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TEXTUALISING TRAVEL IN ANDRÉ GIDE AND HENRI MICHAUX

Elizabeth Geary Keohane

Ph.D thesis

Trinity College Dublin

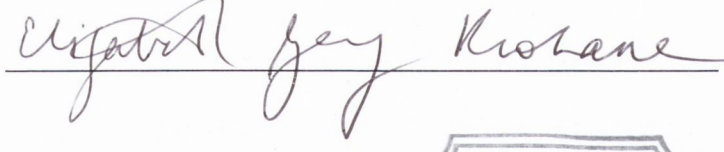
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SUMMARY

This thesis considers the interplay between real and imaginary travel in the works of André Gide and Henri Michaux, whilst also positing that this interplay can manifest itself in an intermediate form, anticipated travel. The methodology of my project involves focusing on the textualisation of travel. That is to say, my project favours a focus on the way(s) the author represents journeys, one, therefore, which does not seek to classify texts solely on the basis of whether the journey they describe has actually taken place or not. Indeed, the texts relating the real or actual voyages of Gide and Michaux will be seen to inform and be informed by each author's extensive experimentation with the imaginary voyage. The generic permutations and variations that encompass the travel narratives ultimately produced (journal, *récit*, *sotie*, *traité*, *roman*, [prose] poetry, and any combination thereof) will also be taken into account. In remaining attuned to their experimentation with genre, my approach allows me to explore the intertextual connections linking representations of real and imaginary travel in Gide and Michaux.

Both works of fiction and texts based on journeys undertaken by the writer in question therefore form my corpus of study, though it is understood that the representation of a real journey can feed into fiction as much as fiction seeps into purportedly faithful accounts of travel. Chapter 1 considers three of Gide's works written in the 1890s as key texts in his development as a writer who travels, texts that experiment with ways to relate and interrogate the experience of travel. The rich links that exist amongst the journeys central to *Le Voyage d'Urien*, *Paludes* and *El Hadj* are uncovered. This thesis posits the idea that Gide is using the creative freedom inherent to the enterprise of fiction in order to approach travel as a subject, theme and narrative motor in these formative years of his career; in short, he is experimenting with the textualisation of travel. *Les Nourritures terrestres* is seen as a work which synthesises many of the principal findings and persistent concerns of the other three travel texts of the same period studied here – yet, at the same time, it introduces representations of real travel, therefore looking forward to and informing Gide's later narratives relating journeys of physical displacement. Chapter 2 considers the interplay between Michaux's narratives *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie*, both of which are based on real journeys, as well as exploring to what extent his later

narratives on imaginary countries are rooted in these texts. It also investigates the way Michaux's dual status as artist-writer informs his verbal expression of the travel experience. Chapter 3 analyses Gide's year-long trip around West Africa and the narratives it produced – and continued to generate upon his return (in the form of reactions and clarifications), as well as their exploration of identity formation in terms of travel. Chapter 4 explores Gide's account of his trip to the USSR, tracing the way in which a country under construction can destabilise the construction of a travel narrative that attempts to negotiate a destination in flux. Chapter 5 returns to Michaux, and analyses the ways in which his *Ailleurs* collection, a series of narratives based on imaginary voyages, revisits and often revises problematic aspects of his earlier experiences in textualising real journeys. This shows the extent to which textualising travel can also operate as a corrective exercise.

It will therefore be seen in this thesis that, rather than compartmentalising an author's work into expressions of real and imaginary travel so that they might be considered separately, a more fruitful analysis of an author's engagement with travel can emerge from studying the way(s) in which the author approaches the textualisation of travel. Such an analysis uncovers the interplay and overlap between real and imaginary travel that can often *generate* – as much as permeate – a text.

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For my parents and for my husband

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List of Abbreviations used

A – Ailleurs (Voyage en Grande Garabagne, Au pays de la magie, Ici, Poddema)
BA – Un Barbare en Asie
EC – Ecuador
EH – El Hadj
NT – Les Nourritures terrestres
PA – Paludes
R – Retour de l'U.R.S.S.
RAM – Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.
RT – Retour du Tchad
VC – Voyage au Congo
VU – Le Voyage d'Urien

INTRODUCTION

At first sight, André Gide (1869-1951) and Henri Michaux (1899-1984) may seem to have relatively little in common. A generation separates them; Gide was a well-known and respected intellectual on a national scale in France, as well as being an internationally acclaimed figure (confirmed by his Nobel laureateship in 1947), whereas the more reclusive Michaux purposely shied away from public attention from the outset of his career. Gide's writings attempt to reach out to the reader, from the provocative refrains of *Les Nourritures terrestres* to the political exposés that *Voyage au Congo*, *Retour de l'URSS* and their offshoots came to constitute, whilst many of Michaux's works have the effect of alienating or at least exasperating those who engage with them, for example, *Ecuador*, a travel account prone to undercutting each step of the central journey's progression. Gide, viewed by many to be an innovative prose writer, moves from an early dalliance with Symbolism to a literary Modernism that has achieved much critical recognition.[1] Michaux is best known as a painter-poet; on the one hand, an artist whose calligraphic lithographs raise vital questions about verbal and visual interrelations, as well as the nature of the sign, and, on the other hand, a poet (but also prose writer) whose prolific output, whilst spanning a plethora of themes and concerns, often provides an acknowledgement of his skills and sensibilities as a visual artist (whether passages in *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie*, or a broader consideration of his art such as *Emérgences-Résurgences*).[2] Yet, in the case of each author, a lifelong concern that runs through their wide-ranging literary production is that of travel, specifically an interest in writing about both real *and* imaginary peregrinations. Each author travelled widely across a number of continents; for the most part, these journeys generated their own narratives (Michaux, however, rejected the possibility of writing accounts of the extensive travel he undertook in the years following the 1933 publication of *Un Barbare en Asie*).

At the same time, however, this compulsion to travel is underpinned by a common interest in ways of representing mobility that will, in the case of each author,

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[1] See Toril Moi, who identifies Gide as a key writer in the birth of Modernism in her text *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theatre, Philosophy* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), and Kimberley J. Healey's study *The Modernist Traveler: French Detours 1900-1930* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

[2] Gide refers to Michaux primarily as 'le poète Henri Michaux' in his published talk on the author. See *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, in *Essais critiques*, ed. by Pierre Masson (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 733-49 (p. 734).

entail a focus on and interplay between accounts of real and imaginary travel. Gide moves from experimenting with imaginary travel in the 1890s to a more politically evolved understanding of travel in his interwar *carnets de route.*[3] The creative output of Michaux, who also focuses on travel in the interwar period, describes an inverse trajectory; he represents his South American and Asian journeys (in *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie* respectively) before turning to narrate his travels around the imaginary lands of Grande Garabagne, Pays de la Magie and Poddema (accounts which comprise the 1948 *Ailleurs* collection). Gide's 1941 text *Découvrons Henri Michaux* sees the author set up a link between Michaux and himself, and it is Gide who, in considering Michaux's *Ecuador* and *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* in tandem, emphasises that understanding an author's expressions of real and imaginary travel in unison is as important as viewing each work as a stand-alone text. In encouraging his reader to view Michaux's body of work in this light, Gide therefore paves the way for a similar analysis of his own literary production. This thesis will thus operate as an extended analysis of the impact that expressions of real and imaginary travel can have upon each other across an author's body of work, focusing specifically on Gide and Michaux, not only because of the significant link Gide suggests with Michaux, but also because of each author's wide-ranging and experimental approach to textualising travel.

My understanding of real travel encompasses the following possibilities. First of all, real travel will be understood as empirical travel, that is to say, an actual journey that takes place across space and time, or, as Victor Segalen so succinctly categorises it in the opening lines of *Équipée*, '[des] actes qu'on affirmait avoir commis dans les lieux bien précisés, au long des jours catalogués'.[4] The expression 'déplacement physique', favoured by Pierre Bayard in his recent study focusing on the *voyageur casanier*, will also be frequently used over the course of this thesis, albeit in its English version, physical displacement.[5] In principle, such travel ought to be easily biographically verifiable (whether it be through correspondence, reportage, or photographic and filmic evidence). This notion of verifiability generally means that accounts of real travel are categorised as travel writing, for, as Peter Hulme notes:

[3] A term used by Gide in *Découvrons Henri Michaux* in order to describe narratives focusing on real travel. See *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, p. 736.
[4] Segalen, *Équipée: Voyage au Pays du Réel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 11.
[5] Pierre Bayard, *Comment parler des lieux où l'on n'a pas été?* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2012), p. 15.

'All travel writing involves an explicit or implicit truth claim: writers claim to have been in the places they describe. If they are subsequently discovered not to have been, then their work is discredited'.[6] It must be underlined, however, that any account of travel is prone to omissions and inaccuracies, as is the case in all attempts to textualise human experience. Reasons for omissions, when it comes to representing physical travel, might first of all include the personal agenda of the writer. Jean-Didier Urbain's assessment of the traveller as a potentially unreliable figure merits attention in the light of any tendency to gloss over perceived failures in relating one's travels:

> Qui, de retour de vacances ou de mission, n'a voulu en effet, par honte ou par vanité, tromper son monde en exagérant certains aspects de son voyage, en en taisant d'autres, ou même en en inventant afin de mieux cacher un essentiel non-dit?[7]

Added to the problem of omitting aspects of one's journey ('en en taisant d'autres'), then, is the potential for further inaccuracies through exaggeration, embellishment and invention. Along the same lines, it might be noted that the careful construction of the narrative self may also lead to certain lacunae, as the evolution that the self can undergo upon one's travels is often an integral part of a travel account (for instance, Gide's relation of his move from explorer-aesthete in search of the exotic to motivated political campaigner over the course of his Congo travel narratives). Moreover, the evident part that is lost when attempting to textualise the complexities of a physical journey (examples of such difficulties might include a change of plan, unforeseen obstacles along the way, as well as the disappointment and sense of failure such problems might create in the traveller) must also be taken into consideration. Each of these caveats exposes what might already have been discerned as problematic in Hulme's grounds for distinction – fiction can affect, imbue, and, I will argue in the case of Gide and Michaux, generate travel writing. Indeed, speaking about the travel accounts of Marco Polo, narratives of questionable veracity, Bayard emphasises 'la part de fiction qui s'attache à tout récit de voyage'.[8] Moreover, as a study by Percy

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[6] Peter Hulme & Tim Youngs, *Talking About Travel Writing* (Leicester: The English Association, 2007), p. 3. Tim Youngs later questions the idea of authors being discredited on this point, suggesting that 'an evolution in our understanding of literary forms – and of those forms themselves', as well as the fact that 'travel writers themselves differ about the degree of invention they will practise', might undermine the notion that travel literature can never be fiction. See *Talking About Travel Writing*, p. 4.

[7] Jean-Didier Urbain, *Secrets de voyage: Menteurs, imposteurs et autres voyageurs impossibles* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2003), p. 18.

[8] Bayard, *Comment parler des lieux où l'on n'a pas été?*, p. 29.

Adams argues, travel writing and fiction (Adams focuses on the novel) in fact accompany rather than eschew one another in their evolution.[9]

Imaginary travel will be understood here as intimately linked with real travel, and in many instances, emerges from the exaggeration and invention that can potentially beset accounts of real travel (Michaux, for example, turns to create his *Ailleurs* texts following the seemingly exasperating process of producing two accounts of actual journeys, *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie*). Imaginary travel will be broadly defined as travel that has not taken place. As Michaux, in an essay on the imaginary voyage in poetry notes: 'Tous les éléments du voyage étaient là. Mais pas de parcours'.[10] The imaginary voyage can be described as a physically unexecuted journey to a geographical location that might be based on a real place (but can equally be invented). With its variations from the realist to the fantastic (a line Michaux treads with the *Ailleurs* collection, whose preface attempts, in the footsteps of Jonathan Swift, to cajole the reader into believing each account, but whose main body of text wholly embraces the fantastic), imaginary travel is primarily the reserve of fiction. However, whilst accounts of imaginary travel might be understood as fiction, the impact that real travel has had upon the author will often inform, shape and even generate such imaginary peregrinations. Although Gide, for instance, begins to travel widely in the 1890s, his fin-de-siècle output will consist of fiction informed by his travels rather than travelogues that might stand alone from his *Journal* (as his later accounts of travel in the Congo and the USSR will go on to do). Yet, a primary aim of this thesis will be to show that favouring one type of travel over the other at a certain point in one's literary production does not preclude a return to or fascination with the other type of travel – indeed, in the case of both Gide and Michaux, such an interplay between real and imaginary travel categorises each account of displacement analysed here.

Whilst there is a dearth of studies considering the interplay between real and imaginary travel in an author's body of work (the 2001 volume of essays *Roman et*

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[9] See Percy Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983). See also Casey Blanton's chapter on 'lying travelers' (using the example of Bruce Chatwin) in *Travel Writing: The Self and the World* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 95-105.

[10] Michaux, 'Les poètes voyagent', *Passages*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. by Raymond Bellour and Ysé Tran, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1998-2004), II (2001), 307-09 (p. 309).

récit de voyage being a notable exception), there is nonetheless a strong literary tradition in French when it comes to accounts of imaginary travel;[11] noteworthy texts in this vein include Xavier de Maistre's influential *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (1794) at the turn of the nineteenth century, Baudelaire's extensive meditations on imaginary travel in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), and the character of Des Esseintes and his partly executed – but ultimately perfectly gratifying – journey in the Huysmans text *À Rebours* (1884). The imaginary voyage's wide reach (both within and beyond French literature) has generated a number of key scholarly works, including Philip Babcock Gove's *The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction*, and another study by Percy Adams, *Travellers and Travel Liars*, which considers accounts of purportedly real travel either wholly composed of – or erroneously containing – elements of fiction. At the same time, however, a more nuanced understanding of imaginary travel (beyond that of merely unexecuted travel), and the way in which it relates to (rather than can be seen to dissociate itself from) real travel, is necessary in order to approach the interplay between real and imaginary travel in an author's work.[12]

Whilst critics have tried either to polarise or correlate expressions of real and imaginary travel, there has been less of a focus on a middle ground that would expose and even promote the interrelation of real and imaginary travel, precisely because this middle ground itself borrows from – and indeed, depends on – both real and imaginary peregrinations.[13] Such a middle ground will be understood in the context of this thesis as anticipated or imagined travel, that is to say, the journey imagined by the traveller before he physically embarks on it. The tendency to imagine travel prior to – and, it might be stressed, depending upon – an actual departure often paves the way for disappointment and disillusionment when finally en route, a theme both Gide and Michaux explore in their accounts of real travel (*Voyage au Congo*, *Ecuador*), and

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[11] See Philippe Antoine & Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud, eds., *Roman et récit de voyage* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2001).

[12] See Philip Babcock Gove, *The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction: A History of its Criticism and a Guide for its Study, with an Annotated Check List of 215 Imaginary Voyages from 1700 to 1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941). I will discuss Babcock Gove's text further in Chapter 1, not least because this study omits certain key works – notably De Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre* – in its lengthy inventory of the imaginary voyage in literature. This is a function of its bias towards imaginary travel in an implied exterior world, thus precluding works set in a domestic interior.

[13] Percy Adams, in his study *Travelers and Travel Liars* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), provides a notable exception to the usual binary model in proposing a spectrum that moves from the imaginary voyage to accounts of real travel, with the narratives of those he terms 'travel liars' situated in the middle.

even represent in narratives focusing on an imaginary voyage (*El Hadj*). My understanding of anticipated or imagined travel also takes into consideration the impact of memories of past journeys, including the undeniable influence that reading other accounts of travel has on subsequent attempts to represent travel (for example, Gide's appreciation of Joseph Conrad may be kept in mind when *Voyage au Congo* is analysed). Bayard's focus on accounts of real and imaginary travel is also noteworthy since each of the narratives studied anticipates, through invention, and often the unavoidable misleading of the reader, places that have not yet been visited, or which have been visited but, for a variety of reasons, have not been fully explored (for example, Chateaubriand's artfully embellished account of a partly anticipated and partly real voyage around America). Bayard posits the *voyageur casanier* as central to his study, a figure who varies from relating travel whilst staying put to recounting a physical journey that involves avoiding – or missing out on – an extended physical engagement with the exterior world (indeed, Michaux's Plume character, constantly missing out on any interaction with the place where he happens to be, could also be categorised as a *voyageur casanier*).[14] Bayard identifies a key characteristic of the *voyageur casanier* as follows:

> [À] la fois peu soucieux de prendre des risques et désireux de garder une juste distance avec son objet de recherche, il sait dissocier déplacement physique et déplacement psychique, et prend soin de limiter le plus possible ses mouvements.[15]

Whilst Bayard's *voyageur casanier* might claim to be able to dissociate physical and psychological displacement, psychological displacement in fact chooses to *present* itself as physical displacement in the corpus of texts he analyses (and very often psychological displacement compensates for a lessened physical engagement with the world when en route), showing that any ambition to make a clean division between the two is illusory. Instead, Bayard's *voyageur casanier* is in part symptomatic of the compulsion to play on, and perhaps even take advantage of, the reader's tendency to engage willingly with travel writing as 'objective observation'.[16] Anticipated travel then, particularly as it tends to feature as an integral and early part of accounts of real travel (for example, the opening pages trace the expectations of each journey in

[14] Michaux, 'Plume voyage', in *Plume* précédé de *Lointain intérieur*, *OC*, I (1998), 625-26.
[15] Bayard, *Comment parler des lieux où l'on n'a pas été?*, p. 15.
[16] Youngs, *Talking About Travel Writing*, p. 9.

Voyage au Congo and *Ecuador*), carefully draws its reader into its assumptions about the place visited, and undermines as much as it uncovers the destination in question once it is finally reached. Indeed, it will be argued that in the case of *Ecuador* the representation of anticipated travel in an account of real travel also feeds into the text's central theme – that is, the revelation of the growing *décalage* between the author's expectations and subsequent realisation of the journey.

The position of anticipated travel in relation to the modal distinction generally used to separate accounts of real and imaginary travel deserves some attention. In identifying the concept of fiction as central to distinguishing between travel writing and literature (on travel), Peter Hulme attempts to clarify what the parameters of each appellation might be:

> In one sense all writing is fiction: all writing is made of language. But not all writing is fictional [...] I usually explain it to my students as the difference between *made* and *made up*. All travel writing – because it is writing – is *made* in the sense of being constructed, but travel writing cannot be *made up* without losing its designation.[17]

Though Hulme's analysis prefers to firm up the boundaries of travel writing arguably at the expense of what he views as 'that slightly uneasy category of imaginary voyages', his distinction is nonetheless useful insofar as it foregrounds the constructed nature of any account of travel. If accounts of real travel can be understood as 'made' (or constructed), and accounts of imaginary travel can be viewed as 'made up', that is, an addition to as much as a reworking of the world, anticipated travel might then be seen to comprise the *ready-made* assumptions gleaned from the reading and research done by an author before his departure, or his prior knowledge of the world (Michel Butor's emphasis on reading as a form of travel might be recalled here).[18] Accounting for anticipated travel, therefore, has the potential to distort the categorisation of real and imaginary travel. For example, holding on to one's assumptions about one's destination, even if they prove to be entirely inaccurate when *in situ*, could impact greatly upon the construction of one's travel narrative, calling into question precisely what is 'made' and what is 'made up'. Again, Urbain's rhetorical question, flagging the potential for inaccuracies and untruths in representing travel, springs to mind:

[17] Hulme, *Talking About Travel Writing*. p. 3.
[18] Michel Butor, 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', *Romantisme*, 4 (1972), 4-19.

'Qui, de retour de vacances ou de mission, n'a voulu en effet, par honte ou par vanité, tromper son monde en exagérant certains aspects de son voyage, en en taisant d'autres [...]?'

I have already noted that Gide makes a link between Michaux's accounts of real and of imaginary travel; indeed, his understanding of the interplay between real and imaginary in terms of travel provides the point of departure for the ideas developed in this thesis. As a part of his consideration of Michaux's *Voyage en Grande Garabagne*, Gide notes that Michaux describes customs, habits and traditions which initially appear to have only a very distant relationship with ours, thus creating what Gide deems to be a sort of mysterious and unsettling poetry. He then outlines what exactly can be seen to perturb the reader of Michaux's accounts of imaginary travel:

> Le malaise vient de la relation qui s'établit involontairement en notre esprit entre l'imaginaire et le réel. Et ce malaise, parfois, traversant la bouffonnerie, tourne à l'angoisse. Après tout, se dit-on, tout cela, qui n'existe pas, pourrait être; et tout ce que nous savons qui est pourrait bien ne pas avoir beaucoup plus de réalité. Ce qui se passe sur cette terre n'est pas, somme toute, beaucoup plus raisonnable que ce que Michaux nous peint.[19]

Gide's awareness of the possible slippage between the real world and any alternative that one might imagine or conjure up is noteworthy in the light of his own experimentations with the limitations of travel throughout his literary career. For his discussion, in this passage, of the arbitrariness that defines any society shows that Gide wholly appreciates a key outcome of travel: a self-awareness that allows for the detection – but also the interrogation – of perceived difference (a characteristic perhaps most to the fore in his Congo travel texts, as will be seen). Indeed, Kimberley J. Healey, a critic who acknowledges the interplay between real and imaginary travel in writers such as Segalen, sees 'travel texts [as having] a privileged if ambiguous position between real and imaginary', as they are '[c]aught between depicting reality and re-creating or denying reality' (indeed, anticipated travel, as it features in an account of real travel, is acutely attuned to this crisis of representation).[20] Gide's interpretation of Michaux's account of imaginary travel seems to embrace the way in

[19] *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, p. 745.
[20] Kimberley J. Healey, *The Modernist Traveler: French Detours 1900-1930*, p. 11.

which this narrative undermines or exposes the illusory nature of what is perceived to be reality, as if he were attempting to posit the travel text itself as a valuable mediator between real and imaginary. Furthermore, Gide's interpretation only serves to remind us that any geographical location – and any attempt to represent it – will always be filtered through individual perception. Indeed, it might also be understood that the space of the travel account itself (regardless of the stage of development it finds itself at) is a space *apart* from the geographical place it examines, as much as it is a document purporting to reveal insights about this place. That is to say, the textual space can be seen to replace, displace or even *put in place* the geographical location outlined therein. In the light of the textual space's ostensible dominance over the geographical space it represents, Todorov's emphasis on the probable primacy of the *récit de voyage* over the voyage itself, as highlighted in *Les Morales de l'histoire*, might be taken into account: 'les récits de voyage sont aussi anciens que les voyages eux-mêmes, sinon plus'.[21] The implication of Todorov's pithy statement is that imagining travel (as a textual exercise) is a likely precedent to physical travel, whilst also suggesting that actual travel is not a prerequisite in order for a *récit de voyage* to be written.

A further point of reference throughout this thesis will be Bayard's idea of the *espace atopique* in relation to the travel narrative. In his playful examination of what he identifies as misleading (though no less enriching and worthwhile) accounts of travel, *Comment parler des lieux où l'on n'a pas été?*, Bayard defines the travel text as an *espace atopique* in the following terms: 'Espace que mettent en scène la littérature et l'art, et qui se caractérise par la perméabilité des frontières entre les œuvres et le monde, ainsi qu'entre les différentes œuvres'.[22] Bayard's notion of the permeability of borders between the text and the world, and between different texts, can be joined with Jacques Derrida's emphasis on the porous boundaries that he claims ought to supplant the indivisible line (understood to be the traveller's traditional assessment of the boundary), an idea outlined in his co-authored work *La Contre-Allée*. For Derrida, the predicament of travel can be seen to lie with the traditional defence of the indivisible line, be it the border, the threshold, the *trait,* by the traveller, or the writer of the travel account, who focuses on traversing,

[21] Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Morales de l'histoire* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1991), p. 95.
[22] Bayard, *Comment parler des lieux où l'on n'a pas été?*, p. 157.

transgressing, and surmounting these perceived divisions. In the light of this tendency, Derrida advocates a renegotiation of the nature of the line as it can be seen to relate to travel: 'Le passage des frontières s'annonce toujours selon le mouvement d'un certain pas – et du pas franchissant une ligne. Une ligne indivisible. Or l'on suppose toujours l'institution d'une telle indivisibilité'.[23] If one is to engage with this notion of porous and divisible borders, rather than rigid boundaries, this idea of porosity might also be used in relation to accounts of travel, whereby there is no one clear indivisible line that can be seen to separate expressions of real and imaginary travel. This, of course, does not preclude the possibility of distinguishing and differentiating between a narrative based on real travel and one based on an imaginary voyage, or the possibility of a travel account that would blend different types of travel – real, imaginary, or anticipated. Rather, it argues the importance of identifying and mining the intimate and indissoluble link between attempts to relate real and imaginary travel (opening up a two-way border crossing, even) in the author's body of work. Pierre Jourde's examination of Michaux's *Ailleurs* collection in his study *Géographies imaginaires – De quelques inventeurs de mondes au XX^e siècle* also imparts a valuable insight in relation to the perceived boundary that binds together – as much as it can be seen to separate – expressions of real and imaginary travel. In Jourde's text, the traveller is seen as a self-aware and self-referential inventor of worlds, as much as he is understood to be a conscientious negotiator of and commentator upon society. However, more importantly, in his exploration of texts that focus on imaginary voyages which take place in what might be understood as (re-)imagined worlds, Jourde identifies a problematic that also lies at the heart of this thesis. Like Bayard, Jourde emphasises the importance of the textual space being understood as a site of representation, one which, by its very nature, immediately invites any single boundary between real or imaginary to collapse (a result which Hulme's distinction attempts to evade), or at least will lead to its being renegotiated:

> [...] le véritable problème est posé par l'adjectif "imaginaire": qu'est-ce qu'une géographie imaginaire? Cette appellation ne pourrait-elle pas s'appliquer parfaitement à l'espace parcouru par Ulysse bien que nous sachions qu'il s'agit de la Méditerranée? Ou bien au Japon vu par Barthes dans *L'Empire des signes*? Car enfin,

[23] An extract from Derrida's *Apories* that reappears in Jacques Derrida and Catherine Malabou, *La Contre-Allée*, (Paris: La Quinzaine littéraire – Louis Vuitton, 2009), p. 161.

> tout lieu, tout espace figurant dans l'œuvre est par définition imaginaire, et la Touraine de *Gargantua* l'est au même titre que l'Orsenna du *Rivage des Syrtes*.[24]

Despite the insistence of both Bayard and Jourde that the representation of travel calls into question any pressing need for a distinction between real and imaginary travel, it is evident that some differentiation as to the nature of the journey represented is entirely necessary, and that the terms used to describe travel narratives ought to ask whether the travel in question has actually been undertaken or not. Without a confirmation of – or grounds to believe in the veracity of – a journey, the made/ made up/ ready-made triad deployed earlier to categorise and situate fiction and travel writing in relation to one another is rendered useless, and such a taxonomical enterprise nugatory.

It might be noted that, despite certain moves to dissociate real and imaginary travel that have been outlined thus far (such as the illusory attempt to do so that is central to Bayard's *voyageur casanier*), different types of travel can be seen to be conflated in, and openly embraced by, the hybrid figure of the 'poète-alpiniste' discussed by Segalen in *Équipée* ('refusant de séparer, au pied du mont, le poète de l'alpiniste'), and also in his correspondence.[25] In a letter to Jules de Gaultier, written in 1914, Segalen comments:

> Mon voyage prend décidément pour moi la valeur d'une expérience sincère: confrontation, sur le *terrain*, de l'imaginaire et du réel: la montagne, vue par le "Poète", et la même, escaladée par celui à qui elle barre la route [...].[26] (emphasis in original)

In this extract what initially seems to be a problematisation of the notion of a writer who travels can be apprehended; this appears to create a fissure between the frequently complementary identity markers of traveller and writer, which are instead seen as representative of two ostensibly *different* ways of viewing the world – in this instance, the mountain as a physical challenge, an obstacle to be surmounted by the traveller, and the mountain as a source of poetic inspiration, a moment in the writer's anticipated travel experience likely to be revisited in his subsequent (indeed,

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[24] Pierre Jourde, *Géographies imaginaires – De quelques inventeurs de mondes au XX^e siècle* (Paris: José Corti, 1991), p. 14.
[25] Victor Segalen, *Équipée: Voyage au Pays du Réel*, p. 13.
[26] Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthétique du Divers* (Fontfroide: Fata Morgana, 1978), p. 68.

inevitable) narrative. However, it seems that these two differing perspectives on the mountainside can be committed to writing only once the mountain has been scaled, or bypassed (Segalen's emphasis on 'terrain' might be noted), as although the writer can appreciate the mountain and perhaps imagine negotiating it, the traveller must prevail over it, and can only speak of his experience once it has been lived through.[27] The writing process that will record this encounter (or the process of 'digestion' that will allow one both to understand – and move away from – the encounter, as Michel Butor suggests in 'Le Voyage et l'écriture') will see both perspectives fused – the drive to physically negotiate the mountain *and* an acknowledgement of the poetic vision and sense of anticipation it had fostered – as emblematised by the hybrid figure of the writer who travels (and as will be evidenced in his travel account).[28] The confrontation between real and imaginary in the middle ground of anticipated travel, as elucidated by Segalen here, can therefore be understood not only as an integral part of the experience of travel ('sur le *terrain*'), but also of the experience of *writing* about travel, that is to say, of the writing process involved in relating one's travels.

With a view to emphasising the inverse nature of the creative trajectories of Gide and Michaux, my thesis has been organised chronologically, allowing me, as Gide approaches Michaux's output in 1941, both to trace and to highlight the interplay between representations of real and of imaginary travel in each author's body of work. In emphasising the creative trajectories of Gide and Michaux, my thesis will demonstrate the importance of integrating the imaginary voyage into the scope of travel writing, a field of study whose primary critical focus has traditionally tended to lie with representations of voyages that involve actual physical displacement (more often than not immortalised in the travel journal form), even if scholars such as Percy Adams, Tzvetan Todorov, Normand Doiron and Odile Gannier have tried to redress this imbalance, or at least call into question this particular bias.[29]

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[27] It is interesting to note Robin Magowan's take on Michaux's conception of and interaction with the concrete in *Ecuador*: 'S'il s'agit d'une montagne [Michaux] y grimpera, s'y crèvera un poumon, fera tout ce qu'il faut pour se prouver qu'elle existe en dépit de lui'. Robin Magowan, 'Ecuador', in *Henri Michaux*, ed. by Raymond Bellour (Paris: L'Herne, 1966), pp. 278–82 (p. 280).

[28] '[J]'ai besoin de digérer d'anciens voyages; je n'en suis pas encore tout revenu, je n'en reviendrai jamais complètement, il s'agit pour moi de trouver un *modus vivendi* avec eux par le moyen de l'écriture, avant de pouvoir repartir vraiment [...]'. Michel Butor, 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', p. 4.

[29] See Percy G. Adams, *Travelers and Travel Liars 1660-1800*, and *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*. See also Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Morales de l'histoire*; Normand Doiron, 'Depuis Babel toucher la lune: De quelques manières de voyager/ XVI^{e} – XX^{e} siècles', *Études*

It would seem that the significance of any author choosing to relate both real and imaginary travels merits an extended analysis – yet criticism on Gide and Michaux demonstrates the frequent tendency in the fields of travel writing studies and literary studies respectively, when speaking of the way in which authors relate *and* relate to travel, to overlook the integrality of an author's work in order to concentrate solely on either their real-life travelling experiences or their fiction. Indeed, writing on travel is often considered in a framework that can be constricted by the question as to whether the journey has actually taken place or not, rather than responding to that question by the considering the problems of textualising travel in a more holistic fashion. A major implication of such compartmentalisation is that the overlap and interplay amongst the expressions of real and imaginary travel experiences that co-exist in an author's body of work go unexplored by critics, who often seem to remain within what are the already debatable parameters set around travel writing studies, or those set around literary studies. At the same time, however, literary studies clearly provides elements of the critical apparatus with which many texts focusing on travel are considered. This is a notion arguably highlighted whenever the umbrella term travel *literature* is favoured over the term travel writing (it is also brought into focus when travel writing's progression from 'a body of material previously dismissed as sub-literary' into a burgeoning field of critical inquiry is considered).[30]

My thesis therefore aims to address the problem of compartmentalisation through emphasising that there is not an indivisible line separating real and imaginary travel, as the move to categorise and separate expressions of travel would appear to suggest. Their relation will instead be emblematised by an always porous division,

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françaises, 24.3 (1988), 99–107, and Odile Gannier, *La littérature de voyage* (Paris: Ellipses, 2001). It is particularly revealing that Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, in editing *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, include a 'Chronology' section that insists on this separation between the imaginary voyage and travel writing, although its key travel writing texts are selected within the context of 'a generous definition of the genre as long as the text recounts actual travels undertaken'. Examples of fictional 'travel-related texts' are organised into a column which serves to contextualise historically works of travel writing. What scope, then, might this separation provide for a cohesive analysis of the evolution of authors who produce imaginary voyages as well as so-called travel writing? Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs, *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 279. However, their later collaborative publication *Talking about Travel Writing* would seem to suggest a fundamental disagreement on their part regarding the categorisation of travel narratives. Peter Hulme emphasises the importance of travel having taken place in order for the narrative to merit the appellation 'travel writing', whilst Tim Youngs immediately calls into question this caveat (*Talking about Travel Writing*, pp. 3-5).

[30] Charles Forsdick, Feroza Basu and Siobhán Shilton, *New Approaches to Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French: Genre, History and Theory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 5.

whereby each one permits the infusion of the other, and may even combine with the other to create the middle ground of anticipated travel. That is not to say that what is at stake in terms of real and imaginary travel is undifferentiated unity, where any attempt to distinguish between the two is ultimately destined to collapse. Instead, the focus of my project is to trace the way each individual text locates, negotiates and attempts to define the porous division that *relates*, as much as it can be seen to separate, real and imaginary travel. My thesis therefore aims to contribute to – and further bridge the gap between – literary studies and travel writing studies, whilst also generating vital insights into the creative endeavours of Gide and Michaux. The analysis of the imaginary voyage as an essential component accompanying travel writing means that those texts relating the real or actual journeys of Gide and Michaux will be seen to inform and be informed by each author's extensive experimentation with the imaginary voyage. Moreover, it will equally be shown that the writer often travels back across his body of work as part of the creative process behind each new travel account. The generic permutations and variations encompassing the travel narratives ultimately produced (travel journal/*carnet de route*, *récit*, *sotie*, *traité*, *roman*, essay, [prose] poetry, and any combination thereof) are also taken into consideration throughout my thesis as, in the words of Tim Youngs, there exists 'a genuine confusion about genres and the borders between travel writing, memoir, autobiography, journalism, reportage and novel [...]'.[31] Each text in my corpus, I would argue, grapples with and generates insights regarding the generic confusion that accompanies any attempt to relate travel. That is to say, the self-awareness in terms of narrative construction presented in the travel accounts analysed here means that each account negotiates its own journey across genres as an integral part of its narrative's progression. In bringing the (inter)generic status of each narrative into focus, therefore, this 'genuine confusion' is not only engaged with as part of my critical assessment of travel accounts, but is also used to point out that the slippage existing among genres, when it comes to representing travel, is a problem that not only parallels that of the constant interchange among real and imaginary journeys across an author's *œuvre*, but, in many instances, exists *because* of this real/imaginary interplay. Furthermore, as previously emphasised, travel narratives will be understood as self-aware texts that not only narrate but also dissect or meditate

[31] Tim Youngs, *Talking about Travel Writing*, p. 5.

on the author's apprehension of travel. Indeed, Gide and Michaux can be seen to share a desire to create a template for an ideal voyage, that is, a voyage of acute self-discovery, in their expressions of real and imaginary travel experiences. This is perhaps one of the reasons why their awareness of how best to represent their travel experiences and how best to construct their travel accounts ends up permeating – or even generating – their narratives. In Gide's case, travel's potential to engender self-discovery and self-renewal is a constant focus of his travel accounts – along with what Gide might see as the writer's 'disponibilité', or openness to the world, but which Butor aptly clarifies as 'la disponibilité des vacances', that is to say, a sense of adventure and willingness often reserved by the writer for his travels.[32] Travel's potential to generate a process of self-discovery, in enabling a (mostly) desired confrontation with perceived difference, endures as a driving force behind Gide's peregrinations throughout his life. Indeed, it might be quickly noted that Gide's affirmation of his sexuality can be seen as a major result of his will to 'discover' himself through travel in the 1890s. This outcome – and 'coming out' – associated with Gide's travels in this period have been extensively documented, however, along with his more vocal emphasis on his homosexuality in the interwar period, which coincides with his later travel narratives.[33] Gide's sexuality will therefore not be a pressing concern in my examination of his travel narratives (neither will Michaux's deliberately provocative insights into his heterosexuality be called into question in my appraisal of his narratives based on real journeys). In Michaux, it might be noted that physical displacement and the attempt to relate experiences of real travel stimulate the creation of imaginary voyages (narratives recounting his travels through invented countries). Indeed, in the case of both writers, another aim of this thesis will be to ascertain to what extent relating experiences of real and imaginary travel affects and informs their assessment of themselves as writers who travel, as well as to trace their literary and personal evolution in terms of the intersection between their creative enterprise and the various forms of travel in which they engage.

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[32] Butor, 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', p. 10.

[33] Jean Delay, *La Jeunesse d'André Gide*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1956–57); Pierre Masson, *André Gide: Voyage et écriture* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1983); Patrick Pollard, 'Gide in the U.S.S.R.: Some Observations on Comradeship', in *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, ed. by Gert Hekma, Harry Oosterhuis and James Steakley (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1995), pp. 179–95; Michael Lucey, *Gide's Bent: Sexuality, Politics, Writing* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Apart from Pierre Masson, whose 1983 study *André Gide: Voyage et écriture*, operating partly within a framework which considers parental influence on Gide, looks at Gide's approach to travel in his early fiction, there has been no work which draws together and critically engages with these texts in terms of the real and imaginary journeys they comprise.[34] No critic has fully examined Gide's extensive experimentation with imaginary travel in the fin-de-siècle period in order to ascertain the full impact of this formative engagement with travel upon his later travel narratives, which have mainly been evaluated on the basis of the marked social engagement they display.[35] Moreover, there has been a dearth of critical inquiry into Gide's own appraisal of Michaux, *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, which my thesis will attempt to correct, offering the first critical assessment of this text in terms of Gide's self-conception as a writer who travels.[36] My project's focus on the imaginary voyage in Gide also highlights and concentrates on the role and conception of the domestic interior in his work (specifically, the writer's study or writing space), putting this forward as a model that can also be used to understand certain passages in Michaux's travel accounts, namely, key scenes in *Ecuador* and *Ici, Poddema*. Furthermore, while there has been a surge in studies on Michaux both as a (calli)graphic artist and an artist-writer, little has been done to consider Michaux's status (and his frequent self-appraisal) as a burgeoning artist in the context of his travel narrative *Ecuador*, or the tension that characterises the crisis of representation leading Michaux to decide

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[34] See Pierre Masson, *André Gide: Voyage et écriture*. Jocelyn Van Tuyl has worked on the interconnection between travel and writing in the case of *El Hadj*, *L'Immoraliste*, *Les Caves du Vatican* and *Thesée*, in a doctoral dissertation entitled 'Voyage and Writing in Gide's Fictions', Yale University, 1993. See *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 54.8 (1994), 3057A. Part of this thesis has been published as 'Figurations of the Voyage in El Hadj', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 32.2 (1995), 176–86.

[35] See Daniel Moutote's study of Gide's political engagement: *André Gide: l'engagement 1926–1939* (Paris: Sedes, 1991), as well as Tom Conner, ed., *André Gide's Politics: Rebellion and Ambivalence* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave, 2000). It might be noted that the lengthy 'Voyages' entry, written by Pierre Masson, which appears in the recently published *Dictionnaire Gide*, does not focus on Gide's experimentation with travel in these early works. See Pierre Masson and Jean-Michel Wittmann, eds, *Dictionnaire Gide* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011), pp. 431–34.

[36] The most thorough consideration of *Découvrons Henri Michaux* thus far has been Jean-Pierre Martin's article, 'Gide lecteur de Michaux' (*Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide*, 33.105 [1995], 71–76). Akio Yoshii's recent article, '*Découvrons Henri Michaux* d'André Gide: La conférence non prononcée en mai 1941', considers the conditions around the cancelled talk (*Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide*, 38.167 [2010], 311-22). Other texts which focus in part on *Découvrons Henri Michaux* include Maurice Blanchot's *Henri Michaux ou le Refus de l'enfermement* (Tours: Farrago, 1999), and David Vrydagh's *Michaux l'insaisissable: socioanalyse d'une entrée en littérature* (Geneva: Droz, 2008).

between adopting the hybrid role of a writer who travels, or that of artist-writer.[37] However, this thesis also builds on the work of the many monographs on each author that focus in part or in the main on travel. In the case of Michaux, numerous studies consider what is deemed to be a shift from relating real travel experiences to relating imaginary peregrinations, though none so far has analysed his accounts of imaginary travel with regard to their tendency to revisit and carefully rework certain problematic aspects of the earlier accounts.[38] There are also several publications that focus on each author's experience of and relationship to certain countries or areas, examining important links between the author and a geographical location in the light of their real-life travels. These are links, however, which might also be seen to feed into imaginary travel, though none of the studies in question examines this possibility at length.[39] This thesis aims for a more wide-ranging approach to each author's *œuvre*, one where the notion of looking back (as Gide does in 1941, not only on Michaux's accounts of travel, but also, arguably, at his own travel narratives) on the ensemble of an author's experimentations with real and imaginary journeys (as well as being sensitive to the role of anticipated travel) is deemed to be an essential part of ascertaining and exploring his relationship to mobility, that is to say, an approach that is necessary in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of travel in each author's body of work.

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[37] For an appraisal of Michaux as artist-writer, see Margaret Rigaud-Drayton, *Henri Michaux: Poetry, Painting and the Universal Sign* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), and Nina Parish, *Henri Michaux: Experimentation with Signs* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2007).

[38] See Malcolm Bowie, *Henri Michaux: A Study of His Literary Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973); Peter Broome, 'The Introversion of Henri Michaux: His Aims, Techniques and Shortcomings', *Nottingham Journal of French Studies*, 1.2 (1962), 34–44, *Henri Michaux* (London: Athlone Press, 1977), 'Henri Michaux and Travel: From outer space to inner space', *French Studies*, 39.3 (1985), 285–97, Introduction, *Spaced, Displaced/ Déplacements Dégagements*, trans. by David and Helen Constantine (Oxford: Bloodaxe, 1992), pp. 9–45; Laurie Edson, *Henri Michaux and the Poetics of Movement* (Saratoga, Calif.: ANMA Libri, 1985); Lajos Elkan, *Les Voyages et les propriétés d'Henri Michaux* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988); Jean-Michel Maulpoix, *Henri Michaux, passager clandestin* (Seysel: Champ Vallon, 1990); Jean-Pierre Martin, *Henri Michaux: écritures de soi, expatriations* (Paris: J. Corti, 1994); Michel Butor *Le Sismographe Aventureux. Improvisations sur Henri Michaux* (Paris: La Différence, 1999); Bruno Thibault '"Voyager contre": la question de l'exotisme dans les journaux de voyage d'Henri Michaux', *The French Review*, 63.3 (1990), 485–91.

[39] See, for example, works discussing Gide's travels in Italy (François-Paul Alibert, *En Italie avec André Gide: impressions d'Italie, 1913, voyage avec Gide, Ghéon et Rouart* [Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1983]), in Africa (Carlos Lynes Jr., 'Northern Africa in André Gide's Writings', *PMLA*, 57.3 [1942], 851–66; Jacqueline M. Chadourne, *André Gide et l'Afrique: le rôle de l'Afrique dans la vie et l'œuvre de l'écrivain* [Paris: Nizet, 1968]; Paulette Hacker, *Gide's Entanglements: Weaving in and out of Africa* [Paris: Lanore, 2007]) and the USSR (Rudolf Maurer, *André Gide et l'URSS* [Berne: Tillier, 1983]); or those that consider Michaux's travels in China (Liu Yang, *Henri Michaux et la Chine* [Paris: Le Manuscrit, 2006]) and Japan (Akane Kawakami, *Travellers' visions: French literary encounters with Japan, 1881-2004* [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005]).

Contemporaries and friends, yet separated by a gulf in age and status (bearing in mind Gide's longstanding reputation as a public intellectual and man of letters by the time that *Découvrons Henri Michaux* is published), these authors have nonetheless been previously considered side by side in a number of studies on Francophone travel writing.[40] Whilst these studies may certainly *align* Gide and Michaux, no critical work has thus far engaged at length with the multiple resonances that connect the creative trajectories of Gide and Michaux, a study that would especially serve to illuminate more fully Gide's decision to focus on Michaux late in life, producing *Découvrons Henri Michaux*. The corpus under study here reflects the key moments of interplay and exchange between real and imaginary travel in the work of each writer, focusing on the periods where travel is a principal concern in their creative development. Of course, in *œuvres* as broad and varied as those of Gide and Michaux, there are many narratives focusing in part – or in the main – on travel, some of which have been omitted here for a number of reasons. Notable exclusions include, in the case of Gide, *L'Immoraliste*, published in 1902 (where the ailing protagonist Michel recuperates against the background of an exoticised and sexually permissive North African society), *Les Caves du Vatican*, which appeared in 1914 (Gide's 'roman d'aventure', in which a number of the principal characters are engaged in a relay-style chase), and Gide's last stand-alone travel text, *Carnets d'Égypte* (written over the course of his 1939 trip, but published posthumously in 1954), which will not be focused on here because their dates of composition and publication fall outside the crucial stages of Gide's evolution which I have chosen to analyse and interconnect. In the case of Michaux, works after the *Ailleurs* collection are excluded for two primary reasons. Firstly, many of these texts, though they relate imaginary travels, emerge from the author's measured use of mescaline to stimulate and shape the writing process; secondly, these experiential and textual experiments in generating an illusion of mobility have already been examined in considerable detail.[41] My corpus of study will

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[40] See Gérard Cogez, *Les écrivains voyageurs au XX^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2004); David Scott, *Semiologies of Travel: From Gautier to Baudrillard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Charles Forsdick, Feroza Basu and Siobhán Shilton, *New Approaches to Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French: Genre, History and Theory*.

[41] Ilona Leki has looked at the way in which Michaux's mescaline trips fit into his relationship with travel in her unpublished doctoral thesis on Michaux and travel literature. Ilona Nina Leki, 'The travel literature of Henri Michaux' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1974; abstract in *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 35.12 (1975), 7312-

nonetheless be formed by texts from a wide variety of genres, each of which will be understood to negotiate key aspects of real, imaginary and anticipated travel as outlined above. The selection moves from the fin-de-siècle period to the years after the Second World War, with a particular concentration on the interwar period, a time when travel narratives based on real journeys are at the forefront of each author's creative drive and literary production.

Chapter 1 considers the importance of imaginary travel in terms of Gide's development as a writer in the fin-de-siècle period. Chapter 2 looks at Michaux's accounts of real travel, suggesting that the sense of disappointment that has been understood to emanate from these texts in fact serves to *generate* each narrative, as well as to lay the foundations for Michaux's later works on imaginary travel. Chapter 3 considers Gide's travels in French Equatorial Africa, showing the ways in which unexpected elements of a journey (in this case, Gide's discovery of the abuses perpetrated by the concessionary companies working alongside the colonial government) can problematise – but also expand – any notion of authorial self-identification. Chapter 4 concentrates on Gide's journey to the USSR, outlining the problematic relationship between anticipated travel and its subsequent realisation – Communist Russia prior to departure is understood by Gide to be a modern utopia, yet this assumption quickly begins to unravel once his journey progresses. It also traces the way in which a country under construction can destabilise the construction of a travel narrative that attempts to negotiate a destination in flux. Chapter 5 focuses on Michaux's accounts of imaginary travel, outlining the ways in which Michaux revisits and reworks problematic elements of his real travel experiences in the *Ailleurs* texts.

Critical work on Gide and Michaux has not yet produced the extensive consideration that the symbiotic relationship between real and imaginary travel in each author's body of work deserves; at the same time, the connection between both authors in terms of their appraisal of travel, as suggested in *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, merits further attention. My thesis therefore aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between real and imaginary travel across each author's output, highlighting the significant impact that these forms of travel have on

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7313A). See also Lajos Elkan, *Les Voyages et les propriétés d'Henri Michaux* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988).

each author's literary production at key points in their literary careers. In engaging with a broadened understanding of the various ways in which an author might treat travel, as well as demonstrating a sensitivity towards the motivations behind any such authorial approach, this thesis aims to have an impact on the way(s) in which the textualisation of travel might be considered.

CHAPTER 1 – LITERARY PEREGRINATIONS: IMAGINING THE SCOPE OF TRAVEL IN GIDE'S EARLY WORK

1.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates Gide's earliest experimentations with travel in his fiction written in the fin-de-siècle period. In these works, travel will be seen to operate as a principal topic to be mined both in and through the writing process. The concept of travel – whether understood in terms of displacement, progression, or the return trip – will also be considered as acting as a narrative motor in Gide's work during this period. I will argue that *Le Voyage d'Urien* (1893), *Paludes* (1895) and *El Hadj* (1899) deserve to be considered as key texts in Gide's writing on travel insofar as their creation allows the young author to negotiate the possibilities that travel might offer him in terms of his development as an author. Gide's heightened interest in and investigation of travel in the 1890s is not only central to any appraisal of these early works, but also to his later travel journals based on real journeys undertaken (as investigated in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis). Indeed, the texts written in the 1890s will be viewed in the broader context of the thesis as comprising a conceptual basis to Gide's pronounced social engagement during his mid-life Congo voyage, undertaken between 1925 and 1926.[42] The three texts in question are classed as works of fiction; it will be emphasised that Gide uses the creative freedom involved in writing fiction to *develop*, as well as to explore, his relationship to travel at this formative stage of his literary development. It will also be argued that *Les Nourritures terrestres* (1897), which combines elements of both real and imaginary travel experiences, serves as the culmination of the themes explored in this trilogy of texts on travel. That is to say, some of the key metaphors for the writing process used in these three texts are combined and redeployed in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, whose self-appointed status as a 'disposable' guidebook advising how to travel signals Gide's completion of and move away from the apprenticeship he has undertaken in writing about travel during this period.

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[42] As already noted, critics such as Daniel Moutote (*André Gide: l'engagement 1926–1939* [Paris: Sedes, 1991]) have shown that Gide becomes increasingly interested in and vocal regarding socio-political issues from the early 1900s. But in the mid-1920s begins the period where Gide shows himself to be most politically engaged, above all in his reactions to the abuses committed by the colonial concessionary companies, which become evident to him over the course of his travels in the Congo. See also Tom Conner, ed., *André Gide's Politics: Rebellion and Ambivalence* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave, 2000).

Gide's assessment of his workspace, the study-bedchamber, will occupy a key position in my analysis of his texts written in the fin-de-siècle period. Writing in the *Journal* in 1893 (as part of *Feuillets*), he notes:

> Dans ma chambre, un lit bas; un peu d'espace, un meuble de bois avec large planche horizontale à hauteur d'appui; une petite table carrée; une chaise dure. J'imagine couché; compose en marchant; écris debout; recopie assis. Ces quatre positions me sont indispensables.[43]

Gide's apparent tendency to shift between states of immobility and displacement around his room as the creative process unfolds is revealing given what can be seen to link each text in this trilogy. This common thread is Gide's sustained focus on the site of the travel text's creation, the room in which the writer imagines and writes about his journey. In each of these three texts, the site of the text's composition can be understood as encoded, eulogised or symbolised.

The earliest of the three texts, *Le Voyage d'Urien*, serves as an initiatory exploration of the writer's creative process. Although it deploys the ancient template of the sea voyage as its central motif, it in fact hinges upon on an imaginary trip around the writer's study-bedchamber, looking back to the antecedent of Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (1794). I will argue that Gide brings together the sea voyage and the imaginary voyage rooted in the domestic interior in *Le Voyage d'Urien* in order to establish a way of writing about travel. That is to say, Gide negotiates the activity of imagining displacement in revisiting and utilising these two primary antecedents (the sea voyage and the bedroom-based voyage) in his fiction on travel. He does this whilst retaining a connection to the site of the text's composition as the imaginary voyage unfolds. To view *Le Voyage d'Urien* as a mere exercise in writing about an (imaginary) travel experience, however, would be to miss the rich links this work has with each of its literary antecedents. The key traditions in which this text inscribes itself will therefore be given due attention in this section.

Paludes is the one text in Gide's early career which can be seen as prefacing the Modernist vision central to later key works such as *Les Caves du Vatican* and *Les*

[43] Gide, *Journal*, ed. by Éric Marty and Martine Sagaert, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1996-1997), I (1996), pp. 193-94.

Faux-Monnayeurs.[44] My aim, however, is to integrate an understanding of the interconnection between travel and the (sedentary) writing process in *Paludes* into the broader development of the Gidian conception of travel during this period.

The third text to be examined, *El Hadj*, can be seen as a work which accompanies, and perhaps even serves to heighten, Gide's growing interest in North Africa, an obsession which reaches its apogee in the 1901 'récit' *L'Immoraliste*. It will be seen that *El Hadj* looks back to the theme of literary creation and the ways in which it is treated in both *Le Voyage d'Urien* and *Paludes*. *El Hadj*'s desert setting epitomises a site where human control is weakened by the force of Nature – Gide as a writer must then find ways both to surmount *and* harness this sense of desolation and helplessness in order for literary production to ensue. This struggle to create is akin to that experienced by the narrators of *Le Voyage d'Urien* and *Paludes*. Indeed, the desert setting of *El Hadj*, in symbolising the blank page and the challenge it lays down to the writer's creativity, finds counterparts in the similarly desolate plains of *Le Voyage d'Urien,* and the marshland represented in *Paludes*. Moreover, in focusing on what has been termed a *voyage inachevé*, or a failed voyage, *El Hadj* casts an eye back to the quickly abandoned voyage equally central to the narrative's generation and progression in *Paludes*.[45]

All three narratives will be understood to focus on how interior and exterior spaces are related to each other in the Gidian text. Gide is a diligent writer whose study-bedchamber commits him to his work. However, travel requires the writer figure to absent himself from his isolated workspace and open himself up to the multifarious possibilities of the outside world and its inhabitants. The three texts, therefore, draw out the tensions inherent to the constant struggle on the part of the writer of travel both to remain apart from, and yet also integrate into, the host society. *Le Voyage d'Urien* uncovers the urge to root an imaginary nautical voyage in the narrator's study-bedchamber; *Paludes* interrogates travel's viability as a source of textual inspiration whilst positing a voyage as a potential means of transcending the never-ending to-ing and fro-ing that comprises activity within the narrator's social

[44] See Alan Sheridan, *André Gide: A Life in the Present* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 110.
[45] See Daniel Bengsch, 'L'Absence présente: échec et prosopopée dans les premières œuvres d'André Gide', in *André Gide et la tentation de la modernité*, ed. by Robert Kopp and Peter Schnyder (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), pp. 315–33.

circle; *El Hadj* sees the creation of microcosmic metaphors for the domestic interior within the vastness of the desert exterior, an aspect of the work that is linked to the physical and psychological challenges faced by the human body in the desert setting. This struggle between the comforts and confines of the interior and the fearsome boundlessness of outer spaces which, I propose, can be related to the writer's struggle to create – and, it must be added, finish *and* finalise –[46] a travel text, is a fundamental aspect of Gide's increasingly complex understanding of both travel and his own creativity in this period.

The final section in this chapter considers *Les Nourritures terrestres*, a text which begins and ends with the narrator's decree that the volume itself should be discarded in order for meaningful travel to be undertaken. *Les Nourritures terrestres*, completed at roughly the same time as *El Hadj*, will be seen as the culmination of the apprenticeship to which Gide committed himself during the writing not only of the latter text, but also in composing *Le Voyage d'Urien* and *Paludes*.

What might also be acknowledged in this chapter is Gide's minimal engagement with exoticism in *Le Voyage d'Urien*, *Paludes* and *El Hadj*. Gide offers a comprehensive outlook at what the notion of the exotic might mean in relation to his writing in the following passage from *Feuilles de route* (1896) (later collected in *Amyntas*), in which he discusses the changes that colonialism has introduced to Tunis:

> Il y a deux ans, la rue Marr, la place des Moutons étaient encore telles qu'on ne s'y savait où transporté, et que l'Orient le plus extrême, l'Afrique la plus secrète n'eussent pas eu, je crois, goût d'*étrange* plus stupéfiant. Une forme de vie différente et que tout réalise au-dehors, très pleine, antique, classique, établie; pas de compromis encore entre les civilisations de l'Orient et la nôtre qui paraît si laide surtout quand elle veut réparer.[47] (emphasis in original)

Gide's conception of the exotic as a force of stupefying *dépaysement* and a source of aesthetic pleasure as suggested above is not a pressing motivation behind the construction of his early works of fiction. Even in the descriptions of the varied landscapes visited by the travellers in *Le Voyage d'Urien*, for instance, a sense of

[46] In both *Le Voyage d'Urien* and *Paludes*, the conclusion to the work is purposely drawn out by various addenda. In the case of *Paludes*, the final addendum can be seen to require, or indeed, initiate, a re-reading of the entire work, as will be discussed later in this chapter.
[47] Gide, *Amyntas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1925), p. 26.

austerity, rather than of the ostensible plenitude of the exotic, tends to prevail.[48] It is only in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, a handbook extolling the virtues of travel and, at that, one which frequently hinges on accounts of the real travels of the author – who appears to be recording his apprehensions of travel *sur place* (journal entries based on Gide's actual travels around Italy and North Africa infiltrate the text) – that elements of what might be termed an exoticist aesthetic become evident.[49] Moreover, other extracts from the contemporaneously composed *Amyntas*, again primarily comprising (travel) journal entries written *in situ*, recount experiences of the desert in an exoticist style; experiences of the desert, and accounting for such experiences, evidently feed into the writing process of *El Hadj*, although this is a text which, unlike Pierre Loti's *Le Désert* (1895) of the same period, does not operate as an aesthetic eulogising of this vast space. These observations underline that, in the 1890s, Gide reserves any engagement in what James Clifford describes as 'established exoticisms – those for example of a Pierre Loti'[50] precisely for those texts which purport to give an accurate account of the real, verifiable travel which he has undertaken. His fiction, however, largely eschews this particular aesthetic in order to concentrate more specifically on experimenting with – and indeed generating a narrative from – the relation of a travel experience, be it partly inspired by real travel, or an entirely imaginary journey.

1.2 A Return Trip in the Writer's Imagination - *Le Voyage d'Urien*

This section exposes the ways in which the activities promoted by the traditional functions of the study-bedchamber space, namely, creative writing, rest/restlessness and dreaming, generate, sustain and yet ultimately harness the *voyage intérieur* central to Gide's text *Le Voyage d'Urien*. In putting forward a comprehensive definition of the *voyage intérieur,* and focusing upon the complex narrative structure of *Le Voyage d'Urien* through categorising and examining this text as a voyage in this vein, this section aims to rectify the tendency in Gidian criticism to assess the book as

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[48] See, for example, the narrator's moralising in *Le Voyage d'Urien* regarding exotic excess, that is to say, depicting the torturous deaths of sailors who have indulged in food, drink – and women – that are represented in the text as exotic.

[49] The contrast between these journal entries, written 'on the spot' or 'in situ', and Gide's journal entries in *Le Voyage au Congo*, which were heavily reworked and added to upon his return, might be noted.

[50] See James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 152.

but an extended dream narrative.[51] A notable exception to this trend is Valérie Michelet Jacquod in *Le Roman symboliste: un art de l' 'extrême conscience'*. She notes that 'l'expédition décrite n'est, en réalité, qu'un voyage en bibliothèque ou un voyage dans l'écriture, dimension que le narrateur met en relief par son métadiscours'.[52] The notion of a 'voyage dans l'écriture' will inform – and be further developed through – my examination of *Le Voyage d'Urien* in the present section. *Le Voyage d'Urien* constitutes Gide's relatively short-lived and decidedly ambitious flirtation with Symbolism; prior to its composition, Gide posited *Le Voyage d'Urien* as the novel the Symbolist movement lacked.[53] The text is, on occasion, dismissed as one of his least successful by Gidian scholars, a viewpoint arguably bolstered by Gide himself when, in a 1949 interview focusing on his body of work, he appears to undermine the qualities and ostensible achievements of the book.[54] In *Le Voyage d'Urien*, the narrator recounts a dream-like voyage from the moment of departure to the instant of return. The opening paragraphs place this journey's *point de départ* in an interior setting, which can be recognised as a study-bedchamber. The 'Envoi', in

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[51] Jean Delay has emphasised that *Le Voyage d'Urien* is 'un voyage en chambre', although he does not take this initial observation any further since his psychoanalytic stance leads him to concentrate on the oneiric elements of the text, see *La Jeunesse d'André Gide*, II (1957), 193, while Germaine Brée briefly evokes 'le thème du départ intérieur' in her study *André Gide: l'Insaisissable Protée* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1953), p. 50. Christian Angelet also terms *Le Voyage d'Urien* 'un voyage en chambre' in *Symbolisme et invention formelle dans les premiers écrits d'André Gide* (Ghent: Romanica Gardensia, 1982), p. 78, while David H. Walker sees *Le Voyage d'Urien* as 'a dream journey' in *André Gide* (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 6. Indeed, Frédéric Canovas writes that '[*Le*] *Voyage d'Urien* n'est autre qu'un long récit de rêve [...]', *L'Écriture rêvée* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), p. 105.

[52] Valérie Michelet Jacquod, *Le Roman symboliste: un art de l' 'extrême conscience'* (Geneva: Droz, 2008), p. 425. Moreover, see Daniel Bengsch, 'L'absence présente: échec et prosopopée dans les premières œuvres d'André Gide', in *André Gide et la tentation de la modernité*, ed. by Robert Kopp and Peter Schnyder (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), pp. 315–33 (p. 318). In this essay, Bengsch highlights the 'réclusion quasi religieuse' sought by the heroes of Gide's fin-de-siècle work, noting that '[l]es uns la cherchent dans le voyage ou dans le silence du désert, les autres dans la fermeture de la fenêtre ou, à l'instar d'Urien, en faisant simplement des voyages autour de la chambre'. However, Bengsch goes on to say that, in contrast to the appraisal of solitude in Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, the Gidian hero 'ne parvient nullement à faire concorder l'isolement avec sa vie intérieure'. The present chapter will argue that the narrator's continuing connection to his study-bedchamber in *Le Voyage d'Urien* is in fact an attempt on his part to reconcile, *à la* Xavier de Maistre, his isolation in an interior setting with the voyage undertaken in his imagination.

[53] Upon beginning this writing project, Gide stated the following: 'Mallarmé pour la poésie, Maeterlinck pour le drame [...] et j'ajoute Moi pour le roman', André Gide–Paul Valéry, *Correspondance 1890-1942*, ed. by Robert Mallet (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 46. See also Gide's later confirmation of having had such an intention in 'Entretiens André Gide–Jean Amrouche', in Eric Marty, *André Gide – Qui êtes-vous?* (Lyon: La Manufacture, 1987), pp. 139–317 (p. 160).

[54] 'Entretiens André Gide–Jean Amrouche', in Marty, *André Gide – Qui êtes-vous?*, pp. 160-61. This sense of detachment from the initial aims of *Le Voyage d'Urien* is particularly evident when Gide says of the work 'Je dirais presque que la seule chose qui m'y intéresse, c'est l'introduction du saugrenu dans la seconde partie' (p.161). Gide, over fifty years later, sees this section as the work's most notable achievement, not least, presumably, because he managed to resist advice from his peers at the time of writing, advice which suggested that he should delete this part.

discounting the narrative of the sea voyage as follows – 'nous ne sommes jamais sortis / de la chambre de nos pensées'[55] – creates the illusion of a return to this interior space. The narrator of *Le Voyage d'Urien* can be seen as split into 'deux moitiés d'écrivain-voyageur', to rework Jacques Meunier's incisive phrase,[56] insofar as the former is at once the nameless writer at work in his study-bedchamber *and* the traveller, Urien,[57] who has 'departed' on an imaginary voyage of his own literary invention. Analysing this text as a *voyage intérieur* will serve to expose the series of metaphors for the writing process that Gide has crafted in this book using the schema of a return trip, which can be understood here as a falsified outward journey that posits a return as both inevitable and necessary, in order to highlight this very falsification. *Le Voyage d'Urien* deploys the ancient template of the sea journey; this section, however, will aim to underline the importance of the traveller's continuing connection to the study-bedchamber throughout the course of the text, that is to say, the space from which he, in writing, imagines his sea adventure. This connection is founded on the use of metaphors for this particular interior space throughout the sea voyage, as well as in numerous evocations, in the main body of text, of the frequently overlapping activities the study-bedchamber can be seen to foster. The study-bedchamber is then not only the journey's *point de départ*, but is in fact encoded and evoked in the sea voyage in order to be understood throughout as the very site in which the central reverie – the sea voyage – unfolds.

It is necessary, first of all, to clarify my proposed categorisation of *Le Voyage d'Urien*. An analysis of the central role of the study-bedchamber in *Le Voyage d'Urien* can be informed by what is generally considered to be the prototypal bedroom voyage, Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre*. De Maistre's text firmly establishes two of the bedroom-based voyage's key themes:

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[55] *Le Voyage d'Urien*, p. 230. All references are to the following edition of *Le Voyage d'Urien*: Gide, *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), I (2009), 179-231. Hereafter referred to in the text as (*VU*).

[56] Jacques Meunier, in *Pour une littérature voyageuse*, ed. by Alain Borer and others (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 1992), pp. 141-51 (p. 148). Moreover, Nancy Blake, touching upon 'la question des rapports entre auteur et personnage' in Gide's work, emphasises the importance of his early focus on the figure of Narcissus (see Gide's 1891 text *Le Traité de Narcisse*), 'Le 'Nouveau Roman' de 1890: Barrès, Dujardin, Gide et Gourmont', in *'Agencer un univers nouveau'*, ed. by Louis Forestier (Paris: Minard, 1976), p. 58.

[57] Jean-Michel Wittmann highlights the indissociable nature of the intertwined figures of Urien and the writer in *Symboliste et déserteur – Les œuvres 'fin de siècle' d'André Gide* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997), p. 100.

isolation/exile, and the writing process in terms of the functions promoted by the space that is the writer's study-bedchamber. For the writer, the bedchamber, amongst its other functions, is a space of rest and, frequently, a space of work, whilst also constituting the space where dreams, *rêveries* and, thus, imaginary travels, are accommodated and authorised. Although the term 'voyage immobile' has been noted as a viable categorisation for de Maistre's text by Adrien Pasquali,[58] I would argue that the privileging of immobility in this expression tends to take attention away from the fact that the physical stasis of the narrators of both *Voyage autour de ma chambre* and *Le Voyage d'Urien* is constantly underpinned – and undermined – by the journeys on which they mentally depart. Of course, in *Le Voyage d'Urien*, the narrator's immobility must be reconciled with the element of adventure that the lengthy sea voyage brings to the text. Yet the frequently used expression 'voyage imaginaire', though it respects the scope (both imaginative and geographical) introduced by the model of the nautical voyage, can be seen to disregard the underlying domestic setting of the journey; the expression is perhaps, therefore, too evocative of narratives of global travel, exploration and adventure – narratives of exteriors real and imaginary – as focused upon by one of the only critics to attempt an anatomy of the imaginary voyage, Philip Babcock Gove. In his extensive study and inventory of the eighteenth-century imaginary voyage in Europe, *The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction*, Babcock Gove chooses to exclude de Maistre's work and its offshoots, preferring instead to devote his attention exclusively to the profusion of texts that recount imaginary journeys through real or imaginary seas and lands.[59] Such an approach in criticism might be seen as having paved the way for problems facing the categorisation of the voyage which roots itself in the domestic interior as a *voyage imaginaire*. Ursula Franklin remarks that *Le Voyage d'Urien* 'is couched in the age-old image of a questing voyage, symbolically a voyage of the soul.'[60] It therefore comes as no surprise that several commentators have noted that *Le Voyage d'Urien* is strongly informed by the structure and content of the *Odyssey*, the evident template for the writer of an (imaginary) sea voyage (Gide's reading log shows him to have turned to this text during the writing of *Le Voyage d'Urien*). In proposing that *Le*

[58] Pasquali, however, chooses to concentrate on the 'voyage immobile' in terms of the 'voyage hypnotique'. Adrien Pasquali, *Le Tour des horizons* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1994), p. 77.
[59] See Philip Babcock Gove, *The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction: A History of its Criticism and a Guide for its Study, with an Annotated Check List of 215 Imaginary Voyages from 1700 to 1800*.
[60] Ursula Franklin, 'Urien's Anti-Quest: Gide's parting statement to Symbolism', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 7.3-4 (Spring-Summer 1979), 258-71 (p. 260).

Voyage d'Urien be examined in the light of the bedroom voyage genre inaugurated by de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, the category of the *voyage intérieur* will emerge as an important component of my analysis. The *voyage intérieur* can be characterised as a voyage which unfolds both in a given domestic space and/or around the inner spaces of the narrator's mind, as encapsulated by Michaux's notion of the *lointain intérieur* in the twentieth century.[61] When Albert Thibaudet categorises *Le Voyage d'Urien* as a *voyage intérieur*, seeing it as the writer's voyage of self-exploration, he believes such a genre to be 'une des inventions du symbolisme'.[62] However, the present section will show how Gide's sustained inscription of the domestic into this text has the effect of ultimately destabilising the Symbolist project seemingly driving the creation of the narrative.

My understanding of the *voyage intérieur* embraces the double meaning of *intérieur*, that is, denoting compartmentalised space as well as signifying the recesses of mind, as this duality at once reflects and surmounts the tension that I have already exposed between the terms *immobile* and *imaginaire*. It is worth noting that Gide himself, in *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, will go so far as to describe Michaux's imaginary countries as the product of a 'voyage dans un fauteuil.'[63] This categorisation on Gide's part would seem to indicate his bias towards the interior as the site of an imaginary journey's creation, which, as the writer's usual location when composing his text, is thus viewed by him as an obvious *point de départ* for *any* variation on the imaginary voyage. Moreover, the significance of Gide's emphasis on the interior, as embedded in his assessment of Michaux's imaginary countries, is further heightened by the fact that these fictional states are conceivably the products of Michaux's *real* travels, undertaken in the 1920s and 1930s (indeed, it might be remembered that Gide had read Michaux's 1929 text *Ecuador* with relish). Gaëtan Picon's description of Gide's *œuvre*, then, can be, of all the latter's individual works, most aptly applied to *Le Voyage d'Urien*: '[Gide] [...] nous fait pénétrer à l'intérieur de l'atelier'.[64] Moreover, reading *Le Voyage d'Urien* as a bedroom-based voyage highlights this work's acute self-awareness with regard to its own construction. The

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[61] See Henri Michaux's text *Lointain intérieur*, *OC*, I, pp. 559–606.
[62] Albert Thibaudet, 'Le Voyage intérieur', in *Réflexions sur le roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p.146.
[63] Gide, *Découvrons Henri Michaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), p. 744.
[64] Gaëtan Picon, 'Actualité d'André Gide', in *L'Usage de la lecture* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1979), p. 73.

reader's attention is drawn to the narrator's struggle to propel the story forward at numerous points throughout the main body of the text. Indeed, Gide's tendency to highlight certain aspects of the creative process (the struggle to write, the act of writing about one's experiences, the writer's satisfaction with what has been created/produced) throughout the text only reinforces his effort to sustain the connection to the bedchamber in which the voyage is being imagined.

The ambiguity of the narrator's state in *Le Voyage* must also be acknowledged here. There is a constant crossover or confusion between *rêve* and *rêverie* throughout the text, both terms being used freely;[65] one is reminded of Gide's suggestion that between reality and dreams there lies what he terms *une seconde réalité*, one in which, it can be argued, the imaginary journey can be set in motion, so to speak.[66] For this reason, reverie, or the idea of a waking dream (one in which creation can take place), takes precedence in the current assessment of *Le Voyage d'Urien*.[67]

In the opening lines of *Le Voyage d'Urien*, a sudden event occurs which leads the narrator to 'depart': 'Sans que je m'en fusse aperçu, ma lampe s'était éteinte; devant l'aube s'était ouverte ma croisée'[68] (*VU*, 181). Certain elements of the interior can be seen as actively precipitating the narrator's voyage, for the extinguished lamp and the swinging window not only draw the narrator into the light, but also invite him to enter a reverie. Therefore, the study-bedchamber, in addition to establishing itself in the opening lines of the work as the site of this extended reverie, also lays bare its own fundamental role in setting the narrative in motion. Even though the use of the possessive determiner 'ma' establishes the narrator's dominion over this interior setting as well as his familiarity with it, it appears that he has no physical control over

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[65] This confusion is evident in the opening lines of the text, where the terms 'rêverie', 'rêve' and 'songe' all feature. Moreover, in the text's *Envoi* the words 'rêve', 'pensées' and 'songe' are used.

[66] Gide writes: 'Et quand je me retrouve dans mon lit, j'ai les idées toutes brouillées et je pense, avant de sombrer dans le sommeil, confusément: il y a la réalité et il y a les rêves; et puis il y a *une seconde* réalité' (emphasis in original). *Si le grain ne meurt* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 27. See also Gide's comments to Valéry in a letter dated 11th June 1892, where the former, having commenced *Le Voyage d'Urien*, notes: 'ces nuits de fièvre, j'ai rêvé de conquêtes extraordinaires. J'écris des phrases qui m'enthousiasment', in André Gide–Paul Valéry, *Correspondance*, p. 162.

[67] In Mallarmé's 'Salut' and 'Brise marine' the imaginary sea voyage projected by the narrator arguably reveals itself to be the daydream of the poet at work. Each poem hints towards its own writing process; in each case the daydream is exposed through the poem's evocation of the blank page, which seems to threaten or, at least, certainly lay down a challenge to, creativity.

[68] For an analysis of the interplay between the door and the bedchamber in Gide's work, see Pierre Masson, 'Histoires de portes et de chambres', in *La Chambre noire d'André Gide*, ed. Alain Goulet (Paris: Le Manuscrit, 2009), pp. 39-64.

his apparent departure. The study-bedchamber itself can be seen to be an 'invitation au voyage' 'dans le val étroit des métempsychoses' (*VU*, 181). Metempsychosis, or the transmigration of the soul, can be seen in this instance as evocative of the tension inherent in the narrator's dual identity as writer and traveller, as one element of this dual identity appears to take precedence over the other and vice versa. From the very outset, then, against the background of this tense struggle, it is clear that the narrator will physically remain in the bedroom throughout his journey, where he will both imagine his experiences and commit them to writing.

The study-bedchamber's potential to act as an ideal starting point for an imaginary journey deserves to be brought into focus here. In negotiating this quality of the study-bedchamber, Gaston Bachelard's observations regarding immensity in his seminal 1957 study *La Poétique de l'espace* prove to be insightful. He writes:

> L'immensité est en nous. Elle est attachée à une sorte d'expansion d'être que la vie refrène [...] mais qui reprend dans la solitude. Dès que nous sommes immobiles, nous sommes ailleurs; nous rêvons dans un monde immense. L'immensité est le mouvement de l'homme immobile. L'immensité est un des caractères dynamiques de la rêverie tranquille.[69]

Bachelard sees immobility and solitude as the ideal states for apprehending the immense. If the imaginary sea voyage can be seen as an extended engagement with the immense spaces the mind can possibly conjure up, then the narrator rooted in his study-bedchamber – the location *par excellence* of rest/sleep and the potentially immobilising process of writing – might be understood as being in the ideal state – and place – for undertaking such a voyage. It is the *rêveur*, or daydreamer, who, in his heightened psychological state, has the strongest capacity to feel immensity, for immensity can be seen as coming from within; it exists, as it were, 'en nous' - which is why, presumably, Bachelard terms it 'l'immensité intime'. But, more importantly, 'l'immensité' can then also be seen as something to be discovered or possibly even generated within, which would seem to accord both the curiosity and the imaginative capacity of the writer a particularly privileged position. Moreover, the conception of 'immensité' that can be seen to be intertwined with imaginary travel – in terms of the wide, uncharted spaces that the mind might generate and traverse – has been noted, in

[69] Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957), p. 169.

Bachelard, to be 'attachée à une sorte d'expansion d'être que la vie refrène'. What better example of an 'expansion d'être' exists in Gide, it might be said, than the kind of metempsychosis that the narrator undergoes in the opening lines of *Le Voyage d'Urien*? As Urien, or as any one of Urien's companions, the narrator can voyage, so to speak, far beyond the confines of his bedroom, whilst always remaining mindful of the limits imposed by this space and the reality it epitomises (hence Bachelard's need to invoke life's capacity to curb [*refréner*] such creation). Gide would later say that each of the twenty-one travellers in *Le Voyage d'Urien* represents an 'état d'âme', whilst noting in his preface to the second edition of this text that: 'mes marins sans caractères [...] se réduisent à moi-même'.[70] The group, who as individuals are vacuous and two-dimensional, might then collectively represent and facilitate the author's will to depart. Moreover, de Maistre seems to prefigure Bachelard's notion of *immensité*. Written whilst de Maistre was under a forty-two day long house arrest, the narrator of *Voyage autour de ma chambre* announces, with a note of triumph: 'Ils m'ont défendu de parcourir une ville, un point; mais ils m'ont laissé l'univers entier: l'immensité [est] à mes ordres.'[71] Gide, many years after *Le Voyage d'Urien*, would also truly experience the joys of bedroom-based imaginary travel. Bedridden before an appendectomy, Gide tells Roger Martin du Gard: 'Le séjour que je fais ici, c'est un de mes plus beaux voyages. [Charles-Louis] Philippe disait qu'une maladie c'est le voyage des pauvres'.[72]

The notion of *immensité* that underpins *Le Voyage d'Urien* also allows us to contextualise this work in terms of Gide's extensive writing on travel. Chateaubriand, who was seen as perhaps the most pre-eminent *écrivain-voyageur* in French literature at this point, and whose work Gide also read during the writing process behind *Le Voyage d'Urien*, addresses the notion of immensity thus:[73]

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[70] Gide, 'Préface à la nouvelle édition du "Voyage d'Urien"', in *Romans et récits: Œuvres lyriques et dramatiques*, I (2009), 234.

[71] Xavier de Maistre, *Voyage autour de ma chambre* (Paris: Flammarion, 1957), pp. 132-33.

[72] André Gide & Roger Martin du Gard, *Correspondance*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), I, *1913-1934* (1968), p. 670.

[73] Edward Said, in his seminal 1978 work *Orientalism*, discusses Chateaubriand's wide-ranging influence on French representations of the so-called Orient, as well as the appropriation of Chateaubriand's work on travel by subsequent *écrivain-voyageurs* in the French tradition. See *Orientalism*, 3rd edn (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 169-83.

> L'homme n'a pas besoin de voyager pour s'agrandir; il porte avec lui l'immensité. Tel accent échappé de votre sein, ne se mesure pas, et trouve un écho dans des milliers d'âmes: qui n'a point en soi cette mélodie, la demandera en vain à l'univers [...] [S]i dans l'oubli profond de vous-même, dans votre immobilité, dans votre silence, vous ne trouvez pas l'infini, il est inutile de vous égarer aux rivages du Gange.[74]

Gide, then, might also be seen as experimenting with immensity as an aspect of the imaginary voyage in *Le Voyage d'Urien* in order to prepare himself, as a writer, for the creative scope generated by the vicissitudes of *real* travel.[75] *Le Voyage d'Urien* is a work of literary apprenticeship, which, in its refusal to disconnect itself fully from the site of its creation as the narrative progresses, proves itself a sustained initiatory exercise in relating the activity of travelling to the writing process.

Given the importance accorded to the voyage's interior aspect throughout the course of the narrative, it is essential to examine the way, in *Le Voyage d'Urien*, this interior aspect might relate to the structure of the text itself. Vinio Rossi views the tripartite main body of the text as follows: 'Gide's imaginary travelers make their way through three landscapes representing as many responses to life: the sensual ("Sur une mer pathétique"), the introspective ("La mer des Sargasses"), and the ascetic ("La mer glaciale")'.[76] Thomas Cordle also suggests several readings of this narrative structure, one of which is particularly relevant here: '[The novel's itinerary] is the image of a mind forcing itself away from the contemplation of a phenomenal reality toward a reflection on the abstract ideal'.[77] The encoding of the site of the text's creation throughout the main body of text would seem, however, to contest Cordle's reading. Moreover, any reflection on the text's tripartite structure must acknowledge the presence – and content – of the *Prélude* and *Envoi* that are excluded from this tripartite model. Given the crucial nature of such an acknowledgement, I would propose that the components of the tripartite structure of the main narrative, together with the *Prélude* and *Envoi*, can be seen to offer a commentary on certain key

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[74] François-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, ed. by Maurice Levaillant, 4 vols (Paris: Flammarion, 1982), IV (1982), p. 587.

[75] Gide had travelled to England, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands only by the time *Le Voyage d'Urien* appeared, although he had previously considered accompanying his cousin Georges Pouchet on a (later aborted) scientific expedition to Iceland. Indeed, the working title used by Gide for the earliest sections of this text was the suitably arctic *Le Voyage au Spitzberg* (to Mallarmé's initial horror, for the poet thought that Gide had *physically* undertaken such a trip).

[76] Vinio Rossi, *André Gide* (New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1968), p. 4.

[77] Thomas Cordle, *André Gide* (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 46.

elements of the writing process itself as it evolves – inspiration (the *invitation au voyage*, which initially sets the narrative in motion in the *Prélude*, delivering upon its unspoken promise of adventure), stagnation (the problems with writing up, reflected in the dominant thematic of *ennui*) and frustration (the sense of a lack of achievement upon completion of the writing process/travel). The *Envoi* can be then viewed as an acutely self-aware synthesis of the potential achievements and pitfalls of the creative process, integral to our understanding of the text as a whole. Michel Butor, commenting upon the interrelation of the activities of travelling and writing in writers who travel, himself included, notes: '[Les écrivains] voyagent pour écrire, et voyagent en écrivant, mais c'est parce que pour eux le voyage est écriture'.[78] Mapping the writing process behind the narrative onto its central imaginary voyage, *Le Voyage d'Urien* is perhaps one of the finest late nineteenth-century examples of the interplay between the activities of travelling and writing. Therefore, Gide's early experimentation with the relation between the overlapping activities of writing and (imaginary) travelling in *Le Voyage d'Urien* can be seen to pave the way for his lifelong interrogation of the creative potential offered by travel.

Seeing *Le Voyage d'Urien* in terms of the interplay between its central tripartite structure and the two key elements that surround it also presents a new reasoning behind the conclusion frequently drawn regarding the title of the work – that *Le Voyage d'Urien* is a 'voyage du rien'. In the *Envoi*, a sharp sense of cancellation or *biffure* comes across (this is perhaps is the reason why Justin O'Brien deems the *Envoi* 'rather unnecessary').[79] Of course, it might be argued that the imaginary return trip tends to register a *bilan* of zero upon its completion (insofar as space has *not* been traversed during the imaginary voyage; moreover, the disillusionment that this lack of progression in space – or lack of apparent achievement – seems to occasion, upon a renewed negotiation of the phenomenal, shows itself to be marked). Indeed, this specific quality of the imaginary return trip can be seen to inspire the act of adding up the total of one's actions and weighing them up against (in fact, subtracting them from) the day's projected aims, an activity which is central to the narrator's daily existence in *Paludes*, as will be seen in the next

[78] Michel Butor, 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', p. 17.
[79] Justin O'Brien, *Portrait of André Gide: A Critical Biography* (New York; Toronto; London: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 82.

section. Moreover, the *bilan* of zero motif can also be discerned in the Huysmanian return trip (where a speedy return is necessitated by a premature – and false – sense of achievement, the voyage thus being effectively 'cancelled') at the heart of *Paludes*.[80]

The effect of introducing elements of the bedroom-based writing process into the narrative is heightened when this interior space undergoes several metaphorical transformations in *Le Voyage d'Urien*. Considering the initial discussion held by several of the twenty-one somewhat disorientated voyagers, who find themselves aboard a ship called the *Orion*, is central to establishing the first of these metaphorical transformations:

> [...] [N]ul de nous ne savait comment il avait pu venir jusqu'au navire, mais nul ne regrettait l'amère nuit de pensées.
> 'De quel obscur sommeil me suis-je éveillé', dit Alain, 'de quelle tombe?' [...]
> — 'J'étais tourmenté d'un désir de conquête', dit Paride; 'je marchais dans ma chambre plein de vaillance, mais triste et, de rêver toujours des héroïsmes, plus fatigué que de les faire. [...] où allons-nous? dites! savez-vous où va nous mener ce navire?'
> Aucun de nous ne le savait [...]
> 'Que faisons-nous ici', reprit-il, 'et qu'est-ce donc cette vie, si celle d'avant était notre sommeil?'
> — 'Peut-être alors que nous vivons notre rêve', dit Nathanaël, 'pendant que dans la chambre nous dormons.' (*VU*, 186)

The ship here acts as a metaphor for the similarly confined and delimited space of the bedroom (and arguably, that of the bed itself), as Nathanaël's claim would seem to intimate. The ship of *Le Voyage d'Urien* is but an imaginary space that maps onto that of the writer's bedroom, whilst also facilitating the narrative's projected sea voyage. In his essay 'Des Espaces autres', also known as 'Hétérotopies', Michel Foucault writes: 'le bateau, c'est un morceau flottant d'espace [...] qui vit par lui-même, qui est fermé sur soi et qui est livré en même temps à l'infini de la mer'.[81] The self-contained nature of the ship therefore can be seen to echo the bedroom's capacity to act as a closed-off sanctuary or even as a prison-like enclave for the writer at work, at the mercy of, and grappling with, his own boundless imagination. Foucault, in 'Des

[80] I am referring to the return trip of the travel-weary/wary character Des Esseintes, which comprises Chapter XI of Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), pp. 231-48. See also Pierre Masson on the connection between Des Esseintes and Gide's writings at this point. Masson, *André Gide: voyage et écriture*, pp. 34–36.

[81] Michel Foucault, 'Des Espaces autres', in *Dits et Écrits, 1954-1988*, ed. by Daniel Defert and François Ewald, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), II (2001), 1571-81 (p. 1581).

Espaces autres', will go on to conclude that '[L]e bateau a été, [...] depuis le XVI[e] siècle jusqu'à nos jours [...] la plus grande réserve d'imagination. Dans les civilisations sans bateaux les rêves se tarissent [...]'[82] The ship can be seen as a site which stirs creativity and actively promotes dreaming – roles similar to those which have already been attributed to the study-bedchamber.

The second metaphorical transformation of the bedroom is revealed when members of the group begin to disembark the ship, in order to land on a series of populated islands. We might also speak of the re-imagining of the bed itself in relation to *Le Voyage d'Urien*, for we see that the islands, in sheltering sex-obsessed male and female inhabitants, constitute delimited sites of great physical temptation for the group, overlapping, on a functional level, with the bedchamber.[83] This particular encounter deeply disturbs the twelve chaste passengers among the group, one of whom includes Urien. Here, the bedroom temporarily diverges from the themes of work, rest and reverie; the islands, if they can be seen to symbolise the bedchamber, constitute spaces inviting sexual encounters and sheltering often ferocious outdoor sexual activity. Sleep, however, thematically underpins the 'Océan pathétique' section. The travellers are now held captive on the island of the Circe-like Queen Haïatalnefus. She tells them: 'Une nuit, savez-vous, vous dormiez dans vos chambres; sans bruit, je vins vous baiser sur les yeux, et votre âme a été rafraîchie du baiser que je vous ai donné [...]' (*VU*, 202). The queen appears to have mesmerised the travellers whilst they slumbered in their bedchambers. Her transgression not only displays how the boundaries of the private space suggested by these imaginary bedchambers wholly disintegrate on her island, but also shows how the travellers' bedrooms and the Queen's island now seem to co-exist as one continuous space of imprisonment. Again, this emphasis on the travellers' confinement points to the figure of the writer rooted in his bedchamber, at work. Moreover, the queen's seemingly effortless ensnaring of the group in their bedchambers serves to remind us that the bedchamber remains the constant location of the narrator, bound as he is by the duty of writing his narrative. Indeed, Queen Haïatalnefus might be viewed as a distorted vision of a poetic Muse, one whose presence suggests the laboriousness of the writing

[82] Foucault, Michel, p. 1581.
[83] Paul Ryan acknowledges 'the symbolism of the island' in relation to the bed in Valéry's *Cahiers*. See Paul Ryan, '"Penser 'cette chambre' où penser 'univers'": Valéry and the Universe of the Room', *The Romanic Review*, 93.3 (May 2002), 307-22.

project, rather than serving as the inspiration which ought to fuel such an enterprise.[84] The notion of a distorted Muse figure is later reprised in the character of Ellis (Urien's idealised female companion) who, upon boarding Urien's ship, begins to read a book entitled *Traité de la Contingence*, the subtitle of what is to become Gide's next published work, *Paludes*. The sight of this book makes a furious Urien grab it from her and, reprimanding her, he throws it into the water:[85] 'Ne sais-tu pas [...] que le livre est la tentation? Et nous sommes partis pour des actions glorieuses...' (*VU*, 210). Furthermore, the deathly sickness that later befalls the islanders, as well as the numerous sailors from the group who give in to sexual temptation, means that people later lie dying all over the island, in a feverish confusion of satiation and physical degeneration.[86] The intertwining of sexual intercourse and prolonged death in the last pages of the 'Océan pathétique' section offers up the island as an evident metaphor for the bed itself. As de Maistre philosophises over the course of his own journey: 'Un lit nous voit naître et nous voit mourir [...] c'est le trône de l'Amour; c'est un sépulcre.'[87]

The third and ultimate manifestation of the bedchamber and the bed in *Le Voyage d'Urien* that I will highlight here occurs in the third and final chapter of the book. The remaining seven travellers, having survived great hardship during their journey across a glacial sea, discover a supine corpse encased in a block of ice. His pose brings to mind de Maistre's affiliation of the bed and the sepulchre; indeed, of this corpse we are told that '[l]a glace, sur lui refermée, l'avait pris comme en un sépulcre [...]' (*VU*, 228). The dead man has carved from within the block of ice his own epitaph – 'HIC DESPERATVS' – and is still clutching a piece of paper. Though initially they decide against it, the travellers extricate the body from the ice in order to

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[84] The emergence of an almost threatening Muse figure here, one who pressurises rather than inspires the writer, might be viewed as an amalgam of the figures of the 'Idole' and the 'Spectre' in Charles Baudelaire's prose poem 'La Chambre double'. Here the 'Idole' fulfils the role of a stimulating poetic muse, whereas the narrator is filled with horror when he fantasises that the 'Spectre' might well be in the room to collect an overdue manuscript from him. 'La Chambre double', *Le Spleen de Paris/La Fanfarlo* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), pp. 79-80.

[85] This act of apparent frustration prefigures the command central to Gide's 1897 text *Les Nourritures terrestres*, where the narrator implores Nathanaël to throw away the book (but only when, it must also be noted, Nathanaël has read it).

[86] For critics who have traced a journey of authorial self-discovery in terms of sexuality, this incident can be interpreted as a disgust-filled rejection of (heterosexual) congress. See Delay, *La Jeunesse d'André Gide*, II, 199-200.

[87] De Maistre, *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, p. 51. Baudelaire describes the bed as 'ce trône de rêverie et de volupté' in 'La Chambre double'.

read the content of this page, only to find that it is blank. In *Si le grain ne meurt* (1926), Gide speaks candidly about the difficulty he had in writing *Le Voyage d'Urien* (Jean Delay suggests that this is linked to the former coming to terms with his own emerging homosexual identity at the time):[88]

> À La Roque, l'avant-dernier été, j'avais pensé devenir fou; presque tout le temps que j'y passai, ce fut cloîtré dans la chambre où n'eût dû me retenir que le travail, vers le travail m'efforçant en vain (j'écrivais *Le Voyage d'Urien*), obsédé, hanté, espérant peut-être trouver quelque échappement [...].[89]

We might see the figure trapped in the ice block as the writer who has exiled himself to his bedroom, awaiting inspiration and finding none – the writer with writer's block. From Gide's testimony above, the writer figure encased in the ice can even be seen as a portrait of Gide himself. This serves to underline the connection between these dim arctic surroundings and the bedchamber in which they are imagined, thus further tightening the structure of the book. Indeed, 'La Roque, été 1892' signs off the *Envoi*, as if to once again emphasise the illusory return to the domestic space where the journey was imagined and committed to writing.

David Scott, in *Semiologies of Travel*, notes: 'the travel writer's desire to re-establish contact with the real [...] is ineluctably accompanied by a desire to commit such experience to the symbolic – through writing or art'.[90] Yet, if the bedroom is never left, if space is never physically traversed, how and at what point during an imaginary journey of this kind does (re)construction begin? Urien goes on to announce the following in the final chapter of the work: 'Ici cessent les temps des souvenirs, commence mon journal sans date' (*VU*, 219). It can be seen that Urien is about to engage with the sedentary writing process, thus preparing for a full 'return' to and reintegration of the post-metempsychosis soul into the study-bedchamber space towards the end of the book – that is, Urien and the remaining sailors collapsing back into the stationary writer figure, or being reduced, post-self-expansion, to this figure. Indeed, the last line of the main body of text displays the 'nous' of the voyage once again becoming 'Je' (capitalised in Gide's text for emphasis):[91] '[...] nous avons

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[88] Delay, *La Jeunesse d'André Gide*, II, 174-76.
[89] Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt*, p. 342.
[90] David Scott, *Semiologies of Travel: From Gautier to Baudrillard*, p. 21.
[91] As Marc Beigbeder notes: '[T]out, chez Gide, part du je'. *André Gide* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 'Classiques du XXe siècle', 1954), p. 47. The marked return to the 'Je' in the closing line of the main

cherché sur l'eau noire le reflet du ciel que Je rêve'. (*VU*, 229) Moreover, Urien's self-awareness can easily be linked to that of the writer of travel; Urien seems not only to prevent himself from dwelling on the past, but also appears to want to put a stop to creating any more memories on this journey, so that he might engage with the present (and pressing) task of constructing his journal. Nevertheless, time cannot be frozen so that he might begin his journal – it can only ever be a 'journal sans date' in name – an emphatic return is inevitable and the journey, naturally, carries on. For instance, once what they deem to be the apex of their journey is reached, '[...] comme en une histoire qu'on relit à l'envers, ou comme en le reflet du passé, nous reprenions notre voyage [...]' (*VU*, 214). Of course, the acknowledgement that such a turning point has been reached further underlines the idea that the journey has been projected or mapped out by the narrator from the outset, once again exposing the text's tendency to promote its self-awareness as a literary construct.

Following the encounter had by the remaining sailors with the person whom they initially believe to be Ellis, we read: 'Notre voyage est vraiment bien mal composé. Que signifie notre plaine si morne à ce moment de notre histoire? Ou que signifions-nous dans la plaine?' (*VU*, 210–11) In this instance, it can be seen that Urien attempts to comprehend the symbolism of his (self-created) surroundings not only by negotiating the *émotion/paysage* binary Gide later emphasises as central to the text, but by also trying to ascertain what role his surroundings will go on to play in the development of his story, that is, the narrative of his journey.[92] The acute self-awareness displayed by Urien in this episode, a self-awareness which regularly surfaces in *Le Voyage d'Urien*, serves to remind us that the principal subject of the travel journal is arguably the exploration of the self/other selves, although the travel journal model traditionally tends to posit an exploration of the encounter with an external 'other' as its primary focus. In addition, the phrase 'Nous comprenions que nous étions parvenus au point suprême de notre histoire' (*VU*, 214) not only prefigures Urien's return, but also his decision to create a journal; now that the journey has been declared finite, and that the end or 'return' is in sight, it seems that

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body of text in *Le Voyage* seems to highlight the centrality of the first person in Gide's work. Christian Angelet, however, sees this return as 'la régénération finale où Urien réintégrera le Premier Homme'. *Symbolisme et invention formelle dans les premiers écrits d'André Gide*, p. 55.

[92] Gide, 'Préface à la nouvelle édition du "Voyage d'Urien"', *Romans et récits: Œuvres lyriques et dramatiques*, I, 234.

he can begin to commit this Symbolist journey to the symbolic. Everything thus far can be seen as constituting Urien's direct reaction to the travel experience as it unfolds – or an 'enregistrement du voyage', as Michel Butor might call it. Now begins the 'journal', and the return journey of Urien's character, as the fragments (Urien and the other travellers) of the writer figure's transmigrated soul begin to reform.[93]

Reflecting Butor's initial correlation of the activities of reading and travelling in 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', the reader of *Le Voyage d'Urien* can be seen to undertake an *aller-retour* of his own as he makes his way through Gide's text, one in which the 'la chambre insonorisée, le laboratoire de l'écrivain' is gradually revealed to him.[94] In the *Envoi*, the adventure we, as readers, have departed on seems to be denied to us. Indeed, the reader appears to be rather cruelly ejected from the text in which he has been absorbed. In her 1966 article on Gide, Catharine H. Savage writes that this return to reality in the *Envoi* 'is an explicit renunciation of the symbol: not because, to be valid, a true symbolist novel would have to refer to reality, but because Gide prefers to reassert the reality to which he has *not* referred' (emphasis my own).[95] In showing that the reality of the writer's study-bedchamber *is* referred to in the *Prélude* and throughout the main narrative, the complex interplay between the *états d'âme* symbolised in the imaginary seascapes and landscapes of *Le Voyage d'Urien* and the elements of the domestic interior in which the narrative is rooted has been exposed and emphasised. This section also aims to have rectified the lack of critical commentary on Gide's inscription of the key elements and functions of the study-bedchamber space into the work. In the light of the reader's inevitable ejection from the text in the *Envoi*, Butor's comments on reader behaviour seem pertinent:

> Impatients [...] nous ne nous soucions guère de tous les intermédiaires qui permettent notre transport, la fabrication de l'ouvrage, le travail de l'auteur [...] Nous sautons au point d'arrivée.[96]

Gide, in *Le Voyage d'Urien*, has challenged our frequent dismissal of a journey's *point de départ* by carefully encoding it throughout the text. As readers, then, we are

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[93] Butor, 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', p. 18.
[94] Butor, 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', p. 5.
[95] Catharine H. Savage, 'Gide's Criticism of Symbolism', *The Modern Language Review*, 61.4 (October 1966), 601-09 (p. 607).
[96] Butor, 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', p. 5.

conditioned, perhaps unwittingly, over the course of the narrative for the final (illusory) return to the study-bedchamber, that is, the site of the text's creation itself recreated in the text – at once the journey's *point de départ*, constant *point de repère* and ultimate 'destination'.

1.3 A text chasing its own tail/tale: travel, recreation and creation in *Paludes*

This section investigates the interconnected themes of travel, recreation and literary creation in *Paludes*. Gide's use of travel as a narrative device – insofar as it serves to generate and propel the writing of *Paludes* – will be emphasised since, engaged with in this way, travel comes to emblematise textual progression as much as it encompasses the peregrinations and mental wanderings of the text's characters. Moreover, travel will be examined in this section in the light of its potential as a recreational activity, a diversion, and a means of generating an illusory sense of escape from one's habitual work, as in the case of the narrator of *Paludes*. In turn, both the formal organisation of the text-in-progress and travel's etymological and conceptual associations with work and the concept of metaphor itself will be considered.

First of all, the impact of the opening passage of *Paludes* will be explored; this sheds light on the relationship that exists between the activities that might be contrasted with (though never easily dissociated from) one another using the terms 'work' (in many instances, this refers to the narrator's commitment to literary creation) and 'recreation'. This passage reads:

> Mardi [...]
>
> Vers cinq heures le temps fraîchit; je fermai mes fenêtres et je me remis à écrire.
> A six heures entra mon grand ami Hubert; il revenait du manège.
> Il dit "Tiens! tu travailles?"
> Je répondis: 'J'écris *Paludes*'.[97]

As the narrator settles himself down to continue working on his text, he is interrupted by a friend, post-recreation, visiting him for pleasure. This intrusion disrupts the narrator's plans to make progress with the text he is attempting to develop (which

[97] Gide, *Paludes*, in *Romans et récits: Œuvres lyriques et dramatiques*, I (2009), 257–317 (p. 261). Hereafter referred to in the text as (*PA*).

shall henceforth be referred to as *Paludes* II, following both Alain Goulet and Alan Sheridan).[98] Instead, it is the interrogation initiated here by Hubert, fresh from the riding stables, which constitutes the narrative of the opening pages of the book we are reading (which shall be referred to as *Paludes* I whenever a distinction needs to be made between this work and the nascent text that features in it, *Paludes* II). 'Manège' is a word also used to describe a game, a diversion and, of course, a merry-go-round, amongst other meanings. In choosing a word so entrenched in concepts of play and recreation, and offsetting it against the exclamation 'Tiens! tu travailles?', Gide, then, from the outset of this text, establishes the interplay between the activities of work (literary creation, in the case of the narrator) and recreation as the narrative's central tension. Moreover, the almost immediate indication that the work-in-progress bears the same name as the book we are reading reveals to us that the text we are embarking upon as readers will constitute a playful exposition of the narrator's creative process in terms of *Paludes* I as well as his own nascent narrative. We are, therefore, from the opening lines of this text, introduced into the writer's *chambre noire*, his workplace. The explicit emphasis on the narrator's place of work throughout *Paludes I* can be understood as a progression from *Le Voyage d'Urien*, where the writer's place of work is encoded, rather than overtly focused upon, throughout the narrative. *Le Voyage d'Urien* was understood to be inscribed in a tradition established by de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, and therefore was viewed as an imaginary voyage rooted in the domestic interior. *Paludes*, however, manages to foreground the site of literary creation whilst also generating valuable insights into *exterior* travel, by incorporating into the text the planning and attempted undertaking of a journey by the narrator.

This section highlights the symbiotic nature of the relationship between work and play, looking not only at the way this relationship is represented in *Paludes*, but also at the extent to which this dynamic interplay between creation and recreation relates to travel in this text. It will be argued that the tension that inevitably stems for the constant interplay between work and play, creation and recreation, drives the narrative forward, insofar as the interruptions and disruptions that seem to complicate

[98] See Alain Goulet, *Fiction et vie sociale dans l'œuvre d'André Gide* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1986), and Alan Sheridan, *André Gide: A Life in the Present*.

any attempt by a character to compartmentalise these activities is in fact central to the progression of the text itself, generating content as much as it denotes creative stasis for the narrator's literary enterprise.

During a series of interviews with Amrouche, Gide comments on how he began writing *Paludes*, that is, by using two unconnected and seemingly inconsequential phrases from his notebook, both of which had greatly amused him, as a *point de départ* for the writing process:

> Voilà, c'est autour de cela que, comme une dentellière qui fixe les épingles, c'est autour de cela que se tressèrent les fils du livre.[99]

It is no surprise that Gide has invoked the figure of the lacemaker here, a person who has mastered a difficult and extremely delicate craft, to represent the writer's engagement with the creative process. Firstly, the lacemaker shares the same sedentary state as the writer – the invocation of lacemaking here can be seen to suggest that a narrative can only emerge from the writer's laborious deskbound existence. Secondly, the image of the lacemaker reinforces for Gide the idea that dedication and hard work, against the foil of self-imposed isolation, are central not only to being a writer, that is, the creator of literary output, but to being *regarded* as a writer. Indeed, the incessant worry that literary production cannot quite be considered 'work' is examined throughout *Paludes*. This worry perhaps stems from Gide's own circumstances – his inherited wealth enabled him to choose an exclusively literary career and, indeed, his first text, *Les Cahiers et les poésies d'André Walter*, was published at the expense of his widowed mother. For Gide, then, work is never a simple question of being remunerated, but arguably one of, amongst other qualities, edifying literary creation. We might now turn to an instance where the narrator's concerns about the outside perception of literary production seem justified. Angèle asks her close friend, the narrator, a seemingly innocent question: 'Qu'avez-vous fait aujourd'hui?' (*PA*, 262). The narrator, slightly perturbed by the directness of her query, responds as follows:

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[99] 'Entretiens André Gide-Jean Amrouche', in Marty, *André Gide – Qui êtes-vous?*, p. 169. These phrases are: 'chemin bordé d'aristoloches' and 'Pourquoi, chère amie, par un temps toujours incertain, n'avoir emporté qu'une ombrelle? – C'est un en-tout-cas, me dit-elle' (*PA*, 305).

> Je me souvenais d'aucun acte et je répondis: 'Rien', inconsidérément, puis aussitôt [...] je songeai à la visite et m'écriai: Mon grand ami Hubert est venu me voir à six heures.
> — 'Il sort d'ici', reprit Angèle; puis soulevant à son propos d'anciennes querelles: 'Lui du moins fait quelque chose, dit-elle; il s'occupe'. (*PA*, 262)

When pressed by the somewhat irked narrator as to what exactly Hubert does to occupy himself, Angèle volunteers a summary with gusto:

> Des masses de choses... D'abord lui monte à cheval et puis vous savez bien: il est membre de quatre compagnies industrielles, il dirige avec son beau-frère une autre compagnie d'assurances [...] Il suit des cours de biologie populaire et fait des lectures publiques tous les mardis soir [...] Hubert fait beaucoup de bien: cinq familles indigentes lui doivent de subsister encore; il place des ouvriers qui manquent d'ouvrage chez des patrons qui manquaient d'ouvriers. Il envoie des enfants chétifs à la campagne, où il y a des établissements. Il a fondé un atelier de rempaillage pour occuper de jeunes aveugles. – Enfin, les dimanches, il chasse. –Et vous! vous, qu'est-ce que vous faites? (*PA*, 262)

The narrator's response to the seemingly inexhaustible array of activities in which Hubert engages betrays the former's self-awareness regarding his working day: 'Moi! répondis-je un peu gêné –, j'écris *Paludes*' (*PA*, 262). Literary production, then, is seen here as a weak counterpart to a more widely varied and fulfilling life, one of quicker and more frequent gratification, represented in this instance by the worlds of commerce and philanthropy. The narrator's assessment here of his day as amounting to 'rien' might be seen to derive from Gide's own day-to-day experience as a writer when he elaborates on the vicissitudes of literary creation in the contemporaneous *Feuillets*:

> L'imagination (chez moi) précède rarement l'idée; c'est celle-ci, non point du tout celle-là, qui m'échauffe [...] L'idée de l'œuvre, c'est sa composition [...] Pour moi, l'idée d'une œuvre précède souvent de plusieurs années son *imagination*. [C]omme le travail doit être toujours naturel, il faut s'occuper de son idée sans crispation ni violence [...] Il faut l'attendre. [...] L'idée préférée ne vient que quand il n'est plus aucune autre en la place. C'est donc à force de ne plus penser à rien d'autre qu'on l'appelle. Parfois je suis resté plus d'une heure à l'attendre. Si, par malheur, ne sentant rien venir, on se dit: je perds mon temps, c'en est fait et le temps est perdu.[100]

In the case of the narrator of *Paludes*, recreational activities impinging on his working – or creative – hours, as evidenced in the text's opening lines, can be seen as emblematic of the literary circle in which he moves, whose emphasis on sociability

[100] Gide, *Journal*, I, 194-95.

and social exchange (the *salons*; correspondence; receiving regular visits from other writer friends) leaves limited time for the literary production upon which these social interactions purport to focus. This has the effect of making the narrator believe that travel, as opposed to attempting to write in his room, will prove productive.

The two pins around which Gide purported to weave his narrative have already been mentioned. It is also essential to consider the importance of the figure of the circle in the formal organisation of *Paludes*. Critics such as Catharine Savage Brosman and Justin O'Brien have commented at length upon the many circular aspects embedded in this text.[101] Indeed, this work is bound by a circle, insofar as the closing lines of the main text recall, and draw us back to, the opening passage of the work, as both Justin O'Brien and Frédéric Canovas point out.[102] This section, however, asks to what extent the figure of the circle can be seen as connected to the book's subtitles, or what might be termed the work's paratextual self-assessment, for the subtitles in question aim to categorise the text either as 'cette satire de quoi' or as a 'traité de la contingence'. It will be argued that these subtitles endeavour to act as a tangent which departs from the circular form of the main text (*traité* already evoking a *trait*, a line), and are therefore symptomatic of the text's struggle for linear progression on a thematic level (travel in space and time) and a formal level (the writer advancing in the composition of his text).

In his assessment of Georges Perec and the quotidian, Michael Sheringham, in noting that 'the question of the everyday' is central to the former's work, goes on to suggest that the eternal difficulty of grasping the everyday is emphasised by Perec's 'insistent' use of question marks in his text 'Approches de quoi?'. It might be suggested that the interrogation of the 'quoi' embedded in the 'quotidien', central to Perec's writing project, is also a driving force behind Gide's far earlier *Paludes*. For example, a key circular motif is developed in *Paludes I* through the narrator's manner of diary-keeping – he commits himself to composing and noting down diary entries 'huits jours à l'avance' (*PA*, 266). By the time he comes round to the day in question,

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[101] See Justin O'Brien, *Portrait of André Gide: A Critical Biography* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1953), and Catharine Savage Brosman, 'Le Monde fermé de *Paludes*', in *Revue des Lettres modernes, André Gide*, 6 (1979), pp. 143–57.

[102] See Justin O'Brien, *Portrait of André Gide: A Critical Biography*, and Frédéric Canovas, *L'Écriture rêvée* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

the narrator believes that he will have had 'le temps d'oublier' and thus the capacity 'pour me créer des surprises, indispensables dans ma manière de vivre; chaque soir ainsi je m'endors devant un lendemain inconnu et pourtant déjà décidé par moi-même' (*PA*, 266). In taking into account Maurice Blanchot's assessment of the cyclical nature of the everyday in his essay 'L'homme de la rue', the Gidian narrator's need to feign control over his future through the written word can be better appreciated. Blanchot writes:

> [L]e quotidien, c'est ce que nous ne voyons jamais une première fois, mais ne pouvons que revoir, l'ayant toujours déjà vu par une illusion qui est précisément constitutive du quotidien et nous renvoie à la profondeur vide de ce qui ne commence jamais, mais toujours commence par recommencer.[103]

Indeed, let us not forget that, in one instance in *Paludes I*, the narrator describes his *Paludes II* as 'l'histoire [...] de l'homme normal' (*PA*, 285) – the circular motifs easily identifiable in the snatches of *Paludes II* to which we are privy emphasise the predicament of its Virgilian protagonist Tityre as being the one we all share – the latter's oppressive marshland habitat operates here as a metaphor for the hold of the quotidian upon us: 'Tityre [...] c'est moi, c'est toi – c'est nous tous' (*PA*, 284). In terms of *Paludes I*, however, the Gidian narrator's unlived diary entries can be first of all viewed as a coping mechanism which allows him to tolerate the cylical nature of the chronic repetition at the core of the human condition – which is elsewhere described in *Paludes* in terms of 'Samson tournant la meule' or 'Sisyphe roulant le rocher'. Because the narrator projects his own future onto the page as an attempt to *resist* the cyclical nature of the everyday, in addition to attempting to draw the 'quoi' out of the 'quotidien' in his evocations of everyday life, this eternal repetition in fact acts as a narrative motor, one which propels and generates *Paludes*. Indeed, a passage in *Paludes*, one which prefaces (and serves to validate) the voyage the narrator has envisaged, can be related to Perec's call to interrogate the everyday, in which the latter states: 'Décrivez votre rue [...] Questionnez vos petites cuillers'.[104] In *Paludes*, the narrator asks

> [...] savons-nous quelles sont les choses importantes? [...] Regardons tout avec une égale insistance [...] Regardons! Regardons! – que vois-je?

[103] Maurice Blanchot, 'L'homme de la rue', *Nouvelle Revue française*, 114 (1962), 1070–81 (p. 1073).
[104] Georges Perec, 'Approches de quoi?', in *L'infra-ordinaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), pp. 12–13.

—— Trois marchands de légumes passent.
—— Un omnibus déjà.
—— Un portier balaie devant sa porte.
—— Les boutiquiers rafraîchissent leur devanture.
—— La cuisinière part pour le marché.
—— Des collégiens vont à l'école.
—— Les kiosques reçoivent les journaux; des messieurs pressés les achètent.
—— On pose les tables d'un café. (*PA*, 304)

The narrator's reaction to this unprecedented focus on the minutiae of the everyday is to shut the window quickly (once again, marking a retreat into the site of the text's creation) in a bid to cut himself off from this contemptible repetition – his planned voyage then is finalised and ostensibly justified by his now amplified need to make haste in departing from the everyday existence he acknowledges here. Indeed, in Chapter 2 of this thesis Michaux will be seen to display a similar distaste for the everyday in *Ecuador*, before deciding to focus on the inescapable quotidian as subject matter in the subsequent *Un Barbare en Asie*.[105]

The figure of a circle is perhaps most notably embedded in the text through its 'voyage d'agrément' chapter. The narrator and Angèle depart on a short voyage, with the former emphasising that 'l'important c'est de partir' (*PA*, 297). Indeed, in earlier digressions on this planned trip, the narrator notes, with more than a nod to Baudelaire's *Le Voyage*: 'Je pars simplement pour partir; la surprise même est mon but – l'imprévu' (*PA*, 279). The ostensible aim of this voyage, in terms of the narrator's literary production, is articulated just before they set off:

> Ne noter du voyage rien que les moments poétiques – parce qu'ils rentrent plus dans le caractère de ce que je le désirais. (*PA*, 304)

The two unconnected phrases, which Gide identifies as the *épingles* from which the text could be woven, both feature in this short chapter. In terms of the text's composition, then, 'Angèle'/ 'Le Petit Voyage' and its constituent return trip represent the key circular motif around which other circular motifs in the text can be

[105] Charles Forsdick ascertains that a shift occurs in *Ecuador* in terms of Michaux's approach to the everyday, arguing that Michaux's appraisal of the everyday ultimately engenders 'a renegotiation of the exotic' in this text. He also notes that the everyday becomes a major focus in *Un Barbare en Asie*. Forsdick, 'Sa(l)vaging Exoticism: New Approaches to 1930s Travel Literature in French', in *Cultural Encounters: European Travel Writing in the 1930s*, ed. by Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan (Oxford: Berghahn, 2002), pp. 29–45 (p. 38).

seen to develop. Moreover, it might be argued that Gide puts forward this episode of physical travel as a metaphor for literary inspiration and the activity it consequently generates. Physical progression will, in the narrator's eyes, lead to a progression with the text that he has committed himself to writing – this text, *Paludes* II, has stalled because the narrator's social life intrudes upon his work on a daily basis. He hopes, betraying a rather delusional state, to evade the tension between work and play, as manifested in his daily existence, by departing on this voyage. The idea of metaphor is of particular import in this chapter's engagement with travel in *Paludes*. Both Jacques Derrida and Michel de Certeau have commented on the connection between metaphor and transportation, as in the Greek word *metaphorikos*.[106] Derrida, in his essay *Le Retrait de la métaphore*, writes: '[...] [I]l n'est pas seulement *métaphorique* de dire que nous habitons la métaphore et que nous y circulons comme dans une sorte de véhicule automobile'.[107] Metaphor, then, is at once complicit with, and inextricable from, the idea of transportation or travel (it is still used to signify transport in Modern Greek, as Derrida and de Certeau both point out). The complicity of the notion of metaphor and the activity of travel thus problematises the narrator's desire to find new inspiration for *Paludes* II through his voyage, for Gide's deployment of travel as a metaphor for literary progression can be seen to be destabilised, I would argue, insofar as metaphor *itself* conveys travel. In a similar fashion to the trip to London only partly undertaken by Des Esseintes (in *À Rebours*), the Gidian narrator's trip takes him no further than the suburbs of Paris, upon which he and his companion decide to turn back. The narrator must therefore commit, like Des Esseintes, to imagining the rest of his journey. The Gidian narrator then writes of encountering certain flora and fauna, despite Angèle quickly revealing these encounters to be purely imaginary (thus emphasising the constructed nature of his or, indeed, any attempt to relate the travel experience). Later, the dejected narrator admits:

> Je comptais, je l'avoue, beaucoup sur ce voyage, je croyais qu'il allait donner à mon talent une direction nouvelle [...]. (*PA*, 307)

[106] See Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), I, (1990), 170, and Derrida, 'Le Retrait de la métaphore', *Psyche: Inventions de l'autre*, 2 vols (Paris: Galilée, (1998–2003), I (1998), 63–93 (p. 63).
[107] Derrida, 'Le Retrait de la métaphore', p. 64.

Justin O'Brien, commenting on the figure of the circle in the text, notes that, in the case of the narrator's return trip, the 'suburbs [ring] the city'.[108] The difficulty of penetrating the countryside beyond the suburbs is emphasised by the narrator, who notes: '[...] [L]'important c'est de quitter Paris; on ne sort des cités que par des moyens énergiques, des express; le difficile, c'est de franchir les banlieues' (*PA*, 280). The writer's pronounced difficulty in progressing beyond his social circle and his city, and the inevitable return to both city and familiar society in order to digest and write up his travel account, seems to highlight the primacy of repetitiveness and the circular in the world (as Michaux uncovers in *Ecuador*) over any sense of linear progression and newness. Indeed, it might be added that, in terms of the scope of travel, the circumnavigation of the globe can be seen as the return trip *par excellence*. The inevitable circularity of any voyage, then, would appear to call into question the narrator's hope of using travel to find 'une direction nouvelle' in his writing.

Now that the primacy of the circular over the linear has been established in terms of travel in *Paludes*, the word 'manège', which was earlier identified as marking the introduction of the concept of recreation into the text, might be revisited. This word can also refer to a sustained pirouette in dance, whereby the dancer turns around repeatedly on the spot, without lateral progression. The notion of circular movement then, from the mechanics of travel and writing to those of a simple merry-go-round or dance movement, can be seen as being inextricably connected with the pleasures of recreation. This is certainly held up in the French language by the word spoilsport, which is expressed in French by the phrase *empêcheur de tourner en rond*, evoking in mechanical terms an impediment to cogs turning, as well as reminding us of the joys of other variations on the turn. Moreover, Gide wrote up most of *Paludes* when convalescing from a pulmonary illness in the calm if not extremely dull surroundings of La Brévine, far from his mainly Paris-based social circle. In the Amrouche interviews, it can be noted that Gide, although he had already professed some difficulty in initiating the writing of *Paludes*, in fact enjoyed himself immensely once this process was underway: '[t]rès franchement, j'écrivis *Paludes* avec une

[108] Justin O'Brien, *Portait of André Gide: A Critical Biography*, p. 110.

grande joie, un énorme amusement que je n'ai éprouvé par la suite qu'en écrivant *Les Caves du Vatican* [...]'.[109]

The cyclical nature of literary production itself is also brought into focus by the closing passage of the main text of *Paludes*, where the narrator reveals to his friend that he has begun a new work, *Polders*. Like the narrator's assessment of the day-to-day in *Paludes*, once one book is completed, it seems that the narrator's impulse is to have the will and the imaginative spark to begin the next. It has already been emphasised here that the end passage of *Paludes* maps neatly onto the opening lines. This completes the circle that can be seen to represent the cyclical dynamic of the writer's career, finishing one work, but then beginning another. In the closing lines of the text, a new friend, fresh from his recreational activity (fencing in this instance) enters not only to interrupt the early stages of the narrator's (new) creative process, but also to serve the narrative function of once again thrusting the narrator into a daily cycle in which work-related and recreational activities overlap and appear to jostle with one other for his attention over the course of his waking hours. The opening lines of the new text, then, can be seen as already embedded into the ending of *Paludes*, whilst the new creative process will, as it progresses, generate the text of *Polders*. Yet the fact that the final lines of the main narrative mirror and can be seen to map onto its opening lines seems to suggest that *Polders* will simply reproduce the pattern that the writing of *Paludes* II establishes.

The importance of the interlinked themes of creation and recreation in *Paludes* is further highlighted by the last page of the text, which is set out as a 'TABLE DE PHRASES LES PLUS REMARQUABLES DE *PALUDES*'. Here, the reader, although seemingly on the verge of completing his perusal of the text, comes to be engaged by the narrator in another activity. In these closing lines the narrator puts forward what are, to his mind, two of the book's most significant phrases.[110] The reader himself is invited in fill in a third: 'Pour respecter l'idiosyncrasie de chacun, nous laissons à chaque lecteur le soin de remplir cette feuille'. The reader, then, although encouraged by this paratextual element to make his mark on the work as a

[109] See 'Entretiens André Gide–Jean Amrouche', in Marty, *André Gide. Qui êtes-vous?* (Lyon: La Manufacture, 1987), p.167.

[110] These are: 'Il dit: "Tiens! Tu travailles?" and 'Il faut porter jusqu'à la fin toutes les idées qu'on soulève' (*PA*, 317).

whole, is instead thrust back into an immediate re-reading of the book he had thought himself about to complete. The pleasure of the reading act can be seen to be reconfigured here as a Sisyphean chore or task, insofar as the narrator has passed into the hands of the reader the maddening responsibility of finishing a text whose circular patterns prevent it from ever tending towards a conclusion. The proposed reading and re-reading of this text can be contrasted with the rejection of the completed text and call to travel that are voiced in *Les Nourritures terrestres*. Moreover, the *Envoi* of *Paludes*, instead of staging an 'ejection' of the reader of the preceding narrative through exposing itself as fantasy, as was the case in *Le Voyage d'Urien*, underlines the text's deliberate attempt to foreground – and suggest the writer-narrator's inextricable connection to – the interior site where it was created:

> Nous avons guidé sans houlettes
> Les troupeaux vers nos maisonnettes. (*PA*, 314)

This couplet can be seen to intimate that the project of *Paludes*, then, is to expose the vicissitudes of the creative process to the reader, ultimately guiding him or her towards the 'maisonnette' that serves to symbolise, in this instance, the interior site in which the text is constructed.

1.4 Fervour and fever in the desert – anticipated travel in *El Hadj*

El Hadj was completed by Gide in the summer of 1896, following his trip to the deserts of North Africa earlier that year. El Hadj, the eponymous narrator, recounts a journey undertaken across the desert by a mysterious Prince and his people, whom El Hadj accompanies. El Hadj describes himself as 'un conteur des places', stating that 'on m'a pris parce que je savais des chansons'.[111] El Hadj is the protagonist's pilgrim name, 'hajj' being the title accorded to a person who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca. From the outset, then, El Hadj is defined by two things – his previous travels, from which his name derives, and his occupation as storyteller. Indeed, in recounting the journey undertaken, El Hadj is cast in a joint role of traveller and narrator, and can be seen as a counterpart to the protagonists of *Le Voyage d'Urien* and *Paludes*. The text's alternative title, 'Le Traité du faux prophète', highlights El Hadj's somewhat unwilling transformation from market-based storyteller (creator and narrator of

[111] Gide, *El Hadj ou Le Traité du faux prophète*, in *Romans et récits: Œuvres lyriques et dramatiques*, I (2009), 327– 346 (p. 330). Hereafter referred to in the text as (*EH*).

fiction) to desert prophet (supposed paragon and conduit of verity). As his return trip hinges on a lie that he has imparted to the crowd, El Hadj's predicament can be seen to reflect Gide's compulsion to expose the imaginary voyage as a work of fantasy, as discerned in *Le Voyage d'Urien* and *Paludes*. Moreover, the contrast or *décalage* between El Hadj's static role in the city, 'un conteur des places', and his role as traveller in the desert, can be seen as analogous to the tension we have already identified between the fixity of the site of literary creation and the 'progression' central to the imaginary voyage or the imagining of the voyage in *Le Voyage d'Urien* and *Paludes* respectively. Furthermore, the alternative title of *El Hadj* can be linked with the model set out by these antecedents in Gide's writing on travel. In all three texts, the revelation or exposition of the constructed nature of the travel narrative aims to foster a sense of complicity with the reader – one which acknowledges the impossibility of accurately representing the travel experience.

In *El Hadj*, the journey undertaken across the desert is cut short by the Prince's death, forcing El Hadj to lie about the Prince's state in order to lead the crowd back to their point of origin, a North African town they choose to identify (once they have departed from it) as 'Bâb-el-Khoûr'. The reason for this pilgrimage across the desert is unclear – '[o]n partait en troupe pressée, on ne savait ni pour quoi, ni pour où' (*EH*, 330). It seems that El Hadj and the crowd follow the reclusive and retiring Prince, because of 'une mystérieuse dépendance' (*EH*, 330), although the Prince, enthralled by the songs of El Hadj, later speaks of journeying towards a stranger who is to become his bride.[112] Yet, as El Hadj notes, for the crowd too, this is a journey that is founded, from the outset, on assumption and illusion: 'Il leur suffisait, pour marcher, de croire que c'était vers un but, et que le prince au moins le connaissant, les menait avec assurance' (*EH*, 335–36). Later in the text, El Hadj comments on the feverish crowd's restraint upon seeing what they believe to be a desert lake: 'Aucun ne songeait plus à avancer; comme si suffisaient des promesses au lieu de satisfactions [...]' (*EH*, 339). This comment will prove pertinent in the light of their journey's outcome – no 'destination' is reached, instead, they are abruptly forced

[112] Jocelyn Van Tuyl suggests that this can be seen as a 'counterfeit bride [who] motivates the journey', a figure *generated* by one of El Hadj's songs early in the narrative, rather providing the inspiration for it. 'Figurations of the Voyage in El Hadj', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 32.2 (1995), 176–86 (p. 181).

by El Hadj to return to their point of departure. But, more importantly, the promise of a journey, or even the possibility of imagining the sensual delights their *parcours* will see them attain, can be understood as having as powerful an effect on the crowd as actual progression; they might at this point be seen to engage in anticipated travel.

The connection Gide made, in invoking Charles Louis-Philippe, between illness and imaginary travel has already been highlighted in this chapter. Indeed, *El Hadj* will be seen to focus on the way in which illness heightens the travel experience, making this text a foil for the contemporaneous *Les Nourritures terrestres*, which focuses instead on the role of convalescence in relation to travel. If illness is a means to imagining travel, as Gide suggests, it is important to ascertain the extent to which it might (in)form the Gidian travel narrative. In the case of *El Hadj*, the affliction of fever stands out against the desert backdrop and shows itself to be a driving force behind the narrative. The focus on this bodily state can be linked with the representation of the psychological state of fervour, a mentality that permeates the narratives of both *El Hadj* and *Les Nourritures terrestres*. Fervour will be understood here as intense passion and zeal, whereas fever will be identified as the intense bodily heat that is often accompanied by a delirious mental state. Fervour and fever can be closely related in meaning – 'fervent' can also be used to mean 'hot', 'burning, 'glowing', 'boiling', terms we would certainly associate with fever. (It might be noted that 'fièvre de', denoting the burning desire to do something, is an idiomatic expression which can be seen as synonymous with being in a state of fervour.) In *El Hadj*, fervour will be seen as a heightened, enraptured mental state, whereas fever, a state which can push the body to its limits, will be seen as its physical manifestation. Fervour and fever will be understood as mutually dependent states of being in *El Hadj* – in showing how an understanding of fervour and fever is crucial to decoding the ambiguous actions of its enigmatic characters, their relationship with travel can be further uncovered.

The desert setting of *El Hadj* might first of all lead us to ask whether such an isolated expanse can be considered a space which privileges the heightened mental and physical states of fervour and fever. Moreover, it is necessary to ascertain the extent to which the desert might provoke, encourage and sustain these states. To illuminate our understanding of the conditions and processes of fervour and fever in

El Hadj, however, Gide's conception of the desert at this point in his literary development must be clarified. *Feuilles de route* (1895-1896) is a travel journal which features in its entirety in Gide's *Journal*; the North African leg of the trip is also collected in *Amyntas* (1925). These journal entries were composed during Gide's honeymoon, part of which took Gide and Madeleine, his bride, to North Africa, along with several other travelling companions. This text celebrates the North African landscapes which inspire, amongst others, *El Hadj*'s desert setting. An entry in *Feuilles de route*, written when Gide is still in Italy, anticipates the party's voyage to North Africa:

> Obsessions d'Orient, du désert, de son ardeur et de son vide [...] obsessions où les sens s'affolent, les nerfs s'exaspèrent, et qui m'ont, au début de chaque nuit, fait croire le sommeil impossible.[113]

Gide's use of the word 'ardeur', a synonym for fervour in the two senses earlier highlighted – intense zeal and intense heat – is revealing. Gide employs 'ardeur' here to evoke the desert's great heat, but the use of this word also foregrounds his passion for the as yet unseen desert. For even the thought of the desert provokes certain physical and mental reactions in Gide – indeed, 'les sens s'affolent' might be seen as the precursor to the fever represented in *El Hadj*, and 'les nerfs s'exaspèrent' the precursor to the raptures of fervour which consume both El Hadj and the crowd. We might also note that, in the narrator's evocation of the desert in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, the desert is described as a 'terre de passion, de ferveur'. Again, Gide evokes the desert's intense heat through the word fervour, but his coupling of passion and fervour in this line suggests that we can also interpret this word in its other context – as an intense, zealous feeling. The examples above show that Gide, at the time of writing *El Hadj*, perceives the desert to be a space which instantly stimulates passion and fervour in the people who travel through it, whether their journey is actually undertaken, anticipated, or imaginary. In the passage above, an impatient Gide is *imagining* the travel experience prior to reaching his destination, therefore engaging in anticipated travel before actually undertaking his planned journey. In *El Hadj*, moreover, it seems that the protagonist's imaginative songs also become something upon which his apprehension of the subsequent voyage will be based:

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[113] Gide, *Journal*, I, 211.

> Je ne sais si mon chant donnait de l'assurance au prince, mais moi j'en étais extraordinairement fortifié. Ce que je chantais devenait; après l'avoir chanté j'y croyais. (*EH*, 336)

In both instances, a verbal imagining of travel can be seen not only as preceding the voyage that follows it, but also as *exceeding* the subsequent voyage – that is to say, these prior imaginings create a travel narrative in terms of which the journey itself is apprehended, rather than the travel experience serving to generate its own narrative. Indeed, the narrative of *El Hadj* is underpinned by the suggestion that this journey has already been mapped out for the Prince and his people:

> [...] c'était une chose étrange, et je m'en étonnai dès lors, que notre marche semblât prévue et la route déjà précisée, comme si, passant avant nous, d'autres l'avaient déjà tracée. Nous n'étonnions rien sur la route, et dans les villes approchées, tant aisément l'on nous trouvait des vivres et tant l'on nous admirait peu, il semblait que l'attente de nous, nous avait déjà précédés. (*EH*, 330)

Moreover, the passage above contrasts with the conception of the desert elsewhere in the text as a site where the traveller cannot leave a trace; this mirrors the frustration Michaux will voice in terms of the traveller's relationship to the ocean, as will be seen in Chapter 2.

The crowd – a phenomenon that becomes increasingly inseparable from an urban context in the nineteenth century, as discussed by John Plotz – and their transposition to a desert setting in *El Hadj* is another point of interest in the narrative.[114] First of all, it must be noted that just as the Prince still reigns over his people in the desert, so the crowd remains intact despite their transposition from an urban to a desert setting; its members still move as one, and move in and out of the states of fervour and fever as one. Applying Plotz's critical framework to the model of the Pacific beach, Vanessa Smith, in her study of European-Oceanic encounters, raises the following question:

> Account after account records the experience of being inundated by the crowd: being noticed and enveloped by a mass of bodies emerges as a trope of encounter, through which the visitor constitutes and authorizes their experience [...] Is the dialectical relationship between the body of the individual and the body of the crowd in any way

[114] See John Plotz, *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

> comparable to that between recognition and repudiation that takes place in confrontation with cultural difference?[115]

El Hadj's fluctuation between a desire to include himself in and a wish to exclude himself from the crowd can be connected to the similar urge that pervades the writer who travels, whereby he desires to ingratiate himself with the people he also hopes to stand apart from and comment upon, as acknowledged above by Smith. Moreover, it will be considered later in this section that Gide might be seen to transpose the crowd into this desert setting in order to create an exaggerated corporeality in what is the apparently 'absent' space constituted by the desert. A double loss of identity can be seen to occur in *El Hadj* – the integration of the individual in the crowd, as well as the destabilising of the individual's sense of normalcy due to the perceived universalising force inherent to the desert experience, as will presently be explored. It might also be noted that the common nouns 'pèlerin', 'peuple' and 'prince' dispersed throughout the narrative override the possibility of identifying and specifying in *El Hadj*. The notable lack of proper nouns in this text might be seen as a further bid to eschew any focus on the individual, for fear of vitiating the perceived universality of the desert experience.

The group's journey sees them voyage northwards across the desert from their town in the South. What can be seen to unfold in this narrative might be deemed a reverse exoticist perspective, in which the landscape of the North (the shock Gide professes in *Amyntas* upon apprehending the increasingly Europeanised aesthetic of urban areas in North Africa might be remembered) has the potential to capture and fuel the imagination of the desert traveller:

> Songeant à la monomorphie des palmes: pour rêver l'habitant du désert, me disais-je, il faut parler des nombreuses ramures du Nord et des troncs variés des arbres; et je chantais les profondes forêts, les ravins; l'odeur des feuilles et des mousses, les brumes du matin, du soir, la fraîcheur de la nuit, l'aménité du jour et sur les prés l'humidité délicieuse. (*EH*, 336)

This comment also provides us with a further insight into El Hadj's role in shaping the way in which this voyage will be apprehended by the Prince and his people. In El Hadj's lyrical evocations of a different landscape and climate, he is attempting to engage his interlocutors in an anticipated voyage across and out of the desert space.

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[115] Vanessa Smith, *Intimate Strangers: Friendship, Exchange and Pacific Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 40.

Although he frequently enters into states of fervour and fever along with the crowd, El Hadj is, at the same time, trying to maintain a stance apart from them in manipulating their apprehension of the desert through the perceptions of travel he puts forward in his songs.

It is important to identify the object of the general fervour that permeates *El Hadj*. It seems at first to be the mysterious Prince, whose face has never been revealed to anyone. Carried on a litter by his mute slaves, he leads his devoted subjects into the desert. Yvonne Davet suggests that '[...] c'est Dieu qu'il faut substituer au mystérieux prince'.[116] If we are to make the substitution Davet proposes, then the crowd's fervour can be deemed almost religious: the ardent worship of their deity-like monarch. Indeed, there are numerous Biblical parallels in *El Hadj*. As God commands the bewildered Israelites to journey into the desert, so the Prince, as a God substitute, leads his people into the wilderness, with no return intimated (for it is El Hadj who makes the decision to turn back after interring the Prince). The Book of Exodus, however, is not the only source of inspiration for *El Hadj*. One of the text's two epigraphs (the other is from the Quran) is a citation from the Book of Matthew:

> Qu'êtes-vous allés voir au désert? Un roseau secoué par le vent? – Mais qu'êtes-vous donc allés voir? Un homme couvert d'habits précieux? – Mais qu'êtes-vous allés voir? Un prophète? – Oui, vous dis-je, et plus qu'un prophète [...]. (*EH*, 335)

Furthermore, the lines that feature in this epigraph are later woven into the main body of text, reappearing in an exchange between the Prince and El Hadj. The Prince, who is being interrogated by El Hadj, replies that the reason why he has entered the desert is in fact to see El Hadj, whom the Prince deems to be a 'prophète' and 'plus qu'un prophète'. The Prince sees El Hadj as God's representative – meaning that each character views the other as his spiritual superior – and in entering the desert to hear El Hadj's words, has undertaken a pilgrimage born out of his own religious fervour. Yet what the Prince sees as prophecies are instead the words of songs woven in El Hadj's imagination. The Prince's folly is highlighted after his death: for when El Hadj prophesises to the crowd, it is always in the name of the late Prince, never in God's name. To state that the fervour displayed by El Hadj and the crowd derives solely

[116] Yvonne Davet, *Notice*, *El Hadj*, in André Gide, *Romans, récits, soties: œuvres lyriques*, ed. by Yvonne Davet and Jean-Jacques Thierry (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 1508.

from their admiration of the Prince, however, would be to neglect the manner in which fervour manifests itself in the figure of El Hadj after the Prince's death. Though the crowd have now returned to the city, El Hadj does not immediately wish to do so: 'je veux m'attarder au désert' (*EH*, 329). For, as evidenced in the closing pages, it is the desert itself which begins to engender fervour – El Hadj, overcome by the extraordinary beauty of the desert by night, says:

> [J]e sentais en moi, plus profondément que je n'eusse pensé trouver profondeur en moi-même, un autre amour, plus fervent mille fois, plus doux, plus reposé que l'amour que j'avais pour le prince, et auquel il semblait que cet immense calme répondît. (*EH*, 344)

It might be also added that seeing fervour in *El Hadj* as solely religious would mean a failure to encompass Gide's prior establishment, in *secular* terms, of the desert as a space which privileges and even generates fervour. Moreover, it is useful to trace the reason as to why El Hadj, the individual, appears as fervent as the crowd in his love and admiration for the prince. It might be argued that the incorporation of the individual's mentality into that of the crowd is related to the purported universalising force constituted by certain elements of the desert experience. As David Jasper notes:

> There is in the sands a true ecumenism, human experience drawn into a unity through the universal encounter with the basic demands of life felt at the edge.[117]

Jasper's idea of 'the universal encounter with the basic demands of life felt at the edge' also brings to mind the physical side of the desert experience – the thirst, hunger, fatigue and intense heat which challenge the body. Dehydration, coupled with the disappointment which resounds throughout the group as water sources continually turn out to be mirages, leads to the delirium associated with fever. Yet, in El Hadj's case, it is his fervent worshipping of the Prince which leads the former to enter a similarly feverish state:

> [Je] pensai m'évanouir de tendresse, de doute et de désolation en sentant sur mon front trop brûlant sa main trop tiède se poser. (*EH*, 339)

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[117] David Jasper, *The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 6.

The Prince, at this stage, is near expiring, having fallen victim to fever himself – a later passage notes that 'cette main brûlait de fièvre'. However, in this instance the enraptured El Hadj reach a state of feverish excitement which, in terms of body temperature ('brûlant'), seems to surpass the early stages of the Prince's ultimately fatal fever ('tiède'). However, it is only in the company of the Prince that El Hadj's fervent love for him becomes fully evident – El Hadj even admits to the Prince that in the desert his fervour fluctuates:

> Je vous aime, prince, autant que je peux vous aimer. C'est à midi que tout chancelle; la nuit je m'assieds près de vous et me consume de ferveur. (*EH*, 337)

It is clear from the above observations that the relationship between fervour and fever in *El Hadj* is fraught with tension – each state, though it depends on the other to sustain itself, seems to struggle for domination over the other. If, for example, we are to momentarily view the Prince as the embodiment of fever, and El Hadj and the crowd that of fervour, another important instance of this struggle for domination can be seen to emerge: 'Certainement, de son lit fermé qui précédait toujours la marche, le prince entendit les cris délirants de son peuple' (*EH*, 340). This at first appears to be an image which symbolises fever leading (and thus, dominating) fervour in the desert (El Hadj will earlier talk of 'une ferveur [qui] soutient ma marche' [*EH*, 332]); the feverish prince leading his devoted people on this already anticipated voyage. However, these 'cris délirants' are sounded when what appears to be a desert lake is spotted in the distance. As the health of the crowd comes increasingly under threat from desert conditions – the thirst, hunger, fatigue and disillusionment earlier mentioned as precursors to fever – their adoration of the prince somewhat falters. As El Hadj says: 'ils n'avaient point comme moi le cœur rempli d'amour pour le prince' (*EH*, 337). The crowd's fervour, now deflected from the Prince, instead manifests itself as their unbridled joy and enthusiasm upon spotting what they believe to be a lake.

Tracing fervour and fever as forces driving the narrative in *El Hadj* is further problematised by the circular narrative form of this *traité* – it begins after the crowd's arrival back in the city, thus identifying itself from the outset as a narrative based on a return trip. Even before we can trace the interdependence of fervour and fever in this

text, El Hadj, his lesson learned from his desert experience, highlights his concerns about the former:

> Car je sais maintenant qu'il y a des prophètes, cachant pendant le jour aux peuples qu'ils conduisent l'inquiétude, hélas! Et l'égarement de leur âme, simulant leur ferveur passée pour dissimuler qu'elle est morte. (*EH*, 329)

First of all, it is important to note that this knowledge has not been gleaned from the generalised 'prophètes', but rather from El Hadj's own desert experience. Secondly, the fervour this unwilling prophet once displayed, it is intimated, had such a positive effect upon the crowd that to renounce all semblance of it would be destructive and harmful to them. Such an exhausting simulation of fervour puts forward the idea that the crowd thrives on El Hadj's encouragement, as well as seeing his words as a validation of their fervour. However, when doubt and even disdain ultimately pervade El Hadj, his role in stoking fervour ultimately becomes, by necessity, one of simulation, as has been uncovered. Moreover, the pretence intimated here through the use of the word 'simulation' brings to mind the simulation of travel at stake in the travel account, as well as the simulation of travel that can potentially be involved in anticipating a voyage (Gide's sensory responses to, and mental reactions stemming from, his planned – but not yet realised – trip to the desert might be remembered).

Gide's concentration on mind and body in this desert narrative, via the processes of fervour and fever, also aligns the traveller with a Western conception of the desert space. The desert is traditionally seen as the great void by Westerners at this point – Gide's use of the term 'vide' in relation to the desert has already been noted. Laura Rice problematises this tradition by comparing it with the perception of the desert in what she frames in general terms as the Islamic culture of the indigenous peoples, in which the desert is viewed 'primarily as a space of presence – not mere absence'.[118] *El Hadj* is an interesting case study in this light insofar as Gide, a European with somewhat limited desert experience from previous trips to North Africa, creates a narrator indigenous to the country in which the desert lies. Yet the deprivation and disillusionment experienced by El Hadj, the Prince and the crowd, as manifested in their fervour and fever, seem to put forward a Western perception of the

[118] Laura Rice, 'Critical Appropriations: one desert, three narratives', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 4.3 (2001), 128–45 (p. 129).

desert experience, one where the desert operates as a space of absence, and desolation is to the fore.[119] The body in the Gidian desert, then, ostensibly represents what is real and tangible – present – as opposed to what can be viewed as deceptive and illusory, and therefore, absent – for example, the mirages which the characters consistently experience as part of desert life. However, the ephemeral nature of the mirage is made problematic in *El Hadj* by the verbs used in conjunction with this word. '[L]e désert se couvrit de mirages' (*EH*, 335) and '[q]uand les mirages n'y germaient pas' (*EH*, 337), or the verbs 'se couvrir' (to become covered with) and 'germer' (to sprout), suggest physical presence; the absence of the mirage can therefore be seen to fill and resound in the minds of the travellers. (Indeed, such a strategy in textualising the experience of the desert space can be detected elsewhere in the narrative when El Hadj describes the desert's silence as 'chose réelle' [*EH*, 344]). The body, in its encounter with the desert, might then be seen to project its corporeal presence onto this perceptible absence. Yet the delusions and delirium – mirages of the mind – the characters experience in *El Hadj* seem to suggest that it is in fact the desert's absence which invades, or makes its presence felt in, both mind and body. As El Hadj, upon finding that the desert lake is but the moon reflected in a salt deposit, says: 'Il me semblait que m'envahît, qu'en moi s'étendît, s'ouvrît une désolation sans larmes, plus vaste encore et aussi morne que le désert' (*EH*, 342). El Hadj, at the beginning of the text, in mourning the now dead Prince, reveals the details of the latter's interment:

> [...] [M]oi-même je vous ai couché dans la mobilité des sables; le vent a soufflé; les sables ont coulé comme les vagues des grands fleuves; et qui sait à présent le lieu de votre errante sépulture? (*EH*, 329)

As these lines feature at the beginning of the retrospectively narrated journey, Gide's wishful attempt to juxtapose body and desert can be seen as failing even before it begins. Moreover, the desert's perceptible absence, which appears to conquer body and mind, reaches its apotheosis in the example of the Prince as absent from, yet thought to be present in, the litter as it guides the crowd back to the city. It is, of course, El Hadj who leads the people back to their city, allowing them to believe their

[119] Gide, in *Feuilles de route* (written at the same time as *El Hadj*), begins to understand the notion of a 'populated' desert, noting: 'J'aime infiniment le désert [...] Cette monotone étendue me paraissait de jour en jour d'une diversité plus spécieuse'. See *Amyntas*, p. 35. This notion is best summed up in the 1899 text *Mopsus*, where he writes: 'Devant nous, rien; — le vide *nuancé* du désert' (emphasis my own). See *Amyntas*, p. 21.

Prince to be still alive, 'guiding' them home in his litter. The burial of the Prince in the desert seems to underline that fervour and fever must be left behind in these expanses, that there must be a return to a reasoned state of mind (and a normal body temperature) upon reaching the city. Yet the empty litter carried back to the city not only symbolises the sense of emptiness that might be apprehended in the desert itself, for this striking image might also lead us to think back to the notion of a 'voyage du rien', a voyage ultimately shown to be without displacement and fulfilment, but one which has nonetheless produced a narrative. *El Hadj*, then, is a text which, through the interlinked thematics of fervour and fever, extends the meditation on the way in which imagination and creation relate to travel and the travel narrative, a meditation initiated in *Le Voyage d'Urien* and continued in *Paludes*.

1.5 *Les Nourritures terrestres* – Restorative travel and rejecting the *manuel d'évasion*

This section engages with representations of the travel experience in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, considering the tension between real and imaginary travel set up in and subsequently explored through this narrative, as well as interrogating its emphasis on a sensual reappropriation of the world. *Les Nourritures terrestres* underlines the importance of travel in one's self-development and sees an unnamed, formerly convalescent, narrator renegotiating the phenomenal.[120] Whilst it builds on the 'envois' of *Le Voyage d'Urien* and *Paludes*, which serve to uncover the constructed nature of the (travel) narrative, *Les Nourritures terrestres* instead discusses its status as a construct in its foreword:

> [...] [S]i parfois j'y parle de pays que je n'ai point vus, de parfums que je n'ai point sentis, d'actions que je n'ai point commises — ou de toi, mon Nathanaël, que je n'ai pas encore rencontré, — ce n'est point par hypocrisie, et ces choses ne sont pas plus des mensonges que ce nom, Nathanaël qui me liras, que je te donne, ignorant le tien à venir.[121]

The use of the word 'mensonges' in the original preface to *Les Nourritures terrestres* is revealing, for it can be seen as a marker in Gide's evolution as a writer who focuses

[120] Wallace Fowlie has written an illuminating discussion of *Les Nourritures terrestres*, which he identifies as a 'book of travel'. See Fowlie, 'Gide's Earliest Quest: *Les Nourritures Terrestres*', *Essays in Criticism*, 2.3 (1952), 285–94 (p. 287).

[121] *Les Nourritures terrestres*, in *Romans et récits: Œuvres lyriques et dramatiques*, I (2009), 347– 444 (p. 349). Hereafter referred to in the text as (*NT*).

on travel. The 'Envoi' of *Le Voyage d'Urien*, as will be recalled, acts as a prolonged exposition of the lie at the heart of the imaginary voyage:

> [...] [N]ous n'avons pas fait ce voyage.
> [...] Si je n'ai pas mordu les fruits,
> ni dormi sous les avenues [...]
> c'est que ce n'était que mirages [...]
> Ellis! pardonnez! J'ai menti.
> Ce voyage n'est que mon rêve,
> nous ne sommes jamais sortis
> de la chambre de nos pensées, —
> et nous avons passé la vie
> sans la voir [...]. (*VU*, 230)

The vocabulary (particularly the focus on the senses *not* being stimulated) and rhetorical structures ('[s]i je n'ai pas [...]') used in this 'envoi' show that it operates as a template for the preface that will appear in *Les Nourritures terrestres*. It might be noted, then, that *Les Nourritures terrestres* looks back to a narrative of imaginary travel in Gide's *œuvre* in order to structure the framework (the preface) through which its main narrative can be apprehended. Moreover, if the 'Envoi' of *Le Voyage d'Urien* appears to act as an apologia for imaginary travel, then *Les Nourritures terrestres*, despite hinging in part on representations of lived experiences of travel, in fact serves to defend and reinforce the *importance* of the imaginary voyage by means of its preface. At the same time, a principal aim of the project central to *Les Nourritures terrestres* can be understood as the desire to understand imaginary travel in terms of representing a sensual renegotiation of the phenomenal. Even if the narrator of *Le Voyage d'Urien* identifies the desire to engage with the phenomenal as an abandoned motivation behind the composition of the text ('[...] j'ai voulu regarder la vie [...]' [*VU*, 231]), an re-engagement with the material world is nonetheless implied in the 'return' to the study-bedchamber emphasised at the end of the text. However, the following statement made by Gide in the Amrouche interviews in relation to *Les Nourritures terrestres* elaborates on his desire to focus more carefully, in writing this text, on a sensual reappropriation of the material world:

> [...] [J]e crois qu'aujourd'hui il est extrêmement difficile de se rendre compte de ceci: à quel point la littérature était devenue chose factice, chose apprêtée, qui se tenait en dehors de la réalité; de la réalité sociale d'une part, et de la réalité matérielle de l'autre [...] Ce que j'admirais, ce que j'admire encore dans la littérature grecque, par exemple, c'est à quel point ce n'est pas une littérature à côté et en dehors de la vie,

> c'est la vie même. Il est certain que quand j'écrivais *Les Nourritures*, j'avais cette idée, cette prétention de replonger la littérature aux sources même de son existence dans la vie.[122]

It would appear, then, that one method Gide might adopt in this quest is to imbue the imaginary voyage with representations of lived experiences of travel – introducing into the narrative precisely what can be seen elsewhere in his *œuvre* to inspire (the relation of) imaginary peregrinations (it might be remembered, for example, that Gide's honeymoon trip inspired the desert setting of *El Hadj*). Such an aim is arguably rendered more easily achievable in *Les Nourritures terrestres* through the generic hybridity of the text, sections of which are styled as journal entries anchored by an itinerary of different place names. These sections serve to outline the narrator's actual travels, thus serving as an exemplar *and* validation of the tenets on travel imparted in the narrative outside of these entries (throughout which the projected reader is apostrophised). The assessment offered by Gide above is, of course, an extension of the reflections noted in his preface to the 1927 edition of *Les Nourritures terrestres*, in which he writes:

> J'écrivais ce livre à un moment où la littérature sentait furieusement le factice et le renfermé; où il me paraissait urgent de la faire à nouveau toucher terre et poser simplement sur le sol un pied nu. (*NT*, 443)

It is therefore crucial to consider the status of the imaginary voyage in relation to the desired sensual re-engagement with the world ('à nouveau toucher terre') that underpins the compulsion to undertake travel as it is represented in *Les Nourritures terrestres*. As the narrator of *Les Nourritures terrestres* underlines: 'Il ne me suffit pas de *lire* que les sables des plages sont doux; je veux que mes pieds nus le sentent… Toute connaissance que n'a pas précédée une sensation m'est inutile' (*NT*, 361) (emphasis in original). The notion of 'toucher terre' put forward by Gide in the 1927 preface represents the burning need on the part of the narrator to experience the joys of travel – the fruits of the earth – for real and in this way can be seen as a progression from his earlier treatment of imaginary travel in the trilogy of travel narratives identified in this thesis. Underpinning *Les Nourritures terrestres*, therefore, is the acknowledgement that the experience of travel, whether realised or imaginary, cannot be imparted satisfactorily or accurately relived/ (re-)experienced through the writing

[122] See Marty, *André Gide. Qui êtes-vous?* (Lyon: La Manufacture, 1987), p. 176.

process, only represented. Yet despite this foregone conclusion, the narrative chooses to sustain its focus on the importance of a sensual engagement with the material world, a focus which, in presenting itself in the guise of a guidebook to the activity of travel, aims to transcend mere representation by making an impact on the way the reader travels in the real world.

The bridge that unites the 'envoi' of *Le Voyage d'Urien* and the original preface to *Les Nourritures terrestres* has already been identified. In the afterword to an 1896 edition of *Paludes*, which announces the publication of *Les Nourritures terrestres*, two key insights into Gide's evolution as writer of travel can be discerned. Firstly, what might be understood as a creative trajectory akin to that of the narrator of *Les Nourritures terrestres* is outlined:

> 'Un jeune homme plein de passions' — comme disait René [...] — après un an de voyage, durant lequel, de parti pris, mais non sans luttes difficiles, il a pu, tant l'adoration émerveillée de la nature lui semblait préférable, tant l'occupait sa joie volontaire de vivre et son souci de voir telle quelle chaque chose — bannir pour un long temps les livres, soulever les rideaux, ouvrir, briser les vitres dépolies, tout ce qui s'épaissit entre nous et l'Autre, tout ce qui ternit la nature, — harmonisait enfin sa vie et ses pensées [...]. (*PA*, 322-23)

The notion of breaking out the windows of the interior space (specifically, a space that can be linked to the composition of the narrative relating the imaginary voyage) can be seen to act as a response to the illusory departure from the narrative's site of composition described in *Le Voyage d'Urien*. The idea of a wanderlust-filled young man finally attempting to 'harmonise' his life and his thoughts also suggests that an attempt to exit the 'chambre de nos pensées' that emblematises Gide's previous experimentations with imaginary voyage is necessary. Indeed, the process of harmonising his life and his imagination seems to intimate that real-life travel and the outside world must be engaged with from now on in the literary output of the writer who travels. It is revealing, then, that the 'invitation au voyage' presented by the window in the narrator's bedroom in the opening pages of *Le Voyage d'Urien* will be revisited by the narrator of *Les Nourritures terrestres*:

> Ah! croisées! que de fois mon front s'est venu rafraîchir à vos vitres, et que de fois mes désirs, lorsque je courais de mon lit trop brûlant vers le balcon, à voir l'immense ciel tranquille, se sont évaporés comme des brumes. (*NT*, 355–56)

In this instance it is clear that the narrator's ambition to see the world – as represented by the immense sky – is somehow thwarted by the hold the interior exerts upon him. However, elsewhere in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, the narrator's projection outside of his room and into the exterior is represented. This is in marked contrast to an encoded 'voyage autour de [s]a chambre', and constitutes an evident attempt on the part of *Les Nourritures terrestres* to break away from the template of *Le Voyage d'Urien*:

> Lieux que l'on doit quitter; petite chambre; ici, pendant un instant, j'ai posé ma tête; j'ai senti, j'ai pensé; j'ai veillé [...] Chambres quittées! Merveilles des départs que je n'ai jamais voulu tristes [...] Partons! que tout ce que je viens de penser se perde comme moi dans l'étourdissement de la fuite... (*NT*, 402)

The second perspective on Gide's evolution as a writer who travels offered by the 1896 afterword to *Paludes* can be discerned in a comment on the conclusion of this text:

> À un livre factice convenait une aussi factice conclusion; — mais que le lecteur patient veuille bien ne regarder tout ce livre que comme une préface à celui qu'il sera bientôt heureux de lire sous ce titre: *Les Nourritures terrestres*. (*PA*, 324)

Paludes, then, a work which foregrounds the difficulty and perhaps even the futility of representing the travel experience through its central 'voyage inachevé', is put forward as another possible preface to *Les Nourritures terrestres*. That is to say, *Paludes* might be seen as what directly precedes and even *leads* to the project outlined in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, as well as offering a framework for understanding (in fulfilling the role of an explanatory preface for) the latter text. It seems, then, that in its constant struggle to disengage from – and its compulsion to reengage with – its antecedents, *Le Voyage d'Urien* and *Paludes*, *Les Nourritures terrestres* purposely ignores the seemingly clearcut advice it repeatedly imparts to its own projected reader: 'Et quand tu m'auras lu, jette ce livre, — et sors' (*NT*, 349).

The concept of 'ferveur', identified as key to understanding the apprehension of the travel experience in *El Hadj*, is revisited and further explored over the course of *Les Nourritures terrestres*. 'Ferveur' can be understood here as a drive to engage sensually with the world, as opposed to a thought process based solely on reasoning (the representation of fervour might also be seen to extend to the young male figure 'plein de passions' invoked in the afterword to *Paludes*). Living or travelling with

such an acute awareness of and focus on the senses as the tools of apprehension (as evinced in the pithy declaration 'Que ton œil soit la chose regardée' [*NT*, 368]) might be considered in the light of its positioning as an instructive device in *Les Nourritures terrestres*. For, in this text, the aged narrator addresses his various findings and recollections of past journeys to an ostensibly less experienced reader figure (referred to as Nathanaël), whilst at the same time professing a wariness of conventional methods of instruction. Gide identifies *Les Nourritures terrestres* as a 'manuel d'évasion, de délivrance' (*NT*, 443) in the 1927 preface to the work; the narrator stresses to the reader in the original preface that the book's aim is to give the reader the will to leave what is familiar to him – 'sortir de n'importe où, de ta ville, de ta famille, de ta chambre, de ta pensée. N'emporte pas mon livre avec toi' (*NT*, 349). This puts forward two images of the text – firstly, it sees itself as an essential guidebook to – an authority on – the activity of travelling and, secondly, in putting forward the evasion of social and material ties as an essential step in preparing for travel, it paves the way for its own disposal – but only *once* it has been completed. In Chapter 2, Michaux's perspective on the possibility of disengaging from national, cultural and familial ties is considered; it can therefore be concluded that, for both authors, the notion of resistance by means of a travel narrative also serves to *undermine* the travel narrative itself. At the same time, this attitude of resistance is precisely what informs and even generates the content of the travel narrative in question. The compulsion felt by the writer who travels to chip away at the authority of his travel narrative, then, becomes a principal point of interest in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, as will also be the case in *Ecuador*. In adopting this approach in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, Gide carefully imbues his notion of fervour with a seed of destructiveness that emblematises the tension at the heart of the travel narrative – that is to say, the travel narrative's desire to provide a trace, either of a real journey undertaken, or imaginary travel, yet its simultaneous realisation that, in leaving *but* a trace, many aspects of the journey are necessarily effaced (indeed, Michaux sums up this tension in his lament: 'Voyant une grosse année réduite à si peu de pages, l'auteur est ému. Sûrement, il s'est passé encore bien d'autres choses' [*EC*, 235]).

The significance of the convalescent state of the narrator of *Les Nourritures terrestres* must also be noted here, particularly given the connection made between illness and travel over the course of *El Hadj*. In considering the theme of

convalescence in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, the following question emerges as particularly important: how and why does the figure of the convalescent, the person whose once-diminished senses have now been restored through travel, become an element in Gide's conception of the travel experience in this period? At this point, the closing lines of Book II of *Les Nourritures terrestres* might be recalled: 'Je tombai malade; je voyageai, je rencontrai Ménalque, et ma convalescence merveilleuse fut une palingénésie' (*NT*, 358). Falling sick is seen here to prompt a departure; the experience of travel that unfolds serves to restore the narrator to full health, even allowing him to be 'reborn', if one is to engage with this particular meaning of palingenesis. This early emphasis on rebirth and regeneration through travel can be seen to foreshadow the figure of Gide himself in West Africa in the 1920s, as will be seen in Chapter 3, as if the aging narrator of *Les Nourritures terrestres* were a projected portrait of the older Gide and his conception of travel. Moreover, it might be noted that Gide moves in the 1890s from believing Africa to be a land offering infinite new possibilities ('[l]'Afrique! Je répétais ce mot mystérieux; je le gonflais de terreurs, d'attirantes horreurs, d'attente [...]') to seeing Africa, in the 1920s, as a place capable of triggering a process of *re*newal in the willing participant.[123] Much ignored upon its initial publication, it might be added that Gide's text garners new readers in the interwar period, some of whom voiced that they were comforted by the content and even the materiality of the written word – book or page – as they suffered in the throes of disease. In a 1934 letter to Gide, a man hospitalised in a regional sanatorium reveals that *Les Nourritures* 'm'ont aidé puissamment à 'm'intéresser à la vie [...] vous m'avez enseigné la beauté de la vie, me donnant ainsi la volonté d'abord de guérir [...]'.[124] Another man hospitalised in Grenoble writes to Gide in 1935 and, in underlining his attachment to *Les Nourritures terrestres*, uncovers its scope as a guidebook not only to travelling, but also to life more generally:

> Parce que je vais peut-être mourir bientôt, je vous écris enfin. Vous avez été dans ma vie le guide et le soutien aux pires heures de souffrance. Les *Nourritures* ne m'ont pas seulement aidé à vivre, elles m'ont sauvé de la mort. A 17 ans, j'ai copié sur un carnet qui ne m'a jamais quitté depuis, le principal du petit livre; j'y ai puisé la volonté de vivre et si je suis encore vivant, c'est grâce à vous parce que par vous, j'ai compris que 'le plus petit instant de vie est plus fort que la mort et la nie'. J'ai vécu deux ans

[123]Gide, *Si le grain ne meurt*, pp. 289 –90.

[124] Yvonne Davet, *Autour des* Nourritures terrestres. *Histoire d'un livre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 230.

> allongé et j'ai connu les pires bas-fonds de la douleur, mais j'ai toujours aimé passionnément la vie (ou plutôt non, depuis 17 ans, quand je vous ai lu)…[125]

Les Nourritures terrestres, however, appears to move beyond the still-immobilised convalescent in putting itself forward as a text which also traces the emergence of the traveller. It connects the onward progression suggested by the physical activity of travel to that of *imagining* the travel experience:

> [L]e pays n'existe qu'à mesure que le forme notre approche, et le paysage à l'entour, peu à peu, devant notre marche se dispose; et nous ne voyons pas au bout de l'horizon; et même près de nous ce n'est qu'une successive et modifiable apparence. (*NT*, 351–52) (emphasis in original)

It seems that this passage attempts to call into question the tension between real and imaginary travel by suggesting that moving through the world ordinarily implies a perception or apprehension of one's surroundings. In highlighting that the material world is founded on our apprehension of what might understood as the unstable appearance of things, this passage seems to uncover the heightened subjectivity of the traveller as he moves through the world. This is a subjectivity that perhaps can ultimately dispense with such progression, as in the case of representations of both real *and* imaginary travel that 'le pays n'existe qu'à mesure que le forme notre approche' – the word 'approche' at once emphasising displacement or progression *and* a way of seeing that has the potential to involve *invention* as much as apprehension. This passage can therefore be likened to an extract from Segalen's *Équipée*, which underlines the link between progression and creation: '[O]n fait soi-même la Carte, et sous les pas, sous les doigts et le crayon, le grand blanc provisoire se grisaille, l'inconnu se dépèce et se dessine, l'imprévisible devient le déjà vu et s'écrit'.[126] Gide's take on progression at this point underlines the extent to which he places the writer of travel at the centre of the travel narrative, exerting control over his experience of travel in embracing his subjectivity. In his 1900 talk 'De l'influence en littérature', however, Gide will speak of the impact of travel on the traveller, using the example of Goethe:

> Goethe, dans ses Mémoires, parle avec émotion de cette période de jeunesse où sa sensibilité s'était à tel point exaltée, que, se promenant dans la campagne, un chant,

[125] Yvonne Davet, *Autour des* Nourritures terrestres, p. 231.
[126] Segalen, *Équipée: Voyage au Pays du Réel*, p. 95.

> un souffle, le moindre rayon, la moindre ombre semblait le modifier d'une manière réelle. Avec délices il subissait la plus fugitive influence.[127]

Yet even if this example emphasises travel's dominion over the traveller, the willingness of Goethe as traveller to submit to influence in fact suggests the potential for the writer to *manipulate* the influences that work upon him to a creative end – just as Gide's openness to the possibilities of travel (in)forms his writing process.

Les Nourritures terrestres therefore deserves to be understood as the culmination of Gide's other fin-de-siècle writings on travel, as the narrative is not only revealed to be a synthesis of and reaction to many of the findings Gide makes in these earlier narratives of imaginary travel, but also extends beyond this role to operate as an exploration of the tension and interplay that serve to define the relationship that exists between representations of real and imaginary experiences of travel.

1.6 Conclusion

In exploring travel as both a central theme in – and a driving force behind – the fin-de-siècle travel narrative, this chapter has uncovered Gide's variety of approaches to negotiating mobility. In *Le Voyage d'Urien*, Gide encodes the interior setting (the study-bedchamber) in which the voyage is imagined, only to expose the functions promoted by this site as part of the unfolding narrative in *Paludes*. *El Hadj* and *Les Nourritures terrestres* both make reference to the interior site of the text's composition, their sustained focus on the relationship between illness and recovery in terms of travel placing particular importance on the bedchamber. In Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, where the focus will once again fall on Gide's travel narratives, the rich links that exist between these fin-de-siècle writings on travel and his major travel accounts of the interwar period will be identified, showing the extent to which this early apprenticeship in writing about travel shapes Gide's approach to relating his experiences in West Africa and the U.S.S.R. In emphasising the constructed nature of the travel narrative, and in exposing its construction as a central part of any such account, Gide has demystified the travel writing enterprise by the turn of the century, showing that relating one's travel account can be connected to formal and textual

[127] Gide, 'De l'influence en littérature', in *Essais critiques*, ed. by Pierre Masson (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 403-17 (p. 403).

exploration and experimentation as much as representing lived experience. This demystification is achieved through Gide's sustained focus on *imaginary* travel, before the writing of a text that synthesises representations of real and imaginary travel experiences, *Les Nourritures terrestres*. If Michaux appears to undermine his travel narrative *Ecuador*, despite being a seasoned traveller and published writer, in coyly prefiguring his narrative with the cautionary statement 'Un homme qui ne sait ni voyager ni tenir un journal a composé ce journal de voyage' (*EC*, 139), Gide's professed openness to the vicissitudes of his West Africa and Soviet Union voyages shows that his relationship both to travel and writing about the experience of travel has been firmly established at a formative stage. The references, explicit and implied, to his fin-de-siècle works in these later travel accounts, then, are not at all incidental but rather provide a crucial insight into the way Gide's understanding of travel operates and continually evolves.

CHAPTER 2 – 'VOYAGE RÉEL ENTRE DEUX IMAGINAIRES': MICHAUX'S EVOLUTION FROM *ECUADOR* TO *UN BARBARE EN ASIE*

> Quelqu'un est quelqu'un comme une goutte d'eau est une maquette de l'Océan [128]

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will take as its *point de départ* what might initially be perceived as Henri Michaux's ardent desire to move away from his familial, national and continental roots, as voiced by the author in his short autobiographical text *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence* (1959):

> Il voyage *contre*.
> Pour expulser de lui sa patrie, ses attaches de toutes sortes et ce qui s'est en lui et malgré lui attaché de culture grecque ou romaine ou germanique ou d'habitudes belges.
> Voyages d'expatriation.
> Le refus pourtant commence à céder un peu au désir d'assimilation. Il aura beaucoup à apprendre à s'ouvrir. Ce sera long.[129] (emphasis in original)

The emphatic claim 'Il voyage *contre*' can be seen to stem from a long-established socio-historical context where '[b]y the nineteenth century, [travel's] most characteristic figure was the young bourgeois fleeing the dull repetitions and the stifling mundanity of the bourgeois world'.[130] Indeed, in *Ecuador*, Michaux identifies the everyday as precisely what upholds the existence of the bourgeois: 'Le *quotidien* fait le bourgeois'.[131] Michaux's journey to South America both continues and appears to validate the tradition of travel initiated as a result of the antagonistic relationship between the figure of the flighty young man and his bourgeois milieu, for, as Jean-Xavier Ridon notes: 'celui qui décide de partir a le choix et le privilège de briser sa routine quotidienne'.[132] In *Un Barbare en Asie*, Michaux will continue to emphasise what might be understood as the 'stifling mundanity' and the stagnating effect of his own bourgeois world: 'comment écrirait-on sur un pays où l'on a vécu trente ans, liés à l'ennui [...], aux soucis étroits, au train-train quotidien [...]'.[133] The latter comment

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[128] Michaux, 'Quelque part, quelqu'un', *OC*, I, 554.
[129] Michaux, 'Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence', *OC*, I, cxxxiii.
[130] James Duncan and Derek Gregory, 'Introduction', in *Writes of Passage – Reading Travel Writing*, ed. by James Duncan and Derek Gregory (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1–13 (p. 6).
[131] Michaux, *Ecuador*, *OC*, I, 137–243 (p. 227) (emphasis in original). Hereafter referred to in the text as (*EC*).
[132] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *Le Voyage en son miroir: essai sur quelques tentatives de réinvention du voyage au 20e siècle* (Paris: Kimé, 2002), p. 10.
[133] Michaux, *Un Barbare en Asie*, *OC*, I, 275–409 (p. 332). Hereafter referred to in the text as (*BA*).

underlines the fact that Michaux conceives of travel not only as providing him with a rich subject as a writer, but also as presenting him with the means of setting the creative process in motion. It might therefore be argued that Michaux travels *in order to write* at this point, rather than the experience of travel itself propelling him to write en route. A sense of expectancy regarding the potential of travel to inspire Michaux as a writer might be seen to be rather grudgingly implied in what are but the opening lines of *Ecuador*: 'Voilà deux ans qu'il a commencé, ce voyage. [...] Deux ans, une sorte de constipation et maintenant, c'est pour mardi matin' (*EC*, 141). It is notable that the intensive planning of this voyage has not yielded a line of text; it seems that a departure must be at least imminent for the writing process to begin. Indeed, it will be emphasised that the tension that exists between the notion of beginning a voyage, and the notion of beginning to relate the experience of travel, becomes a point of intersection in the travel narratives of both Michaux and Gide.

It is not accidental that the word to follow 'Il voyage *contre'* in *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence* is 'Pour' – for it will be argued here that the notion of 'voyager *contre'* in Michaux can only ever be fully understood in relation to a simultaneously conceived and overlapping notion of what it might be to 'voyager pour'. Such a perspective would contest Napoléon Murat's understanding of 'Il voyage *contre'* in relation to *Ecuador*. Murat sees Michaux as refusing to partake of this voyage, resisting the experience of travel, even regretting the fact that he has undertaken the journey:

> Voyage revanche, voyage haine, voyage souffrance où tout donné est décevant parce que décortiqué de sa gangue: Michaux voit le voyage sans le vivre un instant.[134]

Even though Michaux's evocation of 'voyager *contre'* in *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence* can be historically contextualised, reflecting a long-established bourgeois trend, it can be said that the line 'Il voyage *contre'* is representative of Michaux's inextricably linked drive to create *and* desire to travel. 'Contre', then, can be described as Michaux's reaction to his surroundings that has the

[134] Napoléon Murat, *Henri Michaux* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1967), p. 30. Although Michaux writes: 'Ce voyage est une gaffe' (*EC*, 204), his explanation of this claim ('Le voyage ne rend pas tant large que mondain [...]' [*EC*, 204]) shows that the traveller-narrator of *Ecuador* is coming to a realisation about the value of travel that only partaking in the activity of travelling would allow him to make. The voyage is, therefore, not a blunder by any means. I shall return to the issue of misrepresentation regarding this journey later in this chapter.

effect of moving him in the opposite direction, a force that will propel Michaux out of his everyday life in Europe, and in so doing, spur him on creatively. It is therefore a notion which in fact generates a text such as *Ecuador*, rather than necessarily being identifiable as something which undermines and problematises the voyage this narrative attempts to represent. Indeed, it might be noted that Michaux quickly establishes in the same passage that 'Le refus pourtant commence à céder un peu au désir d'assimilation'. 'Voyager *contre'*, then, as a façade for Michaux's urge to travel and create, and its implied antonymic equivalent 'voyager pour', in fact collapse into one another, as already intimated by Michaux through the word order of his autobiographical text: 'Il voyage contre. Pour [...]'. In seeing 'voyager *contre*' precisely as the façade Michaux creates for travelling with purpose ('pour'), or the will to travel, he might be understood as the consummate traveller, if Baudelaire's assessment of the traveller figure in 'Le Voyage' is recalled: 'les vrais voyageurs sont ceux-là qui partent/*Pour* partir' (emphasis my own).[135] To revisit Murat's assessment above in the light of these comments, therefore, would be to see Michaux as open to the possibilities of the travel experience in *Ecuador*, someone who wants to travel and write about his experiences of travel, even if he claims himself to be, arguably in a tone of mock humility, 'Un homme qui ne sait ni voyager ni tenir un journal [...]' (*EC*, 139).

It is also important to note that Michaux, in *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence*, includes the passage cited above in his 1929 entry, directly after the line 'Voyages en Turquie, Italie, Afrique du Nord', and two years after his voyage 'en Équateur', although, tellingly, 1929 is the year in which *Ecuador* appears. While it is intended that my understanding of the passage cited above will operate as a means to elucidate the background to this 1927 voyage, the possibility of this South American voyage and its resultant work as having *further* fortified Michaux's desire to travel must also be taken into account. *Ecuador* will therefore be seen as both a cultivating ground for, and the development of, such a desire. Indeed, *Ecuador* might be viewed as relating the initiatory 'voyage *contre*', a long-planned and much awaited journey. My analysis of *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie* (1933) will then show that 'voyager *contre'* is not just a short-lived theme in Michaux's life

[135] Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Voyage', in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), pp. 182–83 (p. 182).

and work, but rather a defining thread in both. A discussion of the notion of 'voyager *contre'* in relation to *Ecuador* therefore comprises the second section of this chapter.

The third section of this chapter analyses what is ostensibly Michaux's growing disillusionment with the travel project, which comes to the fore as he progresses through South America. It will be suggested that this sense of disillusionment ties in with Michaux's growing misgivings regarding the relation of travel experiences, as evinced in his appraisals of other accounts of travel. *Ecuador* will also be held up as a prime example of the interplay between real and imaginary travel experiences: this work includes poetry alongside journal entries, and the traveller's imaginings infuse his impressions of South America (this fluid interplay is described as 'transgeneric voguing' by Charles Forsdick).[136] To conclude this section, reasons as to why Michaux chooses to continue travelling (and writing a narrative relating his experience) will be focused upon, given that he contemplates his projected journey through Asia whilst still upon his voyage in South America.[137]

In the fourth section of this chapter Michaux's later travel narrative *Un Barbare en Asie* will be analysed as a text that counters the notion of the 'exotic'. The spaces traversed and environments encountered in the voyages undertaken by Gide and Michaux are numerous: urban or rural; rivers and their hinterlands; jungle and tropical rainforests. Yet my analysis focuses on an approach which unifies these landscapes in their works. Such an approach traces the mapping of the imaginary onto the real, or ascertains the impact of anticipating one's travels before they go on to be undertaken. Raymond Bellour offers us a useful means of defining the real in terms of Michaux's travels:

> Quand je parle du réel, il s'agit de tout ce que Michaux éprouve et voit pendant ce voyage, en tant que réalité extérieure [...] Essentiellement tout ce qui s'offre comme l'autre de la Belgique, dont Michaux est originaire, l'autre de l'Europe, de Paris où il vit depuis qu'il a quitté la Belgique.[138]

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[136] Forsdick, *New Approaches to Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French*, p. 20.
[137] Michaux, *'Sitôt lus': Lettres à Franz Hellens, 1922-1952*, ed. by Leonardo Clerici (Paris: Fayard, 1999), p. 119.
[138] Raymond Bellour, 'L'Amérique du Sud pour Henri Michaux', in *France-Amérique latine: croisements de lettres et de voies*, ed. by Lisa Block de Behar and Walter Bruno Berg (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), pp. 249–64 (p. 252).

Similarly, Gide's conception of the real, of exterior reality, hinges on persistent comparisons with his native land, as will be seen in Chapter 3. For only when there is little similarity between the landscapes of French Equatorial Africa and those of France does Gide truly feel himself to be travelling, experiencing what can be deemed *autre*. A notion of experience, rather than mere physical and social displacement (*dépaysement* in both senses, perhaps), is thus at stake in the travel narratives of these authors. It is useful, in the light of this discussion, to note Catherine Malabou's comments in *La Contre-Allée* (1999): 'On peut toujours partir très loin; s'il n'y a pas survenue de l'autre, quel qu'il soit, le voyage ne s'accomplit pas, n'a pas véritablement lieu, *il n'arrive pas*'.[139] Malabou's play here on 'the voyage does not happen' and 'the traveller does not arrive' (a possible interpretation since this (pro)noun phrase can be seen to be disconnected from its antecedent ['le voyage'] by means of its italicisation) highlights the writer's obsession with his voyage's starting point, as often pointed up in his travel narrative. Indeed, the starting point of a voyage can tend to differ from one's point of departure. It will be seen in Chapter 3 that Gide, in *Voyage au Congo*, declares with almost irritating frequency that the journey has, at last, truly begun; similarly, an exasperated Michaux soon asks in *Ecuador*: 'Mais où est-il donc ce voyage?' (*EC*, 144), quickly followed by: 'Et ce voyage, mais où est-il ce voyage?' (*EC*, 144) It might then be affirmed that the encounter with the other appears to be necessary in order to uphold a voyage as real. Any such notion is then destabilised when the other's alterity is problematised by the writer. It will be shown that this process of questioning and destabilising the other reaches its apogee in *Un Barbare en Asie*, paving the way for Michaux's later narratives of imaginary travel, collected in the 1948 text *Ailleurs*.

My analysis of these narratives will be underpinned by Victor Segalen's seminal work *Essai sur l'exotisme, une esthétique du Divers* (1978), which will provide a framework within which the conception of what might be seen as *autre* can be studied. In the case of Michaux, it will be seen that the exotic (evoked by the terms *exotique*, *Divers*, *autre*) is changeable, deceptive and ultimately out of reach. Segalen, in his re-evaluation of the concept of the exotic in *Essai sur l'exotisme, une esthétique du Divers*, underlines its continuing validity, despite its need for a semiological

[139] Malabou and Derrida, *La Contre-Allée*, p. 12.

overhaul. In writing of his intention to '[j]eter par-dessus bord tout ce que contient de mésusé et de rance ce mot d'exotisme', Segalen highlights the contemporaneous overuse (and misuse or abuse) of the word, which can be connected to the growing number of travel accounts in circulation.[140] Indeed, Michaux will speak of the continuing currency of the notion of exoticism in the interwar period in a particularly disparaging fashion:

> Il est bien vrai que toujours, en tout temps, le vieillard retarde. L'époque actuelle, c'est pour lui de l'exotisme. (*EC*, 163)

Elsewhere in *Ecuador* Michaux derides what he sees as a conventional role assigned to the writer who travels – that of 'amateur d'exotisme' (*EC*, 191). The withering tone behind both of these invocations of the concept of 'exotisme' in *Ecuador* is particularly revealing, as Michaux has already been analysed as an 'anti-exote' in terms of this narrative.[141] It is suggested in this chapter, however, that Michaux retains this 'anti-exote' perspective in *Un Barbare en Asie*. His engagement with a quasi-ethnographic approach to his travel experiences in Asia, for example, informs my understanding of *Un Barbare en Asie* as 'anti-exotic' text, one which continues or revisits the concerns regarding travel and the textualisation of the travel experience raised and developed by Michaux in *Ecuador*, rather than constituting a marked departure from its predecessor.

The final section of this chapter returns to *Ecuador* to concentrate on verbal representation as privileged by Michaux when it comes to expressing his real travel experiences. No study of Michaux can be given credence without highlighting his dual status as artist-writer, as well as the choices regarding modes of representation that this status implies. It will be shown that these choices, particularly in the context of representing his travel experiences, are not easily made, and that debating the possibility of visual or verbal modes of expression is as integral to the evolution of *Ecuador* as Michaux's interrogation of the travel journal form. Of course, the circumstances of Michaux's journey across South America (floating down the Napo

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[140] Victor Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthétique du Divers*, p. 22.

[141] See Catherine Mayaux whose work follows on from Segalen's term 'exote'. Mayaux, 'Michaux l'anti-exote en Ecuador', in *Henri Michaux: plis et cris du lyrisme*, ed. by Catherine Mayaux, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), pp. 205–14.

ensconced in a canoe, traversing mountainous regions on horseback) mean that verbal expression is viewed as the more feasible option – it is considered to be more suited to recording quick reactions to people and surroundings whilst on the move. Indeed, it can be ascertained from the outset that Michaux evinces a certain sense of obligation (and even marked determination) to maintain his journal over the course of the voyage.[142] It will also be seen that any relation of the travel experience is momentarily overshadowed when the notion of this decision-making process enters into his narrative.

2.2 'Voyager *contre*', the travel encounter, and accounting for travel in *Ecuador*

It can be said that Michaux interrogates the travel journal form in *Ecuador*. Over the course of this text Michaux shifts between engaging with and resisting the writing up process in the light of his encounter with the ostensibly familiar, rather than the new, in South America. Tzvetan Todorov's adaptation of Jean Piaget's bipartite accommodation-assimilation model will be fundamental to my understanding of the extent of Michaux's experimentation with the travel journal form. Todorov believes that 'le processus interprétatif' can be apprehended through Piaget's model, which suggests the following:

> Lorsque [le psychisme humain] se trouve confronté à des actions et des situations qui lui sont étrangères, il réagit, d'une part, en adaptant les schèmes anciens à l'objet nouveau (c'est l'accommodation), d'autre part, en adaptant le fait nouveau aux schèmes anciens (et c'est l'assimilation).[143]

One particular problematic outside the bounds of this model seems to come to light over the course of Michaux's voyage: 'un homme qui ne sait ni voyager ni tenir un journal' by his own ready admission, and one who might therefore be seen to hope that this journey will provide him with an apprenticeship in both travelling and writing a (travel) journal, Michaux comes to realise the impossibility of encountering the new even before his arrival in South America. Michaux therefore finds himself in a position whereby the experiences offered by his initiation in the processes of travelling and writing must be reconciled with his renewed collision with the

[142] Michaux, of course, gives *Ecuador* the subtitle of 'Journal de voyage'. The first page of *Ecuador* sees Michaux affirm, even before the voyage gets fully underway, that 'ce voyage [...] il fera des pages [...]' (*EC*, 141).
[143] Tzvetan Todorov, *Symbolisme et interprétation* (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 25.

everyday from which he had initially expected to escape. This encounter with the everyday raises questions for Michaux about the validity of his voyage (Catherine Malabou's claim regarding the encounter with the other might be remembered). Michaux's negotiation of this collision might at first be seen to hinge on whether he will choose to adapt the conventions of the travel journal form to his experience of the quotidian in South America (accommodation) or remould his apprehension of the travel experience in order to respect these norms (assimilation). In bearing in mind such a model, Michaux's inventiveness in *Ecuador* can be identified; the way Michaux manipulates the generic fluidity of the travel journal in this narrative, whilst also appraising the way he remoulds his apprehension of the travel experience in the light of his formal experimentation, will be to the fore of my analysis.

In considering to what extent Michaux's emphatic 'voyager *contre*' might be seen to relate to *Ecuador*, the role of his place of departure in creating this fervent desire on his part to move away must be established. Michaux's biographer, Jean-Pierre Martin, notes:

> Paris sera pour lui le lieu idéal de l'expatriation, un lieu d'où l'on part, où l'on revient, plutôt qu'un lieu d'installation. Un pays sans père, en somme, une patrie possible, puisqu'elle ne colle pas aux pieds, puisqu'on en décolle si facilement.[144]

However, Kimberley J. Healey, in her book *The Modernist Traveler: French Detours 1900-1930*, paints a slightly different picture from that evoked in Martin's optimistic appraisal of the role of Paris in Michaux's evolution. Healey remarks that Paris, having been styled as the centre of the literary world, was accordingly a place from which many young writers, seeing themselves as stifled or oppressed, wished to escape during this period.[145] In fact, the oppressiveness of this city for a young (Francophone) writer is evoked in *Ecuador*, when Michaux, nervously anticipating his return to the French capital whilst still in South America, shows that the effect of Paris on its young literary-minded inhabitants can be particularly far-reaching: '[O]n revient à Paris sans le sou [...] on sent déjà les crampes de la misère, et on se tracasse malgré soi pour la chambre à punaises qu'il s'agira de trouver dans ce grand Paris [...]' (*EC*, 203). Indeed, in the closing passages of the main narrative of *Ecuador* (that

[144] Jean-Pierre Martin, *Henri Michaux*, p. 105.
[145] Kimberley J. Healey, *The Modernist Traveler: French Detours 1900-1930*, p. 1.

is, the text that comes to an end upon acknowledging the ship's docking in Le Havre, directly preceding the 'Quelques souvenirs' appendix and its preface, ostensibly added upon Michaux's return), Michaux will move beyond his focus on Paris in order to concede France's hold upon him:

> Eh! quoi, encore tremblant?
> Ah! oui, on arrive demain.
> *France*, *France*, et il est tout décomposé
> Parce qu'il y revient. (*EC*, 234) (emphasis in original)

What is revealing in this journal entry is Michaux's choice of the word 'décomposé' and the way in which it might relate to his return to France. At this point, it might be noted that Michaux first travelled to Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires as a young ship hand in 1920, returning in 1921. Shortly after his return, he left Brussels for Paris, where he established himself as a writer. In Paris, his Belgian identity nonetheless remained distinct for some time, despite the fact that Michaux, in the 1920s, seemed to desire to 'expulser de lui sa patrie [...]' in a clean and quick fashion. Indeed, in hindsight Michaux would see 1922 as biographically noteworthy only insofar as he leaves Belgium definitively.[146] Paris, then, was the 'lieu idéal de l'expatriation' for Michaux, to reprise Martin's terms, as he was already an expatriate in this city and would remain so for the decades to come, during which he undertook almost all of his extensive overseas travelling. France was also 'une patrie possible' insofar as Michaux could involve himself in the decision to become French (indeed, he became a naturalised French citizen in 1955). However, Michaux's representation of his return to France, his 'patrie possible', subtly undermines, through the use of the adjective 'décomposé', his role as a writer who travels (since 'décomposé' connotes corruption, disorientation, and can even be understood as having an impact on the writer's capacity to construct a travel narrative). The narrator is 'décomposé' '[p]arce qu'il y revient', but, at the same time, the travel narrative he has related up to this point might *also* be seen to be undermined or at least threatened by his return – '*dé*-composé' ('*de*composed', beginning to unravel). Michaux's conception of both Paris and France at this point might then be seen as laying the foundations for the journey related in *Ecuador*, whilst also acting as a threat to undo or destabilise the travel narrative generated, as it nears its climax.

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[146] Michaux, *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence*, *OC*, I, cxxxii.

In the light of the above, it is also important to stress that Michaux's identity as a French-speaking Belgian in the 1920s initially seems to be more consonant with a Flemish background rather than with the literary centre of Paris. Indeed, Gide, speaking about *Ecuador* in *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, sees Michaux, as a Belgian, as being somehow '[d]e retour au pays natal' in Amsterdam (Michaux's point of departure for his South American journey), where 'il ne songera qu'à repartir'.[147] In fact, Michaux, in his haste to leave, is still, in part, reacting to his Paris-Amsterdam train journey which took him once again across the Belgium for which he would evince considerable distaste ('cette campagne flamande d'hier!' he gripes in the opening pages of *Ecuador*, a reaction whose importance Jean-Pierre Martin also emphasises).[148] Yet Gide is correct in suggesting that Amsterdam and its environs are much too reminiscent of Michaux's homeland; it is perhaps, therefore, a fitting place from which to leave Europe in terms of what is still, at the point of departure, though no longer at the point of arrival, an idealised voyage.

Michaux's tendency to manipulate the generic fluidity of the travel journal in *Ecuador* has already been flagged; the text comprises poetry, logbook-style entries and an appendix (referred to as 'Quelques souvenirs') that seems to operate as a memoir. Indeed, Michaux's representation of his journey is shaped by this formal experimentation and generic interplay; for example, poem titles, rather than a conventional place-date-time model (which is nonetheless deployed elsewhere in this narrative), often serve to anchor the reader regarding the specific point of the journey under discussion. In emphasising the multiplicity of genres with which Michaux experiments in *Ecuador*, a seemingly contradictory strand that runs through this narrative – the interlinked themes of loss, absence, missing out, renouncement, negation and effacement – also comes to the fore. In *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence*, Michaux uses the verb 'expulser' to speak of his ardent wish to dissociate himself from his country and continent (from what he sees, to an extent, as the cultural homogeny of Europe). 'Expulser', of course, suggests a forceful motion that separates one body from another – in other words, what might be understood as the compulsion to travel. Didier Alexandre's comments prove

[147] Gide, *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, p. 735.
[148] Martin, *Henri Michaux*, p. 169.

insightful in this regard: 'La progression dans l'espace est synonyme de renoncement à une culture, à la civilisation occidentale trop identifiée au moi [...]'.[149] Indeed, it will be shown that any such renouncement also implies what travelling can be said to take away from the traveller, that is, the sense of absence or loss that travel can engender in he who undertakes a journey, noting the way in which this can affect the traveller's identity. This sense of absence, it can be stressed, does not explicitly refer to the traveller's removal from his (adopted) homeland, but rather to the sense of absence that travel might create *within* him as a result of committing himself to the travel experience. In his 1981 work *Poteaux d'angle* Michaux further develops the simplification or cleansing process invoked by the notion of expulsion present in *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence*, in declaring: 'Non, non, pas acquérir. Voyager pour t'appauvrir, voilà ce dont tu as besoin'.[150] This precept raises an important question about the development of any travel narrative that might hope to adhere to it: how might a sense of absence be transposed by the writer into his travel account? Malcolm Bowie comments on the representation of a sense of absence or emptiness in the closing sections of *Ecuador*:

> The sense of futility which fills the remaining pages of the book is plain [...] The telling of every event [...] is permeated with a knowledge and a fear of the emptiness lying behind it.[151]

However, it can be argued that the idea of an emptiness lying behind every event related does not only come to the fore in the latter half of *Ecuador*. The notion of effacement is, for example, suggested by the ability of the ocean to reform as if nothing has crossed its surface, an idea invoked in the opening pages of the book, before being discussed at length in the appendix to *Ecuador*. Michaux, musing on the fact that no mark is made by ocean travel, writes:

> Bien sûr, tout le monde y a passé, les Phéniciens, les Chinois; les galères romaines y étaient, le *Mauretania*, il y a une heure. Oui, mais il ne garde pas la trace. Cette putain est toujours vierge (*EC*, 240).

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[149] Didier Alexandre, 'Entre ici et ailleurs', in *Passages et langages d'Henri Michaux*, ed. by Jean-Claude Mathieu et Michel Collot (Paris: José Corti, 1987), pp. 93–105 (p. 94).
[150] Michaux, *Poteaux d'angle*, *OC*, III (2004), 1039–1107 (p. 1042). In Chapter 3 of this thesis, it is noted that Gide uses the imagery of cleansing in relation to travel.
[151] Malcolm Bowie, *Henri Michaux: A Study of His Literary Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 58.

Even though Michaux, in invoking these past voyages, is engaging with a tentative history of the ocean voyage, the potential for any such history to be narrated (by Michaux himself or any other writer who travels) is destabilised in his understanding by its lack of traceability, a notion that is further emphasised through the emasculating image of the eternal – yet eternally seductive – virgin. The promiscuous ocean is always ready to host a new voyage, the impact of all others before non-existent on its waters (indeed, Michaux calls an earlier prose poem in *Ecuador* 'Océan solide', exaggerating the seemingly impervious quality of such a body of water). It seems, then, that the only way the passage across the ocean can be marked is in the pages of his travel journal. Yet Michaux will find it extremely difficult to fill the opening pages of his travel narrative that attempt to recount the ocean passage, as if afraid that – or attempting to resist the possibility that – the impact of his words might also be washed away, or quickly negated, stalling the narrative's progression. This fearfulness leads Michaux to interrogate – rather than ignore – the problem in question: 'Est-ce depuis deux ou trois jours qu'on est en mer? Dans l'anti-calendrier de la mer? Pauvre journal!' (*EC*, 142). It might also be suggested that the ocean not only distorts the traveller's sense of spatial relations but, in acting as an 'anti-calendar', also disrupts his conception of the passage of time. This is not only detrimental to the traveller's sense of the world, but to his travel journal, where dates not only provide a point of reference (or anchor) for readers but also serve to steady the keeper of the journal himself (in Chapter 3 the effect on Gide's West Africa travel narratives brought about by his increasingly relaxed attitude towards noting the date will be considered). The thematic of negation can also be detected in another of Michaux's ocean-related images in *Ecuador*. '[L]e grand désert d'eau' (*EC*, 142) is an oxymoron which not only evokes the ostensibly void-like space that fascinated nineteenth-century traveller-writer figures such as Chateaubriand, Loti and the young Gide, but also might be seen to sum up Michaux's conception of the Atlantic. This image reminds us of the desert's similar ability to cover, or more correctly, negate, the traveller's tracks (through its shifting sands), as well as its comparable treacherousness for any traveller willing to negotiate it.

Negation and the notion of erasing traces are not solely used in *Ecuador* to comment upon forces of nature such as the ocean, however, as Michaux also displays a predilection for *self*-erasure throughout this narrative. Upon arriving in Ecuador, for

instance, Michaux absents himself from his new surroundings via the escape offered by reading: 'Je ne suis plus à Quito, je suis dans la lecture' (*EC*, 159). (It might be even suggested that in the very writing of those lines, Michaux could have instead proclaimed: 'Je ne suis plus à Quito, je suis dans l'écriture', a notion that will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter.) A similar sense of absence will resound later in the work when Michaux travels downriver and through the Amazonian rainforest in a traditional enclosed canoe called a 'pamakari'. Ensconced in this vessel, he cannot partake of anything – be it riverside scenery or even, because of space restrictions, a book. He is floating down the Napo river but is not experiencing it vividly on a visual or other sensory level. The traveller, hidden away from the delights of the voyage, thus feels cut off from his surroundings. The canoe might even be seen to represent a vacuum-like in-between space, capturing and holding Michaux between each riverbank but never allowing him the possibility to engage with, or even disembark upon (their onward progress is a practical necessity), either one. Michel de Certeau's analysis of the railway traveller provides us with a useful point of comparison with Michaux's situation at this point:

> Enfermement voyageur. [...] Immuable, le voyageur est casé [...] Ne voyage qu'une cellule rationalisée. Une bulle du pouvoir panoptique et classificateur, un module de l'enfermement qui rend possible la production d'un ordre, une insularité close et autonome, voilà ce qui peut traverser l'espace et se rendre indépendant des enracinements locaux.[152]

While Michaux, ensconced in the canoe, can be seen to traverse space and escape 'des enracinements locaux', the opaque surface of his vessel does not allow it to act as '[u]ne bulle de pouvoir panoptique et classificateur' (of course, it might be argued that train travel also has the potential to create an impediment to the traveller's visibility). However, Certeau's bubble image seems to reflect my earlier suggestion that Michaux's cocoon-like canoe resembles a vacuum, an empty but constricted space which he is forced to inhabit. What might also be emphasised in the case of 'une bulle', suggesting the train's windows and the transparency of their glass, is the scope for visual distortion. Indeed, in writing of his canoe experience – 'On se croit dans une lunette' (*EC*, 239) – Michaux purposely evokes visual distortion and plays on his severe case of enforced and necessary 'blindness' regarding his Amazonian surroundings. This quasi-blindness means that his 'view', or apprehension of these

[152] Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, I (1990), 165.

surroundings, is greatly distorted. Nonetheless, as my comparison between modes of transport suggests, any mode of transport has the potential to engender such distortion. However, Michaux's play on visual distortion here raises another important question: if certain conditions of travel greatly impinge on the traveller's visual apprehension of the travel experience, how then can he conceive of the travel experience when sight is removed from the equation? This problematic will be considered further in the fifth section of this chapter.

Michaux's sensitivity towards any impediment to the traveller's visual apprehension of his journey only serves to underline the difficulty of ensuring that there are traces left to apprehend. In the early sections of *Ecuador* Michaux speaks of 'ma virginité de vue, d'observation refaite pour ainsi dire' (*EC*, 150), which might be contrasted with his hyperbolic conception of the ocean, 'cette putain est toujours vierge' (*EC*, 240). In an attempt to emulate the characteristic of the ocean which prevents any trace of previous crossings from remaining on the surface of its waters, Michaux tries to cultivate a kind of 'first look' ('ma virginité de vue') one which aims to right the failings of any previous observations ('observation refaite'). Yet he comes to realise that such a distillation proves a particular challenge, and that the representations of the vicissitudes of his journey are often the sole traces that will resist being washed away from the travel journal to which he has dedicated himself.[153] Moreover, Kimberley J. Healey, in noting that, by this period, 'the only virgin spaces left to explore and conquer, apart from a few inhospitable oases and Himalayan peaks, are narratives about the act of writing travel narratives or examinations of the self',[154] brings to mind the challenges to the creative process laid down by Michaux's distorting experiences – visually and otherwise – on water.

After the frustration of the ocean crossing, and the resultant feeling of emptiness that pervades Michaux, the reality of his voyage as firmly underway (a problematic also present in the case of Gide in West Africa), once *in situ* in Quito, takes a considerable length of time to sink in:

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[153] This is particularly evident in the journal entry which recounts the decision-making process behind the return leg of Michaux's trip: 'Aujourd'hui se decide à Quito, si je reviens en Europe par l'Amazone ou non [...] Si oui, il me faudra partir dans trois semaines, car le voyage est long [...] Si cela se fait, cette note est bien stupide et en effet elle est peu spontanée, mais si cela ne se fait pas, elle au moins me restera' (*EC*, 202).

[154] Kimberley J. Healey, *The Modernist Traveler: French Detours 1900-1930*, p. 3.

> Pour moi, depuis bientôt trois semaines que j'y suis, Quito ne me semble pas encore tout à fait réel, avec cette espèce d'homogénéité et de naturel que possède une ville que nous connaissons bien (si divers que soient ses aspects pour un étranger) [...]. (*EC*, 156)

This passage is one of many which might allow us to see *Ecuador* as a travel journal that relates a voyage which counters even the most modern (albeit Eurocentric) notion of the exotic (this, as noted earlier, is Segalen, writing from 1904-1918, but unpublished till 1978). For this passage shows how Michaux problematises an important condition of exoticism as theorised by Segalen, who writes that 'le pouvoir de l'exotisme [...] n'est que le pouvoir de concevoir autre'.[155] Michaux in Quito, however, can only conceive of homogeneity and familiarity.[156] The city's 'exotic' aspects are suspect in Michaux's eyes – pointed towards only in parenthesis. Segalen, of course, defines 'le moment d'Exotisme', or the exotic encounter, as 'l'ivresse du sujet à [...] sentir le Divers'.[157] Michaux, however, seems to suggest that his experience of the diverse is overridden by the sobering sense of homogeneity created by the familiarity of the urban setting. Indeed the cityscape appears so familiar to him that this constructed environment seems *natural*, like a city he already knows extremely well. This is why Quito does not yet seem real to Michaux as, following the thrust of Bellour's comments noted earlier, in reminding Michaux of his adopted Paris and, possibly, Brussels, Quito is not presenting itself as sufficiently different from these cities in order to be understood as 'autre' in Michaux's view. Moreover, it is revealing that Michaux seems to set up an opposition between 'moi' and 'étranger' in the passage above, even though *he* is a foreigner in Quito. This might be seen to indicate the extent to which Michaux wallows in what he perceives to be the homogeneity of this particular cityscape as, in his view, this sense of familiarity somehow diminishes his self-identification as foreigner. It is important at this juncture to note that Michaux travelled to Ecuador with, and on the invitation of, an Ecuadorian friend returning to his native land, the poet Alfred Gangotena. Michaux is then not so much travelling independently in anticipation of the new, as participating in someone else's homecoming. Although Michaux had never been in Ecuador prior

[155] Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthétique du Divers*, p. 23.
[156] In Italo Calvino's travel text *Invisible Cities* the character of Marco Polo notes: 'Traveling, you realize that differences are lost: each city takes to resembling all cities [...]'. See Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 137.
[157] Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthétique du Divers*, p. 24.

to this visit, the close companionship between himself and Gangotena no doubt emphasises that he is very much entering the quotidian of a familiar party. Gangotena's dominant presence here, as well as his initiatory role in this (homeward) voyage, might then be one of the reasons why Michaux, in *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence*, explicitly refers to his subsequent voyage through Asia as 'Enfin *son* voyage'.[158] In *Ecuador*, Michaux, as the guest of the upper class Gangotena family, and therefore moving in the upper echelons of Ecuadorian society, can be seen to feel somewhat cheated of any interaction with 'l'homme de la rue', an issue he will purposely redress in the narrative to emerge from '*son* voyage', *Un Barbare en Asie*. For despite Michaux's intermittent bursts of desire to explore his surroundings at length, his hosts are, somewhat understandably, far from curious. In the bosom of the Gangotena family, where he is even requested to choose a new decor for the bedroom he is staying in ('Ma chambre! Quelle histoire! [...] Ils veulent donc que je demeure toute ma vie à Quito' [*EC*, 183]), Michaux comes to the following conclusion, not without retaining a link to the domestic interior that seems to dominate his stay in Quito:

> Le voyage ne rend pas tant large que mondain, 'au courant', gobeur de l'intéressant coté, primé, avec le stupide air de faire partie d'un jury de prix de beauté [...] On trouve aussi bien sa vérité en regardant quarante-huit heures une quelconque tapisserie de mur. (*EC*, 204)

Michaux's apprehensiveness in *Ecuador* towards the way in which the travel experience might be related can be connected to the lack of traceability of all previous voyages on the surface of the ocean's waters. Michaux's capacity to record his travel experience is affected, as noted earlier, since he initially feels paralysed by his fear of not being able to leave a trace. Moreover, a sense of having arrived and a realisation that the transcontinental journey has begun in earnest fail to resonate upon Michaux's arrival in Quito. It has been established that any notion of the journey as real and actually underway is destabilised when the other's alterity is problematised by the writer's recognition of what he sees as merely another man's everyday, despite the significant differences this might nonetheless entail. It is important to note that Michaux himself is sensitive to the potential for co-existing yet differing versions of the everyday, through a clever juxtaposition of terms in the phrase 'l'autre quotidien'.

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[158] Michaux, *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence*, *OC*, I, cxxxiii.

He also acknowledges that '[...] le quotidien de l'un peut désorienter jusqu'à la mort l'homme de l'autre quotidien' (*EC*, 227), putting forward the capacity of the other's everyday to disconcert the traveller as a possibility, rather than an inevitability. If this voyage can be seen to be a quest in which Michaux strives for self-discovery and self-development, or what he goes on to term 'mon perfectionnement' (*EC*, 191), then his renewed collision with, or rather acknowledgement of, the inescapable everyday in Quito also serves to destabilise his understanding of the individual of the new country.[159] It might be remembered that Maurice Blanchot, in an essay entitled 'L'homme de la rue', which focuses on the snatches of self-awareness we evince with regard to the everyday, writes: 'Dans le quotidien, nous n'avons pas de nom, peu de réalité personnelle, à peine une figure [...]'.[160] What seems to emerge in *Ecuador*, then, is an understanding on Michaux's part that there are parellel quotidians ad infinitum within man's reach – what is therefore potentially most interesting is not the increasingly difficult aim of self-discovery, but rather the journey made between any given two, in the absence of any otherworldly exploration, as playfully invoked elsewhere in the text:

> Cette terre est rincée de son exotisme. Si dans cent ans, nous n'avons pas obtenu d'être en relation avec une autre planète (mais nous y arriverons) l'humanité est perdue. (*EC*, 155)

Indeed, in the light of the discussion above regarding traceability and a move towards (self-)erasure in terms of representing the travel experience, it is particularly revealing that Michaux elaborates a viewpoint based on the impact of negation immediately prior to his reaction to Quito, noting that '[u]ne contrée ou ville étrangère est aussi remarquable par ce qui lui manque que par le spécial de ce qu'elle possède' (*EC*, 156). Firstly, Michaux's choice of the word 'spécial', as opposed to exotic, might be noted; as he invokes the notion of 'exotisme' almost immediately afterward, 'spécial' might well be considered an alternative to the adjective 'exotique' in Michaux's lexicon. However, 'spécial' not only refers to what is particular to the city or the country; it also suggests what can be understood as bizarre – a meaning that is not quite so explicit in words such as 'exotique', 'Divers' and 'autre', when outlined and

[159] The individual countryman is invoked by Michaux when he discusses national characteristics, habits and customs in both *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie*.
[160] Maurice Blanchot, 'L'homme de la rue', *Nouvelle Revue française*, p. 1077.

used by Segalen (indeed, the words used by Segalen in *Essai sur l'exotisme* that can be understood as nearest in meaning to bizarre are 'insolite' and 'singulier'). Secondly, the emphasis on the verb 'manquer' in Michaux's statement above is striking. Indeed, in a poem in *Ecuador* entitled 'Je suis né troué', Michaux reveals the importance of 'manque' in his make-up: 'J'ai sept ou huit sens. Un d'eux: celui du manque' (*EC*, 95). Michaux's acute sensitivity towards the notion of 'manque' throughout *Ecuador* therefore predisposes him to align the statement he makes about Quito with his understanding of the self – that is to say, what is lacking in something is as remarkable as whatever it can be seen to 'possess'. It might then be argued that Michaux is ultimately happy for his travel narrative to centre on his failures and losses (what the travel experience has taken away from him, as encapsulated by the growing *dis*illusionment that underpins the relation of his voyage), as much as any perceptible achievement or *attainment* on his part. As will be seen in the next section, Michaux's growing disillusionment comes to propel the travel narrative in the case of *Ecuador*. In fact, Robin Magowan connects Michaux's conception of 'manque' in *Ecuador* to the originality of this text, noting that '[u]ne grande partie de l'originalité d'*Ecuador* tient dans la conscience qu'a Michaux d'un manque, en lui et en toute chose'.[161] Jean Roudaut's perspective on *Ecuador* might also be taken into account at this juncture. Responding to Michaux's exclamation 'Pauvre journal!', the former writes:

> Si le journal s'appauvrit ce n'est pas seulement parce que les jours sur mer sont interchangeables et qu'il n'y a plus ni espace ni temps sur le vieil océan. Le journal se détruit à mesure qu'il accumule les notations: se recouvrant, elles s'effacent les unes les autres [....] 'Mais écrire, écrire: tuer quoi'.[162]

Roudaut, in speaking of the 'journal [qui] s'appauvrit', brings to mind the Michaux axiom mentioned earlier in this chapter, 'voyager pour t'appauvrir', which was connected to Michaux's long-established desire to travel, as summed up by the deceptive expression 'voyager *contre*'. *Ecuador*, as it progresses, can be seen to expose the tension that exists between Michaux's quest for self-discovery on his South American voyage and the notion of 's'appauvrir', insofar as this travel journal is an elucidation and exploration of 'voyager *contre*' – that is, Michaux's will to resist and move away from comfortable (and stifling) habits or conventions, both societal

[161] Robin Magowan, 'Ecuador', in *Henri Michaux*, p. 279.
[162] Jean Roudaut, *Lieu de composition* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), pp. 173-74.

(his departure from Europe) and generic (remoulding or reinvigorating the travel journal form). For in disengaging from such social and generic norms in the writing of *Ecuador*, Michaux is both enacting *and* recording the process of 's'appauvrir', ensuring that the travel experience, however 'impoverishing', nonetheless produces an illuminating narrative. Michaux's approach to potential self-erasure in the context of *Ecuador* has already been discussed; Michaux's travel journal, in recording his 'appauvrissement', can also be seen to be in danger of effacing itself, palimpsest-like, as it evolves, as Roudaut intimates in the above passage. This is all the more evident when we look back on the extent to which this journal is constructed upon an imagery of negation, erasure and renouncement – it is, so to speak, a text running on empty. The journal's move to efface or undermine itself as it attempts to progress, therefore, might be viewed as the ultimate negation in evidence in *Ecuador*, insofar as this narrative might be understood as a text in which the travel experience, as it is apprehended and condensed into a travel account, seems to be under constant threat of disintegration, or even unravelling. This threat is highlighted not only through the use of the word '*dé*composé' at the end of the main narrative, connoting disintegration as we have seen, but also by the striking image used to depict the travel-based search for personal 'truths' ('[o]n trouve aussi bien *sa* vérité' [emphasis my own]), that of a wall hanging ('une quelconque tapisserie de mur'), which can be seen to represent, for Michaux, the potential for any narrative (that is, construction) to unravel.[163]

2.3 Disillusionment and the writing process in *Ecuador*

This section focuses on the disillusionment evinced by Michaux over the course of his voyage across South America, as well as considering the effect this disillusionment has on his writing process. In Gide's case, as will be shown in Chapter 3, such disillusionment will be seen to stem from his growing knowledge of the unprecedented abuses visited on the native peoples by the French concessionary companies, with whom the colonialist regime seems to be complicit. In Michaux's case, however, it will first of all be seen that disillusionment is in fact a process of exposing *illusions* of travel to which he initially subscribes, a process which hinges on

[163] The narrator's emphasis on personal 'truths' in *Les Nourritures terrestres* might be remembered here: 'C'est une route à élire dans un pays de toutes parts inconnu, où chacun fait *sa* découverte et, remarque-le bien, ne la fait que pour soi [...]' (*NT*, 352) (emphasis in original).

his experimentations with the travel journal form. Gerard Cogez considers the interspersal of poems in the journal, writing:

> Dans *Ecuador*, Michaux [insère], entre les pages du journal, quelques poèmes. Mais nous les voyons, au fil du texte, perdre de plus en plus leur caractère proprement poétique, comme s'ils étaient progressivement contaminés par la prose; et il ne reste pratiquement plus, pour les distinguer du reste du texte, que la disposition typographique.[164]

As Cogez suggests, it can be said that the prose of the main narrative seems to 'contaminate' these verse poems, which appear in a smaller size type than the journal entries in prose. In this section, however, the way in which the poems in *Ecuador* similarly suffuse its prose will be acknowledged. Cogez does not choose to highlight the effect upon the reader of the titles of these poems. These titles introduce the poems via capital letters in the main body of the text, serving as a striking interruption of both the visual layout *and* chronological flow of the narrative (this interruption in terms of the visual composition of the page is arguably bolstered by the smaller type in which the text of the poem appears). Moreover, Michaux deploys a ruse that perhaps hopes to problematise our apprehension of the significance of the typographical layout of his journal – in some cases, what seem to be poem titles (capital letters; interrupting the day-by-day progression of the narrative) are instead operating as titles for certain prose-based journal entries, for example, the capitalised 'L'Amazone n'était pas d'une taille à se laisser voir avant le XX^{e} siècle' (*EC*, 232). The use of capitalised titles might therefore be compared to the conventional travel journal format, where the only prefatory anchoring the reader receives is the (proper) name of a place and possibly, though not always, the inscription of a date and a time.

The poems that feature in *Ecuador* would appear to underline the constructed nature of any travel account, their interruptive – rather than intermittent – presence in the narrative calling into question the truth value of the journal entries with which they co-exist or even overlap. However, at the same time, these verse poems seem to put themselves forward as *literary* distillations of Michaux's travel experiences, thus potentially serving to overshadow the literariness of the prose-based journal entries. What emerges in *Ecuador*, therefore, is a playfulness that tends to blur our

[164] Gerard Cogez, *Les écrivains voyageurs du XXe siècle*, p. 94.

apprehension of – as much as it aims to reveal – the fabricated nature of the travel narrative. The poem 'Souvenirs' is an important example of the purposely ambiguous interplay of what is ostensibly based on the real and what is potentially imaginary in *Ecuador*. Under the capitalised title the following line appears in the same size type as the prose of journal entries: 'En ce temps-là, je me perdais à perte de vue dans cet horizon que tenaient deux bras' (*EC*, 204). The absence of a full stop after 'bras' leads the narrative to flow into a parenthesis produced in a smaller type, which appears on the right-hand side of the page like a conventional place-date-time entry:

> (La veille du départ, le voyageur
> regarde en arrière, c'est comme s'il
> perdait courage.) [*EC*, 204]

The reader is given a date of sorts here: the eve of the traveller's supposed departure. Yet Michaux goes beyond the conventional brief of the place-time-date entry when he appears to speak of himself, 'le voyageur', in the third person, before launching into the main body of the poem, which also appears in small-size type, marking visual continuity between the replacement place-date-time entry and the text of the poem itself, and creating discontinuity between the text of the poem and its potential preface. In addition to the ambiguous typographical presentation of 'Souvenirs', the question arises as to whether or not this is a poem rooted in the imagination of the travelling persona ('le voyageur'), or Michaux, the writer, recounting an event from lived experience, albeit in the third person. Indeed, Michaux's tendency to speak of himself in the third person from time to time in *Ecuador* can also be seen as a bid to underline the tension that exists between Michaux the keeper of a travel journal and Michaux the traveller. These two inseparable sides to Michaux's identity can be seen to conflict – rather than harmonise – with each other throughout *Ecuador*. Michaux's renewed use of the third person in his 'Préface à quelques souvenirs' is particularly revealing in the light of this discussion:

> Voyant une grosse année réduite à si peu de pages, l'auteur est ému. Sûrement, il s'est passé encore bien d'autres choses. (*EC*, 235)

This passage allows us to contrast Michaux's self-identification as traveller (the afore-mentioned 'voyageur' of the poem 'Souvenirs') and Michaux's self-identification as writer ('l'auteur' of the 'Préface à quelques souvenirs'). For, in this extract, there

seems to be an acknowledgement of a discrepancy between what has been experienced and what has been recorded in the preceding narrative. Indeed, the writer attempts to redress this perceived imbalance while back in Paris, reclaiming and fleshing out several memories and impressions – a series of more detailed and sustained observations – to construct an appendix. Yet the gap between travelling and writing up the travel experience seems to widen momentarily in the preface to this appendix, for the writer's memory appears to fail him upon his return:

> Le voilà qui cherche. Mais il ne rencontre que brouillards.
> Alors, pour masquer son embarras, il prend une voix de pédagogue.
>
> H. M.
> (*EC*, 235)

Michaux introduces his initials here to validate what in fact becomes a statement to explain his supposed memory loss throughout *Ecuador*, one which willfully exposes the perhaps unexpected reasoning behind the 'pedagogical' tone he adopts in the subsequent appendix and, in so doing, attempts to shirk responsibility for the many lacunae in his travel account. As evident in the preface to the main narrative of *Ecuador*, Michaux's carefulness in accounting for his travel experiences revolves around a self-effacing policy of always being the one to throw the first stone ('Mais, au moment de signer, tout à coup pris de peur, il se jette la première pierre' [*EC*, 139]).

What emerges as particularly striking in *Ecuador*, as evidenced by the preceding examples, is the way in which Michaux's focus constantly returns to the tension between traveller and writer. In 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', Michel Butor offers another noteworthy perspective on the tension that exists between the inextricable roles bound up together in the hybrid appellation *écrivain-voyageur*:

> [J]'ai besoin de digérer d'anciens voyages [...] il s'agit pour moi de trouver un *modus vivendi* avec eux par le moyen de l'écriture, avant de pouvoir repartir vraiment.[165]

The writer who travels, in committing himself to writing about his travel experience, can accordingly use the writing process in order to comprehend the significance of his travel experience, as the writing process not only allows him the scope to 'digest' his travels but, as Butor notes in his own case, operates as a *compartmentalisation* as

[165] Michel Butor, 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', p. 4.

much as an exploration of the travels he has already undertaken. In writing up prior travel experiences, therefore, Butor is clearing the way, psychologically speaking, to depart on new voyages and devote himself to new travel experiences. What might be seen as challenging, however, is mustering the ability to write about – digest – one's travel experience whilst still continuing the voyage in question. Michaux, for example, invokes the notion of taking the time to 'digest' his travels in *Ecuador*, in an extract from a letter to a friend reproduced as part of a journal entry: 'Quand j'aurai digéré un peu ce *Guadalupe*...' (*EC*, 161) (emphasis in original). Moreover, 'ce *Guadalupe*' is emphasised in the text in order to highlight that it is the Guadalupe of Michaux's experience, as represented in the pages preceding this comment, for it must also be noted that the image of digesting one's travel experience underlines the process of making this part of oneself, or appropriating one's interaction with the place in question. Michaux emphasises this internalisation in a comment written in the 1967 preface to *Un Barbare en Asie*, thirty-four years after its initial publication: 'l'Asie continue son mouvement, sourd et secret, *en moi* [...]' (*BA*, 279) (emphasis my own). Although Butor will later go on to argue that 'le voyage est l'écriture', that is to say, the voyage generates writing, we must not lose sight of the fact that this essay is entitled 'Le voyage *et* l'écriture' (emphasis my own), which serves to remind us of the division or hyphen that at once separates and joins together the two components of 'écrivain-voyageur'.[166] Jean-Xavier Ridon also chooses to emphasise the often strained co-existence – rather than the synthesis – of travelling and travel writing, claiming: 'L'écriture est la mort du voyage parce qu'elle se place forcément à côté de lui'.[167] Moreover, the project outlined by James Duncan and Derek Gregory in their study *Writes of Passage – Reading Travel Writing*, in aiming to '[rework] the connective between 'travel' and 'writing'',[168] seems to presuppose the imminent threat of a fissure between these two activities.

It was mentioned earlier in this chapter how Michaux's comment 'Je ne suis plus à Quito, je suis dans la lecture' might also be read as: 'Je ne suis plus à Quito, je suis dans l'écriture'. In dissecting the sense of immediacy Michaux's observation wishes to impart, Jean-Xavier Ridon's comments might be taken into consideration:

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[166] Michel Butor, 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', p. 17.
[167] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *Henri Michaux, J. M. G. Le Clézio: l'exil des mots*, p. 50.
[168] Duncan and Gregory, *Writes of Passage – Reading Travel Writing*, p. 1.

> Il n'y a pas de journal qui puisse s'écrire "sur le vif" puisque l'instant de l'écriture suppose cet arrêt du mouvement propre au voyage [...] L'écriture est le moment où le regard du poète se fait rétrospectif, ou au contraire, se projette sur le futur même du voyage. Elle est donc une forme de fuite, un moyen d'échapper au voyage.[169]

Indeed, these comments resonate with Segalen's elucidation of poetic and practical takes on the travel experience in his 1914 letter to Jules de Gaultier. It can also be suggested that Michaux, in the writing of his travel journal, constructs an escape from the travel experience (perhaps giving himself the time to digest this experience) similar to the temporary exit route reading seems to offer him during his time in Quito. Moreover, it can be suggested that in composing a travel journal, the writer is the original reader of his own work. It might then be understood that reading another author's works on one's own voyage (as Michaux, and to a far greater extent, Gide, both do) is not such a transgression after all, for the (re-)reading involved in constructing one's own travel journal already introduces a critical distance between the writer and his relation of the travel experience.

The second part of my analysis of disillusionment in the context of *Ecuador* weighs up Michaux's propensity for – and thinly veiled delight in – exposing the constructed nature of other accounts of travel. Consider the following passage:

> Les écrivains commencent à se dire de l'Univers.
> Parfois il arrive que l'un d'eux se mette en voyage, pousse jusqu'à Hong-Kong, passe la nuit avec une Jaune. Puis il revient, on le regarde, on l'invite à parler... il connaît la Chine!
>
> Semblablement, les matelots japonais du bateau amarré au mien à Rotterdam, je les écoutais, qui me parlaient de la France. L'abbaye de Thélème, le Casino de Paris. Je les vois encore. Je les écoutais avec un visage de cuir (*EC*, 181-82).

In the first part of this extract Michaux disparages the traveller who puts himself forward as an authority on a place by virtue of having spent time there, exaggerating this supposed sense of authority through the invocation of carnal knowledge. In the same breath, however, the audience of this projected traveller figure is also held in disdain, for they are the people who seem to suggest that the traveller, upon his return, 'connaît la Chine'. The passage is all the more notable when we realise that Michaux also invokes the notion of 'connaître' in relation to the voyage he narrates in *Ecuador*,

[169] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *Henri Michaux, J.M.G. Le Clézio: l'exil des mots* (Paris: Kimé, 1995), p. 50.

writing in one journal entry: '[...] j'ai décidé de connaître le cratère de l'Atacatzho' (*EC*, 201). Michaux's ambivalent attitude towards the figure of the traveller attempting to recount his journey is further uncovered by the statement he makes regarding his experience on the River Amazon:

> Mais où est donc l'Amazone? se demande-t-on, et jamais on n'en voit davantage. Il faut monter. Il faut l'avion. Je n'ai donc pas vu l'Amazone. Je n'en parlerai donc pas. (*EC*, 232-33)

In eschewing a detailed description of this part of his voyage on the basis of having had an apparently insufficient experience of the river, coupled with his dismissal of the shaky foundations of knowledge presented in other travel accounts, Michaux seems to be attempting to underline the validity and accuracy of other parts of his narrative. Yet, as already noted, Michaux is always poised to negate the progress he makes and seems happy to undermine the validity of every word he commits to the page, even encouraging the reader to understand his text as compromised and suspect: 'Jusqu'à présent, c'est comme si je n'avais pas eu le sens du mensonge. Mais je vais me mettre à mentir. Je crois que c'est très profitable à l'âme' (*EC*, 163).

Moreover, it can be seen that, in the second part of the passage above (which recalls an encounter with Japanese sailors), Michaux, in attempting to highlight the discrepancy that exists between the traveller's received ideas and the native's perception of themselves, moves the focus away from his perspective, as a writer who travels, on the so-called foreign, and onto the foreigner's perspective on the writer's (in this case adopted) homeland. This switch in perspective is also evident in the narrator's dialogue with Sabardandrade, an Ecuadorian whose oscillation between contesting and praising France's attributes serves to frustrate the reader as much as his interlocutor (*EC*, 165-66). Indeed, Michaux's playful tampering with perspectives in *Ecuador* paves the way for the reversible positions encapsulated in the title of his next travel narrative, *Un Barbare en Asie*.

The unwarranted pieces of travel advice that precede any departure also contribute to Michaux's disillusionment over the course of this voyage, leading him to intimate that a vow of silence would be preferable to redistributing such counsel:

> Les conseils que l'on vous donne avant de partir en exploration ont quelque chose de commun avec ceux que l'on donne aux enfants.
> [...] Ainsi pour ce voyage: infinis furent les conseils qu'on me donna, et contradictoires. Mais maintenant je sais ce qui me convient. Je ne le dirai pas, mais je le sais. (*EC*, 229)

Indeed, Michaux does not particularly welcome travel advice en route either, as his encounter in Vargas Torres with a drunken administrator, who attempts to impart travel advice to them, demonstrates: 'Il nous a dit qu'à Rocafuerte, nous trouverons tout ce que nous voudrons. Il n'y est jamais allé' (*EC*, 216). What is revealing here is that the administrator's combination of advice and inexperience appears to uphold the opinion that Michaux formulates in writing up *Ecuador*; that is, one does not need to displace oneself in space and time in order to uncover or convey a 'truth' about the world, or even oneself. This episode is therefore the crystallisation of Michaux's fervent belief, stated earlier in the text, that '[...] [o]n trouve aussi bien sa vérité en regardant quarante-huit heures une quelconque tapisserie de mur' (*EC*, 204). Michaux realises that his voyage, then, has not been strictly necessary to his self-development, yet, at the same time, it has taken him a lengthy return trip to come to this conclusion. Therefore, making this journey has in itself proved a valuable experience in terms of Michaux's literary (and, as will be later acknowledged, artistic) evolution. Returning to the way in which the illusion of 'voyager contre' is presented in *Ecuador*, Malcolm Bowie's assessment merits attention:

> It is not easy to imagine that a writer who had already revealed a marked taste for introspection and fantasy could have had any very confident expectation that travel would exercise any beneficial, tonic influence on himself or his art.[170]

Bowie seems to suggest that Michaux had already drawn the conclusion above ('[o]n trouve aussi bien sa vérité [...]') before he had even departed on his South American voyage. If this is the case, Michaux, then, can certainly be counted among those 'qui partent/Pour partir', as, despite any reservations he might have, he still opens himself up to the possibilities travel might generate for him and commits himself to representing the experience that unfolds, however frustrating or tedious such a promise proves (as evinced by the repeated laments that surface in *Ecuador* regarding this commitment to maintaining a journal, for example: '[...] il y a déjà longtemps que mon journal m'embête' [*EC*, 233]).

[170] Malcolm Bowie, *Henri Michaux A Study of His Literary Works*, p. 55.

Michaux, in an undated letter (most likely written in Quito, according to the editor of these letters, Leonardo Clerici), tells the Belgian writer Franz Hellens: 'Ne me croyez pas guéri de voyages'.[171] Michaux's use of the verb *guérir* here not only brings to mind the images of illness evoked throughout *Ecuador* (his own heart problems, fever, skin conditions, amongst others), but also the idea that the desire to travel can be viewed as an affliction in itself (a perspective that counters Gide's assessment of travel as restorative in *Les Nourritures terrestres*). Michaux has pre-emptively resigned himself to the illusions created by the idea of travel. It has also been acknowledged that a great part of his disillusionment can be seen to primarily lie with the conventions and limits of travel writing, particularly those related to the journal form. The next section focuses on Michaux as he embarks on yet another journey across the world, one which he had already tentatively mentioned to Hellens in their correspondence. For this journey, Michaux abandons the journal format that he had so deftly manipulated and interrogated in the writing process behind *Ecuador*. He instead focuses on constructing a narrative that comprises short essay-like fragments, each an insight into and distilled observation regarding the journey underway.

2.4 *Un Barbare en Asie* and the 'anti-exote'

In *Orientalism*, his 1978 text on the Western creation of the Orient, Edward Said writes:

> Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text [...].[172]

The outsider status which Michaux as a writer of travel adopts and cultivates through his chosen title *Un Barbare en Asie* has already been noted. What might also be considered is Michaux's attempt to 'locate himself' *outside* the so-called Orient through his choice of writing style in creating this work. His deployment of a quasi-ethnographic writing style – one which is detached and appears emotionally distant –

[171] Michaux, *'Sitôt lus': Lettres à Franz Hellens, 1922-1952*, p. 119.
[172] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p. 20.

in this narrative contrasts greatly with the highly personal ruminations and incidences of self-criticism that comprise *Ecuador*. This section reveals, however, the points of similarity that exist between these texts, suggesting that, despite their often very different approaches both to negotiating and to narrating the travel experience, *Un Barbare en Asie* acts as a companion text to (and a continuation of many of the concerns raised in) *Ecuador*.

In relation to maintaining the distance between the writer who travels and his destination, as suggested by his narrative's title, Michaux can be seen as both imagining and upholding notions of 'West' and 'East' in *Un Barbare en Asie* by constantly placing the terms 'l'Européen'/ ' l'homme blanc'/ ' l'Occidental' in opposition to the specified native of the country in question. Indeed, Michaux in his 1967 preface to *Un Barbare en Asie*, calls his journey around Asia a '[v]oyage réel entre deux imaginaires', which, although suggesting an awareness that the poles of East and West are constructions, nonetheless serves to uphold these two headings in placing them in opposition to one another (*BA*, 280).

The conclusion to *Un Barbare en Asie* seems to suggest that the narrative ought not to have been written at all, for a sense of utter disillusionment (harking back to the principal thematic of *Ecuador*) with the travel experience is conveyed to the reader in the final lines of this text:

> Et maintenant, dit Bouddha à ses disciples, au moment de mourir:
> "A l'avenir, soyez votre propre [...] refuge."
> "Ne cherchez pas d'autre refuge."
> "N'allez en quête de refuge qu'auprès de vous-même."
> .....
> "Ne vous occupez pas des façons de penser des autres."
> "Tenez-vous bien dans votre île à vous." (*BA*, 409)

First of all, 'votre île à vous' might be seen as characterising the writer of travel who wishes to avoid assimilation in his new environment in favour of retaining his outsider status over the course of his journey. Yet, in the light of my discussion of *Ecuador* and Michaux's notion of 'voyager *contre*', the question arises as to whether Michaux's compulsion to travel can also be seen to identify him as an outsider in Europe. Didier Alexandre, in discussing the title *Un Barbare en Asie*, writes:

> La barbarie naît de la neutralité culturelle: être barbare, c'est n'être ni occidental ni oriental, c'est prendre ses distances vis-à-vis de sa culture d'origine et de la réalité découverte dans les pays d'Asie.[173]

Whilst Michaux might indeed attempt to distance himself from both the Occidental and the Oriental, he is aware that any such dissociation is entirely illusory, and one which perhaps can only hold water in the illusion-nurturing vessel that the travel narrative represents. Secondly, the closing paragraph of *Un Barbare en Asie*, as cited above, is the culmination of a series of digressions in the text which question the value of both the experiences of travel *and* writing about travel. These include the following supposition: 'Après avoir parlé de la mentalité de certains peuples, on se demande vraiment si ça en valait la peine, si on n'aurait pas mieux occupé son temps d'une autre façon' (*BA*, 395). It appears to be ambiguous in this particular instance as to whether or not Michaux is bemoaning the travel experience, or the fact of having textualised it. In a comment added to the 1984 edition of this work, however, there is decidedly less ambiguity in this regard. Michaux, in describing this work as the 'fâcheuses impressions d'un voyageur déçu' (*BA*, 387), suggests that the voyage itself and writing about it both proved tedious exercises (a sentiment that can be repeatedly detected in Michaux's attitude towards keeping his journal all through *Ecuador*). As Peter Broome notes, citing *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie* as prime examples, Michaux's corpus of work is replete with 'travel which does not quite "gel": journeys where he fails to make the connection or which somehow resist or impede total adhesion'.[174] The question of this apparent failure unfolding despite Michaux, or because he desires or even cultivates this end result in order to make a point about the influence of one's native or one's host culture, arises, particularly in the case of *Un Barbare en Asie.* The notion of travel 'which does not quite "gel"', or cohere, brings to mind an earlier image evoking the capability to cohere and come undone at will. This was Jean-Pierre Martin's comment on Michaux's choice of Paris as his preferred point of departure as well as return destination for his travels, 'puisqu'on en décolle si facilement'. However, it would seem that Michaux resists indulging in any illusion of 'total adhesion' to his new environment, not least because the environment from

[173] Didier Alexandre, 'Henri Michaux, le barbare', in *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 95.2 (1995), 199–217 (p. 201).
[174] Peter Broome, Introduction, in *Spaced, Displaced/ Déplacements Dégagements*, trans. by David and Helen Constantine (Oxford: Bloodaxe, 1992), pp. 9–45 (p. 13).

which he emerges (the Paris literary circle) *cannot* be easily eschewed by Michaux on his travels.

Un Barbare en Asie can be seen as marking an important step in Michaux's desire to travel, as summed up by the notion of 'voyager *contre*', for Michaux finds that he cannot counter his family, his nation, his continent, without first and foremost attempting to problematise his perspective on himself (in remembering that he is, and will remain, the product of these forces combined). Michaux therefore organises his narrative so that he becomes the focus of a defamiliarising process in *Un Barbare en Asie*; it is he, therefore, who becomes the other (the other's other). David Scott has already done a lucid analysis of Michaux as the other's other in his study *Semiologies of Travel.*[175] My aim is to investigate how Michaux's self-creation as the other's other generates a further questioning of Eurocentric exoticism in his work, insofar as, in becoming the other's other, it would seem that the East's perception of the West(erner) as exotic (perhaps the reason why Michaux speaks freely of 'l'Occidental', but never 'l'Oriental') is privileged in the text. It will be argued, however, that *Un Barbare en Asie* ultimately wishes to appear to be extricating itself from the reversible exoticism it sets up, for two reasons. First of all, *Un Barbare en Asie* both engages with and furthers the sense of dillusionment that pervades *Ecuador* and serves to sum up Michaux's apprehension of his South American experience. This sense of disillusionment is encapsulated by Michaux's gradual effacement in *Ecuador* of any desire to evoke the exotic. In continuing to resist evocations of the exotic, given its predilection for quasi-ethnographic description over aesthetic eulogising, *Un Barbare en Asie* in fact furthers the thematic that underpins *Ecuador*, rather than being a pronounced departure from this earlier narrative (as other commentators have suggested).[176] Secondly, the travel journal form at once contested, reinvigorated and yet ultimately upheld by Michaux in *Ecuador* is not employed in *Un Barbare en Asie*. Assailed by different countries, peoples, and customs, Michaux uses a discursive, digressional narrative form that at best resembles a series of short essays (Bréchon calls them 'essais' or 'reportages').[177] Seeing *Un Barbare en Asie* as

[175] David Scott, *Semiologies of Travel: From Gautier to Baudrillard* , pp. 62–75.
[176] See Peter Broome, 'Henri Michaux and Travel: From outer space to inner space', *French Studies*, 39.3 (1985), 285–97, and Bruno Thibault, '"Voyager contre": la question de l'exotisme dans les journaux de voyage d'Henri Michaux', *The French Review*, 63.3 (1990), 485–91.
[177] Robert Bréchon, *Henri Michaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 128.

a series of digressions highlights its subversion of a single itinerary – it is more apt to think of meandering, rather than of a linear trajectory in terms of the voyage recounted, an issue to which I will return when speaking about the chapter entitled 'Histoire naturelle'. Indeed, Jean-Pierre Martin playfully asks:

> Ce voyage a-t-il eu lieu? Oui, puisque quelques lettres l'attestent. Mais il s'est fantômisé. Le récit en est absent. *Un barbare en Asie* [...] en efface soigneusement les étapes, l'itinéraire, les corps, les dates.[178]

Martin suggests that the text, as it develops, purposely erases certain defining elements of the journey itself (not dissimilar, then, to the journal's capacity in *Ecuador* to erase itself slowly or turn in on itself as it progresses). An account of the traveller's progression through space, or what Michaux might term 'parcours',[179] is purposely omitted from *Un Barbare en Asie*, lending yet another meaning to the narrative's central statement: 'J'arrive aux Indes, j'ouvre les yeux, et j'écris un livre' (*BA*, 332). Indeed, the text, true to this statement, starts off in India; its instant dive into an in-depth analysis of Calcutta's social structure suggesting that the narrator has arrived there long before beginning to write up this narrative. Gone is the poem in verse or prose, as encountered in *Ecuador*; *Un Barbare en Asie* instead embraces the often unimaginative descriptiveness of ethnography, as Michaux takes on the mantle of amateur ethnographer (and, notably, *not* that of the *amateur d'exotisme*, so disparaged by him in *Ecuador* [*EC*, 191]). Harry F. Wolcott, in his discussion of ethnography as a way of seeing the world, notes:

> Ethnographers do not engage in what has been referred to lightheartedly as "immaculate perception". We do not and cannot simply *observe*, *watch* or *look*; we must observe, watch, or look at *something*.[180]

In his terse statement 'J'arrive aux Indes, j'ouvre les yeux, et j'écris un livre', Michaux seems to suggest that his narrative is incidental rather than planned or at least envisaged before his departure. Wolcott's observation allows us to realise, however, that Michaux clearly presupposed his extensive engagement with the people encountered during his travels in Asia, a point on which *Ecuador* differs. Michaux seems to have learned that, rather than asking 'Mais où est-il donc, ce voyage?' and

[178] Martin, *Henri Michaux*, p. 205.
[179] Michaux, 'Les poètes voyagent', in *Passages*, *OC*, II, 307–09 (p. 309).
[180] Harry F. Wolcott, *Ethnography: a Way of Seeing* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira, 1999), p. 70.

virtually eschewing any lengthy representation of the people he encounters as a result, he must instead commit to a clearer objective before departing, for, as Wolcott suggests, he cannot 'simply *observe*, *watch* or *look* [...]'.

Further to my exploration of the distorted vision of the traveller as represented in *Ecuador*, Maulpoix's perspective on Michaux in Asia proves particularly revealing:

> Michaux le barbare est un être à facettes, lieu optique, oeil de mouche, microscope et prisme, capable de déceler la vertu primordiale du peuple qu'il visite et qui lui importe plus que tout.[181]

Maulpoix, in his rich and varied evocation of the traveller's gaze, gives us further pause for thought in the light of the above discussion of Michaux's statement 'J'arrive aux Indes [...]'. Maulpoix uses the images of the fly-eye, microscope and prism to suggest that Michaux is all eyes in Asia and readily open to the travel experience. Yet these images all suggest visual distortion or manipulation, indicating that an openness to seeing, as much as obstacles to seeing, can lead to misrepresentation and deception. Michaux's willingness to engage with the people of the various countries he visits in Asia does not therefore make the voyage any more successful or valuable to him than his South American trip (once again, it cannot be seen as a marked progression from it), as emphasised by the closing lines of the Asian narrative:

> "Ne vous occupez pas des façons de penser des autres."
> "Tenez-vous bien dans votre île à vous." (*BA*, 409)

Bruno Thibault writes that the travel texts of Michaux 'ne font pas appel à l'imagination du lecteur (point de descriptions pittoresques) [...]'.[182] Although Thibault nonetheless believes that *Un Barbare en Asie* plunges the reader into a profound 'sensation d'exotisme' (Thibault uses Segalen's terms), it might be understood that its quasi-ethnographic notation or description, in eschewing an aesthetic appraisal of what the traveller encounters, instead lays down a challenge to the reader's perception of the exotic.[183] There can be no 'sensation d'exotisme' when there is nothing to provoke it, or perhaps it can be said that there can be no 'sensation

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[181] Maulpoix, Jean-Michel, *Henri Michaux, passager clandestin* (Seysel: Champ Vallon, 1990), p. 65.
[182] BrunoThibault, '"Voyager contre": la question de l'exotisme dans les journaux de voyage d'Henri Michaux', *The French Review*, 63.3 (1990), 485–91 (p. 490).
[183] Thibault, p. 489.

d'exotisme' when there is no emotive writing strategy to stimulate it. Michaux's amateur ethnography – and outsider status – means that he observes and even indulges in the banalities of the other's everyday existence; this engagement with an alternative quotidian was seen to be a fatal blow to experiencing the exotic in South America. In drawing the reader of *Un Barbare en Asie* into an alternative quotidian, without a 'parcours', whilst intimating that '[o]n passe sur les différences' (*BA*, 333), rather than appraising precisely what can be seen to be different, any potential stimulation of the sensation of the exotic is disrupted rather than roused in the reader.

The role of the 'anti-calendrier' in *Ecuador* has already been pinpointed. It is now fitting to reflect on whether Michaux employs an equivalent technique to disrupt our conception of time in *Un Barbare en Asie*. The critical yet critically overlooked chapter entitled 'Histoire naturelle' is striking in this respect, as it moves, with little regard for the journey's chronology, it would seem, from an unknown location to India, from India to Malaysia and from Malaysia to Saigon Zoo. This has the effect of jarring the reader, who, up until this point, was happy to follow what he/she believed to be Michaux's route through Asia, on the basis of the chapter titles given (it might be recalled that the route is not detailed in the main narrative). The insertion of this chapter does not, as Anne-Élisabeth Halpern suggests, operate merely as a bridge between India and China, the countries where Michaux spends most of his time, but instead represents Michaux's attempt to loosen the reader's grip on the truth value of his Asian journey.[184] Upon reading this chapter, the constructed nature of the travel text is carefully highlighted; the chapter, rather than providing the reader with a means of connecting places, or a detailed itinerary, then serves to destabilise his or her usual understanding that the traveller's progression from place to place is directly reflected in the unfolding of the narrative.

An often overlooked thread in *Un Barbare en Asie* that can be connected to the playful temporal disruption outlined above is Michaux's fixation with recognising and understanding concepts of truth and lying in the countries he passes through. His evocation of what he perceives to be a truthfulness integral to Bengali literature, as

[184] See Anne-Élisabeth Halpern, 'L'espace dans *Un barbare en Asie*', in *Quelques orients d'Henri Michaux*, ed. by Anne-Élisabeth Halpern and Vera Mihailovich-Dickman (Paris: Findakly, 1996), pp. 53–86.

well as his analysis of the destabilisation of the act of lying in China, are prime examples of this ongoing fascination:

> Chaque fois que je lis un écrit bengali, après dix lignes, je suis pris. Il y a dans la littérature bengali quelque chose de vrai, de tout à fait vrai, et qui n'est ni la sainteté ni la vérité, mais la vie intérieure. (*BA*, 348)

> Ce que le Chinois sait le mieux, c'est l'art de s'esquiver [...]
> Vieux, vieux peuple d'enfants qui ne veut savoir le fond de rien.
> Le mensonge, à proprement parler, n'existe pas en Chine.
> Le mensonge est une création d'esprits excessivement droits...
> Le Chinois s'adapte, marchande, calcule, échange. (*BA*, 367–68)

Michaux's interest, during his journey through Asia, in cultural nuances when it comes to representations of 'truth' might lead us to expect a level of experimentation on his part with Western conventions of representing 'truth' – one such experimentation might be understood to be the apparent lack of regard for chronology of *Un Barbare en Asie*, as outlined above. The 'Histoire naturelle' chapter can therefore be viewed as an example of Michaux's experimentation with the travel narrative in the light of the awareness of constructs that he develops over the course of his real experiences of travel.

Michaux's comments upon what he sees as a notable convention of deception in Hindu painting might also be considered: 'Chose curieuse, quand leurs peintres font un tableau de leur intérieur sale, de leurs occupants en guenilles, ils font un tableau des plus propres' (*BA*, 297). In terms of painting as it is viewed in China, he concludes:

> C'est une idée courante parmi les Chinois que la peinture *doit tenir la place de la nature*, que les tableaux doivent donner une telle impression de celle-ci que le citadin n'ait plus à se déranger pour aller à la campagne, ce qui, en fait, se produit. (*BA*, 376) (emphasis in original)

Here the phrase 'doit tenir la place de la nature' appears in italics, highlighted as if they were foreign words appearing in the text (or even denoting a foreign idiom or custom translated back into French for the reader's convenience). The use of italics seems to suggest that this belief is particular to the Chinese mentality, and therefore deserves prolonged attention from the projected reader back in Europe (his admission in the 1967 preface that 'je fonçai dans ce réel, persuadé que j'en rapportais

beaucoup' might be recalled [*BA*, 280]), one who would not be familiar with such a custom. Firstly, Michaux's emphasis on the Chinese perception of the artistic representation as replacing the real can be seen as an analogous to his own travel text having the potential to replace, as much as represent, his travel experience. Secondly, it is evident that, in the numerous comparisons he draws between the European and the native of the particular Asian country in question (as discussed earlier, in relation to the creation of the poles of East and West in the text), Michaux involves the European reader in his narrative. In the above example where the narrator flags an idea as 'foreign' or 'alien' by means of italicisation, the traveller is not the only so-called barbarian in Asia to be represented in this narrative. He also seems to set up the Western reader, making his way through the text, as another barbarian, one who only remotely and vicariously experiences this Asia, and one who is, as a result, susceptible to what the traveller chooses to fabricate, or promises to 'bring back' [*rapporter*].

At this point, it might prove useful to take note of Segalen's following observation:

> Définition du préfixe *Exo* dans sa plus grande généralisation possible. Tout ce qui est 'en dehors' de l'ensemble de nos faits de conscience actuels, quotidiens [...].[185]

The prefix 'Exo-' might therefore be linked to what falls outside the quotidian, or more specifically, fixed perceptions regarding the everyday in a given society. Yet Michaux, in *Ecuador*, concludes that the idea of escaping from one's own routine through travel is ultimately deceptive and deserves to be exposed as illusory. However, Michaux remains attuned to the effect that finding oneself another everyday context *can* have, as noted in Chapter 2:

> [L]e quotidien de l'un peut désorienter jusqu'à la mort l'homme de l'autre quotidien, c'est-à-dire l'étranger, ce quotidien fût-il le plus banal, le plus gris, le plus monotone pour l'indigène. (*EC*, 227)

Michaux, as the amateur ethnographer open to the possibilities of travel, would seem to gravitate towards the everyday of the other, throughout his travels around Asia, in

[185] Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthétique du Divers*, p. 20.

order to appreciate the experience of disorientation this might engender (something which his friendship with Gangotena prevented him from experiencing in Quito). But, at the same time, as Francis Affergan writes, 'une des conditions essentielles pour que le regard soit pertinent consiste dans l'éloignement de ce qui est vu'.[186] There is a constant necessity for a *décalage* between the writer and the object of his contemplation – it can then be said that Michaux, once he puts pen to paper in Asia, is forced to remove himself, metaphorically speaking, from that continent, and in deciding to write, distances himself from the everyday that his newly ethnographic eye is trying to negotiate. Indeed, this recalls Said's assertion in *Orientalism* that '[w]hat [the Orientalist] says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said and written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient [...]'.[187] Michaux's quasi-ethnographic stance creates such a distance, underlining his outsider status and guiding him back to the indeterminate and mutable identifier of 'the other's other'. Didier Alexandre notes elsewhere: 'Le voyage décentre le voyageur, pour le situer dans *l'espace autre* de la 'CONTEMPLATION'' (emphasis my own).[188] Indeed, if we are to see Michaux as occupying an 'espace autre', it might prove most compelling if understood to be representative of his desired (and ultimately detachable) 'otherness'. To emphasise Michaux's drive both to identify and advertise his status as an outsider in *Un Barbare en Asie* would also be to highlight his heightened awareness of the 'other' status inevitably projected upon the inhabitants of the country visited by the traveller as a seemingly intrinsic part of his travel experience. In the light of his awareness that 'un nom est un objet à détacher' (*EC*, 151), Michaux's continuous subscription to the poles of East and West throughout *Un Barbare en Asie* appears to suggest that the label 'other' is invited to trace, continually – and perhaps without it ever facing the possibility of being made redundant – a two-way path between them.

2.5 'Ce que tu as vu' – Text and image interrelations in *Ecuador*

While several studies have devoted themselves in part to an analysis of the interrelation of the verbal and visual in *Un Barbare en Asie*, little has been done to

[186] Francis Affergan, *Exotisme et alterité alterité: essai sur les fondements d'une critique de l'anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987), p. 157.
[187] Said, *Orientalism*, p. 21.
[188] Didier Alexandre, in *L'Autre et l'ailleurs: Homère, l'Odyssée Chants 5 à 13. Henri Michaux, Un barbare en Asie. Claude Levi-Strauss, Tristes tropiques*, ed. by Didier Alexandre, Anne-Marie Meunier and Suzanne Saïd (Paris: Belin, 1992), p. 95.

link text and image in *Ecuador*.[189] In the former travel narrative, Michaux comments at length on the visual culture of many of the countries visited (India, China) over the course of his journey around Asia. However, in *Ecuador*, the various evocations of the visual are inextricably intertwined with Michaux's own burgeoning status as a visual artist, which seems to evolve in tandem with his role as a writer, and at that, one who travels. This section therefore aims to redress the critical imbalance which has privileged *Un Barbare en Asie*'s discussion of the visual over *Ecuador*'s struggle to engage with *and* suppress the validity of visual modes of expression (for instance, sketching, painting) when it comes to representing the travel experience.

There is only one moment in *Ecuador* where Michaux speaks of an attempt on his part to express through a visual medium what he encounters on his journey:

> [J]e m'étais dit aujourd'hui: 'Ce que tu as vu, tu pourrais encore le peindre en couleurs'.
> Mais le moi de moi n'a pas voulu et sur la toile sont apparus mes larves et fantômes fidèles, qui ne sont de nulle part, ne connaissent rien de l'Équateur, ne se laisseraient pas faire. (*EC*, 177)

Michaux's style as an artist is far from realist, far from representing something which he or anyone else might easily recognise. Although a single unsuccessful attempt to represent his travel experience through a visual medium cannot be seen as an outright failure, it can be ascertained that Michaux quickly comes to the conclusion that he cannot, or even does not wish to, represent his travel experiences visually – 'le moi de moi n'a pas voulu'. However, Michaux's dual status as artist-writer nonetheless problematises his desire to relate and express the meaning of his travel experiences. As he notes:

> Il n'y en a que pour les peintres dans le premier contact avec l'étranger; le dessin, la couleur, quel tout et qui se présente d'emblée! (*EC*, 151)

Although Michaux will not describe or even evoke colour very frequently in *Ecuador*, he has, in the statement above, suggested the visual impact of colour. Yet the 'premier contact avec l'étranger' introduces another problem:

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[189] For an analysis of the interrelation of the verbal and visual in *Un Barbare en Asie*, see Anne-Élisabeth Halpern and Vera Mihailovich-Dickman, eds, *Quelques orients d'Henri Michaux* (1996) and David Scott, *Semiologies of Travel: From Gautier to Baudrillard* (2004).

> [O]n a mis le cap sur l'entrée du port. On est entouré, à moins d'une encablure, de toutes choses, et notre œil ne voit rien, et notre cerveau ne comprend rien. (*EC*, 149)

Michaux, in describing the boat's tantalising proximity to the shore, suggests that the visual and the cerebral (or what might be understood as the verbal) are parallel processes (Michaux will, shortly after this observation, draw up the mental processes which propagate a language, reaching the conclusion that '[u]n nom est un objet à détacher' [*EC*, 151]). As Catherine Mayaux writes: 'L'appréhension du réel oblige à le catégoriser par les mots [...]', even though '[l]'image est immédiate [...]'.[190] Indeed, Michaux will later reiterate and even exaggerate the difficulty he faces in attempting to comprehend his travel experience: 'Ici comme partout, 999.999 spectacles mal foutus sur 1.000.000 et que je ne sais comment prendre' (*EC*, 161).

Another moment in *Ecuador* that evokes visual representation also merits consideration: 'Une femme accoudée qui soupire, beau tableau' (*EC*, 168). In this instance Michaux looks at a woman with a painterly eye, omitting to mention whether or not he finds her beautiful because he is instead imagining that her *image*, if committed to canvas, would produce a visually satisfactory result. Michaux, however, chooses to commit the whole incident, both exterior (encountering this woman) and interior (his own probable wish to paint his conception of her) to his journal. Even though this woman is never represented visually by Michaux, to our knowledge, his desire to represent her in a visual medium is duly recorded. As such, his preference here for a visual mode of expression, although ultimately not indulged, is nonetheless *voiced* within the text.

Michaux, in a 1938 text entitled 'Peindre', writes on the interrelation (or, more specifically, the frequent lack thereof) of his artistic and literary skills:

> Le déplacement des activités créatrices est un des plus étranges voyages en soi qu'on puisse faire.
> Étrange décongestion, mise en sommeil d'une partie de la tête, la parlante, l'écrivante (partie, non, système de connexion plutôt). On change de gare de triage quand on se met à peindre.[191]

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[190] Mayaux, Catherine, 'Michaux, l'anti-exote en *Ecuador*', in *Henri Michaux – Plis et cris du lyrisme*, p. 212.
[191] Michaux, 'Peindre', in *Passages*, *OC*, II, 318–19 (p. 318).

The idea of a 'système de connexion' suggests a way of perceiving and relating the world as it is experienced. In these remarks, Michaux exposes a firmly held belief that textual and visual modes of expression involve very different ways of seeing the world; a conscious decision to choose either one or the other must be made ('[o]n change de gare de triage'). Moreover, this choice is described in terms of a strange journey within the self, underlining that this displacement or exchange of creative activities in the mind is a journey as important in creating a travel narrative as an actual journey across space and time.

It is vital to note that local colour generally lacks throughout *Ecuador*, as Bruno Thibault points out.[192] Moreover, brown (as in coffee and earth) and black (as in darkness and, once again, earth) are the predominant colours mentioned in this text. These are arguably the dullest colours of the artist's palette, a fact that is further stressed by Michaux when he decides to compare the Ecuadorian terrain to the lively colours present in the landscape of Europe (indeed, the vividness of these colours is further emphasised through the use of animate imagery – blood, laughter and plant growth):

> L'Europe a partout le petit rire de sang de ses maisons en brique, de ses toits, de ses tuiles.
> Elle gît de plus sous l'huile immense du vert végétal, intense, frais, allègre.
> La terre de l'Équateur, elle, est brune ou noire, ou couleur de cuir. C'est la couleur de son paysage [...]
> Les maisons d'abord obéissent, de terre elles-mêmes, et le toit est de paille brune.
> Le maïs ensuite. Le maïs n'est pas comme le blé, ni comme la canne à sucre, le maïs est brun. (*EC*, 197)

Indeed, the intermittent appearance of brown and black in *Ecuador* serves to underline even further the absence of other hues, particularly in the case of black when it suggests darkness, which obliterates the ability to perceive any colour, leaving the narrator 'comme un aveugle' (*EC*, 160). Given the predominance of these dark hues, it is particularly interesting that Michaux exhibits a remarkable habit of evoking colour in general terms throughout *Ecuador*, insofar as he avoids specifying what colours are in question. For instance, in one particular entry he writes:

> Le poncho de couleur éclatante et sombre est une joie constante pour moi.

[192] Thibault, p. 487.

> C'est le triomphe splendide sur la terre noire. (*EC*, 158)

Here the colours of the poncho are evoked and eulogised, but not identified – the reader's imagination cannot, therefore, partake of a joy similar to the narrator's, for only a background of black earth is specified.[193] Similarly, a multitude of colours is suggested in the passage below describing clouds, yet not a single one of 'toutes les teintes' is dissociated from this group and specified:

> Le nuage équatorien n'a pas son pareil, le beau nuage équatorien! Il gobe l'horizon presque entier [...] Et pour la couleur [...] il a toutes les teintes et tous les jus [...]. (*EC*, 198)

In the interrelation of text and image in *Ecuador*, the thematic of blindness predominates. This time, however, it is the reader who suffers this enforced 'blindness'; his reading experience, like Michaux's travel experience, is distorted and disrupted through the imagery of cecity and poor visibility that permeates the narrative. Michaux might therefore be seen to transmit an important aspect of his own travel experience, the interconnected feelings of blindness and missing out, *manquer*, to his reader in his treatment of colour throughout this text.

2.6 Conclusion

For Michaux, his voyage to South America initiates in his writing his lifelong questioning of the value of travel, as well as allowing him the scope to understand and record a significant stage in his own evolution as artist-writer. Jean-Paul Maulpoix concludes his study of Michaux's voyages in South America and Asia as follows:

> Michaux se résout à *imaginer* le voyage, car il a désormais conscience, au terme de nombreux parcours, que 'le vase est clos', qu'on ne s'en échappe pas, et que la chambre est un meilleur espace pour le savoir que la terre.[194]

Although in Chapter 1 I have shown that Gide privileges 'la chambre' as a site for imaginary travel in the case of *Le Voyage d'Urien*, it will be argued that for Michaux, though Maulpoix would seem to suggest otherwise, this is not always the case.

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[193] In a journal entry in early July, Michaux will return to the description of the poncho, noting: 'Cette couverture est orange, ou rouge foncé ou bleue, ou violette, de couleur éclatante mais grave'(*EC*, 197-98). This brief description constitutes a rare glimpse of colour in the text.

[194] Maulpoix, *Henri Michaux – Passenger clandestin* (Seyssel: Éditions du Champ Vallon, 1984), p. 70.

Indeed, Michel Butor writes that, for Michaux, 'le voyage au lit ne lui suffit pas'.[195] That is not to say that a focus on the exterior does not, in Michaux's view, have its shortcomings:

> Aucune contrée ne me plaît: voilà le voyageur que je suis.
> On construit bien de petites choses. Mais les grandes! Jamais je n'ai vu une ville bien construite, rarement une colline. Jamais un panorama parfait! (*EC*, 158)

It seems that in the grievance outlined above, Michaux is exhibiting an extreme wariness of both constructed *and* natural environments. This comment, in the light of his later work, would seem to infer that the ideal landscape already exists – in our minds. It appears to suggest that the perfect panorama can be created, and even enjoyed, in our imagination, but it nonetheless raises other pressing questions: can this 'panorama parfait' go on to be easily 'accessed' in the imagination? Indeed, how can an exemplar of so-called perfection exist anywhere other than in the imagination? Michaux's desire to travel, then, will lead him further and further into the world of his own imagination – *Voyage en Grande Garabagne*, *Au Pays de la magie* and *Ici, Poddema*, the texts that comprise *Ailleurs*, will be the prime result of this, but the quasi-ethnographic focus presented in *Un Barbare en Asie*, where landscape description is kept to a bare minimum, must also be acknowledged.[196] Chapter 5 of this thesis, which explores the *Ailleurs* narratives in depth, will underline the fact that Michaux's voyage into the 'lointain intérieur' does not always presuppose an interior setting – indeed, Michaux will be seen to use the template of his earlier exterior voyages to inform both the creation and relation of these imaginary journeys, notably marrying the quasi-ethnographic focus central to *Un Barbare en Asie* with *Ecuador*'s tendency towards geographical description.

Michaux's texts based on his real voyages can therefore be understood as the vehicles that allow him the creative scope to develop as a writer. Indeed, Charles Forsdick sees *Ecuador* as exhibiting 'the notion of travel writing transformed into the account of a writer's emergence'.[197] Michaux identifies early on in *Ecuador* the

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[195] Michel Butor, *Le Sismographe aventureux: Improvisations sur Henri Michaux* (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 1999), p. 27.
[196] See, for example, Michaux's exceptionally brief description of the Himalayas in *Un Barbare en Asie*: 'L'Himalaya et ses pics neigeux apparaissent' (*BA*, 337).
[197] Forsdick, in Forsdick, Basu & Shilton, *New Approaches to Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 30.

important role that representing the travel experience will play in his literary and artistic evolution:

> Dans quelque deux ou trois ans, je pourrai faire un roman. Je commence grâce à ce journal à savoir ce qu'il y a dans une journée, dans une semaine, dans plusieurs mois.
> C'est horrible, du reste, comme il n'y a rien. On a beau le savoir.
> De le voir sur papier, c'est comme un arrêt. (*EC*, 163)

The final lines here, bolstered by the self-assured claim 'il n'y a rien', seem to suggest that any literary form struggles to express the emptiness of day-to-day existence, especially when it is also charged with representing an actual journey. This claim is further emphasised by Michaux's assertion that seeing the little he has produced on paper has stopped him in his tracks – this 'arrêt' might be understood as the death knell for any future narratives based on real travel. The mundanity described and even generated by the journal he keeps can only pave the way for Michaux's entry into the world of fiction; representations of the real can only give way to a focus on the imaginary. Indeed, Peter Broome sees this particular passage from *Ecuador* as suggestive of a distinction 'between the factual material… and some possible future fictional re-animation of it'.[198] (Chapter 5 of this thesis will, in fact, trace the roots of the *Ailleurs* narratives to certain discursive passages in *Ecuador*.) The realisation in *Ecuador* that lived experience, despite the extent of the traveller's sense of anticipation regarding his journey, must be condensed into a manageable and yet ultimately inadequate representation is, it might be recalled, almost immediate: 'Je n'ai écrit que ce peu qui précède et déjà je tue ce voyage. Je le croyais si grand. Non, il fera des pages, c'est tout' (*EC*, 141). In 'Préface à quelques souvenirs', towards the end of the text, this seemingly premature conclusion is revisited and validated in the light of the journey both undertaken and textualised: 'Voyant une grosse année réduite à si peu de pages, l'auteur est ému. Sûrement, il s'est passé encore bien d'autres choses' (*EC*, 235). The question that arises in view of the similarities that can be detected in the opening statement above and its concluding counterpart is: if relating a journey of this magnitude can only ever be reduced to a number of pages, nothing more, then why would one ever choose to leave? Most revealing of all, however, is that this foregone conclusion, so to speak, will be reproduced in the closing lines of

[198] Peter Broome, 'Henri Michaux and Travel: From Outer Space to Inner Space', *French Studies*, 39.3 (1985), 285–97 (p. 289).

Un Barbare en Asie. *Un Barbare en Asie* is not, therefore, a progression or thematic departure from *Ecuador*, for Michaux can instead be seen to indulge, in both cases, in the template of the real voyage in order to produce two generically divergent works, before utilising these early narratives in *tandem* to inform and shape his subsequent narratives based on imaginary travel.

This chapter has exposed the interrelation of representations of real and imaginary travel in *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie*, whilst in each case remaining attentive to the way the anticipated travel that foreshadows the actual journey is represented. Moreover, my discussion of text and image interrelations in *Ecuador* addressed the constructed nature and acute self-awareness behind any mode of expression, underlining the way in which such a struggle can become an intrinsic part of apprehending the travel experience for the artist-writer. Jean Laude, writing on Michaux's real and imaginary voyages, suggests that 'Michaux [...] n'ajoute la dimension imaginaire que pour donner (ou trouver) un sens à la dimension réelle'.[199] It will be argued in Chapter 5 of this thesis, however, that the 'dimension réelle' in fact *cultivates* the 'dimension imaginaire' that comes to the fore in Michaux's later writings. In view of this assertion, Todorov's remarks on the interplay between the interior and exterior voyage might be taken into consideration:

> Le rapport entre voyage intérieur et voyage extérieur va de la complicité à l'hostilité... Cela veut dire que dans notre civilisation, qui privilégie le spirituel au détriment du matériel [...], le voyage réel sera tantôt encensé, en tant qu'incarnation ou préfiguration du voyage spirituel, et tantôt dénigré, dans la mesure où il faut préférer l'intérieur à l'extérieur.[200]

In the case of Michaux, it can be said that the 'voyage réel' is identifiable as the prefiguration of the 'voyage spirituel' which, in the context of Todorov's essay, is understood to be synonymous with the 'voyage intérieur'. Moreover, the 'voyage réel' is ultimately eschewed by Michaux, not because of a prior preference for the interior voyage, but rather because of what he repeatedly perceives to be the failure of the real voyage. Michaux's realisation that relating one's experience of being displaced does not necessarily engender a narrative of self-discovery, generated by

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[199] Jean Laude, 'Voyages' in *Henri Michaux*, ed. by Raymond Bellour (Paris: Cahiers de l'Herne, 1966), 159–65 (p. 163).
[200] Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Morales de l'histoire*, p. 99.

and verified in both of his narratives based on real travel, means that the imaginary voyage is the evident option to continue writing about travel whilst ensuring the focus remains firmly on the project of self-discovery, or even what Michaux sees in *Ecuador* as the 'perfectionnement' of the self.

CHAPTER 3 – AN OUTPOST OF PROGRESS: GIDE IN FRENCH EQUATORIAL AFRICA

> [...] [O]n suit du doigt sur la carte, on remonte le Congo [...] Il semble qu'il n'y ait plus de bornes à son appétit.[201]

> [...] [C]e voyage m'apparaît comme une immense parenthèse à ma vie.[202]

3.1 Introduction

In July 1925 Gide began a year-long journey through the then French Equatorial Africa (comprising the regions of Gabon, Middle Congo, Oubangui-Chari and Chad), travelling with his companion, Marc Allégret. This chapter suggests that the journal Gide keeps during this voyage is central to generating *and* sustaining a multiplicity of contrasting identities, which Gide alternately gravitates towards and resists at various points throughout this sub-Saharan journey. By the interwar period, Gide was held in high esteem among his contemporaries as one of France's most important, if not controversial, writers, hence the extensive press coverage of the trip upon his return, as well as the considerable attention his criticisms of the colonialist companies would receive. But, aside from the official role which he sought out, travelling as a government-backed observer of colonialism in practice, and charged with compiling a report, the question arises as to why Gide would undertake such a physically gruelling and lengthy trip in his late fifties, especially given recent health problems at the time.[203] In response to this, Gide's interview with Jean Amrouche might be examined, for Gide claims in this that he hoped to find 'un bain de nouveauté [...] un bain de jouvence' in French Equatorial Africa.[204] Indeed, in the opening pages of *Voyage au Congo*, Gide talks of 'plunging' himself into this journey:[205]

> Je me suis précipité dans ce voyage comme Curtius dans le gouffre. Il ne me semble déjà plus que précisément je l'aie voulu [...]; mais plutôt qu'il s'est imposé à moi par une sorte de fatalité inéluctable, comme tous les événements

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[201] Maria Van Rysselberghe, *Cahiers de la Petite Dame*, IV (1977), 200-01.

[202] Gide, in a letter to Dorothy Bussy dated 21st October 1925, collected in *Correspondance André Gide–Dorothy Bussy*, ed. by Jean Lambert and Richard Tedeschi, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1979–1982), II (1980), 52.

[203] Maria Van Rysselberghe notes that Gide was acutely aware of the potential strain of such an undertaking, writing: 'Il parle gravement de son voyage, des risques qu'il comporte à son âge, des précautions qu'il y a lieu de prendre', *Cahiers de la Petite Dame*, IV (1977), 201.

[204] 'Entretiens André Gide–Jean Amrouche', in Marty, *André Gide – Qui êtes-vous?*, p. 263.

[205] Michel Leiris uses the verb 'plonger' to describe the commencement of his African travel experience: '[...] je plongeais dans un monde que je n'avais guère connu que sous son éclairage de légende [...]', *L'Afrique fantôme*, 3rd edn (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p. 7.

> importants de ma vie. Et j'en viens à presque oublier que ce n'est là qu'un 'projet de jeunesse réalisé dans l'âge mûr'; ce voyage au Congo, je n'avais pas vingt ans que déjà je me promettais de le faire; il y a trente-six ans de cela.[206]

As Pierre Masson notes, Gide's friend Elie Allégret (Marc's father) had visited the Congo in 1889, so Gide, in fact, had an ardent desire to explore the African continent many years before the 1902 publication of Joseph Conrad's key text set in the Congo, *Heart of Darkness* (and its 1899 appearance in serial form).[207] Moreover, it was an ambition that Gide had quietly fostered throughout the fin-de-siècle period, during which he began to experiment extensively with writing up imaginary voyages. The idea of a voyage to the Congo, then, was already present in Gide's imagination by the time he was manipulating travel as a theme and narrative motor in texts such as *Le Voyage d'Urien* and *Paludes*. Even Gide's early explorations of North Africa in the 1890s are underpinned by his as of yet not fully explored and, therefore, unvoiced longing to visit the Equatorial regions of this continent. Gide's desire, as expressed to Amrouche, then, to enjoy a 'bain de jouvence' over the course of his Congo voyage, seems to suggest a desire on Gide's part to return to the outlook that characterised his experimentations with travel in his youth (a possible understanding of rejuvenation here), where the tension between realised and imaginary voyages emblematised his writing on travel. In the light of Gide's appraisal, in the Amrouche interview, of the reasons why he initially chose to travel to the Congo, Gérard Cogez's suggestion might also be taken into consideration:

> [...] il n'est pas inconcevable après tout qu'un individu puisse partir en Afrique en 1925 motivé essentiellement par la fatigue d'être Gide, c'est-à-dire par une certaine exténuation due à une identité publique de plus en plus sollicitée et exposée. Rien d'étonnant à ce qu'il souhaite expérimenter le retour à un certain anonymat, jouir d'une période de vacance; comme si ce nom, devenu encombrant, pouvait se révéler soluble dans un territoire qui, pour autant qu'on le sache alors dans les milieux cultivés en Europe, semble encore offrir d'immenses ressources à ceux qui ne seraient pas mécontents de se perdre, tout au moins de vue.[208]

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[206] Gide, *Voyage au Congo*, in *Souvenirs et voyages*, ed. by Pierre Masson, Daniel Durosay and Martine Sagaert (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 331–514 (p. 333). Hereafter referred to in the text as (*VC*).
[207] Masson, *André Gide: Voyage et écriture*, p. 13.
[208] Gérard Cogez, 'L'Afrique au cœur', in *André Gide et l'écriture de soi*, ed. by Pierre Masson and Jean Claude (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2002), pp. 39–53 (p. 41).

Even if Gide delights in the much desired anonymity that the African landscape will provide him (he notes in the opening pages of *Voyage au Congo* that 'Tout ici semble promettre le bonheur, la volupté, l'oubli' [*VC*, 336]), his evocation of – and indeed, notable emphasis in the Amrouche interview on – the notion of cleansing might be seen as indicative of a desire not to 'forget' himself, but rather to 'revisit' himself.[209] This will involve rejuvenating what he perceives as his long-established identity as a writer who travels, as well as opening up paths to a new understanding of the self that long-anticipated travel might generate when it is eventually undertaken. As Gide says in a letter to Allégret written in the months before their departure:

> La pensée de ce voyage me fait tourner la bobine. Je n'arrive pas à me persuader que c'est moi qui vais réaliser cela! Qu'il fait beau, déjà! Chaque jour j'attends la catastrophe qui va rendre cela impossible [...] Ah! vieux, je vais tellement mieux, je suis tellement plus jeune et plus avide qu'il y a vingt ans![210]

The notion of a 'projet de jeunesse réalisé dans l'âge mûr' is particularly important to remember here – the middle-aged Gide is embarking upon a voyage he has *imagined* from a young age, and is therefore finally seizing the opportunity to undertake long-*imagined* or greatly anticipated travel for real. It might be remembered that *El Hadj* was inspired by Gide's travels in North Africa, that is to say, it is a narrative of imaginary travel based on real travel experiences. In the present example, however, Gide's anticipated voyage to the Congo is a *precedent* to his real travel experience in this region. This inevitably sets Gide up for certain disappointments; one refrain centres on Gide bemoaning the fact that he has not yet come across what he had expected on this trip. The impression of travelling along an already imagined itinerary is furthered by Gide's multiple readings of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and the time spent by Gide and Marc excitedly and frequently consulting maps of the region (see the first epigraph to this chapter, taken from Maria Van Rysselberghe's notes on life with Gide). Conrad's inevitable influence on any Congo-based travel narrative, as acknowledged by Tim Youngs in his essay 'Africa/The Congo: the politics of

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[209] This suggests an evolution in his attitude towards the capabilities of travel, for the young Gide wrote in *Amyntas*: 'Par ces chaudes journées de voyage je songe à l'essor des nomades; ah! pouvoir à la fois demeurer ici, fuir ailleurs! ah! s'évaporer, se défaire, et qu'un souffle d'azur, où je serais dissous, voyageât...!' (*Amyntas*, p. 156).

[210] André Gide–Marc Allégret, *Correspondance 1917-1949*, ed. by Jean Claude and Pierre Masson (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), pp. 608-09.

darkness', is a key aspect of Gide's two texts worth exploring at length here.[211] (Indeed, the title of the present chapter comes from another Congo-based short story written by Conrad.) Gide uses *Heart of Darkness* as a template and reference book, as critics such as Paulette Hacker and David Scott have noted, and he does so in the same way that he turns to Auguste Chevalier's scientific study of the Congolese landscape for information (indeed, it might be recalled that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* was itself inspired by the author's 1890 sojourn in the Belgian Congo). We might also engage with Edward Said's comments on Conrad in *Freud and the Non-European*, to shed further light on both of Gide's texts. Said remarks that '[...] in Conrad [...], the felt tension between what is intolerably there and a symmetrical compulsion to escape from it is what is most profoundly at stake – what the reading and interpretation of a work like *Heart of Darkness* is all about'.[212] Gide, as a reader and as an interpreter of Conrad, feels a similar tension between Conrad's text and his own compulsion to re-write, discredit or uphold this text as he too negotiates the lands described in it.

Moreover, the discursive potentiality of the travel journal model allows its author to indulge himself in the vicissitudes of the self-discovery that travel and the writing up of the travel experience traditionally engender (it might be noted that in 1929 Michaux will go on to speak of the process of 'mon perfectionnement' in *Ecuador*, a process that seems to be connected to the construction of his tentatively subtitled 'journal de voyage'). The present chapter will therefore resist Walter Putnam's statement regarding the Congo travel narratives, where Gide is seen to adopt what Putnam understands as:

> [...] a form appropriate to the subject, one that *subordinates* writerly considerations to the compelling nature of the colonial situation rather than attempting to make Africa into some raw material for his own creative purposes.[213] (emphasis my own)

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[211] Tim Youngs, 'Africa/The Congo: the politics of darkness', *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. by Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 155-73.

[212] Edward Said, *Freud and the Non-European*, (London; New York: Verso, 2004), p. 26.

[213] Walter Putnam, 'Writing the Wrongs of French Colonial Africa: *Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad*', in Tom Conner, ed., *André Gide's Politics: Rebellion and Ambivalence* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 89–110 (p. 90).

In fact, this chapter will argue that while the journal form is appropriate to the subject here, it happens to thrive on *simultaneously* exploring both writerly considerations *and* compelling commentary on colonialism, rather than subordinating one topic in favour of another. This simultaneity is accommodated by the creative freedom or fluidity that the journal form allows, as will be seen when the importance accorded to the footnotes in the main narrative is examined. Moreover, it must be emphasised that Gide can be seen to happen upon the theme of colonial abuses, as it forms a major part of his travel experience as it unfolds, rather than 'the compelling nature of the colonial situation' being identifiable as a focus from the outset of the text (despite the prior suspicions Gide voiced regarding such a regime, as will be noted). Even if we are to speak of a shift from Gide's aspirations to encounter the exotic to a sense of obligation on his part regarding important social questions arising from his experience of the machinations of colonialism, Africa still remains the raw material inspiring the textualisation of the travel experience.

The journal or diary form employed by Gide here has been understood as a *travel* journal by Gidian scholars in the context of this lengthy voyage, many of whom do not emphasise the fact that Gide is, of course, above all continuing the journal to which he had frequently devoted himself from the late 1880s onwards. The significance of specifically readdressing the journal dimension, so to speak, of the travel journal will be central to my discussion here, not least because of the limited attention given to the voicing of any distinction between Gide's travel journals (where Gide is presumably outside of France) and his journal (which, according to the latter clarification, might be seen to refer to when Gide is located somewhere within the borders of metropolitan France, although this is not always the case),[214] despite a fissure between the travel journals and the *Journal* itself being wholly evident in the treatment of these texts in criticism on Gide.[215] This is a problem which has been compounded by the fact that two separate publications emerge from Gide's intensive journal-keeping on this trip: *Voyage au Congo*, published in 1927, and *Le Retour du Tchad*, published in 1928, texts that in themselves are rarely distinguished from one another (Gide himself describes *Le Retour du Tchad* as the 'la relation de mon voyage

[214] See Éric Marty, *L'écriture du jour: Le Journal d'André Gide* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), p. 134.
[215] Éric Marty's discussion of the relationship between the Congo travel narratives and the *Journal* is a notable exception to this general trend in Gidian studies. See also Daniel Durosay, 'Le *Voyage au Congo* et son livre fantôme: la mise en question du *Journal*', *Littérales*, 7 (1990), 121–47.

– deuxième partie' in the *Journal*).[216] Of course, just as *Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad* cannot be cleanly disconnected from the *Journal*, neither are these travel narratives easily dissociated from one another, given that they both deal with the same year-long voyage – the former narrative recounts the journey up until its most inland point, whilst the latter begins at this turning point and traces the return leg of Gide's trip.[217] The two West Africa narratives, then, will be seen as an 'outpost' of the *Journal*, at once integral to and disconnected from it. These narratives will also be understood to replicate many of the concerns raised in the *Journal*, as well as displaying a self-awareness regarding the journal form they deploy.

In attempting to establish the importance of focusing on Gide's use of a journal format in the relation of his West Africa travel experiences, the observations made by Roland Barthes in relation to Gide's *Journal* might be noted:

> C'est un livre qui m'a toujours fasciné par sa structure discontinue, par son coté 'patchwork' s'étendant sur plus de cinquante ans. Dans le *Journal* de Gide, tout y passe, toutes les irisations de la subjectivité: les lectures, les rencontres, les réflexions, et même les bêtises. C'est cet aspect-là qui m'a séduit et c'est ainsi que j'ai toujours envie d'écrire: par fragments.[218]

Here, the 'patchwork' image Barthes uses to describe the *Journal* is particularly significant, for it emphasises the fragmentary nature that characterises the journal genre. At the same time, however, it can be said that the journal also provides a structure which unifies such fragments. The 'patchwork' image used by Barthes seems particularly well suited to describing the evolution of an author, insofar as patchwork, although it hinges on the individuality of each fragment, nonetheless depends on the connections amongst fragments in order to be wholly appreciated. Elsewhere, Barthes will go on to elucidate what he means by the term 'fragments' in the context of his own writings:

> Ce qui vient à l'écriture, ce sont de petits blocs erratiques ou des mines par rapport à un ensemble compliqué et touffu. Et le problème de l'écriture, il est là: comment supporter que ce flot qu'il y a en moi aboutisse dans le meilleur des cas à un filet

[216] Gide, *Journal*, II (1997), 26.
[217] It might be noted that *Travels in the Congo* is the title Dorothy Bussy, who translated many of Gide's works into English, gives her one-volume translation of both *Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad*.
[218] Roland Barthes, *Le Grain de la voix: Entretiens 1962-1980* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 305.

> d'écriture? Personnellement, alors, je me débrouille mieux en n'ayant pas l'air de construire une totalité et en laissant à découvert des résidus pluriels. C'est ainsi que je justifie mes fragments.[219]

Indeed, the way Barthes sees and justifies these fragments can help us to understand more easily the manner in which Gide's journal functions during his Congo voyage, particularly as the journal form acts as a framework that allows Gide to negotiate what he views as the problematic boundlessness of the African landscape: 'comme toujours dans ce pays démesuré, rien ne fait centre; les lignes fuient éperdument dans tous les sens: tout est illimité' (*VC*, 425-26). The compartmentalisation, yet also the relative malleability, that characterise the journal form, therefore, can be seen as particularly suitable for the relation of Gide's sub-Saharan voyage. The question might be raised as to the alternative forms of representing this journey that Gide might have explored – the generically hybrid *Amyntas*, for instance (comprising four narratives based on Gide's travels through North Africa, namely *Mopsus*, *Feuilles de route*, *Biskra à Touggourt* [which most resembles an extract from the *Journal*] and *Le Renoncement au voyage*), or the later example of *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* – both of which explore a real travel experience whilst, overall, appearing to eschew the journal format (a politically-oriented narrative, just as the West Africa publications ultimately become, *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* seems to operate like a *traité*, as will be discussed in Chapter 4).

Another important question that will be raised in this chapter will centre on Gide's unplanned engagement with the problems of colonialism and commercial exploitation, which, I argue, leads to a re-imagining of his self-identification as a writer who travels. The importance of understanding the writer who travels as a figure for whom the activities of travelling and writing cannot be separated, following Jacques Meunier's observation, has already been highlighted in this thesis. Once Gide has established as his personal mission on this trip the anguishing social questions raised by colonialism, can we also speak of the emergence of a range of new identifiers, such as colonial author and subversive anti-exploitation campaigner, complicit colonial traveller and explicit critic, which can be seen to be somehow in conflict with one another? Or indeed, an array of identities that can be adopted and/or resisted at will by Gide? The travel journal then becomes an arena in which the various creative trajectories suggested by these identities can be played out. As will be

[219] Barthes, *Le Grain de la voix: Entretiens 1962-1980*, p. 306.

seen, the hybridity that characterises the travel journal form manages to accommodate the generic variations such trajectories might be seen to prompt – for instance, the journal is capable of supporting statistics, lyrical description and political commentary all at once (likewise, Michel Leiris speaks of adopting 'un angle mi-documentaire mi-poétique' in his travel journal *L'Afrique fantôme*).[220] It might be noted that William E. Connolly speaks of what he calls the 'social paradox' inherent in the politics of identity, one which 'operates as pressure to make space for the fullness of self-identity [...] by marginalising, demeaning, or excluding the differences on which it depends to specify itself'.[221] While Connolly's statement can be deployed to sum up the sense of superiority central to the colonialist's identity, showing this identity to be possible only because it depends on the inferiority it establishes for the colonised, I would argue that it also seems to imply the necessity of an arena which might allow 'space for the fullness of self-identity'; the discursive possibilities offered by the travel journal can be seen as fulfilling such a demand. Moreover, as Charles Forsdick notes, travel writing 'has acquired a privileged role in the exploration of intercultural relations on which many contrastive or differential aspects of identity formation depend'.[222] The flexibility and generic fluidity of the travel journal form, therefore, not only enable Gide to present 'contrastive' aspects of identity formation (subscribing to and even contributing to notions of the coloniser and colonised; revealing colonial complicity, and engaging in colonial critique), but also *incite* and accommodate an exploration of identity formation itself.

In shifting emphasis in this chapter back to the act of keeping a journal, it is argued that this form not only allows Gide to reflect upon his personal development over the course of this journey, but that the capacity for reflection accorded to him by the journal form is, in fact, what *nurtures* this self-development. The journal, of course, can depart in both fictional and autobiographical directions; indeed, certain studies of autobiographical writing tend to argue that these directions may even converge from time to time.[223] To this end, it must be noted that Gide had from an

[220] Michel Leiris, *L'Afrique fantôme*, p. 9.
[221] William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), p. xv.
[222] Charles Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.1.
[223] See, for example, Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

early stage experimented with the journal form in his fiction, such as in *Les Cahiers d'André Walter* (1891) and *Paludes* (1895); these early manipulations of the journal model show an acute awareness of its literary possibilities, not least its ability to portray a character's development in graded (for example, daily) steps. Let us not forget the journal's ability to capture or, indeed, distil the essence of the everyday (as parodied by Gide in *Paludes*), and the way the travel journal, whose traditional foundation involves resisting the 'everyday' content (as well as the traditional 'every day' structure of) the journal in order to explore a new society or culture, in fact ends up as a potential examination of the quotidian of the traveller's destination (despite any disappointment such a realisation might engender in the writer who travels: for example, Michaux's reaction to Quito in *Ecuador*).

Finally, an acute awareness of Gide's always ambivalent relationship with colonialism underpins this chapter: a close friend of the high-ranking colonial administrator (and future governor-general of French West Africa) Marcel de Coppet,[224] Gide will nonetheless critique the colonial government for their silence with regard to the treatment of native workers by the cartel-operating concessionary companies. These companies drain the colony's abundant natural resources, rubber in particular. Gide will focus on the frequent acts of violence in these regions that can be invariably traced back to colonial representatives such as Georges Pacha (whom Gide happens to have lunch with on the eve of finding out about the most recent atrocity presumed to be overseen by this district head, the mass slaughter of men, women and children in a village whose inhabitants had attempted to resist being moved to another area). Indeed, passages from Gide's travel narrative will go on to be read out in the Assemblée, pointing up its role as a political commentary of note. Alan Sheridan also emphasises the fact that no fewer than 600 complimentary copies of *Le Retour du Tchad* were published in 1928, many of which were sent to various politicians in the hope of alerting them to the situation unfolding in French Equatorial Africa.[225]

[224] Maria Van Rysselberghe notes that Gide's meeting with Coppet in Paris played an important role in making Gide's wish to travel to the Congo a reality. *Cahiers de la Petite Dame*, IV (1977), 200.
[225] Sheridan, *André Gide: A Life in the Present*, p. 421.

3.2 'Au seuil de l'exotisme'? The illusions of travel and the traveller's disillusionment

> Compagnons de traversée: administrateurs et commerçants. Je crois bien que nous sommes les seuls à voyager 'pour le plaisir'. (*VC*, 333)

Even the opening lines of *Voyage au Congo*, noted during the sea voyage towards West Africa, show that Gide, in using inverted commas, is already wary of the notion of travelling for pleasure. In these lines Gide juxtaposes the presence of administrators and salesmen on the boat with that of himself and Marc. This juxtaposition seems to suggest a tentative division between functionality (in this case, for many of Gide's company, the pursuit of colonial business interests) and leisure in terms of travel. These lines are succeeded by what is represented in the text as an interrogative exchange, which can easily be understood as Gide questioning *himself* about the motivations behind this particular voyage:

> — Qu'est-ce que vous allez chercher là-bas?
> — J'attends d'être là-bas pour le savoir. (*VC*, 333)

Indeed, in the above lines, a precursor of sorts to Michaux's frustrated refrain in *Ecuador* ('Mais où est-il donc, ce voyage?') might be detected. Central to both viewpoints is the suggestion that the real voyage must already be underway before it can be fully apprehended and understood.

Almost three weeks into his journey, the cloud of uncertainty evident in the opening pages of *Voyage au Congo* dissipates as Gide finally proffers his interpretation of the capacity in which he is received in the Congo. Gide records the following realisation, or perhaps, resigned observation:

> Je n'ai pas encore bien compris que, chargé de mission, je représente, et suis dès à présent un personnage officiel. (*VC*, 340)

Nonetheless, it seems that Gide was well aware of the official capacity in which he would be received, as well as many of the problems inherent to colonialism, long before his departure. At the funeral of Jacques Rivière in February 1925, Gide is purported to have discussed his planned voyage with Loup Mayrisch, revealing a

prior understanding of the mistreatment of the native, along with the fact that he had obtained government backing for his trip:

> Il se met ensuite à parler de son voyage, longuement, disant le mal qu'on a fait aux nègres sous prétexte de civilisation, ce qu'il y aurait peut-être à faire pour eux? Il a obtenu une sorte de mission du gouvernement, des rapports à faire [...].[226]

In the later interviews with Jean Amrouche, Gide discusses the motivations behind his voyage, as well as the importance of official intervention and support in its organisation:

> Les curiosités qu'il y avait de ma part, c'était des curiosités peut-être de naturaliste, puis un certain goût d'aventure, le désir de me rendre dans une terre non préparée, où je n'allais pas trouver des hôtels tout prêts pour recevoir les voyageurs – enfin, c'était l'aventure. J'irai plus loin. Pour pouvoir réaliser ce voyage, qui était un voyage très difficile, qui nécessitait des réquisitions d'hommes, de porteurs, puisqu'il n'y avait pas de moyen de transport, j'ai dû me faire 'missionner'.[227]

The line 'le désir de me rendre dans une terre non préparée' might be noted in the light of Gide's comment, in *Le Retour du Tchad*, that 'L'inconvénient d'un voyage trop bien préparé, c'est de ne laisser plus assez de place à l'aventure'.[228] Gide expresses in these two statements a wariness of being seen as a tourist in the context of this voyage. However, he will later come to understand that being viewed in this way enables him to be privy to more sensitive information than he might normally have encountered. Moreover, whilst the Congo voyage has already been imagined and meticulously planned (by Gide and Allégret), Gide still ensures the scope in this voyage to allow for the unexpected, the unforeseen. This openness towards adventure and the unexpected is precisely what allows Gide to champion a cause he is at first wary about.

In the main body of text, Gide frequently bemoans the fact that no sensation of exoticism is stirred by his travels around certain parts of Equatorial Africa. The ostensible familiarity and, to a certain extent, the seemingly interchangeable quality of the urban setting is straightaway remarked upon arriving in Dakar:

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[226] Maria Van Rysselberghe, *Cahiers de la Petite Dame*, IV (1977), 214.
[227] 'Entretiens André Gide-Jean Amrouche', in Marty, *André Gide – Qui êtes-vous?*, p. 261.
[228] *Le Retour du Tchad*, in *Souvenirs et voyages*, ed. by Pierre Masson, Daniel Durosay and Martine Sagaert, pp. 515–707 (p. 518). Hereafter referred to in the text as (*RT*).

> Dakar la nuit. Rues droites désertes. Morne ville endormie. On ne peut imaginer rien de moins exotique, de plus laid. (*VC*, 334)

This, of course, brings to mind Michaux's similar realisation upon his arrival in Quito, as discussed in Chapter 2. The main difference in their perception of the first city encountered in their country of destination is that Michaux has accepted, even before the continent of South America is reached, that the world is devoid of exoticism, whereas the older Gide, despite his openness on this voyage to the unforeseen, nonetheless *expects* to seek out and ultimately find what he understands to be exotic. Even as the journey progresses he will lament or bemoan whatever he judges to be insufficiently exotic, or, more precisely, whatever reminds him of European vegetation and landscapes: 'Forêt des plus monotones, et très peu exotique d'aspect. Elle ressemble à la forêt italienne [...]' (*VC*, 402). Gide believed himself to have experienced what he viewed as the exotic in the North Africa of his heady younger days, as evinced in the travel narratives *Les Nourritures terrestres* and *Amyntas*. His sense of increasingly impatient anticipation regarding what he believes to be in store for him in West Africa pervades the early chapters of *Voyage au Congo*. He will therefore display an exasperating habit of announcing, at frequent intervals, that the voyage is yet to truly get under way:

> Mais nous ne cessons pas de sentir que ce n'est là que le prologue d'un voyage qui ne commencera vraiment que lorsque nous pourrons prendre plus directement contact avec le pays. (*VC*, 347)

> Nous devons quitter Bangui définitivement dans cinq jours. À partir de quoi commencera vraiment le voyage. (*VC*, 389)

> C'est ici que *va commencer* vraiment le voyage. (*VC*, 393) (emphasis my own)

Gide's conception of 'beginning' this voyage lasts, as we see, for quite a substantial period of time; a large expanse of ground is traversed and over three months of their voyage have actually passed before the final citation above appears in his narrative. Indeed, it is important to consider the reasons why Gide continues to display such an unabated sense of anticipation over such a lengthy period of time. It can only be suggested that he remains hopeful that he will encounter and enjoy precisely what he so fervently expects – the exotic – and that only in encountering at length what he deems to be exotic will he have provided his travel account with its true *point de départ*.

This prolonged sense of anticipation and numerous false starts together have the effect of making the reader acutely aware of the travel journal's construction. Description of surroundings and the peoples encountered is frequently deferred in order for Gide to ascertain his progress along the planned route. A particular instance of such a deferral of description in *Voyage au Congo* sees Gide, sounding a regretful – or even slightly apologetic – note, write:

> Je prends ces notes trop 'pour moi'; je m'aperçois que je n'ai pas décrit Brazzaville. Tout m'y charmait d'abord [...] de sorte que par excès d'étonnement, je ne trouvais plus rien à dire. Je ne savais le nom de rien. J'admirais indistinctement. On n'écrit pas bien dans l'ivresse. J'étais grisé. (*VC*, 344)

Gide moves away from his own ruminations in order to make a pointed reference to the desires of his intended reader, realising that a description of the town of Brazzaville might be welcomed. Yet it can be seen here that because of the newness he encounters, Gide can no longer write about his surroundings at this point, so taxing is the effort of understanding or digesting his experience. Indeed, shortly afterwards, he will add:

> [...] [J]e ne trouve aucun plaisir à parler de ce que déjà je voudrais quitter [...] Surtout que je m'aperçois qu'on ne peut y prendre contact réel avec rien; non point que tout y soit factice; mais l'écran de la civilisation s'interpose, et rien n'y entre que tamisé. (*VC*, 345)

Whilst Gide posits the 'écran de la civilisation' as an obstacle, I would argue that the 'écran' of the journal form also problematises his travel experience, not least because Gide is already targeting his intended reader, knowing that these travel journals will eventually be published. The journal's power to *distil* the essentials of a given experience has already been noted; in the above passage, the adjective 'tamisé' seems instead to hint at loss and dilution, perhaps taking another view of the processes of editing and selection that are an evident part of textualisation. Indeed, Gide makes the following observation in a footnote to *Le Retour du Tchad*: 'Je ne puis récrire ces notes, et renonce à regonfler artificiellement ces souvenirs.' (*RT*, 525n) It seems that Gide finds it difficult to become the editor of what he would no doubt like to have maintained as a narrative that gave the impression of being written 'sur le vif'. This idea is reinforced by Gide's tendency to invoke a sense of immediacy when recording

his impressions at several points throughout the narrative, as exemplified by the pointed inclusion of phrases such as the following: 'tandis que j'écris ces notes' (*VC*, 442) and 'tandis que j'écris ceci' (*VC*, 449).

When a certain stage of the journey is completed, it is not accidental that Gide turns to literary terminology to express himself. Upon reaching Bosoum, where they once again meet a passable road, Gide notes: 'Là s'achève ce long chapitre de notre voyage' (*VC*, 453), just as the fifth chapter of *Voyage au Congo* draws to a close. (It might also be remembered that the journal is further compartmentalised into chapters for its publication in book form.) Once again, there is an acute awareness on Gide's part of the literariness of the journal form, as well as of the way in which its fragmentary yet ultimately coherent structure allows him to organise (and reconstruct) aspects of his journey.

Another notable aspect of the travel journal's construction is the way in which Gide aims to work out a lexicon to express his travel experience in the Congo. En route to Dokundja-Bita, he remarks:

> Passé la rivière [...], la forêt est de nouveau des plus étranges et des plus belles. J'associe volontiers dans ce carnet ces deux épithètes, car le paysage vient-il à cesser d'être étrange, il rappelle aussitôt quelque paysage européen, et le souvenir qu'il évoque est toujours à son désavantage. Peut-être, si j'avais vu Java ou le Brésil, en irait-il de même pour ce sous-bois encombré de fougères épiphytes et de grands arums; mais, comme il ne me rappelle rien, je puis le trouver merveilleux. (*VC*, 405)

In *Le Retour du Tchad*, Gide will go on to make the following observation:

> Je m'étonne que les quelques rares voyageurs qui ont déjà parlé de ce pays, de ces villages et de ces cases, n'aient cru devoir signaler que leur 'étrangeté'. La case de Massa ne ressemble à aucun autre, il est vrai; mais elle n'est pas seulement 'étrange'; elle est *belle*: et ce n'est pas tant son étrangeté que sa beauté, qui m'émeut. (*RT*, 528–29) (emphasis in original)

Considering both of these passages in tandem proves particularly fruitful, for it allows us to see that Gide's approach to writing up these narratives is strongly informed by both reading *and* critiquing prior travel journals on this region. In Gide's eyes, the association of the words 'étrange' and 'beau' is especially vital because he maintains an aesthetic awareness of his surroundings throughout the course of the voyage.

Identifying this particular oversight on the part of those who have preceded him in terms of their Congo travel narratives demonstrates that Gide is aiming to redress some of the problems presented by prior writings on this region. In this instance, Gide is also highlighting the possibility of *décalage*, omission or misrepresentation in other travel writing.

Even if the epithets 'étrange' and 'beau' are to be often associated with one another over the course of Gide's West Africa narratives, it is important to also note the use of 'étrange' as a noun, one which represents a particular state of being or mindset:

> Chaque jour nous nous enfonçons un peu plus dans l'étrange. J'ai vécu tout aujourd'hui dans un état de torpeur et d'inconscience, *as though of hemlock I had drunk*, perdant notion du temps, du lieu, de moi-même. (*VC*, 419)

The idea here of losing the notion of 'oneself' is particularly important to our discussion, where Gide is seen to evoke constantly his desire to escape into the Congolese landscape. At the same time, however, this almost uncontrollable urge to lose any notion of the passage of time, of the places through which one is passing and of oneself will struggle to be sustained once Gide realises that his social standing can act as a platform for voicing the problems connected to the colonial regime's relationship with the concessionary companies operating in French Equatorial Africa. The line from Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' cited in the passage above also brings to mind the word 'grisé' that Gide used to describe his confused state in apprehending his Brazzaville surroundings earlier on in the narrative. To delve a little further into Gide's use of Keats, whose work also provides the epigraph to *Voyage au Congo* ('Better be imprudent moveables than prudent fixtures'), at this juncture is particularly useful. 'Ode to a Nightingale', it might be remembered, is a poem whose primary theme is an exploration of the imaginary and ephemeral nature of any attempt to escape from phenomenal reality. Indeed, Gide's frequently disappointing encounters with the African landscape lead him to display an attitude of listlessness in the relation of his travel experiences.

> La contrée est mouvementée [...] mais pourquoi chercherais-je à atteindre ce point plutôt que tout autre? Tout est uniforme – pas un site, pas une prédilection possible. Je suis resté tout le jour d'hier sans aucun désir de bouger. D'un bout à l'autre de l'horizon, et où que mon regard puisse porter, il n'est pas un point particulier, et où je me sente désir d'aller. (*VC*, 455)

For Gide, at this stage of his journey, movement and displacement seem almost futile – there is no 'invitation au voyage' here to excite and tempt him to progress further. He expresses a desire to stay put, which naturally complicates the possibility of going forward and continuing with the planned journey (*and* planned journal), as well as embracing the inevitability of eventually returning homeward.

Although Gide's use of the journal format in the case of both West Africa travel narratives has already been noted and commented upon, an important related issue is the resistance Gide can from time to time display towards certain (travel) journal norms. In *Voyage au Congo*, Gide will at one point admit to the envisaged reader that 'Je n'inscris plus les dates. Les jours coulent, ici, tous pareils' (*VC*, 472). Indeed, it is particularly revealing that in the same journal entry, Gide reverts to short, telegrammatic sentences to enumerate the ensemble of the day's activities:

> Lecture. Visites. Déjeuner chez Marcel de Coppet. Sieste. Travail. Thé chez Coppet et révision de sa traduction du *Old Wives Tale* de Bennett. Promenade à cheval. (*VC*, 472)

The truncated nature of these lines serves to reflect Gide's frustration with – and seeming resignation towards – the uninspiring landscape surrounding him. As the journey continues, and his knowledge of the brutal mistreatment of the colonised increases, he remarks: 'Je n'ai le temps ni le désir de rien noter. Complètement absorbé par la contemplation' (*VC*, 477). Later on in the narrative Gide will go on to admit that 'Je ne sais plus les dates. Mettons: le jour suivant' (*VC*, 503). *Voyage au Congo*, therefore, is a text which, although it adheres to the journal format, nonetheless serves to provoke a discussion of the author's frequent lack of respect for journal norms, such as the convention of anchoring entries with precise dates. Moreover, as *Voyage au Congo* draws to a close, the reader familiar with Gide's previous works will recognise a link to his past writing on travel in the following passage:

> C'en est fait. Nous avons atteint le point extrême de notre voyage. A présent c'est déjà le retour. Non sans regret, je dis un adieu, sans doute définitif, à tout l'au-delà du Tchad. (*VC*, 500)

The morose declaration above is reminiscent of Urien's identification of the point of return in his journey towards the end of *Le Voyage d'Urien* ('Nous comprenions que nous étions parvenus au point suprême de notre histoire' [*VU*, 214]). With *Voyage au Congo*'s tendency to stray from journal-keeping norms, and its self-awareness with regard to its own construction, it is therefore no surprise that Gide introduces a literary work on imaginary travel as a point of reference here. *Le Voyage d'Urien* is, as I argued in Chapter 1 of this thesis, a travel narrative that at once attempts to cover up and playfully reveal the processes of its construction. The interplay between Gide's early works on imaginary travel and the present West Africa narratives will be examined in further detail in the next section of this chapter.

Having both detected and discussed the ways in which Gide brings the reader's attention to the constructed nature of his travel journals, Gide can be seen to awaken in the reader a heightened awareness of the way in which facts are merely represented and can be constantly and even unscrupulously manipulated. It might be said, then, that the way in which these travel narratives are written reflects one of the major subjects they attempt to emphasise: the arbitrariness of representation.

3.3 Modes of representation

This section first of all investigates the extent to which mentions of Gide's earlier literary texts permeate his West Africa travel narratives. Secondly, it considers Gide's observations on the role of description in these narratives, as well as his playful invocation of other modes of representation, such as theatre or the visual arts.

In investigating references to Gide's early works in *Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad*, Gide's valorisation of his early imaginary voyages is particularly evident. Similar to the way in which he utilises *Heart of Darkness* in his West Africa travel journals, Gide also calls upon his early writings as points of reference for both himself and his intended reader. In invoking these narratives of imaginary travel as points of reference whilst undertaking a real voyage, Gide can be seen to be putting prior narratives of imaginary travel and the present travel journal-in-progress on an equal footing in his work (it must also be remembered that the idea of travelling to the Congo was already on Gide's mind during the period when he came to write these works of imaginary travel).

In the opening pages of *Le Retour du Tchad* Gide notes: 'Paysage de plus en plus paludéen et tel que je le dépeignais dans la deuxième partie du *Voyage d'Urien*' (*RT*, 525). In the African landscape, Gide picks out references to his own earlier imaginary travels of the 1890s – besides identifying the similarity to the landscape of *Le Voyage d'Urien* himself, there is also a link to be drawn with the marshlands that comprise Tityre's surroundings in *Paludes*. Indeed, in terms of Gide's attitude towards reading whilst undertaking this voyage through the Congo, Thomas Cazentre detects another important link with *Paludes* (indeed, Gide's experimentation with the journal form in *Paludes* has also been noted):

> [...] [C]ette association systématique de la lecture à la monotonie du monde extérieur et à la langueur du quotidien n'est pas sans évoquer *Paludes*: "Je suis Tityre et solitaire et j'aime un paysage ainsi qu'un livre qui ne me distrait pas de ma pensée".[229]

It is striking that Gide should draw extensively on imaginary landscapes from fin-de-siècle works that hinge on imaginary travel. In the statement below, Gide displays an awareness of the way in which the habit of anticipating the travel experience can affect a real journey already underway, potentially problematising the relation of the real travel experience as it unfolds:

> Ma représentation imaginaire de ce pays était si vive (je veux dire que je me l'imaginais si fortement) que je doute si, plus tard, cette fausse image ne luttera pas contre le souvenir et si je reverrai Bangui, par exemple, comme il est vraiment, ou comme je figurais d'abord qu'il était. (*VC*, 389)

Indeed, arriving at Carnot, Gide will quickly note that 'Carnot ne ressemble en rien à ce que je l'imaginais' (*VC*, 430).

In the preface to *Le Renoncement au voyage*, a text featured in the *Amyntas* collection, Gide had already discussed the *décalage* that can exist between accounting for anticipated travel ('le livre que j'espérais en rapporter') and relating an experience of real travel:

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[229] Thomas Cazentre, *Gide lecteur* (Paris: Kimé, 2003), p. 334.

> Quand, pour la sixième fois, je m'embarquai pour l'Algérie, le livre que j'espérais en rapporter était tout autre que celui que j'offre aujourd'hui. Les plus graves questions économiques, ethnologiques, géographiques, devaient y être soulevées. Il est certain qu'elles me passionnèrent. J'emportai des cahiers que je voulais remplir de documents précis, de statistiques…
>
> Sont-ce bien ces cahiers que voici?
>
> De retour en Normandie, du moins cherchai-je à les remanier en vue d'un tout plus homogène. Mais, lorsque je les relus, je compris que leur élan faisait peut-être leur seul mérite, et qu'un apprêt, si léger fût-il, y nuirait. – Je les publie donc sans presque y changer un seul mot.[230]

The passage above might be read in tandem with a 1933 journal entry by Gide, in which he remarks upon what might have been different had he assiduously kept a journal in North Africa as he had done in West Africa in 1925-1926. Here, Gide comments on the way in which the act of keeping a journal can shape one's apprehension of the travel experience:

> Si j'avais tenu journal, lors de mon premier voyage en Algérie, comme j'ai fait quotidiennement au Congo, sans doute eussé-je parlé de l'affaire des phosphates de Gafsa que je pouvais alors suivre de près, du retrait progressif des Pères Blancs après la mort du Cardinal Lavigerie, et surtout de l'arrivée des tonneaux d'absinthe pour la réduction des indigènes, et de l'expropriation des Arabes par le procédé de la banque Cazenave selon une méthode monstrueuse que j'aurais sans doute exposée…
>
> (Et, par contre, si je n'eusse pas tenu ce journal en A. É. F., sans doute n'aurais-je rapporté de mon voyage au Congo que quelques "paysages" pour un nouvel *Amyntas*).[231]

The potential for compartmentalisation offered by the journal form (a characteristic which makes it a suitable means for Gide to address the boundlessness of the sub-Saharan landscape) has already been discussed, as well as the creative freedom it promotes (the pithy assessment – 'un angle mi-documentaire, mi-poétique' – made by Leiris in *L'Afrique fantôme* might be recalled). What Gide draws up in the journal entry cited above is the way in which adhering to the journal form in West Africa in fact *prevented* him from creating a text that would resemble what he had produced almost thirty years earlier in *Amyntas*. Even if the apparent constraints of the journal form (such as the writer's need to anchor himself in a certain place, at a certain time) alternately aid and problematise the writing up process of the West Africa narratives, and despite the presence of numerous references to his earlier works on imaginary travel, Gide still wants *Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad* to be considered as progress in terms of his *œuvre* – indeed, this harks back to the image of cleansing he

[230] Gide, *Amyntas*, p. 67.
[231] Gide, *Journal*, II, 395.

will later use in the Amrouche interview to describe his motivations behind these texts.

In the previous section of this chapter, Gide's wariness regarding description was highlighted. Gide appeared to be questioning the omissions he believed that he had detected in prior travel accounts centred on the region. It might be noted that, in the case of both West Africa narratives, different modes of representation are invoked by Gide in order to stimulate a richer understanding of the possibilities of description in the reader. In the first passage to be examined, taken from the early stages of the voyage, Gide seems to display a more ambivalent attitude towards representation, praising an economy of description in Conrad:

> Troisième visite aux rapides du Congo [...] Un ciel radieux impose sa sérénité à ce spectacle, plus majestueux que romantique. Par instants, un remous creuse un sillon profond; une gerbe d'écume bondit. Aucun rythme; et je m'explique mal ces inégalités du courant.
> 'Et croiriez-vous qu'un pareil spectacle attend encore son peintre!' s'écrie un des invités, en me regardant. C'est une invite à laquelle je ne répondrai point. L'art comporte une tempérance et répugne à l'énormité. Une description ne devient pas plus émouvante pour avoir mis dix au lieu d'un. On a blâmé Conrad, dans le *Typhon*, d'avoir escamoté le plus fort de la tempête. Je l'admire au contraire d'arrêter son récit précisément au seuil de l'affreux, et de laisser à l'imagination du lecteur libre jeu, après l'avoir mené, dans l'horrible, jusqu'à tel point qui ne parût pas dépassable. Mais c'est une commune erreur, de croire que la sublimité de la peinture tient à l'énormité du sujet. (*VC*, 342–43)

Of particular interest here is the comparison that can be drawn between the notion of 'laisser à l'imagination du lecteur libre jeu' in Conrad, and Gide's treatment of the reader in his travel accounts. Gide's frequent economy of description in the West Africa narratives does not necessarily stem from his stylistic approach; rather, it often occurs because of either the intoxicating or numbing effects his surroundings can be seen to have upon him (examples of which were discussed in the previous section). Indeed, as has been ascertained, Gide also checks himself whenever he leaves the description to the reader's imagination ('Je prends ces notes trop 'pour moi' [...]'). It is particularly in his interests, of course, to avoid leaving 'à l'imagination du lecteur libre jeu' once *Voyage au Congo* begins to develop as a text that both exposes and explores social problems in the region. Another notable aspect of the passage above is Gide's apparent resistance towards the seemingly flattering epithet 'peintre', a suggestion to which he refuses to respond. Just as inflections of his earlier works of

imaginary travel dot the West Africa narratives, however, Gide's focus on painting and the role of the painter provide an example of the vocabulary of representation – terms emanating from the visual arts and theatre, for example – which becomes prominent in the West Africa narratives. Thus, upon seeing a bridge constructed from interwoven lianas on the approach to Abba, Gide notes:

> Rien de plus élégant que cet arachnéen réseau, d'apparence si fragile que l'on s'y aventure en tremblant. Non loin, plongeant dans la rivière, un pandanus gigantesque ajoute à *l'exotisme du tableau*. Et, durant tout le trajet qui nous éloigne si redoutablement, je pense éperdument à des choses de France [...]. (*VC*, 437) (emphasis my own)

The expression 'l'exotisme du tableau' is particularly striking. Gide, in fact, has seemingly moved from beholder to verbalising the visual, 'painting' in words what Nature has framed for him (a role which he appeared to resist earlier on in the narrative). Moreover, speaking of his desire to uncover the machinations of the colonial regime, Gide uses the metaphor of going backstage:

> Je veux passer dans la coulisse de l'autre côté du décor, connaître enfin ce qui se cache, cela fût-il affreux. (*VC*, 402)

But a theatrical metaphor is not solely reserved for the description of the front created by the colonial government and the concessionary companies, who are conspiring in order to cover up their wrongdoings, as evidenced by the passage below:

> Quantité d'arbustes vert cendré, semblables aux saules et aux osiers de France. De même il y a, sur ces bords, des similicressons, des faux épilobes, des imitations de myosotis, des substituts de plantains. On dirait que les acteurs seul ont changé, mais ni les rôles, ni la pièce. (*RT*, 518)

In the passage above, Gide decides to describe a frequent problem he encounters through theatrical terms. Over the course of both travel accounts, we become increasingly accustomed to Gide detecting and voicing disappointing similarities between the African landscape and various European landscapes. In playfully introducing theatrical vocabulary here, Gide is highlighting that the African landscape, when it appears disappointingly familiar to him, comes to *represent* the European landscape he is accustomed to. Thus, instead of 'cresson', 'épilobes', 'myostosis' and 'plantains', Gide sees 'similicressons, des faux épilobes, des

imitations de myostosis, des substituts de plantains'. Indeed, Gide's way of viewing the African landscape here can be connected to the comparison he also makes between a part of this landscape and an *imaginary* landscape that featured in one of his early travel-based works, *Le Voyage d'Urien*. Both Gide's approach and points of reference, then, destabilise the reader, who quickly comes to the desired conclusion that 'rien n'y entre que tamisé'.

Gide's references in his West Africa narratives to his earlier works on both real and imaginary travel experiences demonstrate his interconnection of works based on real and imaginary travel. His exploration of the ways in which real and imaginary travel might interact is accompanied by a vocabulary hinging on modes of representation, one which serves to highlight the difficulties that can arise in textualising one's travel experience.

3.4 Gide's re-engagement, or Curtius and the chasm of colonialism

It has been established that Gide has a tendency to disengage from the voyage he is undertaking, even at points preferring to opt for the inspiration with which immobility – rather than physical progression – might provide him. But the social problems which Gide gradually comes to detect in French Equatorial Africa in fact lead him to *re*-engage in the writing of his travel narrative, giving the project a new focus and, moreover, generating and sustaining the narrative, where before stasis and apathy had begun to take hold. Whereas, in the case of *Ecuador*, Michaux allows his disillusionment to generate content for his travel journal, Gide's disillusionment gives his narrative new purpose – the West Africa narratives evolve into a politically engaged work.

If Gide had already invoked in the opening pages of *Voyage au Congo* the self-sacrificing figure of Curtius falling into the chasm (which also has the effect of mirroring the reader's headfirst absorption into the 'immediacy' of the journey being related), it was to suggest his openness to the possibilities that this gruelling voyage might introduce into his life, whilst also, it might be argued, offering a new alternative

to the long-established 'Heart of Darkness' metaphor.[232] In evoking this image at the beginning of *Voyage au Congo*, Gide shows a willingness to be moulded by this journey, as if it he wanted it to be part of his *formation*, even in middle age.[233] Amar Acheraïou notes, however, that 'Gide explicitly identifies with the Roman hero. He impersonates a modern Curtius and acts as France's colonial conscience, eager to save his country's civilizing mission'.[234] Whilst this chapter has already identified elements of Gide's colonial conscience coming to the fore, the question arises as to whether Gide's invocation of Curtius is indeed connected to a profound desire to 'save the country's civilizing mission'. Indeed, this section will not view the Curtius comparison as representative of Gide sacrificing himself on the altar of a particular cause. It will instead focus on the fact that in evoking Curtius, Gide is also invoking his own ostensibly 'brave' entry into the 'gouffre', the chasm, the abyss that West Africa represents to him.

It is also important to note here that the regions Gide and Allégret were visiting at this time were already in flux, as huge numbers of the native peoples were also on the move. There were large groups of natives fleeing villages for fear of enslavement; abandoned huts therefore become an increasingly frequent sight along the trail for Gide and Allégret. Indeed, Gide becomes gradually more and more sensitive to the plight of enforced travel amongst the natives, uttering a particularly cryptic statement regarding their mass exodus: 'Les gens qui ne possèdent rien, et n'ont rien à quitter, n'ont jamais beaucoup de mal à partir' (*VC*, 433). Later in the narrative, Gide notes:

> Surprise de trouver le village complètement déserté. Le vrai chef en s'enfuyant a entraîné la désertion de tous ceux qui pensaient marquer ainsi leur attachement.
> (*VC*, 442)

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[232] Marcus Curtius, a young *eques*, was a figure in Ancient Rome who sacrificed himself in order to fill a chasm that had opened up in the middle of the Roman Forum. The *auguri* declared that only Rome's most precious thing would seal the chasm; Curtius recognised that this was the courage of its soldiers and threw himself into the abyss, which closed over immediately.

[233] See both Marc Allégret ('Un témoignage de Marc Allégret', in *André Gide–Marc Allégret, Correspondance*, 1917–1949, ed. by Jean Claude and Pierre Masson [Paris: Gallimard, 2005], pp. 845–46 [846]) and Victoria Reid (*André Gide and Curiosity* [Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2009]) for a discussion of Gide's insatiable curiosity.

[234] Amar Acheraïou, 'Pedagogy of Re-Colonisation or the Peaceful Re-Conquest: André Gide's *Voyage au Congo*', in *Rethinking Postcolonialism: Colonialist Discourse in Modern Literatures and the Legacy of Classical Writers*, pp. 158-75 (p. 164).

Gide's ambivalence towards the flight of the natives is particularly noteworthy. His journey is carefully planned and, physically speaking, an arduous undertaking (as evidenced by the large entourage of native porters and guides that supports Gide and Allégret as they travel). Yet the natives flee their homes and livelihood in fear of their lives, and often to escape the kind of servitude Gide and Allégret are ultimately benefitting from on a daily basis. Gide's Congo journey, then, unfolds against a background that combines native peoples fleeing, and being chased by colonial representatives, with his own largely coerced entourage, bringing to mind the division between leisure and functionality in regard to travel highlighted in the opening pages of the text.

Gide's sense of disillusionment regarding this journey, coupled with the way in which this disillusionment promotes the splintering of self-identification, has been important in this chapter. Gide already had wished to stimulate the emergence of a new, revitalised self through visiting these regions. This raises the following question: how will Gide resolve his official status as a government-backed 'witness', a figure complicit in colonialism from the outset, a potential propagandist for imperialism, with that of a writer who tavels, a person who, traditionally speaking, is meant to narrate what he observes upon his journey (as summed up by Michaux's pithy formula in *Un Barbare en Asie*: 'J'arrive en Inde. J'ouvre les yeux. J'écris un livre' [*BA*, 332])? Moreover, how will Gide resolve his new status as ostensible truth-bearer (he is, of course, charged with writing up a report for the French Government) with his long-established status as creator of travel fiction? Indeed, in a letter to the interim general Governor of the A.E.F. dated 6th November 1925, Gide emphasises his awareness of the way in which the truth can easily be deformed when attempts are made to represent it:

> Croyez bien que, déjà sceptique par nature, le peu de mois que j'ai passés en A.É.F. m'a mis en garde contre les 'récits authentiques', les exagérations et les déformations des moindres faits. C'est pourquoi j'ai tenu dans mon premier récit à préciser les noms et les chiffres. (*RT*, 659)

This is Gide reproducing in epistolary form what he had already emphasised in his travel journal:

> Le peu de mois que j'ai passés en A.É.F., m'a déjà mis en garde contre les 'récits authentiques', les exagérations et les déformations des moindres faits. (*VC*, 400)

Moreover, the ambiguity that often underpins Gide's multi-dimensional status in West Africa – he at once embraces the roles of tourist and official colonial representative, beyond the role of writer – often appears to dilute the gravity of his presence:

> Voyageant en simple touriste, je me persuade qu'il peut m'arriver parfois de voir et d'entendre ce qui est trop bas pour l'atteindre.
>
> En acceptant la mission qui me fut confiée, je ne savais pas trop tout d'abord à quoi je m'engageais, quel pourrait être mon rôle, et en quoi je serais utile. A présent, je le sais, et je commence à croire que je ne serai pas venu en vain. (*VC*, 400)

As evident in the citation above, Gide understands that there are certain advantages to being considered a tourist. In fact, in being identified as a tourist, as somebody travelling for pleasure, rather than as an emissary with a specific political agenda, he is on occasion unwittingly made privy to insider information. Gide, therefore, has a heightened awareness of the way facts can be manipulated. This awareness might be understood as one of the principal reasons for the Congo travel journals splitting into two visually distinctive strands – the main body of text which primarily consists of Gide's impressions of his surroundings and of events as they unfold (or are brought to his knowledge) throughout his African voyage, and a series of lengthy explanatory footnotes, some of which were added (and added to) upon Gide's return. These footnotes explain, justify, support and elucidate certain comments and observations present in the main text. The ostensibly statistical and empirical foundations of these footnotes mark them out as Gide at once operating in his (partly self-styled) 'official' capacity, offering first-hand reportage on the current situation,[235] *and* chipping away at the veneer of colonialist righteousness, to which, of course, he also frequently subscribes (the racialist and imperialist discourse often used by Gide in these texts has been explored at length by Anny Wynchank).[236] Yet, at the same time, we might remember Amar Acheraïou's observation:

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[235] We might note that Gide later describes his work as a 'témoignage' in his 1927 article 'La détresse de notre Afrique équatoriale' (*RAM*, 678).

[236] Anny Wynchank, 'Fictions d'Afrique: Les intellectuels français et leurs visions', in *Afriques Imaginaires: Regards réciproques et discours littéraires 17^e – 20^e siècles*, ed. by Philippe-Joseph Salazar and Anny Wynchank (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), pp. 71–87.

> Gide clearly enhances the truth principle of his tale and wants his readers to adhere to it. This skilful strategy should not yet divert the reader from the fact that this narrative is not a political tract with a straightforward message, but a complex, elusive literary account.[237]

Understanding the West Africa narratives, then, hinges on navigating a line between reportage and literature. The reader might at once demonstrate a wariness towards and appreciation of what Gide is presenting in these narratives. However, as noted earlier in this chapter, Gide, in his careful exposition of the constructed nature of travel narratives, encourages such an attitude on the reader's part, not least because of his invocation of early accounts of imaginary travel as points of reference en route.

What can also be seen in both *Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad*, however, is an extraordinary testament to – and a testing of the limits of – the travel journal's fundamental generic hybridity. Gide, as the horror of colonial injustices becomes increasingly apparent, decides to insert statistics as evidence of these injustices. These statistics form the basis of many of the above-mentioned footnotes. The importance of Gide's appendices to *Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad* must also be emphasised here. Similar to the way in which Michaux's appendix to *Ecuador* provides us with insights into what he had experienced in South America but could not, for fear of further disrupting the already faltering rhythm of his travel journal, enter into the main body of text, Gide's appendices comprise an elucidation and extension of several chapters and numerous footnotes in the case of *Voyage au Congo*, and, in the case of *Le Retour du Tchad*, a selection of letters both sent and received on the subject of his West Africa texts. In the case of *Voyage au Congo*, these lengthy additions fashion themselves as a series of appendices to certain *chapters* of the main text. In this instance, therefore, the paratext sees itself as on a par with the main body of text, namely, the chapters which it serves to extend. Moreover, the relegation of additional important information to the footnotes featured in the *Voyage au Congo* appendix allows the main body of text to continue to concentrate in part on Gide's personal search for the exotic. In the case of both travel narratives, the appendices serve as Gide's apology for the demotion of additional information of note, underlining that, upon completing these travel narratives, a return to the horrors

[237] Amar Acheraïou, 'Pedagogy of Re-Colonisation or the Peaceful Re-Conquest: André Gide's *Voyage au Congo*', p. 163.

he has seen is both vital and necessary for his reader. This return to and concentration on the horrors of colonialism in practice is not only the culmination of Gide's West Africa travel writings, but also the culmination of his journey, that is to say, what has given his voyage its enduring socio-historical and documentary value. What had initially proven to be an often depressing and relatively uninspiring place, making Gide almost ache to be stationary, has now, in fact, had the effect of mobilising him and boosting his social engagement (for it might be recalled that Gide had already shown his involvement in social questions regarding the judicial system in *Souvenirs de la Cour d'Assises* [1914]; he also became mayor of La Roque in 1896).[238]

As his journey progresses, Gide's relative kindness towards the surprised yet exceedingly grateful natives gains the respect of several tribal chiefs who tell him their story in the not unrealistic hope that he will try to do something to ease their situation. Gide's dual position here as both colonial representative and sympathetic listener might be contrasted with the response in French and Belgian media to what were on occasion perceived to be his subversive efforts in *Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad*. A 1928 article from the daily newspaper *Paris Midi* was entitled 'La case d'Oncle Gide' – in carrying this title it attempted to posit Gide as a victim of his own sympathy towards the natives (we might think of the image of Curtius sacrificing himself in this instance), a white Uncle Tom, as it were, as well as presumably intending to draw up other contemporary connotations of 'oncle' in metropolitan French culture (a male elder, one who might have an undetermined close relationship to a younger figure, whether blood relative or not; a benefactor whose wealth might have been accrued through colonial or other business interests, an *oncle d'Amérique*).[239] Realising that he is in the unenviable position of also being a representative of those whom the companies have, with regard to the treatment of the indigenous peoples, deceived (that is, Gide's peers in the upper echelons of French society, to which one could add the French nation as a whole), Gide writes:

> Impossible de dormir [...] Il ne me suffit pas de me dire, comme l'on fait souvent, que les indigènes étaient plus malheureux encore avant l'occupation des Français.

[238] See Tom Conner, (ed.) *André Gide's Politics: Rebellion and Ambivalence*, a collection of essays which together serve to trace Gide's evolving political conscience from young adulthood onwards.
[239] See 'Le Dossier de presse de *Voyage au Congo*', *Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide*, 11.58 (1983), pp. 239–49 (p. 239). Marc Allégret also notes that he and his brothers called Gide 'Oncle André'. See 'Un témoignage de Marc Allégret', *Correspondance*, p. 845.

> Nous avons assumé des responsabilités envers eux auxquelles nous n'avons pas le droit de nous soustraire. (*VC*, 401)

This is swiftly followed by a moment of intense self-interrogation:

> [...] [J]e sais des choses dont je ne puis pas prendre mon parti. Quel démon m'a poussé en Afrique? Qu'allais-je donc chercher dans ce pays? J'étais tranquille. A présent je sais: je dois parler. (*VC*, 401)

To contextualise Gide's realisation and to highlight his always ambiguous relationship towards colonialism, a particular aspect of Gide's interaction with his team of native porters will be examined. Where his sympathetic and seemingly earnest engagement with a certain number of the colonised creates a standpoint from which Gide can interrogate the failings of colonialism, the eternal duel of dual, or even multiple contrastive identities, is highlighted by his attitude to his team of porters, which appears to be the attitude of a master towards his servants. Gide employed a large team of native porters to carry not only provisions, but also a huge number of books, as he read voraciously throughout the journey. He outlines what he feels to be a recurring source of exasperation in this regard:

> Ah! pouvoir s'arrêter ici, pouvoir y revenir sans cette escorte de porteurs qui fait s'enfuir au loin tout le gibier... Parfois cette constante compagnie m'importune, m'excède. Désireux de goûter ma solitude et l'enveloppement étroit de la forêt, je presse le pas, m'échappe en courant, tâchant de distancer les porteurs. Mais aussitôt ils partent tous au petit trot pour me rejoindre. Impatienté je m'arrête, les arrête, trace un trait sur le sol qu'ils ne devront dépasser qu'à mon coup de sifflet lorsque je serai déjà loin. Mais un quart d'heure après il faut retourner en arrière les chercher, car ils n'ont pas compris et tout le convoi reste en panne. (*VC*, 397)

It can easily be suggested that this recurring event might also act as a metaphor for the tension between Gide's ambitious view of escape, both physical and ideological, and the inevitable failure of any such desired escape. But Gide also seems to ape, unbeknownst to himself, the perverse symbiotic relationship enforced by the coloniser, where cleanly extricating oneself from an established colonial setup, whether coloniser or colonised, is almost impossible. To repeat Gide's crucial realisation: 'Nous avons assumé des responsabilités envers eux auxquelles nous n'avions pas le droit de nous soustraire' (*VC*, 401). The line drawn by Gide in the ground in the passage above can be seen as an unintentional pointer towards the geographical compartmentalisation central to the colonialist project; in fact, the

episode in its entirety seems analogous to the narrative of colonialism in Africa (the Scramble for Africa or the Partition of Africa, as it was also known, which lasted from the 1880s to 1914). Moreover, the line in the ground here can be seen as representative of Gide's efforts to compartmentalise his day-to-day experiences in his journal – reminiscent of the line drawn under the day's projected aims in the journal central to *Paludes*. Indeed, the episode also displays Gide's attempt to control and distil his experience of the seemingly boundless jungle landscape.

It is also clear in *Voyage au Congo* that Gide evinces certain hesitations regarding his suitability and aptitude for representing native interests, or even adopting the role of potential whistleblower in the light of the actions of both the colonial administration and the concessionary companies in the Congo:

> Mais comment se faire écouter? Jusqu'à présent, j'ai toujours parlé sans aucun souci qu'on m'entende, toujours écrit pour ceux de demain, avec le seul désir de durer. J'envie ces journalistes dont la voix porte aussitôt, quitte à s'éteindre ensuite. (*VC*, 401–402)

In a letter to his translator and friend Dorothy Bussy, dated 21st October 1925, where he speaks of the monopoly held by the concessionary companies, the early signs of a fissure in Gide's self-identification as writer can be noted. Gide informs Bussy that he has sent a letter outlining unjust business practices to Gabriel Hanotaux, a French statesman and former minister of foreign affairs in France, who had been in charge of the country's colonial operations at the turn of the century, and could be seen as an authority on the so-called missions:

> À Paris [Hanotaux] s'était montré pour moi des plus aimables [...] et comme il s'intéresse vivement aux questions coloniales et qu'il est assez puissant je crois, il m'a paru bon de le mettre au courant de certains scandaleux abus dont j'ai pu être témoin, que l'on ignore en France, car ceux qui pourraient en parler ont intérêt à ce qu'on les ignore [...] J'aurais écrit au *Temps*, si je n'avais craint de me voir refuser mon article. C'est plutôt l'affaire de l'*Humanité*, ou du *Quotidien*; mais il faudrait alors mener toute une campagne, et je ne suis pas qualifié pour cela – qui m'entraînerait trop loin et risquerait de me distraire trop de ce qui m'occupe et pour quoi je me sens né.[240]

[240] Gide-Bussy, *Correspondance*, II (1980), 51–52.

Here Gide identifies himself resolutely as a born writer who, either in view of his social standing or personal capabilities, believes that he cannot meddle too much in the affairs of the colony. He also displays an unwillingness to mount any sort of campaign at this stage. Almost in the same breath, however, Gide informs Bussy about the politically charged letter that he has already sent to the influential Hanotaux. Indeed, in Chapter 4 of this thesis, a similar sense of initial self-doubt will be seen to reemerge in Gide's *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, another journey whose unexpected findings put Gide in an ethical dilemma when it comes to relating his travel experience. On the same day that an oblivious Gide pens this letter to Dorothy Bussy, a heinous and atrocious act is committed by colonial officers, presumably sanctioned by the head officer, Georges Pacha. Finding out about this bloodshed seems to provide the desired incentive for Gide to complicate and revisit his identity as a *self*-absorbed writer who travels, since this discovery instantly mobilises him, and accordingly leaves him in no doubt that his writing must both uphold *and* somehow reflect this new social engagement. As Gide will go on to write in a letter addressed to the interim Governor of French Equatorial Africa:

> En acceptant la mission qui me fût confiée, je ne savais trop tout d'abord quel pourrait être mon rôle et à quoi je serais utile… Si cette lettre peut vous servir, je ne serai pas venu en vain. (*RT*, 660)

This statement also reaffirms Gide's realisation of the impossibility of a smooth and effective extrication from France's present situation in West Africa, which, of course, also highlights the impossibility of a return to the pre-colonial. It is therefore a statement that displays Gide's acute understanding that the implications of colonisation will be long-term and its effects a lasting scar to be borne by the peoples of these regions.

3.5 Conclusion

Gide's 'De la détresse de notre Afrique equatoriale', an article published in October 1927 in *La Grande Revue de Paris*, deserves attention in the light of the thematic concerns of this chapter (firstly noting Gide's pointed use of the possessive adjective 'notre' in the title of this piece). Gide writes: 'On ne voyage pas au Congo pour son plaisir. Ceux qui s'y risquent partent avec un but précis' (*RT*, 677). From the opening pages of *Voyage au Congo* it would appear that Gide travelled to the Congo 'pour le

plaisir'.[241] Gide goes on identify himself in this article as 'un voyageur libre', stating that

> Quand, par extraordinaire, un voyageur libre se hasarde là-bas, comme j'ai fait moi-même, sans autre souci que celui de connaître, la relation qu'il rapporte de son voyage ne diffère pas sensiblement de la mienne, où l'on s'étonne de retrouver la peinture des mêmes misères qu'un Auguste Chevalier par exemple dénonçait il y a vingt ans. Rien n'a changé. Sa voix n'a pas été écoutée [...] Je n'ai pas grand espoir que la mienne ait plus de chance de se faire entendre [...] Et c'est exactement ce qui ne manqua pas d'arriver. Dès que l'on vit que mon témoignage risque d'être écouté, l'on s'ingénia à mettre en doute sa valeur; je me vis traité d'esprit léger, d'imagination chimérique, de 'chercheur de tares'... (*RT*, 677–78)

Gide's efforts would eventually ensure that the contracts of the concessionary companies were not renewed; his lengthy campaign therefore produced significant results in French Equatorial Africa. What also might be noted here is Gide's apprehension of the ways in which he is being (mis)represented by those who fervently oppose his campaign. Gide experienced a fruitful identity crisis during his West Africa trip; however, the already multitudinous aspects to his identity that come to the fore over the course of this trip are further distorted by other mantles of identity thrust upon him by opponents to the publication of *Voyage au Congo*: for example, fault-finder, inveterate dreamer. If Gide, departing on this voyage, had as an initial aim 'un bain de nouveauté [...] un bain de jouvence', a re-imagining of his identity, then he had not perhaps fully appreciated that such a personal evolution would also generate epithets from more hostile quarters. What is particularly refreshing, then, is that despite his initial, ambivalent hesitations towards mounting a campaign, Gide's commitment to generating change in French Equatorial Africa remains unwavering upon his return to France.

Gide's acute disappointment and disillusionment with the interactions between the colonial administration and the concessionary companies in French Equatorial Africa did not serve to discourage him from agreeing to undertake a voyage to the USSR in a comparable 'official' capacity ten years later (indeed, Gide would be

[241] Gide's ambiguous use of quotation marks around 'pour le plaisir' in the opening pages of *Voyage au Congo* merits consideration. Is Gide simply reproducing the assessment of his voyage offered by a fellow traveller aboard the *Asie*? Or is he distancing himself in hindsight from the notion of having initially travelled for pleasure?

invited to the USSR as a guest of the Soviet government, who also fostered the hope that he would produce a flattering commentary on the social structure in place). French Equatorial Africa's role in Gide's political mobilisation, and in heightening his social awareness, gave new meaning to his predilection for travel at an age where depressive thoughts of his demise began to take hold.[242] The social problems he encountered there also had the effect of further piquing his interest in the potential for a socialist utopia that Communism seemed to offer. What is particularly important in terms of Gide's voyage through French Equatorial Africa is that he realises at this point in his life that he has an extremely pertinent – indeed, essential – role to play in raising social awareness amongst the readers of his travel texts. He also discovers that he can provoke key players in politics into engaging with his perspectives, whether this involves widely distributing complimentary copies of his texts, or avid letter-writing. Moreover, Gide becomes increasingly aware of the impact of his own literary fame, wholly acknowledging and utilising the respect that he has managed to garner and retain (not without controversy, it must be added) beyond Paris literary circles. In the wake of his West Africa journey, Gide is not afraid to rise to the occasion to ensure that his social standing in France promotes the greater good even further afield. Yet what will perhaps emerge as a surprise in terms of the subsequent Soviet narrative, *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, is that many of Gide's concerns as to his suitability to 'speak out' will resurface. It is Gide's approach towards these concerns and doubts, however, that will inform and generate the Soviet travel narrative alongside the social questions it attempts to raise and explore.

[242] In an entry dated March 6th 1927, Gide writes: 'Trop de projets en tête. Et désir de travailler à tous à la fois. Mon cerveau n'a jamais été plus actif. Mais l'idée de la mort ne me quitte pas un instant'. Gide, *Journal*, II, 25.

CHAPTER 4 – GIDE IN THE U.S.S.R.: TREATISE AND RETREAT OF THE 'FAUX PROPHÈTE'

> O prophète! fais connaître tout ce qui est descendu sur toi à cause de ton Prince; car si tu ne le fais pas, tu n'as pas rempli son message.[243]

> Ce n'est pas tant ce qu'on y dit qui fait la valeur d'un livre, que tout ce que l'on n'y peut pas dire; tout ce que l'on voudrait y dire qui l'alimente sourdement.[244]

4.1 Introduction: 'Littérature engagée' or 'témoignage'?

This chapter explores Gide's 1936 journey to the Soviet Union. Gide recounts and analyses in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* his experiences on this journey; his narrative is constructed upon his return to France. In the light of attacks from Communist Party members, Party sympathisers and the Soviet press, he then goes on in his 1937 work *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* to dissect this initial representation of the journey and further discuss his observations regarding the Soviet Union. The latter text presents itself not merely as an afterthought but as a response to the numerous critics of *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, specifically those who were genuinely unaware of how Communism was operating in the Soviet Union.[245] As Gide notes in the opening lines of *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*: 'A côté des insulteurs, quelques critiques de bonne foi. J'écris ce livre pour leur répondre.'[246]

I will draw several points of comparison between this duo of texts written later in life (Gide was sixty-seven years of age when he undertook his Soviet voyage) and Gide's 1899 text *El Hadj*, examined in Chapter 1 of this thesis. 'Hajj' is the name given to the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and the eponymous narrator of *El Hadj* is recognised as – and I argued, defined as – a traveller. It can be added that, as a pilgrim, he is also defined as the traveller with a purpose, the traveller who has traced a well-worn path. Indeed, Paul Hollander, in his article 'Gide and Soviet Communism', considers Gide's Soviet voyage to be an intellectual pilgrimage. Such a categorisation, I will argue, links Gide's Soviet texts to his previous works on travel; these include works based on real voyages (for instance, the Congo travel accounts) or

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[243] Epigraph from the Quran (*EH*, 328).

[244] Gide, *Caractères*, in *Divers: Caractères – Un esprit non prévenu – Dictées, lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), p. 35.

[245] Dorothy Bussy's 1938 translation of Gide's *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* carries the titles *Afterthoughts: a sequel to Back from the U.S.S.R.* and *Afterthoughts on the U.S.S.R.*

[246] Gide, *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, in *Souvenirs et voyages*, ed. by Pierre Masson, Daniel Durosay and Martine Sagaert, pp. 803–71 (p. 805). Hereafter referred to in the text as (*RAM*).

on imaginary peregrinations (Gide's writings on travel in the 1890s).[247] The alternative title of *El Hadj* is *Le Traité du faux prophète*; the character of El Hadj can be seen to be a 'faux prophète' as he leads the crowd which accompanies him to believe that their Prince is alive and continuing to guide them across the desert, when the Prince has in fact died and has been secretly interred in the desert sands by El Hadj. *El Hadj* explores El Hadj's attempts to understand the misfortune that has befallen him and the value with which his word, now constructed on lies, is invested. The appellation 'faux prophète' might also relate to Gide's assessment of his own position as his Soviet journey unfolds insofar as he too can be viewed as a 'pilgrim' whose pilgrimage is traced by the (written) word. It would seem that Gide, upon his return, hopes to represent the favourable points of the place of pilgrimage to all (and perhaps return a person transformed). However, much like El Hadj, Gide is accorded what turns out to be a particularly arduous mission; unlike El Hadj, however, he finds himself to be in a position where he feels that he cannot but shatter the illusions held dear by the majority of people awaiting his return and his highly esteemed word, admitting the illusions he was also under in the process. Those who refuse to accept his testimony accordingly denounce his word and so Gide still runs the risk of being declaimed a 'faux prophète' by his adversaries, a figure whose word shelters the intent to deceive and break his earlier promises. The revelation that Gide is compelled to make upon his return is that the Communist project has not been an outright success, and is beset by grave flaws which threaten to turn the U.S.S.R. into the very opposite of the hoped-for socialist utopia, that is, a dictatorship. As Gide notes in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*:

> *Dictature du prolétariat* nous promettait-on. Nous sommes loin de compte. Oui: dictature, évidemment; mais celle d'un homme [...] ce n'est point là ce qu'on voulait. Un pas de plus et nous dirons même: c'est exactement ceci que l'on ne voulait pas.[248] (emphasis in original)

Firstly, however, it is essential to outline to what extent Gide felt himself to be engaged with Communism at this point. In a June 1932 entry in his *Journal*, Gide writes:

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[247] Paul Hollander, 'Gide and Soviet Communism', in *André Gide's Politics: Rebellion and Ambivalence*, ed. by Tom Conner (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 161–78 (p. 162).
[248] Gide, *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, in *Souvenirs et voyages*, ed. by Pierre Masson, Daniel Durosay and Martine Sagaert, pp. 745–802 (p. 778). Hereafter referred to in the text as (*R*).

> [...] [C]ommuniste, de cœur aussi bien d'esprit, je l'ai toujours été; même en restant chrétien; et c'est bien pourquoi j'eus du mal à séparer l'un de l'autre et plus de mal encore à les opposer. Je n'y serais jamais parvenu tout seul. Il a fallu gens et événements pour m'instruire. Ne parlez pas ici de 'conversion'; je n'ai pas changé de direction; j'ai toujours marché de l'avant; je continue; la grande différence c'est que, pendant longtemps, je ne voyais rien devant moi, que de l'espace et que la projection de mon propre ferveur; à présent, j'avance en m'orientant vers quelque chose; je sais que quelque part mes vœux imprécis s'organisent et que mon rêve est en passe de devenir réalité.
>
> Au demeurant parfaitement inapte à la politique. Ne me demandez donc point de faire partie d'un Parti.[249]

Not only does Gide emphasise his own resistance to political adhesion here, but he also expresses his delight at the thought of moving towards a particular goal – that is, engaging with what he hopes will be a Communist utopia made real, or the compatibility of his anticipated voyage and the one which he is going to realise. A Communist utopia will therefore be the destination towards which he will venture on what is, at this point, his idealised pilgrimage. There is an echo of his past literary peregrinations in this passage: again, the figure of El Hadj, who is at once unsure of the exact destination towards which his desert pilgrimage is directed, yet certain that he should continue to travel, comes to mind. In noting that '[..] j'avance en m'orientant vers quelque chose; je sais que quelque part mes vœux imprécis s'organisent [...]', Gide also seems to place emphasis on the actual pilgrimage, the voyage itself, through avoiding the disclosure of further specifics about the destination. When El Hadj makes his way across the desert to what he believes to be an oasis, another resonance with the Soviet texts might be discerned. The oasis towards which El Hadj moves turns out to be a mirage caused by a salt deposit, which engenders much consternation and confusion amongst the now increasingly disillusioned crowd of followers. Similarly, the hopes of Gide, exposed before his Soviet voyage – and those of his five companions, Jef Last, Schiffrin, Eugène Dabit, Pierre Herbart and Louis Guilloux – will be dashed by the unexpected social structure (that is to say, one which seems to replicate class hierarchies) and censorship that they encounter in the Soviet Union. Like the travelling crowd in *El Hadj*, they too experience so great a disillusionment that it in fact comes to emblematise their Soviet voyage.

[249] Gide, *Journal*, II, 368.

Gide finds himself to be caught in a difficult moral position with regard to the journey he has willingly undertaken in the U.R.S.S., following an invitation from the Soviet Writers' Union. Gide goes to the Soviet Union arguably as a 'fellow traveller', a person who is interested in Communist ideology in practice; he will even be accorded the honour of delivering an elegy at Maxim Gorky's state funeral in Moscow's Red Square (Gorky, whom Gide had hoped to visit, died just after Gide's arrival in the Soviet Union). Yet Gide's resulting publications upon his return will sever any ties he had had with the Communist Party, as his representation of his journey through the U.S.S.R. finds itself exposing a web of misinformation and propaganda that has thus far managed to stave off discerning public inquiry from Western Europe. In this sense, isolated from the crowd as both a traveller/foreigner amongst them *and* as a dissenter in terms of their proletarian politics, and with the dream of a Communist utopia now appearing unattainable to him, Gide realises that all that remains for him is to bear witness to the truth, as he sees it. This also involves remaining true to himself in his role as a writer. In his capacity as a guest intellectual touring the U.S.S.R, he has been invited by the Soviet Writers' Union with a view to producing a positive report on the Communist utopia supposedly in action in the Soviet Union. Gide, however, is compelled from the core of his being to produce a two-sided yet purposefully ambivalent account of what he has seen – or, as will be explored later on – what he has been *shown* during this voyage.

Secondly, it is necessary to outline Gide's understanding of political engagement in the 1930s. A *Journal* entry written by Gide in January 1948, which in part looks back to his key travel texts of the interwar period, is particularly revealing:

> Valéry, Proust, Suarès, Claudel et moi-même, si différents que nous fussions l'un de l'autre, si je cherche par quoi l'on nous reconnaîtra pourtant du même âge, et j'allais dire: de la même équipe, je crois que c'est le grand mépris où nous tenions l'actualité. Et c'est en quoi se marquait en nous l'influence plus ou moins secrète de Mallarmé. [...] J'écrivais: "J'appelle journalisme tout ce qui intéressera demain moins qu'aujourd'hui." Aussi rien ne me paraît plus absurde à la fois et plus justifié que ce reproche que l'on me fait aujourd'hui de n'avoir jamais su *m'engager*.
>
> Toutefois, lorsque besoin était de *témoigner*, je n'avais nullement craint de m'engager [...] Mais les *Souvenirs de cour d'assises*, non plus que la campagne contre les Grandes Compagnies concessionnaires du Congo, ou que le *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* n'ont presque aucun rapport avec la littérature.[250] (emphasis in original)

[250] Gide, *Journal*, II, 1057–58.

This aspect of Mallarmé's influence resounded with Gide from an early stage; as noted in Chapter 1 in my discussion of *Le Voyage d'Urien*, Mallarmé had freely admitted to Gide his momentary horror at the thought that Gide had actually undertaken the voyage that was to be described in what was then entitled *Voyage au Spitzberg*. In the above extract, the present, however significant its effects on the future, is not to be dissected in the domain of literature; as will be noted later in this chapter, Gide believed that his own literary works ought to be written with an eye towards a future readership, thus always appearing to transcend their epoch. This belief was made credible in his own lifetime when his 1897 book *Les Nourritures terrestres*, which sold a mere 500 copies within the first twenty years of its publication, went on to become a huge success with a subsequent generation in the interwar period.[251] With their focus on current events, then, the travel texts based on his Congo and U.S.S.R. voyages cannot, in Gide's understanding, be admitted as literature. However, in 1924, the year before he departed on his Congo voyage, Gide wrote: 'Chacun de mes livres se retourne contre les *amateurs* du précédent. Ceci pour leur apprendre à ne m'applaudir que pour le bon motif, à ne prendre chacun de mes livres que pour ce qu'il est: une œuvre d'art' (emphasis in original).[252] This chapter suggests that the shift between these two points of view is not as marked as Gide would have it, and that the Soviet texts in fact betray a sense of self-awareness with regard to their construction that has come to be equally emblematic of his other writings on travel, notably, his imaginary voyages. In Chapter 1, the travel text's self-awareness as a literary construct was examined in relation to *Le Voyage d'Urien*, *Paludes* and *El Hadj*. As the travel journal's construction is a theme which will be seen to underpin *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, the present chapter argues that Gide's Soviet travel journals are far from having 'presque aucun rapport avec la littérature', and certainly far from having 'aucun rapport' with Gide's works of fiction. The importance of Jacques Derrida's comments might also be considered at this juncture, for he links Walter Benjamin's account of his 1926-1927 Moscow trip to Gide's Soviet travel accounts:

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[251] Gide discusses this surprising turnaround in the Appendix to *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, noting '[...] l'extraordinaire succès que devait connaître ce livre plus tard et [...] l'influence qu'il exerce sur la jeune génération d'aujourd'hui'(*R*, 454).

[252] Gide, *Divers: Caractères – Un esprit non prévenu – Dictées, lettres*, pp. 33-34.

> [S]ignées par des écrivains, ces œuvres s'intègrent à des corpus tenus pour littéraires [...] elles appartiennent [...] à l'espace dit de l'autobiographie et posent donc tous les problèmes maintenant canoniques des rapports entre autobiographie et littérarité, autobiographie et fictionnalité, autobiographie et référentialité; et ces séquences autobiographiques nous intéressent, nous leur accordons en général du crédit et de l'autorité en premier lieu et peut-être uniquement parce que de tels 'témoignages' sont aussi le fait d'intellectuels-écrivains déjà 'légitimés' dont l'engagement principal est à la fois littéraire et politique.[253]

Derrida raises an important point about the hybrid – but inevitably literary – nature of these travel accounts. Simply by being written by Gide, the established or bona fide ('légitimé') man of letters, the Soviet travel accounts will be given credit in the public domain. Another consequence of Gide writing these travel accounts is that they will always engender a discussion of their literary merit, not least because they occupy a place in his body of work, which is deemed a literary one. Yet it seems that Gide himself relates quite differently to the terms *littérature engagée* and *témoignage*, and feels the need to emphasise this himself. He is not comfortable with the 'littérature' element that is stressed in the term *littérature engagée* (which might be considered to be a literature exploring individual political mobilisation) as evidenced in the above-cited journal entry; rather, his preference is for the vocabulary centred on the word *témoignage*, which connotes the incidental and unavoidable (when one bears witness and attempts to represent faithfully what has been encountered). As Gide remarks: 'Je puis dire que ce n'est pas à moi-même que je m'intéresse, mais au conflit de certaines idées dont mon âme n'est que le théâtre et où je fais fonction moins d'acteur que de spectateur, de *témoin*' (emphasis my own).[254] It seems that Gide does not wish to take centre stage ('acteur') in his exploration of travel in the interwar period, preferring instead to hark back to the distance invoked in Urien's key line in *Le Voyage d'Urien* – 'Il faut toujours répresenter' (*VU*, 187) ('répresenter' being a word that can be linked to 'témoigner'). It is important to note, however, that what underpins Gide's seemingly late entry into a political domain is precisely the fact that he had to overcome his fear of being incompetent outside the world of *littérature*:

> Le sentiment de mon incompétence m'a longtemps retenu de parler de ce qui n'était pas *ma partie*. Il a fallu la guerre pour m'amener à douter de la valeur des 'compétences', pour me persuader qu'un spécialiste peut se blouser comme un autre homme, et que j'avais autant qu'un autre le droit, et même le devoir, de parler.[255]

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[253] Derrida, *Moscou aller-retour* (La Tour-d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 1995), p. 23.
[254] Gide, *Divers: Caractères – Un esprit non prévenu – Dictées, lettres*, p. 31.
[255] Gide, *Journal*, I, 1155–56.

Gide's shift in attitude then comes from his realisation that he has the potential to *disengage* from the field of literature in order to make his voice heard on other matters of importance. This, of course, further problematises the term *littérature engagée* as applicable to his interwar travel accounts. Yet despite the distinctions Gide attempts to make with regard to *littérature engagée*, we ought not to lose sight of the fact that it is Gide's place in the French literary canon which is responsible for the official travel invitations he receives. As already noted, the invitations extended to Gide also implicitly require him to represent his subsequent travel experience; might we then speak of a *témoignage engagé*, a middle ground between Gide's conception of his role ('témoin') and his commitment to *representing* political reality, notwithstanding the role that has been created for him (suggesting perhaps the need for a broader understanding of the notion of 'engagement')?

It can also be suggested that Gide, through the addition of a number of letters and writings from well-placed individuals supporting his standpoint in 'Témoignages' (which comprises a considerable part of the appendix to *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*), embraces the possibility of joining his voice to those of other critics (or witnesses, as he might have it) of the Soviet regime. Moreover, in *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* he takes care to emphasise that he is also voicing the views held by Eugène Dabit (who died during their voyage), further supporting this with the addition of testimonials confirming Dabit's stance from both Herbart and Last. The *témoignage*, then, has the added advantage of potentially aligning itself with other reports from people from a variety of fields (in 'Témoignages', apart from Gide's own letters, there are also writings from Dr. A. Denier, a biologist, and Kléber Legay, a mining chief, amongst others). Gide ensures that he capitalises on this particular advantage in his appendix to *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, a point to which I shall return.

It is important, however, to note that Gide continues to struggle, in a journal entry composed in the aftermath of his U.S.S.R. trip, with the notion of politically engaged literature:

> Mais que penser de ce reproche que [Pierre Naville, whose preface to his brother Claude Naville's study Gide had read in a Gallimard bookshop] fait à toute mon œuvre (jusqu'à ma 'conversion') de ne s'être point laissé influencer par les grands événements sociaux qui se produisaient à l'époque où je l'ai écrite? [...] Pour moi, j'estime [...] que, lorsque les préoccupations sociales ont commencé d'encombrer ma tête et mon cœur, je n'ai plus rien écrit qui vaille. Il n'est pas juste de dire que je demeurais insensible à ces questions; mais ma position à leur égard était la seule que doive raisonnablement prendre un artiste et qu'il doive chercher à garder. Le 'ne jugez point' du Christ, c'est en artiste *aussi* que je l'entends.[256] (emphasis in original)

This is not to say that Gide's conception of ambivalence (the 'ne jugez point' which he believes to be essential in a writer) precludes a final judgement on any given situation; rather, the ambivalent attitude he can be seen to foster is founded on the time *and* space that he allows himself in order to make any observations. As Gide wrote even before his Congo voyage: 'Pour bien juger, il faut s'éloigner un peu de ce que l'on juge, après l'avoir aimé. Cela est vrai des pays, des êtres et de soi-même.'[257] It is only in *returning* (to France, in the case of his real travels) that Gide can begin to do justice to his travel experiences.[258] Although their notable political value and historical importance have been explored by critics, this chapter considers *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* and *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* as travel texts that stand together as a treatise [*traité*] on the concept of returning from one's travels, and the problems of negotiating or writing about the travel experience. The epithet 'faux prophète' might then even be seen to be reclaimed by Gide by virtue of the fact that his observations trace and address the ways in which he came to be denounced by the Soviet Union and Party sympathisers. The two Soviet texts can therefore also be seen as comprising an exploration of the way in which Gide might treat the ideological pathway that he has thus far followed when he has made the decision to retreat along it. In this sense, Gide's Soviet travel accounts bear witness to his *dis*engagement from an ideal, and can be seen to epitomise a failed pilgrimage, where the erstwhile pilgrim has not reached the destination he had envisaged (or had hoped for), and returns with his faith dashed – a trajectory that once again resounds with the journey represented in *El Hadj*.

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[256] Gide, *Journal*, II, 1255.

[257] Gide, *Divers: Caractères – Un esprit non prévenu – Dictées, lettres*, p. 31.

[258] This differs from Gide's treatment of the 'return' in his imaginary peregrinations. For instance, it was argued in Chapter 1 that, in the case of *Le Voyage d'Urien*, the narrator encodes the site of the text's composition, the study-bedchamber, within the sea voyage that follows, thus exposing the 'return' as illusory, whilst underlining the importance of upholding this illusion throughout the main body of the text.

If the travel journal's construction is to the fore in *Retour d'U.R.S.S.*, then a related thematic must also be examined in the course of this chapter. Gide's concentration on new directions (including the possibility of retreat, as we see above), youth and processes of renewal permeates the two U.S.S.R. texts. It might be argued that the older traveller – and Gide has a tendency to address on a regular basis in his travel texts not only his own age but also the issues of age and aging – is in a position in which he can wholly embrace the sense of apartness and exile that both foreign travel and political dissent can create. For, as Gide came to understand with *Le Voyage au Congo*, the travel narrative is a form of writing that can be revisited and reinvigorated (notably, in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* and *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* he refers back to *Le Voyage au Congo* at several points). The travel narrative can be written upon one's return; it can be added to/extended or, if the role of *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* is taken into account, a travel narrative can be retouched; touched upon once again in the author's body of work, it may be said.[259] Moreover, it can be argued that Gide, in his supplementary text *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, further problematises what can be categorised as the traditional 'aller-retour' journey model (regardless of whether the travel is actually undertaken, or imaginary). Firstly, unlike *Le Voyage au Congo*, we are not privy to the 'aller' leg of Gide's trip. The destination, that is, the Soviet Union, is the illusory starting point of the first text; however, in fact, from the title page, or even the book cover, the return point is emphasised as the textual *point de départ*. Moreover, Gide's complex return, which in this instance can be seen to signify the beginning of a writing up process that culminates in the publication of *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, turns out not to be, however, the beginning *and* end of his literary journey, but rather ends up acting as a *point de départ* for a *new* exploratory text, that of *Retouches*. Gide proves himself cognisant of the fact that his socially aware 'non-literary' travel accounts constitute not only an ostensible break within his literary corpus (as noted earlier), but also a move towards fighting his own physical demise. As he writes in 1932: 'Si les questions sociales occupent aujourd'hui ma pensée, c'est aussi que le démon créateur s'en retire. Ces questions n'occupent la place que l'autre ne l'ait déjà cédée. Pourquoi chercher à se surfaire? refuser de constater en moi [...]: une indéniable

[259] See also Martine Sagaert's detailed description of Gide's writing process. Martine Sagaert and Peter Schnyder, *André Gide: l'écriture vive* (Pessac: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 2008).

diminution?'[260] Moreover, Gide, in choosing to draw certain parallels amongst the outcomes of this particular voyage and those of his journey through French Equatorial Africa (undertaken a decade earlier), invites his reader to understand his position in the Soviet Union in the light of his Congo voyage:

> Ceux qui m'approuvaient de chercher, au Congo, quittant l'auto des gouverneurs, à entrer avec tous et n'importe qui en contact direct pour m'instruire, me reprocheront-ils d'avoir apporté en U.R.S.S. un semblable souci et de ne me laisser point éblouir? (*R*, 751)

This anachronistic approach to navigating the present project of textualisation, whereby the reader is invited to understand the present travel narrative by means of an earlier travel narrative, is characteristic of Gide. Furthermore, the links that connect Gide's Congo travel accounts to his Soviet travel writing reflect the ideological flux in which Gide finds himself at this time. His Congo journey made him aware of some of the problems inherent to capitalism and arguably pushed him forward on his Communist journey. Yet, although Gide will change direction with regard to Communism over the course of his Soviet travels, his Congo accounts are still used by him to support the points of view he develops in the U.S.S.R. texts. Once again, Gide's ambivalence can be ascertained. Jean-Jacques Brochier sheds further light on this:

> [...] Gide, même engagé, accueille toujours avec une certaine sympathie les arguments de la partie adverse [...] La force de Gide, c'est sa propension au dialogue; mais c'est sa faiblesse aussi puisque ce dialogue l'amène toujours à ne revenir qu'avec réticence à son propre point de vue. Enfin [...] Gide est toujours tenu par cette nécessité morale de témoigner. Il doit dire ce qu'il a vu, aussi bien au Congo et au Tchad qu'en U.R.S.S. Qu'importe pour lui si les deux témoignages vont en sens contraire. Gide ne croit pas tant à la vérité intellectuelle qu'à la réalité de ce qu'il voit.[261]

Gide embraces the ideological change of direction because, for him, it can mark a potentially more truthful representation. Yet there can be no doubt that going back on oneself has the potential to create textual chaos. As David Scott writes: 'Far [...] from clarifying or confirming a theory or its political realisation, travel deepens Gide's confusion in relation to the utopian/dystopian status of Stalinist USSR, where he is

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[260] Gide, *Journal*, II, 1139.

[261] Jean-Jacques Brochier, 'Gide ou le scandale permanent', *Magazine littéraire*, January 1968, 20-22 (p. 22).

confronted, not with answers but with further questions [...]'[262] Alan Sheridan notes that the 'apparent confusion' of the *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* 'may mask three possibly linked strategies', which he describes as follows:

> [...] first, the progress from delighted approval to bitter criticism follows the actual progress in Gide's mind over the nine weeks he spent in the Soviet Union; second, it shows that Gide is a reluctant critic, not one looking for material to make an attack; third, it lulls the pro-Soviet reader into a false sense of security, gradually exposing him to doubts that, in more hostile hands, he would not have entertained.[263]

It can be argued, however, that Gide more than compensates for his seeming reticence towards retracing his steps in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, in feeling morally obligated to revisit and clarify his own previously held views through the further exposition of his errors of judgement (as well as a more detailed exploration of the Soviet Union's problems) in *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* In this text, Gide not only exposes the role in which he had been 'engaged', but also highlights the difficult and particularly serious nature of his ideological divergence: '[...] [J]e ne demandais qu'à me laisser séduire, pour en séduire d'autres à mon tour. Et, comme il est fort agréable de séduire et d'être séduit, je voudrais que ceux que j'ai nommés [Grenier, Pons and Alessandri, who had also travelled through the U.S.S.R. and had denounced Gide's representation of the current situation] se persuadent que, pour protester contre cette séduction, il faut que j'aie de bien fortes raisons; et que je ne le fais pas, comme on l'a dit, 'à la légère'' (*RAM*, 808-9). Gide's purported difficulty in navigating his way through the confusion engendered by his change in ideological direction throughout the course of his travel accounts renders a consideration of the construction of Gide's Soviet travel journals necessary.

4.2 The travel journal 'under construction'

In his preface to Yvon's 1938 text *L.U.R.S.S. telle qu'elle est*, Gide writes:

> On ne construit rien de solide sur le mensonge. Il importe de voir les choses comme elles sont: Le peuple est aujourd'hui plus malheureux en U.R.S.S. qu'il n'a jamais été, plus malheureux et moins libre que dans n'importe quel autre pays. "En 1917, le peuple russe avait vraiment fait sa révolution jusqu'au bout; l'histoire qui reste à écrire est celle de la façon dont il se l'est laissé voler", écrivait Yvon.[264]

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[262] David Scott, *Semiologies of Travel: From Gautier to Baudrillard*, p. 127.
[263] Sheridan, *André Gide: A Life in the Present*, p. 508.
[264] Gide, *Littérature engagée* ed. by Yvonne Davet (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), pp. 161–62.

Gide's use of the verb 'construire' in this preface is particularly telling, for not only does it indicate a commitment on his part to avoiding the shaky foundations of untruths and propaganda, but it also draws up the criticism that was frequently levelled against Gide's Soviet writings – that he had not respected the fact that the U.S.S.R. was still under construction. In fact, Gide had aimed to show through his two Soviet texts that the U.S.S.R. was developing in ways that defied and even condemned its revolutionary foundations:

> On aimerait pouvoir penser qu'un débordant amour des hommes, ou tout au moins un impérieux besoin de justice, emplit les cœurs. Mais une fois la révolution accomplie [...], il n'est plus question de cela, et de tels sentiments, qui d'abord animaient les premiers révolutionnaires, deviennent encombrants, gênants, comme ce qui a cessé de servir. Je les compare, ces sentiments, à ces étais grâce auxquels on élève une arche, mais qu'on enlève après que la clef de voûte est posée. (*R*, 774)

The confusion from which Gide attempts to construct his two Soviet travel accounts was discussed briefly in the first section of this chapter. It is important to note that this underlying confusion bears on the way the Soviet travel texts are constructed. As Derrida writes:

> Il me semble bien qu'il n'y ait pas d'autre exemple, dans l'histoire de la culture humaine, de types d'œuvres qui, comme ces *Retours de l'URSS* entre octobre 1917 et avant-hier, se lient à une séquence unique et finie, irréversible et non répétable d'une histoire politique; et *se lient à cette séquence dans cela même qui soude le fond à la forme*, la sémantique ou la thématique à la structure du récit de voyage ou du témoignage autobiographique.[265] (emphasis my own)

Indeed, Gide chooses to highlight, at intervals, the difficulties behind writing up his thoughts on his Soviet travels in the texts he produces. He emphasises that '[i]l m'est extrêmement difficile d'apporter de l'ordre dans ces réflexions, tant les problèmes, ici, s'entrecroisent et se chevauchent'. (*R*, 427) (Alan Sheridan, however, notes that Gide, back in Cuverville, in fact worked 'with unaccustomed speed' on *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*[266]) It is worth noting that Walter Benjamin, in a letter to the sculptor Jula Radt written during his Moscow trip, elaborates a similar difficulty in approaching the writing up process (in these lines, the basis for the criticism levelled at Gide regarding the Soviet Union's *ongoing* construction can also be discerned):

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[265] Derrida, *Moscou aller-retour*, p. 18.
[266] Sheridan, *André Gide: A Life in the Present*, p. 504.

> Don't imagine that it is easy to report on things here. I will have to work a great deal on what I am seeing and hearing if I am to give it some sort of shape. In the current state of affairs, the present – even though it be fleeting – is of extraordinary value. Everything is being built or rebuilt and every moment poses very critical questions.[267]

In this letter Benjamin also proclaims that he 'cannot assess all of this; basically, the situation here *enables and requires one to take on a position within it*, even though this might be a sceptical position in many respects; from the outside, all you can do is observe it. It is totally impossible to predict what's going to come of all this in Russia. Perhaps a truly socialist community, perhaps something entirely different. The battle that is going to decide this is still in progress' (emphasis my own).[268] Benjamin's accentuation here of the need to 'take on a position' within Soviet society, along with his recognition of the fact that 'from the outside, all you can do is observe it', is particularly relevant in terms of Gide's later ambivalence towards the U.S.S.R. For how might an outsider like Gide establish a definitive position on the U.S.S.R. if the Soviet Union is still undergoing construction? Gide's ambivalent approach can be seen, in fact, to respect the Soviet Union's unfinished state in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, as will be seen; it is not until *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* that he fully condemns the way in which the Soviet Union has been developed. Yet it is important to note that establishing outsider status becomes problematic when it concerns a 'fellow traveller' on a pilgrimage to the Soviet Union. Derrida chooses to emphasise 'l'unicité historique de la série des œuvres du genre *Back from Moscow, in the USSR*' and underlines that 'ce ne sont pas des récits de 'voyage' à l'étranger, dans des pays lointains à la culture inconnue, mais des voyages vers un nouveau modèle du 'chez soi' à venir, de la Révolution à importer, vers ce que Gide [...] appelle une 'patrie d'élection' [...]'.[269] However, as the construction of this new spiritual 'homeland' is still underway, Gide cannot fully appraise it, let alone integrate himself into it in a meaningful way. He can simply note (as Benjamin did in his *Moscow Diary*) that 'L'U.R.S.S. est 'en construction', il importe de se le redire sans cesse. Et de là l'exceptionnel intérêt d'un séjour sur cette immense terre en gésine: il semble qu'on y assiste à la parturition du futur' (*R*, 750). The U.S.S.R. is interpreted as having the potential to develop before Gide's very eyes, with parturition denoting the process

[267] Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, p. 127.
[268] Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, p. 127.
[269] Derrida, *Moscou aller-retour*, pp. 39-40.

(rather than the act) of bearing offspring. In accordance with the birth-related image used, Gide's perception of the reality he experiences in the Soviet Union germinates and develops as his journey unfolds. Alan Sheridan notes that '[i]n Africa, with little to do for long stretches of time, Gide kept a copious diary [...] In the Soviet Union, [Gide] and his friends were bombarded with time-consuming hospitality and tours of inspection. They were, too, actually afraid to make detailed notes, knowing that these might well fall into the hands of the secret police'.[270] As Martine Sagaert points out, Gide happened to keep a series of encoded and particularly brief notes during the journey (which remain unpublished until 1997); these were used upon his return to France as a *point de départ* in the construction of *Retour de l'U.S.S.R.*[271] In part echoing the observations by Benjamin cited above, Derrida comments that Gide's experience in the U.S.S.R. 'est celle d'une 'construction' dont on ne peut décider d'avance si elle accouchera ou non du 'futur', si l'incarnation de l'universel y aura lieu ou non'.[272] Gide's travel journal, then, can be seen to be a 'texte en gésine', one which reflects the Soviet Union's sense of uncertainty about the future path it will take. As Derrida notes: '[l]'être 'en construction' du texte gidien, la carte et la charte de son parcours, de son voyage, de son trajet, de son transfert, est analogue à l'être 'en construction' de l'URSS [...]'.[273] Moreover, the birth-related imagery deployed by Gide here points up his emphasis on renewal and youth, a theme that will be explored more fully in the next section of this chapter.

Even if the transitory state of the Soviet Union is respected and a note of uncertainty about the U.S.S.R.'s future sounded in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, Gide displays a heightened awareness from the outset that the observations that he presents in his Soviet travel accounts are founded only on what the administrators were happy to show him during the course of his stay: 'Je livre ici mes réflexions personnelles sur ce que l'U.R.S.S. prend plaisir et légitime orgueil de montrer et sur ce que, à coté de cela, j'ai pu voir.' (*R*, 751) This clarification is a major step in Gide's navigation of the confusion engendered by his Soviet experience. In distancing himself somewhat from his travel experience by highlighting its micromanaged nature, Gide can, in fact, *maintain* his outsider status and, instead of coming down on one side of the argument

[270] Sheridan, *André Gide: A Life in the Present*, p. 508.
[271] See Sagaert and Schnyder, *André Gide: l'écriture vive*.
[272] Derrida, *Moscou aller-retour*, p. 68.
[273] Derrida, *Moscou aller-retour,* p. 68.

or another, finds himself in a position to develop a resolutely ambivalent attitude in these two texts. Alerting the reader to his agenda, an anatomy of this ambivalence is outlined in the 'avant-propos' to *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*:

> C'est témoigner mal son amour que le borner à la louange et je pense rendre plus grand service à l'U.R.S.S. même et à la cause que pour nous elle représente, en parlant sans feinte et sans ménagement. C'est en raison même de mon admiration pour l'U.R.S.S. et pour les prodiges accomplis par elle déjà, que vont s'élever mes critiques; en raison aussi de ce que nous attendons encore d'elle; en raison surtout de ce qu'elle nous permettrait d'espérer. (*R*, 751)

In writing the above, Gide had already suspended his belief that the U.S.S.R. is a viable 'patrie d'élection'. For Gide, there needs to be a *décalage* in terms of this journey and its digestion (which he reserves for his return to France), that is, a distance opened up between the trip itself and his analysis of it (see the above comments on the way in which Gide's impressions germinate over the course of his voyage). Derrida elucidates the potential trajectory and the ensuing predicament of the writer returning from the Soviet Union:

> [...] c'est peut-être la trajectoire de la plupart de ces "retours de Moscou en URSS": on y va prêt à expliquer, au retour, aux amis et sympathisants, pourquoi et comment on n'en est pas revenu tant c'est admirable, puis on en revient et il faut "retoucher" et dire à quel point il a bien fallu en revenir en revenant de loin. Et c'est toujours amer. D'autant plus qu'on pensait ne pas avoir à en revenir puisqu'on n'allait pas là-bas, à l'étranger (*fort*) mais ici, chez soi (*da*), dans une "patrie d'élection".[274]

Gide, however, begins to 'return' to his senses before his departure from Russia (as his notebooks will also testify); *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* is not a radical departure from or reworking of *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, but a text which in fact bolsters and further validates its predecessor. Moreover, throughout *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* Gide also revisits several statements that he had made prior to his Soviet voyage. The following observation is of acute importance to the present discussion, as it seems to offer a perspective on the writer figure that can be extended to Gide himself:

> J'écrivais avant d'aller en U.R.S.S.:
>
> Je crois que la valeur d'un écrivain est liée à la force révolutionnaire qui l'anime, ou plus exactement (car je ne suis pas si fou que de ne reconnaître de valeur artistique qu'aux écrivains de gauche): à sa force d'opposition [...] Dans notre forme

[274]Derrida, *Moscou aller-retour*, p. 45.

> de société, un grand écrivain, un grand artiste, est essentiellement anticonformiste. Il navigue à contre-courant. (*R*, 779)

Gide's Soviet texts are consciously operating 'à contre-courant' (an image which also, rather aptly, has the potential to suggest a marked and perhaps unexpected change in direction). Yet, despite his eloquent elucidation of the revolutionary aspect inherent in many 'grands écrivains' in this particular passage, Gide will still go on to express understandable fears about how his own travel text will be received upon *its* publication:

> Et déjà commençait à m'étreindre une angoisse encore inconnue: de retour à Paris que saurais-je dire? Comment répondre aux questions que je pressentais? L'on attendait de moi certainement des jugements tout d'une pièce. Comment expliquer que, tour à tour, en U.R.S.S., j'avais eu (moralement) si chaud, et si froid? En déclarant à nouveau mon amour allais-je devoir cacher mes réserves et mentir en approuvant tout? Non; je sens trop qu'en agissant ainsi je desservirais à la fois l'U.R.S.S. même et la cause qu'elle représente à nos yeux. Mais ce serait une très grave erreur d'attacher l'une à l'autre trop étroitement de sorte que la cause puisse être tenue pour responsable de ce qu'en U.R.S.S. nous déplorons. (*R*, 785)

Gide's inclusion of his fears in the conclusion of the main body of text not only further highlights the ambivalence of his attitude (he expressly wishes not to injure the U.S.S.R. and the cause that it still represents, whilst maintaining that he cannot lie about what he has encountered) but also serves as an exposition of the thought process behind this ambivalence. In addition, the germ of *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* can already be discerned in the line 'Comment répondre aux questions que je pressentais?' Gide's second text will from the outset respond to the perceived lacunae of *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*: 'Il m'avait paru inutile d'encombrer mon livre [*Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*] de rapports, de chiffres, de statistiques; d'abord parce que je m'étais fait une règle de ne me servir de rien que je n'eusse vu moi-même, ou entendu. Ensuite parce que je ne me fie pas beaucoup aux chiffres officiels. Et surtout parce que ces chiffres, ces 'tableaux' (que j'ai du reste étudiés), on pouvait les trouver ailleurs' (*RT*, 808). Gide will go on to bolster his viewpoint through dissecting the statistics he has obtained. As many figures do not match up or even, in some instances, follow logic, *Retouches à mon Retours de l'U.R.S.S.* cleverly manages to uphold its reservations about the Soviet Union in utilising the official material that the Soviet Union itself provides. Moreover, as David Scott notes: '[...] additional *témoignages*, mostly unsolicited, are added further to widen the basis of judgement

and assessment.'[275] As previously noted in this chapter, these *témoignages* emerge from a variety of backgrounds and situations. In introducing a number of dissenting voices into *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, Gide creates a distance between his own writing and the reader towards the end of this text that allows us the space to contemplate and digest his own observations that have gone before. The organisation of the text, however, means that we are also exposed to a series of *témoignages* that serve to shape a favourable perception of Gide's contribution.

4.3 Representing youth

In the prologue to *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, Gide refers to the Homeric hymn on the Demeter myth. Demeter, the goddess of fertility and of the harvest, is about to breathe immortality into the infant Demophon (she bends over him 'comme sur l'humanité future' [*R*, 747]). In secret, she lays him upon a bed of embers in a ritual that will eventually make him into a god. On this occasion, the child's mother, Queen Metaneira, rushes in and saves the child from the embers, but in so doing, unwittingly undoes all of Demeter's work, preventing Demophon from attaining immortality. Over the course of Gide's text we quickly come to understand that this prologue may be seen to operate as an allegory for the way the Revolution has unfolded in the Soviet Union; the mother (representing the leaders of the Soviet Union) has misunderstood the challenging yet ultimately edifying work that must be done in order to achieve greatness (a Communist utopia) and thus, can be seen (whether unwittingly or not) to have failed her child (the people of the Soviet Union – let us not forget that, in the words of Gide, 'une société encore très jeune' [*R*, 784*n*] is in question).[276] If we are to adopt such a reading of this prologue, it can be said that Gide, from the outset, is implying a critique of the Soviet leadership in exposing Queen Metaneira's well-meaning but ultimately destructive interference. In the myth itself, Metaneira's misapprehension of events is considered to be genuine; in using this myth Gide also seems to avoid an outright condemnation of the potential motives of Stalin and his inner circle. However, the fact that Metaneira is a queen, at the *head* of a monarchical class system, must not go unremarked in Gide's observation regarding the power-hungry actions of the Communist vanguard. This prologue also

[275] David Scott, *Semiologies of Travel: From Gautier to Baudrillard*, p.127.
[276] Helen Watson-Williams, in her work *André Gide and the Greek Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), sees Gide's use of this myth as illustrative of 'an abortive social experiment' (p.108).

introduces a theme which will go on to underpin Gide's textual exploration of his Soviet journey. This thematic is Gide's interest in what he sees to be the key role of young people in, as he notes, a still relatively young society. At numerous points throughout this text Gide will speak of how the young are engaging with – and reacting to – the Communist model of living. Their seemingly unbridled joy gives him pleasure until he realises that they are very often mouthpieces for Communist propaganda; moreover, he sees that they are even more convinced of their superiority over foreign countries than Soviet adults (this is in direct opposition to the cultivation of a sense of equality and an understanding of universality amongst the young that Gide had wholeheartedly expected to encounter). This realisation will be the cause of some consternation to Gide, who identifies young people as central to the future of culture itself. In his 'Discours aux étudiants de Moscou', which appears in the appendix to *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, he writes:

> Jeunes gens de la Russie nouvelle, vous comprenez maintenant pourquoi je vous adressais si joyeusement mes *Nouvelles Nourritures*; c'est que vous portez en vous l'avenir. L'avenir ne viendra pas du dehors; l'avenir est en vous. Et non point seulement l'avenir de l'U.R.S.S., car de l'avenir de l'U.R.S.S. dépendront les destins du reste du monde. L'avenir, c'est vous qui le ferez. (*R*, 791)

In this declaration, despite its emphasis on the seeds of a future culture being already present in the Soviet youth (thus carrying a suggestion of a new departure or a clean break with the past), Gide in fact brings attention back to the hereditary. In *Les Nouvelles Nourritures*, he writes: 'O toi pour qui j'écris – que j'appelais autrefois d'un nom qui me paraît aujourd'hui trop plaintif: Nathanaël [the addressee of *Les Nourritures terrestres*], que j'appelle aujourd'hui: camarade [...] J'ai vécu; maintenant, c'est ton tour. C'est en toi désormais que se prolongera ma jeunesse. Je te passe pouvoir. Si je te sens me succéder, j'accepterai mieux de mourir. Je reporte sur toi mon espoir'.[277] In drawing attention to succession here, Gide's narrator is implying the continuing importance of his own role (in that he is the one to pass on a literary inheritance to his successor), whilst ensuring that his own presence will endure precisely because of what he has passed on. This wily defiance of – and resistance towards – death manifesting itself in one's art, at a time when death might become a

[277] *Les Nouvelles Nourritures*, in *Romans et récits: Œuvres lyriques et dramatiques*, II, 747-94 (p. 792).

more pressing concern in one's life, is all the more striking given the sustained emphasis on youth in both Soviet texts.

A 1933 letter entitled 'À la jeunesse de l'U.R.S.S', reproduced in *Littérature engagée*, is particularly revealing, given that Gide will go on to use the word 'renouveau' in his foreword to *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* In this open letter to the Soviet youth, Gide writes:

> Jeunes gens de l'U.R.S.S., de tout cœur j'étais avec vous dès avant votre avènement dans l'histoire. Mais ce qui devait devenir, grâce à vous, réalité, ne m'apparaissait encore qu'utopie. Je doutais qu'une réalisation fût aussitôt possible, de ce que j'osais à peine entrevoir. Voilà pourquoi ce que vous apportez à notre vieux monde de jeune, de vivace et de neuf, mon cœur l'accueille avec reconnaissance: des raisons de dévouement enthousiaste qui redonnent du goût à la vie.[278]

It seems that the young are eulogised here precisely for what they have the potential to bring to 'notre vieux monde'. Gide also emphasises the way in which young people might give him – and the older generation he represents – a new zest for life.

Elsewhere in his speech to the students in Moscow, Gide accentuates what he claims to be his long-time principle of writing for a future readership; he suggests that, in creating a work, its potential longevity is to the fore of his mind. He writes:

> J'allais me répétant: eux à qui mes livres s'adressent ne sont pas encore nés, et j'avais cette impression douloureuse mais exaltante de parler dans le désert. On parle fort bien dans le désert, alors qu'aucun écho ne risque de déformer le son de la voix; alors qu'on n'a pas à se préoccuper du retentissement de ses paroles et que rien d'autre ne les incline qu'un souci de sincérité. (*R*, 790-91)

Gide cites in this speech the success his 1897 work *Les Nourritures terrestres* had with the young generation in the interwar period. His invocation, at this juncture, of his fin-de-siècle writings of travel is telling; it hints at the possibility of discerning a connection between the Soviet narratives and the imaginary voyages of the 1890s. This would be an unfavourable link, perhaps, if we were to recall the failures, mishaps and even deceit that came to emblematise the journeys represented in *Voyage d'Urien*, *Paludes*, and *El Hadj*.

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[278] Gide, *Littérature engagée*, ed. by Yvonne Davet (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), pp. 26-27.

In 1928, in an interview with Walter Benjamin (which shall be discussed further in the next section), Gide also highlights the importance that he attaches to the notion of a future readership: 'My work seems a little like a thicket from which my distinguishing features emerge only with difficulty. I accept this patiently. I write only to be reread. I have confidence in the future that will follow my death. Only death will drive the figurations in my work out into the open. Only then will its unity become unmistakable.'[279] Gide also uses the image of a forest in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, which is reminiscent of the thicket evoked here, in order to describe the motivation behind his approach to writing up his travel experience: 'La forêt qui m'y attire, affreusement touffue et où je me perds, c'est celle des questions sociales' (*R*, 759). This representation contrasts with the possibility of Gide allowing himself to be inspired by the variety of landscapes he encounters. The metaphorical forest of pertinent social issues might then be seen to refer to what Gide in 1928 describes as the 'thicket' of hidden potentialities in his body of work. Gide also appears to reappropriate in a 1949 interview with Jean Amrouche an image he uses in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* to describe the way in which he relates to the inhabitants of the Soviet Union: 'Dans cette foule, je me plonge; je prends un bain d'humanité' (*R*, 761). This image anticipates the striking 'bain de jouvence' image Gide uses in the Amrouche interviews to describe the motivation behind his long-anticipated visit to French Equatorial Africa. Indeed, it is worth noting that Gide, prior to his trip to the Congo, had written: 'On a dit que je cours après ma jeunesse. Il est vrai. Et pas seulement après la mienne. Plus encore que la beauté, la jeunesse m'attire, et d'un irrésistible attrait. Je crois que la vérité est en elle; je crois qu'elle a toujours raison contre nous. Je crois que loin de chercher à l'instruire, c'est d'elle que nous, les aînés, devons chercher instruction.'[280] The 'bain de jouvence' image, then, is not simply representative of an emotional rejuvenation that could possibly be brought about by fulfilling a lifelong travel goal in one's later years, but might also be seen as indicative of Gide's openness towards the intellectual exchange that can take place between himself and young people, regardless of their provenance. If Gide believes in the power of young people in general to instruct him, what, then, do the young people of the Soviet Union – seemingly further privileged in his eyes insofar as they carry the seeds of the future of humanity – encountered by

[279] Walter Benjamin, 'Conversations with André Gide', in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, I (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 91–97 (p. 95).
[280] Gide, *Incidences* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), p. 94.

Gide during his trip appear to teach him? With regard to the children he meets in the 'campements de pionniers', Gide remarks: 'Leur regard est clair, confiant; leurs rires sont sans malignité, sans malice; on pourrait, en tant qu'étranger, leur paraître un peu ridicule: pas un instant je n'ai surpris, chez aucun d'eux, la moindre trace de moquerie'(*R*, 754). Gide displays an awareness here of how *he* might be perceived by the native inhabitants; as his journey progresses, he gradually becomes cognisant of the fact that the young people encountered manifest what is a *collective* self-consciousness regarding the way in which the foreigner sees them; indeed, the way in which they appear to the foreigner seems to be a primary concern of theirs. Gide gives the following example: encountering a number of girls in the children's park, he notes that they are not interested to hear if there are such parks in France. Instead, they press him to discover if 'nous savons en France qu'ils ont en U.R.S.S. d'aussi beaux jardins d'enfants' (*R*, 768).

Yet, despite highlighting the influence the young might have on their elders, Gide, in conversation with Benjamin, also displays a heightened awareness of his own power to influence the younger generation, particularly in relation to the way in which they might conceive of travel. Gide declares: '[i]f I have had any influence on the younger generation [...] it lies in the fact that the French are now beginning to show an interest in foreign countries and languages, whereas previously they displayed only indifference and indolence. Read Barrès' *Voyage de Sparte* and you'll know what I mean. What Barrès sees in Greece is really France, and where he does not see France, he pretends he has seen nothing at all'.[281] Even though Gide criticises Barrès's emphasis on France at the expense of a thorough exploration of his host country, Greece, later in this chapter it will be shown that one of the most remarkable outcomes of *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* happens to be Gide's renewed focus on the merits of French society towards the end of this work.

Moreover, Gide once again brings into focus the perceived importance of his influence on young people when he speaks of how he refused to recognise as his own the public speeches he delivered over the course of his voyage. Gide protests: 'Ne m'a-t-on pas fait déclarer que je n'étais ni compris, ni aimé par la jeunesse française

[281] Walter Benjamin, 'Conversation with André Gide', p. 94.

[…]!' (*R*, 777n). As we will see in the next section of this chapter, Gide is appalled – although perhaps not altogether surprised – by the way in which his words are translated and retouched by Soviet officials. Yet it is not only the fact that he has been misrepresented on an ideological level that provokes his outrage in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*; rather, as evident in the above citation, it is the very idea that his relationship to the *young* people of France might have been knowingly misrepresented to his Soviet interlocutors that seems to incite Gide's most indignant reaction.

Gide's interest in the young can also be discerned in the terms and imagery he uses in his Soviet travel accounts. For instance, in the foreword to *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, he chooses to highlight the renewal that has ostensibly taken place in the Soviet Union: 'Là-bas une expérience sans précédents était tentée qui nous gonflait le cœur d'espérance et d'où nous attendions un immense progrès, un élan capable d'entraîner l'humanité tout entière. Pour assister à ce *renouveau*, certes il vaut la peine de vivre, pensais-je et de donner sa vie pour y aider. Dans nos cœurs et dans nos esprits nous attachions résolument au glorieux destin de l'U.R.S.S. l'avenir même de la culture […]' (*R,* 749) (emphasis my own). Later, when speaking of the systematic denegation of religion in the U.S.S.R. as a key element in this process of renewal, Gide notes: '[…] [Je] comprends qu'on ait éprouvé le besoin de vidanger une bonne fois tout cela; mais […] *on a jeté l'enfant avec l'eau du bain.* […] Et si maintenant j'entends dire que, par esprit d'accommodement, par tolérance, l'on refond des cloches, j'ai grand-peur que ceci ne soit un commencement, que la baignoire ne s'emplisse à nouveau d'eau sale…. l'enfant absent' (*R*, 796) (emphasis in original). In this instance, Gide uses a well-known German saying (which has also passed into common usage in English), centring on the image of the infant, in order to represent the possibility of this renewal (the birth of the Soviet Union out of the 1917 Revolution) ultimately failing. If in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* Gide initially hoped for a 'bain d'humanité' to be representative of his Soviet experience, he now realises in *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* that he must instead focus on what threatens the survival of the infant Soviet Union. In fact, *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* can be seen to offer itself not only as an exploration of youth in relation to the Soviet Union, but also of Gide's ideas pertaining to readership, mutual influence and posterity. The final section of its appendix is dedicated to the *besprizornis* (abandoned Soviet children, often, but not always, orphaned); *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* thus begins with the elucidation

of a Greek myth based on infanthood, and ends with a poignant exposé that focuses on the disenfranchised child victim of the Revolution, a piece that nonetheless sounds a note of hope about the possibility of the Soviet Union rectifying its perceived flaws. *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, on the other hand, revisits some of the expectations Gide continued to nurture in the first text: he realises, for example, that the startling illiteracy levels amongst the young problematise their supposedly key role in the future of culture itself, and that the innocence of those growing up knowing of nothing other than the Soviet Union has been undermined by the Party's increasingly warped notion of comradeship: '[l]es propos innocents des enfants peuvent vous perdre. On n'ose plus parler devant eux. Chacun surveille, se surveille, est surveillé' (*RAM*, 818).

It might be noted that imagery and vocabulary evocative of youth also spill over into some of the critical comment *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* received. In his January 1937 denunciation of this text, the novelist and dramatist Romain Rolland, an erstwhile friend of Gide's, describes *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* as 'un livre médiocre, étonnamment pauvre, superficiel, *puéril*, et contradictoire' (emphasis my own).[282] It might be argued that Rolland believes *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* to be immature precisely because it does not focus on a single viewpoint, or develop a continuous argument; in fact, noted throughout this chapter, the work chooses to nurture – and oscillate between – oppositional or contradictory approaches to the Soviet Union. Indeed, Rolland does not seem to have considered the possibility that Gide's work might have made the conscious decision to explore his ambivalence towards the Soviet project. In the light of Rolland's use of the adjective 'puéril', it is revealing that Gide will level a counterattack on Rolland in *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* that hinges on the relationship between aging and authorial status in Rolland's own case:

> [...] [D]u moins je tiens sa personnalité morale en haute estime. Mon chagrin vient de là: combien sont rares ceux qui atteignent la fin de leur vie avant d'avoir montré l'extrémité de leur grandeur. Je crois que l'auteur d'*Au-dessus de la mêlée* jugerait sévèrement Rolland vieilli. Cet aigle a fait son nid; il s'y repose. (*RAM*, 805)

[282] Romain Rolland, 'L'U.R.S.S. en a bien vu d'autres! Une lettre de Romain Rolland à propos du livre d'André Gide', *L'Humanité*, 18 January 1937, p. 1.

In this counterattack, Gide seems to shed light on the importance of maintaining a connection with one's younger self, implying that the greatness achieved in one's early work might provide a benchmark for one's literary development in later life. Indeed, Gide's self-awareness regarding his earliest works on imaginary travel feeds into the way in which he treats his Soviet travel experience.

The extensive focus in Gide on his conception of the role of young people, both in and without the Soviet Union, sheds light on his concerns regarding mortality and posterity, specifically, the writer and his legacy. This has also paved the way for a discussion of the relationship between the individual and the crowd in a Soviet context.

4.4 The Man of the Crowd

Gide's interest in the young people of the Soviet Union cannot be dissociated from his concerns regarding the plight of the individual under Communism. These concerns develop rather quickly in Gide's mind as his journey progresses. Moreover, the individual who can arguably be seen to stand apart from the crowd more than any other, that is, the writer or, indeed, the intellectual, is not only subsumed into the crowd in the U.S.S.R., but is seemingly disenfranchised through being forced into belonging to it. Insofar as what was anti-conformist in the pre-Revolutionary era (socialist ideology) is now the very basis for conformism (under the new proletarian state) the writer can no longer – and is no longer *allowed* to – differentiate his voice from that of the crowd. In fact, he *must* act as the crowd's voice. This, of course, raises questions about how a writer can relate to the public in the Soviet Union and vice versa. Gide's own relation to the Soviet public as a writer figure will also be of interest in this section.

Gide's concern in relation to the position of the writer in the Soviet Union can be coupled with his point that true literary greatness (for instance, the longevity of a writer's body of work) is not attainable during the writer's own lifetime:

> [...] [J]e me demande avec inquiétude si, peut-être, dans l'U.R.S.S. glorieuse d'aujourd'hui, ne végète pas, ignoré de la foule, quelque Baudelaire, quelque Keats ou quelque Rimbaud qui, en raison même de sa valeur, a du mal à se faire entendre. Et c'est pourtant celui-là entre tous qui m'importe, car ce sont les dédaignés d'abord,

> les Rimbaud, les Keats, les Baudelaire, les Stendhal même, qui paraîtront demain les plus grands. (*R*, 784)

While Gide can clearly see that this loss of individuality can have major ramifications for both local and world culture in the long-term ('[l]'art qui se soumet à une orthodoxie, fût-elle la plus saine des doctrines, est perdu' [*R*, 784]) due to the absorption of the artist's voice into the crowd, the concern that the common man is utterly indistinguishable from the mass in the U.S.S.R can also be discerned. Indeed, in *Moscou aller-retour*, Derrida will point out that the loss of individuation occurs in the very appellation 'U.S.S.R.':

> [...] le nom même de l'URSS est le seul nom d'Etat au monde qui ne comporte en lui aucune référence à une localité ou à une nationalité. [...] l'URSS est le nom d'un individu étatique, d'un Etat individuel et singulier qui s'est donné ou a prétendu se donner son propre nom propre sans référence à aucun lieu singulier ni à aucun passé national.[283]

Derrida's appraisal of the noun 'U.S.S.R.' not only highlights the diminished status of the individual in the pre-*perestroika* Soviet Union, but also points up the inevitable distancing from a particular national heritage that the collectivising noun 'U.S.S.R.' seems to create. It might be added, however, that there appear to be so many different peoples and countries drawn together under Soviet rule, that the loss of any semblance of individuality is *precisely* one of the only things that can bind these components of the U.S.S.R together.

However, for Gide, despite his recognition of the plight of the individual in the U.S.S.R., the man is also necessarily *of* the crowd. To this end, he will consider the plight of the Soviet *people*; he concludes that it is not a plight from which the rest of Europe can detach itself. Gide writes:

> [...] [J]'estime que s'il importe d'être sincère c'est bien lorsque la foi d'un grand nombre, avec la notre propre, est engagée.
>
> Si je me suis trompé d'abord, le mieux est de reconnaître au plus tôt mon erreur; car je suis responsable, ici, de ceux que cette erreur entraîne. Il n'y a pas, en ce cas, amour-propre qui tienne [...] Il y a des choses plus importantes que l'U.R.S.S.: c'est l'humanité, c'est son destin, c'est sa culture. (*R*, 750)

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[283] Jacques Derrida, *Moscou aller-retour*, p. 17.

The fact that culture is considered to be monolithic by Gide in this instance ought to be highlighted – '[…] c'est l'humanité, […] c'est *sa* culture' (emphasis my own). In the eulogy he delivers at Gorky's Red Square funeral, Gide states: '[…] par-dessus chaque littérature nationale s'épanouit une culture faite de ce qu'il y a de vraiment vivant et d'humain dans les littératures particulières de chaque pays' (*R*, 788). Indeed, it might be pointed out that, despite invoking national literatures, Gide does not emphasise, at this juncture, a plurality of *cultures*, which would befit, for example, a more comprehensive description of artistic production in the varied regions of the Soviet Union (Gide only briefly mentions regional artisans elsewhere in his Soviet travel accounts [*R*, 763], whereas Benjamin specifically brings into focus Soviet artistic production in his *Moscow Diary*). In fact, Gide's emphasis here on a single, binding culture proper to humanity seems to approach the way in which 'culture' was managed by the homogenising powers operating within the Soviet Union, insofar as any notion of plurality is, as Gide will realise, necessarily silenced. Yet in contrast to his apparently egalitarian conception of culture at this point, Gide will go on to convey an intolerant attitude towards popular 'taste' (which is essentially conformist, 'dans la ligne'), as evidenced by an exchange with an unidentified artist, who declares: 'Nous voulons créer un art nouveau, digne du grand peuple que nous sommes. L'art, aujourd'hui, doit être populaire, ou n'être pas.' Gide appears indignant in his response: 'Vous contraindrez tous vos artistes au conformisme […] et les meilleurs, ceux qui ne consentiront pas à avilir leur art ou seulement à le courber, vous les réduirez au silence. La culture que vous prétendez servir, illustrer, défendre, vous honnira' (*R*, 781). Although he has come to recognise the way 'popular', in terms of cultural output, has in fact become a front for State-sanctioned culture, Gide once again reiterates a seemingly monolithic understanding of Soviet culture that coincides with the Soviet regime's own perspective on it. It must be noted that Gide's ambivalent attitude here is founded on his resistance to the fascist movement. As he states in his Red Square address: 'Ce qui menace la culture ce sont les fascismes, les nationalismes étroits et artificiels […]' (*R*, 788). A key element of Gide's ideological journey, then, is his tentative exploration and gradual demarcation of a middle ground between two oppositional modes of thinking, that is, fascist and Communist ideologies. For Gide's ideological retreat goes against his initial move towards Communism; this struggle can be seen to have the effect of undoing, or at least destabilising, many of Gide's prior observations, as evident in the above example.

The narrative frequently progresses, then, through its own undoing, therefore also highlighting the potential for the concept of return to be understood as the *negation* of the outward journey made.

Gide makes it clear at several points that he has not travelled to the Soviet Union for the sensual exploration of the country; he has come with a view to interacting with its people as they go about their daily lives under Communism. This approach to his voyage is formed by his Congo texts, in which he feels obligated to transform his search for the exotic into a socially aware account of capitalist injustices in a colonial context. A people-oriented approach evolves in his textualisation of the travel experience, despite the initial aesthetic focus that can be discerned in the Congo travel accounts. In the case of the U.S.S.R., Gide writes: 'L'âge venant, je me sens moins de curiosité pour les paysages, beaucoup moins, et si beaux qu'ils soient; mais de plus en plus pour les hommes' (*R*, 756). Although he acknowledges that his interest in the Soviet landscape is demoted due to far more pressing concerns, Gide cannot resist mentioning a forest he has encountered during his trip: 'Nous avions traversé cette forêt merveilleuse en nous rendant à un lac de montagne et l'on nous fit l'honneur de nous affirmer que jamais aucun étranger encore n'y était venu' (*R*, 759). He then desists from describing the village of Tabatzkouri ('que j'aurais pris plaisir à décrire' [*R*, 759]), before stating categorically, and not without a note of lament:

> Ah! que n'étais-je venu simplement en touriste! ou en naturaliste ravi de découvrir là-bas quantité de plantes nouvelles, de reconnaître sur les hauts plateaux la "scabieuse du Caucase" de mon jardin. Mais ce n'est point là ce que je suis venu chercher en U.R.S.S. Ce qui m'y importe c'est l'homme, les hommes, et ce qu'on en peut faire, et ce qu'on en a fait. La forêt qui m'y attire, affreusement touffue et où je me perds, c'est celle des questions sociales. En U.R.S.S. elles vous sollicitent, et vous pressent, et vous oppressent de toutes parts. (*R*, 759)

Gide thus imbues the first section of *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* with an echo of the aesthetic motivations behind his Congo voyage, to highlight further that social aims underpin his journey to the U.S.S.R. Yet his continued attraction to the landscape, which he endeavours to resist, also provides him with a useful metaphor for the nature of the social problems he encounters.

Gide's interaction with the people of the U.S.S.R. will unfold in what will be, for the most part, a controlled and heavily micromanaged fashion; as previously

noted, Gide becomes increasingly aware of this over the course of his journey. Gide's monitored movements might be connected to the restricted movements of the worker under Soviet rule. Gide notes: '[...] [L]e travailleur ne peut se dérober aux déplacements qu'on lui ordonne. Il n'est libre ni d'aller, ni de demeurer, où il lui plaît; où peut-être l'appelle ou l'attache un amour ou une amitié' [*RAM*, 817]. He also points out that the worker can no longer circulate freely in the U.S.S.R., as well as highlighting the existence of internal passports [*RAM*, 817*n*]. In this regard, Gide not only finds a common ground with the figure of the worker, but also ascertains that travel itself, the very activity in which he is engaged, is treated with utmost suspicion by Soviet authorities.

As Gide visits the U.S.S.R. in the summertime, many of the people he encounters are dressed entirely in white. Gide comments on the homogenising effect that this creates:

> Chacun ressemble à tous [...] Une extraordinaire uniformité règne dans les mises; sans doute elle paraîtrait également dans les esprits, si seulement on pouvait les voir. Et c'est aussi ce qui permet à chacun d'être et de paraître joyeux. (On a si longuement manqué de tout qu'on est content de peu de chose. Quand le voisin n'a pas davantage on se contente de ce qu'on a.) Ce n'est qu'après mûr examen qu'apparaissent les différences. À première vue l'individu se fond ici dans la masse, est si peu particularisé qu'il semble qu'on devrait, pour parler des gens, user d'un partitif et dire non point: des hommes, mais: de l'homme. (*R*, 760)

Gide's tendency, when discussing humanity and the crowd, to adopt a homogenising outlook regarding the Soviet peoples can be noted here. This homogenising outlook can once again be aligned with that of the Soviet leadership. Gide goes some way towards explaining his outlook in remarking that differences amongst these people are not immediately perceptible. Establishing difference is particularly problematic for the traveller in the Soviet Union not least because, as the erstwhile U.S.S.R. resident Dr. A. Denier notes in his letter to Gide, people are, generally speaking, obligated to maintain two personalities in the Soviet Union: 'l'extérieure, celle que l'on voit, qui parle, qui manifeste au-dehors; puis l'autre, qu'ils cachent très profondément et qu'ils ne font connaître qu'après des journées d'intimité' (*RAM*, 864). That is to say, Soviet citizens are actively trying to keep their heads down and so do not differentiate themselves in any way from the crowd, unless it is in the privacy of their homes and in the company of entirely trustworthy people, with whom they are well acquainted.

Such an approach amongst the Soviet people precludes the traveller from a profound or comprehensive engagement with their ways of thinking. It is important, however, to consider Gide's outlook as propounded here in relation to his actual experiences with numerous individuals during his trip. A particularly notable instance is Gide's encounter with the Bolshevik revolutionary Nikolai Bukharin. Gide was approached by Bukharin in a hotel, only for the latter to be prevented from engaging with Gide due to an intervention staged by a bystander. At their next encounter, Bukharin promises to seek Gide out but never does – Gide admits that, were if not for his travelling companion Herbart's astuteness in recognising that Bukharin was going to be prevented from accessing Gide, he would have automatically thought that the Soviet politician was merely indifferent or neglectful (*RAM*, 840). Moreover, the Soviet artist with whom Gide discusses popular taste and the plight of creativity under Communism will subsequently admit to the bewildered Gide that his views had been reined in and made to appear ultra-conformist so that he might be seen to toe the Party line in front of potential denouncers (*R*, 781). Bukharin's ill-fated attempts to connect with Gide contrast with Gide's set-up in French Equatorial Africa, where he was in a position to settle in a particular spot for a short period of time; this meant that desperate village chiefs could seek him out in secret (mostly under the cloak of darkness) and come forward to him in order to expose the grave problems they were encountering at the hands of the concessionary companies. Moreover, the extended periods of Gide's Congo voyage during which he could remain in the same place are denied to him here, given the highly organised itinerary that has been drawn up for his group by Soviet officials. Indeed, Gide quickly realises in the U.S.S.R. that he cannot 'faire un pas sans être suivi, surveillé'.[284] But even if he were to enter into 'direct contact' with the people, which is one of his primary aims (let us not forget that the main body of text in *Retour de l'U.R.S.*S. opens with the following line: 'En contact direct avec un peuple de travailleurs [...]' [*R*, 753]), Gide comes to understand that people will simply not admit him to their innermost reflections if these thoughts seem to diverge from the Party line:

> En U.R.S.S., il est admis d'avance et une fois pour toutes que, sur tout et n'importe quoi, il ne saurait y avoir plus d'une opinion. Du reste, les gens ont l'esprit ainsi façonné que ce conformisme leur devient facile, naturel, insensible, au point que je ne pense pas qu'il y entre de l'hypocrisie [...] Chaque matin, la *Pravda* leur enseigne

[284] Sagaert and Schnyder, *André Gide: l'écriture vive*, p. 41.

> ce qu'il sied de savoir, de penser, de croire. Et il ne fait pas bon sortir de là! De sorte que, chaque fois que l'on converse avec un Russe, c'est comme si l'on conversait avec tous. (*R*, 766)

This means, then, that Gide will only ever encounter the Party line during his travels; it is only his return to France which precipitates volunteered testimonies from individuals, many of whom oppose the Soviet regime. However, despite the problem of establishing both difference *and* a sense of intimacy in the U.S.S.R., there are a number of instances over the course of his Soviet voyage where Gide purports to have felt himself to be in 'true' contact with the people. Yet Gide, as previously mentioned, manages to highlight in these texts an acute awareness that elements of his Soviet Union experience are being presented to him in a controlled fashion by the governing powers. Of course, this awareness can perhaps be seen to be somewhat undermined by Gide's nonetheless remarkable naïveté regarding certain aspects of everyday life under Stalin. This naïveté is in evidence in his digression on lengthy shop queues, where he notes: 'J'allais écrire: on se résigne. Mais le Russe est bien mieux que résigné: il semble prendre plaisir à attendre, et vous fait attendre à plaisir' (*R*, 761).

Soviet hospitality is extended to Gide because of his Party sympathies and his elevated position in the French intelligentsia. Of course, as Paul Hollander states, the foreign intellectual's voyage of discovery to the U.S.S.R. became a key feature in international relations between the U.S.S.R. and Western Europe during the interwar period.[285] Indeed, in the preface to a planned series for *L'Humanité*, Benjamin notes the following during his own Moscow trip: '[…] I found myself in a city where in my sheer capacity as a writer I enjoyed the privileges of both a material and administrative sort. (I know of no other city except Moscow where the state would pay for a writer's room – after all, the hotels are all run by the Soviet.)'[286]

As with his predecessor Benjamin and successor Derrida, the lack of understanding of the Russian language presents a considerable barrier to self-expression and social interaction during Gide's voyage, though at points he tries to suggest that linguistic hurdles are surmounted by other means:

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[285] See Paul Hollander, 'Gide and Soviet Communism', in Tom Conner, ed., *André Gide's Politics: Rebellion and Ambivalence*, pp. 161–78.
[286] Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, p. 134.

> Poètes de Géorgie, intellectuels, étudiants, ouvriers surtout, je me suis épris pour nombre d'entre eux d'une affection vive, et sans cesse je déplorais de ne connaître point leur langue. Mais déjà se lisait tant d'éloquence affectueuse dans les sourires, dans les regards, que je doutais alors si des paroles y eussent pu beaucoup ajouter. Il faut dire que j'étais présenté partout là-bas comme un ami: ce qu'exprimaient encore les regards de tous, c'est une sorte de reconnaissance. (*R*, 753-54)

> Aussi bien nulle part autant qu'en U.R.S.S. le contact avec tous et n'importe qui ne s'établit plus aisément, immédiat, profond, chaleureux. Il se tisse aussitôt – parfois un regard y suffit – des liens de sympathie violente. Oui, je ne pense pas que nulle part, autant qu'en U.R.S.S., l'on puisse éprouver aussi profondément et aussi fort le sentiment de l'humanité. En dépit des différences de langue, je ne m'étais jamais encore et nulle part senti aussi abondamment camarade et frère; et je donnerais les plus beaux paysages du monde pour cela. (*R*, 757)

In the second extract, Gide also reiterates his willing move away from what he had previously searched for – that is, the superlative of natural beauty – during voyages he had undertaken earlier in his life. Of course, it is important to compare Gide's emphasis on human contact here, wherein he states that words are not even necessary in interrelations he has with the Soviet peoples that he encounters, with his later condemnation of what he believes to be the systematic mistranslation of – or at least tampering with – his oratory texts. For if Gide is a writer invited by the Soviet Union for the purposes discussed in the introduction to this chapter, that is, to write an account extolling Communism in action, his word will *always* be moulded into the word of the people. Thus, despite his status as an outsider intellectual, his similarity of thought is what is the most encouraged. Gide is very much aware of the esteem in which he is held:

> Je dois ajouter que, pour nombre d'entre eux, je n'étais pas un inconnu. Certains avaient lu de mes livres (le plus souvent c'était *Le Voyage au Congo*) et comme, à la suite de mon discours sur la Place Rouge à l'occasion des funérailles de Gorki, tous les journaux avaient publié mon portrait, ils m'avaient aussitôt reconnu et se montraient extrêmement sensibles à l'attention que je leur portais [...]. (*R*, 758)

Gide is the 'known' party no matter where he travels – he is a foreigner, but never an absolute stranger in the eyes of the Soviet people he meets. It is interesting to note that the young Communists question the French travelling party as to whether the games Gide has brought along with him as a conversational icebreaker in fact befit his status as a French intellectual of international renown. Gide's realisation of his own fame in the U.S.S.R. ('adulé, choyé, fêté', as he notes [*RAM*, 832]) reminds us of his

tentative question regarding the actual status of the public intellectual, which follows on from his appraisal of the crowds which throng Gorky's funeral ceremony: 'Qu'était Gorki pour tous ces gens? Je ne sais trop: un maître? un camarade? un frère?' (*R*, 757). Later, in *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, Gide comes to realise the cynical way in which writers are valued in the Soviet Union – only worthy 'pourvu qu'ils écrivent dans le bon sens' (*RAM*, 498). It is, of course, useful to ascertain what exactly Gide is most recognised for in the Soviet Union at this point. It might be noted that Walter Benjamin, in a letter to the writer Siegfried Kracauer composed over the course of his own Moscow trip, refers to Gide's Congo voyage: 'I don't know whether you've been following Gide's diary of his journey to Africa in the *Nouvelle Revue française*. But it is not surprising that the French governor was forced to resign on account of the things that have been reported (and in such unadulterated, severe fashion) about the French colonial atrocities there!'[287] It seems that the *Voyage au Congo* had a considerable readership in the Soviet Union (Gide mentions that this text seemed to be the one most read amongst the Komsomols he meets on a train [*R*, 758]); one can imagine that there was, to some extent, an awareness of Gide's outspokenness in the face of political and corporate injustices amongst the readers of this earlier text, and most certainly amongst those in power in the Soviet Union.

A key component of Gide's assessment of the crowd in the U.S.S.R is his shock at the lack of solidarity amongst Soviet men and women, which is founded on the fact that the civilian revolution had only taken place less than twenty years ago:

> Je crains que ne se reforme bientôt une nouvelle sorte de bourgeoisie ouvrière satisfaite (et, partant, conservatrice, parbleu!) trop comparable à la petite bourgeoisie de chez nous.
>
> J'en vois partout des symptômes annonciateurs. Et comme nous ne pouvons douter, hélas! que les instincts bourgeois, veules, jouisseurs, insoucieux d'autrui, sommeillent au cœur de bien des hommes en dépit de toute révolution (car la réforme de l'homme ne peut se faire uniquement par le dehors) [...]. (*R*, 772-73)

Gide thought that he would encounter among the people a revolutionary spirit still at a relatively early stage of its development. He had hoped that the fervour of

[287] Benjamin, *Moscow Diary*, pp. 129-30.

revolutionary zeal had not yet been dampened by the passage of time. This, however, quickly revealed itself to be a premature assessment of people living under Stalin:

> L'esprit que l'on considère comme 'contre-révolutionnaire' aujourd'hui, c'est ce même esprit révolutionnaire, ce ferment qui d'abord fit éclater les douves à demi pourries du vieux monde tsariste. On aimerait pouvoir penser qu'un débordant amour des hommes, ou tout au moins un impérieux besoin de justice, emplit les cœurs. Mais une fois la révolution accomplie, triomphante, stabilisée, il n'est plus question de cela, et de tels sentiments, qui d'abord animaient les premiers révolutionnaires, deviennent encombrants, gênants, comme ce qui a cessé de servir. (*R*, 774)

Indeed, it is important to underline that the cult of Stalin provides the background to the 'cult' of Gide's own celebrity (Derrida's appraisal of Gide's status as writer, noted earlier in this chapter might be recalled). Stalin's elevated position in the everyday life of the peoples Gide encounters does not go unnoticed by the writer, who observes that Stalin has in fact replaced religious icons in rural homes. 'L'effigie de Staline se rencontre partout, son nom est sur toutes les bouches, sa louange revient immanquablement dans tous les discours [...] Adoration, amour ou crainte, je ne sais pas; toujours et partout il est là' (*R*, 776). (Of course, Gide makes this observation having already claimed in his *Journal* that Christianity led him to Communism.)[288]

Moreover, there is also the problem of protocol that arises when Gide has to address Stalin in a telegraph. This incident gives Gide a startling insight into the extent to which his writings are examined and altered in the Soviet Union before their public dissemination is possible: 'Et comme déjà j'avais pu constater de semblables retouches et 'mises au point' dans les traductions de diverses allocutions que j'avais été amené à prononcer en U.R.S.S., je déclarai aussitôt que je ne reconnaîtrais comme mien aucun texte de moi paru en russe durant mon séjour et que je le dirais' (*R*, 776-77). However, Gide seemingly chooses not to discern any particular malice in these translation efforts; he instead identifies 'le désir d'aider quelqu'un qui n'est pas au courant des usages et qui certainement ne peut demander mieux que de s'y plier, d'y conformer ses expressions et sa pensée' (*R*, 777). This comment is not without a certain sense of irony; Gide realises that the traveller who accepts the advice imparted to him by local experts is someone who is, in fact, conforming, or willingly adhering to fixed customs and rituals. In this way, the foreigner, the traveller, can be seen to be

[288] Gide, *Journal*, II, 1132.

conformist within his host society, and his voice can come to be seen as representative of, rather than differing from, that of the people as a whole. Once again, we are privy to Gide's struggle to maintain his outsider status. His remarks here expose the way the conventional traveller figure would like to conform to or participate in local customs as part of the travel experience, yet retains a wariness of his own voice being lost in such a process. In the Soviet Union, Gide gradually becomes aware of the sinister implications of the writer's voice being absorbed into that of the crowd; that is, the systematic oppression of any writer or artist who is perceived as dissenting from the norm. This means that Gide, of course, is adamant that his own voice will remain outside of this snare, and thus, in having to lessen his hold over his spoken texts, which are quickly translated into Russian over the course of his stay, must naturally denounce these translated works as no longer recognisable as his own. Indeed, it might also be noted that this heightened sense of wariness towards translation is found in someone who was at this stage in his life an accomplished translator himself – having translated works by Goethe, Conrad, Shakespeare and Puskhin, amongst others, into French. Given his work as a translator, and his acknowledgement of the intellectual calibre of his translators and advisors in the U.S.S.R. (*R*, 776*n*), it seems that Gide, despite protestations to the contrary, is suspicious of the way his work is being translated precisely because he has already seen how *everything* must be made to 'fall into line' in the U.S.S.R. This fear, it might be argued, results in the lengthy appendix to *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, in which many of the speeches delivered to the public over the course of his Soviet trip are reproduced in the original French, thus marking the *restoration* of – or marked return to – Gide's own uncensored perspective on the Soviet Union.[289]

Another element of the public's approach to Gide hinges on his foreigner status. People look to him to confirm their misguided observations about the rest of the world: 'Le citoyen soviétique reste dans une extraordinaire ignorance de l'étranger. Bien plus: on l'a persuadé que tout, à l'étranger, et dans tous les domaines, allait beaucoup moins bien qu'en U.R.S.S. Cette illusion est savamment entretenue; car il importe que chacun, même peu satisfait, se félicite du régime qui le préserve de

[289] French was the language of the aristocracy and nobility in pre-Revolution Russia. It will be interesting to see how connotations drawn up by the use of the French language might relate to the French intellectual visiting the Soviet Union. There is currently a research project (which began in August 2011) on the history of the French language in Russia underway at the University of Bristol.

pires maux' (*R*, 767). This ignorance of the world outside the Soviet Union seems to be further emphasised in Gide's eyes when, upon inspecting the foreign section of a wall newspaper at a Soukhoum factory, he remarks 'aucune allusion à l'Espagne dont les nouvelles depuis quelques jours ne laissent pas de nous inquiéter. Nous ne cachons pas notre surprise un peu attristée. Il s'ensuit une légère gêne. On nous remercie de la remarque: il en sera certainement tenu compte' (*R*, 775). In his attempts to interact with the people, Gide notes the Soviet concern – one, moreover, which he has remarked throughout all age groups – regarding self-representation 'Du reste, s'ils s'inquiètent tout de même de ce qui se fait à l'étranger, ils se soucient bien davantage de ce que l'étranger pense d'eux. Ce qui leur importe c'est de savoir si nous les admirons assez. Ce qu'ils craignent, c'est que nous soyons insuffisamment renseignés sur leurs mérites. Ce qu'ils souhaitent de nous, ce n'est point tant qu'on les renseigne, mais qu'on les complimente' (*R*, 768). He is quizzed about France so that his interlocutors might heap further praise on the U.S.S.R.'s supposedly inevitable superiority over his country. For them, France is only ever of interest insofar as it can act as a foil to draw further attention to the Soviet Union's successes. The prevalence of this attitude leads Gide to worry about the believability of this part of his travel account:

> Les questions que l'on vous pose sont souvent si ahurissantes que j'hésite à les rapporter. On va croire que je les invente: – On sourit avec scepticisme lorsque je dis que Paris a, lui aussi, son métro [...] Que tous les ouvriers, chez nous, soient très malheureux, il va sans dire, puisque nous n'avons pas encore 'fait la révolution'. Pour eux, hors de l'U.R.S.S., c'est la nuit. À part quelques capitalistes éhontés, tout le reste du monde se débat dans les ténèbres. (*R*, 768)

The contrast between darkness and light evoked here is particularly interesting given Gide's predilection for such imagery, *à la* Conrad, in *Voyage au Congo*. Moreover, Gide's consciousness of the veracity of his text, which he fears might be undermined by the seemingly excessive ignorance behind the questions asked of him in the Soviet Union, leads him to write up his account of many of the short exchanges that he had had with Soviet children that very night: 'Ces propos d'enfants (propos dictés, appris peut-être) m'ont paru si typiques que je les ai transcrits le soir même et que je les rapporte ici tout au long' (*R*, 770). And yet once again Gide's criticisms are tempered by a positive statement, in this instance his insistence that some very worthy projects were also seen by his travelling party: 'Je ne voudrais pourtant pas laisser croire que

je n'ai pas remporté d'Artek d'autres souvenirs. Il est vrai: ce camp d'enfants est merveilleux' (*R*, 770). For Gide quickly realises that his seemingly respected status does not allow him the immunity to critique Soviet perceptions of the foreign. For example, amongst the members of a naval officers society, Gide makes the faux-pas of raising the issue of the apparently limited Soviet knowledge of France: '[...] [J]e me risqué à oser dire que je crains qu'on ne soit moins bien renseigné en U.R.S.S. sur ce qui se fait en France, qu'en France sur ce qui se fait en U.R.S.S.; un murmure nettement *désapprobateur* s'élève: 'La *Pravda* renseigne sur tout suffisamment.' Et brusquement, quelqu'un, lyrique, se détachant du groupe, s'écrie: 'Pour raconter tout ce qui se fait en U.R.S.S. de neuf et de beau et de grand, on ne trouverait pas assez de papier dans le monde'' (*R*, 769).

As a means of concluding Chapter IV of *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.*, Gide pointedly returns to his earlier assessment of humanity, which featured in his 1911 work *Nouveaux prétextes*: ''L'humanité n'est pas simple, il faut en prendre son parti; et toute tentative de simplification, d'unification, de réduction par le dehors sera toujours odieuse, ruineuse et sinistrement bouffonne. Car l'embêtant pour Athalie, c'est que c'est toujours Eliacin, l'embêtant pour Hérode, c'est que c'est toujours la Sainte Famille qui échappe', - écrivais-je en 1910' (*R*, 779). For Gide has come to realise, nuancing his earlier stance as his journey progresses, that culture hinges, to a certain extent, on the potential for conflict or for a clash of viewpoints: 'Si tous les citoyens d'un État pensaient de même, ce serait sans aucun doute plus commode pour les gouvernants. Mais, devant cet appauvrissement, qui donc oserait encore parler de 'culture'? Sans contrepoids, comment l'esprit ne verserait-il pas tout dans un sens?' (*R*, 778-79)

The interview between Benjamin and Gide that took place in Berlin in January 1928 (that is to say, after Benjamin's own Moscow trip but several years before Gide's journey to the U.S.S.R.) contributes significantly to our understanding of Gide's conception of travel at this crucial moment – that is, the period between his Congo voyage and his Soviet trip. Gide says to Benjamin: 'Once I had taken a particular direction, I followed it through as far as it would go and followed this up by

advancing in the opposite direction with the same resoluteness'.[290] With regard to this statement, Benjamin observes that '[t]his principled rejection of every golden mean, this commitment to extremes – what else is it but dialectic, not as intellectual method but as life's breath and passion. Gide shows no desire to contradict me (or so it seems to me) when I detect in this the basis for all the misunderstandings and much of the hostility that he has encountered.'[291] Gide's long-held belief that there are always two sides to explore would not be comprehended by many of his contemporaries (in his scathing review of Maurice Barrès's *Les Déracinés* (1897), Gide puts forth the North-South and Catholic-Protestant dualities in his own make-up), who would rather that Gide follow one path, or one line of thinking (Rolland, it was noted, dismisses *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* on the basis of it being 'contradictoire'). It is fitting, then, that Gide's Soviet journey ends up producing *two* works and in so doing suggests the exploration of two possible ways of treating his journey. Gide went to the Soviet Union in order to see the Communist project in action, and when, upon interacting with the public, his disappointment at the reality of everyday life under Communism overwhelmed him, he went on to elucidate this further in his *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* As the first work was bound to (and already prepared to) receive numerous harsh criticisms, the germ of *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* takes root in the first text, for Gide had already thought of moving on to explore another possibility of interpreting the journey he had undertaken.[292] The second text is perhaps made all the more necessary as Gide felt himself to be pushed into conforming over the course of the trip and in the public speeches he delivered. His indictment of Soviet conformism reveals his new understanding of what the role of the writer who also travels ought to be in relation to the U.S.S.R., that is, a voice which can transgress the constraints imposed by the Soviet leadership:

> Ce que l'on demande à présent, c'est l'acceptation, le conformisme. Ce que l'on veut et exige, c'est une approbation de tout ce qui se fait en U.R.S.S.; ce que l'on cherche à obtenir, c'est que cette approbation ne soit pas résignée, mais sincère, mais enthousiaste même. Le plus étonnant, c'est qu'on y parvient. D'autre part, la moindre protestation, la moindre critique est passible des pires peines, et du reste aussitôt étouffée. Et je doute qu'en aucun autre pays aujourd'hui, fût-ce dans l'Allemagne de Hitler, l'esprit soit moins libre, plus courbé, plus craintif (terrorisé), plus vassalisé.
> (*R*, 774)

[290] Benjamin, 'Conversation with André Gide', p. 95.
[291] Benjamin, 'Conversation with André Gide', p. 95.
[292] See Martine Sagaert and Peter Schnyder, *André Gide: l'écriture vive*, pp. 44-45.

Gide at this point realises that such a voice must, in order to be preserved, come from a foreign source. The outsider status of the writer who travels, as well as his desire to represent the travel experience, offers a viable means of making the dissenting voice heard.

4.5 Conclusion

Gide writes: 'Et comme il advient toujours que nous ne reconnaissons qu'après les avoir perdus la valeur de certains avantages, rien de tel qu'un séjour en U.R.S.S. [...] pour nous aider à apprécier l'inappréciable liberté de pensée dont nous jouissons encore en France, et dont nous abusons parfois' (*R*, 782-83). Although, as Derrida argues, Gide initially sees his journey to the U.S.S.R. as a spiritual 'homecoming' to a future utopia-in-construction, Gide's preference for – and attachment to – France is, in fact, reasserted at the end of *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* Indeed, it is in encountering and grappling with the constraints placed upon freedom of expression in the Soviet Union that Gide chooses to exercise, more determinedly than ever, the freedom of expression allowed to him in France, through raising questions about the presence and long-term effects of these constraints in the Soviet Union in *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* The renewed focus upon France at the end of *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* can be seen to be a major consequence of Gide's Soviet journey and foray into Communism. Gide's emphasis on France at this juncture signals his physical *and* ideological return to French society. The Soviet Union is far from being a viable 'patrie d'élection' for Gide. In the light of this realisation, W.J. Marshall's remarks might be taken into consideration: 'It is difficult to label Gide's attitude to culture as being "bourgeois": although he is in essence a nineteenth-century man of letters, and stresses the importance of the common human legacy of works of art, he sees the artist as always in the dissident avant-garde of society, and especially bourgeois society.'[293] Operating in a society without freedom of speech, the artist is seen to be forcibly subsumed into – and therefore subdued by and indistinguishable from – the crowd. Gide, seeing this enforced and in action, even on a personal level (the altered translations of his own work during his journey), comes to the conclusion that a society like French society is

[293] W.J. Marshall, 'André Gide and the U.S.S.R.: A Re-appraisal', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 20.1 (1983), 37–49, p. 42.

preferable if only because it promotes freedom of expression, the key to fostering creativity. As Gide writes:

> Je m'étais assez promptement mis en garde contre les notions que je devais aux habitudes inculquées par mes parents, à ma formation protestante, à mon pays même; non point du tout que je les considérasse de parti pris comme mauvaises, mais du moins prétendais-je ne les réadmettre qu'après avoir éprouvé par moi-même leur excellence, les avoir fait comparaître devant moi, comparées à d'autres, soumises au trébuchet de ma critique et m'être bien assuré qu'elles rendaient un son pur et plein.[294]

Perhaps, then, Gide's most important *aller-retour* consists of the above: moving away from the ideals with which he finds himself most familiar, only to return to them over time, convinced that in committing himself to such a journey he has proven their worth.

It has been noted that Gide, in the interwar period, evolves considerably in terms of the way he approaches the textualisation of travel; for instance, he begins to question the term 'littérature' in relation to certain travel narratives, as well as adopting a new documentary focus in his travel writing (one which introduces statistics, footnotes and appendices into the travel account). However, it has also been emphasised that *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* and *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* both look back to Gide's African texts *Voyage au Congo* and *Retour du Tchad*. The mobilisation which occurred in Africa in the mid 1920s enables Gide not only to go forward as a pilgrim to the Soviet Union a decade later, but also develops in him the capacity to retreat from the U.S.S.R., both physically and ideologically speaking. Yet what is particularly noteworthy is the fact that *Retour de l'U.R.S.S.* and *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S* do not seem to look forward in any sense to the possibility of representing *future* travel. Just as the Prince's body is interred in the shifting sands of the North African desert in *El Hadj*; Gide chooses to return to this arresting image of the desert in the closing lines of *Retouches à mon Retour de l'U.R.S.S*, over forty years later, with a view to underlining the deep-seated problems of the U.S.S.R.: 'Mais nous ne détournons pas de toi nos regards, glorieuse et douloureuse Russie. Si d'abord tu nous servais d'exemple, à présent hélas! tu nous montres dans quels sables une révolution peut s'enliser' (*RAM*, 838).

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[294] Gide, *Journal*, II, 575-76.

Gide will go on to accept an invitation from another official body – a Commission of Inquiry into the Colonies formed by the French government – to travel to West Africa in January 1938. This journey is represented in a brief series of journal entries, in which Gide once again remembers instances of his Congo voyage at several points.[295] In 1939, Gide would go on to write *Carnets d'Égypte* (this appeared posthumously in 1954), the final publication focusing on travel to emerge from his *Journal*. Shortly afterwards, however, in his mid-seventies, Gide will encounter a very different reason to travel, choosing, in October 1939, to exile himself from wartime Paris – his much loved *point de répère* in all prior accounts of real travel. These war years are punctuated, in 1941, by what Gide terms his 'tour' of Michaux's *œuvre*, *Découvrons Henri Michaux*.[296]

[295] Gide also revisits his Congo text in a 1950 article for *L'Illustration*. 'Nouveau "Voyage au Congo"' considers the marked differences he believes that he would notice were he to undertake this journey again, as well as building up to an acknowledgement of (the emergence of) 'cette science naissante et bourgeonnante', ethnology. See the facsimile reproduction of the article in Jean-Claude Perrier, *André Gide ou La tentation nomade* (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), p. 127.

[296] Gide, *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, p. 747.

CHAPTER 5 – MICHAUX'S PASSAGE TO *AILLEURS*

> If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them.[297]

> Seigneurs de la Mort
> Je ne vous ai ni blasphémés ni applaudis.
> Ayez pitié de moi, voyageur déjà de tant de voyages
> sans valise [...][298]

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine Michaux's 1948 work *Ailleurs*, a collection of three texts, namely, *Voyage en Grande Garabagne*, *Au pays de la Magie* and *Ici, Poddema*. In Chapter 2 of this thesis, it was argued that although Michaux's expectations of what it is to 'travel' ('[...] où est-il donc ce voyage?' [*EC*, 144]) were dashed by his travelling experience over the course of his South American trip, this particular voyage, as an exploration of Michaux's disappointment, could still provide ample inspiration for a literary travel account to evolve (just as Gide's narratives *Paludes* and *El Hadj* would in the 1890s centre themselves on the fruitful motif of the *voyage inachevé*). In Asia in the early 1930s, Michaux begins the process of distancing himself from relating real travel experiences; *Un Barbare en Asie*, as we remember, would be his last travel account based on an actual journey, despite the fact that Michaux visited Argentina in 1936 and returned to South America (Brazil) in 1939.

It is revealing that none of the three works based on imaginary voyages that will be discussed here is invoked by Michaux in his short 1959 autobiographical text 'Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence'. Michaux does, however, emphasise in this piece the appearance of his works based on his real travels, that is, *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie*, as noteworthy moments in his (literary) development. However, in an early section ('1914 à 1918 Bruxelles') of 'Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence', Michaux notes that the writing process had immediately awakened in him an awareness of the expanses of – and capabilities offered by – the imagination: 'Première composition française. Un choc pour lui. Tout ce qu'il trouve en son imagination'.[299] Indeed, in a 1950 text entitled 'Observations', Michaux had already emphasised how these mental expanses

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[297] Henry Thoreau, *Walden*, in *The Portable Thoreau*, ed. by Carl Bode (London; New York: Penguin, 1975), pp. 258–572 (p. 563).
[298] Michaux, 'Nausée ou C'est la mort qui vient?' (*EC*, 191).
[299] Michaux, 'Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence', *OC*, I, cxxx.

at once inspire – and are themselves further broadened through – his literary creation, in the pithy statement 'J'écris pour me parcourir'.[300] This might be taken as an acknowledgement of Michaux's focus on self-exploration through writing, but it also suggests the presence of limits or bounds (the idea of focusing on travelling within oneself, 'me parcourir', and not outside of oneself into the phenomenal world) as much as it evokes the potential to negotiate them. Emphasis is placed here on the boundaries of the writer's imagination in terms of a concept ('me parcourir') that can be seen at once as expansive (suggesting the creative scope of imaginary travel) yet also reductive (pointing up a potential limitation of imaginary travel, that is, not moving beyond *self*-exploration). It will be shown over the course of this chapter that Michaux resolves the personal focus of the statement 'J'écris pour me parcourir' with the wider problematic of writing up imaginary departures in three ways: by allowing his accounts of imaginary travel to take root both thematically and generically speaking in (his) narratives based on real voyages, by treating the site where the imaginary voyage is both created and recounted in his narratives, and by developing processes of projection and mental displacement through his writing.

If, as Charles Forsdick writes, *Ecuador* is 'an anti-travel text which defines itself generically as the antithesis of previous travel accounts',[301] the subsequent *Ailleurs* collection is very much a series of narratives which promote and adhere to the conventional travel account model, that is, a narrative comprising journal entries written up by a traveller who has tried to assimilate himself into – or at least attempted to attain an intimate understanding of – the target society. It might be argued that *Ecuador*, as an 'anti-travel text', is a work of apprenticeship that ultimately aims towards overcoming or transcending the major obstacle that it identifies at its outset – that is, the dual problem of this narrative being composed by a man who freely admits to being someone 'qui ne sait ni voyager ni tenir un journal' [*EC*, 9], yet which will carry the subtitle 'journal de voyage'. *Ailleurs*, however, presents the framework and structure of a conventional travel account (Hubert Juin describes *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* as 'le journal de voyage appliqué à l'imaginaire'), a journal form that, although arranged into sections (organised into the peoples encountered in the case of *Voyage en Grande Garabagne*, events that occur in

[300] Michaux, 'Observations', *OC*, II, 344–52 (p. 345).
[301] Charles Forsdick, *Travel in Twentieth-Century French and Francophone Cultures*, p. 98.

the case of *Au Pays de la Magie*, and loosely into two 'distinct' geographical locations in the case of *Ici, Poddema*), respects the apparent chronology and the sense of discovery (that is, the non-mundane nature or *newness* of an encounter, the increasing unlikelihood of whose occurrence was often bemoaned in the context of *Ecuador*) behind each journey as it develops.[302]

Voyage en Grande Garabagne, *Au Pays de la Magie* and *Ici, Poddema* were completed at different intervals (1936, 1941 and 1946, respectively); a primary aspect of the role of the 1948 preface to *Ailleurs* is, of course, to link these three imaginary travel accounts written over the course of a decade to one another. In this preface, the reader is invited to understand that the narrator of each text is one and the same. The preface is signed with the initials 'H.M.' – Michaux's introduction of his own initials here can be seen to act as an authorial authentication of what is to follow in the three travel accounts.[303] Placing his initials here also gives Michaux the scope to cast himself in the role of *écrivain-voyageur* with regard to these imaginary voyages; he is at once the traveller exploring these imaginary lands *and* the writer relating – and attempting to interrelate – his three separate travel experiences. The wide range of experience attained by the *écrivain-voyageur* from undertaking voyages is also emphasised in the preface, in order to bolster further the sense of worldly authority Michaux wishes to establish from the outset of this work:

> L'auteur a vécu très souvent ailleurs: deux ans en Garabagne, à peu près autant au pays de la Magie, un peu moins à Poddema. Ou beaucoup plus. Les dates précises manquent' (*A*, 3).

Moreover, in the above citation there is a pronounced detachment on the part of the narrator from any specified 'present'; this initial avoidance of anchoring the texts that follow with particular dates at this point might be seen as a cursory attempt by Michaux to maintain the timeless, and what is presumably hoped to be the ultimately universal, appeal of these imaginary lands. At the end of each of the three texts, however, their date of composition appears. In fact, dating these travels has been postponed – rather than omitted – by the author, so that the reader might initially

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[302] Hubert Juin, 'Situation de Michaux', *Magazine littéraire*, February 1974, pp. 9–12 (p. 11).

[303] A facsimile reproduction in the *Œuvres complètes* of a page of the *Au Pays de la Magie* manuscript displays the handwritten title 'Voyage de Henri Michaux au Pays de la Magie', furthering the idea of authorial authentication. See Michaux, *OC*, II, 1071.

suspend his or her disbelief and follow the course of each journey, only to be brought back into the author's 'present' at the end of each text, in a somewhat sudden fashion. Firstly, this suggests an ultimate cautiousness on the part of the author that the narratives be acknowledged as written in (and accordingly an artefact of) a certain era, an anxiety which perhaps foreshadows Michaux's stern admission concerning *Un Barbare en Asie* in his 1967 preface to this narrative, when he writes: 'Il date, ce livre. De l'époque à la fois engourdie et sous tension de ce continent; il date. De ma naïveté, de mon ignorance, de mon illusion de démystifier, il date' (*BA*, 279). Secondly, as with Gide's *Le Voyage d'Urien*, the use of dates at the end of each account sees the reader abruptly ejected from the imaginary site explored within the given narrative, and placed back into the 'present' of the text's composition at (and, indeed, *as*) its climax. This reader trajectory is reflected by an occurrence at the end of *Au Pays de la Magie*, where the narrator, newly and cruelly divested of his trusted native guide, notes: 'Le jour même je me trouvai, je ne sais comment, *rejeté* du pays de la Magie'.[304] However, the playfulness through which both fluidity and abruptness are interrelated here, and with which Michaux treats the question of time in relation to his imaginary voyages, highlights another important question, one where we might remember Gide's words: 'Michaux, tout en étant un produit de notre époque aussi caractéristique qu'aucun autre, a su demeurer parfaitement inactuel'.[305] In 1948 (the year in which *Ailleurs* appeared), Maurice Saillet, in his article 'Henri Michaux et le voyage imaginaire', can be seen to argue against the writer's supposed duty to emphasise a politically and sociologically sensitive 'present' over the course of a work:

> [...] [C]e serait grandement se méprendre sur la fonction poétique que d'attendre d'elle des résultats palpables ou directement efficaces, comme veut l'absurde doctrine de l'engagement [Sartre's seminal work *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, which expounded his ideas on 'littérature engagée', had appeared in 1947]. En fait, l'expérience imaginaire ne se sépare point de l'expérience vécue; et l'exploration et l'aménagement égoïstes du moi ne sont pas moins nécessaires que ceux d'un continent.[306]

[304] Michaux, *OC*, II, 1–131 (p. 104) (emphasis my own). Hereafter referred to in the text as (*A*).
[305] *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, p. 734.
[306] Maurice Saillet, 'Henri Michaux et le voyage imaginaire', *Mercure de France*, 1022 (1948), 312–17 (p. 317).

Saillet's point here resonates with Michaux's conclusion to *Un Barbare en Asie*, where a number of Buddha's precepts are put across in the spirit of asocial contemplation: 'À l'avenir, soyez votre propre lumière, votre propre refuge. Ne cherchez pas d'autre refuge. N'allez pas en quête de refuge qu'auprès de vous-même' (*BA*, 409). But what if introversion is not solely an exploration of the self, but also an exploration of personal worlds which reflect and play on aspects of the one in which we live, and which therefore promote an outward focus? What if imaginary travel is not self-exploration, but rather an exploration not only of the possibilities of travel, but also of the boundaries and scope of what might be identified as imaginary travel? As Michaux declares in *Ecuador*, neatly emphasising the hold of the interior over that of the exterior: '[o]n trouve aussi bien sa vérité en regardant quarante-huit heures une quelconque tapisserie de mur' (*EC*, 204). The voyage, if it is to be an exploration of the traveller's self, or of the generic boundaries involved in its relation, can easily take place without the *écrivain-voyageur* physically displacing himself. Buddha's precept – "Tenez-vous bien dans votre île à vous. COLLÉS À LA CONTEMPLATION" – cited in the closing paragraphs of *Un Barbare en Asie*, with its emphasis on stasis, is significant in the light of the above observation, as it might be seen to suggest that imaginary travel even welcomes a degree of immobility (this harks back to Bachelard's elucidation of 'immensité intime', discussed in Chapter 1).

With regard to the question of time and the abrupt reiteration of a 'present' at the end of each of the *Ailleurs* travel accounts, another point raised in the preface to this work offers an acute insight into the narrator's ten-year period of emerging from and re-entering into the imaginary lands explored therein. Michaux writes: 'Il est revenu chez lui après chaque voyage. Il n'a pas une résistance indéfinie' (*A*, 3). Indeed, we might well ask ourselves why the narrator, H.M., emphasises his return after each voyage. Might it be suggested that 'H.M.', the narrator, still retains a sense of attachment to a non-specified 'homeland'? It seems that, just as Gide begins to return to his senses during his U.S.S.R. voyage (see Chapter 4), returning to France finally ready to challenge his own convictions in his U.S.S.R. travel narrative, so must the traveller partaking of an imaginary voyage return to his senses – or reality – in order both to comprehend *and* relate his personal peregrinations. Indeed, the necessity of allowing oneself the time to digest one's travel experiences was already identified

by Michaux in an anxious statement in *Ecuador*, which reveals the fleeting nature of even the strongest impressions made upon us:

> Les impressions les plus fortes, les plus vitales ne tiennent pas longtemps [...] On dit que je compte déjà un certain nombre d'années. Je n'ai jamais eu dans ma vie plus de quinze jours. D'une seconde à quinze jours, voilà toute ma vie. (*EC*, 174)

Indeed, the always temporary nature of one's ostensible escape as an imaginary traveller is also emphasised at length by Michaux in *Ailleurs*. In the preface to the collection Michaux remarks that '[i]l traduit aussi le Monde, celui qui voulait s'en échapper. Qui pourrait échapper? Le vase est clos' (*A*, 3). This statement is particularly revealing, an acknowledgement from the outset of the text that imaginary travel will ultimately 'fail', or be brought to an end, insofar as the phenomenal world itself – external reality – is ultimately inescapable. Yet it is in acknowledging the very impossibility of fully eschewing reality that the writer paves the way for the phenomenal world to be 'translated', as Michaux suggests, by means of an imaginary travel account. At the same time, it is important to note that the texts that comprise *Ailleurs* do not necessarily put themselves forward as offering alternative universes: several allusions are made to 'la Terre' and Europe (which will also be invoked in the 1936 preface to *Voyage en Grande Garabagne*) in the second narrative, *Au Pays de la Magie*, for instance, in a playful attempt to reintroduce a familiar point of reference for the reader, and perhaps to bolster the truth claims made by the preface.[307]

The introduction to *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* that prefaced the 1936 edition of this text, but did not reappear in *Ailleurs* in 1948, makes explicit the links Michaux detects between his accounts of real voyages and those of his imaginary travels:

> Comme après mes voyages aux Indes, en Chine, en Équateur, une fois de plus à présent, j'en suis à désespoir de n'avoir pu traduire toute la personnalité de ces peuples étranges, impression que connaissent tous ceux qui sont plutôt explorateurs qu'écrivains.[308]

Michaux's call upon all writers who travel to empathise with the difficulty he had in adequately representing the peoples he encountered not only allows him to suggest

[307] See *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* (*A*, 61), and *Au pays de la magie* (*A*, 77; 88).
[308] Michaux, *OC*, II, 133.

that he too is both an 'explorateur' *and* an 'écrivain' (to employ the terms he uses here), but also seems to intimate that he identifies more with the epithet of 'explorateur' than 'écrivain' at this point. This introduction is also signed with the initials 'H.M.', indicating as the 1948 preface would go on to do, an authorial authentication of the travel account that follows. A fascinating element of the 1936 introduction, however, is that another traveller figure is invoked. Emphasising his pressing need to relate this travel experience, Michaux speaks of 'ces pays que seuls James Fitzgerald et moi avons explorés (car sa femme n'en a rien vu, quoi qu'elle prétende) [...]'.[309] The idea of invoking a 'compagnon de voyage' in the context of an imaginary voyage shows that in the 1936 preface Michaux wants, rather playfully, to authenticate Grande Garabagne as a previously undiscovered territory, rather than acknowledging it from the outset as a figment of his imagination. This impression is reinforced in this preface by emphasising his return to Europe ('je me résigne à publier ici des notes établies peu de temps après mon retour en Europe [...]') and fervently promising a future publication, which would contain 'un atlas de grand format, les belles cartes de Fitzgerald, et les croquis et portraits que j'ai faits des différentes races observées', visual pieces of evidence that would uphold the 'existence' of these hitherto unknown lands.[310]

In mining the resemblances between Michaux's narratives of real and imaginary travel even further, Dominique Nogez's observation regarding the style in which *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* is written proves insightful: '[...] [C]omme pour donner au récit une allure plus *directe*, la phrase devient souvent brève et nominale, comme s'il s'agissait de notes prises sur le vif, ou d'une sorte de croquis rapide' (emphasis in original).[311] This 'sur le vif' style (reminiscent of the immediate style in which both *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie* are written), evident throughout this text, and in the two subsequent narratives on imaginary travel, belies Michaux's need to emphasise in his 1936 preface to *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* that the writing process behind this narrative took place upon his return to Europe.

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[309] Michaux, *OC*, II, 133.
[310] Michaux, *OC*, II, 133.
[311] Dominique Noguez, 'Les voyages imaginaires de Michaux', *Liberté*, 11.6 (1969), p. 11.

Secondly, in his essay 'Observations', Michaux provides us with a crucial insight into the way he perceives the interrelations amongst his works relating real experiences of travel and those which focus on imaginary travel. He explains:

> Mes pays imaginaires: pour moi des sortes d'États-tampons, afin de ne pas souffrir de la réalité.
> En voyage, où presque tout me heurte, ce sont eux qui prennent les heurts, dont j'arrive alors, moi, à voir le comique, m'amuser.
> Mes 'Émanglons', 'Mages', 'Hivinizikis' furent tous des personnages-tampons suscités par le voyage [...].[312]

In Michaux's work, then, the fantastic travels described in the *Ailleurs* collection are to be understood as being rooted in real travel and, indeed, are a progression from the real journeys he had already undertaken. Michaux goes on to reveal in 'Observations' that the Mages of his text *Au Pays de la Magie* 'furent commencés le lendemain de mon arrivée à Rio de Janeiro, me séparant si bien de ces Brésiliens, avec qui je ne trouvais pas le contact [...]'.[313] It might be added to this observation that the *Ailleurs* texts could only be composed precisely because Michaux had already overcome his struggle to represent the vicissitudes of actual travel (his important declaration in *Ecuador* can be once again recalled: 'Un homme qui ne sait voyager ni tenir un journal a composé ce journal de voyage' [*EC*, 139]). Despite his disillusionment, as evinced in *Ecuador*, with representing the travel experience, Michaux's confidence can nonetheless be bolstered by the fact that the narrative ultimately manages to carry the subtitle 'journal de voyage', precisely because it narrates the creative struggle that *comprised* and ultimately defined his South American journey. It is presumably this confidence that allows to Michaux to write *Un Barbare en Asie* (buoyantly defining the journey it recounts as 'enfin son voyage' in *Quelques renseignements sur cinquante-neuf années d'existence*), and to continue on after this publication in order to indulge in writing a series of imaginary journeys. Jean-Michel Maulpoix's assessment of Michaux's evolution from relating real travel experiences to focusing on imaginary voyages further illuminates the preceding observation: '[...] [P]our avoir traversé l'épreuve du voyage sans succomber au charme de ses sirènes, pour y

[312] Michaux, 'Observations', *OC*, II, 350–51.
[313] Michaux, 'Observations', *OC*, II, 351.

avoir bien déchiré ses enveloppes, Michaux pourra divaguer ensuite à sa fantaisie sans sortir de la chambre [...]'.[314]

The questions that will be raised in this chapter, therefore, are the following: is the move between accounts of real and imaginary travel in Michaux particularly pronounced, or are the seeds of imaginary journeys already embedded and detectable in his early travel narratives? This will comprise the first section, entitled 'Approaches to travel'. The second section, entitled 'In sight of and on the site of the imaginary voyage', aims to investigate the following questions: how does Michaux's approach towards the travel journal form develop over the course of this shift from representations of real travel to that of imaginary voyages through invented countries? What does this creative trajectory tell us about the way in which Michaux relates to the activity of travel? The third section of this chapter, entitled 'The imaginary voyage: reconfiguring the world', will look at Michaux's response to and reworking of Nature in his *Ailleurs* narratives in the wake of his treatment of the natural landscape in his earlier texts based on real journeys.

5.2 Approaches to travel

> Aucune contrée ne me plaît: voilà le voyageur que je suis. On construit bien de petites choses. Mais les grandes! Jamais je n'ai vu une ville bien construite, rarement une colline. Jamais un panorama parfait! *Si je pouvais donner du relief à une province.* (*EC*, 158) (emphasis in original)

As evinced in the above passage, which professes the profound urge to reconfigure or mould a land oneself, the seeds of Michaux's imaginary countries can be detected in *Ecuador*. Such a desire to fashion countries oneself can be seen to emanate from Michaux's discontentment and disappointment with what he has encountered so far on his travels ('[a]ucune contrée ne me plaît'). Even though he greatly lessens his focus on landscape description in *Un Barbare en Asie*, Michaux still realises that accounts of travel through imaginary countries provide the only path to the 'perfection' he appears to seek. How, then, might the imagining of such lands begin? Gide's recognition of an intermediate reality between sleep and consciousness in his

[314] Jean-Michel Maulpoix, *Henri Michaux – Passager Clandestin* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1984), p. 68.

autobiographical text *Si le grain ne meurt*, as discussed in Chapter 1, might be recalled when the narrator of *Ecuador*, while in a similar state, hints at the potential to undertake imaginary travel that such a state creates:

> Une habitude très mienne. Voici les circonstances: c'est quand je suis étendu et que néanmoins le sommeil ne vient pas. Alors je me comble. Je me donne en esprit tout ce qu'il me plaît d'obtenir. Partant de faits personnels toujours réels et d'une ligne si plausible, j'arrive doucement à me faire sacrer roi de plusieurs pays, ou quelque chose de ce genre. Cette habitude est aussi vieille que ma mémoire, et je ne reste pas plusieurs jours sans me donner cette satisfaction. C'est pourquoi je sors du lit avec une grande paix. (*EC*, 162)

The bedroom was understood as a privileged site for imaginary travel in the context of Gide's *Le Voyage d'Urien*. Here Michaux displays a similar understanding of the importance of a private and enclosed interior space that can both generate and promote the imaginary travel experience.

Despite demonstrating a considerably diminished interest in landscape description, *Un Barbare en Asie* also foregrounds Michaux's ongoing ruminations on travel and the imagination. In the 1967 preface to this work, we might remember that Michaux notes:

> Quand je vis l'Inde, et quand je vis la Chine, pour la première fois, des peuples, sur cette terre, me parurent mériter d'être réels.
> Joyeux, je fonçai dans ce réel, persuadé que j'en rapportais beaucoup.
> Y croyais-je complètement? Voyage réel entre deux imaginaires. (*BA*, 280)

It can be seen here that it is the activity of travelling itself ('voyage réel') which appears to be something Michaux can conceive of, for the manifest differences between countries and cultures only serves to highlight for him the arbitrariness (imparted by his use of the word 'imaginaire' as a synonym for society) according to which any society organises itself. Indeed, in his introduction to *Ailleurs*, Michaux will go on to emphasise this point of view when he addresses the subject of his imaginary countries:

> Ces pays, on le constatera, sont en somme parfaitement naturels [...] Naturels comme les plantes, les insectes, naturels comme la faim, l'habitude, l'âge, l'usage, les usages [...]. (*A*, 3)

Indeed, Michaux's sensitivity to the founding and careful sculpting of societal structures by humans (so that operating as part of a society becomes 'second nature' to us) can already be detected in the *Un Barbare en Asie* preface, where he comments on the way in which he considered these journeys: 'Peut-être au fond de moi les observais-je comme des voyages imaginaires qui se seraient réalisés sans moi, œuvre d' 'autres'. Pays qu'un autre aurait inventés' [*BA*, 280]. In this self-evaluation, a dejected Michaux realises that to be a writer relating real travel experiences is to fill a role that has already been hollowed out by the mere existence of any two poles/societies, and that a narrative can be written up or even reworked by any would-be writer of travel willing to undertake the trajectory suggested between two poles/societies. Because of this, it would seem that a literary elaboration of these countries is not something to which he feels he can ultimately contribute at length. The conclusion once again reached by Michaux is that a truly fruitful creative act in terms of relating the travel experience, therefore, would be to go on and develop countries in one's imagination on the basis of having undertaken real travel. This is, to revisit the *Ecuador* passage which introduced this section, the kind of traveller Michaux *wants* to be. Indeed, Michaux emphasises the validity and pressing importance of the project of imaginary travel as early as his 1927 text *Qui je fus*, writing: 'On en a terriblement besoin d'ailleurs, la Chine et le Pôle étant depuis longtemps rincés de leur exotisme'.[315] This statement will, of course, go on to be bolstered by the well-known maxim to emerge from *Ecuador*: 'Cette terre est rincée de son exotisme' (*EC*, 155).

It is also revealing to note the way in which the different peoples encountered over the course of the *Ailleurs* narratives consider travel within their societies. For instance, the narrator introduces several approaches to travel amongst the tribes of Grande Garabagne to the reader. Members of the Hiviniziki tribe are seen to be particularly nomadic, eternally restless and perpetually in motion:

> Les Hivinizikis sont toujours dehors. Ils ne peuvent rester à la maison. Si vous voyez quelqu'un à l'intérieur, il n'est pas chez lui. Nul doute, il est chez un ami. Toutes les portes sont ouvertes, tout le monde est ailleurs.
> L'Hiviniziki vit dans la rue. L'Hiviniziki vit à cheval. Il en crèvera trois en une journée. Toujours monté, toujours galopant, voilà l'Hiviniziki. (*A*, 58)

[315] Michaux, *Qui je fus*, *OC*, I, 71–129 (p. 100).

The Émanglons, however, instead of focusing on outward journeys of physical displacement, often attempt to partake of imaginary voyages that depart from a domestic interior, a vignette which serves to highlight, once again, the site in which the imaginary voyage might be constructed:

> Une odeur, un parfum complexe occupe toujours la demeure d'un Émanglon.
> S'il est fruste et vulgaire, c'est la fumée de bois qui la donne avec un peu d'herbes sèches, bien dense, et dont il se saoule.
> Vulgarité! Le but est autre: par des parfums diversifiés, infimes et forts, obtenir des horizons, des voyages, un ruisseau petit comme un ver, la forêt en automne, la mer iodée et tumultueuse, les ports où les navires attendent dans une apparente torpeur. (*A*, 14)

In presenting these opposing perspectives on travel, Michaux develops *Ailleurs* as a series of narratives in which he can map his previous personal struggles to enjoy and make sense of his travel experiences onto the peoples he creates. Just as was the case when he invoked a travelling companion, James Fitzgerald, in his 1936 preface to *Voyage en Grande Garabagne*, Michaux is slowly removing the focus from the narrator of *Ailleurs* and placing it on the shoulders of *other* travellers. This approach continues with what might be seen as a reference to Michaux's ongoing fascination concerning the relationship between water and his travel experiences (which will be examined in greater depth later in this chapter). In this instance, the Émanglons are similarly represented as greatly affected by their aquatic surroundings. Indeed, they seem to enjoy partaking of what might be termed a 'voyage immobile' (to reprise Pasquali's term) upon the surface of their lakes:

> En Émangle, il y a aussi beaucoup de lacs. Sans les lacs, on ne pourrait comprendre les Émanglons.
> Ils se collent à l'eau, des lanières passées sous le ventre, attachées à deux planches, et restent ainsi sans bouger, pendant des heures. (*A*, 25)

Of course, it might be also be added that in presenting the varying attitudes towards travel of these peoples to the reader, the narrator is widening the basis of our understanding of travel, as much as he is attempting to remove the focus on himself as traveller or visitor. The narrator's complicity in the other perspectives on travel that are evinced in these imaginary lands means that travel, then, becomes an important

theme in *Voyage en Grande Garabagne*, as much as it is the force behind the narrative's conception.

To say, however, that the narrator of the *Ailleurs* narratives is always outwardly complicit in the social structures he describes would be to ignore the significance of the notable opening passage of *Au Pays de la Magie*. In this narrative, rather than the natives extending a welcome to strangers, dead bodies are used to form a ring of grotesque buoys to warn off travellers intending to visit the land of the Mages: 'Entourant le pays de la Magie, des îlots miniscules: ce sont des bouées. Dans chaque bouée un mort. Cette ceinture de bouées protège le pays de la Magie, sert d'écoute aux gens du pays, leur signale l'approche d'étrangers. Il n'est reste plus ensuite qu'à les dérouter et à les envoyer au loin' (*A*, 66). Whereas the reader was made privy to differing perspectives on travel in the case of *Voyage en Grande Garabagne*, the natives' ostensible intention here is to derail and reject potential visitors from the outset. However, this means that the narrator's penetration of this 'ring of death' is meant to be seen as a major achievement in itself, and that he is already complicit with the Mages' endeavours to keep foreigners at bay. This would seem to suggest to us that the narrator has an inside track regarding life in the land of the Mages, and that the reader, in engaging with a narrative that is being related from within this sinister boundary, is being exposed to a privileged perspective on their lives. Indeed, the apparent difficulty in penetrating the imaginary Land of the Mages might even be seen as aping contemporaneous accounts of extreme, that is, physically challenging, travel, even, for example, Michaux's *Ecuador*, in which he recounts his exhausting exploration of the Andes, and his trying voyage down the Amazon.

The germination of the imaginary voyage in Michaux's accounts of real travel has been brought into focus here. In identifying this germination, it can be said that the move between Michaux's narratives based on real journeys and those based on imaginary travel is both gradual and acutely self-aware, rather than being a creative volte-face. Moreover, travel has been revealed to be a dominant theme in the *Ailleurs* narratives, as much as it is the driving force behind their creation.

5.3 In sight of and on the site of the imaginary voyage

The importance of Michaux's declaration in *Ecuador* that '[l]es impressions les plus fortes, les plus vitales ne tiennent pas longtemps' has already been emphasised. What is particularly notable when we consider this declaration in its entirety, however, is that Michaux does not appear to assess the potential of the travel journal itself as a site that might be used to 'retain' or 'preserve' some of these impressions. An instance in *Au Pays de la Magie* emerges as significant in this regard, as it seems to constitute a thinly veiled attack by Michaux on those who wholly indulge in landscape description in their travel accounts, a criticism reminiscent of the 'jury de prix de beauté' barb (discussed in Chapter 2) that Michaux had voiced in *Ecuador*:

> Il se forme, disent-ils, en la plupart des gens qui regardent un paysage, une capsule. Cette capsule n'est pas si petite qu'on croit.
> Cette capsule est le médium entre le paysage et le contemplateur. Si le contemplateur pouvait arracher cette capsule et l'emporter il serait heureux incommensurablement, il conquerrait le paradis sur terre.
> Mais il y faut une délicatesse extrême, une force prodigieuse et savoir ce qu'on fait. C'est comme arracher d'un coup un arbre avec toutes ses racines. Les petits malins qui usent un peu partout de moyens mnémotechniques, de représentations graphiques, de comparaisons, d'analyses et de brutalités sur la matière observée, non seulement ne savent pas de quoi je viens de parler, mais ils ne peuvent absolument se rendre compte de la simplicité merveilleuse et presque enfantine de cette opération qui vous mène simplement au seuil de l'extase. (*A*, 83–84)

In this passage the idea of a particular site retaining a memory ('une capsule'), in this instance inside the body, comes to the fore. It provides a middle ground between the narrator and the landscape he evaluates, a site where he can register and retain his impressions of what he has experienced. Of course, it might be added that the writer of travel would surely reach his apotheosis if he could adequately represent the landscape to reflect the extent of his sensual experience of it, and if the contents of that magic capsule in which our contemplations of the landscape lie could somehow be transferred onto the pages of the travel journal. Despite the fantastical element to this extract, it is suggested that the narrator thinks that the careful process of extraction itself – that is, redaction, the activity of writing up one's travel experience – is what can, in the end, be seen to give one the most satisfaction. Indeed, perhaps this is another reason why a physical departure is no longer necessary for Michaux to indulge himself in the process of constructing travel experiences, as this end no longer, in fact, necessitates the means (actual travel) formerly used to achieve it.

Moreover, the means, although essential to his development as a writer who travels, can now be dispensed with entirely, so that Michaux might concentrate from hereon in on what he finds to be an ultimately more pleasurable experience of travel – the imaginary voyage.

It is evident then that Michaux comes to view the travel journal of an imaginary voyage as a site where he can register and go on to develop his preliminary assessments of the imaginary travel experience. Alongside the internalised 'capsule' which mediates the travel experience, discussed above, it is also important to take into consideration the possible site of the imaginary travel narrative's *creation*. Indeed, Gide notes in his talk *Découvrons Henri Michaux* that '[l]a fantaisie visionnaire de Michaux l'entraîne à de nouveaux voyages: des voyages dans un fauteuil; des voyages dans des pays imaginaires'.[316] The phrase 'voyage dans un fauteuil', synonymous with 'voyages dans des pays imaginaires' in Gide's assessment, is of particular significance here for, as was the case with Gide's *Le Voyage d'Urien* (where the emphasis on 'ma lampe' and 'ma fenêtre' in the opening passages might be recalled), a familiar domestic interior from which the writer might depart *and* remain within in order to write up an imaginary voyage is emphasised (through Gide's use of the word 'fauteuil'). This emphasis on the interior also harks back to the similar realisations made by both Gide and Michaux, whereby imaginary travel is understood to be particularly well facilitated by an interior space, specifically, the (study-) bedchamber.

In bearing in mind the understanding of 'site' elucidated in the context of Michaux's travel writings, the notions of projection and mental displacement might be considered. These processes are, for Michaux, central to the mechanics of imaginary travel. An extract from the much later poem 'Glissement', which appears in a 1978 collection of his poetry entitled *Jours de silence*, provides us with an acute insight, not into the mental displacement of the would-be traveller, but into the potential for a site to displace *itself* (or become an 'elsewhere').[317]

SOUDAIN…

bloc d'une autre réalité substitué à celle-ci

[316]Gide, *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, p. 744.
[317] This text was also collected in the 1981 work *Chemins cherchés, chemins perdus, transgressions*.

le plateau d'en face tout entier est devenu autre

Dans un moment d'absence
le sacré à la place du profane
s'est trouvé sur la montagne

Transgression accomplie
un lieu n'est plus dans son lieu
un endroit élu le remplace, sorti du fond des âges [318]

The progression towards the line 'un lieu n'est plus dans son lieu' is particularly significant in terms of the way Michaux approaches imaginary travel. Beyond the context of this poem, it might be suggested that the departure point – even if it is the room in which the writer remains – has the potential to become, through his insistence and in the text he produces, another place. The above line also appears to hint at the suspension of disbelief necessary in the reader, so that he too might depart on the voyage that the narrator is undertaking and relating in the text. In any case, such a demand on the writer's imagination can only result in a fluid transformation of the given space – or perceived transportation beyond this space – with practice. Michaux, of course, speaks of the possibility – and even the necessity – of mental displacement and dissociation elsewhere in works contemporary to his travel accounts, most notably, perhaps, in his 1938 essay 'Peindre', where he declares, as previously highlighted: 'Le déplacement des activités créatrices est un des plus étranges voyages en soi qu'on puisse faire. Étrange décongestion, mise en sommeil d'une partie de la tête, la parlante, l'écrivante [...] On change de gare de triage quand on se met à peindre'.[319] Michaux's dual status as artist-writer has meant that decision-making is an integral step not only in terms of the way in which he relates his travel experiences, but also in terms of *how* he chooses to experience travel, as concluded in Chapter 2 of this thesis. The notion elucidated here of being obliged to 'changer de gare de triage', in deciding to represent an experience either visually or verbally, reminds us of what is at stake in Michaux's conception of the imaginary voyage. A choice is made to transport or project oneself beyond the site of the narrative's creation, whilst ultimately acknowledging and perhaps even relishing the impossibility of such a spatial dissociation. For Michaux, then, this inherent tension, as encapsulated in the 1948 preface to *Ailleurs* ('[i]l traduit aussi le Monde, celui qui voulait s'en échapper.

[318] 'Glissement', in *Jours de silence*, *Chemins cherchés, chemins perdus, transgressions*, *OC*, III, p. 1204–28 (p. 1209).
[319] 'Peindre', in *Passages*, *OC*, II, 318.

Qui pourrait échapper?'), and the notion of mental displacement together characterise the creative process that generates the imaginary voyage.

Mental displacement, for Michaux, cannot be dissociated from the skill of projection, which Michaux carefully hones in several works that appear the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, projection can be seen as the means to achieving this kind of displacement. An instance that displays Michaux's projection skills can be found in his text 'Magie', which appears as part of *Entre Centre et Absence*, in *Lointain intérieur* (1938). The episode outlined below highlights his ability seemingly to project himself into the imagined interior of a given object, whose actual presence appears to trigger or at least inspire this act of projection:

> J'étais autrefois bien nerveux. Me voici sur une nouvelle voie.
> Je mets une pomme sur ma table. Puis je me mets dans cette pomme. Quelle tranquillité! [...] J'en viens à la pomme. Là encore il y a eu des tatonnements, des expériences; c'est toute une histoire. Partir est peu commode et de même l'expliquer.[320]

Moreover, just as the 1948 preface to *Ailleurs* will go on to do, these lines happen to point out the difficulty of disengaging from a phenomenal reality in order to project oneself into an elsewhere ('Partir est peu commode [...]'), whilst also emphasising the difficulty of writing about such an *expérience*, if this word is to be understood both in the experiential and experimental sense.

Indeed, episodes outlining the interlinked processes of projection and mental displacement can already be discerned in *Qui je fus*, which appeared in 1927. One extract below describes a particularly forceful projection beyond the self and into an imaginary voyage:

> Vous savez qu'on rayonne, qu'on se jette hors de soi de tous côtés, ou seulement en ligne droite; et loin de ses immobiles fémurs et de son immobile cage thoracique et de sa chambre de coucher immobile, on fait les plus longs voyages. C'est l'âme qui s'en va, seule, vite![321]

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[320] Michaux, 'Entre centre et absence', *OC*, I, 559–72 (pp. 9-10).

[321] *Qui je fus*, *OC*, I, 85. This extract reminds of us of the closing lines of Baudelaire's 'Any Where Out of the World': 'Enfin, mon âme fait explosion, et sagement elle me crie: "N'importe où! n'importe où! pourvu que ce soit hors de ce monde!"'. (Baudelaire, *Le Spleen de Paris/La Fanfarlo* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987), pp. 177–78 [p. 178]).

A piece tellingly entitled 'Projection', which features in *Mes Propriétés* (in *La Nuit remue*, a text Gide speaks of in his talk on Michaux), is revealing insofar as it exposes the tension between the imaginary and the phenomenal that underpins this mental process. In this instance, the spectacle before which the narrator finds himself appears to him to be a 'projection', until he eventually comes to realise that it is a spectacle unfolding at the very site where he finds himself in reality. Michaux writes:

> Cela se passait sur la jetée d'Honfleur, le ciel était pur. On voyait très clairement le phare du Havre. [...] Et tout d'un coup vers huit heures, je m'aperçus que tout ce spectacle que j'avais contemplé pendant cette journée, ça avait été seulement une émanation de mon esprit. Et j'en fus fort satisfait, car justement je m'étais reproché un peu avant de passer mes journées à ne rien faire.
> Je fus donc content et puisque c'était seulement un spectacle venu de moi, cet horizon qui m'obsédait, je m'apprêtai à le rentrer. Mais il faisait fort chaud et sans doute j'étais fort affaibli, car je n'arrivai à rien. L'horizon ne diminuait pas [...]
> Je marchais, je marchais [...] et ainsi arrivai-je pour dîner à l'hôtel d'Angleterre et là il fut bien évident *que j'étais réellement à Honfleur*, mais cela n'arrangeait rien.[322] (emphasis in original)

Moreover, in *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, Gide describes what he terms Michaux's 'très singulier tour d'esprit', the effect of which he traces in Michaux's work:

> [...] [Son tour d'esprit] qui, par sincérité, précipite sans cesse Michaux hors de l'ornière des conventions, de l'appris par cœur. Sensation ou pensée, il la suit, sans souci qu'elle paraisse étrange, bizarre ou même saugrenue. Il la prolonge et, comme l'araignée, s'y suspend à un fil de soie, laissant le souffle poétique l'emporter, il ne sait lui-même où, avec un abandon de tout son être [...].[323]

Gide appears to discern in Michaux the creative outward impulse that can be seen to be encapsulated by the sometimes precarious processes of projection (as symbolised by the image of the spider suspended on a single strand of silk) and mental displacement (identifiable here through a vocabulary which includes 'précipite', 'hors de', 'suspend', 'emporter' and 'abandon'). Gide therefore understands what we have identified as Michaux's ability to ensure that 'un lieu n'est plus dans son lieu' as characteristic of the latter's writing.

A notable precedent to *Ailleurs* in terms of the process of projection is to be found in the opening passage of *Ecuador*:

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[322] Michaux, *La Nuit remue*, *OC*, I, 417–512 (p. 487).
[323] Gide, *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, p. 736.

> Voilà deux ans qu'il a commencé, ce voyage [...] Deux ans, une sorte de constipation et maintenant, c'est pour mardi matin. Je suis soumis toute la journée à une sorte de projection à distance [...] Quel effort il me faut pour revenir à moi, et combien 'impur' ce retour, comme quand on cède à une image de sexe dans la prière. (*EC*, 141)

The narrator identifies the process of 'projection à distance' from the outset of *Ecuador* as a precedent to embarking upon actual travel. As in the case of Gide departing on his voyage to the Congo, Michaux also embarks upon an anticipated voyage of sorts before its equivalent in reality actually gets underway. What differs from Gide's approach in terms of anticipating the travel experience, however, is that Michaux purposefully (and with some difficulty, if the potent image of long-term 'constipation' is understood to describe this particular resistance on Michaux's part) avoids any such anticipated travel over a long period of time until the departure for his real journey is finally set and only a matter of days away. It would seem, then, that in the case of *Ecuador*, anticipated travel is only validated when it nears an experience of real travel. What is particularly striking in the passage above, however, is that the activity of 'projection à distance' seems to encapsulate an act of sacrilege in the eyes of the narrator, one which can be seen to foreshadow the bedroom-based transgression enacted in the opening pages of *Ici, Poddema*, and explored later in this chapter.

Elsewhere in *Ecuador* Michaux speaks of the projection enabled by his experimentation with ether:

> La nuit passée, j'ai pris de l'éther. Quelle projection! Et quelle grandeur!
> L'éther arrive à toute vitesse. En même temps qu'il approche, il agrandit et démesure son homme, son homme qui est moi, et dans l'Espace le prolonge et le prolonge sans avarice, sans comparaison aucune. L'éther arrive à une vitesse de train, par sa route de bonds, d'enjambements: escalier à marches de falaises. (*EC*, 182)

What might be noted in the light of the passage above is that Michaux does not solely depend on drugs to practice what he calls projection, as his narratives of imaginary travel precede his texts based on drug-induced 'trips'.

Michaux's approach to generating an imaginary travel experience is mediated by the way in which he views the role of the narrative of imaginary travel, that is, as a

site bearing a trace, mark or imprint of his journey. Indeed, it is Gide who offers us an insight into this fixation in *Voyage au Congo*, where it might be argued that Gide's use of the word 'trace' maps onto his own conception of the role of writing, that is, to address posterity through what one records and interprets in one's work. Still en route to West Africa aboard the *Asie*, Gide acknowledges his delight in picking up on the traces left in the works of a much earlier writer, Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695): 'Je reprends, avec délices [...] toutes les fables de La Fontaine [...] Celui qui sait bien voir peut y trouver trace de tout [...]' (*VC*, 334). Later in *Voyage au Congo*, Gide puts forward the following as a beginning to a journal entry written after a particularly enlightening evening with the curiously ambivalent Doctor: 'Je voudrais bien laisser ici quelques traces de la fantastique soirée hier' (*VC*, 417). It has already been ascertained that Michaux comes to see the journal of the imaginary voyage as a hospitable site for his impressions, just as Gide speaks about leaving traces in the 'ici' of his Congo journal. What is particularly striking in terms of Michaux's development of the notion of leaving a mark in the last of the *Ailleurs* narratives, *Ici, Poddema*, however, is his playful focus on the narrator's bodily emissions, an image where the notions of making one's mark and fruitful production can be seen to intersect. So the masturbation/mock crucifixion scene that takes place in the land of Langalore, at the beginning of *Ici, Poddema*, is revealing insofar as it describes, through near-blasphemous terms, how one might transcend boundaries without ever leaving one's room (in invoking mental transportation and [self-] projection). It might be added that one's room can be seen to act as a site which one can attempt to transgress (in terms of attempting to move beyond its boundaries) *and* in which one can commit a transgressive (boundary-crossing, convention-eschewing, or even borderline-sacrilegous) act:

> Dans ce vain transport torturant, je me tournai, peut-être par association d'idées avec le mal de la crucifixion, je me tournai vers le mur (car j'étais dans ma chambre où je me martyrisais à la fenêtre à contempler les belles Langaloraines qui passaient, légères, insoucieuses). Je me collai donc, dévêtu, bras en croix, sur ce mur froid.
>
> Ce qui se passa alors, je voudrais tant le faire sentir.
>
> Mon transport se fondit en bonheur, un bonheur fier et harmonieusement infini. Je tâtais avidement, pour m'en repaître, cette grande surface froide qui paraissait n'en pas finir. (*A*, 106)

Once the seemingly torturous act is completed, the narrator declares: 'Je me débarrassais d'un intolérable amour non partagé. Enfin... j'aimais ce mur [...] J'étais

dans un moment où j'aurais donné n'importe quoi, pourvu que ce fût immense' (*A*, 106). In engaging in this act, the previously frustrated narrator seems to be taking a turn around the confines of the room where he is writing, one which requires both a physical connection with the room (the exaggerated contact with its bounds a sly suggestion of the possibility of making a mark, or leaving a trace) *and* a mental departure, the ultimately rapturous 'transportation'. The trigger for this act is that the traveller cannot seem to leave the room in which he has been staying, and thus begins to fantasise about the female natives passing in the street below. Once again, an image that emblematises the narrator's inability to grasp or engage wholly with his travel experience is presented (reminiscent of the sense of detachment from his surroundings frequently invoked by Michaux in *Ecuador*), here reworked as a seemingly impossible sexual encounter that instead goes on to inspire what we might see as a bedroom-based 'voyage' of sexual expression.

The notion of leaving a mark or depositing a trace is developed above in the narrator's tentative sexual encounter with the boundaries of the room in which he is writing. However, this notion is later revisited in *Ici, Poddema* when the narrator is cordially invited to partake in a fathering ceremony, which involves depositing his semen into a pot to create one of the 'potted' race:

> Varinai est la province de Darridema où l'on va le plus loin dans l'expérience des naissances. Même il y a plus d'enfants disons semi-artificiels que de ceux que la nature seule et le couple homme-femme a poussés à la lumière du monde. Ce sont des enfants 'au pot'.
> [...] On invite les hommes à faire acte de père 'au pot'. Je n'en dirai pas tous les détails, ce sont là d'autres mœurs qui pourraient étonner [...]
> Moi-même je fus invité à prendre part à la prospérité (par naissances) de la nation qui m'offrait l'hospitalité. Comment refuser? (*A*, 112)

Once again, the idea of depositing a trace is seen as fundamental to the travel experience ('Comment refuser?'), precisely because the narrator's ostensible aim is not merely to travel, but for the travel experience itself to generate literary (and artistic) content. In this sense, the repeated imagery of bodily emissions aptly emphasises how important it is to the narrator to register and record his travel impressions. This focus on the relevance of representing travel would appear to confirm that Michaux's resistance to relating accounts of real travel in the wake of *Un*

Barbare en Asie, then, does not hinge on any lasting aversion to writing about the experience of travel.

5.4 The imaginary voyage: reconfiguring the world

Having previously explored the significance of the interrelated processes of projection and mental displacement in Michaux's work, it is important to bring into focus another process of great consequence in Michaux's imaginary voyages, that of 'intervention':

> Autrefois, j'avais trop le respect de la nature. Je me mettais devant les choses et les paysages et je les laissais faire.
> Fini, maintenant j'interviendrai.[324]

In the above lines, Michaux seems to suggest how the role of the writer who travels, in terms of real travel, is essentially a passive one, a question of exposing oneself to another country and culture, without necessarily having creative scope as to the way this land might be represented. In this way, it foreshadows the concerns regarding the interchangeable and arbitrary nature of the role of the displaced writer that Michaux will go on to pinpoint in the preface to *Un Barbare en Asie*, composed decades later. To remedy the above problem, it would seem that a staged intervention in reality on the part of the traveller is necessary. So the traveller therefore endeavours to stage such an 'intervention' during a visit to the French coastal town of Honfleur (the subversive introduction of a clichéd element of exoticism, the camel, might be noted):

> J'étais donc à Honfleur et je m'y ennuyais. Alors résolument j'y mis du chameau [...] Je les introduisis d'abord les jours de grande affluence, le samedi sur la place du Marché. L'encombrement devint indescriptible et les touristes disaient: "Ah! ce que ça pue! Sont-ils sales les gens d'ici!" L'odeur gagna le port et se mit à terrasser celle de la crevette. On sortait de la foule plein de poussière et de poils d'on ne savait quoi. Et la nuit, il fallait entendre les coups de pattes des chameaux quand ils essayaient de franchir les écluses [...].[325]

Yet reconfiguring Nature or the elements in the way Michaux's process of 'intervention' allows is not a continuous preoccupation for the narrator of *Ailleurs*. Instead, it is important to ascertain the way the native peoples of *Ailleurs* appear to view their surroundings, and to acknowledge the power and respect that they attribute

[324] Michaux, *La Nuit remue*, *OC*, I, 488.
[325] Michaux, *La Nuit remue*, *OC*, I, 488.

to Nature. For example, in *Ici, Poddema* the landscape is viewed by the inhabitants with an attitude of fearfulness. In *Ecuador*, the realisation of the arbitrariness of language systems, as encapsulated by the declaration 'Un nom est un objet à détacher' (*EC*, 151), can be viewed as a central moment in Michaux's development as writer. His realisation in *Ecuador* goes on to be revisited in a parodic fashion in *Ici, Poddema*, when it is revealed to us that the naming of mountains and large rivers is strictly forbidden amongst the people of Poddema:

> Leur capitale est bâtie face à un grand pic. Ce pic est anonyme. Ils n'osent donner de nom aux pics. Ils n'osent donner de nom aux montagnes [...] Aussi avais-je toutes les peines du monde à m'orienter. Et s'il y avait un nom, même lointainement allusif et bien peu propre à faire retrouver la chose ou le lieu, ils craignaient encore de me le faire connaître, par peur de lui conférer une soudaine nouvelle importance. (*A*, 115)

The narrator, in an environment practically free of place names, runs the risk of ending up lost rather easily as a direct result of this. In his resultant state of total disorientation, he is given the opportunity to reappraise the significance of signification in narrating his experience of this strange new land. Here Michaux seems to offer the reader the prospect of returning once again to the concerns he raised in *Ecuador* upon sighting land, that is, whether he had made the right choice (particularly given his abilities as a visual artist) in deciding to represent his travel experiences *verbally*, when signifiers are seemingly detachable and interchangeable at will. Moreover, even in an imaginary land and despite Michaux's development of the process of 'intervention', Nature can still be seen to be a force to be reckoned with in *Ailleurs*. It seems that to intervene fully in Nature, and to remould it entirely to one's liking, would be to dissipate the tension between contemplating the landscape and relating one's impressions of it. Michaux has recognised from his experience in writing *Ecuador* that this tension is fruitful, if not essential, to the creation of an engaging travel narrative.

In *Au Pays de la Magie*, however, it is not simply a language system that seems to disintegrate before the traveller's eyes. Instead, the sensory experiences of travel are targeted by the natives he encounters, in particular the sense of sight:

> Ce qu'il y a de plus intéressant dans le pays, on ne le voit pas. On peut être sûr de ne pas l'avoir vu. Ils l'entourent de brouillards. Ainsi m'est restée inaccessible, invisible,

> la Capitale Fée inaccessible, invisible, la Capitale Fédérale, quoiqu'on m'en ait indiqué je ne sais combien de fois le chemin et que j'ai été une semaine assurément presque à la toucher. (*A*, 80)

In fact, these conjured fogs have the effect of both physically *and* mentally destabilising the narrator: 'Leur brouillard suffirait à rendre fou. Cette absence complète de repères… on voit une feuille, une patte, un museau, mais impossible de reconnaître l'arbuste, l'animal' (*A*, 80). First of all, this reminds us of Michaux's frequent difficulty in visually apprehending his surroundings in South America, as outlined in *Ecuador*. Secondly, this passage sees other characters in the text display the very capability Michaux has exercised in creating these lands, that is, the capability of reconfiguring Nature. In this instance, however, the natives deploy that skill to the *detriment* of the narrator and his journey.

It is therefore important to consider any positive impact of reconfiguring the elements of nature that might be explored in *Ailleurs*. Water, in particular, is an element that is reconsidered at length in the *Ailleurs* narratives. This is not surprising insofar as its representation throughout *Ecuador* uncovers its significant role in frustrating and challenging the narrator's creative project. Indeed, it seems that gaining a modicum of control over the fluidity and ungraspable nature of the travel experience can be emblematised by Michaux's engagement with water imagery in *Ailleurs*. Michaux's frustrations with the ocean leg of his South American voyage were examined in depth in Chapter 2 of this thesis. In *Au Pays de la Magie*, the ocean is not a hindrance to the flow of Michaux's writing as it is in *Ecuador*, but instead is developed into a source of literary inspiration. The ocean is understood as a fragmented body in *Au Pays de la Magie*, rather than as an all-enveloping force of nature (and thus, something which can, in fact, stifle creativity, as I would argue in the case of *Ecuador*), for it appears in one particular vignette in the guise of a single dislocated wave:

> Sur une grande route, il n'est pas rare de voir une vague, une vague toute seule, une vague à part de l'océan.
> Elle n'a aucune utilité, ne constitue pas un jeu.
> C'est un cas de spontanéité magique. (*A*, 67)

Michaux's acute frustration when it came to the difficulty of engaging with the banks of the Amazon (due to his near-entombment in a traditional canoe) is reworked in *Au*

Pays de la Magie into an image where the native Mage is given the scope to triumph over Nature:

> Marcher sur les deux rives d'une rivière est au contraire un exercice, d'ailleurs pénible.
> Assez souvent l'on voit ainsi un homme (étudiant en magie) remonter un fleuve, marchant sur l'une et l'autre rive à la fois: fort préoccupé, il ne vous voit pas. Car ce qu'il réalise est délicat et ne souffre aucune distraction. (*A*, 67)

What is notable in this final instance is that the *Ailleurs* narratives are not necessarily concerned with providing Michaux with the chance to redress the problems that frustrated him during his real travels by means of his narrative persona. Instead, the narrator can observe reworkings of and reactions to these frustrations through the native peoples he conjures in the *Ailleurs* narratives. Indeed, this tendency to lessen the focus on the narrator figure prevails in *Ailleurs*, as evidenced by the 1936 insertion of a travel companion, James Fitzgerald, and the depiction of various native approaches to travel.

5.5 Conclusion

Nicolas Ragonneau sees *Ailleurs* as 'le rejeton engendré par la perplexité d'un voyageur trop souvent déçu par le réel, qui découvre, à l'instar de Claude Lévi-Strauss, que tout voyage est avant tout exploration de soi'.[326] However, Michaux's *Ailleurs* operates as an exploration of the creative scope of the imaginary travel account, as much as it acts as an exploration of the authorial self. Instead of seeing the *Ailleurs* narratives as generated by Michaux's resistance to his earlier works based on real voyages, *Ailleurs* might be considered as an exploration of the writing process involved in the invention of the imaginary travel experience. In this way, a far stronger link can be discerned in Michaux's creative trajectory or development amongst this later trio of texts and his earlier interrogation of the ways in which experiences of real travel might be textualised, as elucidated in both *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie*. Indeed, the ways in which the *Ailleurs* narratives rework elements of these early texts, *Ecuador* in particular, have been highlighted in the current chapter.

[326] Nicolas Ragonneau, 'Henri Michaux et les 'États-tampons': Aspects du voyage imaginaire dans *Ailleurs*', in *Textyles*, 12 (1995), 137– 53 (p. 137).

The way in which projection and mental displacement operate in Michaux's travel accounts at this time has also been outlined here; the author's propensity towards these practices has been shown to facilitate his urge to depart on imaginary voyages. These imaginary voyages are not merely a result of the frustrations he felt during his earlier real travels, but are a response to, as well as an extension *and* reworking of, these initial travel experiences. In fact, it can be said that Michaux's frustration with travel, the unresolved and, indeed, always indissoluble tension that exists in his work between travelling and relating the travel experience, is exactly what propels his accounts of imaginary travel as much as it provided the material for the accounts of his real voyages. Moreover, the striving on the part of the narrator to present a reconfiguration of the elements of Nature was also emphasised over the course of this chapter. This was deemed to be a continuation of Michaux's verbal reaction to the physical and psychological challenges imposed by Nature during his earlier real travels.

The concluding lines of *Ici, Poddema* (and therefore, of the entire *Ailleurs* collection) are illuminating in regard to Michaux's underlying project in writing *Ailleurs*:

> Quelqu'un, me dira-t-on, a bien dû trouver un jour une espèce nouvelle dont il était satisfait, après quoi il s'est arrêté de créer. Certes, mais pas pour longtemps. La recherche des encore insatisfaits autour de lui excite bientôt le déjà satisfait qui, biffant son œuvre et la retriturant, jettera dans le Monde une nouvelle race, de nouveaux destins, et la Roue incessamment tourne à nouveau entraînée. (*A*, 131)

The narrator's attempt to distance himself in the passage above ('[q]uelqu'un', 'me dira-t-on') from the assessment made therein belies the insight this passage gives into Michaux's own creative trajectory. Michaux was, in essence, satisfied with his accounts of real travels undertaken, coming to conclusions in each narrative that pointed towards the validity and fruitfulness of (future) imaginary travel/travel without *physical* displacement. Yet it is in pointing in the direction of imaginary voyages that Michaux also realised that he must follow this trajectory himself, and write his own narratives of imaginary travel. The extract above also emphasises the passage of time – or, more specifically, the onslaught of the everyday ('la Roue incessamment tourne' reminding us of the cyclical and circular imagery employed in

Gide's *Paludes*). Michaux's evolving stance on representing the everyday from my examination of both *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie* might also be remembered; there is the suggestion here that a new everyday can be created in lands of one's own invention, and that the effect of the other's quotidian upon the foreign visitor, even in imaginary travel experiences, will continue to be acknowledged. The image of erasing and reworking one's output contained in this extract, encapsulated by the words 'biffant' and 'retriturant', is also striking, and serves to highlight how Michaux's narratives of imaginary travel represent above all an urge to revisit and rework his approaches to textualising actual journeys.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has traced the interplay between real and imaginary travel in the accounts of mobility which proliferate in the *œuvres* of both Gide and Michaux. It has also taken into consideration the possibility of a middle ground – that of anticipated travel – and the ways in which this type of travel not only precedes but helps shape the author's apprehension of the subsequent journey represented (be it real or imaginary) in his narrative. My approach has been to show the importance of understanding the generic and disciplinary divisions that dissociate works focusing on the imaginary voyage from those purporting to represent an actual journey, whilst identifying such divisions as problematic in themselves. Yet, because they are not steadfast or uniform, as various critical debates have come to underline, such divisions can in fact be understood as fluid and ultimately renegotiable. Whilst I have warned against collapsing what can nonetheless be valuable distinctions in ascertaining the truth value of a journey, I have suggested that these distinctions must be porous, at the very least, in order to reflect the various approaches to textualising travel that any account of a journey seems to marry.

Underpinning this central problematic was the connection that I discerned between Gide and Michaux, authors, who, at first glance, seem to be not only a generation but a world apart in terms of their writing styles, working methods, and public personae. However, using Gide's own appropriation of Michaux in *Découvrons Henri Michaux* as my point of departure, I have uncovered the links between both authors in terms of travel not only as an enduring theme and source of literary inspiration, but also as a way of structuring and advancing the writing process, an input which can even be represented in the emergent text.

Moreover, the lifelong interest in textualising travel that both Gide and Michaux demonstrate has necessitated a contextualisation of their works, not only in terms of French literature, but also in relation to rapidly evolving social contexts. This means that the corpus studied here accordingly traces the disengagement from the Symbolist voyage of the 1890s in favour of a more socially engaged writing on travel in the interwar period. This socially engaged travel account moves away from its examination of problematic ideologies in practice (such as capitalist imperialism and

Communism, as explored in Chapter 3 and 4 of this thesis) and towards an escapist reengagement with the imaginary voyage, a shift which takes place against the backdrop of another world war (it might be acknowledged here that, apart from the devastating impact of this war on humanity in general, it also affected the common understanding of mobility, insofar as it wove exile, escape, deportation, decampment, and enforced transportation into the fabric of everyday life).

This contextualisation also extends to the ways in which the works of Gide and Michaux can be seen to relate to contemporaneous developments in the understanding of concepts central to travel, such as the exotic, the other, and the everyday. I wish to draw on the concept of the exotic to reach a further conclusion in the case of both authors. In a 1935 journal entry, Gide observes that 'une sorte de virginité' is part of the attraction of the elsewhere, or what he understands as exoticism:

> Ce qui fait le charme et l'attrait de l'*Ailleurs*, de ce que nous appelons exotisme, ce n'est point tant que la nature y soit plus belle, mais que tout nous y paraît neuf, nous surprend et se présente à notre œil dans une sorte de virginité.[327] (emphasis in original)

It is perhaps remarkable that Gide can appear enthused by the notion of the exotic in the wake of his Congo journey, where the aesthetic motivations behind his travel accounts had to make way for a narrative tracing Gide's social engagement and move towards political action. Yet the emphasis in the above extract on encountering newness in the material world shows that Gide is in fact recounting a key lesson to emerge from his travels in West Africa, where, as underlined in Chapter 3 of this thesis, landscapes are bemoaned for their disappointing similarity to their French counterparts, and the exotic accordingly seems out of reach. Following the logic outlined in Gide's statement in his *Journal*, it is only if something appears sufficiently new that it can be truly called exotic. However, it has been seen in Chapter 5 of this thesis that Michaux's manipulation of such a conceptualisation of the elsewhere – that is, the elsewhere as the uncovering of a perceived exotic – is to focus his narrative on countries of his own invention, where he can, as Segalen writes of the exotic, 'sentir

[327] Gide, *Journal*, II, 504.

le Divers'.[328] Whereas *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie* focus on the banality of the everyday as a common ground in which both the traveller and the inhabitant of his destination participate in a perpetual othering process, as explored in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the chosen title of Michaux's collection of narratives of imaginary travel, *Ailleurs*, seals his ambition both to identify and relish the virgin territory of the blank page as creative impetus, point of departure, and *invitation au voyage* – an uncrossed ground awaiting its first pioneer. As Butor writes: '[À] travers cette lucarne qu'est la page, je me trouve ailleurs [...]'.[329] Yet the *Ailleurs* narratives are nonetheless preceded by a meditation on what Michaux terms 'ma virginité de vue' in *Ecuador*:

> Le mimétisme m'a longtemps paru un de ces attrape-savants comme il en existe tant. Souvent, je sentis par ailleurs, et aujourd'hui ma virginité de vue, d'observation refaite pour ainsi dire, je constate une fois de plus, le *mimétisme des choses*, des objets, dits inanimés. (*EC*, 150) (emphasis in original)

In identifying the mimicry that exists in the natural world as well as in human interaction, the traveller can begin to review the world, and forge infinite new connections: 'Pas une chose sur notre planète, je vous assure, ne ressemble autant à un nuage qu'une île' (*EC*, 150). Such a realisation precedes his conclusion that '[u]n nom est un objet à detacher'; he then accentuates the importance of having such power to manipulate language and engage in the process of naming: '[l]es avoir à détacher' (*EC*, 151). Michaux's understanding of 'virginité' as it relates to apprehending travel shows that, unlike Gide's 1935 position, where the exotic is relative to some perceived 'outside', and attributable to apparent difference, the newness that one seeks must instead lie in one's way of seeing the world, resulting in a 'virginité de vue'. As shown over the course of this thesis, Michaux's reformulation of his way of seeing, as aided by the production of accounts of real travel, *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie*, allows him to revisit and remould his apprehension of these journeys with a view to creating his *Ailleurs* texts. Michaux's understanding of the traveller's way of seeing is all the more remarkable in the context of this thesis because it echoes the apprehension of the material world suggested by the narrator of *Les Nourritures terrestres* – 'Que ton œil soit la chose regardée' (*NT*, 368), from which Gide's 1935 assessment of evaluating one's surroundings would seem to depart. Michaux,

[328] Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme: une esthétique du Divers*, p. 24.
[329] Butor, 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', p. 5.

therefore, takes up the challenge laid down by Gide in *Les Nourritures terrestres* – if Gide paves the way for the visual apprehension of the world in this narrative, Michaux textualises such an approach, particularly, as evidenced in my analysis of *Ecuador* and *Un Barbare en Asie*, when it comes to accounts of real travel. In this way, Michaux ultimately challenges his assertion in *Ecuador* that 'Il n'y en a que pour les peintres dans le premier contact avec l'étranger' (*EC*, 151), showing that the textualisation of travel can similarly engage with and impart the primacy of the visual encounter at the heart of the experience of travel. Travelling, then, suggests treading a line between knowledge and discovery; accepting things as they appear, or reviewing the way in which one apprehends them. In *Un Barbare en Asie*, for example, Michaux accords a superiority to the 'passant aux yeux naïfs' who can, much more so than the inhabitants of a given place, identify its essence, or 'mettre le doigt sur le centre' (*BA*, 333), an assertion that moves beyond the frustration of trying to replicate the initial encounter with the exotic in one's travel narrative to a fresh understanding of newness as a way of seeing that lies with the traveller, rather than with the destination he beholds.

However, tracing Michaux's evolution in this regard would not be to say that Gide altogether disregards the honing of the traveller's visuality in his accounts of travel, despite his 1935 stance positing the traveller as one who seeks to uncover an always attainable newness in the world, rather than reinvigorating the way in which he sees his surroundings. Indeed, an interplay between the *visibility* and visuality of the traveller can be detected as a concern in Gide's work. For instance, in the manuscript version of *Voyage au Congo*, Gide notes the importance of the keeping the figure of the traveller to the fore in any account of travel: 'Le gênant dans les relations de voyage, c'est lorsqu'on perd de vue le voyageur; il ne me plaît point qu'il s'efface; il m'intéresse autant que le pays parcouru'.[330] Charles Forsdick sees Gide's comment as a response to the travel diary's mounting focus on the traveller and his self-discovery, and the impact of this shift 'on those more traditional understandings of the journey's textualization' (such as the logbook).[331] Firstly, it might be added that Gide's assertion that the traveller must remain central in the travel account is also a countermeasure to ensure that the focus on the self is not diminished because of the

[330] Gide, in 'Notes et variantes – *Voyage au Congo*', *Souvenirs et voyages*, p. 1220.
[331] Forsdick, *New Approaches to Travel*, p. 29.

challenges a journey might bring. Such challenges often problematise or involving a rethinking of the textualisation of the journey, as evidenced in the unexpected developments which impact on the construction of Gide's Congo travel texts, the revisions which extend as much as rework Gide's first Soviet travel account, or Michaux's attempt to trace his increasing disillusionment with his South American journey in *Ecuador*. Secondly, even if his 1935 stance suggests that Gide reverts to an understanding of the exotic that correlates with his apprehension of the concept in the fin-de-siècle period (particularly as evidenced in his writings focusing on real travel, as noted in Chapter 1), his emphasis on the visibility of the traveller in the above extract from his Congo manuscript also suggests that he wishes to remain attuned to the precept central to *Les Nourritures terrestres*, that is, the precept which connects travel and an awareness of visuality. It is not only the traveller who deserves to remain the focus of the travel account, therefore, but the eye of the beholder, that is, the traveller, also merits consideration. Indeed, as Anne-Marie Christin's article on the illustrated edition of *Le Voyage d'Urien*, jointly worked upon by Gide and the painter Maurice Denis, shows, Gide in fact has a broad understanding, from a very early stage in his literary career, of what it might mean to textualise travel.[332] This understanding demonstrates an awareness on Gide's part of the visual aspect in play when representing human experience, that of travel included (indeed, it might be noted that this ambition seeps into the vocabulary used in the preface to *L'Immoraliste*, which underlines the author's desire to 'bien peindre et d'éclairer bien ma peinture').[333]

Bearing in mind the eye of the beholder, and the infinite perceptions of the world possible because of this, the mechanics of influence, beyond the literary camaraderie discussed (specifically Gide's 1941 championing of Michaux), has featured in my consideration of travel and its textualisation. Pascal's statement on influence, with its emphasis on reconfiguring trajectories and outdoing rivals, helps to shed light on the complexities of writing about one's travels: 'Qu'on ne dise pas que je n'ai rien dit de nouveau: la disposition des matières est nouvelle; quand on joue à la

[332] Anne-Marie Christin, 'Un livre double: *Le Voyage d'Urien* par André Gide et Maurice Denis', *Romantisme*, 43 (1984), 73-90.
[333] Gide, *L'Immoraliste,* in *Romans et récits: Œuvres lyriques et dramatiques*, I (2009), 589-691, p. 592.

paume, c'est une même balle dont joue l'un et l'autre, mais l'un la place mieux'.[334] Travel often sees a fusion of one's own itinerary and paths taken by other travellers (the impact of reading other accounts of travel has been noted at several points throughout this thesis), meaning that there can be a struggle to ascertain the value of travelling for oneself. This disillusionment with – and pressing need to interrogate – one's journey can seep into the nascent travel narrative, even generating precisely what is novel and engaging about the work, as evident in the case of *Ecuador*. Indeed, the struggle to evaluate travel coincides with the desire for the exotic, that is, the possibility of uncovering an untouched elsewhere, identified as a primary *invitation au voyage* for both Gide and Michaux. The novel insights their accounts engender lie, for Gide, in ultimately ascertaining that the exotic is relative to and dependent upon the traveller's perception of the world, and, in the case of Michaux, in forging a new way of seeing that can be used not only for considering the real world, but also as a tool to construct an imaginary place. For Michaux, the cultivation of a new way of seeing also has the potential to lead on to a radical overhaul of what it might mean to textualise travel – as a number of his subsequent texts show, for example, 'Portrait des Meidosems' (one version of which is punctuated by lithographs depicting the inhabitants of this imaginary land), *Par la voie des rythmes* (an experiment in creating a visual narrative that challenges our understanding of calligraphy), and *Idéogrammes en Chine* (in which the notions 'être calligraphe, comme on est paysagiste' and calligraphy as an 'expression du trajet, de la course' are both explored and arguably demonstrated).[335]

Of course, the ways in which a writer approaches and ultimately textualises travel, whether such displacement be real, imaginary, or anticipated, can emerge from influences as varied and ostensibly divergent as poets who explore travel as a literary theme, and geographers or officials on a fact-finding exploration. Michaux recognises the variety of influences that can underpin the will to depart on any type of journey, and in his 1946 essay 'Les poètes voyagent', he comments on the extensive influence of poets whose meditations on the imaginary voyage inspire in others the wish to travel in real life:

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[334] Pascal, *Pensées*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Louis Lafuma (Paris: Seuil, 1963), pp. 493-644 (p. 592).
[335] See Michaux, *Idéogrammes en Chine*, p. 839 and p. 841. Michaux, *Idéogrammes en Chine*, in *OC*, III, 815-51.

> Excitants pour les jeunes en état de pré-réalisation, ressuscitants pour les autres, les poètes donnent éternellement le 'départ'.
> Ces velléitaires enfin impriment leur volonté, ces cryptiques sans profondeur enfin en d'autres s'approfondissent, ces amants sans avoir femme enfin inspirent l'amour, et ces voyageurs sans bouger suscitent des croisières.[336]

Despite the somewhat dismissive tone used in describing the poet as the creator of the imaginary voyage, Michaux nonetheless brings the importance of the poet's role into focus in this essay (whilst once again acknowledging Lautréamont, an influence, he admits elsewhere, on his own writing). Gide also outlines a model based on the intersection of influence and self-discovery that can be used to further our understanding of the way in which he approaches the textualisation of travel:

> [C]omme on ne peut inventer rien de neuf pour soi tout seul, ces influences que je dis personnelles parce qu'elles sépareront en quelque sorte la personne qui les subit, l'individu, de sa famille, de sa société, seront aussi bien celles qui le rapprocheront de tel inconnu qui les subit ou les a subies comme lui, – qui forme ainsi des groupements nouveaux – et crée comme une nouvelle famille, aux membres parfois très épars, tisse des liens, fonde des parentés – qui peut pousser à la même pensée tel homme de Pékin à moi-même, et qui, à travers le temps, apparente Jammes à Virgile [...].[337]

Gide traces the way influence might make one travel, whether it moves one away from one's society, or towards a like-minded group or individual (as evidenced in Chapter 4, this does not necessarily preclude a return to one's familial or social origins as a result of travel), as well as indicating that influence itself can be seen to *travel* across time and space. Indeed, Gide's exploration of the forging of new links amongst those who share influences has set the precedent for apposite couplings in relation to travel over the course of this thesis. Other couplings radiate from its core comparison of Gide and Michaux; a section of Chapter 1 aligns Gide with Xavier de Maistre, whilst Chapter 4 considers Walter Benjamin and Gide in tandem, comparing their approaches to their respective U.S.S.R. journeys, at the same time as considering Derrida's appraisal of his predecessors during his own Soviet voyage.

In terms of future research, therefore, scholarship on Michaux would benefit from an analysis of the mutual influence connecting him with other writers who travel with whom he was acquainted, such as Michel Leiris and Jean Paulhan (who commissioned *Ecuador*), thus uncovering the extent to which his reputation as 'un

[336] Michaux, 'Les poètes voyagent', p. 308.
[337] Gide, 'De l'influence en littérature', p. 405.

solitaire, un retiré' can be called into question when it comes to the topic of travel.[338] Moreover, Gide's decision to champion Michaux at a stage when the latter had already obtained recognition in European literary circles might be investigated further in the light of Gide's increasing preoccupation, in his writing during this period, with his own mortality and questions of legacy, particularly as, in committing to what he terms a 'tour de Michaux', Gide reminds us of Butor's assertion that '[p]artir en voyage, c'est revivre'.[339] In contributing more widely to the understanding of Gide and Michaux as writers who travel, this thesis also prefigures extended – and holistic – engagements with travel as a theme and narrative motor across the *œuvres* of other authors, possibly even taking in those who encourage writing on travel in others as much as they travel and write about mobility themselves (for example, Jean Paulhan). Indeed, if we are to engage further with the broader understanding of what it might mean to textualise travel that Gide seems to instigate in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, which Michaux seems to follow through on in his own literary production, then this model could not only be employed across a variety of disciplines – travel writing studies, literary studies, and text-image studies, but may also shed light on the examination of crossover concepts such as ekphrasis (remembering what Michaux says of the creative process behind his poems on René Magritte's paintings: 'Car c'est de chemins qu'il s'agit, de voyage, si l'on veut').[340]

It has been shown over the course of this thesis that the travel text always retains a link with the world it represents; as an *espace atopique*, it is engaged with its referent (a real or an imaginary world) as much as with its equivalents (other texts on travel, whether their focus fall solely on, or combine, real, imaginary and anticipated travel). More specifically, it has been seen that in the case of an account of real travel, this can mean a connection with the destination it comments upon; in the case of an account of imaginary travel, this can vary from inscribing the site of its construction into the narrative (a notion explored in my analysis of *Le Voyage d'Urien* in Chapter 1), or the permeation of elements of real journeys (as evidenced in *Les Nourritures terrestres*, explored in Chapter 1, and in the analysis of *Ailleurs* in Chapter 5). Despite these connections, however, the travel account at the same time attempts to remain a

[338] Gide, *Découvrons Henri Michaux*, p. 734.
[339] Butor, 'Le Voyage et l'écriture', p. 9.
[340] Michaux, *En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques*, *OC*, III, 693-715 (p. 695).

space *apart* from the place it invents or attempts to represent. As Casey Blanton notes in the case of accounts of real travel: 'Like the Maori spear brought back as material object with a narrative to tell, the travel book is also a decontextualized object, forever disembodied from its source [...]'.[341] Indeed, if we are to engage with Blanton's idea that the account of empirical travel is a decontextualised object, a further point of distinction between an account of real travel and an account of imaginary travel may be noted. Real travel, as a traversal of space enshrined in a certain timeframe, can be seen to stand apart from the narrative it helps to generate, whereas imaginary travel, when it engages with invented worlds, can be understood as eternally bound up in its own narrative, the text itself often being the only tangible manifestation of the imaginary journey. Yet this thesis has emphasised that distinctions such as this should not mean that understanding of accounts of real and imaginary travel in terms of one another deserves to be eschewed, as an approach that brings expressions of real and imaginary travel together reveals their wealth of connections, as well as showing the extent to which they co-depend on one another. This study, then, has negotiated the network of possible – and infinitely reconfigurable – interactions between real and imaginary travel, showing that an author's textualisation of travel can extend beyond, and call into question, the parameters suggested by genre and, more broadly speaking, by a field of study. The inclusiveness with which Gide and Michaux operate as writers who travel – who write to travel and travel to write, to borrow Butor's antimetabole – demonstrates that they are acutely sensitive to the interplay between real and imaginary travel, as well as attuned to the possible middle ground of anticipated travel. Their inclusive approach also shows that, in many instances, their remaining attentive to the creative potential offered by such interplay is precisely what generates and shapes their travel narratives. Above all, however, their wanderlust is marked by its eternal willingness to accept multiple *invitations au voyage*, which sees each writer partake of a 'voyage dans le livre' – be it a reading or writing (ad)venture – as easily as departing on a lengthy trip across the world. This appreciation of travel as protean and yet incorrigibly various, challenging yet also enriching, seafaring or even sedentary, is perhaps best summed up by the young Gide writing about his discovery of Flaubert's works: 'Ce Flaubert est grisant: à lire ses lettres, il me prend des rages énormes de voyager, d'éprouver des sensations

[341] Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*, p. 111.

nouvelles, inconnues, voir des pays et des choses, connaître d'autres langues, et surtout de lire'.[342] Across the prolific *œuvres* of both Gide and Michaux, disillusionment, disappointment and other obstacles that might impede a journey do not signal an end to the voyage or its textualisation; instead, their writings persist in uncovering the potential to reconfigure and revisit not only routes and paths taken, but also ways of seeing.

[342] Gide, *Journal*, I, 59.

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