

NB this paper has been published in French, in the Bulletin des Amis d'André Gide, no 131/132 (xxxiv^e année – vol XXIX), juillet-octobre 2001, pp. 355-77

I want to begin with four quotations, which will, I hope, set the scene.

The first is from a novel by J. M. Barrie called *The Little White Bird*, published in 1902 and containing in its central section a first version of what became the play and novel *Peter Pan*. A crusty bachelor secretly befriends a young couple and becomes attached to their little son David, whom he wants to borrow from them.

Q 1

When you release David's hand he is immediately lost like an arrow from the bow. No sooner do you cast eyes on him than you are thinking of birds. It is difficult to believe that he walks to the Kensington Gardens; he always seems to have alighted there: and were I to scatter crumbs I opine he would come and peck. [...]

David knows that all children in our part of London were once birds in the Kensington Gardens; and that the reason there are bars on nursery windows and a tall fender by the fire is because very little people sometimes forget that they have no longer wings, and try to fly away through the window or up the chimney.

J. M. Barrie, *The Little White Bird* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1902), pp. 3-4 and 20-1; henceforth LWB

The second is from Gide's Journal of 20 July 1914:

Q 2

Je ne pensais pas qu'il fût possible de tant regretter un oiseau. Quand je sortais, je le cherchais des yeux ; même sans le voir je le sentais vivant, dans le feuillage. J'aimais sentir cette petite chose ailée, sur mon épaule, ou la voir voler autour de moi ; puis repartir soudain vers une très haute branche ; puis revenir.

Certainement il me reconnaissait, car il ne marquait pas aux autres autant de confiance ; et précisément, ce dernier matin, j'avais en vain cherché à le persuader de se poser sur le bras d'Em. ; il la laissait bien approcher mais s'enfuyait au dernier moment, pris de crainte.

André Gide, *Journal 1887-1925*, ed. É. Marty (Paris : Gallimard, 1996), p. 814 ; henceforth J1

The third is a description of Peter Pan, in the voice of the narrator, but showing how he looks to Mrs Darling. This is from the prose text of 1911, published seven years after the first stage production :

Q 3

She started up with a cry, and saw the boy, and somehow she knew at once that he was Peter Pan. If you or I or Wendy had been there we should have seen that he was very like Mrs Darling's kiss. He was a lovely boy, clad in skeleton leaves and the juices that ooze out of the trees ; but the most entrancing thing about him was that he had all his first teeth. When he saw she was a grown-up, he gnashed the little pearls at her.

J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan and Wendy*, London: Pavilion, [1911], 1988, p. 16; henceforth PPW

The fourth is a description of Lafcadio as viewed by his mother, from Gide's unpublished notes for *Les Caves du Vatican*:

Q 4

Il avait gardé sur les bras, les cuisses et descendant de la nuque le long du dos jusqu'à cet endroit (l'axis) ou la statuaire grecque pose le bouquet de poils des satyres, un soyeux duvet blondissant que sa mère appelait en riant des poils de lait, comme l'on dit des dents de lait des premières. Elle aimait le voir nu, et loin de s'en scandaliser, s'amusait de son impudeur. André Gide, *Romans, récits et sotties, œuvres lyriques*, ed. Y. Davet and J.-J. Thierry (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 1573; henceforth AGR

From these four passages I think we can get a glimpse of two writers and their fantasy characters: two boys whose bodies reveal their charming agelessness, more like infants than children, *as viewed via the complicated desire of a maternal woman*; and who are, moreover, desirable for what they have in common with a bird: youth, joy, a touching ability to be tamed and to resist being tamed.

We are looking, then, at a particular mode of desire.

- It is, **first**, the desire of a man for a boy;
- **second**, it takes the form of creative writing, that is, it addresses itself *both* to the object (fantasy or real – after 1918, Gide consciously directed his fiction to that other golden child, Marc Allégret; before that he addressed the perfect virtual youth Nathanaël, whose prize characteristic is his ability to get beyond the desire that writes him and let go its hand);
- *and*, as a text, it addresses itself to all those others who will read it, whose entry point to the one-way trajectory of desire could be from any position: that of the man subject, that of the boy object, that of the indifferent or voyeuristic other, the envious or denied other, whether male or female...
- **thirdly**, it is a desire that celebrates male relations but cannot do without the mediation of a female figure who stands in the maternal position, the mother that the boy or bird does not want but from whom he must be stolen;
- **finally**, it is a desire that, based on a kind of timeless infancy, is intimately tied to the mystery of both birth and the danger of death.

In this paper I am going to look at a number of connecting points between Gide and Barrie and use them to develop some observations on how this desire functions, in particular how it is anchored on the problematic image of 'lost boys'. I will begin by sketching in some biographical information on both authors, then look in detail at that Journal narrative about the bird; afterwards I will develop three symptomatic moments of similarity in the two writers, and finally I want to speculate about the desire at the centre of my subject.

Born in 1869, Gide lost his father in 1880 and was brought up by his mother whom biographers and psycho-biographers alike like to blame for his impotence, his homosexuality, his desire nevertheless for marriage and his attempt to keep love and sex in two differently gendered compartments. Why 'blame'? Because he did not behave well to those he loved, neither to his wife nor to the many boys he desired serially and generally very briefly. The escape from the domination of maternal love in his double loss of virginity in North Africa in 1893 and 1895 typifies an association between travel and sexual emancipation; he returned from the second trip to the orientalist's Neverland to find his mother dying and became quickly engaged to his cousin Madeleine. Throughout their *mariage blanc* Gide continued to pursue adolescents and boys and he gave her no children, but in 1923 he had a child with Élisabeth Van Rysselberghe, the daughter of his closest woman friend, who had earlier been

the lover of Rupert Brooke and Marc Allégret and was later the wife of Gide's ideal Lafcadio figure Pierre Herbart.

Gide was all his life an educator as well as desirer of boys: pederasty and pedagogy were inseparable to him, as in the hallowed tradition of Plato. But pedagogy was also always associated with women, in the negative form at least. Firstly because he claims to have inherited the impulse to form and control others from his mother. Second because of its relation to Madeleine, who was two years older than him and liked to play the elder sister; as adolescents they shared books and intellectual passions; later he began, as did Jérôme with Alissa, to write her initial in the margin of her books at passages he wanted her to read – thus did the shared literary space become one of territorial possession. Both Madeleine and Alissa felt guilty at their resentment of this, and repressed their impulse to refuse. Later, after Gide married Madeleine, he gave up his wish to educate her, to **Q 5 violenter ses réticences et l'entraîner avec moi vers l'exubérance et la joie** (André Gide, *Journal 1939-1949, souvenirs* [Paris: Gallimard, 1954], p. 1132; henceforth J3), seeing how (sexually) she was **Q 6 exclue du jeu** (J3 p. 1133). They must have quickly abandoned a pre-marital ambition to learn new languages together (see Jean Delay, *La Jeunesse d'André Gide*, vol 2 [Paris: Gallimard, 1957], p. 509; henceforth JD2), as travel became his prerogative and she grew, with the years, less and less willing to leave Cuverville even to visit him in Paris.

Another negative association of women with education concerned the difficulty of raising a daughter. While Gide had endless theories about the bringing-up of boys – as we shall see – by separating them simultaneously from their parents and their childish timidity, he was fundamentally uninterested (at least until around 1930) in the education of women. At the birth of his daughter Catherine:

Q 7

D'abord, grande déception que ce soit une fille; déroute absolue devant cette chose inattendue. Pour un garçon, il sait qu'il aurait été un bon éducateur, il en est certain. Il aurait voulu en faire un être hardi, qui ose – on n'ose jamais assez. Pour une fille, il ne saura comment faire, comment s'y prendre. Loup (Maria's close friend) lui a dit: « Je sais à quoi vous pensez : vous aimeriez qu'elle fût élevée comme on l'élèverait à Cuverville ». Il acquiesce.

Maria Van Rysselberghe, *Les Cahiers de la Petite Dame*, vol 1 1918-1929 (Paris : Gallimard, 1973, pp. 178-9 ; henceforth CPD1

There was, thus, a lost boy at the birth of Gide's child, just as there were lost boys in a long series among the real and fictional objects of desire. There is a last lost boy in his life and that is the one whom he mourned with seemingly inexhaustible and hyperbolic passion when, in 1918, Madeleine burned all her letters from him.

The occasion for this act was that Gide's first real love, for Marc Allégret, a boy of his own class and circle, whom he took to England for the summer of 1918. About a year earlier he had described him thus :

Q 8

De son visage et de toute sa peau émanait une sorte de rayonnement blond. La peau de son cou, de sa poitrine, de son visage et de ses mains, de tout son corps, était également chaude et dorée. [...] Rien ne dira la lueur, la grâce, la volupté de son regard. J1 p. 1037

Madeleine too had a warmly brown skin, inherited from her creole mother and therefore outlawed to gidean desire. In this drama she plays the role not of the beloved but of the destroyer – not of pleasure, for she knew Gide was going away with Marc, asked him not to and saw him depart – but of something which, it turned out, was more precious to him :

Q 9

Oh ! je sais bien qu'elle a souffert atrocement de mon départ avec Marc ; mais devait-elle se venger sur le passé ?... C'est le meilleur de moi qui disparaît ; et qui ne contre-balancera plus le pire. Durant plus de trente ans je lui avais donné (et je lui donnais encore) le meilleur de moi, jour après jour, dès la plus courte absence. Je me sens ruiné tout à coup. [...] Je souffre comme si elle avait tué notre enfant. *Et nunc manet in te*, J3 pp. 1145-6

The boy he lost on that day, then, was a deeper object of desire : a part self which he entrusted, in written form, to his wife's keeping while he travelled. Those letters, the self in those letters, was the bird that flew to her while he was flying away and which, a verbal chaste self, was essential to the existence of the bodied active self that required Madeleine to be two things without complaint : fixed and virginal in order for him to be free and sexual. *Notre enfant* is of course not a child of flesh and blood but the text of the child Gide. *Et nunc manet in te*, written after Madeleine's death while Gide cruised and mourned in Egypt, shows clearly the logic of this failed bargain : the husband may grow old like her but the wife would preserve him by faithfully being not so much the reader as the keeper of his letters.

So much for Gide's life. James Barrie was born nine years before Gide, in the village of Kirriemuir in Scotland. His father was a self-employed weaver, and both parents were ambitious for the education of their sons. Barrie was the third son and ninth child of ten. His mother, Margaret Ogilvy, whose biography he wrote in 1896, had herself lost her mother at the age of eight and thereafter, like Wendy, played mother to her younger brother David and her father. Barrie wrote of her :

Q 10

The reason why my books deal with the past instead of with the life I myself have known is simply this, I soon grow tired of writing tales unless I can see a little girl, of whom my mother has told me, wandering confidently through the pages. Such a grip has her memory of her girlhood had upon me since the age of six.

cited Janet Dunbar, *J.M.Barrie : The Man behind the image* (London : Collins, 1970), p. 24 ;

henceforth Dunbar

The age of six is not insignificant. Barrie was six when his older brother, his mother's favourite and another David, was killed in a skating accident just before his 14th birthday. In her remaining twenty-nine years she never got over the loss and his childhood seems to have been shaped by the attempt to make it up to her, trying to imitate his older brother's swagger, stance and whistle. In this he was both, obviously, trying to be loved for himself and accepting that he could only be the failed substitute for another. He was an under-grown child, and never grew taller than a bit over 5' : this too contributes to the almost seamless image of the 'boy who never grew up'. But again, the issue is rather more complex : Barrie himself did, if not grow up at least grow old : **Q 11** when I became a man, he wrote aged 36 and referring of course to his mother's lost son : **he was still a boy of thirteen** (Andrew Birkin, *J. M. Barrie and the Lost Boys* (London : Constable, 1979, p. 5) ; henceforth Birkin.

Dead children appear in *Peter Pan and Wendy*, in the shape of both the lost boys – **Q**

12

'the children who fall out of their perambulators when the nurse is looking the other way. If they are not claimed in seven days they are sent to the Neverland to defray expenses', as Peter explains to Wendy (PPW p. 33) – and Peter himself. He embodies a longing in the childless : Mrs Darling dreams she has **Q 13** seen him before in the faces of many women who have no children (PPW pp. 15-16), and a tender care for children who die (this appears also in *LWB*) : **Q 14** when children died he went part of the way with them, so that they should not be frightened (PPW p. 14). But Peter can also create dead children in an uncomplicatedly callous way: **Q 15** the boys on the island vary, of course, in numbers, according as they get killed and so on ; and when they seem to be growing up, which is

against the rules, Peter thins them out (PPW p. 51). As a living child, he is always only half-human and half real, a Q 16 *Betwixt-and-Between* (LWB p. 149) of bird and child who, when he is fighting Captain Hook, defines himself Q 17 *at a venture* (PPW p. 135) with the words : Q 18 *'I'm youth, I'm joy [...] 'I'm a little bird that has broken out of the egg.'*

All this is, if you like, the ambivalence towards those who, in death – or by never having been born, or by existing only in verbal or virtual form – will never lose their milk teeth or the glow of the egg.

Like Gide, Barrie is believed never to have consummated his marriage; he too had a real passion outside marriage, but it was not for one boy but a whole family of them : the five sons of Arthur and Sylvia Llewellyn Davies, the eldest two of whom he met in Kensington Gardens in 1898. George (1893-1915) and Jack (1894-1959) were then four and five ; their brother Peter had just been born. The other two were born three and six years later – Barrie's favourite, the beautiful Michael, being, by another arbitrary coincidence, exactly the same age as Marc Allégret.

Peter Pan is no particular one of these boys : Q 19 *I made Peter by rubbing the five of you violently together, as savages with two sticks produce a flame*, Barrie claimed ; *That is all he is, the spark I got from you* (Birkin, p. 2). But he is more than this : he is also the icon made up of the lovely Sylvia and her children, endlessly photographed by Barrie, and the domestic comedy of a middle-class household with a large dog as the children's nanny (based on Barrie's *St Bernard Porthos*) and an infantilised father (another fantasy : Barrie and Arthur did not get on) who ends up living, to the celebration of the media, in her kennel.

When both Arthur and Sylvia died aged 44, in 1907 and 1910, Barrie adopted the five boys more or less formally and supported them all financially as he had already been supporting the family beforehand, dominating their lives for the rest of his. He died in 1937, outliving George, who was killed in the war at the aged of 18, and Michael, who was drowned at Oxford at the age of 21. As for Peter Pan's namesake, he committed suicide in 1960, after burning much of his collection of Barrie's letters and never allowed to forget his supposed role in what he called Q 20 *that terrible masterpiece* (Dunbar p. 138).

As far as I can make out, Gide and Barrie never met ; at least there is no mention of the latter in Gide's *Journal*. But just after they arrived in London in 1918, Gide and Marc certainly saw one of Barrie's most popular plays, *Dear Brutus*, a version of the double transformation plot of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which, among other things, an unhappy artist enters a magic forest where his wife is cast off and he finds instead an adoring, adorable daughter called Margaret, Q 21 *aged the moment when you like your daughter best* (DB p. 496). She discovers he has used his art to manipulate her every experience from birth, agrees it is as well she is a girl since (as he puts it) Q 22 *the awful thing about a son is that never, never – at least from the day he goes to school – can you tell him that you rather like him* (p. 499) and fulfils his wish never to see her grow up and marry by disappearing with the morning light.

Before I go on to my main text, I want to take a moment to show you one more parallel, not so much about desire but about education again. It is, interestingly, a parallel between Gide and Mr Darling in relation to their dogs. Mr Darling, embarrassed by his unwillingness to take some medicine, thinks of a *splendid joke* (PPW p. 23) to play on Nana.

Q 23

'Nana, good dog', he said, patting her, 'I have put a little milk into your bowl, Nana.'

Nana wagged her tail, ran to the medicine, and began lapping it. Then she gave Mr Darling such a look, not an angry look: she showed him the great red tear that makes us so sorry for noble dogs, and crept into her kennel.

Mr Darling was frightfully ashamed of himself, but he would not give in. In a horrid silence Mrs Darling smelt the bowl. 'O George,' she said, 'it's your medicine!'

'It was only a joke,' he roared, while she comforted her boys and Wendy hugged Nana. 'Much good,' he said bitterly, 'my wearing myself to the bone trying to be funny in this house. [...] I refuse to allow that dog to lord it in my nursery for an hour longer.'

He was determined to show who was master in that house, and when commands would not draw Nana from the kennel, he lured her out of it with honeyed words, and seizing her roughly, dragged her from the nursery. He was ashamed of himself, and yet he did it. It was all owing to his affectionate nature, which craved for admiration. When he had tied her up in the back yard, the wretched father went and sat in the passage, with his knuckles to his eyes. PPW pp. 23-4

As I hope you know, this is the reason that Peter Pan is able to abduct the Darling children without getting caught – without which there would be no lost boys and girls, but also, as the narrator points out, **Q 24 no story** (PPW p. 39). And here is another faithful female dog, another trick and another reproachful audience of women. How does Gide assert his male pride in similar circumstances?

Q 25

En parlant de l'éducation des animaux, il raconte que le fait le plus curieux qu'il ait observé chez sa chienne Miquette, dont il s'était beaucoup occupé, est celui-ci : ayant à lui faire prendre de l'huile de ricin, comme elle résistait, il imagina de lui faire faire d'abord certain tour, après quoi elle obtenait toujours une récompense, puis de lui présenter la drogue. La bête n'hésita pas un instant et certaine qu'on ne pouvait à ce moment lui donner qu'une chose qu'elle aimait, avala l'huile sans dégoût. « Admirable preuve de foi ! » dit-il. Comme j'étais prête à épouser l'indignation de Madeleine qu'il nous racontait, il me dit : « Mais non, il n'y a pas lieu ; ça fait partie de la religion du chien. » CPD1 p. 171, Feb 1923

The main difference is the lack of recognition on Gide's part that he has done anything mean, combined with a lofty sense of his moral position as educator. The narrator of this incident, Maria Van Rysselberghe, lacks towards him the sort of whimsical irony that makes Barrie's critique of domestic manhood telling. Another of Gide's biographers, Pierre Herbart, is much less sympathetic. He recounts in a note how Gide shocked a young visitor by explaining that if he accidentally stepped on the paw of a dog he had been given to train, or caught its tail in a door, *je le corrigeais aussitôt pour lui donner le sentiment de la faute— de sa faute à lui, vous comprenez ?* » (Herbart p. 51n). *Mais s'agit-il là d'égoïsme ?* Herbart puzzles [*I would immediately punish it, to give it a sense of guilt - its own guilt, you understand?*] But was this a case of egoism? To which we would have to reply : not exactly. Education always has the appearance of a gift, even when it is more precisely an imposition. Selfishness is only indirectly at stake in the spectacle of the pupil who has learned to teach him/herself. But the religious dog can have only one possible deity : its master.

A wild bird, on the other hand, is the furthest possible thing from a domestic animal. You have no right to its obedience, still less its friendship. This is, I think, what Barrie has in mind when he speaks, as a childless lover of children, of the unborn or new-born baby as a bird. The quotation from *The Little White Bird* with which I began this paper continues :

Q 26

Children in the bird stage are difficult to catch. David knows that many people have none, and his delight on a summer afternoon is to go with me to some spot in the Gardens where these unfortunates may be seen trying to catch one with small pieces of cake.

That the birds know what would happen if they were caught, and are even a little undecided about which is the better life, is obvious to every student of them.

LWB p. 21

The original Peter Pan, far from having his milk teeth, is ageless because he is one of those who changed their minds a few days after birth :

Q 27

His age is one week, and though he was born so long ago he has never had a birthday, nor is there the slightest chance of his ever having one. The reason is that he escaped from being a human when he was seven days old ; he escaped by the window and flew back to Kensington Gardens.

[...] Standing on the ledge he could see trees far away, which were doytbless the Kensington Gardens, and the moment he saw them he entirely forgot that he was now a little boy in a nightgown, and away he flew, right over the houses to the Gardens. It is wonderful that he could fly without wings, but the place [where his wings used to be] itched tremendously, and – and – perhaps we could all fly if we were as dead-confident-sure of our capacity to do it as was bold Pter Pan that evening.

LWB pp. 142-3

He alights on the island in the middle of the Round Pond and there, taught by the old crow Solomon Caw, slowly learns to live like a bird again. The window stays open, like that of the Darlings, for quite some time, while his mother waits for him to return, and one evening he nips back to find her asleep and dreaming of him, but decides not to wake her just yet. When eventually (this reappears in the final play and text of *Peter Pan and Wendy*, as the trauma that still gives Peter nightmares) he decides he does want to go back, he arrives on the sill to find the window closed and barred **Q 28** and peering inside he saw his mother sleeping peacefully with her arm around another little boy (LWB p. 186).

This is Barrie's version of the oedipal moment which binds us to the process of growing up - as Jacqueline Rose points out (*Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* [London and Basingstoke : Macmillan, 1984], pp. 12ff), Freud and Barrie were writing of childhood and the unconscious at exactly the same time. But it is worth noticing that the exclusion of Peter tells the opposite story from Freud's: in losing the domestic world of maternal love he loses not infant bliss but any risk of growing up, remaining for ever outside the clasp of mortality. And this is perhaps because the story is being told, let's not forget, by the younger son who was not left out on the wintry pond but was, or longed to be, the substitute in the mother's arms, for whom the window bars were put on to exclude any rival old or new.

Gide, unlike his Scottish contemporary, is little given to whimsy. But in the rare moments he is, it is often in relation to birds. Recall the **Q 29** *aventure extraordinaire* in *Si le grain ne meurt* (J3 p. 478) of the two canaries who seem to find him in the middle of a Paris street : **Q 30** *je devais scintiller tout entier comme un miroir*, he exults, *et mon rayonnement avait attiré cette créature du ciel*. He concludes that he has been elected by heaven for some **Q 31** *vocation d'ordre mystique [...]* *Décidément j'étais prédestiné.* (J3 pp. 478-9). A touch of irony from a much older autobiographer, no longer given to myths of predestination. In 1914 it is, less mystically, a starling that visits him, and this time the relation is not so much election as something more like seduction – arbitrarily chosen, as if by love, he has to work, by patient and careful stages, to make the wild creature his own.

Q 32

22 juin [1914]

J'ai trouvé dans l'avenue, hier matin, un petit étourneau tombé du nid, mais bien près de pouvoir voler. Tandis que j'écris à présent, il est là, tout près de moi, sur la table ; ou plus exactement entre les doigts de ma main gauche, qui maintiennent ce carnet ; c'est la place qu'il affectionne. Il rentre ses pattes, se gonfle, fait la boule ; on sent qu'il est bien. J'avais tenté de le mettre dans une cage, mais il s'y meurtrissait ; force est de le laisser en liberté dans la pièce, où il salit tout ; toutes les dix minutes, il laisse tomber n'importe où une petite crotte liquide et corrosive. Je lui donne à manger du pain tremper dans du lait, mêlé à du jaune d'œuf dur ; ou des petits vers de terre, dont il se montre friand. Il vient de voler de la table sur mon épaule, aussitôt qu'il m'a vu rentrer. Quand il est resté quelque temps contre ma main, je sens sur le dos de la main courir de petites démangeaisons bizarres ; ce sont de minuscules parasites, dont il est couvert, qui déménagent. Encore une crotte...

(J1 pp. 793-4)

No small part of Gide's delight in this creature is its way of freely sharing its vermin with him – a form of relation that his friends Roger Martin du Gard and Pierre Herbart observed in him also in relation to impoverished or vagrant boys (Herbart 57-9, Roger Martin du Gard, *Notes sur André Gide 1913-1951* [Paris : Gallimard, 1951], ? ?) and that he lends in various tones to his characters Michel, Amédée Fleurissoire and Mélanie Bastian. The relation of bodies is a matter of food and motion – sometimes both at once as the birds anoints him on the wing with its droppings – the opposite, though just as touching, of the canaries.

A day later the bird distracts him from his writing as it sits perched on his shoulder (covered in a cloth now), chokes greedily on the tasty worms or **Q 33** *me suit quand je marche de long en large dans la galerie, trotte après moi, et, si je m'arrête, grimpe le long de ma jambe en voletant* (J1 p. 794). Again what fascinates the man is the bird's voluntary tameness, plus the fact that its actions transform him – in a Sartrean move to the state of *être pour autrui* – from a person into something more like a tree, a transformation he discovers also, though differently, 12 years later with the furry potto Dindiki in the Congo.

Q 34 *Pour égayer mon étourneau, je me suis risqué à le descendre sur la pelouse, à l'heure du thé* (p. 795), while exercising the three dogs, neurotic Toby held by Madeleine on a leash while Miquette, well disciplined as we know, avoids humiliation by pretending to ignore it. It hops about for ten minutes, then returns to the airing cupboard **Q 35** *librement perché sur mon doigt*. Day by day, Gide watches, feeds and trains the bird. After a bath in a saucer of water, he lets it dry off in the warmth of his palm ; he continues to feed it the choicest worms ; but its loyalty cannot be guaranteed :

Q 36

Vers le milieu du jour, tandis que les chats étaient devant la maison, je l'ai amené sous le hêtre pourpre ; mais sans doute grisé par le peu de vent qui soufflait, il a brusquement quitté mon doigt et volé tout droit dans le massif de lauriers du Portugal qui borde l'allée aux fleurs. J'ai eu grand-peur de ne plus pouvoir le ressaisir ; heureusement j'avais pris avec moi la boîte de vers ; je lui en ai tend un et, tandis qu'il essayait de le happer, il s'est laissé reprendre.

Sitôt dans l'herbe, il a détalé devant moi, et comme il n'avait plus faim, j'avais beau lui tendre mon ver... J'ai bien cru qu'il était perdu. J'en avais un chagrin atroce.

J'espère tant que, dans quelques jours, lorsqu'il pourra voler et s'enfuir par la fenêtre de la lingerie que je laisserai ouverte, j'espère tant qu'il prendra l'habitude de revenir piquer sur ma table les vers que j'aurai pour lui en réserve.

The emotional investment that Gide now has in the bird is made clear in the polar terms *chagrin* and *espoir*. It is clear too that he has become accustomised to its presence, after only three days, and cannot be sure that it is similarly accustomed to him. How to ensure that it will remember him (the downside of Peter Pan's agelessness is an inability to remember

anything or anyone for long) and return to him, if even the bribe of food depends on the right balance of greed and appetite? It is a question of seduction. If obedience is a dog's religion, then a bird's – as Barrie observantly implies – is freedom.

Loss might be risked also by the creature's vulnerability. On 25 June it has developed an evil-smelling diarrhoea : **Q 37** *je crains de ne pouvoir le conserver (p. 796)*. Two days later, Gide takes it to the garden again, finding the airing-cupboard too sad and sombre :

Q 38

Il s'est blotti au soleil et n'a guère bougé de toute la matinée. Je me suis occupé de lui chercher des vers et des graines, puis à lui aménager une baignoire où tout aussitôt il s'est précipité ; puis il est retourné à sa première place. Il ne fuit pas quand je m'approche et semble aimer que je lui caresse le dessus de la tête, comme on faut aux chats ; alors il allonge le cou et se fait le plus haut possible.

J'ai perdu à ses soins toute ma matinée, moins une heure (étude de piano). (p. 797)

The next day, he decides to **Q 39** *donne[r] la liberté à mon sansonnet*. At first it stays perched on a low branch of a plum tree and Gide puts it back in its cage, nervous of the cats ; at the second attempt, it flies into an apple tree where he leaves it for the night.

The next page or two is about Gide's friendship with Jacques Copeau, who, he feels, **Q 40** *connaît trop bien mes limites(p. 798)*. The analogy he finds is with his own discovery of the limits of the woodlands around the family estate of La Roque and the first time he realised he could no longer get lost there. If, here, he is both the landscape and the child who discovers he cannot go beyond a hitherto invisible boundary around familial space – cannot, in other words, fly away – it is a sign perhaps of the entry of the bird into his psychological structures, or that it has always been there.

He is with Copeau in the garden when the starling reappears :

Q 41

Nous allions quitter notre travail pour aller goûter, lorsqu'est venu à nous, sautillant à travers l'herbe, et tout empressé, mon petit sansonnet. Il est venu de lui-même tout contre ma main, et n'a fait aucun mouvement de fuite quand j'ai voulu le prendre. Dans ma main il ne s'est absolument pas débattu ; il avait l'air heureux d'y être. [...] Il a mangé très volontiers, mais pourtant ne s'est pas jeté sur la nourriture avec une telle avidité qu'il parût que la faim seule le ramenât. J'en aurais crié de plaisir. Je lui ai préparé sa pâtée avec un œuf dur ; ai changé l'eau de sa baignoire, et suis resté longtemps près de lui. Désolé de devoir partir demain. Dès mon retour de Paris je lui rendrai la liberté.

Back in Cuverville on 3 July, Gide brings the starling a present and notes its preference of him over Madeleine, the surrogate provider:

Q 42

*Je rapporte à mon sansonnet une belle grande cage à barreaux de bois. Certainement il m'a reconnu, car il s'est empressé vers moi venant se faire *gratter* la tête, - tandis que Em. me dit qu'il est comme éperdu chaque fois qu'elle entrait dans la cage. (801)*

It has, indeed, become perhaps *too* tame ; the next day it shows no sign of flying and has to be put back in its cage for its safety. Whether loyalty or sensuality, the bird is now won ; it lets Gide tend to its illnesses and, it seems, takes food from him out of choice rather than greed. The gratification this gives is both physical and psychological, a discovery of power

voluntarily and gratuitously conferred by a creature that is, to quote Barrie again, **Q 43** *gay and innocent and heartless* (PPW p. 157) for **Q 44** *it is only the gay and innocent and heartless who can fly* (PPW p. 154). It is this 'heartlessness' that makes children so appealing : **Q 45** *the most heartless things in the world, which is what children are, but so attractive* (PPW p. 101), says Barrie's narrator at a point where he is identifying with their habit of **Q 46** *[Skipping off] like the most heartless things in the world...* Like him, Gide wants to cage the bird because it has freely chosen not to fly away, while he comes and goes, reassured that his stay-at-home wife enters its space as an unwanted interloper.

During the next few weeks, the couple's nephew, six-year-old Jacques, is staying with them. Gide observes his childish restlessness with a critical eye and blames his mother, Madeleine's sister Jeanne :

Q 47

Je le crois intelligent ; très intelligent même ; mais il ne dit que des sottises, parlant à tue-tête, à tort et à travers, tout le long du jour, non point tant par expansion naturelle et besoin de se dépenser, que par désir d'attirer l'attention, d'occuper autrui de sa personne ; il ne fait pas un geste qu'il ne l'annonce, et il ne fait ce geste que pour qu'on l'admire le faire. À chaque instant il change de jeu ; il semble qu'il ne s'amuse à aucun, mais cherche à être vu s'amusant. Au demeurant, tous les défauts de cet enfant, on les dirait acquis et je crois qu'ils sont de surface. Jeanne croit élever bien ses enfants parce qu'elle s'occupe d'eux sans cesse ; abandonné à soi, ce petit serait tout autre et laisserait paraître son naturel, qu'il a bon ; mais, à présent, même sa joie et son rire sont faussés. [...] - Au demeurant, cet enfant si désobéissant, si insupportable avec ses parents, est ici la sagesse même. (p. 802)

Jacques could be improved, in other words, if, in sloughing off his over-attentive mother, he could behave rather more like a bird than a boy. Gide compares him and the starling explicitly in a comically incongruous context, that of the child's inability to tell masculine words from feminine :

Q 48

Depuis trois jours je tâche de faire un peu travailler Jacques, ou du moins d'occuper son esprit et de le forcer à réfléchir. Ce petit, qui pourtant ne paraissait point bête, a l'esprit d'une consternant versatilité. (Je cherche en vain un mot miex approprié à cette inattention et à ce défaut de logique.) Je voudrais lui apprendre à différencier masculin et féminin ; mais il brouille cela avec la notion des « contraires » et, après trois demi-heures d'efforts (une demi-heure chaque matin), il me dit que le contraire de blanc, c'est blanche, ou que le féminin de grand, c'est petit. Je m'y prends de toutes les manières et j'y apporte autant de patience que pour un chien ou mon oiseau, et même beaucoup plus, mais je ne parviens pas à réveiller la jugeote de ce jeune cerveau. (p. 804)

As a sign of this illogical brain, Jacques does not seem able to understand that, in locking the door of the aviary with his uncle inside it he has locked him into the cage. Gide eventually gets himself out with the aid of a piece of twisted metal : **Q 49** *certainement cet enfant n'a pas voulu me faire une farce ; simplement il n'a pu lier dans son esprit que de fermer ce loquet empêchait ma sortie de la cage* (p. 805). Unfortunate Papageno, trapped in his own birdcage by a stupid boy !

There are other lost boys in these pages. While **Q 50** *chaque matin j'admire à nouveau la gentillesse de mon sansonnet* (p. 806), Jacques begins slowly to unlearn his acquired inability to pay attention. Gide and Schlumberger go cruising at Trouville, observing in a street fair **Q 51** *des tas de tout petits enfants [qui] circulaient parmi les filles* (p. 809), while a drunken woman begs everyone to help her find her 8-year-old son who has run away to be an acrobat. Jacques's brother Domi comes to visit and Gide tries to dissuade him from

choosing business studies. On 18 July Gide lets the starling stay outdoors almost all day; it hovers around him or perches on his shoulder as he strolls round the garden. The next day

Q 52

Ce matin mon pauvre sansonnet s'est laissé déchirer par les chats. Ils se sont jetés sur cette petite chose sans peur et sans défense; j'étais au piano, mais tout à coup j'ai reconnu son appel. Au même instant Em. qui, du perron, voyait la scène, accourut avec un peu de poisson dans l'espoir de leur faire lâcher prise. L'oiseau avait fini par échapper, mais pour tomber un peu plus loin, sans forces. Il remuait encore; je l'ai pris dans ma main; je n'ai pas perdu tout aussitôt l'espoir de le ranimer, car on ne voyait sur lui qu'un insignifiante blessure; du moins il me semblait ainsi; j'ai voulu lui faire boire un peu d'eau, mais il n'a pu l'avalier et s'est abandonné bientôt à la mort. (p. 812)

We have seen already how much the bird was missed. If, years later, the plump and earthbound Dindiki became Gide's **Q 53 démon familier**(J3 p. 1004), the tamed starling is more like the mythic winged messenger, a personal angel, or like Psyche the butterfly soul. But it is more precisely, gradually and sensually won, the image of the Dumont boy or those lads fresh out of prison and still carrying the musty scent of captivity, or the children in Rome, Moscow or Cairo whom Gide would seduce with toys or coins and whom he enjoyed both following *and being followed by*. As he wrote home to Rouart from Algeria in 1895: **Q 54** « Tu sais qu'un de mes plus grands plaisirs est de filer les gens; ici un autre plaisir non moins rare est de se faire filer par eux (JD2 p. 483) The tame bird perfectly exemplifies that double desire of being at once subject and object of the sensual pursuit.

If it is a pursuit, is it inevitably bound to end in death or abandonment? Is the gentle cager of birds simply a cat in disguise? Is seduction, in other words, just a slower form of violent appropriation, the destruction of the other's freedom to fly away? Before returning to these questions, I want to offer two briefer parallels between Gide and Barrie, this time looking at the place of the feminine figure in his desire.

First, two child couples in two half-comical scenes, each consisting of a good older girl and a 'wicked' younger boy [and cf. *Sylvie and Bruno*]:

Q 55

Fortunately she knew at once what to do. 'It must be sewn on,' she said, just a little patronisingly.

'What's sewn?' he asked.

'You're dreadfully ignorant.'

'No, I'm not.'

But she was exulting in his ignorance. 'I shall sew it on for you, my little man,' she said, though he was as tall as herself; and she got out her housewife and sewed the shadow on Peter's foot.

'I daresay it will hurt a little,' she warned him.

'Oh, I shan't cry,' said Peter, who was already of the opinion that he had never cried in his life. And he clenched his teeth and did not cry; and soon his shadow was behaving properly, though still a little creased.

'Perhaps I should have ironed it,' Wendy said thoughtfully; but Peter, boylike, was indifferent to appearances, and he was now jumping about in the wildest glee. Alas, he had already forgotten that he owed his bliss to Wendy. He thought he had attached the shadow himself. 'How clever I am', he crowed rapturously, 'oh, the cleverness of me!'

It is humiliating to have to confess that this conceit of Peter was one of his most fascinating qualities. To put it with brutal frankness, there never was a cockier boy.

(PPW p. 28-30)

Q 56

- Bronja se mit à rire.
- « Boris, pourquoi est-ce que tu racontes tout le temps des choses qui ne sont pas vraies ?
- Pourquoi est-ce que tu ne croies jamais ce que je te raconte ?
 - Je crois ce que tu me dis, quand c'est vrai.
 - Comment sais-tu quand c'est vrai ? Moi je t'ai bien crue l'autre jour, quand tu m'as parlé des anges. Dis, Bronja : tu crois que si je priais très fort, moi aussi je les verrais ?
 - Tu les verras peut-être, si tu perds l'habitude de mentir et si Dieu veut bien te les montrer ; mais Dieu ne te les montrera pas si tu le pries seulement pour les voir. Il y a beaucoup de choses très belles que nous verrions si nous étions moins méchants.
 - Bronja, toi, tu n'es pas méchante, c'est pour ça que tu peux voir les anges. Moi je serai toujours un méchant.
 - Pourquoi est-ce que tu ne cherches pas à ne plus l'être ? Veux-tu que nous alions tous les deux jusqu'ici [...] et là tous les deux nous prions Dieu et la Sainte-Vierge de t'aider à ne plus être méchant.
 - Oui. Non ; écoute : on va prendre un bâton ; tu tiendras un bout et moi l'autre. Je vais fermer les yeux et je te promets de ne les rouvrir que quand nous serons arrivés là-bas. »
- Ils s'éloignèrent un peu ; et, tandis qu'ils descendaient les marches de la terrasse, j'entendis encore Boris :
- Oui, non, pas ce bout-là. Attends que je l'essuie.
 - Pourquoi ?
 - J'y ai touché.
- (AGR pp. 1071-2)

Both these pairs are flanked by an adult male figure whose possessive interest in them is dictated by a sentimental authorly curiosity in the form of knowing humour or avuncular ignorance. But he is looking down not on an interestingly 'wicked' little boy but on the couple formed by him and **Q 57**

a little girl, of whom my mother has told me, wandering confidently through the pages: the maternal-virginal older sister figure of Wendy/Bronja/Madeleine. Gide no less than Barrie, then, needs a complex image of boy-self and mother *both preserved as children* so that the generation gap of oedipal loss is abolished and the adult self can possess *her* lost boy transformed now into his own. In Boris and Bronja, the child André is rewritten as innocent masturbator, his guilelessness condemning all those adults and adolescents who destroy him by conspiracy or neglect. Bronja, like André Walter's Émmanuèle before her, abandons her lover by slipping into easeful death and carrying her goodness out of the world. But before she does so, she provides a frame for him very similar to that provided by Madeleine in Cuverville.

The girl's motherly, teacherly virtue provides a home, frame and function for the boy's lovable naughtiness; his lovable naughtiness provides her with goodness, that is with feminine meaning. Sooner or later, of course, this arrangement must fail – either, as in Gide's life, because suddenly it becomes explicit and refused; or, as in both fictions, because the girl becomes a woman while the man wants to stay for ever a child.

The second pair of images represents another, perhaps the very obverse image of femininity: the femininity found in a dangerously seductive man. Here, first, is the dandyish Captain Hook:

Q 58

In person he was cadaverous and blackavized, and his hair was dressed in long curls, which at a little distance looked like black candles, and gave a singularly threatening expression to his handsome countenance. His eyes were of the blue of the forget-me-not, and of a profound melancholy, save when he was plunging his hook into you, at which time two red spots appeared in them and lit them up horribly. In

manner, something of the grand seigneur still clung to him, so that he even ripped you up with an air and I have been told that he was a *raconteur* of repute. (PPW pp. 52-3)

Hook's distinguished air has Wendy Q 59 fascinated and entranced (PPW p. 113), and he himself is moved by the beauty of Peter lying asleep: Q 60 The man was not wholly evil; he loved flowers (I have been told) and sweet music (he himself was no mean performer on the harpsichord); and let it be frankly admitted, the idyllic nature of the scene stirred him profoundly (PPW, p. 117). Most telling :Q 61 In his dark nature there was a touch of the feminine, as in all the great pirates (PPW, p. 82).

As for Gide, we know how firmly, in both *Corydon* and elsewhere, he rejected the kind of homosexual practice associated with what he called Q 62 *sodomites* and *invertis* (J1 p. 1092); he does so also in a symptomatic scene in *Si le grain ne meurt*, in which his friend Daniel B [Eugène Rouart] is having sex with the boy Mohammed:

Q 63

[...] tandis que je restais assis près des verres à demi vidés, Daniel saisit Mohammed dans ses bras et le porta sur le lit qui occupait le fond de la pièce. Il le coucha sur le dos, tout au bord du lit, en travers; et je ne vis bientôt plus que, de chaque côté de Daniel ahanant, deux fines jambes pendantes. Danie n'avait même pas enlevé son manteau. Très grand, debout contre le lit mal éclairé, vu de dos, le visage caché par les boucles de ses longs cheveux noirs, dans ce manteau qui lui tombait aux pieds, Daniel paraissait gigantesque, et penché sur ce petit corps qu'il couvrait, on eût dit un immense vampire se repaître sur un cadavre. J'aurais crié d'horreur...

[...] Pour moi, qui ne comprends le plaisir que face à face, réciproque et sans violence, et que souvent, pareil à Whitman, le plus furtif contact satisfait, j'étais horrifié tout à la fois par le jeu de Daniel, et de voir s'y prêter si complaisamment Mohammed. (J3 pp. 595-6)

Note here the 'j'aurais crié d'horreur' which forms an exact counterpart to the 'j'en aurais crié de plaisir' of the encounters with the starling. Whatever it is that makes people cry out, Gide distinguishes sharply between these two modes and occasions.

What makes Daniel into a Captain Hook is not simply his threatening manner, piratic long coat and dandyish curls, but the femininity that Gide is so shocked by in his way of approaching the boy. After all, to judge by Mohammed's *complaisance* and by the mutual position of their bodies, this sexual act is indeed *face à face, réciproque et sans violence*. But it is intrusive and domineering in a way Gide associates with the negative feminine of non-pederastic relations between men.

I want to bring this paper to an end now by re-raising the question I proposed earlier on in my argument. Who and what are the lost boys, and who is the 'boy who never grew up'? To do this I want to look more precisely than before at Gide's desire and at the temporal paradox it entails.

Q 64

Je ne suis qu'un petit garçon qui s'amuse – doublé d'un pasteur protestant qui l'ennuie (J1 p. 576) he famously wrote in 1907. After he died, in the *Hommage* volume of the *NRF*, nearly all the writers agree on how youthful or, in other words, ageless he seemed. But what does that impression mean? By desiring the young, a pederast must keep changing the object of desire: every boy loses his attraction as his voice deepens and his beard starts, and so he is replaced by another boy – different in identity, naturally, but in another sense always the same youthful *eromenos* in relation to a steadily and normally ageing *erastes*. By being always replaced (like the children starring year by year in the stage play *Peter Pan*, thinned out like Peter's companions by a height test every December [see Margery Garber, *Vested*

Interests Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992, p. 183]), each specific boy is inevitably lost in order for the ideal or virtual boy to be always available. Thus it is Nathanël, not Lafacadio, and certainly not Marc, who fulfils Gide's desire most exactly, and that is probably why the terms surrounding him are the most bird-like of any of his love-objects: **Q 65** *Si je cherchais tes aliments, tu n'aurais pas de faim pour les manger ; si je te préparais ton lit, tu n'aurais pas sommeil pour y dormir (AGR p. 248).*

But if the object remains young by being infinitely replaceable, two things follow : first, that no lasting relationship is possible, and second, that with every new beloved, the lover gets visibly more older. If Gide is the one who remains constant while Marc grows up or if Barrie stays the same while David, George or Michael dies young, it is the lover who becomes the caricature of the child, the grotesque in fact, the Aschenbach who will drown or decay still seeing Tazio on the marine horizon.

There are two ways of understanding the agelessness of the pederast, then. Gide offers both of them in a discussion with Jean Schlumberger :

Q 66

« Il y a ceux qui veulent à tout prix marquer leur âge mûr par des affirmations ; ils veulent [...] clore l'époque des acquisitions pour entrer dans celle de l'exploitation. Ils vivent désormais sur leur capital. Ils me reprochent de courir éternellement après ma jeunesse ; mais c'est qu'ils ne peuvent pas comprendre le rajeunissement qui s'opère par sympathie. Je ne suis pas un homme de cinquante ans qui fait le jeune, mais la jeunesse des autres passe en moi. »(Jean Schlumberger, 'Tout comme on avait rouvert...' in

La Nouvelle Revue Française : Hommage à André Gide 1869-1951, [Paris : Gallimard, 1951], p. 7)

The first way is economic : you save up the years and instead of living off your capital in your fifties you find a way of conserving it. Gide tried this way by making Madeleine, good housekeeper as she was, the keeper of his young 'real' handwritten self. The other way is to keep replenishing your coffers by sexual proximity to the young. This image, benign, even glorious as it is meant to be by contrast to the dull adulthood of capitalists, suggests the other side of that joyous desire : vampirism.

The desire of a man not to grow up or, more accurately, not to grow old cannot proceed simply by the magic agency of *sympathie*. The beloved is led not to his own free flight but always to the cats or the cage. Most crucially there is no 'pure masculine relation' because the feminine is always needed : in the sister who preserves or refuses to preserve your young self ; or, more hazardously still, in the very desire that leads you - **Q 67** *comme un vampire qui se repaît sur un cadavre* - to drain the young beloved of the essence that made him precious.