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| Dr. Elizabeth Geary Keohane is a Visiting Research Fellow at Trinity College Dublin and a Research Associate at the University of Dundee. Her doctoral thesis focused on the interplay between the imaginary voyage and the travel journal in André Gide and Henri Michaux. She has published articles on Gide, Michaux, Magritte, Butor and Said. | | | |
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| **Your article** |
| **Gide, André (1869-1951)** |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| André Gide (1869-1951) is frequently viewed as a pillar of modern French literature. From his early experimentations with Symbolism to the deeply confessional life writing that perhaps best defines his output, as encapsulated by his multi-volume *Journal*, Gide’s long and prolific career produced a wide variety of works. Gide himself was well aware of his constant tendency to hop among genres and themes, each new work always seeming to reject the preceding one. Perhaps the defining moment of Gide’s adult life occurred in Algiers in 1895 when, tantalised by the so-called exoticism of North Africa, and admitting his desire for the young male musician playing for the room, he came out. *L’Immoraliste* [*The Immoralist*] (1902), arguably his best-known work in the English-speaking world, focuses on Michel, who, finding a new zest for life, remains largely unapologetic for his sexual transgressions. From 1908 onwards, Gide held, as a founding member, a powerful editorial role at *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. *Si le grain ne meurt* [*If It Die*] and *Corydon* [*Corydon*], both published in 1924, essentially revealed his homosexuality to his readership, while 1925 saw the publication of what is widely recognised as his greatest contribution to modernism: the highly self-reflexive novel *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* [*The Counterfeiters*]. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947. |
| File: gide1.jpg  Figure A Young Andre Gide.  Source: <http://www.andregide.org/photo_gallery/gid77.html>  André Gide (1869-1951) is frequently viewed as a pillar of modern French literature. From his early days as a Symbolist to the deeply confessional life writing that perhaps best defines his output, as encapsulated by his multi-volume *Journal*, Gide’s long and prolific career produced a wide variety of works. Gide himself was well aware of his constant tendency to hop among genres and themes, each new work always seeming to reject the preceding one. After his initial dalliances with the Symbolist group (notably, his 1893 work *Le Voyage d’Urien* [*Urien’s Voyage*]), he went on to send up the literary salon in *Paludes* [*Marshlands*] (1895). Classed as a *sotie* (seen as akin to a farce) by Gide, the inventive and self-reflexive structure of this work has led to it being considered a forerunner to modernism. In an 1893 journal entry, Gide, drawing from heraldry, had already outlined his highly influential idea of the ‘mise en abyme’ in literature, that is, the notion of self-reflexivity, or a work within a work.  File: gide2.jpg  Figure Andre Gide, in 1893 in Biskra.  Source: <http://www.andregide.org/photo_gallery/gid7.html>  Perhaps the defining moment of Gide’s adult life occurred in Algiers in 1895 when, tantalised by the so-called exoticism of North Africa, and in the company of Oscar Wilde, he admitted his desire for the young male musician playing for them, and thus came out. In acknowledging his homosexuality while continuing to be informed by his strict Protestant upbringing, Gide wholly embraced the duality central to his identity in his writing. Wilde went on to be the inspiration for Ménalque in Gide’s *Les Nourritures terrestres* [*Fruits of the Earth*] (1897), a text which, despite its initial limited run, would subsequently garner considerable popularity among younger readers in the interwar period. In 1935, an additional text, *Les Nouvelles Nourritures* [*New Fruits of the Earth*], appeared.  Arguably his best-known work in the English-speaking world, *L’Immoraliste* [*The Immoralist*] (1902) focuses on Michel, who, finding a new zest for life, remains largely unapologetic for his sexual transgressions. In true Gidian fashion, this was followed up by *La Porte étroite* [*Strait is the Gate*] (1909), an austere tale of religious devotion and self-sacrifice.  File: gide3.jpg  Figure Andre Gide.  Source: <http://www.andregide.org/photo_gallery/gid37.html>  From 1908 onwards, Gide held, as a founding member, a powerful editorial role at *La Nouvelle Revue Française*. While he reportedly passed on Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*, he nonetheless relished being able to champion a variety of younger writers over the decades, thus cementing his influential status at home and abroad. His international stature was further confirmed by his work appearing quickly in translation, and various friendships with important English-language writers such as Joseph Conrad and Arnold Bennett. This decade also produced Gide’s *Les Caves du Vatican* [*The Vatican Swindle*] (1914). Classed as another *sotie* by the author, this subversive and multi-layered narrative hinges on the fallout from the central *acte gratuit*. In 1918, while Gide was on a literary sojourn in Cambridge with his young companion Marc Allégret, his long-suffering wife Madeleine burnt the letters Gide had sent her since the beginning of their courtship (cousins, they wed in 1895, but never consummated the marriage), leaving him devastated. 1919 saw the publication of another restrained novella investigating the intersection of religion and desire, *La Symphonie pastorale* [*The Pastoral Symphony*]. Although his autobiography, *Si le grain ne meurt* [*If It Die*], and *Corydon* [*Corydon*], a series of Socratic dialogues, both published in 1924, essentially confirmed his homosexuality for his readership, a one-off sexual encounter with Élisabeth Van Rysselberghe, the daughter of his close friends Maria and Theo Van Rysselberghe, produced Catherine (1923-2013), Gide’s only child (whom he officially recognised after the death of his wife). In 1925, the highly self-reflexive novel *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* appeared. Widely acknowledged to be his greatest contribution to modernism, it is also seen as a precursor to the *nouveau roman*.  During the interwar period Gide undertook two major journeys – in 1925-1926, he travelled around French Equatorial Africa, writing *Le Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad* [*Travels in the Congo*], and in 1936, a month-long visit to the USSR yielded *Retour de l’URSS* [*Back from the USSR*] and *Retouches à mon Retour de l’URSS* [*Afterthoughts: A Sequel to “Back from the USSR”*] (invited by the Soviet Writers’ Union, Gide at that point identified as a fellow traveller). Disillusioned by what he discovered over the course of each journey, Gide wrote travel narratives that exposed the shortcomings of each project. In the case of French Equatorial Africa, he would use his privileged position (having been sent on a government mission to report on the workings of the colonialist set-up) to highlight the severe abuse perpetrated by concessionary companies and colonial representatives alike. Though initially largely hopeful about the utopia supposedly under construction in the Soviet Union, Gide’s original publication was swiftly revisited in a second text, in which he revealed evidence of the failings of communism in action, bolstered by his own personal experience in the Soviet Union. The explosive narratives that emerged from these two pivotal journeys attracted admiration and disdain in equal measure from political quarters and the literary world. Many critics have suggested that the extensive travel Gide undertook in the interwar period provided the basis for a political awakening of sorts, but in fact, recent scholarship has shown that these journeys heightened Gide’s longstanding political awareness, as evidenced by his early days as mayor of La Roque, Normandy (a position to which he was elected in 1896), as well as the keen eye he displayed for legal matters (*Ne jugez pas*, a collection of previously published essays on various court cases, appeared in 1931). In 1939, Gide was the first living author to have his work published by Bibliothèque de la Pléiade.  Disconsolate after the death of Madeleine (whom he would go on to memorialise in the 1951 text *Et nunc manet in te* [*Madeleine*]), Gide, in his later years, lost something of the *joie de vivre* and taste for newness that had impelled him to travel widely from the 1890s onwards. Texts such as the autobiographical work *Ainsi soit-il ou Les jeux sont faits* [*So be it; Or, The Chips are Down*] and the travel narrative *Carnets d’Égypte* (both of which appeared posthumously, in 1952 and 1954 respectively) do not crown a life of literary achievement as much as call into question the creative process behind writing, despite the author being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947. In 1952, following his death, the entire list of his works was placed on the Catholic Church’s *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*.  File: gide4.jpg  Figure Gide, 1940s, possibly from Life Magazine.  Source: <http://www.andregide.org/photo_gallery/gid69.html>  Posthumously, Gide’s standing in French literature has been further endorsed by his frequent inclusion on undergraduate courses in French. With the advent of queer theory, many of his works were brought to the attention of an even wider English-speaking readership, a spotlight that has somewhat dimmed in subsequent years. Nonetheless, any consideration of the French literary scene in the twentieth century will always remain dominated by Gide’s wide-ranging and varied contribution as writer, editor and public intellectual.  **Major collected works:**  *Romans et récits: Œuvres lyriques et dramatiques*, ed. by Pierre Masson, Jean Claude, Alain Goulet, David H. Walker and Jean-Michel Wittmann, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 2009)  *Souvenirs et voyages*, ed. by Pierre Masson, Daniel Durosay and Martine Sagaert (Paris: Gallimard, 2001)  *Essais critiques*, ed. by Pierre Masson (Paris: Gallimard, 1999)  *Journal*, ed. by Éric Marty and Martine Sagaert, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1996–1997)  **Major works:**  *Le Voyage d’Urien* [*Urien’s Voyage*] (1893)\*\*\*  *Paludes* [Marshlands] (1895)\*\*  *Les Nourritures terrestres* [*Fruits of the Earth*] (1897)\*  *L’Immoraliste* [*The Immoralist*] (1902)\*  *La Porte étroite* [*Strait is the Gate*] (1909)\*  *Les Caves du Vatican* [*The Vatican Swindle*] (1914)\*  *La Symphonie pastorale* [*The Pastoral Symphony*] (1919)\*  *Corydon* [*Corydon*] (1924)\*\*  *Si le grain ne meurt* [*If It Die*] (1924)\*\*\*\*  *Les Faux-monnayeurs* [*The Counterfeiters*] (1925)\*  *Voyage au Congo* (1927)  *Le* *Retour du Tchad* [translated along with *Voyage au Congo* as *Travels in the Congo*] (1928)\*  *Les Nouvelles Nourritures* [*New Fruits of the Earth*]\*  *Retour de l’URSS* [*Back from the USSR*] (1936)\*\*  *Retouches à mon Retour de l’URSS* [*Afterthoughts : A Sequel to “Back from the USSR”*] (1937)\*\*  *Journal 1889-1939* (1941)\*  *Et nunc in manet te* [*Madeleine*] (1951)\*  *Ainsi soit-il ou Les jeux sont faits* [*So be it; Or, The Chips are Down*] (1952)\*  \*Published by Knopf (New York)  \*\*Published by Secker and Warburg (London)  \*\*\*Published by Peter Owen (London)  \*\*\*\*Published by Random House (New York) |
| **Further reading:**  Apter, Emily, *André Gide and the Codes of Homotextuality* (Saratoga, Calif.: ANMA Libri, 1987)  Conner, Tom (ed.), *André Gide’s Politics: Rebellion and Ambivalence* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave, 2000)  Masson, Pierre, *André Gide. Voyage et écriture* (Lyon : Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1983)  Masson, Pierre, and Jean-Michel Wittmann (eds.), *Dictionnaire Gide* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011)  O’Brien, Justin, *Portrait of André Gide: A Critical Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953)  Pollard, Patrick, *André Gide: Homosexual Moralist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991)  Reid, Victoria, *André Gide and Curiosity* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2009)  Segal, Naomi, *André Gide: Pederasty and Pedagogy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998)  Sheridan, Alan, *André Gide: A Life in the Present* (London: Penguin, 1998)  Walker, David, *André Gide* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990) |