standing behind all of your closed doors. All forms of God are to be cherished, and everything is the form of God.

-- Ménélique (*Les Nourritures Terrestres* 190)

One of the major problems I discovered when reading critical reviews of *Les Nourritures terrestres* (and Gide's oeuvre in general) is that the more traditional analyses of Gide focus on topics that include poetics, sexuality, politics and religion while treating the theme of homosexuality as more or less incidental. Conversely, more recent critics, such as those in the field of Queer Theory in particular, focus closely on the queer aspects of the work but fail to fully treat the issue of religion. My belief is that both sexuality and religion go hand in hand in *Nourritures*, as they work simultaneously to create a tension between each other while at the same time reinforcing one another. Gide wrote *Nourritures* as a way of redefining his vision of God so as to create the possibility of experiencing sexual authenticity through, not despite, a belief in Him. Throughout the text are innumerable evocations of the Deity, along with subtle challenges to the conventions that stifle one's own experience of God, which by consequence stifles one's experience of sexuality. The book can be seen as a reimagining of the Bible (or at the very least, a spiritual guidebook) to achieve that end. It makes a call to the rest of the Gidean corpus in his attempt to reconcile the coexistence of God and same-sex sexuality, a struggle he continues with

throughout the rest of his fictional works. But what sets *Nourritures* apart from the others is that within its pages, Gide almost succeeds in reconciling his sexuality with a belief in God, not with bitterness, but rather with a tone of exaltation. Because of familial obligations, peer pressure and his recent marriage among other factors, however, he loses the more youthful and innocent grasp of the idealism he seems to communicate in *Nourritures*, and spends the rest of his life and writings trying to reclaim it.

My discussion of *Les Nourritures terrestres* therefore brings to light these two themes: God and homosexuality. My argument is that the text serves as the narrator's pantheistic quest to "find God everywhere," a quest through which he discovers God through and within the experience of desire itself. *Nourritures* touts the notion of *dénuement* (denuding), where one must let go of one's possessions, familial ties, social conventions, and pre-conceived definitions of God that have been spoiled by religion in order to achieve a state of *disponibilité* (receptiveness, an openness to change), where one is open to the possibilities of experiencing God, and oneself, in a new and authentic way.

1897's *Les Nourritures terrestres* is a work that represents a break in the tone and tenor among Gide's other works from the same decade. Gide's first published work, *Les Cahiers d'André Walter* (1891), ends with the fictitious diarist's suicide. *Paludes* (1895) and *Le Prométhée mal enchaîné* (1899) figured as part of the fin de siècle symbolist and decadent movements (Gide wrote to Valéry that he was writing "un roman moderne," referring to *Paludes*), laced with cynicism and distrust for the state of art and the novel during that era. Conversely, *Nourritures*, which figures in between the latter two works, serves as the flip side to the literary coin of those that came before and after it, or as Naomi Segal points out, "*Les nourritures terrestres* (1897) forms the logical link between *Paludes*

and *L'Immoraliste*, each its negative in a different way and written out of the same African experience" (PP 191). On one hand, *Prométhée* and *Paludes* were works that represented a thematic "non-production" (cf. Bertrand et. al.'s *Le Roman célibataire* and Chapter 2, where I discuss this problem more fully) through the deployment of an ironic tone that communicated a mode of pessimism and apathy. *Nourritures*, on the other hand, asserts its relation toward the many *possibilities* of life. Interestingly enough, the literary "exercise" that was practiced by the decadent authors in the 1880s and 90s where the state of the novel was being "turned on its ear" with works that could be deemed pessimistic and at times bitter, *Nourritures* does indeed accomplish the same task by taking a more exalting tone as it reveals new attitudes towards life, spirituality, and most importantly, sexuality.

*Les Nourritures terrestres* is itself structurally diverse, comprised as it is of several different modes of writing within the genres of poetry and prose. It has the characteristics of a diary, guidebook, or perhaps even a Bible, availing itself of prosaic narrative style, poetry, and song. Patrick Pollard calls attention to Gide's use of Old Testament structure "to provide a coherent strand to link the episodes" (312), and that is the reason one might assert that the work is itself a reimagining of the Bible. According to Pierre Lachasse, the "Mise en œuvre et répudiation des formules du temps, le livre typifie [...] une stratégie d'auteur qui consiste à la fois à contester et à renouveler la littérature" (qtd in Walker "Retour aux *Nourritures terrestres*: le centenaire d'un bréviaire" 111) ("Implementation and repudiation of the formulas of the time, the book typifies [...] an authorial strategy who is at once challenging and renewing literature"). But the contention that Gide undertook the writing of *Nourritures* as his reimagining of the Bible (or at least a challenge to it) comes from his own declaration in the 1927 preface to the book: "C'est à

cela [son apologie du dénuement] que j'ai dû, comme je le raconterai par la suite, de rallier plus tard la doctrine de l'Évangile, pour trouver dans l'oubli de soi la réalisation de soi la plus parfaite, la plus haute exigence, et la plus illimitée permission de bonheur" (250) ("It is to this [his apologia of *denuding*] that I owe, as I intend to relate at a later date in my later work to assemble of the doctrine of the Gospel, to find through self-denial the most perfect self-realization, the highest exactitude, and the most limitless permission to happiness"). His statement draws both the biblical parallels and counter assertions within *Nourritures*, and most likely refers to his uncompleted project entitled *Le Christianisme contre le Christ*, a work that was to take up much of the philosophy that he puts forth in *Nourritures*: "Son véritable but fut toujours la recherche d'une harmonie totale ; il voulut à la fois la joie et la justification de cette joie" (Lalou 234) ("His real goal was as always the search for total harmony; he wanted both joy and the justification of that joy").

The earliest version of *Les Nourritures terrestres* was a short story entitled "Ménalque" that appeared in the literary magazine *L'Ermitage* in early 1896, and if stylistically it seems out of place with the other chapters, it is because Gide wrote the chapter "all in one breath," separately from the rest of work at the special request of Edmond Ducoté, who had at the time just been named director of *L'Ermitage* and who wanted a short story from Gide to open the new series. In 1935, Gide reflected negatively on the on the chapter, calling it "superimposed" after his colleague Jef Last criticized it, stating that the Ménalque chapter "was a stain" on the rest of the book, and Gide agreed: "Ma désapprobation partielle reste presque imperceptible et le peu d'ironie que je crus mettre dans certaines phrases [...] n'est pas assez marqué. La figure de Ménalque est mieux dessiné dans *l'Immoraliste*" (J1 1222) ("My partial disapproval remains almost

imperceptible, and the touch of irony that I thought I put in some sentences [...] is not sufficiently marked. The figure of Ménéalque is better depicted in *The Immoralist*").

In late 1896, Gide published another fragment in *Le Centaure* that would also later figure in *Nourritures*, "La Ronde de la Grenade," which situates itself into the *récit* immediately following the story that Ménéalque recounts. Both were incorporated into the full publication of *Nourritures* as the first part of the Quatrième Livre (Book IV) with few changes apart from two notable ones. The first is an epigraph in the *L'Ermitage* version of "Ménéalque" that states, "l'Évangile y mène, dit Euclide; on appellera ta doctrine *Nomadisme*, du beau mot : *nomos*, pâturage." (1) ("The Gospels lead there, said Euclid. Your doctrine shall be called Nomadism, the delightful word *nomos*, meaning pasturage"). This epigraph, which did not figure in the final version of *Nourritures*, offended Gide's Catholic contemporaries – particularly Francis Jammes – who found its usage "heretical" since it implies Gide's desire to draw an "evangelic parallel" between Ménéalque, "his 'false prophet,' and Christ" (Delay 465). It is not the only time that an epigraph causes problems for Gide's religious colleagues; a similar event occurred between Gide and Paul Claudel over an epigraph from "L'annonce faite à Marie" in the original version of *Les Caves du Vatican*. In that case as well, the epigraph was not included in subsequent editions of the work with which it was originally associated.

The second notable change between the *L'Ermitage* and final versions of the "Ménéalque" passage is that the Oscar Wilde-inspired character of Ménéalque is ten years older in the final *Nourritures* version: in *L'Ermitage*, Ménéalque states "A quarante ans , l'heure étant venue, je vendis tout..." (5) ("At forty years old, the time having come, I sold everything..."); in the full-published book, however, he declares "A cinquante ans..." (189)

("At fifty years old..."). This ten-year difference in age comes as a surprise, considering in the earlier version Ménéalque and Wilde are roughly the same age, but in the later version, which was finalized after Wilde's incarceration for gross indecency for his homosexual affair with Alfred Douglas, Ménéalque is depicted as a decade older, suggesting that Gide may have been distancing himself from Wilde on more than one level. As Pamela Genova concludes regarding Gide's literary "relationship" with Ménéalque, "Qui plus est, à travers sa longue carrière d'écrivain, Gide va réanimer le personnage de Ménéalque dans le contexte de plusieurs autres livres ; de par cette production textuelle impressionnante, il est évident que la figure de Ménéalque est devenue pour Gide une véritable obsession" ("Visages Nombreux" 513) ("Moreover, throughout his long career as a writer, Gide will revive the character of Ménéalque in the context of several other books of his impressive textual production. It is obvious that the figure of Ménéalque became a veritable obsession for Gide").

When the original pages of the récit were published in *L'Ermitage*, Francis Jammes published the only official response in the press in *Le Spectateur catholique* in July of 1897, entitled "En faveur de la simplicité chrétienne. Lettre à Ménéalque sur les 'Nourritures Terrestres,'" which was highly critical of Gide's publication: "In the name of 'simplicity' and Christian charity, Jammes, (who was the "figurehead" of the naturist movement of the late 1890s, a movement that many felt that Gide "pandered to" [Apter 75]) reproached Gide for his luxurious and lecherous gospel of joy, so indifferent to the suffering of others" (Delay 463) to which Gide responded in a published letter that appeared in *Spectateur's* following volume, where he addresses Jammes directly:

Dois-je affecter, triste Faune, de n'avoir jamais voyagé ? – Dois-je chanter uniquement, pour simuler que je n'ai jamais rien vu d'autre, les louanges de mon jardin normand [...]? Craindrai-je même de chanter trop haut l'éclat, la beauté de mes fleurs, en songeant que peut-être des aveugles pourraient entendre, et vagabond, tairai-je, tairas-tu, à cause de tes *pauvresses immobiles*, ce que la marche a de délicieux? (*Les Nourritures terrestres*; Notice 1483)

Must I pretend, sad Faun, to have never traveled? Must I only sing the praises of my Norman garden to act as though I have never seen another?

Will I be afraid even to sing too brilliantly of the beauty of my flowers, imagining that perhaps the blind would be able hear? And, vagabond, will I, will you, be silent on account of your *pauvresses immobiles*, that the path has its delights?

Frustrated by what he thought to be a lack of critical response at the time to *Nourritures*, as well as by the perception that his contemporaries did not understand the work, Gide composed an updated preface of *Nourritures* for the 1927 edition, where he makes reference to the *récit's* “excessive lyricism,” attributing it to the fact that he wrote the book as a man “qui embrasse la vie comme quelque chose qu'il a failli perdre” (249) (“Who embraces life as if it were something he nearly lost”). This allusion to the fact that he had suffered from a serious bout of tuberculosis and recovered from it in Algeria is not unlike the struggle of his future protagonist Michel from *l'Immoraliste* (1907). In fact, *Nourritures terrestres* contains several elements that articulate to this work that he would publish ten years later. One might even assert that *Nourritures* is the precursor to

*l'Immoraliste*, with Michel presumably as narrator of both, telling his story impressionistically in the former and linearly in the latter. If we are to examine *Nourritures* as the impressionistic version of *l'Immoraliste*, the reader might imagine that it is Michel himself speaking to his fictitious protégé, Nathanaël, one of the few pseudo-characters in the book, as if he had already lived the experience of the events he recounted in *l'Immoraliste*.

But unlike *l'Immoraliste*, there are no “characters” in the work in the traditional sense. The “I” in *Les Nourritures terrestres* belongs almost solely to that of the narrator. But the question of who is the narrator is one of the more compelling questions here, since the “I,” asserted by its unnamed narrator that occasionally “slips” into the voice of Ménalque, and at brief times to the young boys (but never to Nathanaël who is the book’s principal addressee), has the effect of creating a multi-layered sense of “self” and is rendered ambiguous as it sets out to subvert the patriarchal culture and disengage from it. The “I” of the narrator who speaks in *Nourritures* is ultimately a voice that makes its effort throughout the book to assert an impossible or unrequitable desire, a desire that is yet to be fully named or realized. Gide’s *writing* of the text is what displaces this desire as it attempts to form it into language. As Pontalis points out, “Writing is the locus where desire is displaced and its surrogate realization is achieved through language. And it is precisely the impossibility of realization, the constant frustration, that keeps desire alive and the pen moving” (qtd. in Bini 123). Segal concludes that “The massive and repetitious length of the text is surely the result of the internal censor that makes it impossible (yet) for Gide to speak about the desire he really wants to talk about: the text never comes, is never satisfied, is always [in] attente” (“Gide and Women” 63).

There is little opportunity for the other characters to assert their personhood, save in Book IV, when there is an entire section of the *récit* to whom the first person pronoun is ascribed to Ménalque, whose role is that of the “strong character as mentor,” as well as to the group of Ménalque’s young interlocutors who offer pantheistic songs of praise, hymns and ballades, but whose voices are, as Apter points out, virtually indistinguishable from one another (*Homotextuality* 79n). From the most simple and clear standpoint, the voices of the “I” are those of Gide himself who, as a young author, was finding his voice as both philosopher and storyteller. By including the extended discourse by Ménalque, Gide is able to attribute the “I” to the one who plays the role of the sage, adding validity and gravitas to the text, thereby reinforcing the assertions of the narrator. But by not dedicating himself to character development, as he would as his career progressed, he allowed himself to channel the philosophers he had spent the better part of his education reading, most notably Nietzsche and Goethe.

David Walker discusses Diane Setterfield’s observation of the structure of the book and the significance of the narrator’s interactions with these major and minor characters:

*Si Les Nourritures terrestres se présente justement comme l’histoire d’un narrateur qui raconte sa propre quête d’une nouvelle morale, [...] dans le livre il n’y a « personne ». Se demandant donc s’il s’agit ici d’une forme inhabituelle d’autobiographie, cette critique revient à la définition célèbre de la « mise en abyme » et esquisse une théorie de la rétroaction telle qu’elle la voit à l’œuvre dans ce texte. L’analyse du rapport Nathanaël-narrateur-Ménalque, considérée conjointement avec le glissement des pronoms personnels dans l’évocation de Lyncéus, aboutit à une problématisation*

d'identité textuelle : le sujet s'ouvre à un dialogue entre le soi et l'autre, entre le provisoirement fixe et le toujours-incessamment fluide. (Walker 112-13)

(If *Les Nourritures terrestres* presents itself as the story of a narrator who recounts his own quest for a new morality, in the book there is "nobody." Wondering whether it is therefore an unusual form of autobiography, this critic returns to the famous definition of the "mise en abyme" and outlines a theory of feedback that she sees at work in this text. The analysis of the rapport among the narrator, Nathaniel, and Menalque, taken together with the shift of personal pronouns as they evoke Lynceus leads to a problematization of textual identity: the subject of opening a dialogue between the self and the other, between the temporarily-fixed and the ever-fluid.)

Central to the understanding of how God and homosexuality work together in a book such as *Nourritures*, one must ascertain how Gide's visions of God and how his own personal revelations of homosexuality coexist and play off of each other. What is essential to this exploration, then, is to see where and in what ways we find constructions of God in the book: it is certainly not the Judeo-Christian God of his Calvinist upbringing, nor is it the Catholic God of his country. Instead, the God in *Les Nourritures* is a pantheistic construction, one that represents the undoing of the God of Calvinism and Catholicism. Gide, in a way, creates an arc to the Judeo-Christian God, and simultaneously undoes Him.

At the same time what is happening is that as Gide is searching for or waiting for God, he is also attempting to come into his own in terms of his sexuality. In other words, Gide is instructing his protégé Nathanael, who is the ultimate recipient of the book the

narrator is “writing,” is instructed to throw the book away, an admonition that represents both a symbolic discarding of the Bible as well as the preconceived ideas of traditional patriarchal conventions of sexuality, of marriage and family, and of religion in general. As a consequence, the narrator instructs him how to experience divinity in nature. This divinity is in the form of sensuality, and the sensual self is what is ultimately privileged.

The resulting effect is that Gide boldly affirms the undoing of the traditions of Calvinism and Catholicism by structuring the book in a quasi-biblical way; but Gide’s “Bible” is not one of a Judeo-Christian God despite the many obvious allusions to the conventional understanding of who God is. Instead, Gide crafts a world where sensuality and sexuality are very much a part of divinity, but they can only be discovered by shedding the constraints and judgments of the God as defined by Rome, by Paul the Apostle, and by Calvin. Through the act of denuding oneself of old expectations and traditions, one is receptive to the discovery of one’s sensuality and sexuality in new and striking ways. Sexuality is no longer the privileged act within a traditional male/female marriage, but rather an organic conception of sexuality that makes room for a male/male desire, as an idealized version of the Greeks and Ancient Romans: for Gide, homosexuality was tantamount to the pederasty that was practiced by the ancient Greeks, structured as a relationship of pederasty and pedagogy, of mentor/mentee, of older/younger. Naomi Segal describes a chain of pederastic desire within *Nourritures* as

one that runs both ways, from senior to junior in pedagogy and from junior to senior in the impetus of desire. Roughly, the hierarchy is this: real author – implied author – God – Ménalque – narrator – Nathanaël – implied reader – real reader. All of these are male, or at least masculine, for by implication

any infraction of the virility code so stringently and monotonously inculcated would break the chain" (*PP* 192).

The clues to this liberated form of sexuality are found within the text itself, in the voice of the narrator and in the story of Ménélaque. *Les Nourritures terrestres* therefore takes on a neo-biblical quality that serves to respond to rather than to contradict the Bible through its call for a new set of conventions of the sexual and spiritual "other." Concurrent to the notions of sexuality and the bourgeois culture in which he lived was the complex struggle of religion as it pertains to his ever-evolving and ever-changing view of God and divinity. At odds was his Huguenot upbringing, based in Calvinist thought, and the Pauline-based Roman Catholic influence held over the country in which he lived. Calvinism, with its inherent preoccupation with predestination and lack of intercession of Saints or the Virgin Mother, differs vastly from Catholicism's instilled hierarchy of earthly and saintly intercessors. Throughout his career, in fact, Gide frequently challenged, and was challenged by, the tenets of the differing questions of these different religions. In fact, the Pastor and his son in *La Symphonie pastorale* were to act out the struggle that exists between these two doctrines. At odds, for him, was a God in whom he believed, and who, according to the Gospel of John (3:16) "so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." This God was one who forgave all sins, so Gide believed, through the sacrifice of the Christ. How then was Gide to situate himself within a religion – be it Catholic or Protestant – that might exclude him for being what he believed he authentically was: a homosexual and a pederast?

In 1893, four years before the publication of *Nourritures*, he writes "J'ai vécu jusqu'à vingt-trois ans complètement vierge et dépravé; affolé tellement qu'enfin je cherchais partout quelque morceau de chair où pouvoir appliquer mes lèvres" (*J1* 33) ("I have lived

to the age of twenty-three completely virgin and depraved, so thoroughly distraught that I searched everywhere for any piece of flesh where I might apply my lips"). Therein lies the crux of what I believe Gide was attempting to accomplish when he wrote *Nourritures*. Since these above-mentioned traditions and conventions had their roots in the Bible, which itself presents the Western-construction of God and His Word, Gide wanted to take the *conventions* of the biblical format so that he could create a new "biblical guidebook" that was more inclusive of his own experience of God and sexuality (or at least one that he envisioned and yearned for), and from which a new spirituality could be born. His goal was not necessarily to attempt to thwart the Bible, but instead to reimagine it much in the same way he was reimagining social and sexual relationships. The work stops short, however, of linking directly to conventional Judeo-Christian thought, and Gide does not make assertions as to biblical validity. Instead, he depicts the world from a pantheistic standpoint, and challenges the reader, through the agency of the imagined Nathanaël, to reconsider who God is by (re)creating God as one to be experienced through unfettered sensuality.

But that is certainly not to say that the book is not influenced by Gide's Calvinist upbringing or from his own Christian education. *Nourritures* lends itself to an examination and analysis thanks to its quasi-Biblical nature, functioning as an exploration of conscience, and leading to liberation from the societal constraints that would inhibit him from engaging in or experiencing that which is "sinful" or that which would run counter to biblical teachings. In essence, the crux of the book seeks to alleviate notions of guilt for transgressions against sexual normativity: Gide describes a God who can be discovered and celebrated through the pleasures of the flesh. *Nourritures* represents an "unlearning" of

social and sexual codes, and blatantly seeks to indulge in his desire for sexual intercourse with young men, and to depict it as sacred.

Although the reader might initially be struck by the innumerable evocations of “God” and “Creator” within the pages of *Nourritures*, what arguably comes into evidence upon a deeper reading of the work is that within the spiritual elements lie hidden revelations of sexual otherness. There is an insistence of exaltation, sensuousness, and ultimately happiness that can be found by embracing God, rather than despite Him, through his insistence to Nathanaël, to “ne distingue pas Dieu de ton bonheur” (168) (“Do not distinguish God from your happiness”). In this case, happiness, *le bonheur*, expands in its meaning, since “happiness” signifies for the narrator the sensation one feels when one experiences sexual freedom, a freedom achieved when one is liberated from the bonds of traditional masculine sexuality that obligates heterosexual love and heterosexual sex. The narrator is therefore free to explore sexuality in what would otherwise have been seen as subversive with regard to heteronormative codes.

But the ultimate focus of his quest is not merely to achieve an expansive sense of joy and sensuality, nor simply to engage in *masculine* sex with other men/boys, but also to find God through, and not despite, his sexual indulgences. The revelation of God, for the narrator of *Nourritures* is, for all intents and purposes, a revelation of one’s own (homo-) sexual nature. But that is not to say that traditional Judeo-Christian (in particular for Gide Catholic and Calvinist) belief systems regarding sex and sexuality fail to be challenged within the pages of *Nourritures*, since his instruction “do not distinguish God from your happiness” indicates the ever-present moral conscience of the author/narrator, and demonstrates his ever-present preoccupation with the accepted mores of sexual chastity

and spiritual purity that are commanded by the biblical God. Happiness, particularly the happiness one finds in sexual freedom that subverts the religious and social teachings of a Christian society, would otherwise need to exclude God, but, the “happiness” he preaches is actually equated with God.

Nathanaël is the mentee and protégé to whom most of the narrative is addressed, but in his role as the “omnibus addressee” he “is never given the opportunity to challenge his mentor’s opinions, point of view or implicit authority” (Apter 79). Segal asserts that Nathanaël is he “who can be named only in the imagination, the object of desire that will necessarily and admirably exceed any desire that could picture him” (PP 267). Nathanaël is the narrator’s fantasy: it is he to whom most of the narrative is addressed, whose name is evoked in the very first line of the book. It is he who is desired as the young man and mentee who encompasses the notion of desire itself. The narrator instructs him in the ways of sensuality and ecstasy, but never experiences them with him, thereby rendering desire as no more than a literary ellipsis. In the famous conclusion of the work, he wistfully instructs his protégé to “throw the book away,” emphasizing the fact that their relationship has been both fleeting and transitory as he encourages him to find his own way and experience his own set of desires: “Jette mon livre; dis-toi bien que ce n’est là *qu’une* des mille postures possibles en face de la vie. Cherche la tienne” (248) (“Throw my book away. Tell yourself that what is in it is but *one* of thousands of possible positions in the face of life. Find your own”). The relationship becomes the essence of the book itself through the act of relentlessly seeking and experiencing desire, but never achieving that which is desired. The message is one of *disponibilité* – of openness or welcoming – for the sensual pleasures of desire itself, but never achieving its anticipated climax. This unrequited desire in the

context of the repeated evocations of *Dieu* represents Gide's continuing effort to reconcile an unattainable God within the context of his homosexual desire.

It is the very notion of desire that inspires a broad range of theoretical perspectives through which we might understand the Gidean concept of *disponibilité*. Anthony O'Shea, in his article "Desiring Desire," provides a useful summary from which we might understand desire from different critical perspectives. He describes how from a Hegelian standpoint, desire

becomes a movement of negation whereby the subject fixes its other [that which is desired] in order to objectify it, know it and then negate it. Desire both starts from and is experienced by the conscious subject who continually negates others that it encounters but never negates itself; it pushes back its boundary of self-knowledge without ever attempting to rupture it completely. (O'Shea 927)

It is our desire for "self knowledge" that Hegel is referring to, a desire that causes us to recognize in others that which lacks within ourselves. In our need to fill this lack, we assume it into ourselves (thereby negating it) and for just an instant, complete ourselves. "We progress towards an historical end by reflexively recognizing something as different before we internalize it in order to understand it" (927).

The philosopher Alexander Kojève, according to O'Shea, "radically extends Hegelian negation to its limit so that human desire is a desire for the negation of the 'non-I' in pursuit of human subjectivity" (928). He goes on to describe how Kojève's theory links human desire to "the satisfaction of a need with self-reflection; human desire forms the self-conscious 'I'. Human desire here is the need for recognition, a desire to become the

object of the other's desire" (928). This idea has a particular importance as the desire *to be desired* becomes paramount to the human experience: one affirms his own sense of being by identifying oneself as s/he who lacks in others.

Sartre's theory of desire seems to take Kojève's ideas a step further, "We continually desire to be what we are not but to achieve it requires the negation of our own self-consciousness. We continually desire to be everything in order to gain complete self-understanding. We desire to become God" (928). As with the other philosophers whom O'Shea mentions, the "act" of desiring is one where we seek to know ourselves better or to fulfill our whole selves; however, Sartre's ideas are more radical in that he has shifted the notion of desire from the conscious to the unconscious, and when the unconscious self desires, it is an act of self-creation, and eventually, a creation of an idealized God: "Our desire is to become a personalized God that represents a future possibility, something that we want to become. God is an absence that can only be filled through our own negation" (928). What becomes most intriguing about Sartre's definition of desire is that the narrator of *Nourritures* is himself seeking God through the discovery and experience of his desires. What we therefore might conclude is that although the narrator is searching for "God everywhere" and proclaims to his protégé, "you can possess God in His totality," in fact God has already been created within himself. His quest for God is ultimately a quest for his own self-knowledge, and although he is traveling the world to find it, in the end the answer already resides within himself. He has but to create Him.

It is Lacan, however, who possibly illuminates the path to understanding the experience of the Narrator in *Nourritures*. Lacanian theory tells us that a man's

consciousness is incoherent, and that desire is a drive for that which can never be fulfilled.

Says O'Shea:

“Hegel, Kojève and Sartre posit human desire as something that ultimately reveals the human subject to itself through the self-reflection of a coherent, conscious, rational being. Lacan reverses this to argue both that our self-consciousness, rationality and reflexivity attempts to hide desire and that our conscious selves are not coherent but fractured and inconsistent. Desire, for Lacan, is part of our sub-conscious and surfaces through the cracks in our self-consciousness [...] From Hegel the concept of desire as ‘desire-for’ has developed up to a point here Lacan figures it as an unfulfillable drive of the human unconscious[...]” (928-29).

It is this desire – in the Lacanian sense – that seems to go hand in hand with Gide’s notion of *disponibilité*. The unconscious drive described in Lacanian desire is actually the drive into which Gide’s narrator attempts to give himself fully and without reservation, but one that he is unable ultimately to fulfill for the simple reason that such fulfillment is an impossibility in the Lacanian sense. At the same time, he allows himself to relish in that perpetual state of waiting, where hunger, thirst, and tiredness are experienced with the same level of sensuousness as sexual desire. According to Lacan: “Le désir est un rapport d’être à manque. Ce manque est manque d’être à proprement parler. Ce n’est pas manque de ceci ou de cela, mais manque d’être par quoi l’être existe” (*S II* 261) (“Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is lack of being itself. It’s not lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists”). If we examine *Nourritures* for its themes of desire and *disponibilité*, it is as if the subject – the narrator – is writing himself into existence by the

experience of desiring: in fact, he thrives on it and does not exist without it, clinging to hunger and thirst, and taking sublime pleasure (*l'ivresse*) in the experience of them.

Water, food, sleep, and sex take on an ethereal, spiritual quality, as they are each elevated to a sacred level. But they are to be experienced but once: the past does not exist, and he urges Nathanaël: “Ne désire jamais [...] regoûter les eaux du passé. Nathanaël, ne cherche pas, dans l’avenir, à retrouver jamais le passé” (*NT* 167) (“Never desire to taste of the waters of the past again. Nathanaël, do not search in the future to retrieve the past”). He is speaking of water at a symbolic level, and his intent is to instruct his protégé that anything “tasted” in the past no longer matters, or even exists. The act of desiring also resides at this symbolic level: to exist, to live, Nathanaël must be in a constant search for new experiences, not just to experience the pleasure of them, but also to exist. Lacan concludes: “Le désir, fonction centrale à toute l’expérience humaine, est désir de rien de nommable. Et c’est ce désir qui est en même temps à la source de toute espèce d’animation. Si l’être n’était que ce qu’il est, il n’y aurait même pas la place pour qu’on en parle. L’être vient à exister en fonction même de ce manque” (261-2) (“Desire, a central function to all human experience, is desire for nothing nameable. And it is this desire that is simultaneously the source of all kinds of animation. If the being is not who is is, there would not even room to talk about it. Being comes into existence precisely because of this lack.”)

The problem that Gide poses is one that in effect challenges the cult of *disponibilité* that he advocates through his narrator. He is preaching that Nathanaël be receptive to his desires, to delight in them and to celebrate them, but his message undoes itself through the implication that to achieve them, to requite his desires, would ultimately mean that the

desires have been fulfilled: once he has attained that which he desires, he is left with nothing except the effort to remain in the state of desiring more. It is a celebration of sensuousness, but the sensuousness (with its implied experience of homosexual sex) is never to achieve its intended focus: it is the hunger for more where authentic divinity and authentic sexuality reside. Gide describes this experience of desire, of lack, for an unattainable object as an acknowledgement of an unattainable God. The sexual desire is for that which cannot be achieved, for that which ultimately does not exist except through one's experience of it through imagination for the object desired. In other words, God, like the sexual object, exists only because of our desire for "him."

A notable passage in the *Premier livre* is a meditation on *les attentes* (expectations, awaiting), one in which Gide evokes images of the ground cracked with the drought's desiccation as it awaits the rain, and of the insects and flowers that impatiently await the dawn. He equates this state of waiting, a waiting for that which will inevitably arrive, not only as the perpetual waiting for God, but also a waiting for an inevitable (sexual) climax. One of the major revelations of the narrator to his protégé begins with the enunciation "Nathanaël, je te parlerai des attentes" (161) ("Nathanaël, I shall speak to you about awaiting") and what follows is his treatise on "waiting," where the Narrator admonishes him not to wish for that which he cannot have, but rather to relish in that which he already possesses, and to await only those things that will inevitably come to him. He describes the act of waiting for what is inevitable – the rising of the sun or the falling of the rain – with an erotic tension that culminates in a post-coital relief: "Il monta de la terre un souffle si brûlant que l'on sentit tout défaillir; le pollen des conifères sortit comme une fumée d'or des branches. – Puis il plut" (161) ("There rose from the earth a breeze that was so hot that

it seemed all would swoon; the pollen of the conifers poured out like golden smoke from the branches. – Then, it rained”). But he goes further to explain:

Nathanaël, que chaque attente, en toi, ne soit même pas un désir, mais simplement une disposition à l’acueil. Attends tout ce qui vient à toi; mais ne désire que ce qui vient à toi. Ne desire que ce que tu as. Comprends qu’à chaque instant du jour tu peux posséder Dieu dans sa totalité [...] Nathanaël, il n’y a que Dieu que l’on ne puisse pas attendre. Attendre Dieu, Nathanaël, c’est ne comprendre pas que tu le possèdes déjà. (162)

(Nathaniel, may each thing that you await be not so much a desire as a disposition of welcome. Wait for everything that is coming to you; but desire only that which is to come to you. Desire only that which you have.

Understand that at each moment of the day you can possess God in His totality. Nathanaël, the only thing that you cannot wait for is God. Waiting for God, Nathanaël, means that you do not yet comprehend that you already possess Him.)

The tension that is created as the creatures of the earth await the rain and the dawn is interposed with the idea that the only thing he should not wait for is God, since God is already in his possession. God is accompanied by the narrator’s sense of Desire, and both are ultimately sanctified and glorified throughout the text. The celebration of desire, which is never to actually be requited, is the experience of divinity. This idea might seem to be a bit of a contradiction to the narrator’s quest for sexual freedom, but what ultimately emerges is that it is the *act* of desiring that is for him what is divine: it is the experience of

the *pre-coital* sensation where God resides; it is through “waiting” that one “possesses God.”

The above passage demonstrates the way that Gide’s mitigates sexual desire through the desire of God. Desire serves as the agent through which God and sexual desire are both revealed simultaneously, coded within symbols of nature, rendering both as authentic products of nature. Sexual desires and climaxes in the book are more subtly suggested in symbolic form through the descriptions of the beautiful barefoot young men whom he sees harvesting the grain (156), through ecstatic descriptions of hunger and thirst as experiences of pleasure, and of descriptions of nature that can be taken as analogies for ejaculation: “Il y a des sources qui jaillissent des rochers; Il y en a qu’on voit sourdre de sous les rochers” (216) (“There are springs that gush up from the rocks; There are others that one can see erupt from under the rocks”).

But my goal is not simply to reveal where homosexuality and homosexual desire (or for that matter, God) are hidden between the lines or verses of any of his works, but rather to discover the ways in which Gide uses the landscape of his literary “travels” (in a way, through his works, Gide takes the reader on a lifelong journey where questions of sexuality and religion are dealt with in different ways) as a means of exploring and revealing truths about desire and pleasure itself. His journeys are as much to other lands as they are inward as he discovers his same-sex sexual desire, which is ultimately a function of that system of pleasure. Foucault points out the “truths” of sex in the chapter “Scientia Sexualis” in the introductory volume of *History of Sexuality*, where he describes the ways in which sexual pleasure took on a pedagogical form. He describes how, in the *ars erotica* of China, Japan, India, Rome, and Arab/Muslim societies, “truth is drawn from pleasure itself,

understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and forbidden; [...] it is experienced as pleasure, evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul.” Foucault goes on to explain that:

Knowledge must be deflected back into the sexual practice itself in order to shape it as though from within and amplify its effects. [...] Consequently, the relationship to the master who holds the secrets is of paramount importance; only he, working alone, can transmit this art in an esoteric manner as the culmination of an initiation in which he guides the disciple’s progress with unflinching skill and severity. (*H.S. I 57*)

What Foucault is describing is the master/mentor relationship that in ancient civilizations served a pedagogical function; it was not just matters of sexuality that were taught, but also the *philosophy* of pleasure as one to *produce* truth. He asserts that the production of truth from the dawn of modern society became a product of the confessional: no longer were truth and pleasure to be linked. It seems that Gide’s effort to create the link between truth and pleasure is one that seeks to idealize the ancient practice of pederasty; and it’s a term that he used to describe – if not to rationalize – the desire he felt for young men. It is therefore no coincidence that Gide chooses the deserts in the Muslim countries of North Africa and the cities and countryside of the Italian states as the backdrop for his erotic expression, exploration and tutelage of the experience of sensuality, especially as it contrasts the restrictive bourgeois upbringing of his French home in Normandy where the dominance of heteronormative sexuality (not simply from the perspective of the narrator of *Nourritures*, but also from Gide’s perspective given his strict Calvinist upbringing) causes

frustration for him as he yearns for a sensual life not-lived. The narrator is attempting to work within the dichotomy of what Foucault describes as the relationship between the “permitted” and the “forbidden,” in order to reconcile his bourgeois status fraught with conventional and social expectations, with the sexual expression and sensuality he experiences – or the desires he wishes to fully experience – in his travels abroad. These expectations that frustrated him are those that lead presumably to productivity within the economy of land ownership and inheritance, and re-productivity within the economy of inheritance, progeny and paternal legacy, expectations that are addressed and challenged in a similar fashion ten years later in *L’Immoraliste*.

But Gide holds to his definition of the phenomenon of older man/younger man “love” and asserts that his version of homosexuality, pederasty, is part of a nobler tradition than other forms. In fact, Gide went so far as to distance himself from other homosexual contemporaries (Wilde and Proust, most notably) repeatedly throughout his literary career because he did not identify with their manner of homosexuality. It is in the pages of his “Feuillets” published within his *Journaux* where he identifies three types of homosexuals: sodomites, pederasts, and inverts. The first group, the sodomites, he describes as “celui dont le désir s’adresse aux hommes faits” (“One whose desire is for grown men”) which described the homosexuality of men like Wilde most closely. The second group, the pederast, he describes as “celui qui, comme le mot l’indique, s’éprend des jeunes garçons” (“One who, as the word indicates, falls in love with young boys”) and declares bluntly that is the group to which he belongs. He continues to the third group, the inverts, and describes them as “celui qui, dans la comédie de l’amour, assume le rôle d’une femme et désire être possédé” (“One who, in the drama of love, assumes the role of a woman

and desires to be possessed”) and offers a condemnation not unlike the criticism of the hyper-masculine gay men of the 1990s who would refer to themselves as “straight acting” as a way to disassociate themselves from the more effeminate gay men: “quant aux invertis, que j’ai fort peu fréquentés, il m’a toujours paru qu’eux seuls méritaient ce reproche de déformation morale ou intellectuelle et tombaient sous le coup de certaines accusations que l’on adresse communément à tous les homosexuels” (671-72) (“As to inverts, whom I rarely frequented, it has always seemed to me that they alone deserved the reproach of moral or intellectual deformation and fell within the scope of some of the charges that one addresses as common to all homosexuals”).

This idea is both problematic and controversial, and one that is treated thematically in several of his works that I will also discuss: in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, the relationship between Edouard and Olivier is one example where the relationship between uncle and nephew is one that is depicted as nothing other than destructive; in *Les Caves du Vatican*, it is a question of outright molestation leading to a violent outcome; in *La Symphonie pastorale* the pederastic relationship ends with the young Gertrude’s suicide. As Naomi Segal contends,

Classical pederasty is one version of the desire of an adult for a child. What Gide experienced was not and could not be the classical normative version: *Corydon* is dedicated to trying to create a new norm by means of the old genre of the Socratic dialogue. In our world, the word pederasty is an anachronism; we use the term ‘pedophilia’ or ‘child sexual abuse’ and our judgment of the older person in the transaction is generally condemnatory as Plato’s later position but without his nuances. (PP 22)

Judgment aside, it is therefore not merely the locus of his sexual desire that is found outside the borders of his homeland, it is also where the narrator can step outside of himself and indulge his own sexual otherness. Inasmuch as he crosses the border from France and enters physically into other countries, he is also breaking free from the internal *psychological* borders that have been constructed by the social conventions and religious traditions of his strict, religious, bourgeois upbringing. By going to foreign lands he is at once in touch with his own sense of himself as a same sex desiring person as he is receptive to his desires for the young men and boys he encounters there. As Dollimore points out: “For Homosexuals more than most, the search for sexual freedom in the realm of the foreign has been inseparable from a repudiation of the ‘Western’ culture responsible for their repression and oppression” (339).

The pedagogical relationship is not just from the point of view of the narrator for the younger Nathanaël, where the narrator assumes the role of mentor for the young man. Ménélaque plays the role in *Nourritures* – and later in *l’Immoraliste* – as the mentor of the narrator. In other words, whereas Nathanaël is the protégé of the narrator, the narrator is the protégé of Ménélaque in what Segal refers to the male pedagogical chain. He is given a full voice as the moralist/immoralist who is the instructor of the lessons in the “guidebook,” and is the one who recounts the only linear sub-narrative in the entire book. He instructs the “instructor” (the narrator) in his philosophy of desire and receptiveness in his own role as mentor. Ménélaque, who plays a more significant role in Gide’s later *récit*, *l’Immoraliste*, is in effect a major figure in three of Gide’s works if one considers the first iteration of *Nourritures* as a separate and distinct work (which in some ways, it was): first in the “Lettre de Ménélaque” that appeared in the *L’Ermitage* in 1896; second in *Les*

*Nourritures terrestres* in 1897, where the modified *L'Ermitage* version figures as the first section of Book IV; and third, the Ménéalque whom Michel encounters in *l'Immoraliste*, the one who ultimately instructs him in his doctrine of Immoralism. It is important to note that it is widely theorized, as I state above, that the inspiration for the figure of Ménéalque was in fact Oscar Wilde, with whom Gide was acquainted on and off for seven years. As young man, Gide found a mentor of sorts in the British “aesthete” whom he encountered in Paris, Florence and North Africa beginning in 1891.

Wilde is the one who is credited with “initiating” the young author into in the world of same sex sexuality. Richard Ellmann’s essay on Corydon and Ménéalque in *Golden Codgers* provides a fairly comprehensive account of the tumultuous friendship between these two men from the time when they first became acquainted in Africa when Wilde arranged what was to be Gide’s first sexual encounter with an adolescent boy when he noticed that “Gide was captivated by a young Arab boy playing the flute. Gide had previously had only one homosexual experience, but he now felt that he had discovered what was normal for him” (83). Gide describes the incident in *Si le grain ne meurt* (1924) when Wilde asked him “*Dear, vous voulez le petit musicien? [...] Nous n’y fumes pas plus tôt assis que Wilde commença de rire, d’un rire éclatant, non tant joyeux que triomphant [...] Il s’amusait comme un enfant et comme un diable*” (591) (*Dear, you want the little musician? [...] No sooner were we seated than Wilde began to laugh, a burst of laughter, not so much joyous as it was triumphant [...] He was amused both as a child and as a devil*). In fact, Ellmann observes that “Gide sustained, and never quite abandoned, a view of Wilde as Luciferian, debauched and debauching” (88).

The figure of Ménalque who acts in some ways as philosopher, in other ways as “spiritual seducer” of the narrator in both *Nourritures* and in *L’Immoraliste*, serves the important purpose as agent to the awakening of these characters into full consciousness of their own lives, and one cannot ignore that this was the role that Wilde filled for Gide. Like the serpent in the Garden of Eden that tempts Eve to eat from the tree of life, thereby bringing her and Adam the capacity to recognize their own nakedness, Wilde was the tempter of Gide who awakened him to his fuller sense of himself both sexually and, one would presume, intellectually. Ellmann concludes that the relationship between the two men had been: “probably very much like that described in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, between Dorian and Lord Henry Wotton. “To project one’s soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment; to hear one’s own intellectual views echoed back with all the added music of passion and youth [...]” (85).

But as Gide expressed in a letter written to Valéry in 1891, “Wilde s’étudie pieusement à tuer ce qui me restait d’âme, parce qu’il dit que pour connaître une essence, il faut la supprimer : il veut que je regrette mon âme. L’effort pour la détruire est la mesure de cette chose. Toute chose ne se constitue que de son vide..., etc.” (*AG/PV Correspondance* 141) (“Wilde contrives piously to kill what remains of my soul, because he says that to know an essence, it must be suppressed. He wants me to miss my soul. The effort it takes to destroy the thing is its measure. Each thing constitutes itself only through its void... etc.”). In a subsequent letter, written ironically enough on Christmas Eve, Gide admits that since he had met Wilde “je n’existe que très peu” (144) (“I exist but a little”), conceding on the eve of the birth of the Redeemer of Souls that Wilde, who had asserted that one must suppress one’s soul in order to understand it, had succeeded in diminishing his.

The fact that Gide identifies Wilde as the figure who wanted him to renounce his soul, and who was at the same time the one who “corrupted” him through his philosophy of art and literature as well as by arranging the rendezvous with the Arab boy, further elucidates the complexity of Gide’s dilemma of whether his soul can be compatible with his sexuality. The soul in question, though, is at once the soul in the religious sense regarding that spirit part of an individual that is eternal, and at the same time the figurative soul that represents the artist’s essence, his intellect and creativity. That Wilde was the inspiration for Ménéalque perhaps becomes fundamental to the understanding of the latter’s role in Gide’s early works. Wilde’s *essence* persists in the quasi-mythical figure of Ménéalque while his philosophy inspires and shapes both Michel and the narrator of *Nourritures*. His role is what Segal refers to as the *perversitiseur* (PP 249), the one who spiritually abducts and corrupts the narrator by challenging his perceptions of normative, European social and family structures.

Within the pages of *Nourritures*, Ménéalque begins the recounting of his life much in the same way that Michel does in *l’Immoraliste*: in a garden, addressing a group of young men. His narrative is divided up among the different stages of his life. In the first part, he discusses how when he completed his schooling at the age of 18, he was left feeling empty, his “cœur inoccupé” (184), inspiring him to wander without attachments in search of adventure. The following passage elucidates two main themes that Gide explores in *Nourritures*: denuding (*la dénuement*), where one must free oneself from all ties and all possessions in order to experience life, God, and sensuality in their purest forms, and openness (*la disponibilité*), the state of being ready to accept and participate in these experiences:

Heureux, pensais-je, qui ne s'attache à rien sur la terre et promène une éternelle ferveur à travers les constantes mobilités. Je haïssais les foyers, les familles, tous lieux où l'homme pense trouver un repos; et les affections continues, et les fidélités amoureuses, et les attachements aux idées – tout ce qui compromet la justice; je disais que chaque nouveauté doit nous trouver tout entiers disponibles. (184-85)

Happy is he, I thought, who is not attached to anything on earth and brings an eternal fervor with constant mobility. I hated homes, families, all places where man might think he has found rest and a permanent condition, loyalty, love, attachments to ideas - everything that compromises justice; I said that we must each find ourselves entirely in a state of receptiveness.

His wanderings take him throughout the cities of Europe, where he sings with choirs in Venice, tastes the pleasures of the flesh, and spends time on ships before returning to his education at the age of twenty-five “non lassé de voyages, mais tourmenté par l'excessif orgueil que cette vie nomade avait fait croître” (188-89) (“not because I was tired of travelling, but rather because I was tormented by the excessive pride that this nomadic life had made grow”). At the age of 50 (or 40, depending on the version that is being read, as I mention above), after having accumulated book-knowledge, property, and relationships, he sold everything so as to amass enough money to live off of for the rest of his days, “ne voulant rien garder de *personnel* sur cette terre” (“Not wanting to hold on to anything *personal* on this earth”) so that “la sensation te donnerait plus de délices encore, si tu savais t’y donner tout entier. Tu crois y être, mais la meilleure partie de ton être est cloîtrée ; ta femme et tes enfants, tes livres et ton étude la détiennent et te la dérobent à

Dieu" (189) ("Sensation will give you even more delight, if you knew how to give yourself over to it completely. You believe yourself here, but the best part of you is cloistered; your wife and children, your books and study, all have a hold on it and God is robbed of it").

Ménalque's admonition is as much a foretelling of the plight of Michel as it is an erotic take on the words of Christ: "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Mat 19:20). By suggesting that the only way to find his way to God – or perhaps the way to *himself* – Ménalque is emphasizing the fact that material possessions and worldly relationships are what interfere with the search for personal authenticity. His message to the young men is to break from the institutions of family and religion, to turn away from society and seek that which is impermanent. He explains that by breaking with the past and with the ties that bound him, he was able to live a life where he could be true to himself, such that he was able to discover himself and see God in all of his forms. The true paradox of his assertion is that although he has let go of his belongings and social ties and is now living in a state of freedom denuded of all of society's binding conventions, he admits to having a large sum of money to live on, having sold off all of his worldly possessions, an advantage that these young men to whom he addresses his speech would most certainly not have. His situation is not unlike Gide's, who had the advantage of being independently wealthy, thereby allowing him to travel where and when he wanted, free from worry about his personal needs. As I discuss in Chapter 4, his recent marriage two years previously to Madeleine Rondeaux following the death of his mother was of little consequence to him: although he did have familial ties with his new wife and still owned his property in Cuverville, he was essentially to leave the running of the household in her hands as he

traveled when and where he wanted to. In a twist of irony, the philosophy of *dénuement* that he preaches in *Nourritures* and in future works is one that he only pretends to have lived: instead of following the words of Christ to sell one's possessions and give to the poor and follow him, Gide went out in his own search of God but was never without the support of his own personal wealth and security.

However, as a same-sex desiring person, and a self-acknowledged pederast, Gide was essentially not speaking of actual material or worldly possessions. The work ultimately represents for him a means of finding a way to reconcile his external world with his sexual desires and proclivities. The work which comes out of the symbolic movement is for him a chance to play with what *le dénuement* symbolized for him: how can he break from his strict religious upbringing in a society that made *who* he was (sexually) a virtual impossibility? Ménalque's story is that of a man who Gide probably wished he could be: free from a marriage that did not make sense to him despite the fact that he proclaimed – with all sincerity – his deep love for Madeleine. Couple that with the fact that he knew Wilde, who was living rather openly in his relationship with Douglas, and saw him arrested, publicly humiliated, and imprisoned for his homosexual relationship, and one might surmise that at least on one level there was a fear of retribution for his sexual self (in later years, he was to have a very public rebuke from Paul Claudel, who openly proclaimed to be worried for Gide's soul because of his sexual proclivities, a rebuke that is documented in the correspondence between the two men who were both friends and rivals).

Wilde's very public downfall most likely had a profound effect on him, for although he did not live in a country with laws as strict as those in England, he did know the potential consequences of his sexual nature, and spent his life trying to deny that his own

homosexuality was like that of Wilde's by redefining what his sexuality was, allowing himself to still be "other" without the risk of his own public humiliation and downfall. Elliman describes how

Gide must have been astonished to find the ne'er-do-well turned into the suffer-all, no longer victimizer but victim. [...] The sight of Wilde in Paris some months later made Gide look for cover. It took him much of his life to compromise himself, as if the most copious disclosure of his own propensities might expiate his earlier reluctance to accept Wilde's without blushing. (88)

In the end, despite the problematic aspects of the work, Gide does succeed in communicating the ways in which God can co-exist with his sexual-self. He places God in the "everywhere," and this pantheistic stance in *Nourritures* is one that ultimately permits the experience of sexual desire in a sacred rather than profane context. Can the reader view it as a re-imagining of the Bible? Perhaps. But instead, it might be more useful to view it as a guide for spirituality where Gide was undoing some of the staunch religious education from his childhood and trying to envision God in a manner that was an alternative to his upbringing under the tutelage of his mother. Furthermore, the book sets the tone for how he was to write books in the future. By "unwriting" God as he does here, he opens the space up to challenge the religious establishment and to embrace more fully his own same-sex sexual nature.

## Chapter 2 – Diverting the “I”: Les Soties

As the reader considers the tension that exists between conventional religious thought and issues of sexuality in Gide’s fictional (and some nonfictional) works, what arguably becomes most evident is a struggle between authenticity and inauthenticity. This is not to suggest that either religion or sexuality would in itself be considered “authentic” or “inauthentic” according to how it is performed by an individual, but rather that the authentic being cannot deny his sexuality at the expense of his religion or vice versa. What ultimately plays out in his works is Gide’s struggle to find a harmonic balance between his sexual nature and the bourgeois mores of his Judeo-Christian social class.

A narrative element that Gide uses to both add to this tension as well as disrupt it is a device he refers to as the “acte gratuit” or the “gratuitous/unmotivated act,” which in its simplest form can be defined as actions that are performed without thought or concern for consequences, or as Jean Hytier supposes, “ultimately the gratuitous act is merely the act witnesses find inexplicable, or still more simply, merely the act as yet unexplained” (*André Gide* 100). In this chapter, I will discuss how Gide used these spontaneous and gratuitous actions as a means of exploring and defining sexuality and spirituality, while at the same time “undoing” the common Judeo-Christian morality that he portrays as both corrupt and inauthentic.

Through an exploration of three of Gide’s best-known *soties* – works of satire whose name owes its origins to satirical plays that were enacted by law students in medieval Paris (Sheridan 269) – I shall thus reflect on what Gide was actually trying to accomplish when he deployed the gratuitous act as a narrative device, specifically by reflecting on its

function within the story, and examining whether or not its function is merely “gratuitous” in terms of the principal narrative. The gratuitous act becomes one of the threads that tie his *soties* together. Two of his earlier works, *Paludes* (1895) and *Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné* (1899), demonstrate respectively the genesis and evolution of the gratuitous act (in *Paludes*, it is actually referred to as the “acte libre” or “free act”); a decade and a half later in *Les Caves du Vatican* (1914), a biting satire of religion and religious leaders, the gratuitous act reaches its apotheosis when its protagonist, Lafcadio, commits a notorious and supposedly gratuitous murder.

The reader notes that the gratuitous act is not only significant for the divine dimensions it emulates within Gidean works, but also because it presents the idea of absolute freedom, be it physical, sexual or spiritual, from the constraints of established mores. It derails the notions of the “law of the father” (the laws of patriarchal, heterosexist society) as it satirizes unquestioning compliance to the “rules” of (hetero-) sexism, of procreation, and of “conventional” desire. In his works, Gide repeatedly addresses the dilemma of characters who, because of their elevated station in life, enjoy a sense of entitlement and social superiority, but as a result of their repressed desires (particularly when we speak of a same-sex sexual desire), find themselves consequently trapped by those same value systems of the society that has elevated them into their social station to begin with. These value systems have constructed a societal structure that on one hand provides them with their elevated financial means and social empowerment, but on the other specifically excludes them from the possibility of fulfilling their (sexual or social) desires. They come so close to “having it all,” but because of their social expectations and obligations, they specifically cannot. (A notable example of this phenomenon, as I will

discuss in the next chapter, is what the reader encounters through Michel in *l'Immoraliste*.)

When a society's moral codes assign particular roles to individuals – the good father, the loyal son, the obedient wife, or the chaste woman – the expectation is that individuals will comply with its established conventions in order to perpetuate their socio-economic stations. If the individual, however, transgresses the heterosexist, paternalistic hegemony either by not fulfilling his/her assigned role or by seeking to fulfill his/her desires that are not prescribed (or that are proscribed) by the societal conventions, s/he will experience a moral crisis that will result in either guilt or fear of ostracism, or both. The individual therefore would feel compelled to repress these desires, thereby rendering the notion of personal and sexual authenticity impossible. As Judith Butler explains, the fear of transgressing the “paternally sanctioned cultural laws” leads to a “fear of losing cultural legitimacy and, hence, being cast, not outside or prior to culture, but outside cultural legitimacy, still within culture, but culturally ‘out-lawed’” (*Gender Trouble* 111). This idea would as a result beg the question when studying Gide of which situation would be worse, being an outcast, being outlawed, or, simply being “outed?” If any of his protagonists were to become who they truly wished to be, would they be ostracized by the very systems that would have made who they were possible to begin with? Or, is the individual obligated to separate her/himself in a self-imposed exile in order to live authentically? The (anti-)hero of *l'Immoraliste* withdraws from his bourgeois lifestyle on France's mainland after he virtually abandons his mortally-ill wife, and lives with his mistress in the North African colony. But, his true desire (for his mistress' younger brother) cannot and will not be attained. His desire is for an ideal, and by definition, an ideal is nothing more than an abstraction, an idea of perfection that is, in essence, beyond reach.

The gratuitous act is therefore an idealized freedom from these societal constraints, since it represents a rupture within the hegemonic value system; it is the ultimate transgression of the laws that dictate the structures of desire and of self-knowledge, while in effect reaffirming an individual's sense of self: in other words, it is yet again an example of *dénuement*. The gratuitous act is most often a destructive one, one that symbolically breaks (with) the structure of the value system that had heretofore dominated the one who is committing the act. The gratuitous, unmotivated act seeks to break the established laws, rules, roles, and morality while at the same time empowering and privileging an individual. This idea gives rise to the notion of the gratuitous act "belonging" specifically to the God figure: the very notion of creation and destruction can be construed as gratuitous. The laws to which members of a society are subject (and to which they submit) are based in the concept of the Judeo-Christian God who creates and dictates morality, and for whom the privilege of creation/destruction, life/death is presumed. When an individual attempts to usurp this divine privilege, s/he is, as Butler describes, an "out-law."

Consequently, submission to God's (the Father's) law is ultimately tied to the idea that it is through an individual's actions that s/he emulates God. It is in *Le Prométhée mal enchaîné* where the gratuitous act belongs specifically to a god (Zeus, the banker) and not to a human being. His actions of bestowing at random both fortunes and slaps in the face demonstrate Gide's frivolous attitude towards the religious dogma of his time, as well as towards its moralities and conventions. Furthermore, he is examining the question of the provenance of evil and suffering, and seems to arrive at the answer: it is all at God's gratuitous whim. He takes these ideas a step further in *Les Caves du Vatican* when Lafcadio, through his gratuitous act (the murder of Fleurissoire), prolongs what the reader might

surmise as his childish desires, unconscious or even indifferent to the concept of right and wrong as he commits a senseless murder, and is, in a word, amoral. Lafcadio is in a certain fashion the successor to Zeus in *Prométhée*, usurping God's right to create life or end it as he sees fit, to act in a way that is simply amoral. But what we will discover is that what is perhaps Gide's most notable gratuitous act was not gratuitous at all, but rather motivated by the complex psychology of the character who perpetrates it. This idea would then unravel the entire theory behind the gratuitous act, since the infamous crime without motive would, upon closer examination, in fact be entirely motivated, and the quest for authenticity would ultimately become impossible.

Gide continues to skate the line between his religious beliefs and his sexuality in these works. From one perspective, the gratuitous act might be an act of violence and cruelty, but it is nonetheless one that represents a perverse freedom from the structures of religious and societal moralism. As I discuss the following works, I would like to consider the ways that his sexuality plays a role in the characters' motivations, and how, perhaps, the commission of the gratuitous act – whether they are the ones who commit the act or are victims of it – reinforces their sense of sexual marginalism within the context of religion and religious hierarchies.

### *Paludes, or, Writing (about) Nothing*

Although *Paludes* is not known as one of the more important or prolific works by Gide (at 54 pages in length in the Pléiade edition, it is only slightly longer than the 38- page long *Le Prométhée mal enchaîné*), it was considered by Gide to be of particular significance (in a letter to Paul Valéry in 1894, Gide writes “Mon cher ami, j'écris un roman moderne” [qtd. in

Magyar 151] [“My dear friend, I’m writing a modern novel”]) and by some critics to be the precursor to the *Nouveau Roman* (Magyar 151). *Paludes*, originally containing the subtitle *Traité de la contingence*, also has the distinction of being the place of the philosophical origin of Gide’s *acte gratuit* in the form of the *acte libre* (the “free act”). Gide, however, takes a satirical tone with regards to *Paludes*’ (lack of) philosophical content. Although *Paludes* does not delve into questions of sexuality and religion as deeply as in other works, its usefulness within my overall thesis is evident. Published two years before *Les Nourritures terrestres*, *Paludes* provides an early iteration of certain Gidian “archetypes” that come into play in later works, namely that of “the bachelor writer” who is attempting to write a book but unable to create anything of significance, addressing the problem of artistic and sexual non-production. He is the character, perhaps a homosexual (the evidence for which I will discuss), who has not yet, in the Gidian world, learned what questions to ask or what answers to seek out in terms of finding his own personal truths.

*Paludes* (translated as *The Marshlands*) is the story of an author, whom the reader knows only as “Je,” who narrates the tale. The narrator/Je is writing a book entitled (in typical Gidean self-referential fashion) *Paludes*, about a character named Tityre (echoing the character of the same name from Virgil’s *Eclogues*) who lives in a tower surrounded by marshlands and who spends his time contemplating life and the nature around him. The narrator, in turn, is surrounded by his own figurative marshland, a stagnant world populated by the Parisian literati, his friends and acquaintances. Gide satirizes these characters, whose lives are depicted not only as one-dimensional but also as non-productive. The novel is structured in a self-reflective, circular fashion, employing a series of *mises en abyme* – stories within stories, plays within plays, paintings within paintings –

that are described by Lucien Dällenbach as textual mirrors (see Chapter 5 where I discuss the *mise en abyme* in *Les faux-monnayeurs*). For example, Tityre fishes, but catches nothing, instead taking pleasure in eating the bait while the narrator writes but accomplishes nothing of substance. To illustrate the absurdity of the situation, Gide deploys a well-known play on words with the term “manger des vers” which is translated as both “eating worms” and “eating verses.” Tityre eventually obtains an aquarium, and delights in it as a microcosm of the marshes surrounding his tower: in effect, a *mise en abyme* reflecting the marshlands around him. These marshlands are as a consequence the *mise en abyme* that reflect the stagnant world surrounding the author within the *mise en abyme* that is *Paludes* being written within the pages of Gide’s novella of the same name.

*Paludes* is a work about stagnation, and hidden under its humorous themes is perhaps a more sobering theme of a person who is incapable of *doing* anything: the acts of writing, or of traveling, or even of participating in his community of fellow writers, are all somehow undermined. The gratuitous, or as it’s called in *Paludes*, the “free” act is an act that is impossible for the narrator to achieve. In a stagnant fashion, he attempts to write about stagnation, but is unable to realize the one act that he sets out to complete. This stagnation takes on a metaphoric dimension of impotence or perhaps even homosexuality. The story of “Je” and his creation of Tityre is a reflection on Gide’s attitudes towards normativity; the stagnancy of relationships, the stagnancy of being stuck in one place, on an island, unable to travel, is as much a humorous tale of an ineffective writer as it is a serious tale of a man who is trapped. It is important to note that the book was published the year his mother died and when he married Madeleine.

In Jean-Pierre Bertrand et al.'s *Le Roman célibataire*, the idea is presented that *Paludes*, similar to J-K Huysmans' *A Rebours*, was written in response to what was seen as a literary impasse at the turn of the 20th century, with these two works bookending a sub-movement of French Decadence that he refers to as the Bachelor Novel, with the Huysmans novel at the beginning, and Gide's novella at the end. This impasse was addressed by turning the idea of the novel on its ear (43). In a novel such as *A Rebours*, Huysmans' Des Esseintes – the quintessential decadent “hero” – is presented as one who is incapable of action, caught in a state of stagnation and living in an artificial world where the most important element in it is literature. The only thing that actually evolves in the novel is the deterioration of Des Esseintes' health (23). The narrator of Gide's novella is, like Des Esseintes, also incapable of action and disconnected from the society around him. In fact, the reader of *Paludes* gets the impression that friends are no more important to the narrator than mere acquaintances (Due 261). Both protagonists attempt to make a voyage that ultimately fails. For Des Esseintes, the trip was to be to London, but due to rain and other unforeseen circumstances he cannot make the journey, and he instead opts for wearing a suit that was imported from London and eating in a restaurant that, at least from the perspective of his own imagination, most resembled one that he would have found in London. In *Paludes*, the trip he was to take to an unspecified destination with his friend Angèle goes no further than Montmorency because of rain. The failed voyage of “Je” and Angèle resonates with the themes that Gide broaches in his earlier writings, specifically *Les Cahiers d'André Walter* and *Le Voyage d'Urien*, in which there is a problem these narrators have with women. He embarks on his voyage with Angèle, but is unable to go anywhere with her: he cannot accomplish any “act” with a woman. This is in contrast to another

character in the novella, Hubert, who is praised because he actually does “Des masses de choses...” (92) (“a bunch of things”), since he succeeds in making his own voyage to Biskra, another reference to Gide’s burgeoning homosexuality and the setting of *l’Immoraliste*, whose narrator Michel discovers his same-sex sexual desires.

The “Je” of *Paludes* is asked throughout the novella “what are you writing?” and the response is “I’m writing *Paludes*,” which, in its irony, doesn’t really answer the question clearly. When the question is followed-up with “what is it about,” the response is usually a random, quasi-philosophical explanation regarding the story’s content and themes, and is provided as if he is either annoyed by the question, or unclear about how to answer it to begin with:

“*Paludes*, commençai-je, - c’est l’histoire d’un célibataire dans une tour entouré de marais” (*Paludes* 93)

(“*Paludes*,” I began, “is the story of a bachelor in a tower surrounded by a swamp.”)

“*Paludes* - commençai-je - c’est l’histoire du terrain neutre, celui qui est à tout le monde... - mieux: de l’homme normal [...] - *Paludes* c’est l’histoire de l’homme couché” (116)

(“*Paludes*,” I began, “is the story of neutral ground, that which belongs to the everyman. Better yet, the normal man. *Paludes* is the story of a man reclining.”)

“[...] c’est l’histoire des animaux vivant dans les cavernes ténébreuses, et qui perdent la vue à la force de ne pas s’en servir. (118)

(“...is the history of animals living in dark caves, and losing their sense of sight by dint of not using it.”)

The first time he is asked the question “what are you doing,” however, the initial response is “nothing” (“rien”). In the end, the word “nothing” for all intents and purposes becomes synonymous with the word “writing” and ultimately for all action itself. In fact, like many characters in the Gidean oeuvre, the narrator of the tale is always writing, even though the writing is not necessarily of any value, most notably Edouard in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*. Regardless, the narrator is, in a way, attempting to write himself into existence: “The subject establishes itself as subject by referring to an act. The act is to write *Paludes*. This act is justified through the subject itself: ‘Sinon qui l’écrirait’ [‘Otherwise, who would write it?']. But the subject is also defined through his act ‘J’écris *Paludes*’ is his most frequent answer to questions about his life” (Due 263).

For example, he keeps a detailed, weekly to-do list of every task he must accomplish – most of which are of the most banal nature – and then assesses what he did and did not accomplish at the end of each day on an accompanying sheet. Some of the elements on the to-do list, as Reidar A. Due points out, are items that one would not normally consciously set aside time for, such as “contemplate Richard’s individuality,” “be surprised at not having received a letter from Jules,” or “worry about the relationship between Hubert and Angèle.” What they do serve to accomplish is to reinforce the narrator’s obsession of self-reference and self creation, while at the same time undermining the significance of “action” itself, since all actions, even those such as “to think about” or “to worry” which are not actions one would expect to be performed “by force of will,” are given an equal importance and attention in the lists, along with “write a letter” and “spend time at a friend’s” (266).

The act of “writing” or of “paying a visit” exist on the same plane as “thinking” and are given equal value in his to-do lists, and whether he accomplishes the task or not, there does not seem to be any real consequence, positive or negative. Since all actions therefore require the same level of priority, then “action” itself, as a concept, becomes devalued, especially in cases where there are, as the narrator describes, “deficits” in the actions that he has failed to accomplish. What Gide is quite possibly articulating through his narrator is not just the mundane nature of creativity, but perhaps more importantly, of creation itself. In other words, Gide is expressing his frustration with a God who has created a world in all of its splendor, yet in its magnificence, it is nothing but mundane or stagnant. Furthermore, when there are “deficits” within creation, he is acknowledging that the artist’s creation, like God’s creation, could be imperfect, if not defective. This is perhaps one of the many references (along with the theme of non-production) to that which is “wrong” or “defective” in people who experience non-normative sexual desires. But since it is all just mundane, it is ultimately of no consequence. Gide is offering an image of a God who does not care one way or the other.

Since the narrator, as Due asserts, is affirming his very being by enumerating every minute act that he must accomplish, the value of his existence is ultimately derailed by his inability to perform the actions at hand, as well as by the apathy for those tasks he actually succeeds in completing. Furthermore, he barely accomplishes what is arguably his most important action, that of “writing *Paludes*,” and consequently undermines his *raison d’être*. The reader might then conclude that Gide’s *Paludes* is a treatise on the futility of human action and surmise that the act of writing is itself a gratuitous act since there is seemingly no motivation for it (or at least no more motivation than for any of the other actions and

tasks he has in a given day) and ultimately, no real consequence, either. The narrator attests to this fact by affirming near the beginning of the tale that the reason he writes is “probablement que c’est pour agir” (93) (“probably because it is a form of action”) and that “Il faudrait tâcher de remuer un peu notre existence. Mais on n’invente pas ses passions!” (102) (“We should attempt to stir up our existence a little. But we do not invent our own passions!”)

Several conversations take place regarding different themes that the narrator is including in his writings, most importantly the philosophy of “action.” It is through a conversation the narrator has with Alexandre the philosopher where Gide first presents readers with the precursor to the “gratuitous act” in the form of the *acte libre*. Says Alexandre:

“Il me semble, Monsieur, que ce que vous appelez acte libre, ce serait, d’après vous, un acte ne dépendant de rien; suivez-moi : détachable – remarquez ma progression : supprimable, - et ma conclusion : sans valeur. Rattachez-vous à tout, monsieur, et ne demandez pas la contingence; d’abord vous ne l’obtiendriez pas – et puis : à quoi ça vous servirait-il?” (115)

(“It seems to me, Sir, that what you call the free act would be in your opinion an act that does not depend on anything. Follow me: detachable - now see my progression: deletable - and my conclusion: worthless. Attach yourself to everything, Sir, and do not ask for contingency. On the one hand, you would not get it – and, on the other, what would you get out of it?”)

The above passage is part of a series of futile and frustrating conversations that the narrator has with his acquaintances regarding his approach to philosophical and moral

dilemmas within his writings. Each of these characters has heard of the narrator's project only through word of mouth, but each of them believes that he understands all the themes that lie therein regardless of having not yet read a word of it. As for his friends, they are repeatedly telling him, at random mentions of a quasi-philosophical ideas or lines of poetry, that he "should include that in *Paludes*." In the end, the arguments and suggestions are futile, as the narrator is frustrated that nobody seems to understand or appreciate what it is that he is writing about, and as the reader might surmise, "Je" does not seem to know the answer himself. This gives rise to what is probably the most insidious theme within the novella as I mention above: "Je's" sexual and creative impotence.

The impotence of the narrator is exemplified in the character he is creating. Tityre's impotence reflects back on the narrator's inability to free himself from his own stagnation. For example, when the narrator describes Tityre's sickness and depression, he is in fact reflecting his own sickness and depression: his inability to complete any significant tasks, let alone get up in the morning. What is ultimately reflected by Tityre, though, is the impotence of the narrator himself. The impotence is demonstrated over and over throughout the novella, first through his relationship to Angèle which he describes as "sterile," and secondly through his constant obsession with action even though he is completely incapable of it. The *raison d'être* – writing *Paludes* – is ultimately a worthless, boring, and in the end impossible task that is seemingly abandoned for his next project. If he is constantly "doing" something but in the end there is nothing produced, then the act of writing (or for that matter, anything else) is nothing more than a creative masturbation, since nothing evolves, nothing germinates, and nothing develops – epitomized by the aquarium that Tityre acquires – as if a metaphor for a non-procreative sexual act.

Therefore the most gratuitous act of all is to undertake to write an unwritable story that there was no reason to have started in the first place.

Ultimately, the free act (or the gratuitous act, or for that matter *any* act) is actually impossible for *Paludes'* narrator because of his own creative and sexual impotence. *Paludes* is a commentary on the artistic block of one who is incapable of see beyond his immediate confines, and it represents the frustrations Gide felt toward the lack of freedom of creativity for one who does not "act." Although the narrator of *Paludes* wishes to "stir up" his life through action, he is in the end incapable of reaching beyond his own stagnant island and thus remains sterile, trapped in artistic stagnation, unable to achieve creative authenticity. The book is quite possibly a reflection of Gide's attitudes toward his own creative life that he may have felt would be stagnating due to his recent marriage to a woman whom he loved, but with whom he would never consummate that union. It depicts the apprehension of a non-normative person stuck in a tower on an island of normativity who must learn to look beyond that which confines him to find his artistic and productive self.

Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné, or, *Of Gods, Of Men, and the Gratuitous Act*

The Prometheus figure is one that has existed since antiquity, but as Raymond Trousson warned in his exhaustive volume *Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne* from 1964, the notion of labeling the Prometheus character as simply "rebellious" is too simplistic. His function in literature is far more complex; the perception of Prometheus as "rebel" changes over the centuries, and is linked in each case to the "spirit of the times" (III-IV). The classical story – originally recounted in an epic poem by Hesiod in

the 8th century B.C.E. and later in a tragedy by Aeschylus – recounts how Zeus, displeased by humankind’s sacrificial offering of burned bones, steals fire from them. The god Prometheus, in turn, steals the fire back and returns it to the humans. As punishment, he is condemned to be bound to a rock to have his regenerating liver consumed daily by an eagle. Prometheus is frequently perceived as a pre-cursor to the Christ figure, because like Christ, he brought light to humankind and is sacrificed, suffers, dies and resurrects for humankind’s benefit.

The Prometheus motif figures several times during the 19th century in European literature. Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote a play in four acts entitled *Prometheus Unbound* (referencing the title by Aeschylus of the same name) in 1818, following the classic book by his wife, Mary Shelly, *Frankenstein: Or, the Modern Prometheus*. Ernest Myers published *The Judgment of Prometheus* in 1886, in which the Titan turns away from the Gods on Olympus and returns to the humans. In 1897, two years before Gide’s treatment of the motif was published, Hermann Hango placed Faust and Prometheus in opposition to each other in his work entitled *Faust und Prometheus*. Gide’s tale, which first appeared serially in the literary magazine *l’Ermitage* in 1899, was given a title that offers a literary nod to Shelly’s work, but in the case of Gide’s work, an “Un-Bound” Prometheus becomes “Ill-Bound” in *Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné*.

But what influenced Gide in terms of the Prometheus motif, most likely, would be found in the 18th century, rather than the 19th, with the poem “Prometheus” published in 1789 by Goethe in tandem with his poem “Ganymede.” It is widely known that Gide was a great fan of Goethe, who, along with other German writers and philosophers such as Nietzsche and Kant, was a lifelong influence on Gide’s philosophical and artistic formation.

In his journals, for instance, there are no fewer than one hundred twenty references to Goethe and roughly three hundred fifty references to German writers in general (Bishop 326).

Goethe's Prometheus (and his counterpart Ganymede in the "sister" poem) provides an interesting background that informs – if not influences – the reader's understanding of Gide's Prometheus in terms of questions of masculinity and queerness. Robert Tobin in his book *Warm Brothers: Queer Theory and the Age of Goethe*, puts the two Goethe poems in opposition to each other, demonstrating the ways in which Prometheus embodies an archetype of masculinity while Ganymede (who is also male) strives, although unsuccessfully, to embody the feminine. Strikingly, the gendering of these two characters is accomplished through Prometheus' deployment of the self-possessed and self-assured "I," whereas Ganymede is described by Tobin as a "poem of self-dissolution," where the first person pronoun yields more prominently to the more self-effacing "You" (133-4). A final aspect of the Promethean masculinity in the Goethe poem deals with technological prowess (Prometheus points to the hut he has built and the fire that he has created), as well as freedom and autonomy (he refers to his victory over the Titans and his escape from death and slavery). Tobin states: "Not surprisingly for an eighteenth-century bourgeois fantasy, this assertive, technologically gifted, free self is also male" (133).

But perhaps the most curious assertion comes from what Trevor Hope observes is Freud's "reworking of the myth of Prometheus," where it was not man's mere discovery of fire as a natural phenomenon, but rather the control over a homosexual urge. He quotes Freud:

It is as though a primal man had the habit, when he came into contact with

fire, of satisfying an infantile desire connected with it, by putting it out with a stream of urine. The legends that we possess leave no doubt about the originally phallic view taken of tongues of flame as they shoot upwards. Putting out the fire by micturating. . . was therefore a kind of sexual act with a male, an enjoyment of sexual potency in a homosexual competition. The first person to renounce this desire and spare the fire was able to carry it off with him and subdue it to his own use. By damping down the fire of his sexual excitation, he had tamed the natural force of fire. This great cultural quest was thus the reward for his renunciation of instinct. (qtd in Hope 171)

The Freudian “reworking” of the myth of man’s acquisition of fire curiously places it in the realm of man’s renouncing his same-sex desire from the competition of a literal “pissing contest” to one of self-denial and a mastery over his base instincts and desires (what Hope calls a “urethral drive”) to, as Freud indicates, “subdue it to his own use.” The Promethian act of stealing the fire from the gods for man’s use was therefore an act that was congruent to man’s latent homosexual desires. Hope’s assertion is that what is classically seen as the act of hubris of man stealing fire from the gods (or Prometheus stealing it for him) is depicted as “no longer a strictly divine power but a primal homosexual desire that seems, indeed, in its (pre)figuration in the natural phenomenon of fire, to precede the performative act that institutes civilization” (171). If we consider Freud’s assertion, then, homosexuality is the latent desire that must first be subdued in order for man to be able to subdue fire. As I will discuss later, the Miglionnaire/God in Gide’s *sotie* admits that when he created man, he planted within him an egg of an eagle, which represents the internalized cross that mankind must bear, and this cross is one of

latent and internalized desires that must themselves be subdued: in other words, a man must tame his internal eagle.

A further dimension to the Promethean “queer masculinity” concerns procreation. Although Prometheus is the creator of humans, he creates them non-sexually in an autochthonous manner (not unlike the Judeo-Christian God who created the first man out of dust and the first woman out of the man’s rib). At first glance this would not be striking, but on a further examination of Gidean themes, non-sexual procreation actually represents a flip-side to non-procreative sexual acts. Sexual non-procreation and artistic non-creation become blurred themes in Gide’s works through characters who engage in homosexual acts that are biologically incapable of producing progeny, and in much the same way, writers within his works who are constantly engaged in the act of writing but never manage to get anything of substance written (as I have already discussed in terms of the narrator of *Paludes* and will discuss regarding Edouard in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*). It is no wonder therefore that Gide chooses to access the Promethean motif, since this complex character embodies the queer and masculine themes that define many of his works.

The Prometheus character in Gide’s story is, for all intents and purposes, depicted as a Christ-figure, and the eagle, in turn, correlates to a symbol for the cross. With a recurrent theme of “il faut avoir un aigle” (“one must have an eagle”), there is a message that we all have our proverbial crosses to bear and are obliged to embrace them. Prometheus is portrayed as a boring orator who sells matchsticks for a living. Similar to the Christ, he is imprisoned under trumped up charges: Prometheus is accused of selling his matchsticks without a patent. Prometheus is eventually liberated, however, and literally “raised up” by his eagle whom Prometheus fattens up by encouraging the creature to feed on his liver. By

the end of the tale, he kills the eagle, symbolically “triumphing over his cross.”

But this is not to suggest that Gide’s *Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné* is a parable, nor is it a tale that reveals hidden truths about religion or philosophy: it is after all a *sotie*, a satirical work. Gods are presented in the most frivolous of manners as Gide subverts notions of divine authority. Furthermore there is a play on the terms *foi* and *foie*, since the words in French for “faith” and for “liver” are homophonic. In other words, in the same way Prometheus’ liver is repeatedly destroyed and regenerated, so is one’s faith. As Ben Stoltzfus states:

Gide's eagle or the eagles of his fictional characters are direct descendants of the bird that once fed on Prometheus. The eagle is an internal or external obstacle which frustrates the physical, moral, and intellectual growth of man. An internal eagle is the voice of conscience, passion, sensuality, or asceticism which is responsible for the "bad faith" Sartre, in turn, alludes to so frequently. An external eagle may be a person, the family, the Church, society or the State which, in the name of some "higher authority" tries to bind man with chains of moral conformity. (4)

The “bad faith” (“mauvaise foi” c.f. Sartre, *Essays in Existentialism*) to which Stoltzfus refers comes from Sartre’s terminology of his philosophy of existentialism, describing individuals who do not act authentically and instead cave in to societal pressures and value systems and create an inauthentic essence. The crux of Gide’s Prometheus tale is that of “the contempt for moral authority coming from above” (Sheridan 160), that the individual is being controlled by external forces, compelling him to conform to values that are separate from his authentic essence.

Zeus, the G/god-figure, who is also known in the tale as the Banker and the Miglionnaire, is not a resplendent being; he is described rather as a corpulent, middle-aged man whose power is derived from his wealth, not from the supernatural, perhaps a criticism of what Gide saw as the bloated wealth (and undeserved power) of Catholicism. He is merely a two-dimensional character whose benedictions are as random – as gratuitous – as his maledictions, offering fortunes and slaps in the face purely for his amusement, simply to make humans more interesting. After he drops a handkerchief at the beginning of the story, another man, who the reader finds out later is Coclès, bends down to pick it up. Zeus then hands him an envelope containing a 500-franc bill and asks him to deliver it to Damoclès before abruptly striking him in the face hard enough to draw blood. The scene opens the story as a *fait divers* and is described from different points of view throughout the tale. Damoclès, the recipient of the anonymous gift, is eventually driven mad – and to death – by trying to exact meaning from this bounty.

Although Coclès continues to wander the streets in search for the next slap in the face and the next bounty he must deliver to others, it is Damoclès who suffers more. It is not he who has received the “curse” of the slap in the face who is driven to his death, it is the recipient of the fortune who is tormented by the senselessness of his “blessing,” not knowing how to distribute it, feeling indebted to the giver, crushed by the guilt of depriving others of it:

Ces cinq cents francs, haïs, exécrés, je croyais les devoir à tous et n'osais les donner à aucun - j'en aurais privé tous les autres. Je ne songeais qu'à m'en débarrasser [...] On ne perd ni ne gagne au change; c'est une folie circulaire, simplement. Et s'ajoutait à cela cette torture: c'est grâce à la gifle d'un autre

que je tiens là ces cinq cents francs! (*Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné* 331)

This hateful and atrocious five hundred franc bill, I believed I owed it to everyone yet dared not give it to anyone - I would have deprived all others of it. My only dream was to be rid of it! [...] One neither loses nor gains by exchanging it; it is simply a circular madness. And only to add to this torture: it is thanks to someone else's slap in the face that I now hold these five hundred francs!

One could derive from this statement that no matter the fortune, or lack thereof, humankind is vulnerable to the randomness of divine interventions in one's fate. These characters try in vain to exact a logical meaning from that which is gratuitously distributed. Just as the eagle is Prometheus' cross to bear, so are the fates of Damoclès and Coclès. This idea resonates with notions of birthrights, social stations, and sexuality that saddle humankind. What is one person's fortune is another's curse, and whatever hand a person is dealt, s/he is obliged to deal with the consequences, regardless of whether or not the hand is perceived as fortunate or ill-fated. Therefore a person's wealth or poverty, elevated or diminished social status, would have no bearing on happiness or well being, since every human has his or her eagle, his or her cross to bear.

What Gide seems to bring into play through the struggles of his characters is a reflection of Nietzsche's ethic of individualism, which requires that mainstream society's constructed moral codes (including the institutions that govern sexuality and religion) be rejected to reveal an authentic individual. During the course of the story, several characters ponder a simplified version of this ethic and conclude that the individual distinguishes himself by the ways in which he differs from the "common" man. As Damoclès searches in

vain to determine his benefactor and make sense of his bounty, he ascertains that although he thought he was just an ordinary person, he is after all a unique individual: “Un homme commun ne saurait exister, et j’affirme que c’est une vaine ambition que de tâcher de ressembler à tout le monde, puisque tout le monde est composé de chacun et que chacun ne ressemble à personne”(308) (“the common man could not exist, and I affirm that it is a vain ambition to attempt to be like everyone else, since everyone is made up each person, and each person resembles no one”).

In terms of Gide’s *sotie*, it is not that far a leap to extract the homosexual subtext in Prometheus’ reaction to his eagle through an observation of Prometheus’ discourses itself: “Premier point : il faut avoir un aigle. Deuxième point : D’ailleurs, nous en avons tous un” (321) (“First Point: One must have an eagle. Second Point: Moreover, we all have one”). He goes on to describe that he has always had his eagle but that he had not seen him, was not aware of him, until he had taken up his responsibility of tending to humankind. As he describes bringing fire to humans, he claims that he brought them a consciousness of their being. By nourishing them, he provided them with the perception of beauty, and beyond just a simple desire for well being, a “malade espérance du mieux [...] Notre aigle est notre raison d’être, Messieurs” (324) (“mad hope for the best [...] Our eagles are our *raison d’être*, Sirs”). As he claims to have fashioned humankind in his image, he inadvertently planted within them the un-hatched egg of an eagle, which, when hatched, provides humans with a consciousness of their suffering, with desire, and ultimately a reason for being. He encourages Damoclès to embrace his debt, and Coclès to embrace his wounds, if not deepen them. These plights that torment them, that “eat at them,” are their eagles: they distinguish themselves from the rest of humankind through their suffering.

If the eagle, then, represents humankind's cross to bear, these burdens can take on any range of meanings, furthering ideas of "fortune" or "misfortune," and expanding into any number of behaviors or characteristics that belong to an individual. In other words, the burdens that saddle human beings can also take on dimensions of non-sanctioned or subversive sexual desires. Gareth Moore, who was a former Dominican Friar and author of several works in which he discussed homosexuality in the context of Catholic theology and the Bible, criticizes how the Church perceives homosexuality as a "condition," since the notion of "condition" quickly devolves into the notion of "illness." When he describes the suffering of homosexual persons, it is not that one suffers because of homosexual feelings per se, but instead that "suffering involved in being homosexual is rather a matter of other people's reactions and general social attitudes" because "he carries his condemnation around with him" (*Body in Context* 198). Twenty years after the publication of *Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné*, the interlocutor in *Corydon*, in describing his pederastic desires, attempts to thwart the idea of same-sex desire as a sickness, while he at the same time acknowledges society's judgment of same sex desiring persons, affirming their "difference": "la conscience que j'acquis de mon... anomalie me plongea dans une inquiétude mortelle. Il est absurde de soutenir, ainsi que font encore certains, que l'on ne parvient à la pédérastie que par débauche et c'est là goût de blasé. Je ne pouvais non plus me reconnaître pour dégénéré, ni malade" (*Corydon* 22) ("the conscience that I had acquired by my... anomaly plunged me into a state of mortal distress. It is absurd to uphold, as still some do, that one comes in to pederasty only by vice or a taste of indifference. I could neither see myself as a degenerate nor sick").

Words like "anomaly" and "condition" elicit a vision of the "difference" of a same-sex

desiring individual from the notion of the “common man.” That which renders one as apart from all others is the crux of Prometheus’ discourse: the eagle is that which causes one to suffer, but is that which is also to be celebrated. It is what eats away at a person that correlates to a person’s individuality. He asserts that the secret of life is being devoted to one’s eagle, and stresses to Damoclès “...de devoir avec joie. Voilà votre aigle à vous ; il en est d’autres, il en est de plus glorieux” (*Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné* 327) (“to be indebted with joy. That is your eagle; and there are others; and there are others even more glorious”). It echoes the call in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, where the narrator “dis-instructs” his protégé from bourgeois moral codes, telling him to “ne crois plus au péché” (“believe in sin no longer”), and encourages him to unearth his own passions and find his own path. Prometheus calls the characters to embrace what makes them different, to let it devour them and be nourished by it. It is a notion of individuality – and the freedom it provides – that illustrates the eagle as a metaphor for the revelation of a sexual desire that would inherently be “negative.” It is a desire that “eats away” at an individual, but must be nourished and dealt with, because it is, after all, beautiful.

According to Ben Stoltzfus in *Gide’s Eagles*, “The combats that are waged within the psyches of Gide’s fictional characters, their struggles with themselves, with angels, devils, passions, conscience, in short, with all the eagles devouring their livers, reveal conflicts of opposing values. Gide’s works expose the faces of men tormented by such ‘eagles’” (88). Gide in fact eroticizes this torment to which Stoltzfus refers as he proposes a pleasurable suffering both of body and of mind. The characters are not being counseled to heal or forgive; they are rather encouraged to deepen their sense of torment, to feel physical pain more fully or to delve more deeply into mental anguish. Their conditions are privileged and

savored, and become themselves a metaphor of (sexual) desire. Prometheus is instructing his “protégés” to act against what they would ordinarily perceive as negative, and relish in it. Prometheus’ counseling them to find ecstasy in their guilt and suffering exhibits the tension between sexuality and divinity, since the very cause of their distress is coming from above, bestowed upon them by the god figure. He advises them to cherish that which sets them apart as a means to integrate themselves into the human condition, rather than marginalize themselves from it; to shed their guilt and “enjoy the pain.” What G/god has unwittingly inspired in them becomes noble instead of negative, and Prometheus seeks to guide them as they make sense of it. In effect, Gide is working out the problem of the tension that exists between the problematic nature of same-sex desire in the context of the belief in a Divine Creator who not only created man but specifically, if not cruelly, rendered him desirous of other men, and then made him feel ostracized for those same desires that were divinely imparted. He depicts homosexuality, through the trials of Damoclès, as both a gift and a curse.

But the reader must again be reminded of the satirical tone of the tale. Whether or not Gide was creating a homosexual subtext in the *sotie*, he eventually undermines the message of Prometheus, who has touted his eagle as a noble entity that brings meaning to humankind’s being, by revealing that the eagle was only part of the Miglionnaire’s game. He had divulged earlier to the waiter that he engages in gratuitous actions simply because, like a god, he can. Since he is of infinite means, he has no worry for consequence, unlike human beings, who need to concern themselves with such things.

Shortly before Damoclès’ demise, Prometheus and the waiter have an exchange with the Miglionnaire, who reveals: “Je joue, mais je cache mon jeu. J’expérimente ; je joue

comme un Hollandais sème ; comme il plante un secret oignon. Ce que je prête aux hommes, ce que je plante en l'homme, je m'amuse à ce que cela pousse ; je m'amuse à le voir pousser. L'homme sans quoi serait si vide ! (329) ("I play, but I hide my game. I experiment. I play in the way a Dutchman plants; the way he plants his secret bulb. It delights me to watch what grows from what I impart on men, from what I plant within them. I love watching it grow. Without it man would be so empty!")

This passage reveals contempt on Gide's the part for a divine being who toys with humankind purely for his amusement, obligating its members to face conundrums not only of misfortune, but also of fortune and bounty. Zeus reveals that it was he who gave the eagle to Prometheus, and, through Prometheus, to humankind, drawing everyone into his game. He has given him the eagle as gratuitously as he bestowed upon Damoclès the money and Coclès the slap in the face. The fact that the trials of the human condition are being gratuitously distributed from above demonstrates both the randomness and meaninglessness of humankind's struggle, of the behavior of the gods, and of the gratuitousness of the *sotie* itself.

Disillusioned, Prometheus decides to be rid of his eagle and devours it, saving the creature's plumes for their beauty. The story concludes *with* a story, recounted by Prometheus, about Tityre and Moelibée, who represent the opposing precepts of duty and "bare-naked" freedom. The moral is that Prometheus never needed the eagle after all. The crux of the story deals with the vain attempts to extract meaning from the hand the humankind is dealt, particularly in terms of human suffering and its dimension of subversive sexuality. By devouring his eagle, Prometheus is freeing himself from the binds of his morality that he has simply deemed gratuitous.

Les Caves du Vatican, or, Lafcadio's Action

Whereas in *Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné*, Gide attributes the gratuitous act to those actions committed by a deity, in *Les Caves du Vatican*, it is human beings who instead carry out the gratuitous act. Upon initial examination of *Les Caves du Vatican*, the reader could identify several serious themes of family, illegitimacy, religious piety, and murder. The serious nature of these subversive themes, however, is subdued by humorous plot-twists and by the *sotie's* numerous two-dimensional characters: Gide achieves the satirical tone of the work through the use of absurdist plotlines and arcane vocabulary, as well as through the odd names and sometimes ridiculous natures he assigns his characters.

*Les Caves du Vatican*, originally released in serial format in the NRF, addresses themes of paternity, Catholicism and economics that are readdressed more seriously in later works, particularly in *Les Faux-monnayeurs* more than ten years later. The publication of the work provoked a famous moral feud between Gide and his friend-cum-nemesis Paul Claudel over a pederastic passage within its pages (although there seem to be many), as well as over an epigraph that refers to the Schism of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century when two Popes were claimants to the throne. This quotation from the play *L'Annonce faite à Marie* appeared only in the serial format (Gide omitted it from the book because of Claudel's objections to it) at the beginning of Book III. It posed the question: "But of which King do you speak and of which Pope? For there are two and no one knows which is the real one" (Stoltzfus 108).

The plot of *Les Caves du Vatican* revolves principally around the fictional Baraglioul family, to which most of the major characters are at least loosely related either biologically or matrimonially, and the role they play in one of the major plotlines surrounding a scam

where con-artists convince wealthy Catholics that the Pope has been replaced by an impostor and is being held for ransom. Another major plotline involves Lafcadio Wluki, the 19-year old bastard son of Count Juste Agénor de Baraglioul, who learns of his noble but illegitimate birthright. His illegitimacy opens the door for Gide to explore themes of paternity and family as he does in other works, themes for which I will provide an analysis below.

It is worth noting that the first translations of this work into English (by Dorothy Bussy, a contemporary of Gide who served as the first English translator for many of Gide's works) were published in 1925 by Knopf under the title *The Vatican Swindle*, but was changed to *Lafcadio's Adventures* for the second printing of the book. It was published again in 1952 (a year after the author's death) by Cassel with the title *The Vatican Cellars*. These titles are curious, since with the exception of the 1952 title these translations seem to miss the subtlety of the French original: the image of the "caves" that describe not only the symbolic (and literal) underground world of the con-artists, but also the "subterranean" lives of the other characters. Additionally, the word *cave* in French, apart from meaning "cellar," is a slang word for "sucker," undoubtedly referencing the "dupes" of the con game spearheaded by Protos, one of Lafcadio's former schoolmates, who throughout the book disguises himself as different people to carry out the scam.

The major characters in the novel are, as stated earlier, from two principal families. Their names are often silly sounding and many are laced with double entendres. These odd names seemingly predestine the characters to little development and two-dimensionality. The Pétérat sisters are from one of those families, whose unfortunate name evokes the French word *péter*, meaning "to fart." To add a level of irony to this name, each of the

sisters' first names is that of a flower: Marguerite, who is married to Julius de Baraglioul; Véronique, who is married to Anthime Armand-Dubois; and Arnica, who is married to Amédée Fleurissoire (a last name that also evokes the image of flowers, from the French word *fleur*). The Baraglioul family's patriarch is the Comte Juste-Agénor de Baraglioul, who has two legitimate children (Julius and the Comtesse Guy de Sainte-Prix) and one who is illegitimate (Lafcadio Wluki).

*Les Caves du Vatican* is probably best known for the notorious murder committed by Lafcadio, a murder that for some represents the quintessential gratuitous act. But Gide seems to point out in this book that there are more than mere actions that can be considered gratuitous when we observe humankind, there are also gratuitous institutions and belief systems as well. Through the work's satirical tone and plot twists, these institutions and belief systems are overthrown, destabilized, and figuratively murdered.

Destruction, which is in fact a function of the gratuitous act, is also prevalent in *Les Caves du Vatican*, as much is "destroyed" within its pages. One such destructive act is committed by Anthime Armand-Dubois, who after sardonic criticism of the Catholic church as well as of his wife Marguerite's beliefs and prayers, destroys a statue of the Madonna around which his wife had placed candles as a devotion for his recovery from sciatica. The other, major destructive act is when Lafcadio pushes Amédée Fleurissoire from the train, not knowing that the man was actually his brother-in-law. As Doris Kadish points out,

These acts are doubly destructive in the sense that they are aggressions committed against both a direct object and an additional, indirect object as well. In Anthime's case, the attack is aimed directly at a religious statue and

indirectly at the institution of religion. In Lafcadio's case, it is aimed directly at his brother-in-law and indirectly at the institution of the Family. (571)

To focus first on Anthime's destructive act, I turn to the first chapter, where the reader initially encounters Anthime, an "unbeliever and freemason" who performs a myriad of diabolical scientific experiments on whatever small animals are brought to him by his assistant, Beppo. He starves rats to analyze their loss of bodyweight; he removes organs or limbs from other creatures to document in what ways it will affect them. His scientific diversions on one hand serve as a thematic introduction to a gratuitous act (with his cruel and dispassionate treatment of his victims), and on the other create a discourse of science versus the sacred. Anthime, an atheist, is in fact usurping God's privilege of toying with living beings: "...il poussait ses investigations dans d'autres voies, prétendant forcer Dieu dans de plus secrets retranchements" (684) ("...he pushed his investigations in other directions, professing to back God into His most secret corners").

Later, once he has discovered that Véronique has lighted candles to pray for his recovery and has smashed the statue with his cane, he dreams of a visitation from the Virgin Mother, is miraculously cured of his pain, and undergoes a religious conversion. This conversion, however, is short-lived, since by the end of the story he re-embraces his atheism. In this way, Gide presents religious fervor as both fleeting and absurd, scorning dogmatism in all its forms, both religious and scientific. In fact, all three brothers-in-law (Julius, Anthime, and Amédée) are portrayed as ridiculous and unbending "examples of what Protos and Lafcadio, as schoolboys, called 'crustaceans' (*crustacés*), slow-moving minds, protected by shell-like dogmatic systems. Even when such men swap their

philosophical systems for diametrically opposed ones, their mode of thinking remains equally dogmatic" (Sheridan 270).

But Gide takes this mockery even further through the titular plotline of the book: the con game that exploits devout Catholics who have been told that the Pope has been kidnapped by the freemasons and replaced by an impostor. After the Comtesse Guy de Ste-Prix initially gives her ransom check to the priest (who is actually Protos in disguise) to fund the mission to save the Pope, Julius and Amédée Fleurissoire head to Italy to carry out the rescue, leading to their own set of misadventures and Amédée to his death.

What Gide is attempting to do within this plotline is essentially to portray the Church as a powerless institution, one whose adherents could be so easily duped by an outrageous story, one that invests the essence of the entire institution into one singular man (Kadish 576). In fact, there is a deliberate deconstruction of the Catholic Church, as the problem is presented that the institution's titular figurehead could possibly have been kidnapped to begin with. Furthermore, that it, as both a religious organization and a cultural entity, could continue to run, nonetheless, without its leader. Says Kadish:

Gide seems to mock the believers' conviction that the Pope, as the true essence and firm theological foundation of the Church, is necessary: the provocative question Gide asks is, who would know or care if the Pope could be replaced by an undetected impostor as long as the institution continued to function? (576)

What does it say that the Pope could be kidnapped and replaced yet nobody within the active Church would notice? Gide scorns not only the dupes that would be so blindly caught up in their own awe of the Pope who functions as an essential part of the Catholic

Church's organization and hierarchy, but also the absurdity of an institution that proclaims the need for a titular head in the first place. "The allusion to a false Pope is, of course, essential to the plot of *Les Caves*. It is Julius de Baragliouls's inability to distinguish between the real Pope and the presumed false one which undermines the reality of both" (Stoltzfus 109). With this revelation, Gide is in fact rendering the institution of the Catholic Church impotent by mocking – if not kidnapping – its leader, and ultimately of undermining the reality of God himself. What Gide was ultimately trying to accomplish in the context of an absurd plotline, is provide a space where a God who accepts "otherness" (of sexuality, in particular) could be re-created by "destroying" the God of the patriarchy.

What is destroyed, therefore, is not only a human life (Amédée Fleurissoire's, which I will address in a moment), but also – and perhaps more importantly for Gide – the religious dogma and devotion to an institution that would be reliant on a single figurehead to legitimize it. When Julius describes his audience with the Pope (who he believes to have been the impostor), he is mocked by his brother-in-law Anthime, who has regained his limp, ironically, saddled with the burden of not believing in God after "converting" back to atheism:

– Anthime, écoutez bien: Je n'ai pas vu le pape parce que personne ne peut le voir; celui qui présentement est assis sur le trône pontifical et que l'Eglise écoute et qui promulgue; celui qui m'a parlé, le pape qu'on voit au Vatican, le pape qu j'ai VU N'EST PAS LE VRAI. »

Anthime, à ces mots, commença d'être secoué tout entier d'un gros rire.[...]

– Vous plaisantez ?... Et qui me dira si Fleurissoire en arrivant au paradis n’y découvre pas tout de même que son Bon Dieu non plus n’est pas *le vrai* ?”

(*Les Caves du Vatican* 863-64)

(“Anthime, listen closely. I have not seen the Pope because nobody can see him. He who is on the pontifical throne, whom the church heeds and he who promulgates; the one who spoke to me, the Pope who is seen at the Vatican, the Pope whom I saw *is not the real one!*”

“Are you joking? And who will tell me that if Fleurissoire, upon arrival in Paradise, would not discover as well that his Good Lord is not *the real one?*)

In essence, what Gide accomplishes, as in the ancient tradition of a *sotie*, is to humorously refute the validity of institutional power (the Church), its hierarchy (the Pope), and the focus of its adoration (God). In fact, he goes so far, albeit jokingly, as to challenge the legitimacy – if not the existence – of God himself through Anthime’s assertion that the God of the Catholic Church is not in fact the real God.

At play in the text is a challenge to the “patriarchal order,” the order within which the institutions of family, Church, and God Himself are constructed. Lacan presents us with three orders within psychoanalysis, the Imaginary (that of images and imagination), the Real (that which is authentic, existing outside of the structures of language), and the Symbolic (that of authority and structure, a linguistic dimension where language government, and institutions such as the Church are possible). It is within this dimension, the Symbolic, that God, the ultimate authority and the ultimate father figure, is constructed. The patriarchy reinforces its hegemony through figureheads within these institutions that assert and affirm the institutions’ authority. The papacy is a shining example of a

leader/figurehead who represents in human form total authority, in this case of God and Church, as well as leader of a governmental entity in the secular sphere (although it should be noted that the Vatican was not recognized as a Sovereign State until 1929 under Mussolini's government). When Gide mocks the authority of the Pope, and presents the idea that an impostor could be sitting on the papal throne, he is systematically challenging not only the authority and validity of the church, but also undermining the hegemony of the patriarchal order within the Symbolic itself. The Pope is an ultimate father figure, the symbol for God on Earth, and Gide is challenging and mocking His validity.

But what Gide is ultimately attempting to mitigate in this satire and in other works as well, is the overarching problem of "Fathers" (capital F, God) and "fathers" (lower-case f, progenitors) who represent the Order that both constructs and enforces the "laws" of familial and sexual normativity. Again, I turn to Lacan who presents us with three forms of the "father" corresponding to each of his three psychoanalytic orders. The *imaginary* father is the omnipotent father who "can be construed as an ideal father [...], or the opposite, as the 'father who fucked the kid up' [...]. In the former guise, the imaginary father is the prototype of God-figures in all religions, an all-powerful protector. In the latter role, the imaginary father is both the terrifying father of the primal horde, [...] and the agent of privation [...]" (Evans 63). According to Dylan Evans, Lacan is less precise in his definition of the *real* father, but he nonetheless explains, "the real father is the man who is *said to be* the subject's biological father. The real father is thus an effect of language, and it is in this sense that the adjective real is to be understood here: the real of language rather than the real of biology" (63). The *symbolic* father, however, is "not an actual subject but a position in the symbolic order" who regulates desire and imposes law, and "is also referred to as

The-Name-of-the-Father” (62-63). In Lacan’s own words, “It is in the name of the father that we must recognise the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified this person with the figure of the law” (*Écrits* 67). The God of the Abrahamic religions, in this case, is the God of the Symbolic, or more precisely, the God who is constructed within the Symbolic and in whose name we establish the rules of government, as well as of sexuality, family, and religion.

Gide deals with the further problem of God and the Church both being established as the dominant law within the Symbolic by challenging the authority of the Church and the power that it asserts in God’s name. As he mocks the institution of the Pontifical figurehead by depicting him as powerless and interchangeable, he is attempting to weaken the structure of the Law of God itself, calling into question the entire system of religious and governmental authority, and of God Himself. Furthermore, since there is nothing outside of the con game to communicate that a false pope is sitting in the Vatican, then the Pope, like everything else in the Symbolic order, is nothing but an empty signifier.

Additionally, the parallel between church and family as institutions is equally mocked and destabilized as the convention of fatherhood becomes itself delegitimized, a challenge that Gide will take a step further when, in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, Gide questions the authority/validity of the institutions of family and of the government. In the same way that the Pope (Father) is portrayed as an imposter, so are Lafcadio’s “uncles,” who served as his illegitimate father figures, many of whom took advantage of him sexually when he was a boy. “The world of family hardly receives a more serious or respectful treatment [than the Church]. The conventional nature of family life is emphasized through such means as the intricate presentation of family trees and the sharp contrast between

legitimacy and illegitimacy (Kadish 574). As Sheridan describes it, Lafcadio possesses the style of an aristocrat, but due to his illegitimacy he is actually excluded from the aristocracy. He also is “Attractive to everybody, young and old, male and female” and “crosses sexual boundaries.” He further points to the fact that “In a letter to Gide of 6 April 1914, one, perhaps over-attentive, reader, Proust, remarked, with bitchy hyperbole, that Lafcadio’s ‘uncles’ were in fact ‘tantes’ (i.e. ‘queens’) and were as interested in the son as in the mother” (271).

His uncles (who were, in fact, his mother’s lovers) were generally of elevated social stations and bestowed upon Lafcadio the qualities that enable him to pass as an aristocrat. At the same time, they act out their attraction to the boy in various ways, rendering him an object of their fascination, and ultimately, their desire. The Baron Heldenbruck convinced Lafcadio’s mother to allow him to be bare headed and bare footed – and out of doors – as much as possible. He was obsessed with children’s hygiene and every day would plunge him into cold water, as Lafcadio describes, even during the winter, something from which the young boy derived great pleasure. Fabian Taylor, who was also known as Lord Gravensdale, would keep all of Lafcadio’s clothing locked up so that he could be tanned (in fact, there is a photograph in his chambers from that time that Julius finds before meeting Lafcadio, a photograph that Lafcadio eventually burns). The Marquis de Gesvres taught him how to dress, lavishing money on him and spending mornings at a time at a shirtmaker’s in Paris. Ardengo Baldi, the only of his mother’s lovers whom Lafcadio did not call “uncle,” was also infatuated with him. But it was the Prince Wladimir Bielkowski who roused the boy in the middle of the night for “adventures,” whose memory may quite possibly have the greatest effect on the plotline of *Les Caves*.

Michael Rowland, in his article "Lafcadio's Crime Revisited" attempts to answer the question of Fleurissoire's murder by offering an alternative insight into what is an often too-simplistic view of the gratuitous act. "Many commentaries that deal with Lafcadio's crime limit themselves to debating its gratuitousness. But these discussions are not entirely satisfying because they do not establish a significant connection between the killing and events preceding and following the crime" (605). He goes on to discuss Thomas Cordle and Robert Kloss' interpretations of the event, which address the motivation coming from a clash of social classes as well as relations to father figures. His analysis of the event uses imagery of the "uniform" of the Baraglioul family: high, stiff collars whose descriptions surrounding the male members of the family signal the familial tie. It is necks and neckwear that represent Julius, Anthime, and Amédée's: "virtually non-existent or paralyzed will" in terms of the family (609). For Julius, it is during his audience with the Pope when he cannot raise his head to look the Pope in the eye; for Anthime it is a cyst the size of a chicken egg that sprouted on his neck when he married Véronique; and for Amédée it is the bedbugs that attack him about the neck and embed themselves in his shirt collar during his travels in Italy as he attempts to save the supposed kidnapped Pope (608-9).

For Rowland, it is Amédée's gesture of adjusting the collar around his irritated neck that sets in motion the chain of events surrounding his "gratuitous" murder, as Lafcadio, now in possession of his inheritance, is unconsciously reacting to the Baraglioul family "pull," even though he was technically rejected from it by his dying father. This very well may be partly the motivation, but I would also like to contend that it is the flashback that Lafcadio has of one of his childhood midnight "adventures" with his uncle Wladimir that

sets in motion Lafcadio's attack on the old man. Could Lafcadio's infamous gratuitous act actually have been a subconscious reaction to the sexual abuse by the uncles of his childhood? What about the memories of his uncles' behaviors toward him would have caused Lafcadio to have the reaction that he had? In addition to the institutions of family and fatherhood that the above-mentioned critics have asserted as motivation for the attack, I would like to stress that it is the blurring of the lines between perceptions of sexuality and fatherhood (or father figures) that actually motivates Lafcadio to murder Fleurissoire.

Lafcadio's ultimate rejection by his natural father, Juste-Ag n r, is an empowering turn of events for Lafcadio, not only because he received a monetary inheritance, but also because he is specifically cast out of the family to which he did not heretofore even know he belonged. Juste-Ag n r was in a way the first "father figure" who did not desire him, and from whom Lafcadio received the ultimate gift of freedom: a sum of money and a release from family ties. As a child he was objectified for his beauty and his allure; passive, he was manipulated by uncles who desired him. He was in effect legitimized through the uncles who took advantage of him sexually, but was then de-legitimized when Juste-Ag n r rejected him. Having been at last liberated from uncles, fathers and family, however, he is able to embrace his freedom and re-legitimize himself: he becomes the active subject in his own life rather than the passive object of others. In fact, Lafcadio's illegitimacy is ultimately a symbol for a sexual otherness.

Although Lafcadio actually expresses pleasure that he derived from his relationships with his uncles, there is a confusion/relationship between the sexual compulsion and the compulsion to kill. There are two important passages that appear at the beginning of Book V of *Les Caves* that give insight to Lafcadio's motives and state of

mind shortly before the murder. The first comes after receiving his inheritance from Juste-Agénor when he arrives at one of the wardrobe shops that the Marquis had taken him to when he was younger, only to discover that his uncle had left several bills unpaid. He makes good on the outstanding debt, and then spiritually and symbolically breaks with the Marquis by imagining he would send the bills to him, and then saying “coquin de marquis, je te débarque de mon coeur” (822) (“you scoundrel of a marquis, I abjure you from my heart”). The second is the recollection of his encounter with an old woman whose bag he carried to the top of a hill and whom he embraced: “Je l’aurais tout aussi bien serrée à la gorge d’une main qui ne tremble pas – quand j’ai senti cette sale peau ridée sous mon doigt...” (822). (“I could just as well have strangled her with one steady hand as I felt her dirty wrinkled skin beneath my fingers”). He then goes on to describe the intense joy he felt afterwards – what the reader might interpret as a sexual afterglow – for the power he felt over all mankind, from his feeling of power to either embrace it or strangle it in its entirety.

When Fleurissoire enters the train compartment shortly before he is murdered, Lafcadio’s first impression is that the old man is attracted to him: “Pense-t-il que je vais l’embrasser!” (825) (“Does he think I’m going to kiss him!”). In fact, Fleurissoire merely remarks to himself that found him to be no more than a pleasant person and relieved to be in his company. Lafcadio nonetheless makes an unconscious connection between his relationships with his uncles and this man whom he does not know to be his brother in law. Later, as Lafcadio is trying to doze off, he indulges in one of his childhood memories of an incident when his Uncle Wladimir awakened him in the middle of the night for a snack of cookies and Tokay. Whereas the scene is not explicitly sexual, the description of it is fraught considerably with sexual overtones: “Wladi s’approche du piano, l’entrouvre,

caresse du bout du doigt quelques touches qui répondent très faiblement” (827) (“Wladi approaches the piano, opens it halfway, and with the tip of his fingers caresses a few of the keys that respond only faintly”); and “Dans la salle à manger, de quel air il tourne la clef du buffet!” (829) (“In the dining room, with such a presence does he unlock the sideboard!”). Throughout the description, there is an air of danger and adventure, and most importantly, of concealing the incident from Lafcadio’s mother. Afterward, Wladi replaced everything as it was, and brings the boy back up to his room and “quitte avec un profond salut” (829) (“leaves with a deep salutation”). It is an unsettlingly intimate moment shared between Wladimir and Lafcadio that Lafcadio recalls with a certain amount of pleasure and excitement, which, thanks to its sheer level of secrecy, reveals the uncle’s inappropriateness and indiscretion.

Unable to fall sleep, however, Lafcadio observes Fleurissoire through half-opened eyes and considers committing the notorious “unmotivated” crime of pushing him from the train. The murder he is about to commit is ultimately left entirely up to chance. He decides that he will push the old man from the train if he sees a light on the horizon before he can count to twelve:

Un crime immotivé, continuait Lafcadio: quel embarras pour la police! [...] Ce n’est pas tant des événements que j’ai curiosité, que de soi-même. Tel se croit capable de tout, qui, devant que d’agir, recule... Qu’il y a loin, entre l’imagination et le fait! Et pas plus le droit de reprendre son coup qu’aux échecs. Bah! qui prévoirait tous les risques, le jeu perdrait tout intérêt.”  
(829)

(“An unmotivated crime,” continued Lafcadio, “how perplexing for the police! [...] It is not so much events that I’m curious about, but rather myself. So many men think themselves capable of anything, who, when faced with the act, back off. It’s a long way between imagination and acting! And no more does he have the right to take back his move in a game of chess. Bah! If you could foresee all the risks, the game would lose all interest.”)

Rather than examining this scene as an isolated, and thereby truly gratuitous, act, the reader instead needs to examine the way that it fits in as a logical progression to the previous incidents: the rejection by Juste-Agénor, the rejection of the Marquis de Gesvres, the fantasy of strangling the old woman and his subsequent euphoria, and finally the memory of the incident with Wladi. Robert Kloss examines the murder and the preceding fantasy as a natural progression, but only goes so far as to examine Lafcadio’s fear/compulsion of his mother’s death (since when Wladi awakens the boy, his first concern was that his mother had died). His ultimate claim is that the murder of Fleurissoire is a function of the Oedipus complex, and that Lafcadio identifies with Fleurissoire as the rejecting father. Kloss also makes an outdated, if not insulting, claim while speculating on Lafcadio’s homosexuality that “the fantasy [of the midnight adventure with Wladi] reveals a common adaptive measure of homosexuals: the underlying desire to obtain the father causes the young boy to compete for him, as a woman, with the mother” (120).

Both Michael Rowland and Robert Kloss, among others, point to the fact that Lafcadio has made a subconscious association between Fleurissoire and “father” (or, the institution of the family, represented in the father figure), but neither seems to delve deeply enough into the full sexual nature of the Wladi fantasy as the motivation – albeit an

unconscious one – for the murder. It is my contention that the Wladi fantasy represented for Lafcadio his history of sexual molestation, and the murder of Fleurissoire was him acting out against his childish passivity (as a sexual object) to assert himself as an adult, active and in charge of his sexual nature, able finally to embrace his liberation. Perhaps from a broader perspective, however, Gide is representing the sexually othered (in this case Lafadio) as victimized by an institution of the fathers who are nothing more than impostors: the false fathers who abused Lafcadio are merely microcosms of the institution of the false-fatherhood of the Pope, and in the end, of the constructed notion of God himself. When Lafcadio kills Fleurissoire, he is not only breaking with the institution of fatherhood at all of its levels and meanings, but also entering into a sense of liberty where an authentic father figure can then be discovered.

The fact that he was a victim of the sexual advances of his ersatz father-figures was a function of his having been illegitimate: he was sexually abused within the confines of a sexual patriarchy that both victimized and betrayed him. Because he had no father, he relied on “uncles” to be his father figures who, in turn, perhaps perversely, legitimized him by making him the object of their admiration and desire. When he finally encounters his natural father (Juste-Agénor), he is once again de-legitimized through Juste-Agénor’s rejection. This rejection, however, actually frees him from patriarchal (or avuncular) authority rather than alienating him from it. At the moment Lafcadio encounters Fleurissoire, however, he wonders whether the old man wants to embrace him and therefore makes the unconscious association between Fleurissoire and one of his uncles who desired and molested him. This idea is immediately reinforced when he indulges in the memory of the midnight adventure with his Wladi. Lafcadio, in an effort to break out of his

own psychological cycle of sexual and patriarchal victimhood, chooses to assert himself as an active subject by casting off his childhood's sexual passivity. He transfers this passivity onto the old man and pushes him off the train, declaring his "commitment [...] to a total and irresponsible freedom or *disponibilité*..." (Kadish 572-3). Lafcadio is reacting, in fact, to the vulnerability he felt as a child in the presence of his uncles, who took his clothes, locked him outside, and figuratively and literally raped him. Whatever indifference he perceives over memories of his past, he is railing against the domination he experienced as a child. Although his motives are perhaps unconscious, by murdering Fleurissoire, Lafcadio asserts his dominion over his father and his father figures, violently liberating himself from his past and the ties that bind him: it is his assertion of freedom from the institution of fatherhood and family. What he symbolically accomplishes when he casts the Marquis de Gesvres from his heart, he literally does so by expelling Fleurissoire from the train to his death. The murder he commits in his mind with the old woman on top of the hill, he commits in reality on the train.

Bernard-Henri Lévy in the opening chapter of *Le Siècle de Sartre* entitled "Pour en finir avec Gide," discusses the significance that Lafcadio's "act" had within Sartre's oeuvre, and explains that within Orestes' proclamation in *Les Mouches* of "j'ai fait *mon* acte," there is an echo of the Gidian "acte." He continues to describe how while on the verge of committing the infamous murder of Fleurissoire, Lafcadio's dilemma is one that anticipates future Sartrian themes and formulas. He concludes that "C'est *L'Age de raison* qu'il [Sartre] annonçait, fin 1938, comme un roman gidien dont le personnage principal, animé d'une « liberté totale et enivrante », mûr pour « la volupté de l'acte gratuite », était expressément présenté comme venant « à la suite de Lafcadio » (111) ("it is *The Age of Reason*, that he

[Sartre] announced at the end of 1938 as a Gidian novel in which the main character, who was animated by ‘a total and exhilarating freedom,’ and ripe for ‘the pleasure of the gratuitous act,’ was expressly presented as a ‘follow-up to Lafcadio’”).

The term “follow-up” is key here. Mathieu is not a new iteration of a Lafcadio archetype; he is rather a representation of the continuing struggle for the freedom (la liberté) that Lafcadio faced, and arguably achieved through the murder of Fleurissoire. In many ways, Mathieu and Lafcadio are reflections of each other, casting a similar set of shadows in a Sartrian existential struggle, with each character not only seeking freedom through the acts they carry out, but also achieving the *essence* of freedom within themselves. Just as Lafcadio has been defined by his own personal state of illegitimacy and his past sexual abuse, his act severs the ties with his biological family and the ersatz father figures that labeled him as illegitimate, allowing him to create his own essence of a free man, no longer defined by his past or his illegitimacy.

Mathieu’s struggle in *L’Age de raison* is an existential struggle to internalize the notion of freedom. His story is also one that deals with illegitimacy; except Mathieu is the father in Sartre’s novel. Throughout the story, Mathieu is trying to come up with a sum of money so that Marcelle, his pregnant mistress, can have an abortion. He is faced with the conundrum that he either must steal the money (since the other characters in the story are either unable or unwilling to assist him) or lose the “freedom” he has as a bachelor and marry her, thereby legitimizing his unborn child. Near the end of the story, his friend Daniel declares that he will marry Marcelle – despite the fact that he is homosexual (“Homosexuals have always made excellent husbands – that’s well known” [AR 391]) – and will give Mathieu the freedom he desired. Mathieu curtly responds, “It isn’t by giving up a

woman that a man is free,” and then continues, “It might be said that I am robbed of the consequences of my acts; everything happens as though could always play my strokes again. I don’t know what I would give to do something irrevocable” (395). The problem is that Daniel has usurped Mathieu’s prerogative to *act*: previously he had the choice between obtaining the money by either legal or illegal means to terminate the pregnancy, or marrying her, neither of which is possibly any longer because of Daniel’s action. Sartre tells us that with freedom comes responsibility, and Mathieu fails to understand that: to be truly free, Mathieu must act, make choices, and live with the consequences of his decisions in order to have an essence that is free. Says Sartre,

The one who realizes in anguish his condition as *being* thrown into a responsibility which extends to his very abandonment has no longer either remorse or regret or excuse; he is no longer anything but a freedom which perfectly reveals itself and whose being resides in this very revelation. But as we pointed out at the beginning of this work, most of the time we anguish in bad faith. (*EE* 68)

As for Gide, by having Lafcadio toss Fleurissoire from the train, what he actually accomplishes is a rejection of the power that the Church holds over individuals, and treats those who blindly follow religious doctrine as dupes. Through Lafcadio, Gide rails against the Catholic belief systems that have done no more than “molest” its followers and throws out insipid religious piety off the train. However, the fantasy that Gide perhaps unconsciously acts out is his own transgressions with regard to his sexual encounters with adolescent boys (Athman, who is the model for Mektir in *l’Immoraliste*, the young porter in Tunisia, or Marc Allégret the son of his best man). This might beg the question of who Gide

actually may have related to: Lafcadio or Fleurissoire. In the end, the notorious *acte gratuit* is not all that “gratuitous,” as it does after all have a motivation, both for the author and for his characters, and is ultimately the only truly serious action in the *sotie*.

Lafcadio is not only free, but looked at through the Sartrian lens, he *is* freedom through the essence he creates through his action. At the beginning of this chapter I refer to the narrator of *Paludes* as being a man who is trapped, one who is incapable of any action. In *Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné*, Damoclès is saddled with the curse of the “fortune” that ultimately does him in. In Lafcadio, the curse is lifted from both of these characters, since he is the first who is able to assert his freedom from a past that had saddled him and from a family who defined him as inferior and illegitimate. His act renders him *disponible* to an authentic future, creating himself as the Sartrian essence of freedom, by transgressing the “paternally sanctioned cultural laws” that Butler refers to. And by creating himself *as* freedom, he is ultimately creating *himself*.

Gide was trying to locate the ways in which God and sexuality could coexist rather than be in constant opposition to each other, and as he explains in *Si le grain ne meurt*, he came to the realization that he was not unlike Prometheus who was surprised to discover that he could be free of his eagle without having to be devoured by him (550). These *soties* represent for Gide’s characters the process through which they might liberate themselves from their metaphorical eagles in an effort to achieve an authentic experience of themselves, a notion that translates to a freedom (or *liberté*) from the constraints of the institutions of family, of Church, and of God Himself. Through his protagonists’ “actions” (gratuitous, unmotivated, or otherwise) Gide attempted to free them of what was “eating them up from the inside,” and to play out some form of resolution to the struggle between

God and sexuality that haunted him. But sometimes that freedom could not be achieved peacefully. It was only through *violent* action toward his brother in law, for example, that Lafcadio not only frees himself from the eagle of his past and from the laws of a Judeo-Christian God, he also locates through that action the very space where “authenticity” itself exists. Just as in *Les Nourritures terrestres* where it is in the experience of desire that the narrator locates God, in *Caves*, “God” is located in the experience of an act of violence. Within the commission of this violent act, Lafcadio accesses a sphere that exists outside of language, law, and the patriarchy (in essence, outside of the Symbolic), and it is therefore the means through which he comes closest to accessing his Real. Lafcadio represents the legal and cultural “outlaw” and in the scheme of the Gidian *oeuvre*, he may be the first character since *Nourritures* who is truly *disponible* to discover his sexual and spiritual authenticity, since he has released the “eagle” of his illegitimacy without being destroyed by it in the process.

### Chapter 3 – Desert Stories: *l'Immoraliste* and *Le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue*

In this chapter, I will address how the voyage to the desert acts as an agent of self-discovery and furthers the theme of *dénuement* that Gide introduces in *Les Nourritures terrestres*. Following classic literary and mythological tropes of voyages and returns, Gide uses *le voyage et le retour* (the voyage and the return) as a recurrent theme in his works, serving to provide a space for the characters – if not for the author himself – to negotiate pre-established notions of politics sexuality and spirituality. The two works I will discuss in this chapter are *l'Immoraliste*, the story of a reluctant scholar who attempts to break with the morality imposed on him by his bourgeois status and education, and *Le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue*, Gide's treatment of the Christ's parable found in Luke's Gospel (Lk 15:11-32), where Gide sheds a pessimistic light on notions of liberty and self-discovery by continuing the Biblical story from where Luke left off. Both of these works present a common problem for Gide, that of the tension that exists between conventional religiosity and sexual authenticity. Bawer explains Gide's criticism of modern Christianity as one that has thwarted the teachings of Christ and hence relied more on the judgments of religious leaders thanks to the words of St. Paul and of Calvin:

He continued throughout his life to consider himself a Christian – by which he meant not that he believed in certain dogmas about God and Christ but that the person and ministry of Jesus held great significance for him. This, in his view, was not inconsistent with the kind of “immorality” he professed; on the contrary, it obliged one to question and challenge conventional morality in the name of a more truly Christian-which is to say, a more loving,

generous, and honest-approach to life, even if that meant being widely branded as immoral. (388)

If we consider Gide's homosexuality in the context of this statement, it allows for a space to understand that "loving" "generous" and "honest" were the core values that Gide was trying to find for himself, one where he as a man is attempting to reconcile his sexuality within the realm of a loving God. It was only by rejecting Catholic and Protestant religious beliefs that he believed interfered with Christ's teachings that he was able to endeavor to resolve the tensions that existed between his sexual self and his religious upbringing. What the reader therefore witnesses in both *l'Immoraliste* and in *Le Retour de l'Enfant Prodiges* is the complex challenge he faced in doing so, and his protagonists were in the end left disillusioned as a testament to the gravity and impossibility of that challenge.

*L'Immoraliste*, published in 1902, is one of Gide's most important and widely read works. It is a first-person narrative of a historian named Michel, a recently married man of means who travels to Africa on his honeymoon and contracts a life-threatening case of tuberculosis, forcing his bride and him to remain there while he recuperates. It is the story of the philosophical and sexual transformation of a man as he seeks to subvert the limits imposed on him by his conventional bourgeois upbringing. The story itself opens at the end of a prologue, a letter to the fictitious Président du Conseil by his brother, who serves as the fictional transcriber of Michel's story. This prologue ends simply with the words, "Quand ce fut la nuit, Michel dit" (371) ("When night fell, Michel said"), and what follows is Michel's first-person account that begins the *première partie*.

This mode of narrative is in effect a *mise en abyme*, a literary device in which secondary narrative elements such as letters or journal entries are embedded in the

primary narrative with varying effects. Gide spent much of his career, with works dating as early as *Les Cahiers et les poesies d'André Walter* (1891), experimenting with this literary device and how it creates a self-referential effect, as if a coat of arms with an image of itself emblazoned onto it, and what Lucien Dällenbach terms a “textual mirror.” Although *l'Immoraliste* does not represent Gide’s full deployment of the *mise en abyme* as a literary device, it is an example of how he purposefully used it as a method of thwarting the pronoun “I,” a point that I will analyze more fully as I explore his use of the *mise on abyme* in Chapter 5, where I will discuss the his deployment of it in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*.

*L'Immoraliste* is crafted such that the entire *récit* is located within a primary narrative (the recounting of Michel’s story by the one who wrote the letter), which serves to distance the author from his fictional character, a preoccupation for Gide, since he was frequently accused of being Michel:

Although expecting for other reasons a less than favorable reception for his book, Gide was nonetheless upset when even highly literate friends like the poet Francis Jammes, out of insensitivity to the book’s ironic artistry, confused the voice of Michel with that of the author himself. Gide showed in a personal letter how stung he had been by the widespread failure to appreciate his technique: he called “*imbéciles*” [in *Romans*] readers who made a simple identification of him with the *je* of the narrative. (O’Keefe *VV* 30)

Despite Gide’s assertion that his character is merely a work of fiction, there are several parallels one can draw between the author and his creation, including their social status, their marriages shortly after the death of a parent, their travels to Africa, the

question of their sexuality, their bouts with tuberculosis and recovery in Biskra, and arguably most strikingly, their *mariages blancs*. It is the differences in profession (Gide was an author and Michel a teacher and historian) and in plotline (Gide's honeymoon was in Africa, but it was not during his honeymoon that he fell ill with tuberculosis) that serve as what Sheridan refers to as the only "loopholes" (and these loopholes are hardly significant) that separate Gide from Michel if for no other reason than to "make the author feel more comfortable." He describes that following the proscription of Wilde to "never say 'I,'" Gide deploys this particular narrative structure as a means of saying *'I' says* instead of *I say* (188). Clearly, Gide is writing from his own experience of Africa as well as of his own sexual awakening, but any condemnation of his "being" Michel is far too simplistic. In response to accusations that he is writing autobiographically, Gide writes in his preface, "[...] pour un peu l'on voulait me confondre avec lui [Michel]" (367) ("For some wished to identify me with him [Michel]"). Sheridan further recounts Gide's words on the subject, and his repeated disavowals, and offers that "What is unsatisfactory about statements of the 'I-am-not-Michel' kind – as of their obverse 'Ménalque is Wilde' (Painter) type – is that, in their absolute simplicity, they foreclose questions of a more interesting, complicated kind. Although it is a given, we have to begin with the assumption that Michel is and is not André Gide" (189). In response to a review that Robert Scheffer wrote in *La Plume*, Gide writes,

Croyez bien, cher Schefer, que ce n'est que parce que je ne suis pas Michel que j'ai pu raconter son histoire aussi « remarquablement bien » que vous dites. Mais cela vous le savez bien, et le *je*, que je me suis trouvé contraint d'employer, ne trompera que les imbéciles qui ont besoin qu'un Chactas vienne leur montrer que, si René est dans Chateaubriand, Chateaubriand

n'est pas tout dans René, non plus que Benjamin Constant tout dans Adolphe, non plus que Goethe tout dans Werther. Qu'un bourgeois de Michel soit en moi, il va sans dire [...] (*Romans* 1514-15).

("Believe me, my dear Scheffer, that it is only because I am not Michel that I was able to tell his story so "remarkably well" as you put it. But this you well know. And the 'I' that I found myself forced to employ fools only the imbeciles who need a Chactas [referring to Chateaubriand's *Atala*] to come show them that, if René is in Chateaubriand, Chateaubriand is not all in René, no more than Benjamin Constant is all in Adolphe, nor all of Goethe in Werther. It goes without saying that a bud of Michel is in me.")

The *mise en abyme* effect therefore does not produce a self-referential tone, nor does it create a "textual mirror" as it does in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, but instead puts forth a structure whose purpose seems simply to beg the question, "qui parle?" Charles O'Keefe addresses this notion more fully in *Void and Voice*, where he describes the composition of *l'Immoraliste* as a "framed narrative" following the structure of Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In each of these works, the narration is in the first person but has been "relayed" by a narrator who introduces and ultimately recounts the story. In the same way that Michel's first person narrative is conveyed by the brother of the Président du Conseil in his letter, both Des Grieux's and Marlow's first person stories are also transmitted by a narrator whom the reader meets in the introduction (39).

Another problem of the work is the confusion with regard to the term "Immoralist" as one that would inspire notions of "good" or "bad." When describing someone as an "immoralist," it would be too simple to say, particularly in an overly cautious (and

religious) society, that this term should simply describe a person as “immoral.” Indeed, as Robert M. Fagley points out, the idea of an immoralist is not to be confused with an individual who is immoral. He describes in “Narrating (French) Masculinities” that although modern English dictionaries define an immoralist as an “advocate for immorality,” in French it is defined as “a doctrine which proposes rules of action [which run counter to] those admitted by the common morality” (87). (In his article, he is comparing the Merriam Webster definition in English with that in French in *Le Petit Robert*. The English definition represents his own translation from the French.) In other words, the French definition offers the idea that an immoralist is one who seeks to negate established societal conventions, notions, and actions, or an individual who attempts to thwart common mores, a meaning that is closer to the word in an etymological sense. An immoralist is not necessarily breaking society’s rules; rather, s/he is redefining them for him/herself.

When thus discussing the complex character of Michel, the reader should refrain from looking upon isolated actions of the character (or of the author, for that matter) and form opinions of what may or may not have been unseemly or unsavory choices, and consequently be tempted use the idea of immorality as a reason to at the very least judge, or at worst vilify, Gide’s protagonist. Examples of acts perpetrated by Michel that one might too simplistically deem immoral include the poaching of animals on his own property, or his refusal to pray for or be prayed for by Marceline, his new bride (one might wish to include the pedophilic acts, but there is simply not significant evidence that Michel actually acted on his compulstions, unlike Gide). But Gide’s character was not immoral, since these actions are part of a larger system of Nietzsche’s “immoralist doctrine” that plays into Michel’s resistance to his own role within a social hierarchy. The immorality is therefore

not about keeping score of how many “sins” he commits throughout the course of the narrative. The immorality at play in this work is an attempt on the part of the author to thwart the “morality” of French bourgeois customs that he felt were preventing him from discovering his true self, ultimately allowing him to commit the very acts that are otherwise considered “immoral.”

Michel’s immorality/immoralism reflects the themes of morality found in the works of 19<sup>th</sup> century sociologist Emile Durkheim as well as in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, which deal primarily with the social value systems that created the very idea of morals. Whereas Durkheim discusses the various modes of morality that tie an individual to society (cf. Durkheim’s essay on the “Division of Labor in Society”), it is Nietzsche, on the other hand, who proclaimed himself an “immoralist” and is consequently a major influence on Gide’s work. He speaks of immorality as an ethic that rejects belief systems of mainstream society while at the same time stressing one’s individuality, either within or free from established social structures. According to Nietzsche’s philosophy, it is through the systematic shedding of these social mores that a person is permitted to be free to find one’s individual, authentic voice. In his *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche delves into an anthropological analysis of systems of morals and ethics, and reveals that morals are not based in universal truths, but are rather constructed to serve the best interests of the dominant culture. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche describes an immoralist as one who dissects morals, but cautions that moralists of the past preached too much and therefore failed to dissect morals in an efficient manner. A moralist, like an immoralist, is not one whose actions individuals should necessarily emulate or imitate: each person should be

free to examine for himself his personal morality such that he might establish his own set of obligations and standards.

It is through Nietzsche's philosophy that Gide sets the plight of *l'Immoraliste's* protagonist in motion as he examines the multidimensional facets of the human experience and to seek alternative means of understanding it, from a geographical, intellectual, and sexual standpoint. What we will witness in Gide's *récit*, therefore, is the methodical shedding of these conventions – family, land-ownership, sexual norms, and religion – in order to find an “authentic self” within a system of new morality that is free from the traditional mores of his bourgeois station. What becomes problematic is that Michel, who at once desires and identifies with the “other” (namely the adolescent boys) in the desert of the North African colonies, cannot ever assimilate with the Algerian village's culture. The fact that Michel is a wealthy, educated bourgeois man provides him the means to reside in the village in North Africa, although this same social station that he is never fully able to reject specifically does not allow him to be part of that village: he will always be the outsider; he will always be the wealthy, white member of the colonizing government, who will always be in a privileged position over the native people of the colonized states, posing a particular problem in terms of the power relation between Michel and the boys who he sexually desires. This example further illustrates that the locus of his desire, as well as the “alternative” person he wishes to be, are nothing but idealized, impossible notions. This is the quandary that Gide addresses thematically in his major works of fiction: when he talks of freedom and of *disponibilité*, he is revealing the enduring struggle between the moralized self and the authentic one.

Sheridan's analysis of Gide's work further elucidates the "problem" of Michel's appropriation of Nietzsche's doctrine: "But the central, essential similarity between fiction and autobiography lies in the 'problem' confronting the hero and writer; the great, overriding difference in the way they confronted it. Michel took Nietzsche simplistically, absolutely, abandoning Culture for Nature, letting the weak go to the wall, etc., and, in the end, lost everything. Gide knew what to leave as well as what to take of Nietzsche – and when to keep Nietzsche within the bounds of his (Gide's and Nietzsche's) books" (188).

Whether or not he achieves an authentic voice for Michel, Gide at the very least presents us with the case of a man who is searching for a response to a question he cannot clearly identify. To say that Michel is searching for an answer to a question of sexuality would fall short of the problem. To say that the quest is to find a sense of spirit – a sense of God – would also not sufficiently address the complexities of Michel's self-exploration. But these two notions are linked, and nonetheless find their common ground in the intellectual sophistication of *l'Immoraliste's* protagonist. His "immorality" was as much about thwarting his (and society's) pre-established notions of "morals" as it was about "unlearning" the historical and philosophical teachings from his bourgeois status and education. Whereas I might assert that themes in *l'Immoraliste* run parallel to Gide's treatment of Luke's parable, *Le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue* (the character of Bernard's struggles in *Les Faux-monnayeurs* also share many similarities to that of the Prodigal Son), which I will discuss later, it may also be a nod (but only a nod) to the structure of the apprenticeship novels that shaped nineteenth-century characters such as Flaubert's Frédéric Moreau, Stendhal's Julien Sorel, or Balzac's Eugène de Rastignac. It is important to note in this regard that traditionally,

literary critics classify *l'Immoraliste* in the category of the psychological novel (*le roman psychologique*) (Day 23).

Critics such as Scott Manning have referred to *l'Immoraliste* as a “coming out” story, one that is fraught with the challenges and contradictions typical of the coming-out process:

Michel seems to be attempting to work through a sort of coming out process by telling his story to his three friends, but he is ultimately incapable of moving beyond his current state of denial. Even though he emphasizes his desire to disclose every facet of his story in order to reach an understanding of himself (and presumably to help his narratees to reach it with him), Michel avoids supplying the information that would most clearly illustrate his predicament. (Manning “Revelation and Dissimulation” 319)

He continues to explain that Michel “fails to ever really come out,” and Manning is correct in his assertion. As we will see, Michel talks around the issue of his sexual attraction to the young men who work on his property in France as well as the boys in Africa without exactly saying it: he merely spies on them or leers at them and describes why they are attractive, and why he feels drawn to them, but never admits that he is *a person who is sexually attracted to young men/boys*. As I stated earlier, there is no direct evidence that Michel acted on this attraction, unlike the case for Gide, but it is worth noting based on the biographical parallels between Michel and Gide, that perhaps might assert the contrary, that Michel did in fact engage with these young men and boys sexually. Although Michel does not succeed in fully “coming out” the book fits into the overall narrative created by

Gide over the course of his career that demonstrates a *process* of coming out. Michel's process is not Gide's definitive story; it is merely a part of it, a beginning.

A major setting for the work is Africa, not merely as a geographical location but also "Africa" as a concept and a colonial construction that provides the space of "otherness" where the *déclenchement* of Michel's undoing and rebirth takes place. It is the foreign place that affords the narrator of *l'Immoraliste* to discover his latent "nature." In order to put this idea into its proper context, I am first obligated to shed light on what these preconceptions are that set the stage for the experience of "Africa" for Gide's character. The racism that existed towards the colonized people in Africa comes into play, but differently from how it was at play in the United States. This might be more clearly evidenced in the early films from the U.S. that depict distinct and derogatory stereotypes of African Americans, including the buck, the mammy, and the Uncle Tom in films such as Porter's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903, in addition to several others that were made during the next 20 years) and D.W. Griffith's notorious *Birth of a Nation* (1915). On the other hand, French depictions from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century tended to depict the atavistic African, an archetype of the native African that is merely a colonialist construction of the European's perception of the "natural" or "savage" African, one that falls in line with Rousseau's concept of the *bon sauvage* (the noble savage), the idealized vision of indigenous peoples who have not been tainted or corrupted by civilized society.

These depictions were often highly sexualized, and are demonstrated quite clearly in the early works of Josephine Baker, a Black American expatriate who played into these stereotypes both on the Parisian stage, with her highly sexual and "nativistic" *Danse Sauvage*, and in film in the 1920s and 30s, even though she knew nothing of Africa, having

grown up in St. Louis. Her film *Princesse Tam Tam*, for example, takes place, similarly to Gide's *récit*, in an unnamed North African colony of France, where Baker plays a Bedouin woman who steals to eat. She is portrayed in the most animalistic of fashions, climbing trees and fighting with monkeys for bananas, always barefoot, rejecting all that is "civilizing" or "westernizing." This film, dating as late as 1935, is testament to the continued racist perceptions of Africa by the French nearly thirty years after the publication of Gide's *l'Immoraliste*.

To that end, the depiction of Africa as the bucolic, uncivilized Eden provides an "other space" where the mores of French civilization are absent and thus serve as a destination to "where Frenchmen might flee increasingly uncomfortable prohibitions of the mother country" (Lang 84). Several sources therefore make reference to the attitudes of the French, at least at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, toward North Africa as being a place where sexual constraints may be freed and homosexuality would be tolerated. Phyllis Clark, for example, notes that this "European stereotype seems to influence Gide's idealization of "Africa" as an abstract entity in *l'Immoraliste*," where the notion of the African continent is metaphor for male homosexual freedom (72 n.). Jonathan C. Lang further confirms this idea as he notes that, "from the very days of its conquest, Algeria was known to tolerate – even facilitate – the homosexual relations tabooed in the mother country." He further describes Sir Richard Burton's "infamous terminal essay" of the *Thousand Nights and One Night* where the author discusses "the dizzying outbreak of sodomy among the French troops in Algeria" (84).

But we must nonetheless be careful not to draw a parallel between queerness and race as we read *l'Immoraliste*, in the same way that I do with Michel's illness, and in the

next chapter between disability and queerness with the character of Gertrude in *La Symphonie Pastorale*. Butler makes plain that race and racial purity should not function at the same level as a deployment of compulsory heterosexuality in maintaining hegemonic norms:

It seems crucial to resist the model of power that would set up racism and homophobia and misogyny as parallel or analogical relations. The assertion of their abstract or structural equivalence not only misses the specific histories of their construction and elaboration, but also delays the important work of thinking through the ways in which these vectors of power require and deploy each other for the purpose of their own articulation. (*Bodies* 18)

Although the power of the Caucasian colonizers is exerted over the African colonized and may have facilitated the sexual exploitation of the latter, there is a different form of power at play than one of compulsory heterosexuality. In fact, it was the very norms of the patriarchal hegemony that in the context of these exotic Edens that were destabilized once away from the homeland, and the European travelers to these locations experienced a perverse freedom that permitted them to objectify the indigenous peoples who were politically powerless.

Therefore it is not surprising that there is a distinct exoticism of Northern Africa (particularly in the colonized nations of Algeria and Tunisia) that we find throughout Gide's oeuvre. One such example is in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, where native foliage and fauna is described with an erotic fascination, and where unusual fruits are eaten with a sensual fervor. In *l'Immoraliste* this exoticism is played out through the character of Michel and his relationship to the young Arab boys introduced to him by his wife while he was

convalescing from the case of tuberculosis he contracted on his honeymoon as they traveled to Biskra, a village in northeastern Algeria.

The constructed sense of “self” that once existed in this educated man becomes stripped away, as all that remains is his frail body and a will to survive. The genesis of this tabula rasa does not, however, come with his failing health, but rather while he was on board the ship on the way to Africa, where Michel, reflecting on his recent nuptials, becomes aware of the grief (over his father’s death, presumably) and exhaustion that had begun to set in. The grief he describes may well be twofold. He admittedly does not love his new wife, but rather feels a sense of pity and obligation for her. He confesses in the narrative that he had married her “Sans imaginer en ma femme autre chose qu’un camarade, sans songer bien précisément que, de notre union, ma vie pourrait être changée” (376) (“without imagining that my wife would be anything other than a companion, without ever imagining that through our union, my life could be changed”). He had promised his dying father that he would marry her, had promised to live life according to his father’s wishes as well as the bourgeois society’s expectations. But now, shipboard, he may very well not only be grieving his dead father but also that he had “engageai ma vie sans savoir ce que pouvait être la vie” (373) (“committed my life without even knowing what life could be.”)

As his illness takes hold, and the couple is obligated to remain in Biskra, his frustration with the “surrender to weakness” becomes evident. Michel unknowingly begins the systematic shedding of the values and cultural mores he had up until now clung to: by contracting tuberculosis he in effect transgresses the social institution of compulsory able-bodiedness as a moral convention. Foucault describes in his *Introduction* that the late

19th/early 20th century was concerned with “institutions of public health; it claimed to ensure the physical vigor and the moral cleanliness of the social body; it promised to eliminate defective individuals” (54). Health, in other words, took on an ethical function and a moralistic dimension, and Michel, though his illness, was transgressing these conventions simply by being sick. It is for this reason that his tuberculosis was not simply the event that caused him to re-evaluate his life, it was in fact an integral part of that re-evaluation and his first foray into the immoralist ethic.

After experiencing one particularly violent hemorrhage, Michel finds the strength to fight back, refuses complacency, and declares war on his tuberculosis. He violently begins to shed his old self through the coughing up of his own blood, a deeply disturbing occurrence that shakes him to the core. His blood begins to represent for him the blood spilled in the battle for his life, and he vows to regain his health and be “reborn”:

“J’apprenais mon hostilité, la dirigeais sur toutes choses; je devais lutter contre tout : mon salut dépendait de moi seul” (385) (“I began to train my anger and directed it at everything; I had to struggle against everything: my salvation depended on me alone”). In a poignant exchange with Marceline, he asks her to stop praying for him, despite her insistence that he would not be able to get well on his own. He says, “Après, il aurait droit à ma reconnaissance. Cela crée des obligations ; je n’en veux pas” (385) (“Afterwards, I would owe Him something. It creates obligations and I don’t want any”). With this rejection of God, he in effect takes the next step in the systematic shedding of his previously held moral beliefs: he has begun to recreate himself, both physically and intellectually. Fashioning himself as the new Adam, he is exiled from the self that he knew before his marriage and before his illness, while at the same time distancing himself from his position in society as

historian, scholar, and wealthy landowner. This distancing, however, is ultimately revelatory of Gide's own rejection of the biblical and Calvinist teachings that he believed separated him from the access to his true "nature."

As he recounts in *Si le grain ne meurt*, he had accepted for most of his younger life that which was *taught* as the morality of Christ (though he insinuates, as he had many times before, that the words of Christ had been spoiled by the intervention of Paul and Calvin), and as a consequence had experienced an internal turmoil over the incompatibility of his sexual desire with that of the desire to remain faithful to the teachings of the Bible. This internal struggle would have meant for him either to deny his flesh or to deny God, but he eventually came to the realization that "ce dualism discordant pourrait peut-être se résoudre en un harmonie" (550) ("this discordant dualism could maybe resolve with a harmony"). It is in this harmony that Gide creates the space where God and an authentic experience of his same-sex sexual desire are able to co-exist. By wishing to undo the strict Protestant teachings of Christ and arrive at the pure "message," he is perhaps on one level attempting to rediscover the God that has been lost by humankind, or on another, to recreate Him. And in a parallel fashion, when Gide asserts that Michel is becoming the "new Adam," he is, through his fictional creation, describing how he might rediscover himself, or perhaps re-create himself. Further, by re-creating himself, we might even imagine that Gide is once again usurping the power of God and his privileging of creation by (re-) creating himself.

As he brings Michel to the exotic Eden of Biskra, he is fictionally trying to "start over," by setting the events of Michel's re-creation in the Biblical place where humankind first lost God. Michel remains in the exotic Eden, at least for a time, and his re-creation is a

process that is witnessed via the awakening of the sexual desires that had hitherto been latent, repressed by the religious teachings of his childhood. Its inhabitants, the young Arab boys that Marceline brings around to keep him company, begin to stir in him a feeling of envy for what he feels he lacks. He exoticizes their health, and desires them for their youth and their strength, while he longs for the man he hopes to become: strong and virile. He projects onto these boys an idealistic view of his perception of health and sexuality, and winds up objectifying them for what they represent for him. In other words, as he is exoticizing the young boys of Africa, if not Africa itself, he is also exoticizing health.

Through encounters he has with Bachir and Mektir, two of the young boys for whom he had a particular affection, he begins to recognize the dichotomy that exists between health and illness, and between strength and weakness. The first of these takes place one day when Bachir is sitting at Michel's bedside whittling and accidentally pricks his finger with a knife. Michel becomes transfixed by the vibrant red of the young boy's blood, his bright white teeth, and his pink tongue: "C'était là ce dont je m'éprenais en lui : la santé. La santé de ce petit corps était belle" (382) ("That was what I was taken with about him: his health. The health of this little body was beautiful"). He later compares the color of his blood to Bachir's, and finds his own to be vile and black, in a word, sickly. It is this comparison that begins to awaken his "desire" and longing for restored health and new life. This incident with Bachir creates an exoticism of health that is predominant during the rest of his stay in Biskra.

The other encounter involves Mektir, who is alone with Michel one day while Michel is reading. As Michel stands facing the mantle ensconced in his book, he is distracted as he notices Mektir behind him, through the reflection in the mirror, stealthily sneak into

Marceline's bag and steal a pair of scissors. Michel says nothing and acts as if nothing happened, but is nonetheless thrilled by the audacity of the boy: "Je ne parvins pas à me prouver que le sentiment qui m'emplit alors fût autre chose que de la joie. [...] A partir de ce jour, Moktir devint mon préféré" (395) ("I could not convince myself that the sentiment which filled me was anything other than joy. [...] From that day forward, Moktir became my favorite"). The fact that he says nothing either to Moktir or to Marceline about the incident (in fact, he makes up a story to Marceline in order to account for her missing possession) is striking for its moment of transgression. His complicity with Moktir in covering up the theft is yet another act in his participation in the subversion of his social mores. Moktir is stealing from the rich French tourists, his colonizers, and Michel is complicit in a transgressive act that has actually been committed against him. But as he is struggling against his failing health, he is also struggling to free himself from the constraints of the society that he perceives to have colonized his own identity.

These two incidents are important for the reason that he is reflecting back onto himself the qualities of these two boys – their strength, their health and their audacity – that he lacks in himself through participating, particularly in the case of Moktir, in the ruse. As Michael Lucey observes, "through the complicity he creates between himself and Moktir, [he] learn[s] and then internalize[s] a form of transgression that separates himself from his past, from the European forms of sociality he so desires to escape" (*Gide's Bent* 146).

The fact, however, that Michel thinks that Moktir was not aware that he had seen him steal the scissors presents a sort of power play by the colonizer over the colonized, and on a deeper level, marks the predatory stance of a pedophile and his victim. He believes that he alone was privileged with the knowledge of these events, providing him with what

he perceives to be the upper hand in the relationship, since he believes that he outwitted the boy. Much later in the story, though, he learns through Ménéalque, that Moktir was actually aware that Michel was watching him when he stole the scissors. This is ironic since the tables have been turned: Michel's fantasy is shattered as he realizes that the colonized has actually outwitted the colonizer. Michel might perceive himself as being complicit in the act and thereby the dominant one in the game of transgression, but in the end, it was ultimately he who was duped. The mastery he felt over the young boys and his relationship to them was in the end not in his control as he had first thought.

It is important to remember that the character of Ménéalque is in effect the figure of Wilde, since he and Gide had seen each other on several occasions, both in Paris and in Africa during the 1890s. Wilde was instrumental in Gide's inspiration to "transgress" his moral and social rigors, and was the one who arranged for a sexual encounter with a young Arab boy. It is without doubt that he had a profound influence on Gide, particularly in matters of sexuality (c.f. Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence*, notably Chapter 1 "Wilde and Gide in Algiers"). But Ménéalque's role in *l'Immoraliste* is developed differently from the character of the same name whom the reader first encounters *Les Nourritures Terrestres*. He is a platonic interlocutor with Michel, and his discussions with him are not unlike the platonic dialogue found in *Corydon* (1925). But unlike in *Corydon*, the dialogues are not overtly about sexuality, but rather exchanges regarding immoralist philosophy. Throughout their various meetings in the story, Ménéalque instructs Michel, challenging him to be true to himself and admonishing him not to fear his own solitude, since it is through one's solitude that one is freed from the moral conventions that make humans inauthentic to their own desires. He encourages him to shed his old masters; in essence, to shed his

conventional morals and establish his own, new morality, and to embrace isolation without fear:

C'est à soi-même que chacun prétend le moins ressembler. Chacun se propose un patron, puis l'imité ; même il ne choisit pas le patron qu'il imite ; il accepte un patron tout choisi. Il y a pourtant, je le crois, d'autres choses à lire, dans l'homme. On n'ose pas. On n'ose pas tourner la page. – Lois de l'imitation ; je les appelle : lois de la peur. 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!" (431-2)

(The one thing that every man claims not to resemble is himself. Everyone proposes a model and then imitates it. He might not even choose the model he imitates, he merely accepts one that is already chosen for him. There are, I'm sure, other things to read in man, but he daren't do so. He dares not to turn the page. The laws of imitation are what I call the laws of fear. A man is afraid to find himself alone, and he never gets to find himself. This moral agoraphobia is hateful to me; it is the worst kind of cowardice. Man cannot create anything without being alone. But who here is looking to invent? What we feel is different about ourselves is precisely what we possess that is uncommon, which gives each of us our own value – and this is what we try to suppress. One mimics and then claims to love life!)

What we see in Ménéalque's discourse is the affirmation of the Nietzsche ethic as he urges Michel to once and for all break with the traditions that have enslaved his spirit, that have caused him to live his life in imitation of what is modeled by patriarchal authority. He is encouraging Michel, on the other hand, to *learn*. He speaks of subversion to this authority, and is challenging the traditional obligations of religion, marriage, and family, so that Michel can discover who he is as an individual and as a homosexual. As Naomi Segal affirms, "It is not so much Michel's desire that he stands to provoke [...] as his susceptibility to others' authority and ideas, his ability to learn [...] Ménéalque is powerful because he simultaneously speaks authority and sedition" (*PP* 180). In essence, Gide asserts through Ménéalque's discourse that the only way to discover that which is rare and authentic about oneself requires a transgression against the tyranny of fear and tradition.

Consequently, through Michel, Gide begins an internal journey toward authenticity by challenging each of these institutions by transgressing them: when Michel falls ill, he transgresses norms of health; when he asks Marceline not to pray for him, he attempts to free himself from the institution of religion; eventually he will reject his status as husband and property holder, and through these acts, the institutions of marriage and land-ownership. But will any of these acts ultimately be enough to denude him, to allow him to be open to a new and authentic morality, or will he forever be the wealthy, French man?

This question reveals a conflict with Ménéalque's advice, since Michel can only embark on this journey to find freedom (which in his case is an authentic experience of sexuality), because of the elevated financial and social station of which he is part. Money and social status are both constructions within the dimension of the Symbolic, a dimension that has also constructed the institutions of marriage, sexual normativity, and God. As long as

Michel continues to avail himself of his wealth, he will still be participating within the same sphere and under the same rules that make all of these institutions possible. He will ultimately not be able to access his Real, authentic self, nor be freed from the religious or moral systems in which he was raised. In fact, were he even to be able to succeed in liberating himself from the institutions of marriage and sexual normativity, he would simultaneously be liberating himself from God, who, in this context, is no more than a function of the same system that created the other institutions to begin with.

What is arguably one of the most important societal constructions that Gide attempts to break down through Michel is that of normative sexuality. The young boys of Biskra serve as the agent of this particular struggle, since they are the ones who stir within the protagonist the sexual desires that he had heretofore not experienced. Michel describes the erotic fascination he had for the boys, and the description of his discovery of his attraction to them is a function of Michel's coming out story, where Gide is beginning to create his discourse of pederasty through the lens of Michel's pedophilia. When Michel first encounters Bachir, it is a meeting that gives birth to his "newfound sensual awareness" that had hitherto been latent. During their first encounter, Michel's stance is a predatory one: Michel's cold stare elicits from the young boy a startled gaze upon their first meeting, much like a deer in the headlights as he gazed at him "with his big, silent eyes," that Clark notes "is, after all, a dehumanizing objectification of Bachir" despite the "playful tone of this passage" (58) such as when Michel finds himself later watching Bachir sitting in the corner fashioning a whistle out of a piece of wood: "Je le regarde [...]. Ses pieds sont charmants, et les attaches de ses poignets. [...] La gandourah, un peu tombée, découvre sa mignonne épaule. J'ai le besoin de le toucher" (382) ("I look at him [...]. His feet are bare, his ankles

and his wrists are charming. [...] His gandourah has fallen a little, revealing his delightful shoulder. I feel the need to touch him”). The boy leaves shortly thereafter, and is given a cookie from Marceline and two sous from Michel. He cries when Bachir does not return the following day.

The boys are objects of his nascent sexual attraction both for their audacity and for their beauty, yet they are at the same time degraded through their class difference with the narrator: he says of Bachir, “Vraiment, vais-je m’intéresser à cela ?” (382) (“Can I truly be interested in that?”). The obvious difference in class with the boys does not in any case prevent Michel from relating to them, whether or not he sexually objectifies, degrades, or idealizes them. He identifies with them as sexual beings, and projects himself onto them in order to fancy himself as both the criminal and sexual other. These boys are “broken down” into their component parts: they are Arab, poor, young, criminal, and most importantly, sexually attractive to Michel as a sexual colonizer. As he objectifies them, they are reduced to these individual parts, and he sees them not as the complete human beings they are, but as a set of fetishized characteristics. Inasmuch as he is drawn to the subversive and criminal aspect of Moktir, he also identifies with him, but only for that part of him. When the beautiful shoulders and bare feet of Bachir transfix him, he is not drawn to Bachir the person, but rather a reduced version of him, that of body parts, subjective beauty, and most of all the *differences* that exist between himself as a wealthy white man and a poor African adolescent.

Consequently, the objects of Michel’s desire are in fact negated through his “colonizing” gaze, as the bodies of these boys enter into what Lee Edelman refers to as “the

white economy of meaning” in his essay “The Part for the (W)hole,” which deals with racial and sexual identity through metonymy in language. He adds that,

Just as the gaze needs the object, however, so phallic “possession” depends upon “lack” [...] Indeed, to the extent that the scopophilia on which the fantasy of racial differentiation relies harks back to the process on which the psychic construction of sexual difference takes place, the [racially other] body as material supplement or signifier [...] must be possessed in order to validate the dominant subject’s putative possession of the phallus [...] (47).

As Michel is dominating the boys through his desire for them, he is at the same time being dominated by the hegemonic social order he to which he is subject. By projecting himself onto the boys, he is consequently both subject and object of his own latent desires and is thus a link in a signifying chain of desire and possession.

The eroticism and desire he feels for the boys plays itself out additionally through the experience of his own body as he recuperates from his tubercular affliction. These experiences are informed by the natural (and exotic) surroundings of Northern Africa. There are several passages that follow, one that is dedicated specifically to his body and his newfound awareness of it through the extreme sensitivity brought on by his waning illness:

J’étais sensible au froid à ce point qu’un peu d’eau tombée sur mon pied, lorsque je faisais ma toilette m’enrhumait [...]. Je gardai cette sensibilité, la garde encore, mais aujourd’hui, c’est pour voluptueusement en jouir. Toute sensibilité très vive peut, suivant que l’organisme est robuste ou débile, devenir, je le crois, cause de délice ou de gêne. Tout ce qui me troublait naguère m’est devenu délicieux. (387)

(I was sensitive to the cold to the point that a little water splashed onto my foot while I was washing up caused me to shiver. [...] I held onto that sensitivity, I still do, but now it was for a sense of voluptuous gratification. All extreme sensitivity can become, I believe, according to whether the body is robust or weakened, a cause of pleasure or pain. Everything that had heretofore troubled me has become delicious.)

As a consequence of his tuberculosis, he is rendered helpless, almost childlike in his dependency on others to tend to his needs. At the same time, the disease provides him the freedom to rediscover himself in a physical, spiritual, and intellectual sense through the breaking down of his sense of self. Susan Sontag describes this phenomenon in *Illness as Metaphor* when she states, "TB was represented as the spiritualizing of consciousness [...]. In TB, you are eating yourself up, being refined, getting down to the core, the real you" (67). Michel is inspired by his new desires, and experiences his senses in a way that he would not have been able were he still healthy and living his "former" life.

Michel is also provided with the occasion to focus on his individuality while at the same time calling into question the validity of his bourgeois position in society. In effect, he is for the first time able to identify, if not direct, his own "education" as his health and strength are effaced. His tuberculosis allows him to take a critical stance against the person he had been up to that point, as well as the life he had heretofore lived. According to Sontag, tuberculosis is, like cancer, a "master illness" and serves to "propose new, critical standards of individual health, and to express a sense of dissatisfaction with society as such. [...]he modern metaphors [of cancer and tuberculosis] suggest a profound disequilibrium between individual and society, with society conceived as the individual's adversary.

Disease metaphors are used to judge society not as out of balance but as repressive” (72-73). In a way, Michel *needed* the tuberculosis as much as he needed the African desert. Had he been sick in his home, he would not have found the inspiration that forced the unraveling of his notions of society, individuality, and authenticity. The disease, as Sontag states, is the metaphoric repression of the bourgeois society that Michel has left behind, and is at the same time the conduit through which flows the unfolding of events that facilitate his self-discovery. Furthermore, it functions symbolically like leprosy, exiling him in an African colony, separated from his home and country.

The fact that Michel’s illness and subsequent healing, in addition to his becoming aware of his (homo)sexual nature, all take place in a village in Algeria’s desert is not without significance. The desert provides the setting where Michel is able to take advantage of the natural surroundings, which is to him an experience of the exotic, that precipitates his awakening. When he is able to take walks on his own, for example, he experiences sensation after sensation stirring within him in an almost spiritual fashion. Small things, like touching a shrub, listening to the cicadas, and smelling the acacias all seem to move him profoundly, and he discovers that his experience of his senses is as powerful as his thoughts. With descriptions that resonate with those found in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, he describes an exaltation of his senses as he explores the palm groves.

At one point, attracted by the sound of music playing in the distance, he discovers a young, half-naked goatherd playing a flute, and has a brief exchange with him. As always, his first impression of boys like these is their youth and beauty: “Il [...] n’avait que douze ans, était beau” (392) (“he was barely twelve years old, and handsome”). He began to

wander out daily in search of “other shepherds, and other sheep.” But what is most striking about these wanderings and these meetings with other children is that he would lie to his wife and tell her that he was just going to sit a while, desiring in actuality to explore these groves on his own. As his sense of self, with the heightened and newfound sensitivities, is blossoming, he is clearly excluding Marceline. In his search for his authentic self, his wanderings are like those of John in the Desert, or the Prodigal Son who went out in search for answers and returned to realize that all they had known before was no longer valid: a new way of life was coming.

It is important to note that in the work there is no evidence that Michel ever actually does have a sexual relationship or sexual encounter with any of the boys, unlike the author himself whose exploits are seen in his autobiography *Si le grain ne meurt*, published in 1924, seventeen years after the publication of *l'Immoraliste*. The significance of Michel's associations with these boys, and with his eventual desire for them, is in a certain fashion more symbolic than sexual. Since *l'Immoraliste* is in many ways about the sexual awakening of the protagonist, the youth of the young boys represents the adolescent nature of his own sexuality; Michel's attraction for them, and identification with their youth and strength, represents a burgeoning sexuality that runs counter to the sexuality prescribed by Judeo-Christian norms.

As he negotiates these new desires, Michel is acknowledging his own sense of sexual marginality that he finds reflected in the marginal state of the colonized society in Algeria. As he is coming to terms with the fact that he cannot fully participate in a conventional sexual relationship with his wife, he is finding his phantasm reflected, if not concretized, in the young boys in Biskra. The naissance of Michel's heretofore latent same sex desire is

thus focused on the pubescent boys; Michel may very well not be capable yet of relating sexually to an adult (male or female) since he has not yet been in touch with the sexual nature within himself. Throughout the *première partie*, his character is not yet even *sexual*, let alone homosexual. In fact, it isn't until Michel and Marceline are on their journey back to France that he is finally able to "possess" his own wife. Michel first becomes "a man" only after he exhibits violent aggression toward an Italian carriage driver, an act that "awoke in Michel a deep feeling of what could seem to the reader as 'manliness,' which in turn precipitated another such act, that of making love to his wife. [...] Through his physical rehabilitation, Michel's (masculine) preoccupation with strength entails a certain concern with virility" (Fagley 84). The act of finally having sex with his wife recalls an earlier point I made (in my introduction) regarding the act of penetration as one that enforces codes of male hegemony, where the male is the penetrator and the woman the penetrated. By having conventional sexual relations with her, Michel in fact is re-aligning himself with the dominant social orders that he had been attempting to transgress while beginning his recovery from tuberculosis. It is not so much an expression of his heterosexuality, but rather an assertion of his privileged (and colonizing) position as a white European male.

In a final scene in the *première partie*, he sees the peasant workers working on a farm. Much like the way he idealized the young Arab boys in Biskra, he envies them not only for their vigor but also for their dark skin. He becomes increasingly aware of his own skinny arms and his pale complexion, and perceives them as marks of shame that he attempts to overcome by lying in the broiling sun to have his skin tanned. This attempt to identify with these workers, and ultimately to be like those he desired, is itself an act of transgression against his privileged background. The description of him "offering his whole

body to the flames” and the sensation of the *cuisson délicieuse* (a “voluptuous roasting”) is at once erotic and ironic. Says Lang, “Michel emphasizes the sensuousness of his tanned skin because he identifies with and desires those who, characteristically of lower class or inferior race, supposedly embody stronger claims to a life of the body, and whose dark skin is the sign of their eroticism,” but reminds us that darkened skin tone was almost always avoided at that time by the social elite, as it would have identified them with the classes over whom they theoretically were dominant (89). His desire for a tanned skin is an intentional rejection of his position as a wealthy bourgeois man.

As the couple finally leaves Biskra, they head back to France by way of Syracuse. When he encounters the ruins of the old Greek Temples, the subject of his work as a historian, he feels nothing but frustration upon seeing them: “Je ne pouvais voir un théâtre grec, un temple, sans aussitôt le reconstruire abstraitement. A chaque fête antique, la ruine qui restait en son lieu me faisait me désoler qu’elle fût morte ; et j’avais horreur de la mort” (398) (“I had been unable to see a Greek theater or temple without in my mind abstractly reconstructing it. The ruins that remained from each ancient festival made me mourn that it was now dead; and I had a horror of death”). His expertise begins to betray him as he realizes his search for authenticity excludes everything he had heretofore known: “En tant que spécialiste, je m’apparus stupide. En tant qu’homme, me connaissais-je ? je naissais seulement à peine et ne pouvais déjà savoir qui je naissais. Voilà ce qu’il fallait apprendre” (398) (“As a specialist, I appeared to myself stupid. As a man, did I know myself? I was barely born yet and did not yet know who the person was I was being born as. That is what I needed to learn”). He was, in his own words, “the old Adam” whom the Gospels had

rejected, and who in turn rejects his former, learned being that his education had constructed around him, like a prison.

Once back at La Mornière, Michel attempts to normalize his life by resuming his role as landowner and scholar. It is not, however, the learned men of the salons that interest him anymore; in fact, Michel feels distanced from them and more comfortable in the company of the hired farm hands with whom his exploits are at times disreputable. Since much of the estate at La Mornière is uncultivated, the woods become a place for Michel's wanderings, resonating with the nature he roamed in while still in Biskra. It is in nature that Michel feels more in touch with his authentic self, recalling the idealized themes of nature found in the works of the 19th-century romanticists, where the nature in its wild and fecund form serves as an inspiration for exaltation of the spirit as well as for sensual pleasure.

He becomes fascinated with the sort of gangland that exists on his farm, and even sets out poaching on his own land with Bute, one of the workmen hired by one of his contractors to clear a damaged lot. Much in the same way that Moktir became Michel's "favorite" for having been so brazen as to steal from him while in the same room, Bute represented for him the sort of "rough trade" young man with whose crimes Michel wished to be complicit. It is through this crime in which Michel participates, and once again a crime committed against him, that Michel transgresses the patriarchal norms to which he was not only subject but also of which he was in fact master. Lang states that he "rejects the most primary and most valuable characteristic of his land – its ability to be cultivated, to be made productive through the concerted efforts of the landowner and tenants alike – in favor of his identification with the unproductive deviants, the vagabonds and poachers,

who work on his Normandy estate” (98-99). This transgression is against both economic norms (much like in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*) and sexual ones, and serves as yet another example in the systematic denuding of the social structures within which he had once fully participated. Michel is attracted to the workers, stressing in the narrative at several moments that he was more interested in the hired hands than in his farmlands. By participating in the non-production of his farm, he is intentionally transgressing norms of productivity and ultimately procreation.

On his journey with Marceline back to Biskra near the end of the narrative, when it is she who now has contracted the tuberculosis that had previously nearly consumed him, Michel divides his time between tending to her and spending time at the ports of Syracuse, fascinated by the unsavory types whom he encountered there. Michel acknowledges the disillusionment he feels as he idealizes them:

La société des pires gens m'était compagnie délectable. Et qu'avais-je besoin de comprendre bien leur langage, quand toute ma chair le goûtait. La brutalité de la passion y prenait encore à mes yeux un hypocrite aspect de santé, de vigueur. Et j'avais beau me dire que leur vie misérable ne pouvait avoir pour eux le goût qu'elle prenait pour moi (463)

(The society of the low-lives was delectable company for me. And how I needed to understand their language, as the entirety of my flesh savored it. The brutal passion my eyes perceived was a hypocritical aspect of health and vigor. No matter how much I told myself, their miserable lives could not give them the same taste for me.)

In this passage, Michel acknowledges that his desire for the dregs of society, much like his desire for the audacious youths in Biskra, is mere idealization. He is disillusioned as he realizes that he is not one of them and cannot participate in their (counter-) culture. As a final disappointment, he is greeted upon his arrival in Biskra by the children he had known two years before during his convalescence, and is saddened by the fact that the boys had grown up "hideously," and had lost their beauty: "Quels travaux vils ont déjeté si tôt ces beaux corps?" (466) ("What horrible kinds of work had so soon warped these lovely bodies?"). What had been the focus of his desire had now grown up, become deformed, much like the idyllic exaltation of his spiritual and sexual rebirth.

As for Marceline, she has had a miscarriage and fallen mortally ill. She had embodied Michel's preoccupation with God through her extreme piety, which ran counter to his identification with the sexual and geographic other. Just as he rejected her constant prayers for him, he refuses to pray for her at her bedside, rejecting her God and consequently the God of the F/father (although his father was, in fact, an atheist). He had been incapable of making love to her for a long time, and even as he finally finds his inner virility and makes love to her, he fails to fulfill the procreative norms of male/female sexuality from which he finds himself exiled, just as he is exiled from the society that created those norms to begin with. His final rejection of her is what allows him to live his new immoralist self. Furthermore, with the death of his unborn son, Michel experiences the quintessential disappointment, which is for him not only the death of the God, but the death of the Son. He will not be the progenitor; he will not be one with the F/father, as he ultimately is incapable of participating in the procreative act.

At the end, Michel, as he recounts his story to his interlocutor, seems saddened by the “fruit full of bitter ash” that the author describes in his preface. If God is not dead for him, Michel is at the very least incompatible with God, the same way that he was not compatible with Marceline. Michel’s original perception of what his wife is as nothing more than a platonic companion speaks volumes to how Michel ultimately relates to her, and finally through her, to God, and is a direct reference to Gide’s platonic relationship to his own wife and her staunch religiosity. His (both Michel’s and Gide’s) difficulty with being sexually compatible with his wife is a problem that parallels that of his same-sex desiring nature not being compatible with the religion of the Father, or for that matter, procreation. In order to live his life in an authentic fashion, he needed to shed all forms of tradition; in order to create his own existence anew, he needed to destroy the conventional concept of God for himself. In other words, the rejection of God is his definitive act of denuding himself of the moralism of his former education. His father’s death is in a way a presage to these events, since the death of his father is what actually sets the events of the story in motion. Upon his father’s death, he attempts to fulfill his father’s dying wish by marrying Marceline and creating a family. However, his bout with tuberculosis is Michel’s unintentional rejection, if not destruction, of the traditional sense of God. Marceline’s death thus serves as the final nail in the proverbial coffin.

But of all of Michel’s efforts in finding his authentic self, there is one thing he lacks: action. He is passive in nearly all of his efforts at transformation, beginning with his merely witnessing Moktir steal the scissors, watching the farmhands sleeping, and tagging along with the poachers on his property. He may pretend to see himself as actively participating in the subversive acts, but in fact he is simply a spectator. His inactivity, like that of the

narrator of *Paludes*, plays into the larger theme of impotence present in the *récit*. His inability during much of the story to make love to his wife and his eventual inability to sire a son also reflect his inability to act. After giving a lecture in Paris, he realizes this flaw within himself, yet is still unable to fully overcome his inaction:

Ce que j'avais de neuf à dire me parut d'autant plus urgent que j'avais plus de mal à le dire, et surtout à le faire entendre. [...] Mais combien les phrases, hélas ! devenaient pâles près des actes ! La vie, le moindre geste de Ménalque, n'était-il pas plus éloquent mille fois que mon cours ? Ah ! que je compris bien, dès lors, que l'enseignement presque tout moral des grands philosophes antiques ait été d'exemple autant et plus encore que de paroles !  
(429)

(The new ideas I had to express appeared to me ever more urgent that I had trouble expressing them, and above all in making myself understood. [...] But alas! How these phrases paled in the face of action! Is Ménalque's life, his simplest gesture, not one thousand times more eloquent than my education? Ah! I understand consequently that all the moral teachings of the great philosophers of antiquity are as much as by example as by words, if not more!)

In *l'Immoraliste*, God, family, marriage, fatherhood, and landownership are all sacrificed in his quest to nurture his same-sex sexual desire. His desires are placed in opposition to these societal constructions and conventions, and it is through this opposition that Gide demonstrates the futility he felt at reconciling his evolving religious beliefs with his sexuality. In *Si le grain ne meurt*, it is this question of opposition – or as he

calls it, discord – between his sexual desires and the religion in which he was educated that are perhaps not as important as Gide’s goal to turn that discord into harmony (550). His desires are left unrequited, and are rendered nothing more than a literary ellipsis, and Michel is left with a wistful disillusionment having been incapable of learning the lessons of Ménélaque. But it is in these unrequited desires, in the actual physical experience of want, where perhaps the harmony can be achieved. As I previously offered in my discussion of *Les Nourritures terrestres*, it is in the experience *itself* of desire, along with the experience of thirst, tiredness, etc, that this harmony might be found. If, as I stated, the experience of desire is where God is “possessed in His totality,” it is in that same space where an authenticity of sexuality can also be possessed in its own totality. Both of these concepts – God and sexual desire – are ultimately experiences that exist beyond language and beyond the flesh. They are transcendent experiences that Michel, and perhaps Gide himself, was not able to put his finger on. Whereas the narrator of *Nourritures* seemed to grasp that notion, it does not seem that Michel was ultimately capable.

Throughout the story there is the theme of opposition: opposition between action and inaction, health and illness, culture and counter-culture, morality and immorality, and civilization and nature. The setting of the desert is paramount as it sits in its ultimate opposition to the highly cultivated environs of mainland France, and consequently the highly cultivated French couple sits in opposition to the more “natural” people of Biskra. Images of the desert and the journey to the foreign land both have strong and symbolic meanings in *l’Immoraliste*, particularly in terms of their biblical dimensions. Gide uses the symbols of desert and exile as metaphors for Michel’s self-reflection. Much like John the Baptist, the Prodigal Son, and Jesus, Michel too retreats to the desert. According to the

Gospels, John the Baptist spent his time of exile in the desert (“in the wilderness of Judea”) before coming forth to baptize the Messiah and become a disciple; Jesus spent forty days in the desert fasting before beginning his ministry; the Prodigal Son starved in foreign lands during his self-imposed exile before returning home. It is in Gide’s *Le Retour de l’Enfant Prodigue* that the desert takes on its full symbolic role.

Desert imagery serves as a symbol for Gide’s pantheistic attitudes of religion while at the same time providing the space of *disponibilité* to the entirety of creation, both sexually and spiritually. In a way, the desert is used as the basis for his quest for a “new religion,” where notions of spirituality replace dogmatic traditions. What has been revealed about Gide’s quest for a new kind of spirituality thus far in his literary career is the desire to break away from the conventions of his religious teaching that have created an internal struggle between his authentic sexual nature and his desire to believe in God. In *Nourritures*, the experience of desire is the place where an authenticity of God exists, and it not only provides a space for authentic sexual desire, it also creates it. This idea is reinforced by Michel’s quest in *l’Immoraliste*, where Michel recognized that he must disengage from the Calvinist teachings of his past, but he does not seem to be able to go far enough to understand the transcendent nature not only of God but also of sexuality itself. The “new religion” that I infer from Gide’s work seems to require that he work backward to systematically undo the teachings of the Bible such that he might arrive at that space before God and sexuality were created by humankind and then split from each other and only to negate each other.

*Le Retour de l’Enfant Prodigue* is an example of this working backward, since by rewriting a biblical parallel, he is in many ways unwriting it. The book was published in

1907 after a strikingly short turn-around from the time of its conception to completion. Gide writes in his *Journal* on March 16, 1907: “De sorte que cet *Enfant Prodige*, je n’ai guère mis qu’une quinzaine de jours à l’élaborer et à l’écrire” (J1 240) (“So it barely took me fifteen days to work up and write this *Prodigal Son*”). According to Wallace Fowlie, the work provoked harsh criticism from Gide’s contemporaries, particularly Paul Claudel and Francis Jammes, for its “distortion” of the parable found in Luke’s Gospel, and it “scandalized the Catholic world in France and contributed to having the totality of his work prohibited by Rome” (57). In it, as in *l’Immoraliste* (as well as in other works), there are criticisms of society and of religion that are revealed through the pantheistic philosophy that the main character defends in face of traditional, patriarchal views of religion. The message is that if one breaks free from the constraints of dogmatism, one can arrive at an understanding of the world through freedom of thought, and the definition of God is posited far from the purely Judeo-Christian convention. In what can only be described as a doctrine of pantheism, God is everywhere, particularly in the desert.

*Le Retour de l’Enfant Prodige* is effectively the story of the generation gap, the revolt of a young man not only against his father but also against societal, familial, and religious traditions. Marguerite Yourcenar compares the struggle of Gide’s Prodigal Son to Michel’s in *l’Immoraliste* and concludes that, “[L]a révolte ne mène pas très loin l’enfant prodigue ; il se fatigue de sa liberté. Il a, en quelque sort, peur de ce monde infini, dans lequel il se trouve seul et, comme vous savez, comme la parabole biblique le veut, il rentre au bercail” (29) (“The revolt does not bring the Prodigal Son very far; he tires of his freedom. He fears, in a certain fashion, this infinite world where he finds himself alone, and, as you know, and as the biblical parable would have it, he returns to the fold”).

Gide's treatment of the parable begins more or less where the gospels leave off: with the return. Divided into five chapters, of which four of them are dialogues between the Prodigal and different members of his family, *Le Retour de l'Enfant Prodigue* demonstrates Gide's pantheistic attitudes towards religion. In the spirit of a parable, Gide uses Christ's story as his own version of an allegory. In contrast to the biblical spirit of the original story, however, Gide affirms, through the voice of his Prodigal, that God is found outside of the constraints of an organized Judeo-Christian structure. The work itself is a reproach of patriarchal morality, and focuses on the classic trope of the voyage – and the return – as the means of finding truth, even when that truth is filled with a sense of bitterness and regret. As in Gide's journalistic works from the 1920s and 1930s, particularly *Le Retour du Tchad*, and *Le Retour de l'URSS*, which both involve the author setting out to experience life in foreign lands and returning with a sense of disillusionment – if not disappointment – for what he actually discovers, the Prodigal Son returns having been incapable of surviving with the freedom and truth he discovered while being away from his Father's House. In Nersoyan's *André Gide: The Theism of an Atheist*, the significance of the "return" motif is affirmed: "[Gide] does not write of his *impressions* of the USSR [in *Le Retour de l'URSS*], but of his *return*" and that "*return* has the connotation of disillusionment, of reawakening to a greater intellectual or spiritual clarity" (53). Nersoyan also confirms my comparison of Bernard's leaving and returning to his father's home in *Les Faux-monnayeurs* to the Prodigal Son's departure and return. The father's house is an important motif for Gide as he attempted to negotiate, throughout his career, the patriarchal and religious "House" to which he did not feel he conformed either sexually or spiritually.

This clarity is revealed through the idealization of the desert that can be noted in the conversations the Prodigal has with his family members. He evokes the desert several times throughout the course of the treatise, telling his father that it was away from his House, in the desert, that his love for him was at its full fruition: “je ne vous aimai plus jamais plus qu’au désert” (479) (“I never loved you more than when I was in the desert”). He later speaks of the uncultivated desert to his younger brother, and describes the thirst he was searching for that can only be found in the desert, as well as the fruits he could find in a desert oasis to satisfy that thirst: “Les mêmes [fruits] que ceux de notre jardin ; mais sauvages” (490) (“The same [fruits] as those in our garden; but wild”). Forbidden fruits are evoked in these passages, and resonate with the exoticism of the desert flora found in *Les Nourritures terrestres* (not to mention the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Life found in Genesis).

When the Prodigal’s mother asks him why he left the home and what it was that he had been searching for in the desert, he responds simply with “Je cherchais... qui j’étais” (484) (“I was searching for... who I was”). In his conversation with his older brother he explains, “Je sentais trop que la maison n’est pas tout l’univers. Moi-même je ne suis pas tout entier dans celui que vous vouliez que je fusse. J’imaginai malgré moi d’autres cultures, d’autres terres, et des routes pour y courir, des routes non tracées ; j’imaginai en moi l’être neuf que je sentais s’y élancer. Je m’évadai” (481) (“I felt above all that the house was not the whole universe. For myself I was not entirely what you wanted me to be. I imagined, despite myself, other cultures, other lands and other roads to follow, all untraceable; I imagined within me the new being that I felt rushing out of me. So I escaped”). The idea that the character does not know himself and is thus obligated to set

out to find a new meaning for himself resonates with the struggle Michel experiences in *l'Immoraliste*, as both of these characters are obligated to break away from the norms and expectations of the “father’s house” as a means of finding their authentic identity.

The word “House” (“Maison”) is almost always capitalized in *L'Enfant Prodigue*, much in the way that “Him” or “He” are capitalized when referring to God, indicating that this “House” is not just any house, but rather it represents the Kingdom of God. The criticism of the conventional Catholic and Calvinist teachings of “one road to salvation” is more or less obvious. One cannot help but determine that each character, as in the original parable, directly represents a parallel with a religious equivalent: the Father is God, the House the church, the mother Mary, the older brother church leaders, and the younger brother a disciple (he sends his younger brother out on his own quest, to find what perhaps he was unable to find). For example, when the father tells him that he has built his House for him, he protests, “La Maison, ce n’est pas Vous, mon Père. [...] Vous, vous avez construit toute la terre, et la Maison et ce qui n’est pas la Maison. La Maison, d’autres que vous l’ont construite ; en votre nom, je sais, mais d’autres que vous” (478) (“The House is not you, Father. [...] You have made the land and the House, and that which is not a House. Those other than you have created the House; in your name, I know, but those other than you”). The House no longer holds any meaning for the Prodigal any more than the Church held any meaning for Gide. Consequently he can find neither his salvation nor his identity within its walls, thus his need to escape. Even though he may not have ultimately succeeded in his undertaking, it does not prevent him from counseling his younger brother to attempt to enter into the desert himself and find out “who he is” through the experience of thirst and solitude, like Christ, like Nathanaël, like Michel.

The “identity” that the Prodigal seeks is not only a spiritual one, but also a sexual one. Although sexuality and desire are not overtly revealed in this treatise, there is evidence that the theme of authenticity is not merely reflecting the character’s sense of the divine. When he says to his mother that he was “searching for...who I was,” there is the curious use of the ellipse, a hesitation that indicates something hidden, something secretive that he cannot share; in effect, something that “dare not speak its name.” When his father begs him to think of the non-consuming flame of the burning bush, the Prodigal replies, “J’ai connu l’amour qui consume” (479) (“I knew love that consumes”). These vague phrases connote a certain insufficiency within the “language of the Father” that inhibits him from being able to express his sexual identity. By not being able to articulate what he means indicates that he senses that his desire/identity is of an abject nature. Therefore it is only through having separated himself from the repressive nature of the Father’s House that he is able to find the means to discover his authentic nature. With the desert as agency, Gide is able to connect with the transgressive desires of his characters, moving from conscious language to an unconscious and inexpressible one, from the constructed to the deconstructed, in order to find a means of expressing that which is forbidden.

Dollimore remarks for Gide, “African landscapes [are] places where consciousness surrenders” (339) and it is in this realm that Gide reveals the inextricable link between sexuality and religion. They are in conflict with each other within a structure of patriarchal dominance, but the quest for the authentic truth for the two happen concurrently. As Nersoyan explains, “Gide presents self-knowledge as an *alternative* to salvation” (56). It is in the experience of oneself, in authenticity and sincerity, that the relationship between God and sexuality would no longer need to be reconciled, since they would both exist in a

state of harmony in a place where where the very idea of sin does not exist: they can both be experienced once consciousness is surrendered. It is through the surrendering of consciousness that one can surrender to one's true self with full abandon, and where one's desire is not mitigated or diminished by the experience of guilt. And without guilt, salvation is no longer necessary.

Both Michel and the Prodigal Son are caught in a veritable tug-of-war between the foreign place and the Father's House. But whereas the Prodigal Son does experience the desperation that compels him to return home, Michel returns to the desert, even though he is not able to fully assimilate with his desired other. In the end, he nonetheless remains with his mistress in the desert, but reveals in the final passage that the focus of his desire is "probably" her younger brother: "Elle prétend que c'est lui qui surtout me retient ici. Peut-être a-t-elle un peu raison" (472) ("She claims that it is he who keeps me there above all else. She might be right about that"). Furthermore, the official letter to a government official that opens the story thus serves not only to legitimize Michel's continued elevated status despite the events that are revealed by within it, but also to represent the fact that Michel continues himself to be drawn back into the House of the Father, to the government of his homeland that is colonizing the country where he resides. The government is the hegemonic force of the patriarchy and is, in essence, inescapable, just like the Father.

Gide brought Michel to the desert landscape in *l'Immoraliste* in order that he might do the same as the Prodigal (and eventually his younger brother): Michel goes to the desert to explore his own, *interior* landscape. It is his debilitating illness that obligates him, if not facilitates him, to make this exploration by stripping him of his constructed self, of the "House" of his F/father, and he enters into what might be termed as the unconscious place.

But whereas Michel is exploring his burgeoning sexual desires, it is not the only exploration that is taking place. There is another that runs parallel to the search for a sexual authenticity: Michel, too, is searching for God. In keeping with typical Gidean style, the God he finds, as with the Prodigal Son, is far more complex than the linear, Biblical creation of the author's Calvinist upbringing, one that is put in conflict with, and is reflected by, the piety of Michel's bride. *L'Immoraliste* in many ways resonates with *Nourritures* as well as with the *L'Enfant Prodigue*, and Michel represents a disillusioned adult version of Nathanaël, who is in his own way seeking to find "God everywhere" while at the same time coming to terms with his same-sex sexual desires.

#### Chapter 4 – Imagining Madeleine : *La Porte étroite* and *La Symphonie pastorale*

Despite his protestations to the contrary, Gide seems to invite readers to examine his works of fiction from a biographical standpoint. In Chapter 3, I examined how readers (especially the early readers and critics of his work at the time it was published) have been tempted to perceive works such as *l'Immoraliste* as a biographical work given the parallels that one can draw between Gide's and Michel's lives. I also discussed Gide's response to this criticism and how he attempted to distance himself from his protagonist by explaining that although he drew from his own life's experience, Michel was not in fact Gide, but rather that Michel was merely a "bud" that existed within him. Therefore, I wish to avoid making gratuitous associations between him – and for that matter, Madeleine – and the characters in his books. At the same time, the uncanny comparisons that we can draw between his life and his work should not be ignored either, since a biographical perspective provides rich fodder for how we might understand the ways in which Gide, through his fictional creations, was grappling with issues in his own life.

For example, Madeleine's specter looms over much of Gide's *oeuvre*. As his wife in a marriage that was never consummated – a *mariage blanc* – she occupies an intriguing place both in his life and in his fiction. As cousins in a protestant family, the two were childhood sweethearts. He married her shortly after the death of his mother, and she curiously occupied for him the void that his mother had left. Gide even describes in his journal how during the early years of their marriage he would conflate the two women in his mind. Gide and his wife were distant from each other – both physically and, of course, sexually – for much of their marriage, as she rarely accompanied him on any of his many voyages,

essentially staying at home to keep the residence running while he sowed his sexual oats. Bruce Bawer notes that “Gide lived largely apart from her, traveling around Europe and Africa for months at a time with [Marc] Allégret and other friends, having sex with countless strangers along the way and dropping in on Madeleine occasionally in much the way that an adult man would drop in on – yes – his mother,” and explains how throughout the course of their marriage, Madeleine “avoided reading those works by her husband which she knew would reveal to her more about his life apart from her than she wished to know” and that her squeamishness with regards to topics of sexuality (not to mention her husband’s pedophilia) “was an embarrassing, unmentionable topic” (392). Therefore, as I attempt to shed light on the ways in which Gide navigated questions of religion and same-sex sexual desire, I wish to place special consideration on how Madeleine is notably present within these questions.

For this chapter, I have chosen to focus on two books that were published eleven years apart: *La Porte étroite* (1909) and *La Symphonie pastorale* (1920). The female characters in these works – Alissa in *La Porte étroite*, Gertrude and the Pastor’s wife in *Symphonie pastorale* – all have a certain resonance with Madeleine, with her life before and during her marriage to Gide, while at the same time also resonating with Gide himself. Both books focus on how sexuality and sexual otherness work simultaneously with religion and religious piety to reinforce and to negate each other, but each of these works takes one of these issues to an extreme and portrays it to the point of pathology. In *La Porte étroite*, the problematic nature of religious extremism paves the path to Alissa’s self-destruction; in *Symphonie*, it is sexual otherness, portrayed through and masked by disability, that ultimately leads to the blind girl Gertrude’s death. My intent is to demonstrate how Gide’s

personal life is imagined and fictionalized within these two works, with the omnipresence of Madeleine playing a significant role in each book's intrigue.

Gide was keenly aware that readers tended to confuse his biography with his fiction, and in fact, he seemed to encourage that readers would assume that he created and portrayed his characters from a purely biographical standpoint. He therefore structured his works in such a way as to distance himself from the protagonists of his first person narratives, which allowed him to employ the "I" that Oscar Wilde (and later Marcel Proust) had cautioned him against using. As I've already discussed, the method he used in *l'Immoraliste* was to have the secondary narrator (Michel) describe his story to a small group of young men, and for his story to be ultimately relayed by the primary narrator who has supposedly written down verbatim what it was that Michel had recounted to his audience. In *La Porte étroite* and *La Symphonie pastorale* Gide employs a similar tactic by taking advantage of how the literary styles of diary and memoir writing can be used in works of fiction to separate the author from both his subject matter and from his protagonists, since the narrator serves as the intermediary for the "I," and the works themselves are the *written* word of the narrator: both works are essentially the diaries of the narrator who are recounting past events. This narrative style allows him to avail himself of an "I" while at the same time disavowing it since the "I" belongs to a character within the storyline rather than to him. Additionally, it allows him a certain amount of flexibility, since the narratives are reliant on the events that a non-omniscient narrator would recall from the perspective of the storyline, ultimately providing a space for a *fictionalized* flawed memory and a flawed narration. In other words, the reader might question the authenticity and reliability of both the narrator and the story he tells. It is an

ironic choice that Gide – the author who is known for his “cult of sincerity” – chooses to create unreliable narrators whose sincerity the reader will ultimately question.

Since my overall focus on how Gide articulates the first person pronoun within questions of religion and same-sex sexuality, it is crucial to consider the role of the narrator of these *récits* and how he navigates these questions. Their unreliability actually serves an important narrative function in both *La Porte étroite* and in *La Symphonie pastorale*, not so much to undermine the story that is being told but rather to provide the masks that create an extra-textual narrative and spaces that ultimately serve as the clue to understanding their motivations, their deceptions, and perhaps even their subconscious natures. The narrator/memoirist Jérôme in *La Porte étroite* warns from the first line that he will be piecing together his memories from fragments and that the story he will tell will be imperfect. The reader can then question not only the accuracy of events but also the accuracy of his feelings. In a similar fashion, the Pastor who narrates *La Symphonie pastorale* is keeping a diary of the events that surround his relationship with the blind girl, but inconsistencies in his writing reveal to the reader that he is ultimately dishonest and self-serving within the story he tells. What is most fascinating about this tactic in these two *récits* is that Gide gives the characters more psychological depth and challenges the reader to question and understand their *unwritten* motivations and desires on a meta-textual level. At the same time, it also allows the reader to ponder just how much of a “bud” they represent within the author himself. Lastly, we must consider how his female characters also represent not only their own bud within him, but also how, through them, he imagines his complex relationship with Madeleine.

*La Porte étroite*

*La Porte étroite* is one of Gide's most widely known works, and has been the topic of a tremendous amount of discussion, particularly for how it portrays the doomed relationship of its primary characters. The interplay between Jérôme and Alissa, their courtship, their failed engagement, and their correspondence not only represents a re-imagining of the relationship between Gide and Madeleine (where Gide quite literally envisions an alternative reality of his life with Madeleine, as if he had asked "what if?"), but at the same time also serves as a bitter criticism of the asceticism of Calvinism. What emerges is what might be considered a cautionary tale, one that paints a negative picture of religious devotion, since Gide depicts Alissa's religious nature as nothing less than a path to madness.

*La Porte étroite* was published late in 1909 after first appearing serially in the *Mercure de France* earlier that year. The original working titles were *L'Essai de bien mourir* (*Essay on Dying Well*), and later *La Mort de Mademoiselle Claire* (*The Death of Miss Claire*) (Sheridan 228), and "was inspired by the spectacle of the self-denying life and lonely death of Anna Shackleton, at one time the governess and later the companion of Gide's mother" (March 149). The title *La Porte étroite*, meaning "The Narrow Doorway" or "The Strait Gate" (or as in the standard English translation by Dorothy Bussy *Strait is the Gate*), is a reference to Christ's admonition to his followers of the narrow path to salvation, and comes from a biblical passage that Gide cites in the first chapter that begins "Efforcez-vous d'entrer par la porte étroite" ("Strive to enter through the strait gate") (PE 505).

This narrow gate represents in the storyline not only Alissa's self-denying path to her own personal salvation, but also the salvation she wished for Jérôme, asserting that she

herself was what stood in the way between him and God. For Jérôme, the strait gate is his path to Alissa, a gate so narrow that he would have been wholly unable to access her emotionally, physically or sexually without himself being altered or diminished: “Et cette porte devenait encore la porte meme de la chambre d’Alissa; pour entrer je me réduisais, me vidais de tout ce qui subsistait en moi d’égotisme...” (505) (“And this gate became the very door of Alissa’s room; in order to enter, I diminished myself, emptied of all the selfishness that remained in me...”).

The plot of *La Porte étroite* takes place over a number of years, and follows the story of two cousins, Jérôme and Alissa, who are – like Gide and Madeleine – childhood sweethearts. Throughout the course of the book, written as a first person narrative in the form of a memoir from Jérôme’s point of view, with letters between Alissa and him interspersed throughout the text, Jérôme attempts to assemble the pieces of their broken relationship into a coherent narrative in order to make sense out of the relationship’s – and Alissa’s – downfall. Gide begins the narrative by deploying a similar tactic that he used in *l’Immoraliste* by putting a distance between the events that he is recounting and the supposed reality surrounding them by offering the story as an impressionistic remembrance of the events in question. At the same time, Gide permits his own renunciation of the narrator, similar to the tactic he used in *L’Immoraliste*, where the author dissociates himself from the work that he has written, as he establishes that his narrator may not be reliable from the start when Jérôme asserts that his memories of the events he wishes to reconstruct are in fragments.

The book appeared seven years after the publication of *l’Immoraliste*, and these two works are referred to by Gide himself as being each other’s “twin in excess,” since he

initially conceived of them simultaneously. Whereas many readers and critics at the time believed *Porte étroite* represented a “profound shift” in the life and literary perspective of the author when compared to its “twin,” Gide asserted that his more recent work merely represented a “change of subject” (Sheridan 232): “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 maintiennent en équilibre” (*Journal 1* 365-6) (“Who do I persuade that this book is a twin of *The Immoralist* and that the two subjects have grown concurrently in my mind, the excess of one finding a secret permission in the excess of the other, and the two together achieving a certain equilibrium”).

From a critical standpoint this assertion provides a rich perspective from which we might understand both books’ themes as well as their significance in author’s life and indeed where they fit into the Gidean literary corpus in general. First, as is the case with *l’Immoraliste*, *La Porte Etroite* can be read as a fictionalization of the drama that existed between Gide and his wife Madeleine, depicting at least symbolically (if not at times directly) the manner in which religious piety and sexual otherness interfered with and undermined their relationship. Second, regarding the “excess,” Sheridan describes *La Porte étroite* as “this work of ‘virtue’” and *l’Immoraliste* as “that work of ‘vice’” (237), and it is the excesses of “vice” and “virtue” that are at play in these *livres jumeaux*. Michel’s “vice” is what is lived to in excess in *l’Immoraliste* and leads to the ultimate failure of his marriage, and arguably, to Marceline’s death. Meanwhile in *La Porte Etroite*, it is the excess of Alissa’s pious religious “virtue” that leads her to a life of self-abnegation, her incapacity to marry the man with whom she is supposedly in love, and eventually to her own death.

The similarities that exist between Madeleine and Alissa (and Marceline, for that matter) should therefore be viewed as an impressionistic portrayal of the influence the Madeleine “archetype” on his life, one in which Gide is re-imagining his relationship with his wife, rather than an exact biographical telling. Within both *l’Immoraliste* and *La Porte étroite*, Gide explores the ways in which questions of (his) sexual difference and (his mother’s and Madeleine’s) puritanical religiosity are ever looming in his life, and particularly how they shaped his marriage. Sheridan offers that through *La Porte étroite*, “Gide extrapolated a possible alternative future for Madeleine and himself, a future that turned out not to be, after all, an alternative one, but in a sense, a delayed one” (231). Gide himself addresses the speculation of whether or not Madeleine was the inspiration for Alissa as he reflected later in life on his own marriage and on his writings. For example, he wrote in *Si le grain ne meurt* about the role that his fiction played in representing his life’s experiences: “Mon intention pourtant a toujours été de tout dire. [...] Les Mémoires ne sont jamais qu’à demi-sincères, si grand que soit le souci de vérité : tout est toujours plus compliqué que l’on ne le dit. Peut-être même approche-t-on de plus près la vérité dans le roman” (547) (“But my intention was always to say everything. [...] Memories are never only half-sincere, so great is the concern for truth: everything is always more complicated than you might think. Perhaps it is even through the novel that we may more closely approach the truth”), reinforcing the possibility that these characters were figurative representations of himself and Madeleine, written so that he might through his fiction arrive at understanding of his own personal “truths.” However, he did contradict the speculation that Alissa is a fictionalized version of Madeleine in *Et Nunc manet in te*, a memoir Gide wrote, following her death, about his life with Madeleine, where he states,

“Mais l’Alissa de mon livre n’était point d’elle [Madeleine]” (1123) (“But the Alissa from my book was in no way she”). Regardless of that denial, within the pages of *Et nunc*, he continues to describe Madeleine and how their relationship ultimately deteriorated as she pulled away from him, a passage that could just as well be taken directly from the pages of *La Porte étroite* regarding the degeneration of Alissa’s relationship with Jérôme: “C’est dans la religion qu’elle chercha refuge – comme il était naturelle car elle avait toujours été très pieuse – et dans une restauration de ces idées et pratiques bourgeoises qui lui assurassent la sorte de confort moral dont sa fragilité avait si grand besoin” (1135) (“It is in religion where she sought refuge - as was natural because she had always been very devout – as with a restoration of these ideas and bourgeois practices that assured her the moral comfort that her fragile nature so required).

He further discusses how she was emotionally separating herself from him, and in due course isolated herself from him and from their marriage “Car elle ne devait point se contenter seulement de se détacher de moi; il semblait qu’elle travaillât à me détacher d’elle, ébranchant d’elle tour à tour ce qui me la faisait aimer” (1135-6) (“Because she was not to merely content just to break away from me, it seemed she toiled to detach me from her, cutting from herself in due course what it was that made me love her”). Ultimately Gide’s admission of the link between Madeleine and Alissa comes from an interview regarding *Et Nunc manet in te* with Jean Delay in 1947, where Delay asks Gide whether Alissa had been modeled after his wife and cousin Madeleine, and Gide responded: “Non [...] j’ai longtemps cru qu’elle était Alissa, elle ne l’était pas.” (“No, for a long time I believed that she was Alissa, but she was not”), but after pausing a moment, he added, “Mais elle l’est devenue.” (Delay *Jeunesse 1* 502-3) (“But she became her”).

The following questions then must be posed: in what way did Gide create Alissa and in what way did she become Madeleine, and what was the motivating factor for her obsession with salvation? Gide seems to posit within Alissa an almost irrational attachment to faith, one that in the end is represented as both futile and without substance. Her self-abnegation seems to lose itself to the point that the sacrifice becomes the end rather than the means, particularly since by the end of the tale she loses faith in the belief system to which she had attached herself to begin with. I have already described her sacrifice as being depicted as a form of madness, since her obsession with her own redemption (and that of Jérôme) is ultimately uncompromising and self-destructive. Jérôme recounts her deliberate attempt to be unattractive to him, both physically and intellectually, over the course of the story, describing it as her *dépoétisation*. She ceases to play her piano, going so far as to send it away, and she stops reading anything but the most mundane religious works. She stops tending to her hair or dress, and by the end her appearance is shocking to Jérôme to the point that he almost fails to recognize her: “Alissa ! m’écriai-je le premier soir, presque épouvanté par la dépoétisation de ce visage qu’à peine pouvais-je reconnaître et que je fixais depuis quelques instants sans qu’elle parût sentir mon regard” (568) (“Alissa! I cried out the first night, almost frightened by the depoeticized face that I could scarcely recognize, and I stared for several moments without her seeming to sense my gaze”).

David Steel actually suggests that “Alissa’s physical condition is self-inflicted and is the bodily manifestation of [...] her deliberate *dépoétisation* (a noun seemingly invented by Gide from the verb *dépoétiser* [...]) on which she wilfully embarks in order to deter him from finding her attractive” (5). He asserts that her “illness” might be described as anorexia

nervosa, a condition whose onset is marked by her conflict with her adulterous mother and the fear of identifying with her. Although, in the “Journal d’Alissa” presented at the end of the book, she recounts how her father was struck by the resemblance to her mother: “quand je suis rentré dans le salon, et que je t’ai vue, comme tu étais étendue sur le canapé, un instant j’ai cru revoir ta mere” (585) (“Earlier, when I came back into the parlor and saw you, the way that you were laying on the sofa, for a moment it was as if I saw your mother again”). This association with her mother is of particular interest in this case since she is the perpetrator of the inappropriate sexual behavior through her affair, her abandonment of the family and most importantly through the sexual advance she makes toward Jérôme, an incident I will discuss below. But there is also the possibility that the mother’s dysfunction is also a result of a sexually abusive father, one who may have sexualized Alissa as a child and taken advantage of her as he would a surrogate wife, which might likewise explain Alissa’s horror at any resemblance to her mother.

The trauma suffered by both Jérôme and Alissa is then transferred wholly onto Alissa, who is the one who is seemingly atoning for the sins of the mother and/or father through her extreme religious devotion. At the same time, her alleged anorexic behavior can be seen as symptomatic of past or current sexual abuse, a common assertion of anorexia in general, one that Steel (6) affirms though the definition of anorexia from the *Trésors de la langue française*: “Spec, psychopathologique. Anorexie mentale. Maladie qui s’observe surtout chez les jeunes filles adolescentes de 15 a 25 ans, qui a généralement pour cause profonde un conflit avec le milieu familial, en particulier avec la mère et dont les principaux symptômes sont l’anorexie, l’amaigrissement, l’amenorrhée et un état mental particulier.” (“Spec, psychopathology. Anorexia nervosa. Disease that occurs mainly in

adolescent girls 15 to 25, whose root cause comes generally from conflict with the family, especially with the mother, and whose main symptoms are anorexia, weight loss, amenorrhea and a particular mental state”).

If this is true, then we might conclude that her total religious abnegation is provoked by matters of sexuality, and more specifically, by sexual perversion. Gide is therefore ultimately positing sexuality and religion within the same continuum, and presents both entities as pathologized. From this perspective, it is among the most solid examples of how Gide portrayed the incompatible natures of sexuality and religion. Furthermore, although they are on the same continuum, they are nevertheless cast as reactionary, opposing forces that are at work to negate each other: the excesses of one (religion) as an atonement for the excesses of the other (sexuality/sexual perversion). Alissa, a devoutly religious person in her own right, essentially denies herself a sexual existence through her obsession with this atonement, shedding her worldly attachments of music, artistry, beauty, and even body weight so that she can pass through the strait gate to salvation and ultimately shed her worldly attachments, and more importantly, the (sexual) sins of her mother. But what else was she possibly atoning for?

An important factor to consider is that she was not merely atoning for the “sins of the mother” and trying to save her own soul in the process; she was also concerned with Jérôme’s salvation, and I would assert, atoning for his sexual perversion (i.e., his homosexuality). My assertion about his possible homosexuality is not unique, since others, as I will also discuss below, have suggested similarly. But the notion that his homosexuality is what provokes the onset of Alissa’s self-abnegation is what I wish to stress, especially in regards to the way that this perspective articulates back to how Gide is grappling with

these same issues in his own marriage, and why he was seemingly able to predict with a certain accuracy how his life with Madeleine would eventually unfold. It might on one hand provide a deeper explanation as to why Alissa is concerned not only with her own salvation but also with Jérôme's, and on the other hand it might also explain why Jérôme's narrative is itself unreliable. From the standpoint of the narrative itself, Jérôme (as the narrator and a character in the story) is being dishonest with the reader and with himself about his own true sexual nature by constructing a story around Alissa and not examining or revealing what his own role was in her downfall.

In the end, the significance of this *récit* within the theme of "Imagining Madeleine" comes from the point of view that Gide is working out issues of same-sex sexuality and religion within his own marriage. I would assert that *La Porte étroite* not only demonstrates the impossibility of marriage within the context of religious devotion (especially when that devotion devolves to the point of fanaticism and madness), but also, in a subtler way, grapples with Gide's issues with his own sexual desires and reveals the ultimate inauthenticity of his *mariage blanc* to Madeleine. The book and its characters are Gide's "authorial buds," so whereas Alissa might be the fictionalization of Madeleine, she is also a psychological projection of Gide and what he expected, and possibly wanted, of her. Did he have a tacit expectation that it was Madeleine's duty, through her religious devotion, to "save" him? Does the futile nature of Alissa's sacrifice articulate to the futility of Madeleine's marriage to Gide in the first place? The futility of Alissa's sacrifice – her inability to atone for her own sins let alone Jérôme's – seems to be revealed as a poeticized representation of the futility Gide's own marriage, one where the opposite sex desiring person is unable to alter the unalterable sexual nature of her spouse.

*Jérôme: Authorial unreliability and the homosexual mask*

Scott Manning describes how “The role of homosexuality in *La Porte étroite* is more speculative. [...] Certainly his hollow and too-often repeated insistence on his great love for Alissa could suggest that the very purpose of this narrative is to *cover* some other truth” (“Revelation and Dissimulation” 321). Manning cites Albert Sonnenfeld’s analysis of Gide’s oeuvre, where the latter brings to light that in an early draft of *La Porte étroite* there was a brief passage that was omitted in the final edition of the work, describing Jérôme’s time spent in Athens (in the final edition there is merely a passing mention of his sojourn in Greece) where he describes how he tried to “‘free’ himself from austerity in guilt-ridden debauchery” (qtd in Manning 322). I do not wish to overstate that this missing passage (or the fact that it ever existed in the first place) would necessarily constitute itself as a “smoking gun” for Jérôme’s presumed homosexuality, but it does provide a space to at least consider Gide’s intentions with him as a protagonist. It should further be mentioned that Manning does not insist on the term “debauchery” as being synonymous with “homosexuality” (326n) but rather that Gide’s fascination and knowledge about ancient Greek culture implies at least a symbolic reference to same-sex sexuality and pederasty, shades of what he would later reflect on in his notorious apologia of homosexuality, *Corydon*, which was to be written over the course of the next decade.

My assertion of Jérôme’s homosexuality begins with the assertion of his unreliability as a narrator. O’Keefe goes so far as to claim that he is “a narrator who deliberately misrepresents, that is, who lies” (VV 99). If the reader can ascertain that which Jérôme has misrepresented, s/he might question what else in the story he tells would also be

inaccurate or untruthful. It is within these untruths that Gide actually “closets” Jérôme’s sexuality, rendering the story itself as an elaborate mask for his own (both Gide’s and Jérôme’s) sense of sexual otherness. In turn, his closeted sexual otherness is projected onto Alissa in the form of her intense obsession with salvation. In the end, Jérôme presents himself as a victim of the events in question, and the pathology rests solely with the woman he claims to love. Of course, the parallel to Gide’s sexless relationship with Madeleine is evident, since, although he claimed to love her, that love was only ever to be platonic. He lamented her retreat into her own religious devotion while rarely referencing his responsibility in the failure of their relationship.

From that perspective, my reading of *La Porte étroite* is that it is an elaborate mask for Jérôme’s – or Gide’s – own specific sexual nature. As narrator, he – both Jérôme and Gide – embarks on a quest to get at the “truth” of the events that occurred that would have led to Alissa’s pulling away from him, her madness, and her death. But he fails at any introspection or consideration of how he may have contributed to her emotional state. Ultimately, the “truth” has no place in a story that is, through his own admission, made up almost completely of fragments and impressions. The sincerity of the *récit* in the end fails because everything he believes about Alissa, everything he projects onto her, is ultimately more revealing of himself. Alissa’s concern about not passing through the strait gate to salvation is eventually his concern about not being physically or emotionally able to penetrate her. He is unable to save her from her destiny in the same way that she is unable to save him. Jérôme is from one perspective impotent, from another a homosexual.

The evidence of the biographical parallels between Jérôme’s and Gide’s lives appear as soon as the second paragraph of the *récit* when he declares that he lost his father at the

age of 12 (Gide lost his own father at the age of 10). There are then several other details of people and events that are drawn directly from the author's life, such as the familial ties with Madeleine (they were cousins), when they fell in love (as adolescents), and descriptions of residence at Fongueusemare which bears a considerable resemblance to Gide's home at Cuverville, complete with a narrow gate in the garden. These details would also be described in his autobiography *Si le grain ne meurt* a decade and a half later, causing the reader to wonder whether or not he had actually written two (or more) autobiographical texts. But why does Gide create these parallels with his own life if ultimately he wished to disavow himself from the characters he created to begin with? It is as if he defies the reader to draw the obvious comparisons between his life and the life of the characters he creates. As would be the case with all fiction, the autobiographical elements are not merely there to recount events from the author's personal history, rather, they are there so that Gide might re-imagine them.

In *La Porte étroite*, as in *l'Immoraliste*, Gide envisions how his real-life experiences could have had alternative endings. For example, Gide's own struggle with tuberculosis is re-imagined through Michel's bout with the same illness in *l'Immoraliste*, and it provides the psychological and physical space where Gide poeticizes how his illness created an opportunity for his spiritual and sexual awakening. But he takes it a step further, because in the end the female character needed to die so that he might be free to live with his newfound emancipation, and he eventually kills off Marceline to the same disease, thus "liberating" him from the constraints of marriage, and on a grander scale, participation within the conventions and institutions of his bourgeois station. Naomi Segal's article, whose title is borrowed from a quotation from *l'Immoraliste*, "J'ai peur que ce que j'ai

supprimé ne se venge – Gide and Women” illustrates a formula from which we might understand the role that these women play in these and several other books by Gide. A principal element in her observation is that “the figure of the woman has to die so that the male narrator can tell ‘his’ tale” (62). It is certainly not a stretch to conclude – at least on some level – that Gide is therefore fantasizing about the death of his own wife to achieve the same liberation as his fictional male counterparts. As the reader discovers in *La Porte étroite*, a similar situation arises as Gide, through Jérôme, describes the beginnings of his protagonist’s relationship with Alissa, one that is eerily reflective of the courtship between Gide and Madeleine, and then reworks the tale as a marriage that never occurs, one in which the object of his “love” dies in a state of religious abnegation. In other words, Gide has yet again fictionally killed off Madeleine. It must be noted that in his *Les Cahiers d'André Walter*, written before their marriage, he also kills off the character who is considered to be Madeleine's counterpart, so, in effect, Gide has “killed off” Madeleine three times within the context of his fiction.

Therefore, what Gide presents in Jérôme’s story is a palpable reflection of his own story with Madeleine, one fraught with drama and inaccuracies. It is from the first line of *La Porte étroite* that Jérôme himself alerts the reader that the telling of his story will be problematic:

D'autres en auraient pu faire un livre; mais l'histoire que je raconte ici, j'ai mis toute ma force à la vivre et ma vertu s'y est usée. J'écrirai donc très simplement mes souvenirs, et s'ils sont en lambeaux par endroits, je n'aurai recours à aucune invention pour les rapiécer ou les joindre; l'effort que

j'apporterais à leur apprêt gênerait le dernier plaisir que j'espère trouver à les dire. (*La Porte étroite* 495).

(Some might have written a book about it; but the story I am going to tell here is one that took all my strength to live through, and my virtue is exhausted. So I will quite simply write my memories, and if in places they are in tatters, I will make no invention, neither to piece them together nor to connect them; any effort I might make to do so would inhibit the final pleasure I hope to get in recounting them.)

But this is only one of the elements within the first ten pages that indicates the story's fallible nature; there is in fact, a second, which comes in the form of an error in the central Biblical quotation whence the title of the work is derived. Charles O'Keefe points out (*VV* 97) that the passage that Jérôme quotes is actually an amalgam of two separate biblical citations taken from the books of Luke (Chapter 13) and Matthew (Chapter 7). The passage in question appears in the *récit* as "Efforcez-vous d'entrer par la porte étroite, car la porte large et le chemin spacieux mènent à la perdition, et nombreux sont ceux que y passent; mais étroite est la porte resserrée la voie qui conduisent à la Vie, et il en est peu qui les trouvent" (*PE* 505) (From Gide's text, the translation of the quotation is as follows, translated via the New International Version: "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door [Luke 13:24], for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to Life, and only a few find it." [Matt. 7:13-14]). The biblical "misquotation" is one of the initial clues to Jérôme's unreliability, and one that O'Keefe points out has been overlooked by critics and readers alike: "So if Jérôme misquotes the Bible that Gide spent so much of

his life pondering, there should be a high level of confidence that his character's mistake has esthetic significance" (97).

The actual biblical quotations are Luke's "Efforcez-vous d'entrer par la porte étroite. Car, je vous le dis, beaucoup chercheront à entrer, et ne le pourront pas" ("Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to") (Luke 13:24, NIV) and Matthew's "Entrez par la porte étroite. Car large est la porte, spacieux est le chemin qui mènent à la perdition, et il y en a beaucoup qui entrent par là. Mais étroite est la porte, resserré le chemin qui mènent à la vie, et il y en a peu qui les trouvent" (qtd. in *VV* 98n) "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it") (Matt. 7:13-14, NIV). He explains that the portion that is taken from the Matthew quotation represents a more austere view of salvation, one that "few" actually have access to, an idea that is more in alignment with the Calvinistic belief systems of the characters' (and for that matter Gide's) religious upbringing; the Luke version of the quotation, on the other hand, indicates a more universal stance of the inclusivity of salvation, available to a greater number of souls, even though salvation is in and of itself still difficult to achieve: "Not surprisingly, Jérôme veers away from Luke's characteristically universalist development, to accommodate Matthew's subsequently more demanding view of an ascetic handful of the chosen, a view that continues to resonate better with Jérôme's personality" (98-99).

The effect that the passage has from a narrative standpoint, as it is quoted, seems to highlight the Calvinistic asceticism, as O'Keefe observes, that drives the story line, and consequently Alissa's adherence to its message. A close look at the passages in question,

and how Gide manipulated them, reveals how they drive the “aesthetic” that motivated Alissa in her actions. Luke’s “Strive/Make every effort to enter...” is a call to action, admonishing the faithful that salvation, however difficult, is nevertheless achievable through sacrifice and good works, whereas Matthew’s “Enter through the narrow gate...” reinforces the vision of temptation and destruction, that derail a salvation that is already only available to a select view. In other words Matthew’s text is an indicator of predestination, more in line with Calvinist teachings. By replacing the beginning of the Matthew passage (the command to “Enter”) with the one from Luke (the command to “Make every effort,” or “Strive to”), Gide has laid the path for Alissa’s plight: the Matthew text can be read as essentially a command to “be saved” addressed to the chosen few; Luke’s beginning changes the meaning of the entire quotation subtly to one where the faithful are called to endeavor to be worthy (through sacrifice and good works), even though they ultimately might not be predestined to be chosen. In other words, the efforts Alissa makes may ultimately be fruitless and futile. She even seems to recognize the futility of her actions, and in the end loses faith in the belief systems she tried so hard to follow. Although she feared for her own salvation and for Jérôme’s, she nonetheless questions her sacrifice but is nevertheless relentless with it if for no other reason than for the sake of sacrifice itself: “Je m’efforce d’agir avec raison, mais au moment de l’action, les raisons qui me faisaient agir m’échappent, ou me paraissent folles; je n’y crois plus... Les raisons qui me font le fuir [Jérôme]? Je n’y crois plus... Et je le fuis pourtant, avec tristesse, et sans comprendre pourquoi je le fuis” (587) (“I try to act with reason, but when it comes time for action, the reasons that that make me do so escape me, or seem foolish, and I no longer

believe in them... The reasons why I avoid him? I no longer believe in them ... And yet, sadly, I flee him without understanding why”).

Although we might conclude that Gide selectively gleaned verses of similar texts in the Bible less to satisfy an esthetic than to be the catalyst for Alissa’s self-abnegation, there are perhaps more significant reasons for what might be viewed as an intentional distortion of sacred texts. O’Keefe offers his own theories as to what Gide was up to by incorrectly quoting the Bible, as well as the reasons why critics have long ignored what is posited as Jérôme’s/Gide’s inaccuracy, ranging from “partisan Gidians who recognized the ‘verse’ for what it was but overlooked ‘Jérôme’s’ responsibility for the misquotation, tolerantly forgave Gide for what they assumed was his mistake” to speculating whether “perhaps a taboo is at work? Could it be that no one had bothered to check because of a vague uneasiness about dealing with sacred texts in profane criticism?” (100).

I would add that the misquoted verses signal to the reader that Jérôme’s story, although presented as his endeavor to recall and reconstruct the events in question, is no more than a work of personal fiction or revisionism. It is yet another factor in his unreliable nature as a narrator, one that corresponds with his own admission that his memories of the events are in tatters. But that poses a complex problem with his unreliability: from the point of view of the diegesis, I must consider that it is Jérôme, and not Gide, who is inaccurate in the events that are recounted, while at the same time I cannot ignore Gide’s influence on the character he created. But for what reason would Gide intentionally make Jérôme unreliable? To reaffirm my earlier conclusion, it is that the story Jérôme is recounting is one where he tries to understand why the love of his life has regressed into a state of total religious abnegation and refused to marry him, even though it is actually *he*

who subconsciously did not want to marry *her*: Jérôme may have been the one who unwittingly undermined his relationship with Alissa, and not the other way around. Given the common association that Alissa is the fictionalization of Madeleine, and by default Jérôme the fictionalization of Gide (although looked at from another perspective, one might assert that it is Alissa who actually represents Gide), then we must continue to reveal in what ways Jérôme's possible homosexuality or impotence (or homosexuality masked by impotence) is the ultimate cause of the downfall of their engagement as well as Alissa's madness, rather than placing the blame solely with her religious fervor. Is the authorial "bud" that Jérôme represents within Gide in fact a homosexual one? Is it because Gide/Jerome did not wish to marry a woman to begin with?

Perhaps the most significant indication of Jérôme's sexual nature is revealed subtly within the text itself, specifically through the sequence of events that lead to his falling in love with Alissa, and consequently how it relates back to biographical parallels with Gide's life, completing the referential circle that links the sexual nature of the author with his first person narrator. There is an incident that is recounted in *La Porte étroite* where Lucile Bucolin, Alissa's mother – who is cast as the "other" because of her Creole origins and one who strikes terror in the hearts of Jérôme, his mother, and his Aunt Flora – makes a sexual advance toward an adolescent Jérôme, causing the young man to flee: " 'Tiens, regarde si tu n'es pas mieux ainsi!' – et, sortant son petit miroir, elle attire contre le sien mon visage, passe autour de mon cou son bras nu, descend sa main dans ma chemise entrouverte, demande en riant si je suis chatouilleux, pousse plus avant... J'eus un sursaut si brusque que ma vareuse se déchira" (500) ("Here, look if you are not better this way!' And taking out her little mirror, she drew my face against hers, put her bare arm around my neck, and

her hand down my open shirt, and asked, while laughing, if I was ticklish. She then went further... I jumped so suddenly that I tore my shirt open). The scene is followed several pages later by an incident when Jérôme comforts a traumatized Alissa (who is described as resembling her mother), her face covered in tears, while her mother entertains a young lieutenant in the presence of her two other children one floor below. Upon comforting her after discovering her in her distress, he states, "Cet instant décida ma vie" (503) ("My whole life was decided in that moment"), since it was the moment he fell in love with her.

The significance of these two incidents, both resulting from the transgressions of Jérôme's Aunt Lucile, are discussed by Jacques Lacan in his article on Gide entitled "Jeunesse de Gide ou la lettre et le désir: sur un livre de Jean Delay et un autre de Jean Schlumberger" (found in the 1958 French edition of *Écrits*, and in the 2006 English edition as "The Youth of Gide, or the Letter and Desire"), and more recently by Geneviève Morel's *La Loi de la mère* in the chapter "Gide: masques et sinthome," where she provides her own analysis of Lacan's observations. Whereas I have already asserted that Alissa assumes the sins of her mother, and in turn spends her life atoning for her licentious and pedophilic behavior, Morel draws a further link to the significance for Jérôme/Gide, since the incidents in question are undoubtedly based on Gide's actual experiences: the seduction that is recounted only in the *récit*, and the encounter with Alissa/Madeleine recounted in both the *récit* and in his memoirs *Si le grain ne meurt* (236). Both Lacan and Morel reference the significance of these two scenes and how they relate to actual events in Gide's life, and assert that the incident with the aunt "bears the truth of fiction" (Lacan 753), and therefore represents an actual event as well.

These events according to both Morel and Lacan are crucial in the way they marked Gide's – and by consequence Jérôme's – sexual development. Says Morel, “La conjonction de ces deux scènes, distantes d'un an, provoquent un tournant dans la vie de l'adolescent. [...] À ce moment là, il aurait pu s'ouvrir au désir des femmes, mais cette rencontre tardive avec le désir féminin fut traumatique parce qu'elle n'était pas médiatisée par un tiers qui aurait humanisé (c'est à dire phallicisé) ce désir – rôle normal du père” (237) (“The combination of these two scenes, separated by a year, provoke a turning point in the life of the adolescent. [...] At that time, he could have opened himself the desire of women, but this delayed encounter with female desire was traumatic because it was not mediated by a third party who would have humanized (i.e. phallicized) this desire – normally the role of the father”), referencing of course the fact that at the time these events took place, his father (both Gide's and Jérôme's) was already deceased.

The psychological trauma that the events in the first scene have caused, for the adolescent boy, a slip in the system of desires: he perceives himself as the object of desire of his aunt, but without the mediation of the father, he fixates on himself as the desired adolescent boy. When he encounters Madeleine in the second scene in question, he assumes the role of the adult by identifying with his aunt, and perceives Madeleine as the idealized, desired adolescent. At the same time, Morel describes how “Corrélativement, il refoule tout désir pour les femmes [...] Dès lors sa vie sera écartelée entre son désir pour les jeunes garçons ressemblant à l'enfant désiré qu'il a été un bref instant dans les bras de [sa tante], et pour l'amour mystique de sa cousine” (237-38) (“Accordingly, he suppresses all desire for women [...] Thus his life will be torn between his desire for young boys like the desired child he was when for a brief moment he was in the arms of [his aunt], and

mystical love for his cousin”). What emerges therefore is a psychological profile that points to a sequence of events in Gide’s life that would have influenced how he would relate sexually to Madeleine, and correspondingly how when he created Jérôme, unmistakably in his own image, those same events would influence his relationship with Alissa. The relationship between Gide and his protagonist is ultimately one that influences and reflects back on itself, one that facilitates the drawing of the fundamental link to each other’s homosexual (if not also pedophilic) desires.

In light of cultural theories of sexuality, I am not in total agreement that these incidents were necessarily seminal with regard to how they contributed to the formation of Gide’s desires and fetishes, neither am I entirely comfortable with the implied pathology to non-heterosexual behavior and development that seem to be evident in Morel’s analysis. On the other hand, I do find her work to be valuable since it provides a means of understanding how Gide, as a same-sex desiring person, could unintentionally (or perhaps deliberately) influence the psychological profile of certain male characters he creates. Furthermore, I do also find it compelling in terms of how we might understand the complex psychological issues that are at play within the pages of *La Porte étroite*. The “bud” that Gide’s characters represent within him would most certainly carry the codes of his own sexual nature, and provide the space for understanding their motivations, flaws, and desires. The inclusion of the above-mentioned events in a way confirms the same-sex desiring nature of Jérôme by the very nature of the number of links that can be drawn between the character and Gide. Jérôme ultimately is a character who purports to be seeking the truth by reconstructing the events that led to the demise of the woman he

supposedly loves as well as of the relationship he had with her. Jérôme's attempt ultimately fails because he was blind to his own truths about his sexual nature.

Therefore, by making the assumption that Jérôme represents, for all intents and purposes, Gide, then the attempt that Jérôme makes to understand the events that lead to Alissa's descent into a life of religious self-abnegation, starvation, and isolation is therefore one that would plausibly articulate back to Gide's personal struggle with his life with Madeleine, along with the flaws and foibles of their own marriage. Since within the text itself, Jérôme fails to recognize how he, as a result of his own same-sex sexual desire, may have unwittingly played a part in Alissa's personal struggles, Gide does in any case leave clues that allow the reader to solve the puzzle out of the fragments of memories that he assembles for us and create the links that tie these fragments together. Alissa, and presumably Madeleine, were left to deal with, and atone for, not only the shortcomings of their mother but also the sexual otherness of Jérôme/Gide from which they were expressly excluded.

Finally, Gide's assertion that *La Porte étroite* is the twin of *l'Immoraliste* might also be considered an indicator of Jérôme's homosexuality masking as impotence. One might note the notorious inaction of Jérôme and draw a parallel to Michel's own inaction, as I discussed in Chapter 2, but similarities do not seem to stop there. The Alissa figure is as much a literary reflection of Madeleine Gide as is Marceline, particularly from the point of view of her extreme piety, even though Alissa's pious behavior seems to be portrayed as more relentless than that of Marceline. But we must also examine the ways in which Jérôme relates to her, in particular his inability to actually *seduce* her, let alone to wed her, much in the way that Michel was for the most part impotent with Marceline (save one

incident following a display of hyper-masculinity when he was finally able to consummate the marriage). From this perspective, the obvious parallels of Gide's own relationship with Madeleine are revealed, and provide a space of speculation as to the non-heterosexuality of Jérôme in the same way we might consider that of Michel, and finally of Gide himself.

### *La Symphonie pastorale*

As was the case with *La Porte étroite*, *La Symphonie pastorale* is a  *récit*  written in the form of a diary by a primary narrator. Numbering merely 52 pages in the Pléiade edition, the story – which originally carried the working title of *L'Aveugle* or *The Blind Woman* – is what Naomi Segal describes as a Pygmalion (*PP* 328) story of a young blind woman who is brought to life through the intervention and education of a Protestant country pastor. The story takes place in the small village of La Brévine in Switzerland and is the Pastor's account of how he educated the young blind girl of about 15 years of age whom he baptizes with the name Gertrude, the niece of a dying woman he ministers to in a neighboring village at the beginning of the book. When he first encounters Gertrude, she is living in abject squalor, and is described as being no more than an animal. Because of her blindness, she has been neglected for most of her life, presumed to be an idiot and thus incapable of any kind of learning. She has therefore never been given any education, having never even been taught to speak. The Pastor decides to take the girl into his charge, and to the dismay of his wife, Amélie, the Pastor brings the girl home with him to educate her.

The singular narrative voice of the book belongs to that of the Pastor, who tells the story through a journal that is divided into two parts, or  *cahiers* , that describe his initial encounter with the blind girl, his education of her, as well as the evolution of their

relationship and the complications it presents within his own family's dynamics. He recounts how he teaches her not only to speak and to write but also about philosophy and religion. There is a resulting strained relationship with his other family members, notably his wife, Amélie, who is most certainly the figuration of Madeleine in this story, as well as his son, Jacques, who fills the role in many ways as the double for the blind girl: both Jacques and Gertrude represent at least partially the adolescent Marc Allégret (son of Gide's best man Elie Allégret) who was fifteen – incidentally the same age as Gertrude – when Gide began a sexual affair with him five years before *Symphonie* was published. Segal describes that the book, which was “written during the first intensity of the Marc Allégret affair,” was a “fantasy of creating and losing the ideal child.” (PP 326). It should be noted that Marc Allégret was to become a noted film director (*Fanny, ZouZou*, et. al.), and produced the documentary entitled *Voyage au Congo*, filmed during his trip with Gide in the mid 1920s. During this trip, their affair ended when Allégret realized he was heterosexual and preferred the Congolese women.

There are two separate approaches I wish to take as I analyze the book's themes. The first is the idea of the transgressive body, how Gide represents the “queer” through Gertrude's blindness. The second takes a similar cue from my “Imagining Madeleine” approach, which perhaps more descriptively and more accurately includes what emerges as Madeleine's antagonist from the point of view of Gide's life and marriage: “Imagining Marc Allégret.” The analysis of the book, as later critics have addressed, particularly with criticism that emerged in the 1950s (as is indicated in Charles O'Keefe's *Void and Voice*), must go beyond the more simplistic and rather gratuitous assumption that the book is about a young woman who is physically blind and a Pastor who is spiritually blind. *La*

*Symphonie pastorale* is about the masks that the Pastor creates around his feelings and intentions for the young woman he educates and eventually falls in love with, and is a way for Gide to symbolically recount, and perhaps rationalize, the story of his relationship with Marc, and, perhaps more significantly, the way the relationship with the young man deeply affected a disenfranchised Madeleine.

The *mises en abyme* in *La Symphonie pastorale*, apart from the biblical passages that are ever-present throughout the work, include the Beethoven symphony for which the book is titled (the pastor uses the musical setting as a metaphor to describe to Gertrude the concept of colors), as well as Dickens' *The Cricket on the Hearth* (*Le Grillon du foyer*; the story of a poor blind girl whose father lies to her to conceal their poverty) and an anecdote about Laura Bridgeman, an aphasic blind American woman (she is actually incorrectly referred to as English) who is taught to speak by an older man. Each of these reflects a particular significance within the narrative as they reflect different aspects of the relationship between the Pastor and Gertrude, particularly in the ways in which they reveal the Pastor's shortcomings with regards to his approaches to teaching her. Additionally, they uncover questions of his honesty, both to her and to himself, about the amorous feelings he has for her.

Gide's publication of *La Symphonie Pastorale*, initially released in serial form in the NRF before its official publication in book form in July 1920, was an eagerly awaited work. His previous work of fiction four years earlier, *Les Caves du Vatican*, portrayed a character – Lafcadio Wliuki – who was adopted by the Dadaists as a sort of “mascot.” According to Sheridan, André Breton had written to Tristan Tzara referencing *Caves*, saying that André Gide is “on our side” and that “[André Gide] is prodigiously interested in modern

experiments in literature and painting” (329). Gide had deployed his famous *acte gratuit* through the character of Lafcadio (see Chapter 2) as a metaphor for tearing down old conventions and social/familial mores, much in the way the Dadaists and Surrealists were to have done through their works in art, theater and literature during the period following World War I. Lawrence Schehr in *Alcibiades at the Door* evokes the image of Lafcadio shoving the innocent Fleurissoire to his death from a moving train, and draws the link to the “surrealist act” described in Breton’s Second Surrealist Manifesto: “The simplest Surrealist act consists of going down to the street, revolvers in hand, and shooting haphazardly as much as possible into the crowd” (782-783). The founders of the Dadaist and Surrealist movements eagerly awaited the follow-up to *Caves*, but instead “what they got was [...] an inexplicable throw-back, it seemed, to *La Porte étroite* and *Isabelle*. After reading the first instalment in June, Breton wrote to Tzara of Gide’s ‘involuntary senility’” (Sheridan 329).

But indeed Tzara may have spoken too soon with regard to his condemnation of senility on Gide’s part. Perhaps Gide did not actually abandon the challenges or regress to safer themes and characters. Whereas he undoubtedly does, through *Symphonie*, present a work that on the surface is stylistically more subtle with presumably safer, less controversial themes, the reader must look more closely at the work to understand that Gide was in fact not presenting his readership with a safe or bourgeois novel. Charles O’Keefe explains that “It took until the 1950s for the scattered comments on the complexities of *La Symphonie pastorale*’s irony and narrative structure to enter the critical mainstream” (VV 163). In fact, from a stylistic and thematic standpoint, Gide finds yet another iteration of queerness – the transgressive body – in his 1920 publication, mainly

through the metaphor of disability: Gertrude's blindness. Although there does not seem to be adequate evidence in his journals or in his correspondence to affirm that Gertrude's disability is necessarily a metaphor for his own same-sex desire, it is undeniable that at work in the text is the unmistakable "other" that asserts itself in a very specific fashion so as to challenge, in a very Gidian fashion, conventions of health, marriage, family, religion and sexuality, and eventually to destabilize them. These themes are ultimately a reflection of what Gide posits as a social and philosophical critique of Protestantism vs. Catholicism that is debated by the Pastor and his son Jacques who, despite their privileged position within the hierarchy of religion and family, are deeply inauthentic, morally flawed and ultimately incapable of living up to their moral and familial obligations.

Although it is difficult to conclude whether or not Gide was fully intentional with his creation of the Gertrude character as subversive, the very specific nature of her character opens up a rich opportunity to reflect on what she represents from the perspective of the Gidean corpus. Gertrude, as with the other characters in the story, is after all an authorial "bud" from within Gide. Rather than regarding her necessarily as a new mode of character (one could argue that the principal characters in his works are new representations of his characters' archetypes), Gertrude instead represents a further iteration of the overall "otherness" that Gide dealt with again and again. From one perspective, she is a representation of that which is misunderstood – if not pathologized – with regard to the female gender in his works; from another, she is the eventual reflection of that which is socially and religiously pathologized about himself as a same-sex desiring individual. For example, there is evidence that Gide's relationship with Madeleine, and with the young men (particularly Marc Allégret) with whom he was associated throughout his marriage, is

played out through the Pastor's relationship with Gertrude, his wife Amélie and with his son Jacques, a situation that I will discuss in a moment. But I also wish to reflect on how the notion of pathology and the meanings it evokes of "sickness" and "illness" engages in multiple levels of signification. In Chapter 2, I have already discussed the ways in which the illness metaphor was deployed in *L'Immoraliste* and how, when Michel contracts tuberculosis, he is able to use his illness as a means to liberate himself from the bonds and obligations of marriage and eventually heteronormative sexuality in general. The problem Michel faces is that he remains "sick" in many ways and is unsuccessful in even admitting to himself his own nature as a same-sex desiring individual. In the end, he lives his life, much like the quasi-mythological figure of Ménalque, always on the fringes and an outsider from – if not observer of – his native social station, while at the same time not actually fully integrating himself within the culture of the people in Algeria among whom he dwells by the conclusion of the book.

As a man of the cloth, the Pastor of *Symphonie* represents the Word and Laws of God. As a married man with children, he represents family and fidelity. With five functioning senses, including sight, he is strong and capable. The Pastor is, on the surface, the quintessence of heteronormativity and able-bodiedness. His embodiment of normativity is reinforced through Gertrude, who represents the opposing force within the binary of able-bodied/disabled-bodied (not to mention male/female), with regard to the above-named qualities: she is blind, ignorant, filthy, and without means or language. The disability and dysfunction is on the surface posited within Gertrude alone, who ultimately epitomizes the very idea of otherness. Her existence is for the most part subversive, since she wholly exists outside of language, outside of morality, and even outside of the able-

bodiedness that is compulsory within the moral and social structure of the Pastor's world. She is, by this definition, "queer."

One might be reminded of Paul de Man's essay on Wordsworth's *Essays upon Epitaphs* in "Autobiography as De-facement" where he states that "figures of deprivation, maimed men, drowned corpses, blind beggars, children about to die, that appear throughout *The Prelude* are figures of Wordsworth's own poetic self" (924), and conclude that the characters in Gide's works, with their faults, disabilities and internal battles, are all reflections of Gide's own "poetic self" (as a homosexual and as Protestant). Therefore Gertrude and the Pastor possess the qualities and faults of a poetic manifestation of Gide, including representations of his own homosexuality and his Protestantism, as well as the struggles that he faced with regard to these attributes that rendered him as different or apart within the dominant heterosexual and Catholic culture. Just as blindness, not unlike homosexuality as we learn from Foucault and Butler, is itself is a construction, so is Gertrude's blindness constructed in just such a way as to represent for Gide the homosexual self, fraught with the misunderstandings and prejudices of the dominant "healthy" culture. From that standpoint, the significance of Gertrude's blindness is an important one to consider within the scope of the otherness that Gide is dealing with in *La Symphonie pastorale*.

The illness metaphor asserts itself in *Symphonie*, with the "illness" in this case taking the form of blindness and disability, working in new ways to unravel and destabilize the same conventions of marriage, family, and religion, as in *L'Immoraliste*, but in a very different setting. There is an irony to be remarked with the blind woman who is the victim of her circumstance, who must be rescued, desired and possessed, since ultimately she is a

powerful threat to the stability of the Pastor's societal positions of husband and father (the dynamics of father/son seems to haunt the thematics of Gide's works for much of his career, and what will be discussed in more detail as they pertain to *Les Faux-monnayeurs* in Chapter 5), not to mention his leadership status within the Church. Gide "marks" her in two ways: first, upon her body with the pathology of blindness, and, second, upon her spirit with the pathology of ignorance to language, art, religion and philosophy.

Judith Butler discusses the "mark" of the woman as a form of the castration complex:

It is said, of course, that women are always already punished, castrated, and that their relation to the phallic norm will be penis envy. And this must have happened first, since men are said to look over and see this figure of castration and fear any identification there. Becoming like her, becoming her, that is the fear of castration and, hence, the fear of falling into penis envy as well. (*Bodies that Matter* 101)

From this standpoint, the need to create the woman as defective – castrated – signals what might be viewed as the preoccupation from the perspective of the male characters (or for that matter, Gide) who would have otherwise been identified with her, and she is defective to the point that she even loses her gender: the working title of *L'Aveugle* is, as Segal points out, of "indeterminate gender," and when the Pastor's wife first meets her, she refers to the girl as "ça" ("that thing") (*PP* 327). The Pastor then reconstructs her gender through his education of her. When the reader first encounters Gertrude, she is effaced as a human being, since she is essentially incapable of participating in any form of

“human-ness,” unable to speak or communicate in any way, helpless to the point that she is not even able to form cogent thoughts.

Within this fairly short work is an important illustration of what it is that I am attempting to accomplish in this essay: it is not merely homosexuality and religion that exist on two parallel planes, but that they actually are linked and function simultaneously. As his religious feelings are overly restraining and one could argue inauthentic, then also is his own system of sexual desires: the two are inextricably linked. In the guise of well-meaning Christian Charity the Pastor’s motivation to assist and educate Gertrude is ultimately selfish, since he desires her and eventually falls in love with her: it was his more selfish desires that are in fact what motivate him to bring her into his tutelage to begin with, and it is his desire for her that in the end undermines his efforts with the young woman. In *Symphonie* the Pastor is so tied to his notions of Christian Charity as well as the patriarchal ethic, and is so influenced by his biblical readings and the dogma that has shaped him as a religious man that he is rendered incapable of comprehending and managing his amorous desires toward Gertrude. However, that is not the only relationship that is affected by the religious teachings, it is also his dispassionate relationship with his wife and his competitive relationship with Jacques.

The pursuit of a queer discourse that maintains a thread from his previous and following works might not seem evident at the first reading. The reader might not on the surface find significant evidence of homosexuality in *La Symphonie Pastorale*, since the focus of the narrative seems to be on the Pastor’s fixation on Gertrude as well as his – and his son Jacques’ – growing *heterosexual* affection for her, but on closer examination, one might ascertain that Gertrude, through her blindness, is the embodiment of otherness, and

thus maintaining and continuing a contention of queerness. From the start she is not only the forbidden preoccupation for the Pastor, but also a representation of the flawed or incapable body. When the Pastor first encounters her, for example, he refers to her as “ce paquet de chair sans âme” (880) (“this bundle of flesh without a soul”), but ultimately she is a *tabula rasa*: her blindness provides a space for Gide to create a character without any preconceived notions of right or wrong, of morality or immorality, and as we find out, of young or old. Her blindness is also portrayed as a charism – literally “a gift of grace” – that imbues Gertrude with a moral superiority: since she cannot “see” she is not exposed to sin or temptation. What is also not to be ignored is the fact that once the “flawed body” is fixed through surgery, the character’s very being becomes impossible, and she cannot exist within the corrected or normalized sphere. When the medical doctors cure her of the affliction that blinded her in the first place, she loses her state of grace that rendered her a virtuous ideal, ultimately culminating with the character’s death.

The significance of the blindness metaphor in *La Symphonie pastorale* with regard to the interplay between homosexuality and religion is apparent. I shall first consider the parallels that blindness has to questions of sexuality and religion, questions that Gide himself was working out throughout his entire corpus, which leads us to ponder the metaphoric dimension of blindness that Gide has deployed in *Symphonie* and how it relates back to the Pastor and his motivations vis-à-vis Gertrude, and further, how it reaches even beyond the pages of *récit* itself. Blindness in *La Symphonie pastorale* is on the one hand a metaphor for homosexuality; on the other it is a metaphor for the inauthenticity of religious perfectionism. Blindness represents the flawed or diseased body, since it is that which must be corrected or prayed for. It parallels homosexuality, which bears the mark of

judgment from a cultural standpoint of a physical or moral imperfection; it is a mark on an individual where something is wrong and where s/he has deviated from the norm. It is “queer.” But this sense of queerness, of otherness, requires the external heteronormative world to reinforce and define its subversion by informing it of its failings and by compelling it to be fixed.

Gide does not create the character of Gertrude to demonstrate how a country pastor educated her; rather, he creates a subversive subtext to criticize the process of trying to assimilate a person whose innate identity differs from expected societal norms, and presents that difference as both impossible and destructive, much like attempting to compel a same-sex desiring individual to behave on a sexually normative level, an idea that is played out most fully thorough Gertrude’s suicide attempt and subsequent death after her sight is restored through surgery. Gertrude is also the reflection of the Pastor’s selfish desires within himself that he masks with good intentions. She is the blank slate who is taught by the Pastor through unstable and failing normative standards that she is “different” from everyone else, and then proceeds to help her to overcome that difference, and to live and function as a blind (queer) woman in a sighted (normative) world.

The pathology of her blindness is reinforced by the Pastor as he assists her, with the assumption that she must be pitied and fixed, as well as be taught even about concepts, such as colors and light, that only a sighted person could fully understand. In other words, he attempts to normalize her despite the impossibility that resides in the fact that there are glaring differences between the individual who is by nature blind, and the presumed normative natures of the rest of the able-bodied characters in the story. In order to uncover the symbolic meanings of the Gertrude’s blindness, I must first consider what

blindness represents as a signifier. It can on one level be a metonym for illness from both a symbolic and literal standpoint: Sontag's essay on *Illness as Metaphor* addresses this topic by offering that "Illnesses have always been used as metaphors to enliven charges that a society was corrupt or unjust" (*Illness as Metaphor* 72), while Naomi Schor takes that idea a step further in "Blindness as Metaphor," suggesting that blindness "is not always or even ever, strictly speaking, an illness," but rather that it represents the consequence of a myriad of conditions, including medical illness, infections, "or, it is alleged, bad habits like masturbation" (78), an idea that supposes a religious proscription against an autoerotic act. Additionally, the from a religious and moral perspective, one might go so far as to assert that it is Gertrude who must live with the consequence of blindness of the Pastor's sin of extramarital lust in the vein of "God knoweth what thou hast done."

The moral judgments of blindness as an affliction are prominent in the Bible, specifically as they pertain to punishments for moral offenses, for ignorance, or for the more metaphoric "spiritual blindness." We also cannot ignore the biblical references to blindness that indirectly influence the narrative of *La Symphonie pastorale*, since many of them represent punishment for spiritual or moral transgressions, relating back not only to the Pastor's actions toward Gertrude, but also to Gide's subtext of blindness as a signifier for homosexuality. In Genesis 19:10-11, for example, which falls within the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the men who have come to rape Lot's visitors are struck with blindness: "10 But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. 11 Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door" (New International Version [NIV]). In Deuteronomy 28:27-29, blindness is a punishment for disobedience to the Lord:

The LORD will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured. The LORD will afflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of mind. At midday you will grope about like a blind person in the dark. You will be unsuccessful in everything you do; day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you. (NIV)

In Kings 6:17-19, Elisha the prophet defeats the enemy's army by asking God to blind them:

And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike this army with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked. (NIV)

And finally, in John 9, there is the story of the interplay between visual blindness and spiritual blindness, when Jesus heals the blind man and restores his sight, and then addresses the Pharisees: "Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind,'" linking the metaphors of literal and spiritual blindness.

From the standpoint of Gertude's blindness in *La Symphonie pastorale*, I wish to consider what it means "to be blind" as well as what the specific metaphors are that are at play in this *récit*, apart from the obvious conclusions that are drawn about Gertrude's physical blindness as a metaphor for the Pastor's moral blindness. Therefore it is the writings of Robert McRuer in his book *Crip Theory* that shed light on the connections that I

wish to make between disability and queerness, affirming my assertion that Gertrude's blindness in *Symphonie* is a representation of queerness. From McRuer's perspective, disabilities and homosexuality have a common social origin of pathology or deviance. McRuer explains the phenomenon of the double standard with regard to an assumed "invisibility" or "non-identity" of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, since both are assumed to be part of the "natural order of things" (1). He further discusses the phenomenon of compulsory heterosexuality within the institutions that educate us as they pertain to the expected roles that are to be filled and the identities that are to be constructed (150). Consequently, heterosexuality, like whiteness and able-bodiedness, is a reflection of a privileged position, and therefore, to paraphrase McRuer, are invisible and non-identifiers. We only "see" those aspects of individuals that deviate from normative qualities: those who are queer or who have brown skin are seen for those attributes; we do not use sexual normativity or whiteness as identifiers. We do identify the blindness of an individual or the fact that the individual is in a wheel chair; we do not identify a person as being sighted or as one who walks upright on two able legs. Hence the qualities and attributes that distinguish an individual are those qualities that have deviated from that which is considered as the norm (McRuer 112).

Although progress has been made in terms of more relaxed attitudes toward sexual conformity and the implementation of laws to support disabled persons, the problem of non-normative bodies was and continues to be a problem in society at large. Compulsory able-bodiedness, like compulsory heterosexuality, is a principal force that maintains order in a society. Roles are determined within a properly ordered social system, and the players are compelled to conform to the expectations that are put on them. These roles begin at

home within the family structure (father, mother, offspring), move outward into the church and community (religious and secular leadership, participating individuals), and finally to society as a whole. We presume at the beginning of *Symphonie* that this sense of order is intact. The Pastor lives in his home as the head of his (Christian) household, with his wife and children dutifully performing their familial functions within the conventional structure of the family. As head of his church, he provides prayer and service to those who need as he tends to his community, which is itself made up of similar households that conform to these same sets of norms and hierarchies. It is essential that one fulfill one's role within this sort of social structure, and the strength and functionality of the individual's body is what ensures success with regard to compliance to this sort of imperative:

Moreover, one must have a station in life, a recognizable identity, an individuality fixed once and for all: 'What is your station? This question is the simplest expression of the established order in society; such vagabondage is repugnant to it, disturbs it' [...] In short, one should have a master, be caught up and situated within a hierarchy; one exists only when fixed in definite relations of domination. (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 291)

The question then with regard to Gertrude is: how did Gide attempt to depict Gertrude as an "incapable" or "helpless" character, one who is not compliant to the imperatives of able-bodiedness? Gide makes certain assumptions about blindness, and approaches it in what can only be construed as a naïve approach to the treatment and teaching of blind people. Foucault, for example, as discussed by Mary Klages, concerned himself with the power/knowledge dimensions of human bodies within the discourse of

society, focusing on “questions of health and illness, sanity and madness, law-abiding and criminal actions/bodies, and normal and deviant sexualities” (Klages 144). Blindness exists, according to Klage’s summary of Foucauldian thought, as a discourse, and what we know about blindness is produced through the stories we tell about it, through textual and legal references, by historical and anecdotal allusions, as well as via the symbolic meanings that a culture assigns to blindness (143). During the 19th (and presumably early 20th century, particularly taking into consideration the post-war situation with the *mutilés de guerre*), the body that lacked sight was considered to have “produced lack of physical motion, and lack of motion produced physically weak bodies [...]. The bodies of the blind – not just their eyesight but their whole bodies – were thus defined as weak and inferior and unproductive” (144).

The Pastor’s (and quite possibly Gide’s) knowledge of blindness and the education of the blind people, as observed in the pages of *Symphonie*, are rooted almost exclusively in the medical lore regarding the case of Laura Bridgeman and the Dicken’s novel *The Cricket on the Hearth*, both of which we would imagine could provide no more than an anecdotal understanding of the phenomenon of blindness rather than a medical or pedagogical knowledge. Furthermore, the self-deception of the Pastor regarding his feelings toward Gertrude, coupled with his overall treatment of her, is linked to the lie that the father tells his daughter in *The Cricket on the Hearth*:

Et quatre jours après je reçus en effet Le Grillon du Foyer, que je lus avec un vif plaisir. C'est l'histoire un peu longue, mais pathétique par instants, d'une jeune aveugle que son père, pauvre fabricant de jouets, entretient dans l'illusion du confort, de la richesse et du bonheur; mensonge que l'art de

Dickens s'évertue à faire passer pour pieux, mais dont, Dieu merci ! je n'aurai pas à user avec Gertrude. (888)

(And four days later, in fact, I received *The Cricket on the Hearth*, which I read with great pleasure. The story is a bit long, pathetic at times, about a blind girl whose father, a poor toymaker, maintains the illusion of comfort, wealth and happiness; a lie that the art of Dickens strives to pass off as pious, but, thank God! I will not have to use it with Gertrude.)

What the reader soon discovers, however, is that the Dickensian “lie” that he wished to avoid as he worked with Gertrude became a lie that was turned back on himself as he, through the journalistic process, constructs a story that is itself a lie: the Pastor lies to Gertrude by lying to himself, and ultimately to his readers. The Pastor, as we have already seen through Jérôme and Michel, is not reliable in the story he tells, and perhaps, as O’Keefe suggests, that he is not reliable because “he deludes himself” regarding his motivations towards Gertrude, his wife, and his son (165). The question remains, however, as to whether or not the Pastor's lies are unintentional or merely part of a system where he creates a mask around his real feelings, and whether or not he writes his story simply as a means for him to rationalize why he brought Gertrude into his home in the first place. From a meta-textual standpoint, Gide may have created a dishonest narrator once again to rationalize his own sexual attraction to young men and his subsequent emotional abandonment of Madeleine.

The other source of the Pastor’s understanding of blindness comes from the biblical passages that, as I have stated, merely represent moral teachings on blindness: “ ‘Je te l’ai dit, Gertrude : ceux qui ont des yeux sont ceux qui ne savent pas regarder.’ Et du fond de

mon cœur j'entendais s'élever cette prière : Je te rends grâces, ô Dieu, de révéler aux humbles ce que tu caches aux intelligents !" (910) ("I told you, Gertrude: those who have eyes are those who can not see.' And from the bottom of my heart I raise this prayer: 'I give grace to Thee, O God, who reveal to the humble what you hide from those who are intelligent!"). Judgments are made about Gertrude's blindness that at once pity her while at the same time extol her for her spiritual superiority and advanced ability to learn since, unlike the Pastor's daughter, she is not distracted from what he wishes to teach her: "Malgré moi je la comparais à Charlotte et lorsque parfois il m'arrivait de faire répéter à celle-ci ses leçons, voyant son esprit tout distrait par la moindre mouche qui vole, je pensais : « Tout de même, comme elle m'écouterait mieux, si seulement elle n'y voyait pas ! »" (899) ("Despite myself I compared her to Charlotte and when it happened that sometimes I had to make her repeat her lessons, seeing her distracted by a passing fly, I would think: Surely she would be a better listener if only she could not see!").

The perception of moral superiority aside, Gertrude's very existence shakes the foundations of heteronormative (and able-bodied) conventions, since she neither fits into any expected role nor behaves within of any set of social customs, and since she is not only beyond sight, but also beyond all knowledge of culture, including language. The Pastor, in taking on the project to rehabilitate and educate her, is disrupting the harmony and structure of his own life, undermining the order in his household, and ultimately abandoning many of his familial and community obligations. He tends to her with a biblical relentlessness, teaching her about moral righteousness in a sighted world, as well as about subjective and abstract topics such as beauty and decency, while at the same time neglecting his wife and children. On the other hand, he is in a way thankful for her

blindness because it is what prevents the forces of temptation and desire from corrupting her on her path. From that perspective, Gide/the Pastor is treating the disabled person as spiritually superior to the normative individual, since he considers her to be “morally pure” due to her lack of sight:

Ce n'est point ainsi que je l'entends, protesta-t-il [Le Docteur Martins], je veux dire simplement que l'âme de l'homme imagine plus facilement et plus volontiers la beauté, l'aisance et l'harmonie que le désordre et le péché qui partout ternissent, avilissent, tachent et déchirent ce monde et sur quoi nous renseignent et tout à la fois nous aident à contribuer nos cinq sens. [...]  
 Combien heureux les hommes, s'ils pouvaient ignorer le mal ! (887-88)  
 (“This is not at all how I see it,” protested Dr. Martins. “I mean simply that men’s souls imagine more easily and readily beauty, affluence and harmony than they do sin and disorder that everywhere tarnish, degrade, stain and tear this world apart, and what informs us and assists us as we contribute to it is our five senses. [...] How happy are those men who can not know evil!”)

Gertrude is portrayed by the Pastor as a person who was not only morally superior because of her blindness, but that her blindness itself actually represents a state of grace, not only a blessing since it eliminates the possibility of temptation, but, further, that it actually left her in an ignorance of sin. Furthermore, this state of grace is congruent with the state of the Real or “authentic,” since it exists uncorrupted not just by the forces of “sin” but also by the forces of patriarchal moralism that reshape and dictate who we are as human beings. It is not unlike the the authenticity of God and the authenticity of sexual experiences that the narrator of *Les Nourritures terrestres*, Michel in *l'Immoraliste*, and the

Prodigal Son were searching for in the desert. Grace from this perspective is not merely “without sin,” it is a place where sin does not exist. The problem is that since God, sin, law, and language have all been constructed within the Symbolic, as soon as Gertrude is participating in one or more, she is unintentionally participating in all of them: once she learned about God, sin, and language, she could no longer be protected from them.

The Pastor goes so far as to protect Gertrude from passages in the Bible that he feared would confuse her, particularly the Epistles of Paul the Apostle, because of his dialectic on sin:

J'ai mis entre ses mains vigilantes les quatre évangiles, les psaumes, l'apocalypse et les trois épîtres de Jean où elle peut lire : « Dieu est lumière et il n'y a point en lui de ténèbres » comme déjà dans son évangile elle pouvait entendre le Sauveur dire : « Je suis la lumière du monde ; celui qui est avec moi ne marchera pas dans les ténèbres. » Je me refuse à lui donner les épîtres de Paul, car si, aveugle, elle ne connaît point le péché, que sert de l'inquiéter en la laissant lire : « Le péché a pris de nouvelles forces par le commandement » (Romains VII, 13) et toute la dialectique qui suit, si admirable soit-elle ? (915)

(I placed into her vigilant hands the four gospels, the psalms, the Apocalypse and the three Epistles of John where it reads: “God is light and in him there is no darkness” as already in His gospel she could hear the Savior say: “I am the light of the world, and whoever believes in me will not walk in darkness.” I refuse to give Paul's epistles since because of her blindness she knows no sin, and it would only worry her to read: “through the commandment sin might

become utterly sinful” (Romans VII , 13) and the entire dialectic that follows, no matter how wonderful it be?)

The problem is that it is a false assumption on the part of the Pastor, since eliminating sight does little to diminish the forces of temptation and desire; on the contrary, it constructs it. Although he attempts to protect Gertrude in a state of uncorrupted spiritual purity, he slowly discovers that it is impossible to do so. The metaphor then reaches past Gertrude and extends to the Pastor who, despite his attempt at maintaining a façade of moral uprightness, is himself corrupted by the forces of his own desire for Gertrude. The Christian Charity that had initially motivated him to take the young woman into his tutelage in the first place begins to become a love that, to quote Lord Alfred Douglas, “dares not speak its name.” The blindness metaphor is then transferred from Gertrude to the Pastor himself, in the form of denial of his own feelings towards her.

This denial, or what might more accurately be described as lying, is indicated in a similar fashion to Jérôme’s: the diary that he is keeping is prone to inconsistencies. There is an insistence on deception/self-deception in *La Symphonie Pastorale* that is revealed by temporal issues within the diary structure itself, and the Pastor uses his book to create his own revisionist memory of the events to deny his feelings for Gertrude and to eroticize his gaze on his own son. The two *cahiers* in *Symphonie* each treat time a bit differently: the first cahier relates the story of his encounter and eventual education of Gertrude; the second is written as a daily recounting of events as they unfold, as if written in the present. This temporal “slip” within the narrative form has fomented much discussion, since it inadvertently reveals the Narrator’s presumed denial of his motivations and feelings, not to mention his lack of sincerity: as was the case with Jérôme, the Pastor is an unreliable

narrator. If the Pastor were actually to have been writing a diary, then the day-to-day writings would portray the presumptive ignorance to the events that were to unfold; instead the reader can find many clues as to the Pastor's knowledge about what was to occur beforehand. O'Keefe even poses the question,

How does one read a work of fiction in which there is a strong possibility that the only narrator is lying to his readers? [... T]he "forme de monsonge à soi-même" (Gide, *Oeuvres Complètes*, XIII 439-40) which Gide himself considered to be at the heart of this book, draws in its wake many, many things, among which is a conscious dishonesty on the part of the narrating pastor vis-à-vis his readers. (162)

Therefore, the reader might conclude that the principal indication that the Pastor is lying can be found in his narrative style, which confuses the diary with the memoir. The Pastor writes the story presumably as if he were recounting the events as they occurred, but there are indications that he did, in fact, know what was to happen, and was recounting the story from memory. Sheng-Tai Chang presents this problem and discusses the problematics of this seemingly "mixed" style, and asserts the incompatibility with the purported sincerity of the Pastor. Chang discusses the difference between the diary and memoir forms of which the Pastor avails himself in *Symphonie*, asserting that the ways in which the diarist recounts events as they happened that day, or at least in the recent past, demonstrates how "the narrator's future and the character's future are practically synchronous." This contrasts with the way that memoirs are written where the memoirist is writing with a full knowledge of past events and from the perspective of the future of the

events in question, since s/he is telling a story in a more remote timeframe. Hence the difference between diary (recent past) and memoir (remote past) is that in the memoir there is a great gap between the time of the narrator and that of the character: the character's future is often the narrator's past. The time discrepancies in Gide's work arise precisely out of a generic mixture of diary and memoir, which are incompatible in a number of ways. As a memoirist, the pastor knows all the facts about his relationship with Gertrude from the beginning [...] As a diarist, he must confine his knowledge, both of facts and of their significance, to a level roughly synchronous with the unfolding events in his life; in other words, he has to suppress part of his previously gained knowledge and understanding and return to a more "innocent" stage of his life. (70)

Chang further points out that the style of memoir writing is automatically prone to inconsistencies due to the temporal distance that exists between the events as they occur and when they are recounted. Whereas in some cases, a memoir might actually present a past event accurately because of the distance and perspective that exist between the time that the events occurred and the time they are written, in other cases there is a "tendency for a memoirist to represent facts and reinterpret them from the perspective of a later position or mood, thus falsifying past events" (72). As was the case with Jérôme, the confusion of time within the purported diary of the Pastor is in effect just one of the indicators of the Pastor's insincerity and unreliability with regard to his motivation to take Gertrude under his wing: the amorous (not to mention adulterous and pederastic) feelings he has for the young woman are masked by the Pastor's assertion of Christian Charity,

which serves as no more than a pretense to the relationship he engages in with her. He describes in the second cahier that “Je ne lui parlais plus qu’en Pasteur” (913) (“I no longer spoke to her except as a Pastor”) and later observes, “Et de mon côté, je me persuadais que je l’aimais comme on aime un enfant infirme. Je la soignais comme on soigne un malade, – et d’un entraînement j’avais fait une obligation morale, un devoir” (914) (“And as for me, I persuaded myself that I loved her as one would love a sick child. I nursed her as one would a patient - and from my training of her, I had created a moral obligation, a duty”). But these assertions are merely a systematic denial of the emotional and amorous attachment he has formed for her, one that is further complicated by adding his son Jacques to the equation.

Gide also depicts what can only be described as a love triangle among the Pastor, Jacques and Gertrude. In fact, the reader is made aware of the narrator’s feelings for Gertrude through the jealousy he experiences towards his son. One crucial episode occurs when he describes how he used to bring Gertrude to the chapel so she can learn to play the organ. He writes, “je la quittais d’autant plus volontiers que la chapelle ne me paraissait guère un lieu décent pour m’y enfermer seul avec elle” (900) (“I readily left her alone there since the chapel does hardly seemed a decent place for me to be shut up alone with her”), and to avoid scandal, leaves her on her own to play the organ, only to return several hours later to observe her unbeknownst to her, and describes her profound ecstasy: “et je la retrouvais vers le soir, attentive, devant quelque consonance qui la plongeait dans un ravissement prolongé” (900) (“and I found her in the evening, attentive before some harmonic concordance that had plunged her into a prolonged ecstasy”). One day he arrives early, and to his surprise Jacques is with her, and he spies on the two for a considerable amount of time as they converse over the sounds of the organ, Jacques guiding the girl’s

hands over the keys. It is at that moment that he perceives that Jacques is falling in love with Gertrude, and he has an argument with him, accusing him of corrupting her: “Plutôt que de te voir porter le trouble dans l’âme pure de Gertrude [...] ah! je préférerais ne plus te revoir. Je n’ai pas besoin de tes aveux! Abuser de l’infirmité, de l’innocence, de la candeur, c’est une abominable lâcheté dont je ne t’aurais jamais cru capable” (902) (“Rather than see you bring trouble into the pure soul of Gertrude [...] Ah! I would prefer never to see you again. I do not need your confession! Taking advantage of her disability, her innocence, her candor, it's a terrible cowardice that I would never have thought you capable of”), and then sends his son away for a month-long holiday in Neuchâtel to separate him from his charge.

The Pastor’s jealousy reveals a clearly hypocritical stance on his part when he accuses his son of corrupting the girl, because in reality it is he who acted as the voyeur on more than one occasion. As a consequence, he not only objectifies but also sexualizes Gertrude, eventually at the expense of his relationship to his wife and son. But another problem is revealed through the Pastor’s voyeuristic gaze on his son and Gertrude: the love triangle that is borne among these three characters. Whereas the Pastor can be seen as hypocritical and insincere regarding his feelings toward Gertrude, on another level and perhaps one that is less obvious to the Pastor himself, is that his feelings for Gertrude, combined with his jealousy towards Jacques, ultimately produces an eroticized gaze that he ultimately focuses on his son. The Pastor’s desire is in the end focused on two people: not only on Gertrude but also on Jacques, since it is with Jacques whom he competes for the young woman’s affections. When Jacques’ gaze on Gertrude intercepts his father’s gaze, it is

towards Jacques that the Pastor's gaze is then directed. As a result, the Pastor becomes at once jealous of Jacques and at the same time desiring of him.

The Pastor, through his experience of jealousy, provides what can only be described as an eroticized description of his son. The shared gaze on Gertrude by the Pastor and Jacques becomes unstable, and one might argue that since the Pastor and Jacques both experience sexual desire for the same woman, there is a slip in the gaze from the Pastor's point of view, with his gaze actually transferring onto the son, rendering him the real object of his father's desire:

Cependant je le regardais et pensais que, si elle pouvait y voir, Gertrude ne laisserait pas d'admirer ce grand corps svelte, à la fois si droit et si souple, ce beau front sans rides, ce regard franc, ce visage enfantin encore, mais que semblait ombrer une soudaine gravité. Il était nu-tête et ses cheveux cendrés, qu'il portait alors assez longs, bouclaient légèrement à ses tempes et cachaient ses oreilles à demi. (904)

(However as I was looking at him I thought, were she able to see him, Gertrude would not hesitate to admire his tall, slender body, so straight but at the same time so supple, his smooth forehead, his frank regard, his still youthful face that seemed to obscure a sudden gravity. He was bareheaded and his auburn hair that he wore rather long, was curling gently at his temples and was half-covering his ears.)

The Pastor does not himself affirm Jacques' attractiveness, but rather filters it through the "eyes" of Gertrude. He imagines what she would observe about Jacques' physical appeal were she able to see him, and through that gaze Jacques is the one who is

eroticized, suggesting that the Pastor is in not only in denial of (if not outright denying) his feelings that persist for Gertrude throughout the pages of his *cahiers*, but also that he is in denial of sexual feelings towards his own son. This confusion of an incestuous same-sex desire suggests the unstable foundation on which the father/son relationship is established, and adds an element of a subversive homosexual subtext within the work.

Eve Sedgwick refers to this phenomenon in her discourse on homosociality, where she describes that it is the gaze *between men* that exists in the sphere of eroticism or desire as it pertains to a male-male-female love triangle (*BM* 1). Sedgwick's work expounds upon the phenomenon of homosociality, and she references, among others, Lévi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, which argues that the bonds that exist in normative (male-female heterosexual) relationships are actually bonds that reinforce the power structure in a masculine hegemonic society. Rather than reinforcing the relationship between the two members of the opposite sex, these relationships instead cement "the bonds of men with men" within the patriarchal structure: "Lévi-Strauss's normative man uses a woman as a 'conduit of a relationship' in which the true *partner* is a man" (26, emphasis in the original).

O'Keefe observes further allusions to the Pastor's sexualized gaze that exists towards Jacques, and how it falls into the "generalized nimbus of incestuousness," referencing the particular the way in which he kisses both his son and Gertrude on the brow in the same way (206). As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, Gide frequently conflated his wife and his mother, and both are imagined though the character of Amélie; in *Symphonie*, Jacques is confused with Gertrude, who are themselves the imagining of Marc Allégret. The significance of the Pastor's extramarital, and one could even say subversive,

desires holds a particular meaning for the author's own experience of married life: his *mariage blanc* to Madeleine, and his sexual relationship with Marc Allégret:

Knowledge of Gide's affair with Marc Allégret – his ward and so in a sense his son – makes it hard not to suspect that Gertrude and Jacques conflated in Gide's mind. Gertrude has been found to be a fictional emotional substitute for Marc vis-à-vis Amélie/Madeleine in Gide's attempt at narrative self-exploration, while Jacques clearly evokes Marc physically. (206)

Amélie, the Pastor's wife, is for the most part relegated to a two-dimensional – and in a way archetypal – status; her principal function within the *récit* is that of a moral compass for the actions of the Pastor with regard to his education of Gertrude, and the reflection for how his relationship with her affects his familial relationships. She is, according to Chang, “not merely depicted as a mundane matron; she is the very personification of domestic law and order. When first introduced into the diary, she is called ‘un jardin de vertus’” (72). It might even be suggested that the fact that her husband ignores her for the attentions of a younger person (and eventual lover), that the relationship between the Pastor and his wife parallels the relationship between Gide and his own wife, Madeleine or even, as Genevieve Morel suggests, his mother:

Elle couve son enfant d'un amour uniforme qui se renforce après la mort de son mari, lorsque André a près de 11 ans : “Et je me sentis soudain tout enveloppé par cet amour, qui désormais se refermait sur moi” [Si le grain 410] commente Gide. L'écrivain désigne souvent sa mère (ou sa femme Madeleine qu'il lui superposera) comme l'agent de l'inhibition: effet de la loi

maternelle qui ne cessera jamais de peser sur lui comme sur un gisant le couvercle d'un sarcophage. (234)

(She smothers her child with a love that grows stronger even after the death of her husband, when André was almost 11 years old: “And suddenly I felt enveloped by love, which now was closing in on me” [*Si le grain ne meurt* 410] says Gide. The writer often referred to his mother (or wife Madeleine onto whom he superimposed her) as the agent of inhibition: effect of maternal law that never ceased to influence him as if beneath the cover of a sarcophagus.)

Amélie is the character who is ultimately left behind in the story: she is the figure of the wife and mother, the pillar of domesticity in the Pastor's home. But like Madeleine, she is treated as one who is left to manage the household while her role as wife is ultimately diminished – the Pastor simply leaves her behind as he tends almost exclusively to Gertrude, and is eventually unfaithful to his wife with her. Even when in the second *cahier* Gertrude is sent to live with another woman, the Pastor continues to focus his attentions on her while isolating himself emotionally from Amélie.

Once Dr. Martins realizes that Gertrude is operable and that her blindness can be cured, the Pastor and she consummate their relationship in a “nuit si profonde et si belle” (924) (“A night so profound and so beautiful”). His tutelage and education of the young woman has evolved into a courtship and sexual relationship: it is the essence of the pederastic relationships that Gide would extol in the 1920 edition of *Corydon*, one year after the publication of *Symphonie*. Once Gertrude's site is restored, she lays her eyes on Jacques and confounds him with his father. She confesses to the Pastor, “Quand j'ai vu

Jacques, j'ai compris soudain que ce n'était pas vous qu j'aimais; c'était lui. Il avait exactement votre visage; je veux dire celui que j'imaginais que vous aviez... Ah! pourquoi m'avez-vous fait le repousser? J'aurais pu l'épouser..." (929) ("When I saw Jacques, I suddenly realized that it was not you that I loved, it was he. He had precisely your face, I mean that I imagined that you had ... Ah why did you make me push him away? I could have married him...").

Thus the Pygmalion story comes full circle. The Pastor has lost his ideal child once she comes to the realization that she has been deceived, or perhaps more accurately, has deceived herself, and she is no longer attracted to the man she thought it was she loved. Additionally, Jacques has renounced his father's religion and converts to Catholicism, where he will enter the priesthood. The Pastor, in other words, is abandoned by both of his "children," both of whom at one time or another were the object of the Pastor's pederastic desire. The link that can be drawn between Gide's relationship with Marc Allégret is evident, and the fantasy of losing him – an event that would occur in real life just a few years after the publication of *Symphonie* in the jungles of the Congo – plays itself out in the pages this *récit*.

In 1918, a notorious and defining event occurred between Gide and Madeleine at a moment in time when he was traveling to London with Marc. No longer able to handle the emotional strain of his infidelity and his pedophilia, she burned the prolific correspondence that he had written to her, letters that he described as "Le plus pur de mon existence, le plus pur de mon coeur [...]. Jamais je n'avais rien écrit de plus élevé, de plus chaleureux, de plus chargé de suc, que ces lettres interminables, écrites au jour le jour, et où se reflétaient minutieusement non seulement toutes mes pensées, tout mon travail, mais cet amour si

précieux qui n'a cessé d'être en moi comme une lumière" (Schlumberger 191-92) ("The purest of my life, the purest of my heart [...]. I had never written anything higher, warmer, more charged with passion than these endless letters, written from day to day, which carefully reflected not only all my thoughts, all my work, but also this precious love that has not ceased to be a light within me"). Schlumberger continues by describing how Gide felt as if he was dying upon learning of their destruction, as if Madeleine had told him that their children were no more. It seems that her act of burning the letters was the only voice that Madeleine had left. Inasmuch as the destruction of the Pastor's relationships with Jacques and Gertrude may have represented Gide's preoccupation with the day that Marc would leave him, they are also Gide's way of re-imagining the deep sense of loss with regard to his relationship with Madeleine.

## Chapter 5 – Closeted Discourse: The “*Mise en Abyme*” in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*

Of all of Gide’s works of prose, he considered only one to be actually a novel.

Published in 1925 after having been written over the course of several years, *Les Faux-monnayeurs* is Gide’s attempt to reexamine – if not to redefine – the novel and its elements. Throughout the novel (and simultaneously in his *Journal des Faux-monnayeurs*, a journal he kept while writing the novel, which was mimicked, sometimes word-for-word, in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*’ “Journal d’Edouard” sub-sections), Gide methodically discusses approaches to certain essential novelistic elements, including character development and structure.

What is perhaps most compelling within the pages of *Faux-monnayeurs* is that the issue of religion that had dominated so many of Gide’s works up until this point has become less obvious, and seems to have taken on a different form. It is the God of money, as portrayed through the counterfeiting scheme, rather than the God of Abraham that becomes Gide’s preoccupation in this novel, where he calls into question the legitimacy of the Symbolic structures of “father,” “family,” “government,” and yes, “heterosexuality,” revealing that these institutions only have value as long as the members of society agree that they are, indeed, valid. These questions are taken even further as the structure of the Text/Novel is challenged and revealed ultimately to have a more fluid definition. As I will discuss throughout the chapter, it is the structure of language – particularly that of the displaced “I” – that is destabilized throughout the work, as evidenced most clearly through his deployment of the *mise en abyme*.

In this chapter, I would like to explore theories on how, through different forms of hidden expression, Gide subverts and diverts societal conventions such as father, family, God and sexuality, and creates a discourse of the sexual “other.” My intent is to demonstrate the ways in which Gide plays with tropes of homosexuality, most notably the phenomenon of the closet, and how he creates a subversive text that undermines preconceived notions of these institutions and challenges normative views of sexuality and desire. Writings by authors such as Gide who are same-sex desiring may choose to reveal truths about sexuality in different ways.

Traditional criticism of homosexual authors seemed in the past to either avoid any kind of homosexual reading or consistently ignore any subtext that would affirm same-sex desire and sexuality. Karla Jay’s chapter in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* entitled “A Gay Critique of Modern Literary Criticism,” which dates back to the dawn of the post-Stonewall era, reflects this frustration, paving the way for modern literary theorists to develop the field of Queer Literary Theory. Jay’s main argument deals with the idea of “weakness” playing a part in the criticism of homosexual authors, who were seen as “flawed creatures who managed *despite* their mental handicaps to create works of art. Thus Michelangelo’s bisexuality would parallel Toulouse Lautrec’s physical deformities” (66).

This kind of criticism even echoes the Vatican’s proscriptions of Gide’s entire corpus of literary work for its portrayal of homosexual characters. The document in question, a resolution titled “Condemnation of the Works of Andre Gide,” makes reference to, and compares the author with, his *Prodigal Son* and his *Immoralist*. It is a politically charged text that reads like a politically incorrect piece of literary criticism, filled with scathing

moral judgments that completely blur the line between the artist and his art. The Vatican, explaining the inclusion of the entirety of Gide's works on "the list" (the *Index librorum prohibitorum*, the list of books that Catholics were forbidden to read), attacks him for misusing his talent, and compares the author's homosexuality and atheism to a disability that ought better have been lived in shame: "To walk with a limp, and insist that that is the best way to go: to know oneself to be hunchbacked and to boast of it, and to laugh at those who are straight." In an ironic twist to the Vatican's proscription, Gide had the posthumous "last laugh," as less than two decades after his books were banned the *Index* itself was abolished by the Second Vatican Council.

The homosexuality in *Les Faux-monnayeurs* is merely one element in the grander theme of desire and its consequences: homosexual desire among the characters is neither privileged nor devalued in terms of heterosexual desire, since both phenomena demonstrate desire's precarious consequences. As a result, homosexuality and same-sex desiring characters are normalized (at least in terms of heterosexual desire), and the objects of their desire are as legitimate, or as illegitimate, as heterosexual desire in the book. In other words, desire for the "other" is not necessarily distinguished from the same-sex sexual "otherness." In fact, Gide does not seem to go into any kind of ideological debate judging homosexuality *or* heterosexuality as good or bad (unlike the platonic dialogues in *Corydon* or debates he may have had with contemporaries such as Paul Claudel, who was vehemently Catholic and continually appealed to Gide to "change his ways"): Gide allowed the characters to develop authentically, and, as a consequence, his characters "write" themselves and tell their own stories.

That is not to say that Gide does not treat the destructive effect of the alienation a same-sex desiring character experiences as something that is inconsequential. Boris faces the conundrum of attempting to “fit in” with the other boys when he knows he never will, and falls prey to the malevolent prank of Ghérindanisol and the other boys of the secret society. In the end, the only way out of his sense of marginalization from a “manly” society in which he cannot participate is to put the gun to his own head.

*Les Faux-monnayeurs* is a work made up of a conglomeration of narrative elements that serve to move the story along. There is a semi-omniscient narrator who guides the reader through the plot and makes several commentaries in the first person, much as a reporter would discuss a *fait divers*: the plot of the novel is itself based on two different events reported in the news. The first was one was about an adolescent boy who commits suicide at his school, presumably the result a hazing incident gone awry. The second was of a counterfeiting scheme in which children were used to distribute counterfeit coins. In fact, the narrator’s voice in many sections of the novel takes on a unique quality in terms of conventional novelistic narrative, since his “voice” is one that is not only simply telling the story, but also telling it directly to the reader as if specific actions are happening right as he is recounting them. This style disrupts what a reader would normally expect in narrative, since it is told in the present tense, making it clear that the narrator does not necessarily know what is going to happen next. The result of this present-tense direct address creates a sharp contrast to the voice of the other elements within in the novel (such as journal entries and letters), since the tense of the narration as well as the person shift back and forth from the direct address to the other first-person “written voices” of the novel’s players. By speaking directly to the reader during most of the story, the narrator reinforces

the presence of these embedded textual elements, allowing for a variety of voices in the story. It is through the use of these embedded textual elements, such as letters, notes, and journal entries, written and read by the various characters, that gaps in the narrator's knowledge are filled in.

The characters themselves are all somehow connected to each other, either by blood, school, scheme, or in the world of the (counterfeit) literati, and the theme of interconnectedness is one of the true genius elements of the work. This theme not only manifests itself through the characters relating to each other, but also through the way in which the text relates back to itself via a systematic regression of self-referentiality. The novel's self-reference is accomplished through the use of *mise en abyme*, literally translated as "a putting into the abyss," a term that refers to textual elements embedded within other textual elements (e.g., letters copied into journal entries which are themselves implanted within the narrative). Like two mirrors facing each other – or as Dällenbach describes it, a Quaker Oats box depicting the image of the Quaker Man holding a Quaker Oats box with the image of himself on it – the *mise en abyme* is an exercise in self-reflection and self-reference. The novel seeks an authentic core of itself through its own exploration of structure, only to arrive continually at that which is mere reflection, forever regressing into the abyss. In turn, the characters in the novel struggle to do likewise but seem continually to arrive at that which is inauthentic and counterfeit.

Gide was not putting the story (or the letter, or the journal entry) within the story merely as a means of furthering the plot, but rather to have the plot reflect back on itself (or the characters to reflect back on themselves), to tell its own story on a meta-level while at the same time telling the story at the level of the primary narrative. As I examine this

phenomenon, and the way the self-referential elements of the novel come into play, I hope to reveal the dynamics of what I term the “textual closet,” the hidden spaces created among the narrative voices as each embedded element of text is inserted into the story. Each time a letter is written (or read), the story moves one narrative level down from the surface, or primary diegesis. Journal entries are used to “fill in the gaps” when the principal narrator is no longer narrating. For example, at times a journal entry might contain a letter, and within that letter, a transcribed note, allowing a seamless and uninterrupted unraveling of the plot with several different (narrative) voices participating in the narration. Consequently, each of these internal elements moves the narrative context further away from the surface and more into the obscurity of a textual closet, causing the reader to wonder why the narrator’s voice is not being heard.

### *Establishing the Textual Closet*

As stated previously, the *mise en abyme*, according to Lucien Dällenbach, is a textual mirror, or “any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it” (8). In other words, it is a “work within a work” which, by nature of the fact that it resembles the work itself, creates an effect of introspection and self-reflection. Gide’s works are intentionally filled with elements of the *mise en abyme*, and in fact, it is a term that he coined and a device that he arguably perfected.

Gide writes about his intention with this literary device:

J’aime assez qu’en une œuvre d’art, on retrouve ainsi transposé, à l’échelle des personnages, le sujet même de cette œuvre. Rien ne l’éclaire mieux et n’établit plus sûrement toutes les proportions de l’ensemble. Ainsi, dans tels

tableaux de Memling ou de Quentin Metzys, un petit miroir convexe et sombre reflète, à son tour, l'intérieur de la pièce où se joue la scène peinte. Ainsi, dans le tableau *Méniñez* [sic] de Velasquez (mais un peu différemment). Enfin, en littérature, dans *Hamlet*, la scène de la comédie ; et ailleurs dans bien d'autres pièces. Dans *Wilhelm Meister*, les scènes de marionnettes ou de fête au château. Dans *la Chute de la Maison Usher*, la lecture que l'on fait à Roderick, etc. Aucun de ces exemples n'est absolument juste. Ce qui le serait beaucoup plus, ce qui dirait mieux ce que j'ai voulu dans mes *Cahiers*, dans mon *Narcisse*, et dans *la Tentative*, c'est la comparaison avec ce procédé du blason qui consiste, dans le premier, à en mettre un second « en abyme » (*Journal 1 41*).

(I rather like when one finds transposed within a work of art, at the level of the characters, the very subject of the work itself. Nothing better elucidates, nor establishes more assuredly, all the proportions of the whole. As such, in certain paintings of Memling or Quentin Metzys, a small convex and dark mirror reflects the interior of the room where the scene in the painting is taking place. This goes as well for Velasquez's *Méniñez* [sic, Las Meniñas] (but a little bit differently). And still, in literary works such as the play scene in *Hamlet*; and elsewhere in many other plays. In *Wilhelm Meister*, the scenes of the puppets or the castle festival. The *Fall of the House of Usher*, when the character of Roderick is read to, etc. But none of these examples is absolutely right. What takes it a step further, what would explain better what I wanted to do in my *Cahiers* [d'André Walter], in my [*Traité de*] *Narcisse*, and in the

*Tentative [Amoureuse]*, is to compare this device to that of a coat of arms which has, within it [in the abyss, "*en abyme*"], a second version of itself.)

What is most importantly revealed in this journal entry is Gide's intentionality with regards to the way in which he deploys "his" literary device. Gide's purposeful "internal duplication," as Dällenbach calls it, has an enigmatic effect, requiring the reader to navigate the levels of narration and meta-narration within the text. When reading a work such as *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, a book that exemplifies Gide's use of the *mise en abyme*, the reader must pay careful attention to who the narrator actually *is* at any given point in the novel, since from moment to moment, depending on who is doing the writing or the reading, characters are simultaneously the agents and the objects of the narration. The narration glides back and forth among (sub)narrators who are privileged, in differing degrees, to the plot's intrigue, based on the many voices in which the story is told: the "I" at one moment is Edouard, at another Laura, at another the semi-omniscient narrator who, in a meta-referential fashion, Gide presents to us as a sort of reporter.

Gide's initial plan to include internal writings by the characters as a function of the narrative came about after he decided not to bring back Lafcadio (a principal character from *Les Caves du Vatican*) as the story's narrator. He explains that Lafcadio's point of view is far too specialized for it to work throughout the entire novel: "Et sans doute le point de vue de Lafcadio est-il trop spécial pour qu'il soit souhaitable de le faire sans cesse prévaloir" (*Journal des Faux-monnayeurs*, 25) ("And without a doubt, Lafcadio's point of view is far too particular for it to be desirable to incessantly make it prevail"). Instead, he opts to "enrouler les fils divers de l'intrigue et la complexité de mes pensées autour de ces petites bobines vivantes que sont chacun de mes personnages" (26) ("unravel the various

threads of the plot and the complexity of my thoughts around each of my characters who are the living spools”).

It is the introspective aspect of the “abyss,” I assert, that serves as the genesis of the closeted text. Gide’s use of the *mise en abyme* serves to divert the linear narrative, while relegating that which is *en abyme* to a textual closet. It disempowers the authority of the privileged narrator, and creates many “I”s. These closets precariously conceal the first-person from the outside patriarchal culture, creating a system of power plays by either protecting or revealing that which is private or “secret,” allowing the plot and its characters to disengage from the patriarchy (e.g. Bernard discovers his true paternity via his mother’s love letters and flees his home). My intent here is reveal how those sections of the “closeted” narrative are “outed.”

As I discuss closets in a queer context, I am of course referring predominantly to the colloquial term “to be in the closet,” and am expounding on Eve Sedgwick’s theories set forth in her *Epistemology of the Closet*, where she states that, “Even at an individual level, there are remarkably few of even the most openly gay people who are not deliberately in the closet with someone personally or economically or institutionally [and I add: religiously] important to them” (67-68). She describes the idea that walls spring up around them with every new encounter, since “Even an out gay person deals daily with interlocutors about whom she doesn’t know whether they know or not; it is equally difficult to guess for any given interlocutor whether, if they did know, the knowledge would seem very important” (68). A homosexual is therefore “in the closet” when s/he chooses to hide her/his sexual otherness away in a supposedly safe place away from society – whether it needs to be or not – protected from the external forces of a heterosexually dominant,

patriarchal culture. The closet door establishes the divide between public and private, between what is out in the open and what must be kept secret, even when that secret is already out.

The experience of the closet is not necessarily one that must evoke the image of weakness and hiding in the effort to remain safe; there is merely a play on the relations of power that deal with harboring and revealing knowledge. David Halperin's *Saint Foucault* alludes to this concept of power-plays: "To closet one's homosexuality is also to submit oneself to the social imperative imposed on gay people by non-gay-identified people, the imperative to shield the latter not from the knowledge of one's homosexuality so much as from the necessity of acknowledging the knowledge of one's homosexuality" (29). One can also argue that life "on the inside" of the closet affords participants behind closet doors a sense of camaraderie and community through shared experiences of sexuality and marginality.

There are differing dimensions of power relating to the guarding and revealing of secrets in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, since characters are continually "hiding something" in their letters. One aspect of power is based on the adage that states that knowledge is power, or, if not power, then, at least as Sedgwick describes it, the "magnetic field of power" (*Epistemology of the Closet* 4), and those in the privileged position of possessing it use it to their advantage. This most often refers to knowledge one has about *others*, a most notable example in *Les Faux-monnayeurs* being when Bernard uses information he has learned about Laura or Edouard to his advantage. The other, more precarious dimension of power deals with knowledge that one has regarding *oneself*, where one risks personal harm, loss, or alienation as a result of the revelation of certain personal facts, particularly when one is

referring to sexual desire: there is inherent danger of secrets in the closet. But as I already stated, there are certain instances where the presence of the closet can empower rather than weaken an individual's experience: behind the closet door can be found a sense of solidarity shared by those within it. This idea opens the door to the notion of a more complex system of power, one of creativity and bonding that is experienced in the embedded text.

There is a natural tension that exists between conventional early 20<sup>th</sup> Century mores and the self-consciously sexual nature of the author and his oeuvre. In order to discuss what I will purport to be Gide's use of the textual closet, I would like first to call attention to Marcel Proust, whose work in many ways serves as a counterexample to Gide's treatment of same-sex desire. In Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the same-sex desiring nature of the narrator, and ultimately of the author himself, remains for the most part confined to the closet through a series of codes and metaphors. Jarrod Hayes' article "Proust in the Tearoom" illustrates this concept, where the "problematic of interpreting or deciphering secret codes is a recurrent theme" (993). These "codes" alternately conceal/reveal sexual otherness, whether they are through ambiguous, unstable meanings of words, or through the misreading of body/text signs (e.g. Charlus' case of gonorrhea, contracted through homosexual sex, and not heterosexual sex as initially suspected by the butler). Since vernacular expressions frequently take on double meanings, a textual closet is formed by the secondary meanings embedded within the text. When Proust deliberately uses certain terms with alternative, sexual meanings, he is seemingly tempting the reader to catch his drift.

This linguistic ploy resonates with the postmodern arguments of language insufficiency. It begs the question as to how one can possibly articulate a sexuality that runs counter to what Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* refers to as a “language of presumptive heterosexuality.” She draws from Lacanian and post-Lacanian theory that language is determined by paternal law, and is governed by its mechanisms. As a subject (an “I”) must represent itself by availing itself of these mechanisms, it is actually limited by the constraints of the language. In order to represent itself as anything other than heterosexual/masculine, it can only do so by articulating difference, and in doing so, inadvertently reinforces its own state of subordination by establishing itself as Other (xxviii, 37). (I discuss this point further below, in an analysis of one of Edouard’s journal entries.) When a same-sex-desiring individual is closeted, identity is repressed and the articulation of one’s authentic self is limited to a discourse that doesn’t “allow” representation of sexual difference to begin with. He is therefore obligated to create a new, if not subversive, system of codes in order to express an authentic “I.”

The writer creates this system of codes by consciously taking advantage of the unstable nature of language and foiling the referential function of written words by infusing them with multiple levels of meaning. In Proust’s case, this is exemplified by what Hayes contends to be the double meaning behind *prendre le thé*. This expression, which normally describes the bourgeois social act of drinking a cup of tea, may very well be replaced in meaning by a coded message for a same-sex sexual act. Should this be true, we assume the author has thwarted his primary meaning by concealing an expression of same-sex sexuality (of “taking tea”) behind the doors of a textual closet. The recipient of the

hidden message must therefore be “on the inside” to understand what Proust is actually attempting to communicate.

My intent here as I analyze Gide’s works, however, is not so much to look for coded meanings or double entendres, since I believe the closeted text in his works functions differently than in Proust’s, having as much a structural dimension as it does a linguistic one. I believe it is one of introspection and self-revelation. Furthermore, the literary styles of these authors are quite divergent, and the *mise en abyme* is a much more universal device than the coded language of Proust. Embedded meanings in Gide’s works, particularly in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, are revealed more through the careful reading of broader forms of his *mise en abyme*: letters, journals, and the novel within the novel. These literary devices relegate levels of narration into metaphoric closets, precariously masking certain truths within the narrative itself by diverting it and destabilizing it. The characters’ secrets are taboo; their revelation threatens the very foundations of social conventions such as F/father and family. The task at hand, therefore, is to understand what they reveal on a meta-narrative level: what is happening in the *mise en abyme* that actually has nothing to do with the story in which it plays a part? I believe that unearthing these elements of narrative that Gide has “closeted” may actually be the key that discloses the theme of authenticity in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*. Themes of counterfeit money and false literature are merely symbolic masks in the novel itself, closeting other, deeper and embedded meanings. In a way, the author is using the *mise en abyme* as a means of calling conventional, more normative literary devices into question, as if, again, searching for a solution to a problem that he cannot tangibly define.

The idea of falsity with regard to counterfeit money, false literature, and ultimately the inauthenticity of fatherhood is paramount to the understanding of *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, and gives rise to the poststructural notion of the floating signifier. Whereas I might assert that the intangibility of the “problem” of the free-floating signifiers of the *mise en abyme* opens the way for an infinite possibility of meanings (just as the textual mirror gazes at itself to infinity), I might also say that the empty nature of signification itself is one that leads to that which is inauthentic, false, and counterfeit. Accordingly in Gide’s novel, counterfeit money is not the only example of a signifier without a signified (money that says it is money, but is not really money). The “I” is also a “false enunciation” or, to put it differently, is an “I” that is not enunciated by “me.” As characters read each other’s letters, they co-opt each other’s “I’s” that are in turn appropriated by the narrator, and, ultimately the reader of the novel. As perceptions shift from individual to individual, the idiosyncratic baggage of the one *doing the reading* affects the appropriation of meaning. Furthermore, just as the enunciation of the first-person pronoun becomes unclear, so does that of the second-person pronoun, to whom the slipped subject has addressed itself. As different characters appropriate “I” and “you,” these pronouns are at once destabilized and re-created. Both the “I” and the “you” are consequently signifiers that have slipped. As a result, “I” is an ambiguous notion and a floating, if not false, signifier. In fact, like money, pronouns such as “I” and “you” are signifiers that only exist as a cultural agreement, and can easily be rendered “false” within an unstable value system. The theme of falsity in the novel is therefore not a notion of lying, but it is rather part of a system of floating signification that encompasses the ideas of the free-floating meanings of God, paternity, monetary value, and sexuality.

Exploring the Textual Closet in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*

Obvious parallels exist between the author's process and his work. The first and most obvious of these is the "Journal des faux-monnayeurs" that exists both as a published work by Gide (Gide kept a journal as he was writing *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, later publishing it as the *Journal des Faux-monnayeurs*), and as a *carnet* written by Edouard within the novel itself, also titled *Journal des Faux-monnayeurs*. If one is to read both the "internal" and the "external" versions of the *Journal des Faux-monnayeurs*, s/he will discover passages in each work that reflect back on each other word-for-word. This phenomenon invites the reader into a conversation where there are seemingly countless self-referential elements, each of which takes its form in the *mise en abyme*: the coat of arms with a representation of itself at the center.

The effect that it creates for the reader is truly a reflection on reflection, one whose effect is actually carried further than even Gide may have intended. If both Gide and Edouard are writing the same work, the reader may discern that Gide is actually superimposing himself on Edouard. But this is not the same as, say, the Narrator of *Paludes* who is writing a book called *Paludes* – a book that in the story is never finished – because the "Journal des faux-monnayeurs" is developed to a deeper level. Since there are entire sections in the "Journal" written by Gide that the reader finds word for word in Edouard's version of the "Journal," then the two authors - Gide and Edouard - have literally written the same work. Therefore the reflexive mirror that Gide plays with as a *mise en abyme* is one whose reflection is cast by Gide as Edouard, by the *Journal des faux-monnayeurs* with

its counterpart within the novel, and by the individual citations that can be found word for word in each other's reflected versions.

What the reader is left, then, to ponder is exactly how Edouard, as reflection of Gide, is ultimately guilty of the same faults as his creator. The sexual affair between Edouard and Olivier is then not unlike Gide's affair with Marc Allégret, which then reflects back to the Pastor's affair with Gertrude. But this "reflected" sexual affair with a teen-aged boy regresses further into the reflection when one takes into account Gide's behavior toward Madeleine, and Jérôme toward Alissa, and Michel toward Marceline. Furthermore, Olivier's attempted suicide after having had sexual relations with Edouard is perhaps an indication of Gide's acknowledgment of the destructive nature of his own sexual encounters with the young men with whom he had been affiliated over the course of his adult life. In other words, it is a perhaps unintended system of regressive reflections between Gide's real life and the life within his writings; his fictional life and personal life blurred within the mirrors of a *mise en abyme*. Furthermore the *mise en abyme* does not *represent* what is happening in the story, as with the play within the play of *Hamlet*, but rather it *is* what is happening.

The complexity of the structure of Gide's novel thus brings the reader behind the closet door. K. K. Ruthven's *Faking Literature* refers to Gide's text in this way: "Lacking a real foundation for its baroque superstructures, Gide's novel is modeled on the potentially infinite regressions of a *mise en abyme* in an economy in which money has merely a token status" (51), which in the end, is the only status it can possibly have. Thus, language and novelistic structure are actually the meaningless currencies that Gide is exploring in this work, and the resulting "superstructures" are the products the author's discursive exploration: there is no way to "say it" (whatever "it" may be, although once again I will

assert that it is indicative of his struggle with the tension that exists between his Christianity and his homosexuality) directly in literary forms whose meanings are themselves counterfeit. Sheridan states, "Currency and language are both abstract systems of human exchange, in which one thing stands for another. The notion of literary counterfeiters plays with the paradox of how literature can speak truth about the world while 'telling stories', saying something is the case when it is not" (399).

It is therefore no mistake that words cause so much trouble for the characters in this novel. For example, Edouard, who spends all his time struggling at a theoretical level to find the best way to perfect the novelistic medium while attempting to represent his characters successfully, ends up never actually being able to write anything of consequence beyond his own journals. When we first meet Boris, he is speaking in contradictory phrases (1071). Strouvilhou, the mastermind behind the counterfeiting scheme, rants about "poetic inflation" and the dishonor a poet feels should readers actually be able to understand what the poet is trying to say. When he is asked to be an editor at a literary magazine, he proposes instead to create a school that would tear down the literary establishment (1199). This literary establishment has become, for Gide, the reflection of the establishment of the Church, and through Strouvilhou's assertion to "tear it down," Gide is actually offering that the structure of literature – or the literary world itself – has come to bear the same counterfeit meaning as that of the institution of religion. As for Bernard, while discussing Rimbaud with Olivier, he states, "Il me semble parfois qu'écrire empêche de vivre, et qu'on peut s'exprimer mieux par des actes que par des mots." (1150) ("Sometimes it seems to me that writing keeps us from living, and that we can better express ourselves through acts than through words"). He furthers his commentary by

explaining that what he likes most about Rimbaud is that he preferred life to writing, while Olivier astutely points out that Rimbaud actually threw his life away after/as a result of living his life to the fullest.

It is also no mistake that, right at the beginning of the book, it is a *letter* that sets the plot in motion, fractures the security of familial bonds, and sends Bernard out as the Prodigal Son (Gide in effect “baptized” him *Profitendieu*: “*profite en Dieu*” figuratively suggesting that he “profit in God”), to find his way and his place in the world. The letter in question is one of a bundle of old love letters, addressed to his mother and unsigned save for a barely legible “V,” flimsily protected by a pink ribbon, as if to provide any safeguard for the dangerous secret concealed therein that his father is actually a “counterfeit” father. It is when Bernard breeches both the material (the box, the ribbon) and the textual (the letter) closet doors that he is dispossessed of his father’s home and symbolically breaks with the law of the F/father. Everything he once knew as stable, reliable, and truthful are suddenly called into question, and he embarks on a personal odyssey of self discovery, an odyssey that takes on two dimensions: an external one where he sets out to seemingly find a replacement father, and an internal one where the search is to find truth within himself.

Letters, as well as other sub-diegetic elements within the text, in the *Les Faux-monnayeurs* are, in a way, a form of Pandora’s Box, concealing dangerous secrets that, upon their eventual revelation, change the course of the plot, and ultimately, the fates of the characters. Furthermore, it is not only words that cause problems for these characters but fathers too. Letters become the mirrors of truth. The fact that Vincent is the father of Laura’s unborn child, instead of her husband Félix Douviers, is revealed in a letter. It is also within journal entries that the reader learns the pathetic story of LaPérouse, the

estrangement and death of his son, and the resulting separation between LaPérouse and his grandson Boris, born of an affair the son had with one of his father's music students. Moreover, all of these facts are revealed to the reader through another character's *reading* about them, and deploy the regressive reflections of *Faux-monnayeur's mise en abyme*. Whether it is Edouard reading Laura's letter, or Bernard reading Edouard's journal after having stolen Edouard's cloak-room ticket and appropriating his suitcase, the readers of these letters are getting the information "second hand" as if "through a reflection."

But why are these elements of the plot's intrigue cached in a *mise en abyme*, and why are we reading them, learning about them, through another characters' eyes? What is it about these questions of paternity that warrants their being relegated to a textual closet? One reason for this is an assumption of sexuality that is reliant on the father's expression of pro-/re-creation. The notion of a conventionally masculine and heterosexual figure that proscribes life and permits creation is called into question the moment the child is dispossessed of the father. The father in this instance becomes synonymous with God the Father, since the father is the life-giving hegemonic force that offers protection and asserts authority on society and its individuals. By disempowering the father, the text is challenging the institutions of God and fatherhood. As the ground on which "Father's" authority is challenged, the entire *structure* of His laws is destabilized within the dimension of the Symbolic discourse that created Him to begin with: as the Father goes, so do the laws, structures, and conventions of family, language, currency, and heterosexuality. Goux states, "Here Gide foreshadows the crisis of an era in which *structure* tries to make up for the central collapse of all standard values" (65). In other words, when all other values are counterfeit, all that is left are the very structures that made them possible. I contend that

Gide is actually going a step further than what Goux asserts, he is imagining a crisis when not only has standard values collapsed, but also the very structures that made them possible.

It is as if Gide is allowing for a new exploration of what creation *is* by breaking the bonds of the father in order to allow his characters to begin their personal journeys. Not unlike the way the biblical story of the Prodigal Son ends with the son coming home having lost everything, Bernard, the Prodigal Son of *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, returns home after having matured and achieved a renewed sense of appreciation for home. In a way, this novel's storyline is Gide's second treatment of Luke's parable.

If Father (capital F, God) is creator and father (lowercase f, male progenitor) has the prerogative to the creative act, the author must first usurp H/his power in order to express himself in a way that is outside of the boundaries set by these assumptions of masculinity and heterosexuality. But these ideas are themselves closeted as Gide creates a novel in which all of these notions are treated within the context of a carefully (and conventionally) structured novel. The effect of this creates hidden meanings beneath the surface of the narrative itself. The letters and the journals in the story are his *placards*, the textual closets beneath the narrative's surface where characters create, explore, and reveal that which is sexually, literarily, and economically "other."

These different levels of narrative cause a problem vis-à-vis the reader and the text being read. The very fact that there are so many internal textual elements in *Les Faux-monnayeurs* causes a blurring of the pronouns "I" and "you," since each time the reader (any reader) is reading a letter, note, or journal entry it is as important to question who is *reading* as who has *done the writing* of that which is being read. Depending on the character

doing the reading, different meanings are assigned through that particular character's gaze. The relationships among the characters, based on whoever is writing or reading at any point in time, create a circular structuring of knowledge. Laura is "I" writing Edouard, but Edouard is both object and agent of the letter: he is the object of Laura's message, but also agent who appropriates her "I" with the inclusion of her letter in his journal entry (which is in essence his own personal narrative). What comes into play, therefore, is not only Laura's intended meaning of the message, but Edouard's interpretation of that intended meaning for himself. By appropriating her "I," he claims the subject as himself, blurring the surface meaning for the reader. The problem of subjectivity is then further complicated once Bernard, not the intended recipient either of the journal or the letter contained therein, gets his hands on the letter (embedded within Edouard's journal) and reads it himself. Since meanings shift based on each character performing the act of reading, Bernard's "you" shifts unintentionally from Edouard as the primary recipient of the letter, to Bernard who internalizes its message, and, finally, through Bernard to the reader.

Butler addresses the problem of the "I" that cannot separate itself from its situation in discourse. The "I" is the person who claims it, but it is subject to that which others have constructed it to be (*Bodies that Matter* 122). The "I" is therefore dependent not only on s/he who announces it, but also on the other's perception of the person s/he who has named her/himself "I." The notion of the self is therefore not authentic, not "free" in the Sartrean sense (nor *disponible* in the Gidian), given that it too is the property of the discourse in which it is included and the product of the construction of how those who participate in the discourse perceive the one who utters it.

The inconsistency of “I” is therefore at the heart of how unstable subjects play a part in the novel, particularly the effect it has when characters read each other’s letters and journal entries. In the chapter on the Nature of Pronouns in *Problems in General Linguistics* Emile Benveniste states,

If I can perceive two successive instances of discourse containing *I*, uttered in the same voice, nothing guarantees to me that one of them is not a reported discourse, a quotation in which *I* could be imputed to another. I can only be identified by the instance of discourse that contains it and by that alone.

There is thus a combined double instance in this process: the instance of *I* as referent and the instance of discourse containing the *I* as the referee. The definition can now be stated precisely as: *I* is “the individual who utters the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance *I*.” (218, tr. Mary Elizabeth Meek)

In this passage, Benveniste is speaking of the fact that when “I” is existent in the text in more than one place (more than one “utterance”), the reader is not assured of the fact that one is not a “reported discourse” or paraphrase of the first person pronoun. In other words, if Edouard were to say “I read Laura’s letter and she said “I...,” these two “I’s” refer to two different people. Since this phenomenon occurs repeatedly in the novel, the reader must discern to whom “I” is referring, since often “I” might be a product of indirect address.

Kenji Yoshino, in his book entitled *Covering: The Hidden Assault on our Civil Rights*, further elucidates this topic in terms of how it relates to homosexuality and the trope of the closet. He states,

I would think, I wish I were dead. I did not think of it as a suicidal thought. My poet's parsing mind read the first "I" and the second "I" as different "I's." The first "I" was the whole watching self, while the second "I" – the one I wanted to kill – was the gay "I" nested inside it. It was less a suicidal impulse than a homicidal one – the infanticide of the gay self I had described in the poem. (8)

With this quotation, Yoshino reveals a clear example regarding how the author can elicit an objective function of a subjective pronoun: "I." He refers to how the utterance of the first person pronoun takes on its multiple subjective meanings: the first is the agent of the utterance, the second is the represented subject, and the third is an objectified version that subject. The second "I" is diminished, according to his description, to the other, internal self. The "I" thus diminishes to an empty sign within a system of a regressive reflection, the signifier of the repressed self, which needs to be nullified, killed, before being co-opted by the conscious self. By pronouncing "I" and acknowledging its status as the closeted self, the author is recognizing, if not constructing, the "other" within. Yoshino is naming his gay self with a secondary "I," and if he is not seeking to kill it, he is at the very least keeping it in the closet. As Gide repeatedly announces "I" in the novel he is playing on the pronoun's unstable meaning: "I" is at the same time the narrator and the character in the novel who has written the journal entry or letter. The self that is therefore represented by language is objectified once written down on a page and reduced to a series of codes.

These blurred meanings become the spaces that exist between the agent of the letter and the intended/actual object. Bernard's voyeuristic experience of figuratively peering through the keyhole of the closet of Edouard's journal is the genesis for Bernard's

attraction for Laura. When he learns that Laura is pregnant by a man who is not going to take responsibility for her child, it is the first germination of his desire for her: the text, and his interpretation of it, provides the space to create the allure. The hollow void of meaning between the writer and the intended reader is thus fertile ground for his burgeoning love for her, particularly because of how he *perceives* her. Whereas he discovers his status as an illegitimate child by reading a letter, it is also through reading a letter that he first encounters Laura whose own child is illegitimate. This fact may serve as a motivating factor for his attraction for her: his own desire to fill the void of his own lost paternity through trying to attain the role of father *ad litem* of Laura's unborn child. His desire for her is the transference of his own desire for legitimacy by affirming a child's existence through the convention of father and mother, assuming the classic, patriarchal role of the Knight in Shining Armor. Never mind that his need to protect her could never actually end with his being able to reestablish a parent child bond for a child that is not his, any more than he believes he is able to reestablish it for himself with his own father. Bernard is lost in a regressive textual mirror: he is peering at the play of Edouard's "I" who is seeing the reflection of himself through his own "I" which is itself a mere reflection of the "I" of Laura.

Robert K. Martin points out in his article "Authority, Paternity, and Currency in André Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs*" that the very ideas of marriage, fidelity, and fatherhood are mere societal constructions, and that the search for the authentic self must be replaced by the exploration of the truth by stripping away false expectations and idealized qualities of the other and of the self. He notes that Edouard is not necessarily attempting to discover his true self, but rather exploring how to denude "a series of masks, or other selves" (14). To that end, the experimentation with the novelistic genre, performed both by Gide and

consequently by Edouard is the method by which the convention of the novel becomes “denatured,” much like the institution of the F/father.

As Edouard ponders in his journal his relationship to Laura (the entry found in Chapter VIII in Part 1, which Bernard has subsequently stolen), he struggles with his multiple “selves,” the self that loves her and wants to protect her, and the other that cannot. He begins to understand that his attraction for her is an idealistic one since his love for her has caused him to be someone he is not: “...par un étrange croisement d’influences amoureuses, nos deux êtres, réciproquement, se déformaient. Involontairement, inconsciemment, chacun des deux êtres qui s’aime se façonne à cette idole qu’il contemple dans le cœur de l’autre” (986) (“by a strange crossing of amorous influences, our two beings, reciprocally, deformed themselves. Involuntarily, unconsciously, each of our two beings, who love one another, fashioned itself according to this idol that contemplates in the heart of the other”).

He goes on to describe that the day will come that the false ornamentations that he has adorned her with in his ideal will disappear, and the “true being” will reappear, and all he will be left with is the empty shell of the memory of the person he was once in love with. Again, this passage speaks not only to the theme in the novel of the inauthenticity of people, but further of institutions of money, F/fatherhood, marriage, and the novel itself. He describes in this passage the human need to idealize these institutions, and acknowledges that their veracity and power exist only because society has empowered them. These societal conventions, when stripped of their ornamentation (and assumed power), are nothing but an “empty dress,” a shell filled with nothing but disappointment and emptiness.

The confusion of the “I” in this passage becomes even more evident here: Edouard appropriates Laura’s “I” in this passage as he attempts to authenticate his own. He admits that he has “deformed” himself to suit her needs and her ideals, and that he has done the same for him in return, and as a result, his own personality “...ma propre personnalité s’éperdrat en contours trop vagues” (986) (“has been lost in overly vague contours”). By including her letter in this passage, and his consequential meditation on its subject, he has created the mirror of the *mise en abyme* that requires him to look at his own self, which he perceives as mere reflection of her idealized version of him. In other words, he sees himself as reflected by her gaze, and vice-versa. This double mirror is what creates the empty shell of reflection against reflection.

What is more striking in this passage is the fact that it exemplifies the closeted text: it is in this journal entry that we see how Edouard struggles *within his text* with the knowledge of his same-sex desiring nature. As he ponders the reasons that he cannot marry Laura, he states that “Je ne suis jamais ce que je crois que je suis – et cela varie sans cesse, de sorte que souvent, si je n’étais là pour les accointer, mon être du matin ne reconnaîtrait pas celui du soir” (987) (“I am never who I believe I am – and that varies unceasingly such that often, if I am not there to bring them together, my morning’s being would not recognize my evening’s”). As he speaks of his search for his own understanding of himself, he makes reference to the fact that the only reality of himself that he perceives is a *poetic* one. The idea of a “poetic self” is crucial to the understanding of the frustration of this character to come to terms with – if not name – his sense of sexual marginality. He is halted by his inability to articulate fully the “nature” of his desires, as he has no words for them, and ultimately challenges the veracity of sentiments such as love and desire,

concluding that a man feels only what he imagines he is feeling. Consequently, he negates himself in the above passages (“I do not really exist”), and arrives at an absence of himself, since he is unable to find who he is within the dimensions of language, and more so, within the dimensions of the patriarchal culture itself. In other words, he does not exist except for in the language of poetry, and it is in the language of poetry that perhaps he may access is *Real self*, to be *disponible* to his authentic, sexual being.

What remains therefore is the possibility of discovering and of creating meaning within poetry, where, as Cixous describes it, language is closer to the unconscious and the binding structures are freed. Her essay on the *Laugh of the Medusa* makes the point that novelists are merely “allies of representationalism,” and conversely that it is through poetry that language finds its independence, “because poetry involves gaining strength through the unconscious and because the unconscious, that other limitless country, is the place where the repressed manage to survive” (qtd. in Wallraven 209). Therefore, when Edouard states that he sees his reality only as a poetic one, he is recognizing that the language that he has at his disposition to express/explore himself through the novel is insufficient, since his authentic self is in opposition to the societal construction of manhood.

If we take into account Butler’s analysis of Luce Irigaray, which states the problem of language as “pervasively masculinist,” we might see how Gide (through Edouard) is articulating the quandary of novel writing. Novelistic form is dependent on conventions of language, which being inherently “phallogocentric” causes a problem when someone who is trying to express him or herself falls out of the scope of masculine heterosexuality and is thus rendered unrepresentable (*Gender Trouble* 14). As Edouard uses his journal to “write

himself” he finds himself therefore foiled by language and unable to articulate his authentic nature.

This is why problems with the F/father overwhelmingly exist in the textual elements of the novel. However, these problems are unified. The questions of paternity, with the possible exception of Edouard (Edouard is the half-brother of Olivier’s mother, indicating a familial bond that is made up of a splintered paternity), all have to do with fathers whose offspring are products of extramarital relations. Breaking with the social and religious mores of 19<sup>th</sup> century France, all of these children (Bernard, Boris, the unborn child of Vincent and Laura) are considered “illegitimate,” calling into question the veracity of conventional ideas of family and legacy. Their existences are secrets; their birthrights are subversive; their very conceptions are transgressive. In essence, these characters are both the signifier and signified of sexual transgression. By their inclusion and significance in the novel, they disauthenticate the conventions of social mores, and serve a parallel function to the role of counterfeit money within the legal system. Gide’s usage of them within the system of regressive text represents the meta-narrative where the author himself is struggling with these same ideas in the mirror of the *mise en abyme*. When he recreates a justified system of a reordered novelistic structure with these newly legitimized relationships, he is in fact, like Edouard, contemplating these ideas within a textual closet. These institutions are re-evaluated and re-legitimized as old systems of power are undermined.

He challenges the societal mores about sex, which are themselves mere power plays by the bourgeois elite. According to Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, the mid-nineteenth-century saw the rise in the notion of the “conventional” family as one that would subjugate

the urban proletariat through the application of morals (122). By the end of the century (and forward) the preoccupation with family in a bourgeois context related to “a preoccupation with heredity; but included in bourgeois marriages were not only economic imperatives and rules of social homogeneity, not only the promises of inheritance, but the menaces of heredity; [...] the diseases and defects of the group of relatives” (124-25). Sons inherit the not only the qualities of their fathers, but also their shortcomings. Gide in effect challenges this notion by undoing (if not redefining) the notion of paternity. This is why there is an obvious problem when the legitimacy of fatherhood is called into question.

Paternity is an overarching preoccupation in the novel: counterfeited money is paralleled with the notion of the counterfeit father. Money is the construct of the paternal society, and just as the possessing of it is a symbol of power, the lack of it represents a disempowerment and disenfranchisement from that society. The notion of paternity itself is counterfeit, since it is itself a creation of Symbolic discourse. In *The Coiners of Language*, Goux states, “Natural paternity is the minting of a money imprinted with a stamped effigy. Just as a sovereign issues coins, stamping the substance of gold with his noble and regal effigy, which guarantees the coin’s authenticity, and legality for exchanges, the father imprints his image and resemblance upon the child to be born” (40). Goux’s assertion is further complicated by the fact that the father, unlike the mother, was unable to establish an absolute signifying line between himself and his child until DNA testing made that possible. This argument opens up a historical and sociological discussion that I will not be discussing here. Nonetheless, I would like at minimum to mention the role of the woman in terms of reproduction, and point out that the control exerted over women in a patriarchal society in terms of the “problem” for men in with regard to their control over progeniture:

“The only way to be relatively sure of paternity was to set up elaborate social/religious structures which enforced (often incorporating severe punishments for any deviance) the notion that a woman’s biological function was relative to and governed by only one man at a time” (Haas 32).

Money is thus is a form of *mise en abyme* in *Les Faux-monnayeurs*. Legitimate currency, issued by the government and bearing its genuine emblems and inscriptions, is a code, like paternity, and forms the walls around the closet. Falsifying coins devalues a hierarchical system and challenges the authority of the government and the patriarchy. It is the counterfeiting of money, the subversive act of disempowering the societal institution that issues it, that serves as a reflection of the act inside the closet’s walls. In an era where the intrinsic value of money was no longer measured by the gold standard, the legitimacy of the coin requires that everyone who uses it for monetary exchange must have faith in the existence of the authority of the government’s stamp emblazoned on it, much like the coat of arms on its escutcheon. The legitimacy of patriarchal roles requires the same faith in the existence of fathers and sons in order to be valid.

Money’s authenticity is merely symbolic and therefore complements the notion of counterfeit paternity. Since Bernard’s “stamp” from Profitendieu is an illegitimate one, the name of God itself is rendered worthless within the economic system of fathers and sons. Given that Bernard peered inside the closet and released the secret hidden within by reading the letter that revealed his illegitimacy, he in effect sets in motion his own narrative by going underground and running away. According to Martin, Bernard’s rejection of his father’s name is “not merely the rejection of a pattern of a false patronymic but the rejection of a pattern of false authority” (12).

Bernard's personal exploration and self discovery once he leaves the home of his legal father take on both spiritual and sexual dimensions, which Gide plays out through embedded textual elements. In a conversation with Laura, for example, he asks her whether or not she believes whether "il n'y ait rien, sur cette terre, qui ne puisse être mis en doute?" (1088) ("there is anything on this earth that cannot be called into doubt") as he considers writing a story about a man who consults everyone before deciding to do anything, only to find out that everyone's opinion contradicts everyone else's, and that in the end all there is to rely on is oneself. Dispossessed of his father through the written word, Bernard seeks to recreate himself through it: rather than letting the words write him, he instead seeks to write the words. His own truth will reveal itself in his fiction, since through reading he is actually rejecting the false codes of the authority of the family, and writing himself his new identity. He rejects his legal father, the magistrate, whose job it is to enforce the letter of the law (Martin 12).

In a way, Bernard is the straight man who is "queered" through his struggle for authenticity within the system of a false paternity. He represents within the novel the essential relationship of gender "otherness" within the context of his existential freedom. In Edouard, he has found a substitute father and reestablishes his selfhood through his relationship with him in a form of mentor/mentee. In fact, Edouard, the "uncle" of the story, becomes one of the principal (replacement) father figures, albeit an "impertinent" one, who seduces his nephews in the newly established family (15), a theme that is reprised from *Les Caves du Vatican*, where Lafcadio's "uncles" were also culpable of sexually abusing him. We are reminded of Proust's purported comment to Gide that all of the "uncles" in his stories were actually "tantes" ("aunties"), a slang term for feminized homosexual men.

This idea is also played out with the death of the Comte de Passavant, as his son Robert is devoid of emotion over the death of his father, and his brother Gontran, who sits vigil by his body, tells his sister how he hardly knew him. The scene ends with a scolding of the wake's rite, when the crucifix in his father's hands falls askew as Gontran attempts to adjust it, signaling (if not mocking) both the death of the father and the break with the Father. Again, in a theme that is reprised from *Les Caves du Vatican*, a religious symbol is sullied, though with less irony, indicating Gide's overall contempt for patriarchal religion.

The subsequent substitute families that we find in the novel are, to quote Eve Sedgwick, forms of male homosocial communities with, for the most part, female characters' inclusion within these communities and their participation in how desire is played out in the novel, playing a lesser role to that of their male counterparts. Sheridan demonstrates examples of the initial reviews of the novel supporting this impression, one most notably from Fortunat Strowski in March 1926's edition of *La Renaissance* where he accuses Gide of having ought to have titled his novel *Les Nouvelles Liaisons dangereuses* (most likely referring to the epistolary elements of the novel in addition to the themes of manipulation) rather than *Les Faux-monnayeurs*. He describes some characters as "intelligent and corrupt, others [as] stupid and selfish. A few women pass by, but they don't count" (qtd. in Sheridan 399). In fact, the women characters do count, but their function frequently serves rather to thwart the more normative nature of marriage and family as they participate in the illegitimacy of fatherhood and fidelity.

Normalized relationships are not necessarily present in *Les Faux-monnayeurs* but rather destabilized and reestablished in a new and arguably subversive form, most notably through platonic and sexual cross-generational attraction. Gide did not have sexuality

assigned to his characters per se, but he did have characters that represented different forms of gender and sexual expression. This is important to note, since the function of same-sex desire in the novel does not necessarily resonate with twentieth-century ideals nor with the moralizing traditionally expressed by critics. The novel discusses sexuality in a way that presupposes an essentialist view of sexuality, an idea that describes sexual nature as being a natural state of being and not socially constructed (Seidman, *Social Construction of Sexuality* 30-31). In doing so, Gide has created an alternate field of sexuality where societal constructions have not assigned moral weight to sex acts. That is not to say that there are no morality tales with sex and sex acts that come into play in the novel. For example, Vincent's conundrum with the pregnancy of Laura (as well as Bernard's mother's infidelity which resulted in his own birth) is an expression of the consequences of heterosexual unions; Boris' suicide is the direct result of being "different" (more effeminate) from the other boys. They were not overtly in homosexual communities, but rather same-sex communities, where the gaze between men is privileged.

Focusing on the letter that Bernard writes to Olivier at the beginning of the *Seconde Partie*, for example, another expression of the closeted text in *Les Faux-monnayeurs* where the homosocial gaze trumps the male gaze upon the female is revealed. In this letter, Bernard describes how he came to know Olivier's uncle Edouard, and how he has followed him to Switzerland in the role of an assistant. He also confesses to Olivier his love for the married Laura Douviers, how she is pregnant with the child of Olivier's brother, Vincent, and is accompanying Edouard and Vincent to Saas Fee in order that they might care for her. The only element of the letter that Olivier is focusing on, however, is the fact that Bernard and Edouard are sleeping in the same room, and as a result Olivier is overcome by jealousy

for the both of them: “Il n’était jaloux particulièrement ni d’Edouard, ni de Bernard; mais des deux. Il les imaginait tour à tour l’un et l’autre ou simultanément, et les enviait à la fois” (1070) (“He wasn’t particularly jealous either of Edouard or of Bernard, but of both of them. He imagined them over and over again, one, the other, or simultaneously, and envied both of them at the same time”).

What is surprising in this passage is that Bernard has clearly stated that for which he is “closeting” himself: his love for Laura whom he deems to be too good for him. He expresses his urgency in keeping his desire secret, requesting that Olivier tear up the letter. Nevertheless, Olivier in turn is not concerned with his confession but rather with the fact that two objects of his desire are themselves together. He expresses neither jealousy for Bernard’s admitted heterosexual desire nor, for that matter, its object. This passage demonstrates Gide’s attitudes toward of the mutual exclusivity of same-sex vs. opposite-sex sexual desire, and is clearly, at least for Olivier, privileging the former. By Olivier not focusing on Bernard’s love for a woman, he clearly has little concern for the fact that Bernard is enamored with a woman. By obsessing on the relationship/friendship between these two objects of his desire, he is placing the same sex relationship on an elevated plane. Homosexual and heterosexual desires are therefore merely two expressions of sexuality that can exist simultaneously without one existing simply to reinforce the dominance of the other.

This idea confounds ideas of the normalization of sexuality, and Gide uses this notion as a means of negotiating his way around, and through, the social constructions of sexuality. According to Butler, “The efforts to denaturalize sexuality and gender have taken as their main enemy those normative frameworks of compulsory heterosexuality that

operate through the naturalization and reification of heterosexist norms" (*Bodies that Matter* 93). If homosexuality merely exists as a means of reinforcing heterosexist norms, then the trope of the closet is thus considered as a function of the hegemonic paternalistic society. The closet's walls are ensured by the heterosexist culture that keeps that which is in the closet confined. But I might suggest that that the closet itself is the subversive heart of the novel, as the experimentation with what is unconventional must take place behind its doors.

Furthermore, Gide's continued struggle to reconcile questions of sexuality with those of religion seems not to be resolved. He subverts God in the text by acknowledging the hegemony of textuality, and posits Divine Power within the institutions of novelistic creation, of money, and of fatherhood. But at each step, he tears them down: Edouard's novel does not get written, money and fatherhood are nothing but counterfeit conventions. What remains then is the question of sexuality, which is depicted as equally destructive. Boris, the young effeminate boy kills himself in a game of Russian Roulette. Edouard is left with the guilt of Olivier's attempted suicide. What remains then at the end of *Les Faux-monnayeurs* is a battlefield where the conflict between religion and same-sex sexuality seems to have no victors.

### Conclusion

Les rapports de l'homme avec Dieu m'ont de tout temps paru beaucoup plus importants et intéressants que les rapports des hommes entre eux.

The relationships between man and God have always seemed to me to be much more important and interesting than the relationships of men with each other.

--*Ainsi soit-il* 1175

In what ways were Gide's notions of God affected by his sexuality, and vice-versa?

As I demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the tension that exists between his religious beliefs (or perhaps non-beliefs) and his sexuality shaped Gide's fiction perhaps more than any other issue. I have also asserted that readers might be able to view the works of fiction from this time period, from the beginning of his career through the mid-1920s, as a process of "coming out" through his characters, since the protagonists seem to have the common thread of sexuality and sexual otherness that is revealed more and more and in different ways as Gide's literary career progressed. Inasmuch as his *oeuvre* might be evidence of a progression towards an authentic experience of same-sex sexual desire, however, the reader also observes the ways in which his religious beliefs were systematically undone in the process. But the question of whether or not Gide was actually an "atheist" toward the end of his life is perhaps still an open one. It is clear from reading his *Journaux*, his criticism, and most importantly his fiction, that Gide was shedding strict Calvinism in which he was raised early on in his adult life. As I stated in my introduction, sexuality and religion are inter-reliant factors in Gide's complexity as an author, and whereas he became more bold with questions of sexuality, his rejection of Judeo-Christian dogma is often mistaken as a lack of belief in (a) God.

In my discussion of *Nourritures terrestres*, I demonstrated the ways in which Gide explores questions of spirituality and sexuality in the context of sublime pantheism. Using the backdrop of the African deserts, Gide provides the narrator with the space to denude himself of the societal and religious mores of his native France, where traditions, conventions, and institutions can be undone and rediscovered. What is revealed is that God exists in the experience of desire itself, not in the requiting or fulfillment of that desire, but through the experience of pleasure, of pain, of hunger, and of thirst. The book itself is an exercise in calling into question the traditions of literature through its structure that brings together different genres of poetry and prose into a cohesive work that resembles a reimagining of the Bible, which in turn undoes conventions of Judeo-Christianity and provides a new space for God. What makes *Nourritures* unique is that it is the work in which Gide seems to achieve a balance between the search for an authentic experience of sexuality and one of God; two forces that instead of working against each other to negate each other, ultimately manage to exist in harmony to nourish and reinforce each other. Within the pages of *Nourritures*, the narrator reveals God through, and not despite, the revelation of his own homosexual nature, and in the end God can exist simultaneously with his sexual self.

In my discussion of the *soties* (*Paludes*, *Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné*, and *Les Caves du Vatican*), a darker turn is taken from the exhilaration that is encountered in *Nourritures*. I show how Gide presents the reader with the *acte gratuit*, a device that represented a desire for freedom from prescribed/proscribed societal conventions. But these “acts” represent not just liberty for humans, but also the divine prerogative of creation. In *Paludes*, the “Je” is nothing more than an uncreative, stagnant author. His inability to

produce the text that he has set out to write represents both the stagnancy of the literary circles he frequented as well as his own impotence, both sexual and artistic. His inability to write (or to travel, or to accomplish anything of note) portrays the frustration Gide felt as a young author and a new husband, symbolically trapped in a tower, on an island, in a swamp.

It is in *Le Prométhée mal-enchaîné* that “action” is taken to a different level when (a) God (Zeus, the banker, also known as the Miglionnaire) sets the strange plot in motion when he gratuitously slaps one man in the face (Coclès) and hands him a large envelope of money to give to another (Damoclès). The book is an ironic representation of Gide’s frustration with the capricious nature of God and of the bloated wealth and undeserved power of the Church (a theme that is treated more fully in *Les Caves du Vatican*). As he tells the story, it is revealed that the “gift” of money bestowed upon Damoclès is nothing more than an instrument of torment as he attempts to make sense out of his unearned bounty, not unlike the Promethean Eagle (which the reader discovers was also something gratuitously inflicted upon him by G/god) that “eats one up” from the inside. My conclusion with this particular *sotie* is that fortunes, slaps in the face, and yes, our eagles, are for Gide representations of those things within us that distinguish us from others: in other words, they are representations, at least on one level, of sexual otherness, and perhaps at the same time a desire for a “new” God. Through *Prométhée*, Gide is attempting to reconcile his religious education and his (wavering) belief in a God who would have played the gratuitous “trick” on humankind of planting within them the seeds of sexual desire that would serve no other function but to torment them.

It is in *Les Caves du Vatican* that a person, Lafcadio, usurps the divine prerogative of the gratuitous act. Throughout this work there is a criticism, if not mocking, of the Church and its authority, which translates to a deconstructed vision of the authority and power of the institution of fatherhood itself. Lafcadio's illegitimacy, as I discuss, becomes representative of sexual otherness in that he is outside of the structure of the traditional family prescribed by the hegemony of paternal law. As a result, he is target of sexual abuse by a set of "uncles," his mother's concubines, thus Gide presents us with the problem of false fathers, false Popes, and eventually, a false God. But Lafcadio, as I demonstrated, achieves his legitimacy when his biological father, the Count Juste-Agénor, rejects him (and gives him a sum of money, perhaps a nod to the events in *Prométhée*) and sets him on the path to ultimate freedom. When he kills the innocent Fleurissoire (who turns out to be his brother-in-law), he breaks ties not only with his biological family, but also with his past. But as I discuss, Lafcadio is a complex character, and holds a particular significance within the Gidean oeuvre inasmuch as he represents the potential problem of a lost moral code through a rejection of the institutions that establish it. In *Les Caves*, God, the Church, and fathers are all rejected, and Lafcadio, now free of the constraints imposed by these paternalistic entities, resorts to murder to break from his past. For him it is through the act of murder that perhaps he accesses, if only for a moment, an authentic experience outside of language and law, and finds true freedom and perhaps a place where God is not separate from the experience of himself. One can be "free of one's eagle" without being destroyed by it.

In my discussion of *l'Immoraliste* I demonstrate how the theme of *dénuement* originally presented in *Les Nourritures terrestres* has been translated into a doctrine of

Immoralism by the book's protagonist. It is a book that is fraught with contradictions of action and inaction, of culture and counter-culture, conformity and non-conformity, and above all, of morality and immorality. As in other works, it is the institutions of God, family and marriage, as well as the economic questions that are made possible by these institutions, which are in effect sacrificed so that Michel can attempt to find an authentic experience of his sexual nature. One of the major problems that is revealed, however, is the sexualization of the young boys who Michel views as the embodiment of beauty and innocence, boys who are not just colonized by the French Colonial Army, but also whose bodies are "colonized" by Michel's gaze. Although he believes to be denuding himself from the patriarchy that has dictated to him obligations of God, family, and heterosexuality, he ultimately is incapable of shedding that which has constructed him as a wealthy, bourgeois French man. Furthermore, his act of penetrating (if only by his gaze) the bodies of the colonized "other" – the boys in Biskra – he commits the ultimate patriarchal power assertion over them. In the end, he is unable to achieve the authenticity he seeks because he cannot break away from his patriarchal privilege. It is a work in which the incompatibility of God and sexuality is among the most evident.

What I demonstrated in my "Imagining Madeleine" chapter is the way that Gide's wife was a constant presence, if not moral compass, within several of his works of fiction. The two books I discussed at length were *La Porte étroite* and *La Symphonie pastorale*, two books whose representations of sexuality and sexual otherness are simultaneously reinforced and negated by the question of religion. For *Porte étroite's* Alissa, the question of religious extremism is among the most evident and discussed topics within Gide studies. I examined how a past of sexual abuse may have contributed to what eventually became her

total abnegation, but I also examined how Jerome's possible sexual otherness factors into the equation, since he too experienced abuse, and as I speculate, was possibly homosexual. As for *Symphonie pastorale*, the drama among the Pastor, Gertrude, Jacques, and the Pastor's wife is played out in a way that reveals the consequences of the Pastor's actions in emotionally abandoning his family as he focuses on his relationship with the "ideal child," she who is without sin, the embodiment of innocence and beauty. Her feral nature and blindness represented the wild, that which existed outside of normativity and outside of society and its structures. She is, in effect, the quintessence of the "authentic" that Gide through his characters is attempting to achieve, and in my opinion represented both the sexual and religious freedom that perhaps Gide was searching for but never found. As a result, Gide reveals the impossibility of her authentic nature as sustainable since as Gertrude is educated, she is torn away from all that made her noble and innocent. She sheds that which had hitherto been authentic, and is alienated from her status as "ideal child" and cannot survive. The Pastor is in the end alienated from Gertrude, his son, and ultimately his wife, a Madeleine archetype who is the collateral damage of her husband's infidelity.

*Les Faux-monnayeurs* is the text where the meaning of "I" is most fluid through the appropriation (and misappropriation) within the textual elements that make up the novel's structure within the diegesis, i.e. the letters, the journal entries, and the novel within the novel. It is in Gide's only true novel and is the work where he seems to perfect the usage of the *mise en abyme*, a literary device that calls into question the very structure of God and sexuality by creating "textual mirrors" (or as I refer to it, "textual closets") that at once hide and reveal truths through the disempowerment of the structures of text. When the

reflexive “mirrors” of the *mise en abyme* are held up to each other, what is revealed in the mirror images are, at least in the context of a regressive reflection, the authenticity of sexuality and the authenticity of God. The journeys that the characters take are both external and internal, both of which are the search for the truth, whether that truth is for the authentic father figure (particularly for Bernard who re-legitimizes himself at the end of the novel) or the truth of sexual authenticity (as is the case for Edouard and Olivier). At the same time that Gide seems to tear down the authority of the conventional text, the *mise en abyme* gives the writers and the readers within the novel itself the freedom to play God and write God, and in the end, to write themselves. Therefore at the heart of the *abyme* is found the pantheism that seemed to evade Gide’s grasp after his completion of *Les Nourritures terrestres*. Whereas Gide does not seem to solve the problem of reconciling his sexual otherness with a belief in God, it is nonetheless in this novel that he seems to come closest, even if it is no more than a game of Russian Roulette.

In conclusion, the question of the struggle between homosexual desire and religion can only be described as being as complex and full of contradictions as Gide himself. First, in terms of the question of homosexual desire, I feel that it is impossible to separate it from the notion of his pederasty. And as I discovered – something that when I began this project I had not considered – Gide was himself haunted by his own sexuality and the consequences it had on the boys with whom he engaged sexually. The bravado through which he describes the young boys, his conquests, and his affections, mask deeper feelings of guilt that are revealed though a closer analysis of his fiction. Throughout the books I discussed, as well as others that I did not, there is a level buried beneath the surface regarding the *consequences* of his *actions*. When Michel returns to Biskra at the end of

*l'Immoraliste*, he sees the boys who had previously been innocent specimens of health, beauty, and attractiveness, but who he now sees as sullied, ruined by age and time. But these boys were the victims of his colonizing, sexualizing gaze (and if not merely the gaze, then their actual by Michel, and as we know from his *Journaux*, by Gide himself). Through this lens, Gide is acknowledging that the boys have been changed because of what can only be described as their victimization.

This also holds true for Lafcadio, a man who when he was young was the victim of repeated sexual abuse by the ersatz father figures who shared his mother's bed. And even though he seems to recall some of these events with a certain sense of titillation, it cannot be ignored that he commits a rage-filled act after he associates a stranger with one of his memories with his "Uncle" Wladimir. One can only question if when Gide composed this particular scene if he was relating to Lafcadio – which would mean that Gide was quite possibly filled with rage over sexual abuse in his own childhood – or if he felt a certain amount of guilt or fear of revenge for his own acts of molestation.

One might also say the same for Gertrude from *Symphonie* and Olivier from *Faux-monnayeurs*, both of whom become engaged in a sexual relationship with older men. The incident with Gertrude represents the fear of rejection by Marc Allégret with whom Gide had not only a sexual liaison, but also an emotional one. Gertrude attempts suicide (and eventually dies as a result of the attempt) upon regaining her sight and comprehending what has occurred. As for Olivier, it is after a sexual encounter with Edouard that he attempts suicide. As readers we cannot ignore this trope of profoundly inappropriate sexual behavior and the consequences that Gide himself depicts, perhaps out of guilt, or perhaps out of memory. The fact is, however, that despite whatever moral judgment we can

make about Gide post-mortem, he was in fact honest about his sexual otherness, and whether it was about justifying or rationalizing who he was, he does stay true to his promise to “tout dire” through his fiction.

As for the question of religion, perhaps the idea that he was an atheist, as so many have conjectured, is not an accurate assertion. Had Gide actually not believed in God, I do not think that his work would have been so rife not only with criticism of the institutions that were created in His name, but also with what was clearly a quest to achieve some kind of truth about his existence. It would probably be more fitting to say that Gide was searching for a context where his sexuality would exist in harmony with a belief in the Divine, rather than simply despite it. His efforts to do so have been clear, by challenging conventions of discourse, he attempted to create new conventions that would include “queerness”; by unwriting and rewriting the Bible, he tried to find the God that existed before humankind tried to create Him. In other words, Gide wanted to believe and was searching for a context that would be possible for him to do so.

Throughout his writings, as I have examined, his goal was to give a voice to the homosexual. Through the evolution of his works we see the gradual coming out story of his characters as he attempted to assign to them an authentic voice, navigating discourse that at times was one that existed merely “in the closet.” As Gide sent his narrator of *Les Nourritures* and Michel to the deserts of Africa, he was doing so to separate them – if not himself – from the dominant, heteronormative culture that had constructed the questionable parameters of sexuality, and at the same time, the questionable parameters of God himself. It was within the borders of foreign lands that he was able to begin what was to be a lifelong journey of exploration for the authentic self. Gide was compelled to reveal

the voice of a person whose desires did not conform to the expectations of many of his peers who themselves conformed to patriarchal traditions of heterosexuality through their desires, relationships, and marriages. Gide was attempting to construct the queer person.

But it was not merely an authentic sexuality that he wished to achieve. At the same time that he was uttering “I am other” it was not only an otherness of sexuality that was at play: he was also trying to break free from the constraints of religion that had also “normalized” God. Gide’s meticulous readings of the Bible had revealed for him that the word of Christ was not one of judgment or condemnation, but rather one of salvation. As he echoed in his readings of Nietzsche’s *Antichrist*, he felt this message had been twisted and perverted, first by St. Paul, and then by Calvin, and his strict Calvinist upbringing had reinforced a message that he simply was not able to reconcile within himself as true, especially with regard to the messages that condemned him (in a religious sense) for his same-sex desiring nature. So he broke from it. Just as he had proposed for himself a new and authentic sexuality, he also was attempting to redefine God outside the parameters of the dominant religious discourse. This was an extraordinarily complicated undertaking, made evident within his vast body of writings.

Nowhere is the struggle more evident than in his correspondence with Paul Claudel, a devout Catholic and friend-cum-nemesis who believed that Hell was merely a part of the Grand Plan of God, creating a universal harmony with its counterpart of Heaven. In the introduction to the *Correspondences*, Robert Mallet describes

Le rayonnement de l’œuvre d’André Gide est pour Paul Claudel la manifestation de ces “lumières affreuses” de l’Enfer qui ne peuvent rivaliser avec les clartés célestes; mais il considère l’éventuelle damnation d’André

Gide comme la contribution involontaire d'un homme à l'harmonie universelle volue par Dieu, il ne peut accepter de voir la damnation se propager à ceux qui ne trouveraient pas en eux-mêmes de suffisantes protections. (38)

(The influence of the work of André Gide is for Paul Claudel a manifestation of these "dreadful lights" of hell that cannot compete with celestial radiance. But he considers the eventual damnation of Andre Gide as the involuntary contribution of a man to the universal harmony desired by God. He cannot accept seeing damnation spread to those who would not find within themselves sufficient protections.)

It was Claudel, "un catholique à globules rouges" (37) ("a red-blooded Catholic"), who criticized Gide after having read *l'Immoraliste* that he was "sous l'influence du Diable" (194) ("under the influence of the Devil"), and who wrote to Jacques Rivière, after having read one of the pederastic passages in *Les Caves du Vatican*, of Gide's "moeurs affreuses" (216) ("dreadful morals") and later to Gide directly, by challenging him: "Si vous n'êtes pas un pédéraste, pourquoi cette étrange prédilection pour ce genre de sujets?" (195) ("If you are not a pederast, why this strange predilection for these kinds of subjects?"). He further admonished Gide that "Vous prenez pour vous la responsabilité des âmes que vous perdez" (220) ("You take responsibility yourself for the souls that you lose"). Far from the discourse of "love the sinner, hate the sin," Claudel among other Catholics perceived Gide as the sin itself. Claudel's fascination with Gide's condemnation is summed up with an anecdote recounted in Sheridan's biography on Gide, where Claudel, at dinner with the family of Francis Jammes (another devout Catholic), held a crêpe flambé at the end of his fork and

declared, “this is how Gide will burn in hell!” When Jammes’ son recounted to event to Gide, he confessed that “he was on his [Gide’s] side, not theirs” (606).

The fact is that Gide had to have demonstrated tremendous courage for declaring himself a homosexual and a pederast. He had witnessed his former friend, Oscar Wilde, jailed for his homosexual affair for gross indecency. Although he treaded carefully in the early days of his writings, as we have seen, he eventually became more and more bold with his “coming out.” By the time the definitive version of *Corydon* was published in 1920, he declared himself a homosexual without hesitation, and did not make apologies to his friends or within his works. In 1921, he spent time with Marcel Proust, and discussed the topic of uranism with him, and it was during one of their meetings that Proust echoed Wilde’s admonition to him: “Vous pouvez tout raconter, s’écrite-t-il; mais à condition de ne jamais dire: *Je*” (J1 692) (“‘You can tell all,’ he exclaimed, ‘but on the condition to never say: *I*’”). But he was in fact attempting to reveal a voice that would authentically be able to utter “I” within a linguistic system, grounded in political structures that are themselves shaped by dominant religious beliefs, that specifically asserts a power of compulsory heterosexuality that objectifies the sexual other. By embracing the otherness he experienced – for good or for bad – Gide was able to articulate his “I” and was among the first openly homosexual writers to unapologetically declare “I am.”

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