

## ONE

# From Munich to Montoire

## *National Crisis and the Man of Letters*

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A SENSE OF FINALITY pervaded André Gide's personal and professional life on the eve of the Second World War. The writer was nearing age seventy. His major literary works (with the exception of *Thésée*) were behind him, and he had sworn off political involvement following the publication of his 1936 *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* and 1937 *Retouches à mon retour de l'U.R.S.S.* His wife Madeleine—partially estranged, but still a major interlocutor in Gide's emotional and intellectual life—died in April 1938.<sup>1</sup> The following year saw the publication of Gide's *Journal, 1889–1939* and of the fifteenth and final volume of his *Œuvres complètes*. Yet the book was not closed, for the approaching war forced Gide to take political positions even as it plunged him into the greatest political confusion he had ever known.

On 30 September 1938, the leaders of France, Britain, Italy, and Germany signed the Munich Agreement, thus condoning Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland. To many Europeans, the pact meant to secure "peace in our time"<sup>2</sup> came as a welcome relief. Roger Martin du Gard subscribed to this view, and Gide initially shared his friend's opinion, believing that reason—if not justice and right—had prevailed (G/MG 152; J II: 625). Gide soon revised his assessment, however, on receiving a letter from Jef Last, the young Dutch communist with whom he had traveled to the Soviet Union two years before. Last saw the Munich Agreement not as a victory but as the triumph of violence, injustice, and cowardice—as democracy's "suicide" (G/Las 59–60).<sup>3</sup> War had been averted for the moment, Last wrote on 1 October 1938, but by yielding to a dictator the signatory nations had taken a giant step toward the massive conflict that "Hitler predicted and wished for in his book *Mein Kampf*: Germany's holy war to annihilate France."<sup>4</sup> Gide swiftly

came around to Last's position (albeit with some of his usual wavering and hesitation); Martin du Gard changed his views only after Hitler annexed the remainder of Czechoslovakia six months later (Martin, "Ce fou" 119). Though his correspondence reveals Gide's acute attention to the Munich crisis, the *Journal* is silent on this topic. Utterly preoccupied with the events of October 1938, Gide abandoned his diary for two full weeks. When he resumed writing, it was to note that his silence did not indicate lack of interest in "public affairs";<sup>5</sup> rather, his thoughts on political events seemed out of place in the diary. Moreover, his silence revealed the depth of his shock and bereavement (J 3: 404). This reaction set the tone for the *Journal* in the coming years. Throughout the phony war and early Occupation, Gide's literary production consisted almost entirely of this war-inflected diary with its alternating silences and outpourings, its attempts to ignore then to understand.

This chapter examines Gide's political and intellectual trajectory from Munich to Montoire—from the 1938 pact that paved the way for Hitler's expansionism to the 1940 encounter that set France on a course of collaboration with Germany. After discussing Gide's decisions about how best to give of himself as the war approached, I trace his reactions to the war, examining the bewildering shifts in his political opinions and the stylistic evidence of his internal struggle to understand and judge what was happening around him. Next, I turn to several attempts to press Gide into political service—both to support and contest the aims of Germany and Vichy. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the many vicious attacks on the author during the "querelle des mauvais maîtres" that followed the Armistice as well as Gide's robust refutation of the argument that literature had weakened the nation.

#### THE PHONY WAR: ENGAGEMENT BEHIND THE SCENES

Immediately after the declaration of war, newspapers and the airwaves were filled with patriotic exhortations by some of France's most prominent intellectuals. Gide's friends Jean Schlumberger and Georges Duhamel put considerable effort into patriotic writings during this period,<sup>6</sup> and Duhamel, André Maurois, and Paul Valéry<sup>7</sup> addressed the nation over the airwaves (CAG 6: 151). Like many other readers, Gide found these patriotic essays rather ineffectual (G/MG 192, 202–04); he reacted even less favorably to the self-congratulatory tone of many radio broadcasts, lamenting French reaction even more than the events themselves.<sup>8</sup> Gide noted, with a touch of false modesty, that "a few crackpots" (notably Duhamel) had attempted to persuade him that his eloquence would suffice to "calm the troubled waters."<sup>9</sup> However, close friends who were well acquainted with Gide's political malleability dissuaded him from speaking publicly and succeeded in keeping him away from Paris, where the pressures to do so would undoubtedly be too strong for Gide to resist (CAG 13: 476).<sup>10</sup> For the time being, at least, silence seemed to be

the best policy—both because Gide wished to retain his independence<sup>11</sup> and because he clearly perceived the risks of taking a public stance on a rapidly evolving situation: “I do not want to have to blush tomorrow for what I should write today” (J 4: 5).<sup>12</sup>

Wary of appeals to serve as a cultural or political figurehead, Gide instead chose to involve himself in a more personal and humanitarian way. During the First World War, he had eschewed political debates and devoted the bulk of his time to helping refugees through the Foyer Franco-Belge in Paris (SV 1057). At the outset of the Second World War, he adopted a similar approach, sparing no effort on behalf of the numerous intellectuals who appealed directly to him for assistance. Gide’s involvement began in the spring of 1939, when exiles from Franco’s Spain began to fill French refugee camps. From the perspective of his friend Claude Mauriac, Gide approached these visits as something of a dilettante, taking autographed copies of his works to the Spanish Republican refugees and appearing to be drawn primarily by “those laughing dark boys who play pelota [. . .] in front of the [camp] gate” (*Conversations* [Eng.] 157).<sup>13</sup> Gide’s efforts on behalf of communist refugees such as Raoul Laszlo and Harry Domela were more effective, and his intervention with the Ministry of the Interior helped secure Domela’s release from a camp in Perpignan (G/Las 84; CAG 11: 133–34). In August 1939, Gide went to Pontigny, where intellectuals gathered each summer to debate various literary and political issues, to attend a *décade* devoted to the plight of refugees. His presence provided young Mauriac with an opportunity to praise Gide’s “ardent” efforts on behalf of refugees and point out that he had already saved many political exiles from “the wretchedness of the camps.”<sup>14</sup>

Among these detainees were numerous exiles from Austria and Germany—most of them Jewish, and all violently opposed to Hitler. In an October 1939 statement in *Le Petit Niçois*, Gide denounced France’s indiscriminate incarceration of German and Austrian nationals—even those who had been deprived of their citizenship and were technically stateless—and cited England’s more humane approach as a model (Frayse). Following the article’s publication, the writer was inundated with pleas for help from internees (G/P 231).<sup>15</sup> Working closely with André Dubois of the Ministry of the Interior and the Commission de Triage in Nice, Gide managed to secure the release of several prisoners who had given “sufficient proof of attachment to France” (G/Sch 887; SV 1058).<sup>16</sup> Despite his considerable efforts, however, Gide’s success was extremely limited (CAG 6: 160). The failure of many of his attempted interventions led Gide to worry that he was suspect, “red-tinted,”<sup>17</sup> in the eyes of the military authorities. Since one of the unspoken fears motivating the internments was apprehension about possible communist propaganda by anti-Nazi Germans, Gide worried that his recommendations might actually compromise those he was trying to help (G/Sch 892, 895–96).<sup>18</sup>

Gide's frustration was underscored by his conviction that general measures—rather than piecemeal efforts on behalf of individual internees—were called for (*G/P* 232).<sup>19</sup> Above all, he worried that France's "monstrous" mistreatment of German refugees might provide excellent material for Germany's propaganda campaign to keep America out of the war (*G/Sch* 890, 1070).

Though he deplored the camps' unnecessarily harsh conditions and condemned the lack of discernment in French detention policies, Gide nonetheless agreed with the general principle of internment.<sup>20</sup> His diary entry of 25 May 1940 is a study in ambivalence:

Concerning [Léon] Blum, you said: a Jew cannot be a true patriot because he has no true homeland. And now [ . . . ] you say: every German Jew is a German before he is a Jew, and remains German despite the persecutions and massacres. [ . . . ] That said, I hastily add that I wholeheartedly applaud the decision that has been made to intern all Germans indiscriminately [ . . . ] and even if there were among them only one traitor per hundred or per thousand, we would be right to act thus: the peril is too great.<sup>21</sup>

With the German army advancing toward Paris as he noted these reflections, Gide's fears outweighed his political and humanitarian convictions. Within a month, however, his nation would fall, and an attempt to rescue Gide himself would put the writer in a position to help other imperiled intellectuals flee occupied France.

In the summer of 1940, the Emergency Rescue Committee (E.R.C.) sent American journalist Varian Fry to Marseille to help orchestrate the rescue of European artists and intellectuals "whose works and words had made them enemies of the Third Reich." Gide was among those the E.R.C. most wanted to evacuate, but, like many other key intellectuals, he chose to remain in France (*Fry* 3, 140): "I don't want to leave," Gide told Maria Van Rysselberghe, "I want to remain with all of you, all in the same boat."<sup>22</sup> Though he declined help for himself,<sup>23</sup> Gide petitioned Fry and Thomas Mann—an active member of the E.R.C. while in self-imposed exile in America—on behalf of several friends and associates, most of them prominent intellectuals.<sup>24</sup> Among these were the Czech communist Raoul Laszlo, Gide's German translator Ferdinand Hardekopf, and the Jewish Yugoslavian writer Jean Malaquais (*CAG* 6: 202; *Buenzod* 246–48; *CAG* 11: 133–34).<sup>25</sup> Another beneficiary of Gide's efforts was *Pléiade* editor Jacques Schiffrin, a Russian Jewish immigrant. The editor and his family sailed for Martinique in June 1941, but on arrival their ship was turned back to Casablanca. Gide had the Gallimard firm send Schiffrin money from his own royalties account and helped the family avoid internment in Morocco by lending them his Casablanca apartment. The family managed to sail to America later that summer, eventually making it to New York, where Schiffrin helped carry out a project Gide had mooted in December 1940. Talking with representatives

of the Emergency Rescue Committee during that first winter of the Occupation, Gide had proposed the idea of a French publishing company in America that would fulfill the urgent need of writers in occupied France (Lottman, *Left* 131; CAG 6: 254). As predicted, Schiffrin's Pantheon Books became an invaluable outlet for French authors—including Gide himself—during the Second World War.

#### AN INADVERTANT FIGUREHEAD

As France's senior man of letters at the outset of the war, André Gide would be recruited—with or without his knowledge and consent—by a wide range of political interests. Gide's prestige was so great that even the most unlikely parties pressed his writings into service to meet their political ends. In 1940, Berlin published *Experiences in the Congo: France's Inefficiency as a Colonial Power*, a pamphlet consisting of excerpts in English translation from Gide's *Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad*. While carefully disapproving of the "mystifying and disturbing effect" Gide's fictions supposedly exerted on readers, the pamphlet's introduction nevertheless touts Gide's authority and veracity: "even those who disagree with his tenets do not attempt to deny his uncompromising love of truth." There follow some thirty pages of passages foregrounding France's incompetent and inhumane management of its African colonies, and the pamphlet concludes: "The Congo horrors are merely another example of the criminal inefficiency of the French as colonizers. The methods employed by France in governing her colonies have brought disgrace upon her name" (7, 39). As Walter Putnam has argued, the German propagandists responsible for this pamphlet were presenting Gide's highly critical travelogue as "evidence that the French were unworthy allies of the British and Americans" (93).

The following year, the political-intellectual machine in occupied Paris would also seek to enlist André Gide to bolster the legitimacy of the Académie Française, whose wartime membership included many mediocre but politically "cooperative" writers (Lepape 430). In June 1941, Gide received a cryptically worded interzone card from Jean Paulhan: "P.V. ([Academician Paul] Valéry) sends word to Uncle G. (Gide) that if he wants to return to Paris the Académie would like nothing better than to elect him."<sup>26</sup> Gide, who had no desire to assume an official institutional role, made no reply to this indirect offer.

Even as Germany and occupied France tried to profit from Gide's writings and reputation, their opponents were attempting to recruit the nonconformist writer for the resistance cause. A cautious but highly public appeal came from writer Jules Romains, who, like Thomas Mann, had chosen self-imposed exile in America. In an August 1940 "Message aux Français"—part of a broadcast series relayed to France by the B.B.C.—Romains implored the

writers of his acquaintance (including Gide, whom he addressed by name) not to let France be dishonored by her defeat or reject the qualities that had historically constituted her *raison d'être* in the eyes of the world (38).<sup>27</sup>

Other appeals, made privately, were more concrete. The first came from Max-Pol Fouchet, founder of the Algiers journal *Fontaine*, an early resistance periodical. In July 1940, Fouchet contacted writers whose prestige could help *Fontaine's* mission of opposition. Foremost among these was André Gide, whose reply proved disappointing: unsure of the course events would take—unsure even of his own opinions—the writer preferred to wait before committing himself (Fouchet 123–24). Gide was still unready to commit in September 1941, when Jean-Paul Sartre came to visit, bearing encouraging news about “the state of mind in that other France”<sup>28</sup>—the occupied zone, where fledgling resistance movements were developing. Sartre, who humorously referred to himself as a “traveling salesman” peddling ideas—dangerous and subversive ones, Van Rysselberghe reported<sup>29</sup>—tried unsuccessfully to persuade the older writer to join the group *Socialisme et Liberté*. Having failed to convince Gide, Sartre next tried to enlist André Malraux, but again met with failure. As biographer Annie Cohen-Solal points out, Sartre's attempts to recruit Malraux and Gide were premature, for in 1941 most writers preferred “a passive, ‘wait and see’ attitude”<sup>30</sup> to immediate action (310, 314). Such was Gide's position: watch and wait, stay out of the public eye, and consign any political observations to the pages of his diary.

#### GIDE'S WARTIME JOURNAL

“Weathervane” and “chameleon”<sup>31</sup> are the tropes most commonly used to describe the confused, conflicted author of the wartime *Journal*. Political commentary in the diary runs the gamut, and opposing viewpoints follow each other in quick succession as Gide revises and retracts statements made just days—or hours—before. The disconcerting, even incoherent variety of viewpoints in the wartime *Journal* stems largely from the diarist's own character, and from the intellectual and social habits of a lifetime. First, there was Gide's profound lack of political sense. Pierre Herbart, an intimate and insightful friend, believed that Gide was “amoral” not by choice or provocation, but quite simply because he failed to understand politics. As a result, he often resorted to banal and conventional viewpoints, and was capable of making statements as reactionary as those of the right-wing *Action Française* group (*Recherche* 35–36). Then, too, Gide had an extraordinary capacity for being influenced—he often found himself subscribing to the opinions of the last person with whom he had spoken, or agreeing with a viewpoint simply because it was well expressed (J II: 705)—and the people who informed his thought during this period displayed a considerable diversity of opinion.<sup>32</sup> Finally, there was Gide's temperament—the mode of thinking of a self-

described “creature of dialogue” (IID 234)<sup>33</sup>—and a sort of professional bias that condemned the novelist to see both sides of any argument: “It is not with impunity that, throughout a whole lifetime, my mind has made a practice of understanding the other person,”<sup>34</sup> Gide wrote in January 1941 (J 4: 55).<sup>35</sup> These characteristics made for considerable incoherence in the early wartime diary—a “lack of intellectual rigor [that] reveals the extent of his confusion,” in Pierre Herbart’s words.<sup>36</sup>

Stylistic artifacts of Gide’s internal upheaval abound in the wartime diary. As Yaffa Wolfman astutely remarks, the interrogative mode dominates the pages in which Gide reflects on the coming war (141). Once the catastrophe had occurred, Gide shifted from the rhetoric of interrogation to that of persuasion—or rather, of self-persuasion. To maintain an illusion of control, Pierre Herbart contends, Gide took the initiative of accepting—even approving—France’s humiliating defeat in the pages of his *Journal* (*Recherche* 22). But the effort to reach a state of acquiescence left rhetorical traces, and some of the most shocking expressions of “acceptance” in the wartime *Journal*—the passages most often quoted and denounced by Gide’s critics—are hedged round by qualifying terms like “I am almost inclined to say” and “I try to persuade myself.”<sup>37</sup> These repeated expressions of restriction are the rhetorical remnants of Gide’s intellectual and moral struggle.

Gide often referred to his *Journal* as his most important work, and the outbreak of war prompted him to open his notebooks after a six-month silence. His chief source of anxiety at that point was the war’s threat to European culture: “Yes, all that might well disappear,” he wrote on 10 September 1939, “that cultural effort which seemed to us wonderful (and I am not speaking merely of the French effort)” (J 4: 3).<sup>38</sup> He doubted that even the sacrifice of those he loved most dearly could save the values he cherished (J II: 678). Despite his fears and pessimism, however, Gide did not oppose the war on principle, and he refused to sign pacifist Félicien Challaye’s September 1939 petition calling for an immediate and unilateral end to hostilities (Hebey 158).

The declaration of war found Gide in the village of Cabris on the Côte d’Azur, surrounded by the Van Rysselberghe-Herbert family<sup>39</sup> and numerous friends. Despite the “monstrous events,” the phony war was, for Gide, a period of “calm felicity among perfect friends [. . .] sheltered from the torment” (J 4: 14–15).<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the writer was deeply, anxiously interested in the mounting European conflict. During the summer of 1939, he spoke of living in an “era both exciting and loathsome,”<sup>41</sup> and Maria Van Rysselberghe described him as torn between horror and curiosity. Gide fed his craving for information by listening to whatever radio broadcasts he could receive, in whatever language available; as the clandestine press developed, he avidly read any available news from the occupied zone (CAG 6: 154, 281). Yet Gide’s keen curiosity was accompanied by an equally strong capacity for

detachment: “the ‘events’ interest me powerfully, I admit, but as a play [*un spectacle*] would,” he told Paul Valéry.<sup>42</sup> Gide found it easy to disengage his mind from events which, he claimed, “in no way affect my thinking.”<sup>43</sup>

Those thoughts that were unaffected by and unrelated to the war were the only ones Gide deemed worthy of recording in his *Journal* during the early months of the war. With a nod to Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations*, he declared: “My unseasonable thoughts, until better times, I will store up in this notebook” (J 4: 5).<sup>44</sup> Gide attributed his own propensity for happiness to the “antihistoricity” of his mind (J 4: 50).<sup>45</sup> In portions of the diary from this period, he seems to be blithely ignoring the ongoing tragedy, making full use of that propensity for happiness. More often, however, this impression proves to be an illusion. It was because current events left him bereft and nearly mute that Gide resolved to focus on the intimate and the abstract: “Through a sense of decency I am concerned in this notebook only with what has nothing to do with the war; and this is why I go for so many days without writing anything in it. Those are the days on which I have not been able to rid myself of the anguish, not been able to think of anything but *that*” (J 4: 18).<sup>46</sup>

Gide’s determination to “continue to cover the pages of this notebook as if *nothing were happening*”<sup>47</sup> colors the early wartime *Journal* (J 4: 42). Even when references to events and political opinions creep into the diary, they alternate with abstract intellectual reflections and “untimely” anecdotes that are truly vintage Gide. Given the historical context, such remarks easily give an impression of shocking insouciance. Thus, just two days after Gide mentions the “dismaying news”<sup>48</sup> of Germany’s invasion of the Low Countries, we find an entry describing familiar Gidian pleasures: having hoisted a group of children into a cherry tree so they could rob it of its fruit, Gide watched them play for more than an hour, and reflected that his greatest pleasure always came in the company of young children. Then, with a tinge of irony, Gide comments that France is experiencing the same glorious weather it had enjoyed during the summer of 1914: “How, despite the hideous horror of the war, can one help feeling joyful this morning?,” he asks.<sup>49</sup> If this passage—suppressed until 1997, undoubtedly because of its “unseemliness”—evokes the sensual pleasures of the *Nourritures terrestres*, there is a reason: recently recovered from the long and debilitating bout of nephritis that had kept him in bed throughout most of April 1940, Gide was again experiencing that fragile exuberance of convalescence he had described in the lyrical 1897 work.

That bout of nephritis—and plans to treat it with a mineral water “cure”—made for one of the oddest and most darkly comical episodes of Gide’s war. During his illness in April, Gide wrote to his friend Roger Martin du Gard that he would have to go to Vittel or Contrexéville to take the waters. Ironically, his quest for health and safety led him to that most infamous of French spa towns—Vichy. With the German army advancing, Marc Allégret cabled Gide on 25 May, urging him, in the name of an imaginary Dr.



Dubois, to begin his treatment at Capvern in the Pyrénées immediately. It was obvious that Allégret thought Gide was in danger; it was even possible that he was communicating an unofficial warning from the Ministry of the Interior (J II: 697). Rather than head toward the Spanish border as “Dr. Dubois” had suggested, Gide set off in the opposite direction, accepting a ride from a young Belgian refugee named Veza who was driving Gide’s doctor, Roland Cailleux, to Vichy. On 4 June the party left for Vichy, where Gide planned to see his old friend Arnold Naville, then proceed to the spa in the Pyrénées (J II: 698; Sheridan 541; CAG 6: 177). The twenty-two-hour drive to Saint-Genès-la-Tourette was interrupted some twenty times for verification of identity papers; on arriving in La Tourette, the voyagers learned of the German bombing raid on Paris during the night of 3 June (J II: 699; Sagaert, Notes [J II] 1394). Proceeding to Vichy, the three men were traveling against the tide of the *exode* (Hebey 161)—the mass southward “exodus” of some six to ten million refugees who had been flooding the roads of France since the invasion of Belgium on 10 May (Jackson 119–20).<sup>50</sup>

Gide’s *Journal* tells of fleeing families clogging the roads, wandering without a clear destination, of children separated from their families, and of parents desperately searching for those children. During his first night in Vichy, Gide was moved by the distressed cry “Pierre! Pierre!,” which he heard three times through his open window. The next morning, Arnold Naville explained that it was not a bereft man seeking a lost loved one, but the night watchman crying “Lumière! Lumière!” [“Lights! Lights!”] each time he saw a lighted window—in this case, Gide’s own (J II: 699; J 4: 21). Sensitive to the caller’s distress, Gide was nevertheless oblivious to the ways he might be endangering others with his open, lighted window. The window incident, like the entire trip northward to Vichy, is emblematic of the extent to which Gide was out of sync with the rest of the French population during this time of crisis—suffering deeply, but moving, behaving, and often thinking against the grain.

Giving up on the idea of a spa cure, Gide remained in Vichy until 16 June, departing days before the arrival of the German army and not long before the collaborationist government set up shop in the resort town (Sheridan 541; CAG 6: 178). Gide would spend the first two years of the Occupation on the Côte d’Azur, which fell under the jurisdiction of Pétain’s Vichy government.<sup>51</sup>

Marshal Pétain’s politics—and Gide’s reaction to them—form a short but crucial chapter of Gide’s wartime *Journal*. “[S]imply admirable”<sup>52</sup> was Gide’s assessment of the 20 June 1940 broadcast in which Pétain justified his request for an armistice on the basis of Germany’s overwhelming military superiority (J 4: 23). In approving of the Armistice, Gide was in the majority: most Frenchmen—even many who would later resist through their writings or actions—knew that a French victory was impossible and wanted

French soldiers' lives spared. Pétain's speech, which consisted chiefly of military facts and figures, was essentially unobjectionable (Pétain, *Actes* 449–50). There was little of an ideological nature, save the criticisms of interwar France: "Since our victory [in 1918], the pleasure principle has won out over the spirit of sacrifice. We have demanded more than we have served. We wanted to stint on effort; today we are encountering adversity."<sup>53</sup> These comments in fact coincided with Gide's own views on the Third Republic's interwar decadence: "It cannot be better expressed," Gide opined, "and these words console us for all the *flatus vocis* of the radio" (J 4: 23).<sup>54</sup>

As this statement suggests, Gide's assessment of wartime speeches had as much to do with rhetoric as with political positions. Indeed, it was the spin Pétain put on the Armistice that led Gide to withdraw his approval of the marshal a few days later. On 22 June, the day the Armistice was signed, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill addressed the French nation, asking all Frenchmen not under pressure from the enemy to assist with France's liberation. Churchill promised that England would take up the cause of the French people, despite the Bordeaux government's acceptance of the German conditions of armistice (qtd. in Pétain, *Discours* 346–47). Pétain responded the following day: dismissing Churchill as no judge of French interests and honor, he averred that France had chosen to cease fighting "independently and with dignity." With rousing but fallacious patriotic rhetoric, Pétain concluded: "We know that our nation remains intact as long as her children's love for her subsists."<sup>55</sup> This was too much for Gide to stomach:

Yesterday evening we heard with amazement Pétain's new speech on the radio. Can it be? Did Pétain himself deliver it? Freely? One suspects some infamous deceit. How can one speak of France as "intact" after handing over to the enemy more than half of the country? How to make these words fit those noble words he pronounced three days ago? How can one fail to approve Churchill? Not subscribe most heartily to General de Gaulle's declaration?<sup>56</sup> Is it not enough for France to be conquered? Must she also be dishonored? (J 4: 24)<sup>57</sup>

In later years, Gide would point to this early expression of support for de Gaulle as proof of his long-standing resistance allegiances. What he concealed throughout his lifetime was the retraction, two days later, of the *Journal's* denunciation of Pétain.

In a speech delivered on 25 June, the head of the État Français implicitly criticized both de Gaulle's decision to leave French soil and his call to rally in England and fight from the empire. Summarizing the battles of the past weeks, Pétain explained that he had sought the double armistice with Germany and Italy to avoid prolonging futile combat (Pétain, *Actes* 452–53). Again returning to the theme of France's interwar weaknesses, Pétain admonished: "Our defeat came of our slackness. The pleasure principle destroys what the spirit of sacrifice

has built up. I urge you, first of all, to undertake an intellectual and moral reform [*redressement*].”<sup>58</sup> Here again, the marshal was speaking Gide’s language. “Pétain’s explanations are clear, reasonable, and are the only ones we had any right to expect,” Gide wrote on 26 June: “I yield to his reasons, and cannot keep my mind in the state of protest I felt the day before yesterday. There is nothing to do but submit and accept, alas! what is inevitable, and against which all revolt can succeed only in dividing the French people.”<sup>59</sup>

Gide later chose to suppress this diary entry that invalidates the picture of surefooted progress toward resistance sentiments that he sought to present to the world. At the time, however, his approval of Pétain put him squarely in the mainstream of French opinion. In the summer of 1940, the Vichy policies he would come to disapprove had yet to be put in place. Even with the passage of time, however, Gide clung to the hypothesis of the *double jeu* (double game)—the idea that Pétain might be duping the Germans. In October 1942, he worried that he might die without ever finding out “[w]hether Pétain was not, at heart, the most ‘Gaullist’ of us all” (J 4: 126).<sup>60</sup> This fairly commonplace suggestion is followed by a somewhat more disturbing comment omitted from published versions of the *Journal* until 1997. Like many Frenchmen, suggests Jeannine Verdès-Leroux, Gide disassociated the “good” World War I hero Pétain from the “bad” Pierre Laval, who actively sought to promote the German agenda (272). Yet the October 1942 *Journal* entry reveals Gide’s willingness to believe that even Laval was playing a game to France’s advantage: “I go so far as to wonder whether Laval himself is not much more clever than he seems [. . .], whether his role, the most thankless of all, is not indispensable, and whether he isn’t playing it exactly as he should.”<sup>61</sup> Such doubts persisted, and Gide’s views on both Vichy and the Free French would waver dramatically throughout the war.

Equally changeable but more compelling to the author were his views on the German leader. Oddly enough, it was Hitler—not Pétain or de Gaulle—who truly captured Gide’s imagination. He could not help feeling “an admiration full of anguish, fear, and stupor” for the führer.<sup>62</sup> In the *Journal*, Gide repeatedly laments Hitler’s skillful manipulations and his exploitation of France’s weaknesses. Gide’s rueful admiration reaches its fullest expression in the passages concerning the French fleet. Gide saw plainly that the terms of the Armistice, which did not call for France to turn its naval fleet over to Germany, constituted an invitation to England to destroy France’s ships—which it did in the 3 July 1940 attack at Mers el-Kébir. While rejecting Vichy’s attempts to define England as the common enemy of France and Germany, Gide grudgingly admired Hitler’s “genius” in setting France and England against each other (J II: 708–09, 717).<sup>63</sup> Bitterness colors Gide’s admiration here, but elsewhere it is hope—even against reason—that characterizes his assessments. As Maria Van Rysselberghe reported, it was not defeat but the rot it revealed that distressed Gide so greatly. Despite

knowing that Hitler opposed everything he valued, Gide believed that the only hope was to rebuild the world. “Perhaps Hitler is the one who is destined to reestablish this new world,” he wondered. Speculating that the use of force was perhaps a necessary first step, Gide mused: “Who knows, perhaps we are doing Hitler an injustice by assuming that his ultimate dream is not one of worldwide harmony?”<sup>64</sup>

Many Europeans entertained such thoughts, but Gide’s particularly strong sense of *sympathie*, of attempting to understand others’ viewpoints, sometimes led him into fantasy and paradoxical thinking. In January 1941, he penned an imaginary dialogue with Hitler—a dramatization of his mental struggle between condemnation and admiration that is characterized by a mix of detachment and sick fascination. In this dialogue, the “voice of hell”<sup>65</sup> points out similarities between Hitler’s ideas and Gide’s own, even quoting from Gide’s writings (J 4: 57). Apostrophizing the *führer*, Gide writes: “Do not say, Hitler, that I am unable to understand you. I understand you only too well; but in order to approve of you it would be necessary for me to understand only you.”<sup>66</sup> In a more rational mode, Gide describes Hitler as the would-be “great gardener of Europe,”<sup>67</sup> calling his program of “pruning” inhuman and predicting that only mourning and devastation would remain on earth if his plan were to succeed (J 4: 57).

To Van Rysselberghe’s mind, the “Hitler” in this dialogue could only be a fiction: for Gide, she believed, “Hitler, in short, is a sort of symbol for all the reforms which would make possible a new life, on other bases.”<sup>68</sup> Yet the botanical metaphor of Hitler wielding pruning shears has significant resonances with Gide’s earliest political writings, revealing a continuity of antifascist opinion in the midst of Gide’s wartime confusion. In the January 1941 dialogue, Gide develops his horticultural metaphor to conclude that Hitler’s policies may end up strengthening those very values he wanted to suppress: “Indeed, persecutions act like plant-pruning, which precipitates into the remaining buds all the sap that was previously insufficient to nourish the whole shrub” (J 4: 59).<sup>69</sup> The implicit comparison here is with right-wing ideologue Maurice Barrès, whose novel *Les Déracinés*—published at the height of the Dreyfus Affair in 1897—illustrated the deleterious consequences of “uprooting” and “questioned, by implication, the ‘health’ of uprooted people such as Jews” (Sheridan 3). Invoking his own dual heritage in his riposte—his mother was from Normandy and his father from the Languedoc—Gide called uprooting “a school of virtue”<sup>70</sup> that brings out latent qualities and fosters originality. In the 1903 essay “La Querelle du peuplier,” Gide took issue with Barrès for quoting Charles Maurras, the future founder of the Action Française group and “eventual ideologist of the Vichy government” (O’Brien, *Portrait* 130). To Maurras’s assertion that a poplar tree cannot stand uprooting, Gide replied with extensive botanical information, challenging Barrès’s denunciation of “uprooting” with a positive ethic of

“transplantation” (Gide, *Prétextes* 57). Decades later, Gide pointed out the similarities between Hitler’s values and those of Barrès and Maurras: shortly after Hitler came to power in 1933, Gide remarked that Barrès would probably approve “Hitlerism”; a year later, he observed that the doctrines Germany was currently espousing were those of Barrès, and that Hitler had made the French ideologue’s principle of “opportune justice”<sup>71</sup> his own. Reiterating his long-standing rejection of such doctrines, Gide claimed that it was simple to predict that Barrès’s nationalistic theories could easily be turned against France (J II: 404, 465). The portrayal of Hitler as gardener in the 1941 fantasy dialogue was a way for Gide to reassert his earlier arguments against extreme nationalism, though the alternating condemnation and identification tend to obscure the continuity of Gide’s political values.

While he held fast to certain core beliefs, Gide was profoundly shaken when France fell, and he remained confused as to his own political viewpoints for quite some time. Given the instability of his political opinions, Gide wisely decided to remain silent during the initial months of the Occupation. It was not yet time to take a public stand, Gide wrote in the June 1940 diary entry reaffirming his approval of Pétain: “For the moment I feel nothing in me but expectation [*de l’attente*]; and hope . . . but I do not yet know of what” (J 4: 26).<sup>72</sup> This familiar Gidian state of expectancy or *attente* effortlessly transformed itself into the political position shared by the majority of Frenchmen: *attentisme*. “Wait and see” was the predominant attitude at the outset of the Occupation. Who knew how the German and Vichy regimes would develop? Despite the anguish and humiliation of the invasion and Armistice, it was just possible, many believed, that the new order would bring about positive changes. Like most of his compatriots during that first summer and fall of the Occupation, Gide reasoned that there was nothing to be done but make the best of the situation: “To come to terms with one’s enemy of yesterday is not cowardice; it is wisdom, and accepting the inevitable,” he wrote on 5 September 1940: “What is the use of bruising oneself against the bars of one’s cage? In order to suffer less from the narrowness of the jail, there is nothing like remaining squarely in the middle” (J 4: 45).<sup>73</sup> Gide’s resignation and apparent willingness to cooperate with the former enemy would earn him bitter criticism at the end of the war. In point of fact, though, his views were unremarkable, and the much-maligned diary entry of 5 September should not be construed as a call to collaboration. Rather, as Pierre Assouline has aptly observed, the “center of the cage” represents the position of the silent majority, the *attentistes* (*L’Épuration* 38).

This is not to say that acceptance sat easily with Gide. On the contrary, though Gide described himself as “in no wise inclined toward revolt,” the *Journal* at times reflects his palpable effort to coax himself into an attitude of acceptance: “Doubtless it is good, it is wise to be resigned when one cannot do otherwise,” he wrote in an entry lamenting Vichy’s call for a “return to the

soil.” Resignation should not come with blinkers, however: “it is bad not to see clearly”<sup>74</sup>—to fail to recognize that the policy conferred a tremendous advantage upon Germany at France’s expense (J 4: 47).

Gide also believed it was imperative to see France clearly, without ignoring her less admirable characteristics. Despite his love for his country, Gide could not deny the decrepitude of Third Republic France,<sup>75</sup> and he attributed the defeat both to German “faults” and to French “qualities” (J II: 694, 702, 733). The full force of Gide’s sorrow and censure are apparent throughout the month of July 1940. Indeed, entries from this month are among those most often cited by Gide’s detractors. In the somber days leading up to the first Fête Nationale of the Occupation—by Vichy decree, a national day of mourning with church services for the dead rather than affirmations of France’s republican values—Gide made three diary entries that would later be denounced as attacks on French patriotism. Gide believed that nine out of ten Frenchmen would accept German domination if it guaranteed abundance, and lamented that French peasants cared more about the price of grain than about cultural luminaries like Descartes or Watteau. After all, he concluded on 14 July, patriotic feeling is no more constant than our other loves—which, if we are perfectly honest, do not always amount to much (J II: 711–13).

This last entry in particular would provide fuel for Gide’s detractors, not only because it maligned French peasants but also because it implicitly compared their patriotic feelings to Gide’s own highly suspect amorous behavior. Gide foresaw the reaction to such comments and observed that zealots reserved special scorn for those who cared less about the political regime than about the right to “think and [ . . . ] love freely.”<sup>76</sup> Provided he retained those rights, Gide himself would willingly adapt to the constraints of dictatorship—a *French* dictatorship, he hastens to add—the only regime that could save the nation from “decomposition” (J II: 712). Two important issues are at stake here, the first of which is Gide’s paradoxical leaning toward dictatorship at the outset of the Second World War. Pre-invasion predictions that only a dictatorship could save France<sup>77</sup>—a nation Gide diagnosed as suffering from excessive freedom—would resurface in the diary throughout the war. Yet Gide had long been an ardent antifascist, a believer in France’s republican ideals, and a champion of individualism. The second significant issue, Gide’s sexuality, was inextricably enmeshed with his deep attachment to individual freedoms, both in his own mind and in the eyes of the reading public. Long an outspoken defender of homosexuality, Gide had good reason to fear that the new regime might prevent him from loving as he chose. Indeed, Vichy legislation would criminalize pederasty in August 1942, some months after Gide had left France for North Africa (Copley 178, 203). Although the 10 July 1940 diary entry juxtaposes Gide’s sexual agenda and his pro-dictatorial proclivities in a troublesome way, it would be a mistake to interpret this pas-

sage as evidence of homofascist views. While much fine scholarship has been done on the link between fascism and homosexuality, it has little relevance for Gide, an avowed antifascist who, in any case, was drawn to young pubescent or prepubescent boys rather than to macho soldiers or the “beefcake” displays of some fascist iconography.<sup>78</sup> While certain post-Liberation detractors did not hesitate to make this connection, most of Gide’s wartime attackers interpreted his sexual orientation as an effeminizing, weakening influence, going so far as to blame this influence for the fall of France.

PERNICIOUS INFLUENCE:  
THE “QUERELLE DES MAUVAIS MAÎTRES”

When France fell to the Germans, many Frenchmen urgently sought a scapegoat to blame for the nation’s defeat. The culprit many influential politicians and writers lit upon was literature. “Pessimists, defeatists, immoralists and Corydons” filled the bookshelves, André Billy wrote in *Le Figaro*, and these *mauvais maîtres* (negative role models) had “exerted a terrible influence.”<sup>79</sup> In the national debate about deleterious intellectual influences—the “querelle des mauvais maîtres”—that followed the fall of France, writers like Gide, Proust, Valéry, and the surrealists were blamed for the nation’s “decadence” and defeat.<sup>80</sup> Many articles in the post-Armistice press took up Marshal Pétain’s call for intellectual and moral *redressement*, suggesting that literature must be set right in order to promote the nation’s recovery. Predictably, the influences these writers condemned stood in direct opposition to the “virile” values Vichy professed.

At a time when Vichy’s Minister of Education was announcing a strict program of physical and moral education designed to inculcate the discipline, work ethic, and sense of duty characteristic of “robust” nations, André Gide’s influence was perceived as highly undesirable (“La Jeunesse” 1). Gide had used his influence and considerable talents to demolish the values of religion and the family, claimed Camille Mauclair, who lamented the younger generation’s idolization of the author (7). It was Gide’s influence on French youth that became the focal point for most attacks. “La Jeunesse de France,” an anonymous article published in *Le Temps* in July 1940, was among the first to accuse Gide of corrupting France’s young people both morally and intellectually:

One cannot deny the influence of André Gide’s works on contemporary literature and on the minds of our youth. It is against this considerable but disastrous influence that we must react today. The seductive author of *L’Immoraliste* and *Le Traité de Narcisse* (sic) has led a troublesome school. He has molded a proud and decadent generation; under the pretext of sincerity, he has brought them up with a perverted moral sense.<sup>81</sup>

Pointing out that his anonymous attacker had apparently denounced him on the strength of his books' titles alone, Gide declined to defend himself publicly against such accusations (J II: 715).<sup>82</sup> In his diary, however, Gide energetically opposed the spirit of attackers like Mauclair, who accused him of "poisoning youth with doubt,"<sup>83</sup> by endorsing the salutary effects of doubt and questioning. Calling the education of youth the most crucial of tasks, Gide stressed the need to develop children's critical faculties: "There is nothing better against 'nazism,'" he wrote on 16 July 1940 (J 4: 34).<sup>84</sup>

To many people in the defeated nation, however, Gide—a self-avowed *inquiéteur* (disturber)—looked like a dangerous mentor. He was singled out for his defense of homosexuality and for his flirtation with communism during the 1930s (Mauclair 7). While many critics denounced Gide by name, others condemned him implicitly with references to "immoralism" or through more or less accurate quotations and paraphrases of his work. Marshal Pétain's personal secretary René Gillouin (Winock, *Histoire* 212) made Gide the chief target of his February 1942 article "Responsabilité des écrivains et des artistes." The centerpiece of Gillouin's condemnation comes from *Un Malfaiteur: André Gide*, a 1931 pamphlet in which Étienne Privaz excoriates Gide, labeling him the most obscene, noxious, and subversive writer of his time (10). The pamphlet features a bereaved father's account of his son, "a young man of great promise, [who] had been perverted, degraded, and finally led to suicide by the influence of André Gide."<sup>85</sup> Like Privaz, Gillouin wonders how many other suicides Gide may have caused (Privaz 26; Gillouin 3).<sup>86</sup> The story trotted out by Privaz and Gillouin was an old one that Gide rejected outright: "From beginning to end that story is a pure (or impure) invention, what the English call 'a forgery'" (J 4: 102).<sup>87</sup>

Whereas Gillouin suggests that Gide's personal influence was to blame for the anonymous young man's death, Privaz quotes the grieving father's assertion that the "pestilential influence of his obscene books"<sup>88</sup> obsessed his son and pushed him to suicide. For many contributors to the debate, it was the literary works themselves—or at least the intellectual atmosphere to which they contributed—that had weakened the French nation. Some rejoiced when book-banning began,<sup>89</sup> others hoped, in somewhat more moderate terms, that readers would abandon the writers who had led to the nation's downfall: "a novelist of immorality who, we hope, will no longer have any readers, set them [his readers] on the road to defeat by teaching them that 'every pleasure is worth snatching up,'" wrote J. Peyrade in 1941.<sup>90</sup> Even discerning critics like Emmanuel Mounier voiced some blame for the "mauvais maîtres." Refusing to detract from the literary value of works like *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* and *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Mounier nevertheless decried the mentality of the interwar period's "frolicsome and decadent intelligentsia":<sup>91</sup> "a certain Gidian climate, a certain Valéryan detachment, a certain Bergsonian pathos, a certain political conformity with opposing polari-



ties, a certain literature of excess contributed to the decomposition of the French soul."<sup>92</sup> Camille Mauclair made a similar argument in more explicitly political terms, declaring:

Byzantine, evading belief and virtue, at least a part of our literature since 1918 has not been worthy of our ephemeral victory. [. . . It has] contributed to a disaster which was not an unforeseen blow of fate but the inevitable consequence of generalized lack of restraint. Whereas in Germany fanatized youth renounced the seductions and dissolutions of individualism, and sacrificed them to a collective ideal, our literary stars were wantonly destroying national cohesion.<sup>93</sup>

Again laying the blame at Gide's doorstep, Mauclair blamed the *Nouvelle Revue Française*—so closely associated with Gide as to be considered *his* magazine—for presenting its “more or less clever and putrefying literary production” to the world as the “supreme expression of the taste and aspirations of postwar Frenchmen.”<sup>94</sup>

Gide, of course, rejected the notion that literature was to blame for France's defeat (J II: 700, 728). In October 1940—coincidentally, the month Marshal Pétain met with Hitler at Montoire to agree on a program of collaboration—Gide broke his self-imposed vow of silence. He did so with a contribution to *Le Figaro Littéraire's* series “Que sera demain la littérature?,” which featured thirty well-known writers' responses to a survey on the future of literature.<sup>95</sup> In his brief “Réponse à une enquête,” Gide responds mainly to the survey's second question: “Was our literature on the wrong track before the turmoil?”<sup>96</sup> Gide, who was blamed more than any other writer for France's prewar “decadence,” replies laconically: “It seems to me just as absurd to blame our literature for our defeat as it would have been to congratulate it in 1918, when we were victorious.”<sup>97</sup> The essay's final section addresses the survey's request to rank a number of literary genres—the novel, the essay, criticism, and poetry—in terms of their current importance (AQ 25). Gide ranks poetry first, using a biblical simile that he turns into a dig at Vichy rhetoric: France does not need a “return to the soil,” says Gide; instead, French culture needs, “like the Gospel seed, to die and renounce itself first. Beyond the grave, ‘on the third day,’ it will rise again, rejuvenated.”<sup>98</sup> Poetry will be the most natural expression of France's rebirth, Gide asserts.<sup>99</sup> Even more daring than the reference to Vichy's policy of “return to the soil” are the essay's remarks on criticism, a mode of thought Gide defines in terms that go beyond the literary. Although poetry may be the genre that will express France's rebirth, says the author, France must never let go of “its principal quality: criticism. I am speaking of criticism not as a ‘genre’ but as a very rare quality, that quality most indispensable to all real culture, a domain in which France has no equal [. . .] Criticism, in our time, is the most endangered faculty; consequently, we must cherish our critical qualities and virtues.”<sup>100</sup>

As early as autumn 1940, therefore, Gide was taking advantage of a question on literary criticism to encourage a spirit of ideological critique. Within a year, his “Interviews imaginaires” would begin to exploit the possibilities of literary criticism as political critique. In the meantime, however, came a period of involvement with the wartime *Nouvelle Revue Française* under the leadership of the Germans’ handpicked editor, fascist writer Pierre Drieu La Rochelle.