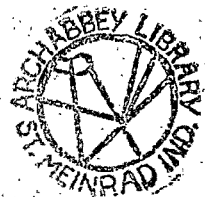


André Gide's Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue:

The Exposition of and Response to a Religious Struggle

A Research Paper
Submitted to the Faculty
Of Saint Meinrad College of Liberal Arts
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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May, 1975
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This Undergraduate Thesis is

Dedicated

In Memory of

James H. Edwards, Sr.

August 12, 1924 - May 15, 1974

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INTRODUCTION

Anyone who is interested in how the Scriptures are used in literary works, would find that André Gide's Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue is indeed representative of this use. It is from this aspect that the idea of doing a thesis concerning this topic originated. Soon after researching a short time however, one realizes that Scripture for Gide is only a tool, thus alerting one to a much broader meaning of the gidean parable.

Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue represents a very important period in the life of André Gide. It was in this period of time that Gide found himself in a conflict with religion. On the one hand there was Catholicism which was being promulgated by Gide's friends, notable among whom was Paul Claudel. On the other side of the struggle was Gide's Protestant heritage and upbringing.

Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue is a response to this conflict, expressing Gide's rejection of Catholicism.

This exegesis of Gide's parable examines some of the devices Gide uses to convey his message. Among these are: the Bible; the symbols, both human and inanimate; and finally, the elements of Catholicism that are present.

What follows is not exhaustive in its analysis. All of the possibilities of interpretation could not be handled in a study of this size. Rather, what is presented is a logical interpretation based on the conflict, which seems to be consistent with Gide's view of religion at the time of the publication of the story.

Chapter one explores the genesis of Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue,

examining Gide's double religious heritage both Protestant and Catholic; the struggle on the subject of religious commitment that Gide was engaged in at the time he wrote the parable; and his manner of dealing with and responding to the pressure of several of his writer colleagues. Chapter two discusses Gide's overall use of the biblical imagery in his own version of the parable, and finally, chapter three investigates the possible interpretations of some of the physical symbols that Gide employs in Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue.

Finally, a special word concerning my father in whose memory this work is dedicated. It was he who first got me interested in literature by his example. He was a teacher of the sciences, but knew the value of integration of all disciplines.

Chapter I

André Paul Guillaume Gide was tormented throughout his life with inner conflicts. Gide himself gives the following description of the cause of these struggles.

Rien de plus différents que ces deux familles; rien de plus différent que ces deux provinces de France, qui conjuguent en moi leurs contradictoires influences. Souvent je me suis persuadé que j'avais été contraint à l'oeuvre d'art parce que je ne pouvais réaliser que par elle l'accord de ces éléments trop divers, qui sinon fussent restés à se combattre, ou tout au moins à dialoguer en moi. Sans doute ceux-là seuls sont-ils capables d'affirmations puissantes, que pousse en un seul sens l'élan de leur hérédité. Au contraire, les produits de croisement en qui coexistent et grandissent, en se neutralisant, des exigences opposées, c'est parmi eux, je crois, que se recrutent les arbitres et les artistes. Je me trompe fort si les exemples ne me donnent raison. (LGNM, 358)

On the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, Gide reiterated and expanded this theme in his Journal when he wrote:

J'ai découvert par grand hasard et sans croire beaucoup à l'astrologie, que le 21 novembre précisément, jour de mon anniversaire, notre terre sort d'influence de Scorpion pour entrer dans celle du Sagittaire. Est-ce ma faute à moi si votre Dieu prit si grand soin de me faire naître entre deux étoiles, fruit de deux sangs, de deux provinces et de deux confessions? (J I, 959)

It would seem that with the introduction of the astrological dualism, Gide is looking for additional excuses for his inability to resolve the conflict in his nature. Jean Delay in his book The Youth of André Gide implies the same when he says, "In point of fact, that kind of reference to the stars, common to many famous writers, is to my knowledge the only one in Gide's works, but the same can certainly not be said for the theme of the two faiths, two provinces, and two races. Indeed it comes back again and again like a leitmotif."¹

Charles Moeller shows what the two races, two provinces and two faiths are. "Meridionale et protestante du côté de son père, normand et catholique par sa mère..."²

However, the interest here is not in the conflict of the astrological signs of Scorpio and Sagitarius. Nor is the interest in the provincial or racial conflicts. Rather, the interest here and throughout this paper lies in the conflict of the "deux confessions" which has been translated as the two faiths.

There is a great deal of criticism written on Gide's religious problem. Karl Pflieger sums up the gidean conflict when he says:

If there is any contemporary writer crowned by official recognition whom the Christian should approach with the most critical caution, it is Gide. His name stands for one of the most complex and -- from the Christian standpoint -- the most tragic stories in the history of literature. (3)

This is a fair assessment of Gide's entire life in terms of the struggle Gide had with the question of the existence of a supernatural being, although later in Gide's life the nature of the problem was different from that of the period with which this paper is concerned. In this period, around 1907, Gide's problem was a conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism not that of which Pflieger speaks. At one point in Gide's life he even opted for Communism which he also rejected eventually. It is therefore easy to see how complex the religious problem was for Gide.

Jean Delay is a little less sympathetic to the question of Gide's problem with Catholicism and Protestantism. Delay attacks a thesis central in the work of Gide, that is, the two faiths motif. Delay says:

André Gide portrayed himself as 'sitting at the crossroads of religions', but actually his foundation was exclusively Protestant... The history of both families well shows that

as the Catholic faction had been nearly decimated since the end of the eighteenth century, Gide's inner conflict between his Catholic blood and Protestant blood could not have taken place, for lack of anything conflicting. (4)

One should bear in mind nevertheless, that Gide himself did consider the two faiths a problem. By virtue of this fact alone, it must be judged a problem, perhaps not a justifiable one, but a real problem nonetheless.

Protestantism for Gide's family was the same as what was generally characteristic of most French Protestants. That is; to quote Delay:

...Devotion to the Bible, considered the supreme religious authority, and its free interpretation; self examination without the intermediary of a priest, of the cult of the Virgin and the saints, and certain sacraments... Every one of these characteristics was to be found in André Gide, occasionally in surprising forms. (5)

As will be seen later, a knowledge of the French Protestant's mentality is of utmost importance for the interpretation of Gide's parable, where the Protestant influence can be seen more readily than any vestiges of Catholic influence. Protestant characteristics will be discerned particularly in the character of the older brother, and in the image of the Maison.

Nevertheless, Gide insists that the Catholic influence is a part of his heritage and therefore should be considered a viable force. There is no question that some of the ancestors on the Rondeaux side were Catholic. However, as yet, and certainly not in Gide's life, there is no scientific evidence of a gene or chromosome that carries the Catholic faith within it.

What seems to make the Catholic question real for Gide are the pressures exerted on him by two friends, Paul Claudel and Francis Jammes. If one were to read the Claudel - Gide correspondence, he would find that these letters contain one of the best representations of Gide's struggle

with religion and of Gide's relationship with Catholicism.⁶

The best summation of the purpose of this correspondence is provided by Wallace Fowlie when he says, "The purpose of Claudel's letters was avowedly that of winning over for the Church Gide's thought and life."⁷

But there is much more to these letters than the polemical purpose. The book itself contains in addition to the 126 letters, journal entries from Gide concerning Claudel which reveal Gide's feelings about him. There is also a summation of Christian Doctrine which Claudel sent to Gide about one year before the publication of Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue.

Claudel received from Gide a copy of Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue somewhere around March 3, 1908.⁸ Claudel's response to the parable as related by Gide is interesting in that Claudel compares the Maison with the Church. Claudel says:

Pourquoi fuir et maudire la maison? Il y a une maison qu'il est parfois sain et nécessaire de quitter comme le prouvaient ces textes: L'homme quittera son père et sa mère -- Qui est ma mère? qui sont mes frères? <<Laissez les morts ensevelir leurs morts.>> <<-- Les renards ont leurs terriers, mais le fils de l'homme n'a point où reposer sa tête>>, etc. Mais cette maison-là n'est point l'Eglise, qui n'est que la forme visible de cette parole: Le premier commandement est d'aimer Dieu de toute son âme; et le second qui est pareil au premier est d'aimer le prochain comme soi-même. L'Eglise n'est exclusive que parce qu'elle est catholique, c'est-à-dire universelle et qu'elle ne laisse absolument rien en dehors d'elle. Qui n'est pas contenu dans l'édifice de Dieu, il est enfermé dans les limites affreusement étroites de l'amour-propre pareilles à ce petit cachot auquel Sainte Thérèse compare l'enfer. Il y a le plus de religion, là où il y a le plus d'amour; il y a le plus d'amour là où il y a le plus d'unité. Ceux qui sont semblables au Christ sont semblables entre eux avec une diversité magnifique. La révélation n'a pas été une inspiration poétique ou philosophique. Le Christ a paru parmi nous en chair et en os et il ne nous a pas laissés sans guide et sans pasteur. L'Eglise est une espèce d'incorporation eucharistique... Mais comment le comprendre, ce frère puîné que vous accompagnez jusqu'au perron? Il y avait un autre conseil à lui donner que de se sauver, il y a un autre moyen de se sauver que par la fuite. (9)

Interestingly enough Claudel posits a view of the Church which Gide rejects in the parable itself. This will be discussed in the second chapter in dealing with the character of the older brother.

Claudel's reaction to the gidean parable is important because it shows how intent Claudel was on converting Gide to Catholicism. Even after Gide makes known via his parable, his decision not to convert, Claudel makes other attempts to change Gide's heart. In fact, Claudel continued urging Gide's conversion until 1926 when the correspondence ended.

Gide's Protestant upbringing, confronted by Claudel's efforts to convert him to Catholicism result in what can be termed, the Catholic - Protestant dialogue. A knowledge of this dialogue is necessary in interpreting the story of the prodigal son, and provides a vantage point from which one can view the gidean parable as a running commentary on the Roman Catholic Church, at least as Gide saw it. Gide's concept of the Church is most evident in the figure of the older brother and in the image of the Maison.

The Catholic - Protestant dialogue represents two of the influences that provided Gide with the incentive to write the story. There is yet another influence which is an important one that is contemporary with the writing of the parable. This was the trip Gide made to Berlin. On March 16, 1907, Gide made this entry in his journal:

Achevé il y a quelque jours l'Enfant Prodigue. La composition de poème brusquement entrevue à Berlin, je me suis mis aussitôt à l'oeuvre; pour la première fois l'exécution a suivi immédiatement la conception. J'avais peur, si je le couvais plus longtemps, de voir le sujet foisonner, se déformer; enfin, j'étais las de ne plus écrire et tous les autres sujets que je part présentaient trop de difficultés pour être traités aussitôt. (J I, 238)

At this time, Gide had been working on La Porte Etroite and was, as he states, having difficulty with it as he was with his other projects.

What inspired Gide at this point in time to begin writing again? Kenneth Perry in a work often quoted in this study relates the following: "Prepared by the religious discussions, Gide, upon seeing the works of art in the Berlin museum, was inspired to creativity."¹⁰

Among the works Gide saw was Michelangelo's John the Baptist. One can speculate that this is one of the reasons why one can interpret the prodigal as the Baptist. There was also a sculpture of a Madonna and Child by Verrocchio, which may likewise be one of the reasons for his including the character of the mother in his parable. Perry claims that Gide's creativity was inspired by these external influences. Indeed this seems possible, because one can see the relationship between the symbols of the story and the works of art that Gide saw in Berlin.

In analyzing the parable it is necessary to keep in mind both the external and internal influences which caused Gide to write Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue. Having considered these, one is ready to make the transition into the thematic structure of the subject of this paper, since the themes are in direct relationship to the influences as outline here.

The first theme and the most obvious is that of Gide himself as the prodigal son. Gide calls himself the prodigal son when he says, "I am like the prodigal son who went into a far country and wasted his goods."¹¹ Furthermore, there is a journal entry at the time of the writing of this parable which reveals that Gide intended to incorporate in this work that in which he believed. "j'élabore un Enfant Prodigue, où je tâche à mettre en dialogue les réticences et les élans de mon esprit." (J I, 237) When interpreting this parable, one should bear in mind the personal level attached to it by its author.

Several critics, such as Martin Turnell, Wallace Fowlie, Klaus Mann,

and Karl Pflieger, in discussing this parable directly refer to Gide as "the prodigal son".

The second theme comes under the general heading of chercher. There are a number of possible ideas for which to look; freedom, personhood, etc. However, there is another possibility of interpretation of this theme in which this study is interested. This is the Catholic-Protestant dialogue which is actually on two levels - the first of which is a response to Claudel. This is implied in a letter written to Christian Beck when Gide wrote:

Peut-être ne savez vous pas que Claudel, après avoir trouvé en Jammes une brebis facile à ramener au Seigneur, a voulu m'entreprendre à mon tour. Cela s'appelle, n'est-ce pas, 'convertir'. Il ne se dissimulait sans doute pas qu'avec mon hérédité et mon éducation protestante il n'avait pas tâche facile; n'importe, il s'obstina, encouragé jusqu'à l'excès par la très vive sympathie que je montrais pour son oeuvre et par l'immense crédit dont en bénéficiait sa parole. Tant par lettre que par conversation nous allâmes fort loin. Jammes, sur ces entre faites, me fit entendre qu'un article de lui, qu'une dithyrambique 'étude' allait célébrer ma conversion. Je compris qu'un malentendu resquait de s'établir, et résolu à ne pas devoir d'éloge de Jammes à un (involontaire mais reconnu) compromis moral, je lui écrivis une longue lettre explicative, qui amena de sa part un brusque refroidissement. Il sentit que 'j'échappais'.

Tout de même, comprenant jusqu'au fond des moelles et L'INTÉRÊT du geste que Claudel et lui souhaitaient me voir faire, et pourquoi je ne le faisais pas -- et comment, si je l'avais fait, ce n'eût pu être qu'à la manière dont MON Enfant Prodigue rentra à la MAISON, et pour aider à en sortir le petit frère -- j'écrivis cette petite oeuvre 'de circonstance' où je mis tout mon coeur, mais aussi toute ma raison. Je la dédiai à Arthur Fontaine, ami et de Jammes et de moi, vivement intéressé par la 'question religieuse' -- à qui Jammes venait de dédier Pensée des Jardins avant son retour au catholicisme, -- et par manière de pendant. (12)

The second level which relates to the first, is Gide's conception of Catholicism in relation to Protestantism. Thomas Cordelle in his book entitled André Gide explains this theme in this manner:

The allegory may just as well be a history of Christianity seen from the Gidean angle. The dissenters leave the Church to live in the liberty of conscience, taking with them their share of the patrimony, presumably the Scriptures, but not the tradition. But they fail in their venture and end up founding a church that differs little, in the essential, from Catholicism. The youngest Brother would be Gide's expression of his own evangelical position outside of Catholicism and Protestantism and of his feeling that such a departure was both possible and necessary. (13)

The analysis presented in this study takes a slightly different view from that of Cordelle. The symbols of the older brother and the Maison are important in this regard. It will be shown that one possibility of interpretation of the symbol of the older brother is that of the Catholic priest. Also it will be shown that one possibility of interpretation of the image of the Maison is that of the Catholic Church instead of all institutional churches as posited by Cordelle. Consequently, this study takes the view that the conflict and therefore the theme is the Catholic-Protestant dialogue.

Complexity is undoubtedly the best word to describe not only the life of the man Gide, but also his works. Recognizing this complexity, alerts the reader to the difficulties he will encounter in analyzing any work of Gide's, because of the wide variety of interpretations possible. The view of Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue presented in the following chapters is one which is logical and consistent with that which has been presented in this chapter.

Finally, the account of the Prodigal son as related to the reader by Gide is based on the 15th Chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke. This Scripture passage was well-known to Gide and he often quoted it.¹⁴

In Gide's autobiography Si le grain ne meurt he relates: "Je portais un Nouveau Testament dans ma poche; il ne quittait point; je l'en sortais

à tout instant,..." (LGNM, 499) It is not difficult to conclude from this statement that Gide knew the whole of the Gospels quite well, an aspect of Gide's background which is important for the interpretation of the parable, since some of the symbols that will be described in the following chapters are obviously drawn from the Bible.

This study is now ready to show how all that has been said in this chapter is important in analyzing the symbols of the characters.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER I

¹Jean Delay, The Youth of André Gide, trans. and abr. by June Gicharnaud, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 57.

²Charles Moeller, Littérature du XX^e siècle et christianisme, (Belgique: Casterman, 1964), p. 120.

³Karl Pflieger, Wrestlers with Christ, trans. by E.I. Watkin, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1938) p. 124.

⁴Delay, p. 57.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Wallace Fowlie, André Gide: His Life and Art, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 163.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Paul Claudel et André Gide, Correspondance 1899-1926, (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1949), p. 83.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Kenneth Perry, The Religious Symbolism of André Gide, (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), p. 100.

¹¹Pflieger, p. 123 (Work cited by Pflieger is unknown).

¹²André Gide, "Lettre à Christian Beck", Mercure de France (Paris, 1 août 1949), Vol. 306, numéro 1032, p. 621, as quoted in Perry, p. 98-9.

¹³Thomas Cordelle, André Gide (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 83.

¹⁴Germaine Brée, Gide, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p. 149.

CHAPTER II

Kenneth I. Perry in his study of Gide, The Religious Symbolism of André Gide, states:

Gide uses specific imagery on two levels -- the explicit level in which he uses religious symbols to set the framework of the story, and the implicit level, that of the metaphor rather than of simile, by which the author, through wordings or associations of objects with a character, causes the character to become symbolic of a religious figure. (1)

This chapter will be concerned with examining in detail what Perry calls the explicit and implicit levels of imagery to discover some of the means by which Gide makes known the message he wishes to convey.

Gide relates in a short introduction to his parable, at least in part, the framework in which the story is contained.

J'ai peint ici, pour ma secrète joie, comme on faisait dans les anciens triptiques, la parabole que Notre Seigneur Jésus Christ nous conta. Laissant éparse et confondue la double inspiration qui m'anime je ne cherche à prouver la victoire sur moi d'aucun dieu--ni la mienne. Peut-être cependant, si le lecteur exige de moi quelque piété, ne la cherchait-il pas en vain dans ma peinture, où, comme un donateur dans le coin du tableau, je me suis mis à genoux, faisant pendant au fils prodigue, à la fois comme lui souriant et le visage trempé de larmes. (RLEP, 3)

This preamble is rich in details of the story. Gide states first, that the parable is in three parts like an old tryptych. These three sections are: the return of the prodigal son; the dialogues that follow with the father, older brother, mother, and younger brother; and finally, the subsequent departure of the younger brother. After making known that the parable is divided into three sections, Gide says that he is going to be deliberately ambiguous. Furthermore, in the same sentence he says that he is not writing this tale to prove the victory of a God over him

or a victory for himself. However, Gide admits that it is possible that someone may identify him as a prodigal who, like the prodigal of Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue, is crying. Thus it is by this confession that the first character - symbol is introduced, implying the possibility that this prodigal might be identifiable with the author himself.

Further along in the story Gide makes this image clearer when he interjects another personal note saying that he is comparable to the prodigal.

Mon Dieu, comme un enfant je m'agenouille devant vous aujourd'hui; le visage trempé de larmes. Si je remémore et transcris ici votre pressant parabole, c'est que je sais quel était votre enfant prodigue; c'est qu'en lui je me vois; c'est que j'entends en moi parfois et répète en secret ces paroles que, du fond de sa grande détresse, vous lui faites crier:

-- Combien de mercenaires de mon père ont chez lui le pain en abondance; et moi je meurs de faim!

J'imagine l'étreinte du Père; à la chaleur d'un tel amour mon cœur fond. J'imagine une précédente détresse, même; ah! j'imagine tout ce qu'on veut. Je crois cela; je suis celui-là même dont le cœur bat quand, au défaut de la colline, il revoit les toits bleus de la maison qu'il a quittée. Qu'est-ce donc que j'attends pour m'élancer vers la demeure pour entrer? -- On m'attend. Je vois déjà le veau gras qu'on apprête... Arrêtez, ne dressez pas trop vite le festin!

-- Fils prodigue, je songe à toi; dis moi d'abord ce que t'a dit le Père, le lendemain, après le festin du revoir. Ah! malgré que le fils aîné vous souffle. Père puissé-je entendre votre voix, parfois, à travers ses paroles! (RLEP, 4)

It seems obvious then that Gide wants to be identified with the prodigal son. But not everyone agrees with this interpretation of the symbol. Germaine Brée in referring to the introduction mentioned before says, "Gide suggests that he himself is the donor-artist, but certainly not that he is either a damned or tormented soul or the prodigal himself, yearning to be admitted once more into the Father's House."²

As mentioned in the first chapter, there are many critics who would take an opposing view to that of Brée. Furthermore, the evidence just

presented in the passage quoted above leads one to believe that Gide sees himself as the prodigal. Indeed, he says in this prayer that he sees aspects of himself in the prodigal. It thus seems conclusive that one possible interpretation views the prodigal as a symbol of Gide.

However, this is not the only symbol that can be drawn from the figure of the prodigal son. As mentioned before, there is specific imagery which lends itself to a religious interpretation.

Moving from the personal level, the prodigal can be considered as a symbol of John the Baptist.³ Gide makes it a point to place the prodigal in a desert setting as opposed to the Gospel parallel which has the prodigal in a distant country. For example, while the prodigal is engaged in the dialogue with his father he says, "C'est dans l'aridité du désert...(RLEP, 5) And again he says, "...je ne vous aimai plus qu'au désert." (RLEP, 5) In conjunction with this, what the prodigal ate is also important. The prodigal relates, "...je me nourrissais de fruits sauvage, de sauterelles et de miel." (RLEP, 5)

John the Baptist in Scripture was in a similar situation as related by this passage, "En ces jours-là paraît Jean le Baptiste, qui prêche dans le désert de Judée..." (Mt 3:1) Farther along in the passage it says, concerning what was eaten by the Baptist, "...sa nourriture était de sauterelles et de miel sauvage." (Mt 3:4)

The comparison between the two characters, the prodigal and John the Baptist is unmistakable. They both spent some time in the desert and ate similar food.

Thus, having established the prodigal as a symbol of John the Baptist, it is now necessary to show why this symbol has been included. It should be remembered that the Scriptural Baptist was, "Une voix crie dans le

désert: Préparez le chemin du Seigneur, aplanissez ses sentiers..." (Lk 3:4)

In a very particular sense, the prodigal in Gide's parable, is also a voice crying in the desert. But instead of preparing the way of the Lord, his is making the path straight for the younger brother.

The two symbols presented thus far have a basis in the Scriptures. The symbol of John the Baptist has its foundation in the three synoptic Gospels, but is not concerned with the parable of the prodigal son which is found in St. Luke's Gospel. However, the second symbol which is that of the prodigal son as Gide does have a basis in the Biblical tale of the prodigal son.

The basic theme of the Gospel account of the prodigal son is that of forgiveness. Any sinner can return to the Father's House if he is truly repentant. Thus, since everyone is a sinner, anyone can consider himself the prodigal in the hope of being forgiven for his transgressions. So, Gide's personal application to himself of the prodigal is not only valid but also realistic in its interpretation.

There is a further significance to the personal application Gide makes of the biblical text of the prodigal son. This is in regard to the religious struggle Gide was experiencing at the time of his writing between Catholicism and Protestantism.

In the succeeding discussions of the symbols, one will become increasingly aware of the important role this struggle about religious belief will play in the interpretations of the images Gide presents. It is therefore necessary to understand that by making a personal application of the parable as told by Christ, Gide is actually interpreting the Biblical account for himself. It should be remembered that in the introduction Gide wrote to his tale he says, "J'ai peint, pour ma secrète joie..." (RLRP, 3) Therefore,

one has the right to conclude that what is to be found in Gide's parable is what he himself believes.

In this story, Gide does not confine himself to the use of Biblical symbols, but goes so far as to use specific passages to achieve his end. For example, to set the tone of the gidean version, the author begins the story with an almost exact duplication of the biblical text. There are the same details, such as the division of the inheritance, the life of debauchery, and the return when the prodigal says, "Père j'ai péché contre le Ciel et contre toi..." (Lk 15:18) In the gidean tale, the prodigal says, "j'ai péché contre le ciel et contre toi." (RLEP, 3)

Farther along in the passage from Gide's parable the Father says:

A -- Apportez la plus belle robe; mettez des souliers à ses pieds, un anneau précieux à son doigt. Cherchez dans nos étables le veau le plus gras, tuez-le; préparez un festin de joie, car le fils que je disais mort est vivant. (RLEP, 3)

The Scriptures has the passage as:

Vite, apportez la plus belle robe et l'en revêtez, mettez-lui un anneau au doigt et des chaussures aux pieds. Amenez le veau gras, tuez-le, mangeons et festoyons, car mon fils que voilà était mort et il est revenu à la vie; il était perdu et il est retrouvé! (Lk 15: 22b-24)

In Gide's version of the parable, the last line, "he was lost but now is found", has been deleted. One can speculate concerning the omission of this line. It is perhaps indicative of Gide's final response to the urgings of Claudel and Jammes toward conversion to Catholicism. Since the prodigal (Gide) was not found, Gide does not have to make a commitment to enter the Church.

The two examples of Gide's use of the Scriptures given thus far do not differ radically from the Biblical text. However, in some instances, Gide has taken some verses from Scriptures and has reversed their meaning.

One such departure from the Scriptural text is the following:

Lorsqu'au défaut de la colline il aperçoit enfin les toits fumants de la maison, c'est le soir; mais il attend les ombres de la nuit pour voiler un peu sa misère. Il entend au loin la voix de son père; ses genoux fléchissent; il tombe et couvre de ses mains son visage, car il a honte de sa honte, sachant qu'il est le fils légitime pourtant. Il a faim; il n'a plus, dans un pli de son manteau crevé, qu'une poignée de ces glands doux dont il faisait, pareil aux pourceaux qu'il gardait, sa nourriture. Il voit les apprêts du souper. (RLEP, 3)

This differs from the Biblical text in that it was the Father who was on the hill and when he saw his son a long way off, ran up to greet him. Moreover, in the Biblical version there is no reference to the household preparing for the evening.

Why did Gide change this passage? Undoubtedly, it can be related once again to his religious struggle. If the father is considered as a symbol of God and if the Maison is seen as the Church then God (the prodigal's Father) is kept within the limits of the House. Thus Gide is saying that God is restricted by the Church.

Another example of a discrepancy is the following:

Et comme la nouvelle déjà se répand, il court; il ne veut pas laisser un autre dire:
-- Mère, le fils que nous pleurions nous est rendu.

La joie de tous montant comme un cantique fait le fils aîné soucieux. S'assied-il à la table commune, c'est que le père en l'y invitant et en pressant l'y contraint. Seul entre tous les convives, car jusqu'au moindre serviteur est convié il montre un front courroucé. Au pécheur repent, pourquoi plus d'honneur qu'à lui-même, qu'à lui n'a jamais péché? Il préfère à l'amour le bon ordre. S'il consent à paraître au festin, c'est que, faisant crédit à son frère, il peut lui prêter joie pour un soir; c'est aussi que son père et sa mère lui ont promis de morigéner le prodigue, demain, et que lui-même il s'apprête à le sermonner gravement.

Les torches fument vers le ciel. Le repas est fini. Les serviteurs ont desservi. A présent, dans la nuit où pas un souffle ne s'élève, la maison fatiguée, âme après âme, va s'endormir. Mais, pourtant, dans la chambre à côté de celle du prodigue, je sais un enfant, son frère

cadet, qui toute la nuit jusqu'à l'aube va chercher en vain le sommeil. (RLEP, 4)

The Scriptural passage is something quite different:

Son fils aîné était aux champs. Quand, à son retour, il fut près de la maison, il entendit de la musique et des danses. Appelant un des serviteurs, il lui demanda ce que cela signifiait. Celui-ci lui dit: C'est on frère qui est de retour, et on père a tué le veau gras, parce qu'il l'a recouvré en bonne santé. Il se mit alors en colère et refusa d'entrer. Son père sortit l'en prier. Mais il répondit à son père: Voici tant d'années que je te sers, sans avoir jamais transgressé un seul de tes ordres, et jamais tu ne m'as donné un chevreau, à moi, pour festoyer avec mes amis; et puis ton fils que voilà revient-il, après avoir dévoré ton bien avec les femmes, tu fais tuer pour lui le veau gras! Mais le père lui dit: Toi, mon enfant, tu es toujours avec moi, et tout ce qui est à moi est à toi. (Lk 15: 25-31)

There are several elements which are different between the two passages. The older brother in both versions has a feeling of resentment toward the prodigal because he has not sinned against the father while the prodigal has squandered his riches. The most important difference between the two versions lies in the fact that in Gide's parable the older brother does not let his feeling of resentment be known to his father, whereas in the Biblical text the information is made known by means of a conversation.

One possibility then, is to interpret the older brother as symbolizing the dogmatic priest. Perhaps Gide is saying that priests do not make it a point to talk with God.

Another difference between the two passages is the introduction in Gide's parable of the forthcoming dialogues of the father and the mother with the prodigal.

This passage also introduces a new character to the story, namely, the Mother. Why Gide might have made this addition will be discussed later.

One final variation from the Scriptural text is the addition of yet another character, the younger brother. The younger brother will be unable to sleep the night of the return of the prodigal. This is of course, a foreshadowing of the eventual departure of the younger brother.

In these few examples of the difference between the two texts, it is evident that Gide has taken what is familiar and has expanded it so that it conveys his purpose.

In the first chapter the themes of Gide's version of the parable were discussed. It is now necessary to elaborate on what has been said so far in relation to these themes.

The first theme, that is, the identity of Gide with the prodigal, has already been mentioned with the specific emphasis on its symbolic nature. Because of this symbolic nature, the tale as related by Gide takes on the aura of a personal application of the biblical parable. This is significant because it reveals to the reader what follows in Gide's parable are his own thoughts. Thus one becomes aware that as the characters are developed, so also Gide's concept of the Church is delineated.

The second theme is that of chercher or seeking. The prodigal at one point says, "Je cherchais qui j'étais." (RLHP, 8) Martin Turnell in his work entitled The Art of French Fiction says:

The parable is a story of waste. It is a story of a man who failed to recognize the truth that stared him in the face, who embarked on a disastrous adventure, and expended his substance in the pursuit of a mirage. This was not Gide's view. In his interpretation, the prodigal is identified with the spiritual adventurer who is on the right track even if he never reaches the goal. (4)

In the prodigal's search for who he is, as Turnell suggests, he is looking for an answer to the turmoil that is ripping his soul. Once again the recurring theme of the Catholic-Protestant struggle appears. It would

seem that with the prodigal's return to the Maison he has found the correct response. In the third chapter it will be established that one possibility of interpretation of the Maison is that of the Church. At present, let it be presumed that this is the case.

The prodigal has not finished with the process of seeking. In the dialogue with the father the prodigal says, "Mon père! Le goût sauvage des glands doux demeure malgré tout dans ma bouche. Rien n'en saurait couvrir la saveur." (RLEP, 6)

The taste of the sweet husks of which the prodigal speaks are outside the confines of the Maison. His thirst for knowledge has not been satisfied because there is more to life than what is controlled within the structure of the Maison. This concept of Maison is applicable to Catholicism and Protestantism, Protestantism being considered outside the walls of the Maison. Evidently, what the prodigal could be looking for is freedom to express his beliefs, which is certainly a prominent part of Gide's Protestant background.

Thus far, many diverse elements have been introduced; the additional characters; variations from the Scriptural text, and the themes. With the exception of the development of the character of the prodigal, all that has been analyzed is contained on the first panel of the tryptych. What follows is the development of the picture as painted by Gide on the second panel.

The second panel is a series of dialogues which the prodigal has with the father, the older brother, the mother, and the younger brother. The dialogues occur in the order just mentioned, and these characters will be analyzed in the same order.

This leads to a discussion of the figure of Le Père or le père.

There is a definite significance in the use of the capital "P" and the lower case "p". There are two levels of meaning in the symbol of the father -- a divine aspect as well as a human aspect. The father represents both God and man.

When the father is referred to as God, the capital "P" is used. For example, "Père! n'êtes-vous pas partout?" (RLEP, 4), and elsewhere the prodigal says, "La Maison ce n'est pas Vous, mon Père." (RLEP, 4). The understanding of the distinction here is contingent on the interpretation of the Maison. If the Maison is considered as the Church, then Gide would be implying that to know and love God, one would not have to be a member of the Church.

On the other hand, there is a human side of le père. "...mon père, j'ai gravement péché contre le ciel et contre toi..." The important word in this clause is the "et". The prodigal does not equate heaven with his father. It is a sin against heaven and a sin against the father.

Another example that stresses the humanity of the father is the following: "Mon père, vous savez bien qu'en partant j'avais emporté tout ce que j'avais pu de mes richesses." (RLEP, 5) This statement again typifies the human level in that the possessions that the prodigal carried with himself were the ones that were his share of his earthly inheritance, that is, that which the prodigal's father had produced.

The distinction of capitalization which was been made is an arbitrary one in some critical works such as Perry, who uses the fact of the upper case "P" as evidence for his opinion concerning the symbol of the Father as God.⁵

Another critic, Wallace Fowlie, provides a distinction between the human and divine levels when he writes:

The figure of the father remains perfectly ambiguous because He is at every point the Divine Father whose love pardons the sinner, and the human father who rejoices at seeing his son again. (6)

There also seems to be a particular emphasis in the distinction between "tu" and "vous" as forms of address. In the majority of the references, the form of address used with the father is "vous", --that is to say, the polite form is used. In the parable, this use of "vous" gives additional support to the figure of the father as a symbol of God. In addressing God, Catholic tradition until Vatican II also used the "vous" form instead of the familiar. This was true at the time Gide was writing Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue.

Thus it seems that there is a particular dualism in the symbol of the father. This dualism also exists in the Scriptural text. The parable as it is related by Christ, is a simple story of a man who had two sons, one of whom left and returned after having led a life of debauchery. However, what the Biblical story exemplifies is the Father's or God's loving mercy. Thus Gide's two levels have not deviated from the Biblical text in this regard.

It is actually in the dialogue with the father, that one begins to understand how Gide felt about the Church.

-- Mon fils, pourquoi m'as-tu quitté?
 -- Vous ai-je vraiment quitté? Père! n'êtes-vous partout?
 Jamais je n'ai cessé de vous aimer.
 -- N'ergotons pas. J'avais une maison qui t'enfermait.
 Elle était élevée pour toi. Pour que ton âme y puisse
 trouver un abri, un luxe digne d'elle, du confort, un
 emploi, des générations travaillèrent. Toi, l'héritier,
 le fils, pourquoi t'être évadé la Maison?
 -- Parce que la Maison m'enfermait. La Maison ce n'est
 pas Vous, mon Père.
 -- C'est moi qui l'ai construite, et pour toi.
 -- Ah! Vous n'avez pas dit cela, mais mon frère. Vous,
 vous avez construit toute la terre, et la Maison et ce qui
 n'est pas la Maison. La Maison, d'autres que vous l'ont

construite; en votre nom, je sais, mais d'autres que vous. (RLEP, 4-5)

There are several elements of this passage which must be discussed. First, from this passage it is learned that Gide's quarrel is not with God, but with the Church, and that God transcends all religions because the Father is not limited by the Maison, He is everywhere.⁷

Also in reference to the Father, Gide stresses His aspect as creator, that is, the prodigal says that the Father has constructed all the earth and that which is not in the Maison. This is important because it gives additional support to the symbol of the Father as God since it was God who created the world and all that is in it.

There is one further reference here that cannot be overlooked and this is in regard to the institution of the Church. The inauguration of the Church occurred as it is recorded in the Gospel of St. Matthew, when Jesus said, "Tu es Pierre, et sur cette pierre je bâtirai mon Eglise." (Mt 16:18) In other words, Christ not only founded the Church but He also provided a means to carry it on through the ages by means of the people who are the actual building stones infused with the breath of the Spirit. As Gide has it, Christ or God may have founded it, but He did not build it. According to him, the Church was built through the ages by others who were separate and not dependent on the life of the Spirit. Gide denies the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which gives the Church life. This is another example of Gide's concept of the Church. Apparently Gide thought that the Church was built on static dogma. This is evident in the figure of the older brother.

The character most representative of Gide's conception of the authoritative aspect of the Church is the figure of le frère aîné. Justin

O'Brien in his study of Gide, Portrait of André Gide, writes:

If the Home in his version of the parable represents any Church whatever and its orthodoxy then the elder brother is its priest, governing the household, laying down the law, and interpreting the words of the benign, forgiving Father. (8)

This concept is evidenced when the older brother says, "je suis dans l'ordre; tout ce qui s'en distingue est fruit ou semence d'orgueil." (RLEP, 6)

This is much like the literal translation of Catholic theology that prevailed in some areas before Vatican II, that there is no salvation outside the Church.

The passage just quoted from the gidean parable is interesting for another reason. The first chapter dealt in part with the Claudel-Gide correspondence. It was also mentioned that in Claudel's reaction to the gidean tale, there was an aspect of the Church which Gide criticizes. If the passage quoted from Gide's parable is considered as a criticism of the Church, then Claudel's response is criticized also because Claudel says,

Qui n'est pas contenu dans l'edifice de Dieu, il est enfermé dans les limites affreusement étroites de l'amour-propre pareilles à ce petit cachot auquel Sainte-Thérèse compare l'enfer. (9)

What lies outside the Church according to the older brother is considered as lacking in humility. Similarly, Claudel's response carries with it the same idea. Claudel's defense of the Church was weakened by this.

The order in which the elder brother lives is not the only aspect of the conception of the authority of the Church which Gide criticizes. Also in the dialogue with the older brother the following exchange of words occurs:

-- Je sais ce que t'a dit le Père. C'est vague. Il ne s'explique plus très clairement; de sorte qu'on lui fait dire ce qu'on veut. Mais moi je connais bien sa pensée. Auprès des serviteurs j'en reste l'unique interprète et

qui veut comprendre le Père doit m'écouter.

-- Je l'entendais très aisément sans toi.

-- Cela te semblait; mais tu comprenais mal. Il n'y a pas plusieurs façons de comprendre le Père; il n'y a pas plusieurs façons de l'écouter. Il n'y a pas plusieurs façons de l'aimer; afin que nous soyons unis dans son amour.

-- Dans sa Maison.

-- Cet amour y ramène; tu le vois bien, puisque te voici de retour. (RLEP, 6-7)

There are several elements of this passage which are significant.

First, there is, once again, the theme that there is no salvation outside the Church.

The words the Father speaks, can perhaps be considered the Gospels. In the Roman rite of liturgy, the Scriptures are referred to as the word of the Lord. If this interpretation of the passage is valid then what Gide had in mind when he wrote this was that the Church, through its priests, is the sole interpreter of the Scriptures.

This thought corresponds to something that Gide wrote later in his life in his Journal.

L'Eglise détient l'Evangile. Les paroles du Christ, elle seule a qualité pour décider de leur sens. Elle se réserve et s'arroge le droit d'interpréter, et déclare hérétique tout homme qui écoute Dieu directement. (J I, 676)

Thus it can be seen that Gide thought that the Church claimed to be the sole interpreter of the Gospels.

As was mentioned in the first chapter, this idea of Biblical interpretation as presented by Gide stems from his French Protestant background which believed in the free interpretation of the Scriptures without the intermediary of a priest.

Furthermore, as Gide relates in his parable, the Church, through its priests, is the only way to know, love and listen to God. This thought leads to another possible symbol for the older brother. He can

also be considered a figure signifying phariseeism.

In the Biblical version, there are two levels to the story. One of these has already been mentioned and this is the traditional Christian interpretation as a portrait of the loving mercy of God. The second level is that of the older brother, who in his self-righteousness can be considered a pharisee.¹⁰

What is the Biblical definition of the Pharisee? Chapter 15 of St. Matthew's Gospel relates the following concerning the Pharisees,

Alors des Pharisiens et des scribes de Jérusalem abordent Jésus et lui disent: 'Pourquoi tes disciples transgressent-ils la tradition des anciens? En effet ils ne se lavent pas les mains au moment de prendre leur repas.' (Mt 15: 1-3)

This role of the Pharisees as upholder of the law and of rigid tradition is certainly comparable to the position held by the older brother in Gide's account. Fowlie in interpreting the symbol of the older brother states:

He is the body of the dogma in the Church, the representative and interpreter of the law whose role is to punish or reward. He is the spokesman for order on both the human and divine levels. (11)

It would seem then that Gide has made the figure of le frère aîné a symbol of a pharisee for two reasons. The first is that he chose the Biblical story of the Prodigal Son as the framework for his story. This use automatically carries with it the themes and symbols inherent in the Biblical text. Secondly, the very nature of the symbol suggests an implication of phariseeism.

In making the older brother a symbol of both a pharisee and the hierarchy of the Church, and therefore a priest, Gide is making a formidable indictment of the priesthood as he conceived it. That is to say quite simply that according to Gide, priests, and more generally, ministers of

the Gospels are hypocrites.

Moving away from the figure of le frère aîné to the character of the mother who does not figure in St. Luke's recounting of the parable, one finds a most elusive symbol. Because of its elusive nature, most critics have said very little concerning her role.

Perry suggests one possibility of interpretation when he writes, "the Mother represents Christian Charity in its understanding and solicitude. She comforts and consoles..."¹² Differing little from this opinion Brée says that, "the Mother is all love."¹³

It is certainly undeniable that the Mother is a symbol of love. She is, as Perry suggests, a universal figure who, along with the Father, transcends the limits of the Maison. The following passage will help clarify this thought.

-- Jamais je n'ai cessé de t'espérer. Avant de m'endormir, chaque soir, je pensais: s'il revient cette nuit, saura-t-il bien ouvrir la porte? et j'étais longue à m'endormir. Chaque matin, avant de m'éveiller tout à fait, je pensais: Est-ce pas aujourd'hui qu'il revient? Puis je priais. J'ai tant prié, qu'il te fallait bien revenir.

-- Vos prières ont forcé mon retour. (RLEP, 8)

By saying that it was the mother's prayers that made him return, the prodigal is reaffirming the mother's universal love which reaches out beyond the confines of the Maison.

There is another aspect of the character which should be mentioned, namely, her humanness. She is as all mothers are, concerned and interested in the family life. Klaus Mann explains this aspect in this manner.

The conversation with her -- the third one of the cycle -- deals mostly with simple and solid things. She wants her boy to get married. She is glad to have him back again. But she is also worried -- not because of the Prodigal Son to be sure, he is back, he will be all right. But there is another boy, the youngest... (14)

A very human and warm person, differing in this regard from no other mother.

Why did Gide add the character of the Mother to this parable? Perhaps because Gide may have felt the necessity of having an additional figure of love. Certainly, the symbol of a mother would satisfy this desire without destroying the continuity of the biblical parable.

The second possibility, which is more tenable, stems from Gide's trip to Berlin just prior to the writing of this story. While he was in Berlin he visited the art museum, where he saw Verrocchio's Madonna and Child. As already mentioned, Gide also saw a sculpture of John the Baptist. If Gide was so inspired by that work as to include it as a symbol in this story, it is certainly within reason to believe that it was this statue of the Madonna and Child that prompted him to include the figure of the Mother.

In the dialogue between the prodigal and his mother the final character begins to develop. This is the figure of le frère puîné, who is perhaps the most important character.

The younger brother is, first of all, a symbol of a symbol. That is, he is an extension of the prodigal himself, a fact which is learned from the dialogue with the Mother. The prodigal says:

- Achevez, mère: de quoi vous inquiéter, à présent?
- En qui pourtant tu aurais pu te reconnaître, car il est tout pareil à ce que tu étais en partant.
- Pareil à moi?
- A celui que tu étais, te dis-je, nonpas encore hélas! à celui que tu es devenu.
- Qui'il deviendra.
- Qui'il faut le faire aussitôt devenir. Parle-lui; sans doute il t'écouterà, toi, prodigue. Dis-lui bien quel deboire était sur la route: épargne-lui...
- Mais qu'est-ce qui vous fait vous alarmer ainsi sur mon frère? Peut-être simplement un rapport de trait...

-- Non, non, la ressemblance entre vous deux est plus profonde. Je m'inquiète à présent pour lui de ce qui ne m'inquiétait d'abord pas assez toi-même. (RLEP, 9-10)

The younger brother is introduced as similar to his brother, the prodigal. The resemblance here is not specified, but it is learned that it is not the outward appearances. What is it then that marks this parallelism?

One learns that the likeness is in the present actions of le frère prûné actions which are not unlike those of the prodigal before his departure, a few years earlier. For example, le frère prûné, "lit trop, et ne préfère les bons livres." (RLEP, 10) Furthermore, "Il est souvent juché sur le plus haut point du jardin, d'où l'on peut voir le pays, ... par-dessus les murs." (RLEP, 10)

Another very important example of this likeness is revealed when the prodigal says:

-- Tu me réponds plus durement que je ne fis jamais à ton frère. Pourtant je protestais aussi contre lui. (RLEP, 11)

Further along in the passage the younger brother says,

-- Ne me parle pas de lui! Je le hais... Tout mon coeur, contre lui, s'impatiente. (RLEP, 11)

Both the prodigal and his younger brother share a similar view of the older brother (the hierarchy of the Church). Thus the concepts of the prodigal have become also those of the younger brother. The younger brother seeks a life outside of the confines of the Maison, thus symbolically the conflict of Catholicism and Protestantism lives on.

One more striking example of their similarity is revealed when the younger brother compares himself to the prodigal saying: "Mon frère: je suis celui que tu étais en partant." (RLEP, 12)

Thus the character of the younger brother is developed in such a way as to make him an extension of the prodigal, or rather more exactly, he himself becomes the new prodigal.

With the realization of the new prodigal, the second panel of the picture is complete. This leaves the final panel of the tryptique to be painted.

The painting of the final panel begins with the mother's prediction of the departure of the younger brother. She says, "un jour il m'échappera j'en suis sûre. Un jour il partira..." (RLEP, 10)

The new prodigal has a better chance than his brother had for survival in the desert. He has the knowledge brought him by the former prodigal to inform him of the hazards of the desert life. The younger brother is also more fortunate in that he has the support of the former prodigal. Finally, he also has a better chance because he has nothing to take with him. As the youngest he is not entitled to a share of the inheritance. In speaking to the former prodigal, the younger brother says, "Tu sais bien que, pruîné, je n'ai point part à l'héritage. Je pars sans rien." (RLEP, 14)

This passage is reminiscent of Christ's admonishment to the disciples when he said, "Si tu veux être parfait, lui dit Jésus, va, vends ce que tu possèdes, donne-le pauvres, et tu auras en trésor aux vieux; puis viens, suis moi." (Mt 19: 21)

So the new prodigal is already on the path toward the gidean concept of perfection, freedom from restraint and dogmatism, where one has absolute liberty. By leaving the Maison of his parents, he is giving up the comforts of a material life, as Jesus requested.

The symbol of le frère pruîné presents a similar problem to that of

the mother. One wonders why Gide included a younger brother. The answer is certainly less speculative. It seems rather obvious that he had a more specific reason than he had in creating the role of the Mother. As mentioned in the first chapter, one of the purposes of writing this parable was to give an unmistakable answer to the urgings of Claudel and Jammes toward conversion to Catholicism. Gide was categorically rejecting Catholicism. Through the symbolism of the younger brother, is he not making this decision known to his friends?

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER II

¹Kenneth Il. Perry, The Religious Symbolism of André Gide, (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), p. 101.

²Germaine Brée, Gide, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), p. 150.

³Perry, p. 114.

⁴Martin Turnell, The Art of French Fiction, (Norfolk: New Direction Books, 1959), p. 223.

⁵Perry, p. 106.

⁶Wallace Fowlie, André Gide: His Life and Art, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 60.

⁷Perry, p. 106.

⁸Justin O'Brien, Portrait of André Gide, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1953), p. 210.

⁹Paul Claudel et André Gide, Correspondance 1899-1926, (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1949), p. 84.

¹⁰George A. Buttrick, ed. The Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), p. 270.

¹¹Fowlie, p. 61.

¹²Perry, p. 109.

¹³Brée, p. 152.

¹⁴Klaus Mann, André Gide and the Crisis of Modern Thought, (New York: American Book -- Stratford Press, Inc., 1943), p. 109.

Chapter III

The preceeding chapter was concerned with the symbolism of the characters in Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue. This chapter deals with another aspect of the author's use of symbols which is also important for an intelligent interpretation of Gide's parable, that is physical objects used as symbols. Four of these objects will be discussed: first, the Maison which has been mentioned in passing as the image representing the Church in its institutional form; second, the pomegranate with its two analagous levels; third, the desert representing the existence of life and the knowledge of good and evil that can be found out there; and finally, le porcher, as a symbol of the protestant clergy. These four symbols will be discussed in the order in which they have been presented here.

The symbol central to the interpretation of the gidean tale is that of the Maison. However, one would be unable to give a complete interpretation of the symbol without having first interpreted the symbolic nature of the characters.

There are various degrees of specificity in the opinions concerning this symbol. For instance, Germiane Brée posits that, "The house suggests all the insitutional forms of belief..."¹ Thomas Cordelle implies the same in his study of Gide's version of the parable. Cordelle says there are three levels to the story: first, the response to Claudel; second, the history of Christianity, and third, the history of the prophetic religions.² Therefore, according to Cordelle, there are elements of Catholicism alone, -- both Catholicism and Protestantism, -- and of the various

prophetic religions. However, there are other critics who conjecture that the Maison is a symbol of the Catholic Church alone, and not of both Catholicism and Protestantism or of all religions.

H.J. Nersayan is one who holds this opinion saying: "Thus the word Maison (written with a capital M) has a bidimensional meaning: it stands for the Prodigal's home and the Catholic Church."³ As Nersayan suggests, one thing that is evident is that with the use of the capital "M" one knows that the house is more than just a family abode.

Ben Stoltzfus agrees with Nersayan when he says: "Within the specific context of Gide's dialogue with Claudel and Jammes, the House the Prodigal returns to is the Catholic Church."⁴ With Stoltzfus criticism another element has been introduced, that is the recurring theme of the attempts by Claudel and Jammes to convert Gide to Catholicism.

It seems that the most logical of these opinions is that Maison actually represents the Roman Catholic Church. There are several reasons for this view.

The most compelling of these reasons deals with the conversion problem of Gide's. The various aspects of this conflict were developed in the first chapter so further discussion is unnecessary. Let it suffice to reiterate that one of the reasons Gide wrote the story was to respond definitively to Claudel.

The second reason is there there are elements of the Catholic faith present in Gide's version of the parable. In fact, Kenneth Perry uses some of these elements to substantiate his opinion that the Maison does symbolize the Catholic Church.

For instance, Perry says:

Whereas the original parable has none, Gide's version has an answer on the part of 'le Père to this confession. (I have sinned against heaven and you.) "Entre dans la maison mon fils..." Et l'enfant déjà preusement s'achemine." It is mainly in the addition that Gide's version differs. The confessional and forgiveness elements of Catholicism are thus introduced into the account. (5)

Perry also says, in speaking about the approach and arrival of the prodigal to the Maison:

He awaits the arrival of the father to be recognized, and kneels before him to make his confession. The father lifts the son up and lifts his hands in blessing, actions similar to confession within the Catholic Church. (6)

The sacramental approach posited by Perry is unique. This interpretation of the gidean parable is in keeping with the influence of French Protestantism on Gide. It should be remembered, as was shown in the first chapter, the Protestants did not believe in some of the sacraments of the Roman Church. One of these sacraments is Penance or Confession. Gide could have been rejecting this sacrament when he wrote this story.

A second reason for viewing the Maison as a symbol of the Church is that of the symbol of the older brother. Without going into all of the arguments presented in the second chapter, one of the possibilities of interpretation of the figure is the priest or the hierarchy of the Church. If in fact the older brother is a symbol of a priest, then his ministry is inside the Maison, or Roman Catholic Church.

All of these reasons are plausible when one understands, Gide's view of the Church. Sometime around 1937, thirty years after the publication of Gide's parable, Gide made the following comment concerning the Church,

Il reste, encore et malgré tout, tant de vérité surhumaine dans l'établissement de l'Eglise que les simples s'y puissent tromper et s'approcher de Dieu par ce canal jusqu'à ne considérer plus que Dieu même; mais de même que le Christ nous disant: «Nul ne vient au Père que par moi», l'Eglise

voudrait que nous ne puissions atteindre le Christ que par elle... (J I, 1282)

The recurring theme present in many of the dialogues, that there is no salvation outside the Church, is present here. Undoubtedly, Gide, whose real knowledge of the Church was apparently somewhat limited, was unable to see farther than the dogmatic aspect of the Church. This is clearly evident in the dialogue with the older brother. (cf. discussion of the symbol of the older brother) Furthermore, it would seem that Gide did not see past the institutional Church while he should have been looking at the Church in its totality.

There should be no doubt in the reader's mind, after examining the first two chapters of this study, that it is indeed a possibility that the Maison can be considered to be the Roman Catholic Church.

There is another aspect of the House which needs to be discussed, namely, the symbolic implication by the use of the walls. From the beginning of the gidean tale one knows that there is a definite significance to the walls. "... à ce jardin abreuvé d'eau courante, mais clos et d'où toujours il désirait evader..." (RLEP, 3) The garden of the Maison is enclosed by a wall. Because the prodigal had long desired to escape, there is an element which implies a very limiting factor. It is the walls that limit freedom of expression and thought.

In the dialogue between the prodigal and his mother, one sees this symbol in a similar light. In speaking of the younger brother, the mother says, "Il est souvent juché sur le plus haut point du jardin, d'où l'on peut voir le pays, tu sais, par-dessus les murs." (RLEP, 10) In this quote one can see that there is a desire for what lies outside the walls.

There is a correlation here between Catholicism and Protestantism.

If the Maison is a symbol of the Church, then what lies outside of the walls is Protestant. Therefore, Gide would seem to be saying that the Catholic Church limits freedom of expression and thought while the Protestant Church invites its adherents to express their liberty.

This dualism of thought, that is, freedom and subjection to the Church is also present in the symbol of the pomegranate, where again there are two levels. These levels are made distinct in the dialogue between the prodigal and his younger brother.

- Je vois une grenade ouverte.
- C'est le porcher qui me la rapporta l'autre soir, après n'être pas rentré de trois jours.
- Oui, c'est une grenade sauvage.
- Je le sais; elle est d'une âcreté presque affreuse; je sens pourtant que, si j'avais suffisamment soif, j'y mordais.
- Ah! je peux donc te le dire à présent; c'est cette soif que dans le désert je cherchais.
- Une soir dont seul ce fruit non sucré désaltère...
- Non; mais il fait aimer cette soif.
- Tu sais où le cueillir?
- C'est un petit verger abandonné, où l'on arrive avant le soir. Aucun mur ne le sépare plus du désert. Là coulait un ruisseau; quelques fruits demi-mûrs pendaient aux branches.
- Quel fruits?
- Les mêmes que ceux de notre jardin; mais sauvages. Il avait fait très chaud tout le jour. (RLEP, 13)

The image of the wall is involved here also, because it is the wall which causes the distinction between the two levels. There are pomegranates within the wall, but they are not wild, because they are cared for by the tenants of the Maison.

The second level is obviously those pomegranates that lie outside the walls of the garden, the wild pomegranates of course are intolerable to those within the House.

The younger brother also mentions that he has a thirst for the grenade sauvage given to him by the swineherd. This pomegranate is one

from outside the Maison. The thirst of which the younger brother speaks can be considered the thirst for free and unrestricted knowledge.⁷ If the walls are a limiting factor, then the knowledge inherent in the garden pomegranate would also be limited. On the other hand, that which exists outside of the Maison is not restricted.

In reference to the Catholic-Protestant problem, this symbol has a definite significance. Naturally, the garden pomegranate is the Catholic side of the problem. Therefore, Gide reiterates his belief that the Church restricts knowledge to such an extent that only what is considered good should be learned.

This distinction is reinforced by another image present in the conversation quoted above, the torn book is sitting next to the wild pomegranate, on the table. The significance of this image is in the fact that the book is torn. At one time pages of books that were considered, for one reason or another, to be evil were torn out. In this way, knowledge was limited to that which was considered good by the one who censored the book. The Catholic Church has had a long history of censorship. Even some of the great doctors of the Church were censored for a period of time. One such example is, of course, St. Thomas Aquinas, now considered to be a great theologian. Furthermore, until recently there was in the Catholic Church an Index of Forbidden Books. It was in this manner that Catholics were preserved from reading heresy or what might influence them to evil. It is also interesting and rather ironical to note that Gide's works were put on that list after his death.

The passage of the story quoted above has two other symbols which must be examined, namely the desert and le porcher. Although le porcher is a character rather than an object, it seems more logical to discuss

his role in the present context of the Catholic-Protestant characteristics, than in the preceeding chapter.

The image of the desert poses no significant problem in its interpretation. It is the existence of life outside the confines of the Maison. It is in the desert that one species of the pomegranate, and therefore knowledge exists. It is a much freer area where one can learn and live as he sees fit, limited only by nature.

If the Maison is the Catholic Church, then that which lies outside the walls is Protestant. Once again through this symbol one learns the difference between Catholicism and Protestantism, Protestantism representing broader freedom.

Finally, one possibility of interpretation for the figure of le porcher is that of the Protestant minister. Perry writes:

The belief that he might represent the Protestant pastor is also reinforced by the fact that he inhabits one of the many farms surrounding the House, but which are not part of the House but merely extensions of it. The farms represent the Protestant churches which have separated themselves from the House which lie beyond the walls of the garden. In any case, it is the swineherd who lures both the Prodigal and the Younger Brother away from the confines of 'la Maison'. Furthermore, it is significant to note that when the Prodigal was in the wilderness, he took up the occupation of the swineherd - he interpreted the Gospel of Love for himself. (8)

It has already been established that one of the strongest possibilities of interpretation of the image of the older brother is that of the Catholic priesthood as conceived by Gide. Furthermore, it has been shown that the Maison can be considered the Catholic Church. It is therefore possible to assume that what lies outside the Maison is Protestant. Therefore, the swineherd can also be considered Protestant.

It is undeniable that the interpretations of the symbols as they

have been presented here do not exhaust the possibilities. One must store in his mind all of what has been said to understand fully the depths to which Gide went to explain his position and justify his rejection of Catholicism.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER III

¹Germaine Brée, Gide, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 151-152.

²Thomas Cordelle, André Gide, (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969), p. 83.

³H.J. Nersayan, The Theism of an Atheist, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1969), p. 53.

⁴Ben Stoltzfus, Gide's Eagles, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), p. 97.

⁵Kenneth Perry, The Religious Symbolism of André Gide, (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), p. 103.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 113.

⁸Ibid., p. 111.

CONCLUSION

When one finishes a study of one of the works of André Gide, he somehow feels that he has done an incomplete analysis. The complexity of the man Gide and his works belie a certain sense of fulfillment in attempting an interpretation. Because of the immensity of his talent in choosing le mot juste one would have to analyze each of the sentences Gide has written to understand completely his works.

This does not prevent the reader from understanding Gide's purpose in writing Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue. What purpose would have been served for Gide to respond to Claudel via his parable, had not Claudel been able to understand it?

This study has examined some of Gide's reactions to certain aspects of the Catholic Church both in his life and as he has incorporated them in his parable.

Gide's view of the Church or establishment which is presented by this parable, is not totally incorrect. It may well be that historians will acknowledge Gide as one of the contemporary authors who has been instrumental in influencing the Catholic Church to examine itself in view of bringing about long needed structural changes.

However, in analyzing the parable it becomes obvious that Gide has accepted many clichés about the Church and has failed to grasp the essence of either its teachings, its sacramental structure, or its form.

André Gide in writing Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue has revealed not only his response to the religious struggle, or his view of the Church, but also his misunderstanding of Catholicism.

Abbreviations*

RLEP	<u>Le Retour de l'enfant prodigue</u>
LGNM	<u>Si le grain ne meurt</u>
J I	<u>Journal 1889-1939</u>
J II	<u>Journal 1939-1949</u>

* see bibliography

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