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The *Journal intime*: From Document to Literary *Œuvre* in André Gide's Hybrid Works

I need to begin with a brief note about the term 'journal intime' in the title of this paper. This is often taken as being simply the French term for the diary, but it is best considered a more specific form, which is written for private use, at least in the first instance, and is focused primarily on the diarist's personal and often psychological experience. When I use the term 'diary' in this paper, I am referring to the French tradition of the *journal intime*, as opposed to the often more exterior focus of the Anglophone diary, epitomised by the politics and social observations of Samuel Pepys's diary.

Research into the writing, publication and reading of diaries in France has come to a certain degree of consensus about their historical development, although particular problems remain regarding their relationship with neighbouring forms of life-writing, such as autobiography and correspondence, and with the fictional counterparts of all these written forms.

The career of André Gide forms a bridge between two salient points in this history. The first point is the wave of diary publications in the 1880s, notably the posthumously published diaries of the Swiss philosopher Henri-Frédéric Amiel and of the artist Marie Bashkirtseff, and the anthomously published diaries of literary life written by the Goncourt brothers. This stage in the diary's development is marked by great success with the reading public, but rejection by the critical institution, on the grounds that its interest is as a documentary record of the author, which was considered alien to the category of literature.

The second point in this history is the 'consecration' of the *journal intime* as a 'literary genre' (to borrow the terms of contemporary critics), a change which is brought about by Gide's own publication in 1939 of his *Journal 1889-1939*. This was significantly the first work by any living author to be published in Gallimard's prestigious collection of canonical works, the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Although the literary status of the diary continued to be disputed after this, especially in the subsequent decades of formalism and high theory, Gide's *Journal* nonetheless continued to be considered the turning point in the diary's admission into the literary field, and a model of the way in which a published diary can invite literary as well as documentary ways of reading.

At the risk of labouring the metaphor, Gide's publishing career forms a bridge between these two points not just because it spans between them chronologically, but also because it was *by means of* this publishing career that the diary and its readers got from one point to the other. More specifically, I propose that the publications of real diaries over this period, by authors including Jules Renard, Eugène Dabit and Charles du Bos, and even the real diaries of Gide himself, do not sufficiently explain the changes that made possible the sudden literary success of Gide's *Journal* in 1939. I suggest that this missing link is to be found in certain fictional, experimental and, in various ways, hybrid works of diary-writing, especially those published by Gide (although another important work which I shall not have time to discuss is the diary of Valery Larbaud's fictional character Archibald Olson Barnabooth).

I shall begin by saying a few words about the publication of Gide's *Journal*, and precisely what it means to say that this work was treated as a literary *œuvre* in comparison with the documentary treatment of earlier diaries. I shall then illustrate how three works by Gide relate to and prepare for the 1939 *Journal*. These works are *Les Cahiers d'André Walter* from 1891 (translated as *The Notebooks of André Walter*), *Paludes* (or *Swamps*), published in 1895, and *Le Journal des faux-*

monnayeurs (or *The Diary of the Counterfeiters*), published in 1926 very soon after the publication of Gide's novel *Les Faux-monnayeurs* (or *The Counterfeiters*). But first, the *Journal 1889-1939*.

Journal 1889-1939

I should clarify that I am using the terms 'literature' and the 'œuvre' not as absolute categories but to refer to entirely historical phenomena. This means that, when contemporary readers describe Gide's *Journal* as a literary œuvre, they are effectively saying that it is appropriate to apply to it literary ways of reading, which in turn wheels on an apparatus of historically variable conventions which are implicitly shared by other contemporary readers.

The most unusual thing about the literary importance which was attributed to the *Journal* is the fact that most of its contents had already been published in various small collections and spread over the fifteen volumes of Gide's *Œuvres complètes* (his *Complete Works*) published between 1932 and 1939. However, his diaries maintained a largely documentary role in these earlier publications, and a preface in the *Œuvres complètes* states that the diary printed in these volumes will 'serve to cast light on the œuvre, by showing the deep reasons which pushed the author to write each of his works'.¹ In fact, Jean-Paul Sartre remarks in his own war-time diaries that he had found the diary in Gide's *Œuvres complètes* to be boring, but he finds this same diary in the form of the *Journal 1889-1939* to be enormously interesting, and discusses it at great length.²

It is therefore the form, paratext, and immediate circumstances of the *Journal's* publication that invite readers to apply to it certain interpretative codes, which have the effect of transforming it almost beyond recognition. I shall now address how the works by Gide that I mentioned earlier were responsible for creating these interpretative codes, which together make up a literary way of reading the diary.

Les Cahiers d'André Walter

Les Cahiers d'André Walter is the diary of the character André Walter, which begins soon after the death of his mother and the marriage of his cousin, with whom he has fallen in love, to another man. He withdraws into solitude and begins work on writing a novel entitled *Allain*. The composition of this novel drives him to madness, which leads to his death soon after he arrives at its conclusion.

This work is now read as a novel written by the young André Gide, but it was initially presented convincingly as the real diary of a real André Walter, and press reviews from 1891 show that at least some readers were thoroughly taken in. Over the following months it became known that André Walter was the fictional creation of a certain, largely unknown, André Gide, but even after this point Gide continued to present some minor works under the name of André Walter.

This deception creates a very different dynamic from an overtly fictional diary novel, which need not be plausible at all, and which is governed globally by novelistic interpretative codes. In contrast, the *Cahiers d'André Walter* effectively contain two texts, the real diary which appears to a reader who is unaware of the deception, and the fictional diary which appears to the informed reader. In the course of discovering that André Walter is not real but a fictional creation, a reader comes to bring into confrontation these two texts, as well as the different interpretative codes which produced them.

What emerges from this confrontation is that this particular form of the real diary can be read, as an

entirely truthful work, in a way that is analogous to the way it can be read as a novel. The aspects of its form which make this possible are that it is apparently an integral publication of the diarist's original manuscript, which covers a certain diary-writing project in its entirety from its conception through to an end-point which is partly a logical development of the diary-writing project itself. This is very different from the form of real published diaries more common at the time, consisting of excerpts selected posthumously by an editor, and it is this unity of the diary-writing project itself that mirrors the unity of the novel guaranteed to the reader by generic convention.

The way this analogy works in practice is that the expectations and questions that a novel creates for its readers in the opening pages, which are to be variously satisfied, answered or thwarted by the rest of the novel, are replaced here by the initial terms of the diarist's project, be it one of exploration, deliberation or confession, and which may in turn be satisfied, disappointed or modified over time.

The principal difference between the real diary and the fictional one is that the reader of the fictional diary shares the totalising perspective of the author (by which I mean a textual author figure), whereas in the real diary the reader has a different perspective from that of the diarist (again, the textual figure of the diarist rather than a historical person), who is primarily concerned, in any given diary entry, with the events of the very recent past. It therefore falls to the reader to find patterns, repetitions and themes in the diary which are beyond the conscious rhetorical control of the diarist, in a way which makes the reading of a diary an essentially more free pursuit than the reading of a novel.

This opposition between the diary and the novel is also developed in André Walter's philosophical preoccupations. His philosophical reflections are complex and often esoteric, but it will suffice to say that he has an overarching desire, influenced by Spinoza, to escape from the diaristic contingency of his experience into the timelessness and necessity of the work of art, and to reach from the position of a diarist to that of an author. His eventual madness and death is in large part caused by his failure to reconcile these two positions.

Paludes

Paludes (or *Swamps* in English), published in 1895, is the diary of an author character in the process of composing a work of fiction, but it is otherwise completely different from *Les Cahiers d'André Walter*. It is explicitly presented as the fictional work of André Gide, the diarist himself remains unnamed, and the main text is so implausible, indeed farcical, that it could never be mistaken for a real diary. The work comes at a point in Gide's career when he is breaking away from the Symbolist milieu and aesthetics that had dominated his earlier works, and the overriding tone is one of satire.

What makes *Paludes* so subversive, and often bewildering, is its carnivalesque proliferation of different texts and narrative instances, which are related to each other in a web of over-determined relationships (and I am using the term over-determined here not in a strictly Freudian sense, but to mean that they are not merely ambiguous, and not merely determined in two or more ways, but determined in two or more ways which positively contradict each other). Broadly speaking, two of these over-determined relationships concern the diary. Firstly, the main narrative appears in different ways to be the narrator's diary, but also a retrospective written account, an interior monologue, and a number of other narrative forms. Secondly, the main narrative in some ways appears to be the diary accompanying the composition of the narrator's novel (also entitled *Paludes*), and in other ways it appears to be, somehow, the narrator's novel itself.

Besides these structural differences from *Les Cahiers d'André Walter*, the narrator's philosophical preoccupations are also very different in *Paludes*. In fact, they are almost directly opposite. He lives in a stagnant world of necessity and repetition (which relates to the swamps of the title), and, influenced this time by Leibniz, he tries in various ways to grasp contingency both in his diary-writing and in his novel (it should be noted here that the subtitle of *Paludes* is 'A Treatise on Contingency', and its Latin epigraph, 'dic cur hic', is a reference to Leibniz). The problem of contingency is related to his desire to commit a free act, and this too is a subject of experimentation in the diary and in his novel, each of them bringing some modest degree of success.

Whereas the structure of *Les Cahiers d'André Walter* invites readers to approach the real diary in a way which is analogous to the way they might read a novel, the over-determinacies of *Paludes* call into question any assumptions about the literary *œuvre* or the diary which a reader might bring to the text. For all that, it does not leave the reader without at least some indication of a new direction to follow. This new direction involves the literary *œuvre* changing by adopting certain characteristics from the diary. It will relinquish the ahistorical necessity characteristic of the Symbolist aesthetic to embrace the contingency of the diary, its capacity for action in writing, and its reduced degree of authorial control.

Le Journal des faux-monnayeurs

Les Faux-monnayeurs (*The Counterfeiters*), published in book form in 1926, is a novel narrated in part by the diary of an author character called Édouard, who is in the course of writing a novel, also entitled *Les Faux-monnayeurs*. In his diary, Édouard spends a long time reflecting on the process of adapting his diaristic, real-life experience into the fiction of his novel, all of which has great relevance to our reading of Gide's novel, and to Gide's ongoing thought on the diary and the literary *œuvre*.

The novel was followed by the publication, several months later, of *Le Journal des faux-monnayeurs* (*The Diary of the Counterfeiters*), a real diary written by Gide, in which he relates his experience of writing the novel, *Les Faux-monnayeurs*. It might seem that this real diary is subordinated to the fictional *œuvre* of the novel, as, for example, a document in the service of a genetic criticism of the novel. But a reading of *Le Journal des faux-monnayeurs* reveals it to be nothing of the sort, and I suggest that it is the unusual structure binding these two texts together, the novel and the diary, that has the greatest significance in preparing the way for the 1939 *Journal*.

The diary-writing project undertaken in the *Journal des faux-monnayeurs* effectively relates how the works arrived at this structure. This particular diary is initially conceived as a tool for reflecting on the nature of the novel in general, and deliberating about the immediate technical problems of writing *Les Faux-monnayeurs*. This role is soon joined by a second, as Gide considers placing the diary's theoretical reflections, or even the diary in its entirety, within the novel, attributed to the author character Édouard (and indeed there are many passages which are almost identical in *Le Journal des faux-monnayeurs* and in Édouard's diary). The diary then takes on a third role, in gathering anecdotes, observations, and characters from real-life experience, and giving them a space in which to develop and interact, before being used in the novel. All three of these functions of the diary develop an overall reflection on reality and fiction (or in the words of Édouard, 'the rivalry between the real world and the representation which we make of it'),³ a reflection in which Gide attempts to use the contingency and freedom of the real diary to correct what he sees as the flaws of the Realist novel, that is, the logical and inevitable prolongation of lines from an initial situation, which in effect bears little resemblance to reality.

With regard to this opposition between reality and fiction, the combined structure of *Les Faux-monnayeurs* and *Le Journal des faux-monnayeurs* allows two general interpretations. In the first interpretation, Édouard is the bad novelist, who fails to use his diaristic reality to produce a good novel, whereas Gide is the good novelist who has instilled the virtues of the diary into his own novel. In the second interpretation — and this is endorsed by all those critics who find *Les Faux-monnayeurs* to be a masterful and perhaps orchestrated failure — Gide fails just as Édouard fails, and just as we have Édouard's diary rather than his novel, perhaps we should consider Gide's real diary in *Le Journal des faux-monnayeurs* to be the real literary *œuvre*.

In practice the structure of the two works is undecidable between these two interpretations, and it is this tension, with the literary status of the real diary at stake, that is most important for the future reception of the *Journal* in 1939.

Return to the *Journal* 1889-1939

I shall finish by returning to the 1939 *Journal* in light of the texts which I have just discussed. The *Journal*'s presentation in a single volume, in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, with almost no critical apparatus, and apparently depicting the unified totality of a fifty-year diary-writing project intimately related to Gide's literary career, invites readers to interpret it as a literary *œuvre* in a way which was made conceivable by earlier fictional and experimental diaries. But rather than allowing the reader to treat the *Journal* as if it were fiction, they challenge and alter a concept of the literary *œuvre* to accommodate the values of the diary, such as its contingency, its capacity to constitute an act, and the interpretative freedom that it offers a reader.

The *Journal* is the endpoint of the process I have been discussing, but of course it is also a new beginning for the diary in France, and the interest which younger generations find in the *Journal*, notably manifested in the readings of Sartre, Roland Barthes and Maurice Blanchot, is precisely this mutual interrogation of the diary and the literary *œuvre*.

- 1 André Gide, *Œuvres complètes*, 15 vols (Paris: NRF, 1932-39), I, p. X; this translation and all others in this paper are my own.
- 2 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Carnets de la drôle de guerre*, in *Les Mots et autres écrits autobiographiques*, ed. by Jean-François Louette (Paris: Gallimard Bibl. de la Pléiade, 2010), p. 375.
- 3 Gide, *Les Faux-monnayeurs* in *Romans et récits: Œuvres lyriques et dramatiques*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard Bibl. de la Pléiade, 2009), II, p. 326-7.