

Joy and the Demon

THE JOURNALS OF ANDRÉ GIDE.
Volume III: 1928-1939. Translated
and annotated by Justin O'Brien.
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
1949. 450 pp. \$6.

Reviewed by MAXWELL GEISMAR

THIS is the final volume in the American edition of André Gide's "Journals." The first two books trace the course of Gide's career from his youth and literary apprenticeship to the point at which he becomes the greatest living French writer. Mr. O'Brien has done an excellent job of editing and translation; the "Journals" as a whole are surely among the central documents in modern literature.

As usual, the third volume contains a mixture of moral reflections, literary comments, domestic notes, personal disclosure. This is both a record of the world Gide lived in and a diary of his responses and reactions; the material, as he tells us, which cannot be used in his books but which actually forms one of his most illuminating and valuable works. The scene moves from Cuverville, his country home, and Paris, the center of his literary activities, to Italy, Germany, and the French Congo. Gide is in his sixties as the book opens, but there is still that continual struggle to perfect his life and to develop his art.

In one sense the "Journals" are an almost perfect example of the curious division between love and desire that marks modern writing—love without desire, and desire without love. Yet one sees very clearly here that both Cuverville, the scene, and Em, the subject, of Gide's most intense personal conflicts, are also the source of his personal stability and even of his literary values. "Free at last," Gide says after the death of his wife, "and with no tie left, like a kite with the string suddenly cut, I toppled over, diving soul-first toward the ground, where I crashed." These are the years of Munich, too, the rise of Hitler and Fascism, the prelude to war. The "Journals" trace Gide's increasing hostility to the politics and dogma of the Catholic Church, his conversion to Communism, his trip to Russia, and final renunciation of both Communist and Catholic authoritarianism.

How much of this late and hesitant political conversion in Gide's career can be attributed to a failure of his creative powers that is openly acknowledged here? If the moralistic bent of Gide's thought becomes apparent "now that the turbulence of the flesh is tempered," it is true also



André Gide—"now that the turbulence of the flesh is tempered."

that the final volume of the "Journals" lacks the emotional turbulence, the intensity of the earlier books. It almost seems that Gide's sustained defense of homosexuality in literature has become a spiritual confession, an act of religious piety. But perhaps there was always an element of sterility in Gide's literary position; ascetic, rational, ironic in tone, it lacks instinctive humor, largeness, generosity—"the thickness of the great comic artists," as Gide himself says, or of the primary creative artists. Rigor takes the place of abundance in his thought, and perfection is cultivated at the cost, perhaps, of inspiration.

Yet this may be truly appropriate to Gide's position as one of the last great voices of the Protestant conscience in Europe—a voice that has preached "the extremity of individualism"—and a late nineteenth-century Europe that is already part of history. It is a strange sight, for instance, strange and admirable, to notice the Gide of the present volume painfully working his way through the Marxist decalogue and conceding the final importance of "the social question." Unlike some of our own disciples of T. S. Eliot, here it is that Gide perceives and laments his lack of the historical sense, and trains himself to admire Balzac, Whitman, and even Zola.

The mark of Gide's triumph, and of his stature, is that he appears to transcend his limits everywhere. I have already mentioned in these columns the remarkable and voluptuous curiosity which takes him very far afield, and the humility which makes him turn back very often to confirm or to alter a judgment. That "joy" which Gide has consciously cultivated at the center of his thinking about life, and that "demon" which he believes to be inseparable from great works of art, have served him well.

Long-Curtained Culture

HISTORY OF EARLY RUSSIAN LITERATURE. By N. K. Gudzy. Translated from the Russian by Susan Wilbur Jones. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1949. 545 pp. \$10.

Reviewed by JOHN COUNROS

THIS book puts the reviewer in mind of the story of those Elizabethan merchant adventurers who, having penetrated the Russia of their day, visited a Northern monastery to find a native painting of the Last Judgment, in which the righteous on one side were all Russians while the sinners grouped on the other side and sentenced to eternal perdition were all foreigners.

Indeed, the Iron Curtain, over which we are making such a fuss, is nothing new. It is an established Russian institution, only now and again temporarily set aside by some rebellious hand like Peter the Great's, opening a window to let foreign ideas drift in. Such ideas, it should be pointed out—and this immense tome offers ample evidence of it—rarely remain in their pure state, but are translated by Slavic minds into something having but little relation to the original idea. There are implications in this which have their bearing on the use to which Russians have put the ideas of Marx and Engels, though, to be sure, the Soviet author of this book has not pursued the question he raises to its ultimate conclusion.

The earliest Russian culture, as the author points out, derives from Byzantium. The earliest narratives usually came from there direct, but underwent curious changes in translation. Such is the case of Josephus's "History of the Judaic War," translated under the title of "Narrative of the Destruction of Jerusalem," made presumably from Josephus's own Greek version. We are told it is not so much a translation as "a free paraphrase of the foreign original into a language resembling that of Russian eleventh- or twelfth-century monuments," and containing additions and expressions by no means warranted by the original text, and of a nature calculated to appeal to the Russian mind. This is freely admitted by the author, who goes so far as to reject unsupported evidence of authenticity offered by German scholars. The Josephus work, by the way, was very important during the Kiev period, and its influence "was particularly manifest in the 'Tale of Igor's Expedition,' while the chronicle narrative showed it to some extent."

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Censorship Can Be Stopped

BY a recent and memorable decision in the Philadelphia courts in which he dismissed the case against five local booksellers accused of selling obscene literature, Judge Curtis Bok has added an arch to the shaking temple of liberty to match that erected by Judge John M. Woolsey fifteen years ago in a famous decision which permitted James Joyce's "Ulysses" to be printed and sold in the United States. The reader may recall with pleasure Judge Woolsey's closing sentence: "But my considered opinion, after long reflection, is that whilst in many places the effect of 'Ulysses' on the reader undoubtedly is somewhat emetic, nowhere does it tend to be an aphrodisiac." Judge Bok also wrote that he had "read with thoughtful care" the nine contemporary novels which had been seized by the police through some absurd and, let us hope, only temporary revival of outraged puritanism.

The books in question in Philadelphia were James T. Farrell's trilogy, "Studs Lonigan," and his "A World I Never Made"; William Faulkner's "Wild Palm" and "Sanctuary"; "End As a Man," by Calder Willingham; "God's Little Acre," by Erskine Caldwell, and "Never Love a Stranger," by Harold Robbins. The law which was responsible for this outrage against common sense and the freedom of the press is based on an earlier act of sixty years ago, a verbose and confusing sentence some four hundred words long. In brief, the law states that anyone in Pennsylvania

can be fined or jailed for a year who has in his possession with intent to sell, lend, give away, or advertise a book, magazine, etc., that is obscene, lascivious, filthy, indecent, or disgusting. Fortunately, judicial practice in these cases has progressed in many states. In Pennsylvania in 1940 the court had said, "In determining whether a work is obscene it must be construed as a whole and regard must be paid for its place in the arts." The prosecution had two strikes against it when the case was tried, so that Judge Bok was able to demolish what remained of it with ease, and to devote most of his long decision to a survey of the broader aspects of the censorship of literature. It is obvious that he did so with a good deal of pleasure and with literary skill.

The main points of his contention that these books were not obscene should be widely read, for they erect a firm barrier against repetitions of this kind of judicial nonsense. "The law," he wrote, "seems to assume that the word obscene has an inherent meaning, both as to what it is and what it does," and he goes on to prove that it has no inherent meaning, or different meanings historically and legally, and "is not indictable unless actual or imminent criminal behavior can be traced to it." He quotes a statement of Justice Holmes to prove his theory: "The public does not read a book and simultaneously rush by the hundreds into the street to engage in orgiastic riots." To use a recent example, it cannot be proved that any criminal act was occasioned by reading Faulkner's "Sanctuary" or Farrell's "Studs Lonigan," whereas in the recent outcry against sadistic or erotic "comic" magazines it could be and was proved that children had been influenced by them to commit crimes and that they had led to a certain amount of juvenile delinquency.

"No literature is vital," said the judge, "that cannot be vulgarized. . . . Far from inciting to lewd and lecherous desires, which are censorially pleasurable, these books leave one either with a sense of horror or of pity for the degradation of mankind." Recalling perhaps New York's Justice Ford, who some years ago became an object of ridicule by using his adolescent daughter as a weapon for the prosecution against certain books, Judge Bok summons his own three daughters for the defense. "I should prefer," he said, "that my own daughters meet the facts of the world in my library than behind a neighbor's barn, for I can face the adversary there directly. . . . By the time [a girl] is old enough to read them, she will have learned the biologic facts of life and the words that go with them."

The Judge thus neatly disposes of the sentimentalists who are always present at these occasions to protest that all literature should be based on what is fit for a child to read.

In another section he uses the opportunity given to him to refer to the present attacks on books or plays that do not conform to some present-day conceptions of social ideology and psychology. The recent furor created by the attempts to censor, or to keep from motion-picture audiences, "Oliver Twist," "The Merchant of Venice," and "Uncle Tom's Cabin" may have been in Judge Bok's mind when he said, "Censorship, which is the policeman of decency whether religious, patriotic, or moral, has had distinct fashions, depending on which great questions were agitating society at the time." In the Middle Ages it was heresy and blasphemy; later it became sexual morality. Today it is again heresy, political rather than religious heresy; it is again sedition against the state; and we are apparently about to add the censorship by minority groups who, rightly or wrongly, would forbid the presentation of characters in fiction and the drama who appear to them to be dangerous caricatures of supposedly racial traits.

Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press and that cannot be limited without being lost." While Judge Bok is helping to win the battle for free literature on one score, it may be lost

Atomic Age Fables



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THE magician had done the trick ten thousand times.

He had mastered the temperature of the water, conquered the lack of air, and broken the formulae of all locks.

On that day he was again placed in the great steel vault. It was sealed with lead, and wrapped in immense chains. Then it was immersed in the icy river.

When the vault reached the floor, he felt a drop on his forehead. Was it water of the river or the sweat of fear?

He will never tell.

—J. S.

The Saturday Review