

Aware that Freudianism in fiction has had its hey-day, Ruth Nicols does not resort to the heroine's childhood experiences in order to discover the roots of the involvement which ultimately leads her to an untimely death. Nor does she employ the much used and abused dream-vision technique. Instead, she adopts the framework of a journey beyond the physical death of the very woman whose self she wants to probe and explore. Indeed, if "Who was I?" and "Why did I love and hate my uncle?" are the major questions asked by Margaret Redmond, the different episodes of the journey mark out and carry forward her progression towards finding the answers. This arrangement gives the novelist scope for complexity, but what follows is rather a disappointment.

After dying of asthma, Margaret finds herself in a very earth-like heaven, travels extensively backward in chronological time, and discovers that she had also been Elisabeth Love in sixteenth century England; Zawumatec, a slave in the long houses of the Iroquois; and, regardless of sex, Tirigan, a warrior prince in ancient Summer. Thus, for those who are totally devoted to reincarnation, there are special rewards on almost every page. Those who do not share this belief will, however, find the book a hard morsel to swallow. Elisabeth hated her husband for his fickleness, Zawumatec hated her master for having enslaved her, and Tirigan hated Utuhegal for having deposed him. Hence, by Nicols's simple equation, Margaret hated her uncle who was the triple reincarnation of the husband, master, and usurper.

Ruth Nicols packs Margaret Redmond's observations into a bracing set of maxims. These pieces of wisdom not only heavily intersperse the narration, but also make the presence of the author herself regretably conspicuous. Finally, solemnities such as "Paradise is to want for nothing" usher in a conclusion which, in the absence of an effective answer to the main question asked in the book, is both disarming and deflating. At the end of her journey, Margaret finds true love in the person of Paul, a young Chinese of the Tang dynasty. Both will be reborn, this time in the United States, will get married, live happily, and procreate. This, of course, leads to a possibility which may be appealing, but may not convince us all: death is no longer the inescapable end of human existence, but a blithe migration from one physical state to another.

This book has nothing to tell about the exploration of human passions or the subtle art of expressing and integrating them. For all her extensive journey, Margaret Redmond never becomes a full character, and, because of the insistence on actual reincarnation, the minor characters cannot be interpreted either as elements of a mythos, or as spiritual clues to the peculiar nature of the protagonist. No subtleties of psychological reading contribute anything to the reader's understanding of the human nature in general, or lead to his progression towards self-knowledge.

However, an impression of youthful enthusiasm is communicated in Ruth Nicols's descriptions of the heavenly landscape where the journey beyond death takes place. This author certainly has an eye for color and an ear for sound. The song of a bird, the rain on a roof, or the misty green of a valley at dawn are occasions for ecstasy. There are also a few noteworthy attempts at coaxing language to divulge its potential for meaning and rhythm.

Ruth Nicols is definitely an imaginative writer, yet the images she conceives have the effect not only to create feasts of illusion, but also to destroy illusion. When we probe the significance of the search for Margaret Redmond's self, the book becomes more improbable than the rudest sketch. *Song of the Pearl* is a promising book, but it is not yet the promise come true.

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MARTINE MAISANI-LEONARD
André Gide ou l'ironie de l'écriture
Montreal: Les Presses de
l'Université de Montréal, 1976.
Pp. 273. \$13.75.

In the introduction to *André Gide ou l'ironie de l'écriture*, Madame Maisani-Léonard situates her approach to Gide's works at the level of the narrator and his style, which it is her task to demystify, in order to reveal the relationship between the narrator and his narration. Gide saw this relationship as a struggle between the

natural being and a preferred fictitious creation. From this struggle, according to Gide, the work of art is born (*Journal*, 11 January 1892). The object of Madame Maisani-Léonard's work is to put this concept to the test.

Madame Maisani-Léonard's intention is to propose a purely formal reading of the *Récit gidién*, which she defines as a literary form in which Gide reconciles the *je* and the *passé simple*. This definition of the *Récit* justifies the elimination of Gide's other writings: the very obviously autobiographical and the accounts of travels, where the *je* of the narrator refers explicitly to Gide (*Journal*, *Si le grain ne meurt*. . . , *Voyage au Congo*, *Retour du Tchad*, etc.); the literary criticism (*Dostoïevsky*, *Prétextes*, *incidences*, etc.); the didactic writings (those titled or subtitled *Traité: le Traité du Narcisse*, *la Tentative amoureuse*, *Philoctète*, and all the *littérature engagée*); the lyrical and dramatic writings (*les Poésies d'André Walter*, *Saül*, *le Roi Candaule*, *(Edipe)*); the *Sotties (le Prométhée mal enchaîné, les Caves du Vatican, etc.)*; *les Nourritures terrestres* (where the proportion of narrative is too limited); and the one work that Gide designated as his only novel: *les Faux-Monnayeurs*.

Madame Maisani-Léonard's definition of the *Récits* as those works in which Gide uses the *je* to refer to a hero/narrator and whose narratives are in the *passé simple* takes in, in chronological order, *les Cahiers d'André Walter*, *l'Immoraliste*, *la Porte étroite*, *Isabelle*, *la Symphonie pastorale*, *l'Ecole des Femmes*, *Robert*, *Geneviève* and *Thésée*. To these nine she adds two other works: *Paludes (Sotie)* and *El Haǧǧ (le Traité du faux prophète)*. These last two are included because, in spite of the categories (*Sotie* and *Traité*) in which Gide placed them, the narration is presented in the same way as that of the *Récits: je* and the *passé simple*.

According to Madame Maisani-Léonard, Gide's preambles play an important rôle in the interpretation of his work; she sees this literary mechanism as much more than pure artifice on Gide's part. In fact its function is to "clarify certain problems inherent to this literary genre [the *Récits*]" (p. 61). (This and following translations are mine.)

When discussing the *Récits* themselves, Madame Maisani-Léonard starts by distinguishing three levels of *discours*: "*en deça de l'histoire*", "*au sein de l'histoire*" and

"*au-delà de l'histoire*" (p. 67). These three levels constitute the headings for the three parts of her study. In the first part Madame Maisani-Léonard concludes that "if the *simultaneous* presence of the two levels [*histoire* and *discours*] is one condition necessary for the *récit gidién*, the equilibrium between the *histoire* and the *discours* is precarious and tends continually to destroy itself" (pp. 90-91).

The second part of the study ("*Au sein de l'histoire*") deals with the *discours implicite: opposition passé simple/ passé composé*, where Madame Maisani-Léonard concludes that "If it is true that the opposition *passé simple/ passé composé* within a text defines the opposition *histoire/discours*, it is necessary to distinguish several levels of narration" (p. 155). She then goes on to deal with the use of the present tense in certain of the *Récits* included in the eleven works and makes the following statement: "An examination of the eleven *Récits* which constitute the *corpus* of this study allows one to conclude—insofar as the use of the *présent historique* is concerned—that this tense indicates either the disappearance of the narrator in favor of the story told (*l'Immoraliste*), or the disappearance of the story in favor of the presentation of the narrative (*les Cahiers d'André Walter*)" (p. 182).

In the third part of her study ("*Au-delà de l'histoire*"), Madame Maisani-Léonard discusses the use of the "*discours rapporté*" (p. 187), the "presence of the narrator as revealed by *la parole de l'autre*" (p. 224), and the use of the adverbs of time (p. 225). The goal Madame Maisani-Léonard sets for herself is to pose "the essential problems of a certain type of literary narrative, which we shall call here the autobiographical narrative" (p. 249).

There is no doubt that in spite of the many works which deal with nearly every aspect of Gide's life and writings, there is an obvious lack in the treatment of "*tout l'aspect formel de l'oeuvre*" (p. 19, note 35). Madame Maisani-Léonard's book is a significant attempt to begin to rectify this situation. The book concludes with two very necessary tools for those researchers who would adopt Madame Maisani-Léonard's approach: a bibliography of studies and articles pertinent to Gide's *Récits* and an index of authors mentioned in her text.

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