ANDRÉ GIDE’S (1869–1951) travel journal from colonial West and Central Africa, *Travels in the Congo*, was a continuation of the writer’s intimate *Journal*, which he interrupted during the journey between July 1925 and June 1926. Gide had conceived of the African journey as a kind of turning point in his life, not just as another journey. Before his departure from Bordeaux with Marc Allégret on July 14, 1925, Gide had sold his villa in Auteuil and part of his library. He had also finished a major novel, *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (*The Counterfeiters*, 1925). An entry on November 1, 1924 in *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*, which is Gide’s journal dedicated to the process of writing *The Counterfeiters*, reveals that the writer had postponed his departure for Africa until the following June in the hope that he could finish the novel before then (2008, 90). In an entry from his *Journal* at the end of May 1925, when Gide notes that he had finished typing the final version of five chapters from the

1. Gide kept this journal throughout the writing process, from the summer of 1919 until May 1925. Gide’s *Journal 1889–1939*, which was published in 1939 in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade collection, was the first in the series of published journals that the author edited from his complete journal. The latter came out in the same collection in 1996–97.

2. Gide refers here to some other important reason for postponing the journey, but does not give any details. The reason was probably his lover Marc Allégret’s examinations in the fall of 1924, which are mentioned in an entry in Gide’s *Journal* on October 26 of that year (see also O’Brien 1953, 264–65). Justin O’Brien has translated the notebook about the writing of *The Counterfeiters* as *Logbook of The Coiners* (1952).
novel, he refers to his high expectations of the Congo, distressed as he was by the apathy he felt:

> Je ne compte plus que sur le Congo pour m’en sortir. La préparation de ce voyage et l’attente des pays nouveaux a désenchanté le présent; j’éprouve combien il était vrai de dire que le bonheur habite l’instant. Rien ne me paraît plus que provisoire. (Gide 1951a, 805–6)

I have given up counting on anything but the Congo to get me out of it [my apathy]. Preparations for this trip and the expectation of new landscapes have disenchanted the present. I am experiencing how true it was to say that happiness lies in the moment. Nothing seems to me anything but provisional now. (Gide 1967, 390)

Furthermore, two brief subsequent entries from the summer of 1925 suggest that the finishing of the novel and the journey were directly connected: “8 June: Finished Les Faux-Monnayeurs; 14 July: Departure for the Congo” (Gide 1967, 390) (“8 juin: Achevé les Faux-Monnayeurs; 14 juillet: Départ pour le Congo”; Gide 1948, 806).

Inspired by the biographical relation between the novel and Gide’s departure for Africa, as well as the writer’s Journal entries from the summer of 1925, Gérard Cogez has argued that Gide’s travel was motivated by a desire to distance himself from the limitations of the novel genre: “How could one not see that this was for the writer an escape from the novelistic trap, and one which enabled him to take a helpful and, perhaps, definitive critical distance from the genre?” (2004, 215).3 The journey would thus have been for Gide a means of turning away from the novel genre with which he had recently, and amply, expressed his dissatisfaction, especially in Le Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs, where Gide, for instance, explains how, in writing The Counterfeiters, he sought to reinvent the novel form. Gide, as he explains in his journal about writing the novel, was particularly concerned about the construction of fictional characters and sought to find powerful verbal expressions, tones of voice and nuanced gestures that would reveal the characters’ minds, instead of using the novelistic convention of narrative access to the characters’ thoughts and emotions (Gide 2008, 82–85). The journal of writer-character Edouard, of which fragments are included in The Counterfeiters, voices similar concerns about novelistic pretensions of verisimilitude, based

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3. My translation of “Comment n’entendrait-on pas qu’il s’agit bien pour l’écrivain de se sortir du piège romanesque, de prendre avec le genre une salutaire, et peut-être définitive, distance critique?”
on descriptive realism, and about traditional means for portraying the characters’ dialogue, action, and states of mind.

However, the assumption that Gide travelled “away from” the novel or that he did so “in hatred of the novel” (Cogez 2004, 212) is not easily reconciled with the fact that the writer had in his luggage several novels and that during the journey he commented on his novel-reading with much pleasure. Furthermore, Gide not only writes in his travel journal about the immersive qualities of fiction, but also structures much of his experience in Africa with the help of fiction, especially in reference to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. In addition, there are some striking thematic affinities between *The Counterfeiters* and the travel journal that suggest a sense of continuity in the writer’s thinking about the novel genre at this time. Gide, for instance, continues in his travel journal to inquire into the relation between mediated reality and the facts of reality, or between the power of imagination and the resistance of facts—questions that are extensively developed in *The Counterfeiters*. In Gide’s career after the journey, there is also no definitive break in writing longer prose fiction—*L’Ecole des femmes* and *Robert* came out in 1929—even if, admittedly, he was no longer interested in questioning the conventions of the genre through ambitious experiments such as *The Counterfeiters*. The fact that *The Counterfeiters* was the only book that Gide called a novel among his works, classifying his earlier undertakings in prose fiction as satires (*soties*) or stories (*récits*), underscores the author’s attempt to rethink the novel genre at this time. However, as to the misgivings about novel-writing that Gide voices in *Le Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs*, or through his mouthpieces in *The Counterfeiters*, these involve mainly his critique of traditional novelistic conventions in characterization and description. All in all, it seems more justified to claim that Gide sought to write a novel that would present its characters and their minds differently from his earlier works (with a sense of outer flatness, for instance), and, at the same time, reject traditional forms of realism that he disliked, rather than to reject the novel genre as a whole.

Below, I will explore the relationship between Gide’s major novel and his African travel journal in more detail, with specific attention given to the question of the possibilities and limitations of the novel as a genre. Such an inquiry involves, on the one hand, an analysis of the features in *The Counterfeiters* that evoke the themes of Africa and travel and, on the other hand, how

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4. The “flatness” of the characters refers here to Gide’s intention to respect the mystery of his characters’ intimate lives, including, for instance, the principle that the novelist should not penetrate into the character’s intimate thoughts by reporting them with the help of introductory phrases such as “He thought that . . .” (see also Gide 1952, 65).
Travels in the Congo reflects on the question of fiction-writing and the reading of fiction. First, I will discuss three interrelated elements in The Counterfeiters: the Conradian trope of madness-inducing immersion in the “heart of darkness,” the question of belief in magic, and the metaphor of “writing as a journey.” All of these elements point to the necessity for some of the characters to leave Europe and move to Black Africa. As to Travels in the Congo, I will then develop a detailed analysis of the functions of reading in Gide’s travel, in particular with regard to the author’s systematic exploitation of fictions as a structuring device for his travel experience. My ultimate aim in this investigation is to illuminate the effects of the complex game of generic mirroring, borrowing, and transformation between Gide’s travel writing (or journal-keeping in a broader sense) and his fiction.

Aspects of Africa in The Counterfeiters

The Counterfeiters, which, in a dedication to fellow writer Roger Martin du Gard, Gide called his first novel, describes colonial adventure in Africa through the destinies of Alexandre Vedel, a tradesman in the French West African colonies, and two lovers, Vincent Molinier and Lady Lilian Griffith, who leave France for the same Casamance region of Senegal where Vedel had made a living. We are told that Alexandre “ran away to Africa” where he found some success after a rough start, making his living in rubber and the ivory trade. Vincent, a young physician interested in sea life and botany, and his lover Lilian, an American, disappear from the European scene around the middle of the novel. Later we hear about their fate indirectly in two letters that some other characters read and discuss. In the first instance, the novel’s main writer-character, Edouard, reads part of Lilian’s letter from Dakar, sent to her friend Comte de Passavant. In her letter, Lilian describes the boredom and desperation during the couple’s voyage to Senegal. She also depicts the tightening “clutches of the demon of adventure” and the growing hatred that the lovers now feel for each other:

Oui, mon cher, l’amour nous paraissant trop fade, nous avons pris le parti de nous haïr. A vrai dire, ça a commencé bien avant; oui, dès notre embar- quement; d’abord, ce n’était que de l’irritation, une sourde animosité qui

5. Gide first published his travel journal in these two volumes, but in subsequent editions they have been usually united. Le retour du Tchad starts where Voyage au Congo ends, on February 20, 1926 in Fort-Lamy in Chad. This was the midpoint in Gide’s journey after which his team returned to the Cameroonian coast, first on the Logone River.
n’empêchait pas le corps à corps. Ah! je sais à présent ce que c’est que d’éprouver de la passion pour quelqu’un . . . (Gide 2002a, 314)

Yes, my dear, love seemed too tasteless, so we have gone in for hating each other. In reality it began long before; really, as soon as we got on board; at first it was only irritation, a smouldering animosity, which didn’t prevent closer encounters. With the fine weather, it became ferocious. Oh! I know now what it is to feel passion for someone . . . (Gide 1966, 287)

In the second instance, Olivier Molinier reads part of Alexandre’s letter from Senegal destined for Alexandre’s brother Armand. In his letter, Alexandre mentions an unnamed “singular” companion (Vincent), who thinks he is the devil and has spells of madness and whom Alexandre suspects of having drowned the woman (Lilian) who accompanied him.

Both letters from Senegal convey images of a mythical Africa of violence, madness, and possession fantasies, but also of freedom from conventional morality. In his letter, Alexandre explains that he wants “less and less” to go back to civilization, likening it to a starched collar and a straitjacket. Alexandre’s letter does not reveal the names of the couple, but the narrator establishes the connection with Vincent and Lilian. The madman’s obsession with cut hands also clearly recalls Lilian’s earlier story about the shipwreck of The Bourgogne in the first part of the novel. In this story two sailors in a lifeboat, one of them a black man, hacked off peoples’ fingers and hands to prevent them from getting into the boat and overloading it. Lilian’s interest in this story had revealed to her listeners an inclination to see life in terms of a constant struggle to survive. In the letter, when the same image of severed hands comes up, the hands stand metonymically for Lilian’s drowning and possible murder.

The uncontrollable “demonic” forces that mark Vincent and Lilian’s journey to the Casamance are closely related to the questions of magic and possession that emerge elsewhere in The Counterfeiters. While it is not possible to delve here into the complex theme of the devil, which informs various aspects of Gide’s novel, we must note how the demonic features are

6. Alexandre’s ironic reference to the “badge of civilization” re-evokes the critique of the writer-character Edouard, laid out elsewhere in the novel, of rules and conventions that atrophy human potential. Edouard observes in his journal: “I lean with a fearful attraction over the depths of each creature’s possibilities and weep for all that lies atrophied under the heavy lid of custom and morality” (Gide 1966, 105).

7. The violent vision may further remind of the imperial practices in King Leopold’s Congo, where the failure to meet rubber collection quotas was sometimes punished by having one’s hands cut off.
frequently associated both with Africa and with the impulse to travel. It is significant, first of all, how the metaphor of the demon is intimately associated with the most significant departures in the novel, as a metaphor for the impulse to seek independence, adventure, and sexual gratification. In the beginning of *The Counterfeiters* the narrator explains that some “demonic” force pushes Bernard Profitendieu to leave his home and renounce his foster father. The discovery of letters from his mother’s lover and, later, the reading of Edouard’s journal, open for Bernard an adventure into a world of surprising unknowns. Similarly, a “demon” supposedly hints to Vincent that he needs to go gambling, and, as the narrator reveals, the “devil” watches over him in amusement as he goes back to Lilian instead of to Laura, who is pregnant with his child.

Secondly, the demonic forces in *The Counterfeiters* are also associated with a childlike belief in magic. The question of magic surfaces specifically in relation to two schoolboys, Boris and his friend Baptistin Kraft, who share a “primitive” belief in talismans and magic spells. The boys’ notion of magic is based on some vague ideas of something they had read, concerning the idea of an unlimited power that “enables one in some mysterious way to gain possession of what one wishes for” (Gide 1966, 184). Magic thinking in this sense holds the supernatural to be present in all reality. Boris’s nurse, Mme Sophroniska, explains the boys’ magic practice as a failed effort to cope with “nervous illness” and as a form of mental laziness. Edouard, however, objects strongly to Mme Sophroniska’s rationalism: “Sophroniska takes to bits the innermost wheels of his mental organism and spreads them out in the broad daylight, like a watchmaker cleaning the works of a clock” (Gide 1966, 183). Edouard clearly distances himself from Mme Sophroniska at this point in the novel, interested as he is in investigating the relationship between magic practices and literary imagination, even if he does not seem to believe in magic in the same sense as Boris and Baptistin. The controversy between Edouard and Mme Sophroniska is noteworthy in that Edouard often voices the author’s views.

In this regard, it is significant how Edouard suggests that he himself might follow a kind of belief in magic. Having just explained that the rivalry between

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8. The novel ends with Edouard’s notes about La Pérouse’s agonizing discourse over what he sees as the similarity between God and the devil, and the cruelty of God in sacrificing his son (here, Christ also symbolizes La Pérouse’s grandson Boris who has committed suicide). The various meanings of the demon metaphor in *The Counterfeiters* have been well demonstrated in Gide scholarship, for instance, in relation to Gide’s personal theology, the theme of sexual desire, and the significance that the writer gives to chance and circumstance in artistic creativity. See, for instance, Brosman 1986. Gide makes the association between sexuality and the demon explicit in his published *Journal* (1951, 540–41).
The immediate of Reading in Gide's Travel Fact and Fictions

The real world and the representation is the deep-lying subject of his novel yet to be written (Gide 1966, 183), Edouard admits that his constant talk of an unfinished novel may appear as a kind of mysticism to people around him. The problem that Edouard thus seems to be posing is whether novel-writing in his case—since he does not adhere to a realism that pretends to start with pure facts—constitutes a kind of magical belief system in its own right, perhaps no better or no worse than the use of a talisman and a belief in the power of incantation. In Edouard's “magic” practice, the writer tries to impose his interpretation on the outside world, even when he knows that the “resistance of facts” is likely to invite him to imagine ideal constructions of reality.

The question of realism and magic is yet another instance in the novel where Gide's personal concerns seem to be voiced through Edouard. In his Travels in the Congo Gide makes explicit the relation between primitive mentality and Africa and displays a similar ambivalence towards mysticism, or belief in magic, as does Edouard in the novel. In the course of the journey, however, the nature of the demonic force that pulls Gide forward seems to change, at least with regard to what he reveals to his readers. Instead of the demonic forces within his mind, or the intense sensual and sexual pleasures that Gide associates with this continent (since the early 1890s), the demonic is gradually associated with the horrors of the colonial situation behind the façade of the French colonial government.

In The Counterfeiters, Edouard's idea of poetic existence is based on the premise that constant change is a prerequisite for an intensive life, while this idea also suggests that imagination and reality are always intertwined. In a conversation with Bernard, Edouard explains to his companion's deaf ears that he has often thought

qu'en art, et en littérature en particulier, ceux-là seuls comptent qui se lancent vers l'inconnu. On ne découvre pas de terre nouvelle sans consentir à perdre de vue, d'abord et longtemps, tout rivage. Mais nos écrivains craignent le large; ce ne sont que des côtoyeurs. (Gide 2002a, 338)

that in art, and particularly in literature, the only people who count are those who launch out on to unknown seas, one doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time. But our writers are afraid of the open; they are mere coasters. (Gide 1966, 309)

The metaphorical journey and the actual journey are thus closely associated in Edouard's thinking, similar to certain passages in Gide's travel journal. It is telling that Edouard's curiosity about a boy called Georges Molinier, whom
he discovers stealing a book from a secondhand bookshop, increases as he realizes that the book in question is a guide book of Algeria, revealing the boy’s possible propensity for vagabondage. In *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* (2008, 39–42), in an entry on May 3, 1921, Gide writes about a similar incidence on meeting a teenager from the Lycée Henri-IV. As a crucial context for understanding the meaning of this encounter for Gide, and the excitement that he associates with vagabondage in Algeria, we need to recall Gide’s literary autobiography *Si le grain ne meurt* (*If It Die: An Autobiography*), which was published in commercial form in 1924, where Gide described his discovery of homosexuality in Algeria in the early 1890s.9

From these references to Africa and travel in *The Counterfeiters*, there emerges an image of Africa that has a mythical, even immoral quality as a den of iniquity, a place of regression, perhaps self-destruction, and madness, and a state of determined exile. Yet the inevitable mystery and force of Africa also invites further travel and adventure and suggests the discovery of new pleasures without the moral and family issues of home. To describe the boredom of a sea passage in her letter from Africa, Lilian quotes Baudelaire’s lines “. . . grand miroir / De mon désespoir,” thus superimposing the landscape of travel on the landscape of the mind. Baudelaire’s poem “La Musique” is one of the poet’s many descriptions of what he called the abyss:

> Je sens vibrer en moi toutes les passions  
> D’un vaisseau qui souffre;  
> Le bon vent, la tempête et ses convulsions

> Sur l’immense gouffre  
> Me bercent. D’autre fois, calme plat, grand miroir  
> De mon désespoir!  
> (Baudelaire 1991)

> I feel vibrating within me all the passions  
> Of ships in distress;  
> The good wind and the tempest with its convulsions

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9. See also Aldrich (2003, 331–44), who discusses Gide’s romantic attachments to “the irresistible youths of the classical Mediterranean or exotic North Africa.” However, Aldrich points out that in his African travel journal, Gide, while occasionally commenting on the attractive physical attributes of blacks, only rarely describes his erotic feelings or the cultural empathy that were “constants of his contacts with North Africa” (2003, 343). For the ways in which Gide’s sexuality is affected by his African travels, see also Michaud 1961 and Chadourne 1968.
Over the vast gulf
Cradle me. At other times, dead calm, great mirror
Of my despair!
(Baudelaire 1954)

Lilian’s and Vincent’s voyage to Senegal is characterized by inevitability: her drowning in the abyss of Africa, both in the metaphorical and the literal sense, is already predicted in the story of the shipwreck of The Bourgogne earlier in the novel. Furthermore, Vincent’s fate conforms to the narrator’s definition of exoticism, which the narrator gives in a detailed description of Vincent:

On appelle « exotisme », je crois, tout repli diapré de la Maya, devant quoi notre âme se sent étrangère; qui la prive de points d’appui. Parfois telle vertu résisterait, que le diable avant d’attaquer, dépayse. (Gide 2002a, 143)

The name “exoticism” is, I believe, given to those of Maia’s iridescent folds which make the soul feel itself a stranger, which deprive it of points of contact. There are some whose virtue would resist, but that the devil, before attacking it, transplants them. (Gide 1966, 130)

Vincent easily feels that he is in a foreign land, even at home, suffering from a sense of estrangement that culminates with his arrival in Senegal.

Finally, to account fully for the African presence in Gide’s major novel, we have to consider the author’s (or the author figure’s) metaphor of writing as a form of travel, which surfaces explicitly in the last chapter of the second part of the novel, entitled “The Author Reviews His Characters,” where the author speaks in his own name. This is a turning point in the novel in many ways, since Gide not only adds another narrative level to his text, but also evaluates the main personalities in his novel and reflects on the direction of his tale. The author begins this midpoint evaluation with the travel metaphor:

Le voyageur, parvenu au haut de la colline, s’assied et regarde avant de reprendre sa marche, à présent déclinante: il cherche à distinguer où le conduit enfin ce chemin sinuex qu’il a pris, qui lui semble se perdre dans l’ombre et, car le soir tombe, dans la nuit. Ainsi l’auteur imprévoyant s’arrête un instant, reprend souffle, et se demande avec inquiétude où va le mener son récit. (Gide 2002a, 215)

The traveller, having reached the top of the hill, sits down and looks about him before continuing his journey, which henceforward lies all downhill.
He seeks to distinguish in the darkness—for night is falling—where the winding path he has chosen is leading him. So the undiscerning author stops awhile to regain his breath, and wonders with some anxiety where his tale will take him. (Gide 1966, 195)

The perspective from above enables the author, and possibly also the reader, to see the story as a whole at this point in the narrative: to examine the ramifications of the story and to develop ideas about the main characters’ possible future itineraries. At the same time, the metaphor of narrative as travel suggests the idea that the story may not be wholly within the writer’s control, but that the events confronted in the course of writing, as in travel, might freely impose themselves on the writing mind. While the author thus makes himself much more visible than in his earlier short interventions, he also pretends to distance himself from his work as if his writing was something happening by itself, by surprise or the like fate, which dictates itself to him, or like some open-ended journey on which he has embarked. Novel-writing, thus, is like a journey, and we are advised to think the same about novel-reading as well.

**Novel-Reading in Fiction and the Travel Journal**

Reading is a central activity in *The Counterfeiters*, in which almost everyone is an avid reader, if not also a writer. Reading literature, letters, and journals determines much of the characters’ experience and punctuates the whole narrative of the novel. Reactions to books, journals, and letters and shared readings have an important function in characterization, as they reveal the character’s inner thoughts, emotions, and interests, and create relations and contrasts between different personalities. Reading can also play a significant role in terms of perspectival change. Reading someone else’s journal or letter without permission, or by accident, which happens quite often in this novel, always reflects both the reader’s and the writer’s state of mind, their motivation to read, and the nature of their emotional involvement with each other and with what they read. Such changes in perspective further mirror the novel’s larger structure in which excerpts from the writer-character Edouard’s journal are continuously interspersed in the narration, thus imposing on the text a structure of crisscross reading between the predominant third-person narration and a first-person journal.

The various moments of reading described in *The Counterfeiters*, from the readings of letters, journals, and talismans to Edouard rereading his
journal notes, facilitate the shifts between third-person narration and first-person writing. Scenes of reading, for instance, allow for the narrator-author to intervene ironically in the characters’ situations, as happens in the passages about the reading of the two letters from Senegal. The readers of these letters, Edouard and Olivier, are surprisingly uninterested in what they read, much less interested than the letters’ recipients (Passavant and Armand), nor do they understand the text’s full implications. Edouard explains that he does not want to bother his head with Lady Lilian’s “outrageous feelings,” as he calls them, and thus does not really pay attention to what he reads. The nonchalant reaction mortifies Passavant, who considers Edouard’s lack of curiosity about his friends’ destiny a personal affront. The narrator then explains, in indirect discourse, Passavant’s complex feelings about the letter, feelings that motivated him to show it to Edouard in the first place: Passavant’s original delight in receiving the letter, the memory of his affection for Lilian and Vincent, the self-satisfaction at being able to be kind to them, then the malicious pleasure in hearing about their failed attempt to find “perfect bliss” in Africa. The scene thus emphasizes the distance between the two writer-characters, Edouard and Passavant, as Passavant fails to have the desired effect on his competitor.

Olivier, in turn, who reads a passage from Vincent’s letter to Armand Vedel, does not have anything to say about the letter. He does not even understand that the mad murderer mentioned in the text might be his brother Vincent. The narrator’s intervention, which ends the scene and the chapter in question, further emphasizes Olivier’s indifference towards his brother: “To tell the truth, Olivier did not trouble much about him” (Gide 1966, 330). This is important information about Olivier, but even more is said about Armand, who controls Olivier’s reading by pointing out that only one sheet of the long letter contains interesting information. The exotic passage about a mad white man, a hideous negro, a murder by the river, and a flourishing ivory business accentuates Armand’s own wish to follow Alexandre to Africa, a plan that he might realize were he not already expected to do military service. Another important aspect of the description of this scene is Armand’s notion of his brother’s self-confident character, calling him “a kind of donkey, something in my style” (Gide 1966, 329). These qualities Armand seems to detect in his brother’s writing as well.

Furthermore, besides serving important functions in constructing and presenting the characters’ minds, or indicating changes in focus and narrative level, the consequences of these reading scenes are part and parcel of the novel’s evolving plot, in which reading incites various departures and motivates key choices. Gerald Prince has in fact argued, in view of the impres-
sive number of readers and scenes of reading in this novel, that reading provides the novelist a way to control and measure narrative voices and to set in motion the story’s evolution, adding to the complexity of narration in indirect exposition (Prince 1973, 20). Prince argues further that *The Counterfeiters* is structured around a series of readings: the evolution of the story and its resolution are in some sense direct consequences of reading and the read (1973, 20). The tragic quality in some of these reading scenes further adds to their importance as structuring devices in the novel. *The Counterfeiters* starts with Bernard finding and reading letters from his mother’s lover. The discovery that his biological father is someone other than the man he has known as his father spurs Bernard to leave home; reading also inspires him to become Edouard’s secretary; a letter makes Olivier feel closer to Comte de Passavant; and the reading of the five mysterious words of a talisman provokes the death of young Boris (or this at least is what some of the boys believe). The importance of reading is also highlighted in that the characters who spend the most time with literature, especially Edouard and Bernard, seem to be the least likely to fall victims to the evil present everywhere in their world—even if in some ways Edouard, being possessed by his novel-writing project, is driven by “demonic” forces. As Prince further perceives, the characters who read the least, or the ones who never read, like Lady Griffith or Vincent, are most likely to become victims of forces that they cannot control (see Prince 1973, 22). Perhaps if Lady Griffith and Vincent had been readers, they could have avoided their tragic fate.

But what do we find if we turn our focus from *The Counterfeiters* to *Travels in the Congo* and consider the many scenes of reading embedded in the travel journal? First of all, it is important to note that in his travel journal Gide never comments on his writing or on the act of keeping the journal. The reader is not invited, as happens in *The Counterfeiters*, to assist in the different phases and hazards of writing or to scrutinize the construction of the text or indeed of a fictional world, from a series of different perspectives, voices, and narrative levels. Second, the travel journal highlights the act of reading as immersion, accentuated by the movement and disorientation in travel and the changing scenery. The various pleasures and displeasures of travel are framed, complemented, and to some extent controlled by the pleasures of reading, as the traveller constantly dives into the classics of Western literature, and novels in particular, during the journey. Gide’s motivation for the travel, as he describes in his first notes in the travelogue, was precisely “voyager pour le plaisir” (2002b, 13), and the sense of pleasure is constantly associated not just with the environment, but also with the experience of reading during the course of the journey.
Reading accompanies Gide’s penetration into the “heart” of Africa as a joyful state of being embedded in a book. Commentary on readings in *Travels in the Congo* is at least as frequent as in Gide’s *Journal*, inviting the reader to share the intimate effects and pleasures of books. Gide discusses his readings so frequently in the travel journal that this made Michel Leiris feel the need to reproach him for it. However, as Leiris advanced further in his own African trek, he explains that he came to understand perfectly why Gide wrote about reading so much, having had similar discussions about literature and aesthetics with his travel companions. Gide’s reading and immersion in the books enhances, for instance, the experience of entering another world, but it has a number of other important functions as well. Gide usually reads before and after each leg of his journey, in the morning and the evening, during the breaks. The books that he had with him filled many boxes, including classics of French and English literature, such as the fables of La Fontaine, Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* and his tragedy *Samson Agonistes*, Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, plays by Molière (*Le Misanthrope*), Corneille (*Cinna, Horace*), and Racine (*Iphigénie*), poems by Robert Browning, and Chekhov’s travel story “The Steppe.” Among the longer fictions were, most notably, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* and *Faust*, the latter two included in a leather-bound Goethe collection in the original German, and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Master of Ballantrae*. Gide also had with him a number of nonfiction and philosophical texts, for instance, some of Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet’s writings (*Traité de la concupiscence; Discours sur la vie cachée en Dieu*), Cuthbert Christy’s travel book *Big Game and Pigmies* (1924), André Cresson’s *Position actuelle des problèmes philosophiques* (1924), autobiographical fiction (*The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*), some liter-

10. Gide uses the metaphor of the heart (cœur) of Africa at the end of September 1925 in a way that reveals the intimate tie between this metaphor and the expectation of the exotic. Entering an unnamed village in the forest, he writes that “a village so strange and so beautiful that we felt we had found in it the very reason of our journey and its very core” (1957, 42) (“village si beau, si étrange qu’il nous semblait trouver ici la raison de notre voyage, entrer au cœur de son sujet”; Gide 2002, 65); again the next day, feeling somewhat disappointed about the exotic, he writes: “The shrubs and plants are not, it must be admitted, the least exotic in appearance, and if it were not for a strange little island of pandanus with its aerial roots, nothing would remind one that this is almost the heart of Africâ” (Gide 1957, 43) (“arbustes et plantes d’aspect, à vrai dire, fort peu exotique et, sans un étrange îlot de pandanus aux racines aériennes, un peu en amont de la chute, rien ne rappellerait ici qu’on est presque au cœur de l’Afrique”; Gide 2002, 66).

11. “Autrefois je reprochais à Gide de parler fréquemment, dans le récit de son voyage en Afrique, de ses lectures, par exemple Milton ou Bossuet. Je m’aperçois maintenant que c’est très naturel. Le voyage nous change que par moments. La plupart du temps vous restez tristement pareil à ce que vous aviez toujours été. Je me rends compte en constatant que très souvent Schaeffner et moi avons des conversations sur des sujets littéraires ou esthétiques” (1981, 225).
ary periodicals and Parisian journals, and a *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. Gide also cites Baudelaire and Flaubert, but this he probably does by heart; he does not mention having the actual books with him.

Commentary on literature also marks the beginning of the travel journal, where Gide praises La Fontaine, calling his fables a miracle of culture, and wonders if they are indeed the best literature ever written. La Fontaine’s stories demonstrate for Gide, as he explains in the first entry in his travel journal, a model of sensitivity in observation and reading. Furthermore, the ease and delicacy of La Fontaine’s expression guarantee for Gide a richness of ideas and density of observation: “There is nothing one cannot find in him, provided one knows how to look; but the eye that looks must be a skilful one, his touch is often so light and so delicate. He is a miracle of culture—Montaigne’s wisdom; Mozart’s sensibility” (Gide 1957, 4) (“Celui qui sait bien voir peut y trouver trace de tout; mais il faut un oeil averti, tant la touché, souvent, est légère. C’est un miracle de culture. Sage comme Montaigne; sensible comme Mozart”; Gide 2002b, 14). These remarks establish the expectation of a world that is rich in details and suggest a kind of sensitivity that the writer-traveller attempts to emulate in his observations.12

To understand better the many meanings of Gide’s readings during his journey, we can turn to David Scott, who has cogently identified the basic functions of these readings in organizing Gide’s travel experience and in what Gide chose to report of this experience. Scott sees that Gide’s travel journal is profoundly marked by a “search for découpages that will cut the amorphous mass of jungle experience into comprehensible units” (Scott 2004, 164). The various reading scenes respond to this search as types of framing devices that help the writer come to terms with the foreign and sometimes frustrating reality around him. This framing and cutting-out process, Scott argues, involves both the level of the sign, such as “clichés, instantanés and other images,” and the “interpretant,” meaning the mental process of interpreting the signs of African reality. The latter include “mental images, memories, associated ideas, taxonomies, whether personal, scientific or cultural,” together with other materials derived from the readings (Scott 2004, 164). Literature thus served Gide both as an underlying explanatory frame of experience, as a structuring device that helped him to sharpen a given image or experience vis-à-vis the context, as an interlude between scene changes, and, as Scott puts it, as “a curtain to blot out the unfathomable monotony or impenetrability of the jungle scene” (Scott 2004, 168).

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12. See also Warehime 1995, 459–60, who points out that La Fontaine is “the most obvious ‘internal’ model” for Gide as observer.
Gide immerses himself in the fictional world of The Master of Ballantrae when he cannot do anything else, for instance, when he is forced to stay put due to the brutally hot afternoon temperatures, or because his leg is aching too much to move. The author explains that he reads Stevenson with much pleasure ("avec délices") to round off a perfect day. Citations from this or other novels can sum up for the traveller his complex feelings of hope, regret, and courage or mark the episodes of the journey. Having reached the turning point of his travels somewhere in Chad, and realizing that he has already turned back towards home, Gide quotes the character Hoffnung in Goethe's Faust: "Sicherlich, es muss das Beste Irgendwo zu finden sein" (Gide 2002b, 264) ("It is certain that the best is somewhere to be found"). Feeling more courageous than ever, Gide explains, he thus lets his reading mark the return from his journey and lead the way towards future discoveries.

In addition to the general functions of reading as a semiotic framework for experience or as a kind of cognitive blackout, as defined by Scott, we may be able to tease out more precise functions of fiction- and novel-reading in Gide's travel journal. In relying on narrative fiction as a major point of reference, especially with regard to Heart of Darkness, but also to some extent in relation to Goethe's Die Wahlverwandtschaften (Elective Affinities, 1809) and Stevenson's adventure novel, Gide not only organizes the travel experience, but also poses the question of the reality of fiction, prompting us to ask what constitutes and produces the pleasure in reading fiction during travel. We can phrase this latent question as a problem of immediacy, which is familiar to us from The Counterfeiters: How can fiction achieve immediacy, realism, and accuracy and do so perhaps better than a nonfiction description of the world in a journal? Or how can the sense of immediacy in journal form contribute to and contrast with third-person perspectives? Gide's reading and interpretation of Conrad's and Goethe's fiction during his travel suggests some answers to these questions.

On Conrad

In his travel journal, which is dedicated to the memory of Joseph Conrad, Gide uses Conrad's fiction not only as a major point of reference to frame and explain his perceptions during the travel, but also to affirm the reality and truth-value of Conrad's novella with regard to the circumstances of his travel

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13. Gide had also contributed an account of his friendship with the writer, who had died in 1924, to a special issue of La Nouvelle Revue Française (December 1924) entitled "Hommage à Conrad."
and the African ways of life that he witnesses. More than any other work, *Heart of Darkness* provides Gide with a kind of global frame of reference that extends from the journal’s beginning to its end.

Gide makes the first reference to Conrad in a long footnote, appended to one of the first entries in the travel journal. The comment stands out from the other references as a significant metacommentary on the reality of Conrad’s fiction, explaining the need to cite from *Heart of Darkness* and to resort to this novella as an authority on the Congo. In this note Gide first explains that the town of Pointe-Noire was the starting point for the Brazzaville-Océan railroad. This leads him to mention Conrad’s travels in the same region ten years prior to the construction of the railroad and to underscore the importance of Conrad’s “admirable” book that remains still

profondément vrai, j’ai pu m’en convaincre, et que j’aurai souvent à citer. Aucune outrance dans ses peintures: elles sont cruellement exactes; mais ce qui les désassombrit, c’est la réussite de ce projet qui, dans son livre, paraît si vain. (Gide 2002b, 23n2)

profoundly true and I shall often have occasion to quote it. There is no exaggeration in his picture; it is cruelly exact; but what lightens its gloom is the success of the project which in his pages appears so vain. (Gide 1957, 11n2)

The statement suggests not only that *Heart of Darkness* is “profoundly real,” but that the novella acts as a kind of guarantee for the reality of the travel experience, just as the travel experience affirms the reality of the novella (even if, in Gide’s opinion, the railroad project turned out to be more successful than Conrad might have expected). This tendency to read Conrad’s novella as fact, or at least as nonfiction, is evident again in an entry for March 25, 1926, when Gide, after reading Conrad’s novella for the fourth time, realizes that it is only after having seen the country about which Conrad writes that he is able to understand the excellence of the description (Gide 2002b, 399).

What is consistent in the references to Conrad’s fiction, mainly *Heart of Darkness* and, to a lesser degree, *Typhoon*, which Gide himself had translated into French, is Gide’s persistent view of these novels as accurate representations of reality and, perhaps even more, as more accurate descriptions of reality than the best nonfiction. In addition to the instances that I have already mentioned, Gide praises the description of a storm in *Typhoon*, which he thinks gives the reader free rein to imagine the real horror of the event. Gide also explains a mistake in the French translation of *Heart of Darkness* (Au
coeur des ténèbres) in which the measure of half a kilo (livre) in a carrier’s luggage is confused with a kilo (he points out in a footnote that the load should weigh thirty rather than fifteen kilos). Furthermore, the function of Heart of Darkness as an authority against which observations of the Congo can be tested and corrected, and the realities checked, becomes evident when Gide refers to Conrad’s “admirable” way of talking about the “extraordinary efforts of imagination” that have been required of Europeans wanting to see black Africans as their enemies (2002b, 245n1). In this footnote, Gide undermines this hostile perception, drawing from Conrad’s disclosure of such contradictions in his critique of colonialist rhetoric by means of fiction.

The passage from Heart of Darkness that Gide quotes at this point in the travel journal may, however, be much more radical in its implications than Gide is ready to admit. The passage includes Marlow’s description of six chained black men who walk in file, passing him within a mere six inches: “but these men could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals, and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea” (Conrad 1994, 22). What follows, then, is Marlow’s depiction of the reaction of a “reclaimed” black man, who accompanies these prisoners and hoists his weapon to his shoulder whenever he sees a white European. From the gesture Marlow infers that “this was simple prudence, white men being so much alike at a distance that he could not tell who I might be” (Conrad 1994, 23). Marlow’s observation indicates a complex understanding of the racial situation in which the African, not only wrongly perceived as an enemy, may also see white men as a group without clear differentiation between individuals, just as the colonials, and indeed Marlow and Gide himself, may have seen the Africans as one mass of people. This is diametrically opposed to Gide’s lament about the terrible “non-différenciation” of the Africans, meaning his impression of the lack of individuality among the Africans, to which I will return later, and which Gide made about a month before the above citation. Gide, while he undermines one preconceived notion of the Africans, thus affirms another.

In these references to Conrad’s fiction, real geography confirms the referentiality of fictional literature and literary value (or vice versa). In one of the most comprehensive discussions of the relation between Conrad’s fiction and Gide’s travel journal, Russell West offers an insightful, but somewhat one-sided interpretation of Gide’s use of Heart of Darkness in his travel journal. West shows how Heart of Darkness fundamentally structures the travel journal and that, as we have already seen, Gide seems to read the novel to a large

extent as a documentary (1996, 149). What is problematic in West’s argument, however, is that he assumes that Gide gives the novella a secondary status as nonfiction. In other words, it is not clear why Gide’s emphasis on Conrad’s novella as a true description, and a form of (potential) nonfiction, would be a sign of the book’s secondary role, particularly if _Heart of Darkness_ so thoroughly informs the travel journal’s structure. Gide’s emphasis on the reality and actuality of Conrad’s fiction may in fact speak to the contrary.

More precisely, West claims that Gide reduces the status of _Heart of Darkness_ to that of a documentary, thus relegating the novel “to a secondary position, subordinated to the relentlessly ‘realist’ nature of Gide’s travel document” (West 1996, 142). The argument might be supported, for instance, by a psychologizing “anxiety of influence” thesis, claiming that perhaps Gide constantly reevoked Conrad’s novella so that he could better negate its influence (similar to what takes place in Graham Greene’s _In Search of a Character_, where Greene laments Conrad’s influence on his novels). In giving Conrad such an authoritative position, Gide may have wished to show that he could outdo Conrad on his own territory. Or we might want to suggest, as West does, that Gide remained oblivious to the way in which _Heart of Darkness_ informed his vision of Africa, and that Conrad’s powerful presence in the travel journal was somehow a blind spot to the writer. While such speculation is interesting, it seems more likely, keeping in mind that the travel journal is dedicated to Conrad’s memory, that the references to the novella are not unmindful or that they are simple corroborations of Gide’s firsthand observations based on Conrad’s fiction, as West would have it. We may, moreover, ask whether the idea of the novella’s (nearly) documentary status was really a negative evaluation for Gide during this time when he wished to report honestly on colonial Africa’s realities, or whether the reality that Gide discovered in the novella was another argument in favour of Conrad’s writing (as fiction that surpasses its limits as fiction and by so doing rivals the truth-value of documentary nonfiction).

Be that as it may, Gide’s reliance on Conrad as an authority on the Congo relocates _Heart of Darkness_ closer to the domain of travel writing. Gide reassesses the value of Conrad’s novella in his travel journal, that is, he turns it into a kind of documentary, while his own travel writing testifies to the novella’s ability to create an accurate image of reality. The status that Gide gives to the novella suggests that fiction has the capacity to capture a sense and experience of reality in the full sense of the term, not just create a reality of its own. Simultaneously, travel writing is relocated closer to the domain of fiction. Reading Gide’s African travelogue together with _The Counterfeiters_,
we may see how the travel journal takes on various Conradian themes and imagery prevalent in the novel. *Travels in the Congo* starts where *The Counterfeiters* closes, that is, with Vincent’s letter from Africa, the contents of which West appropriately calls a “treasure-trove of Conradian tropes” (1996, 136). The beginning of the travel journal evokes the same madness-inducing forces of Africa, the metaphor of the demon that pulls Gide towards the scorching sun, the immense forest, or the abyss, thus illustrating the traveller’s wish to escape from civilization and Western rationalism, renew his perceptions, and perhaps discover unforeseen pleasures.

Gide’s description of the immersive and mimetic qualities of fiction in his travel journal creates an interesting contrast with the author’s poetics of the so-called pure novel, which he develops in his journals and in the fragments of Edouard’s journal that are incorporated in the novel. In *The Counterfeiters*, Edouard even provocatively states that if journals of the composition of *Sentimental Education* or *The Brothers Karamazov* existed, they would be much more exciting and interesting than the novels themselves (2002a, 186). As I mentioned above, Edouard is often a mouthpiece for the writer, and the character’s theory of fiction and his uncertainties about his novel-writing project may reflect Gide’s difficulties in composing the kind of novel that Gide had in mind. The close relationship between author and character is also confirmed by the fact that Edouard is engaged in writing a novel that has the same title as the novel in which he is a character, and he keeps a journal that, as Gide himself claims, emulates what Gide’s *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* had become (see Gide 2008, 36–37). Yet, at the same time, Edouard’s poetics of the pure novel cannot be wholly equated with Gide’s stance on this question. Gide explains in *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* that he had given much of himself to the character, while also wanting to portray Edouard as an amateur writer. Gide also saw that Edouard, partly owing to his “judicious” views, fails to write the ideal, “pure” novel that Edouard has in mind (Gide 2008, 61, 67). For these reasons, as there is a sliding scale from consonance to dissonance between author (and narrator) and character, we cannot make an easy distinction between their views on the novel genre. Further, this enables us to speculate that Edouard’s take on the issue is both more judicious and more extreme than that of his creator.

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16. On Gide’s adherence to Oscar Wilde’s paradoxical principle that nature should imitate art, see Gide 2008, 33.
On Goethe

In late November and early December 1925 in the course of his journey Gide rereads Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*. He starts reading the novel one night after having finished Stevenson’s *The Master of Ballantrae*, sitting by a small table outdoors, surrounded by the sounds of drumming and dancing from a nearby village. The insufficient light of his lantern accentuates the sense of the immensity of the night: “I feel surrounded on all sides by the strange immensity of the night” (Gide 1957, 111) (“Je sens m’environner de toutes parts l’étrange immensité de la nuit”; Gide 2002b, 163). Once again, the text that he is reading appears to envelop the environment, while the environment frames the reading, and thus the experience of reading is metaphorically associated with the qualities of the surrounding landscape and life.

*Elective Affinities* is one of the books about which Gide writes most enthusiastically in his travel journal, and one that he also frequently uses to emphasize or, alternatively, to blot out certain travel experiences (such as numbness, monotony, and exhaustion). In later references to Goethe’s novel, Gide mentions that he had finished his day by “diving” and “diving again” into the novel, sometimes reading it in “rapture” (*ravissement*). These evening readings were regularly followed by a bath or accompanied by reading lessons that Gide gave to an Arab boy called Adoum, one of his and Marc Allégret’s assistants. Gide also associates the joyful reading of this novel with the purity and gentleness of the air, and explains how the reading of Goethe’s novel helps him to forget the monotony of the road after completing the day’s journey. Gide quotes from this novel too, using a famous proverb by the character Ottilie: “Durch nichts bezeichnen die Menschen mehr ihren Charakter als durch das, was sie lächerlich finden” (Nothing so characterizes a man as what he finds ridiculous)—to comment ironically on a recent article by a critic who had called Gide’s fiction “abstruse” (*abscons*) (Gide 2002b, 200). Gide congratulates himself that he is able to read the novel easily in the original German, without the help of a dictionary.

There are some important structural similarities between Goethe’s and Gide’s novels, including the important role given to scenes of reading. On more than one occasion Goethe’s *Elective Affinities* focuses on the act of reading, and such scenes serve characterization and plot development in important ways. Reading in *Elective Affinities*, as in *The Counterfeiters*, is always significant in terms of understanding the characters’ minds, revealing the nature of their thoughts and their underlying emotional relations and atti-

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tudes, such as distance from or closeness to each other. Acts of reading also move the story forward. To mention only two such instances, Baron Eduard’s lack of “affinity” with his wife Charlotte is revealed through an act of reading early in the novel. Here the narrator explains that Eduard cannot stand it if someone even looks at the book he is reading. And when Charlotte indeed looks at his book, Eduard feels as if he were torn apart. Eduard’s anger, we are told, is due to his emotional attachment to reading as a form of thinking: for him, reading the written text equals thinking and mental privacy. Thus, for Eduard, to interrupt the act of reading by looking at his book from behind his back is not different from trying to intrude upon his privacy violently. Similarly, Ottilie’s love for Eduard, and the deep emotional closeness between these two characters, becomes manifest during another reading scene when, upon reading a text that Ottilie has copied for him, Eduard realizes that she has imitated his handwriting. For Eduard, and for the reader, the imitation implies emotional involvement or “affinity,” to use Goethe’s pseudoscientific concept, suggesting that Ottilie is able not only to understand Eduard’s thoughts, but also to share them at some deeper level.

*Elective Affinities* is mostly narrated in external perspective with frequent narratorial reports about the thoughts and feelings of Eduard and his wife, but it also includes other modes of narration, in particular, shifts from third- to first-person narration, which are relevant here. Such changes occur mainly through quoted letters and journals. Various letters are interspersed with the narration; they include those from Eduard to his wife and to Ottilie, and from Ottilie to her friends. The excerpts from Ottilie’s journal in the second part of the novel create a further contrast to the predominant third-person narration. These entries, however, are atypical journal notes in that they reveal relatively little of the journal-keeper’s thoughts and feelings. The excerpts are only loosely related to the novel’s events and consist mostly of philosophical generalizations or commonplaces, save perhaps the question of life without love, which has a direct personal meaning for their writer. Some of these entries comprise aphorisms about the nature of art or human nature, including meditations on the development of natural science, moral questions, or the passing of time. As the novel gives no account of Ottilie’s unspoken thoughts in third-person narration, either through the use of free indirect discourse or by other means, Ottilie’s mind seems to shun penetration, remaining a kind of mystery even when the reader seems to have access to her at the moment of writing.

18. “Eine seiner besonderen Eigenheiten, die er jedoch vielleicht mit mehreren Menschen teilt, war die, daß es ihm unertäglich fiel, wenn jemand ihm beim Lesen in das Buch sah” (Goethe 1965, 36–37).

19. See also Leacock 2002.
What is important in Goethe’s novel with regard to our question of the fiction/nonfiction divide is that *Elective Affinities* is one of the first modern novels systematically to cite passages from an intimate fictional journal. The shifts of perspective in the second part of *Elective Affinities* between third-person narration, with an omniscient narrator, and the first-person voice of the journal writer create the effect of juxtaposed points of view and suggest a prototype of a kind of fictional blend of genres that Gide later employs and expands in *The Counterfeiters*.

To read *The Counterfeiters* in an intelligent way, it is essential to follow similar changes in the point of view as in *Elective Affinities*, involving shifts between the narrator’s third-person and first-person narration (Edouard’s journal), as well as the author’s direct interventions, and between the reality of the fictional world and what the novelist pretends to make of that reality, integrating information from the different sources. The narrator’s relentlessly changing distance from the world of his characters—between the “objective” third-person narration and direct intervention, including occasional “subjective” evaluation of his characters or expressions of uncertainty about their thoughts and motives—is a seminal element of Gide’s novel. However, at the same time, the reader never has much direct access to the characters’ minds. While the narrator’s report on the characters’ thoughts are frequent in this novel, free indirect discourse, in which the narrator can appropriate parts of a character’s speech or thoughts, remains fairly rare. In the chapters in third-person narration, and often also in the excerpts from Edouard’s journal, dialogue and thought reports dominate, thus leaving the boundaries between who speaks (or thinks) and who narrates relatively intact. The characters’ thoughts and their whole intimate world remain in some sense a mystery, unless some bits and pieces are revealed in letters or, in Edouard’s case, in his journal. The reading scenes make an exception in this respect, as they allow the narrator to report more closely on the characters’ minds.

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20. Another structural resemblance between Gide’s and Goethe’s novels is the double “elective affinity” between a married couple, Eduard (or Edward in the English translation) and Charlotte, and their two good friends, the Captain and Ottilie, in Goethe’s novel, and the intricate relations between the two boys, Bernard and Olivier, and the two writer figures, Edouard and Robert de Passavant.

21. Henri Godard has pointed out how Gide multiplies his “confessions” of uncertainty in his interpretation of the characters during the novel and thus pretends to place the novelist-writer on the same level as the actual readers. The frequent use of the first-person plural pronoun may also associate the narrator with the reader (Godard 2006, 109–10).

22. With regard to his use of dialogue, Gide often deletes the reporting verb of “saying” and conjunction. This gives the appearance of the immediacy of the event, but also prompts
By contrast, in the travel journal, there is hardly any verbatim speech, with the exception of some short direct citations. For the most part, the perspective remains internal and fixed; even the subtle shifts between the more objective and the more subjective descriptions, between the descriptions of the outside world and the descriptions of the traveller’s experience and state of mind follow the conventions of travel writing.23 Yet the method of multiplied and contrasted viewpoints is relevant with regard to the way in which Gide writes about his reading experiences and the effects of reading during the journey. Consider an example from Gide’s entry on March 9, 1926 in Logone-Gana, where he moves from describing the rediscovery of a dead body in the river to his reading of Browning and Milton during the same day:

I shall not have drawn up an accurate balance of the day’s proceedings if I omit Browning and Milton. I re-read with delight, with rapture, some of the sonnets, the opening of Samson, and long passages of Paradise Lost, with less enthusiasm Browning’s In a Balcony, of which I had kept a better recollection. It is often an advantage not to understand too perfectly. My imagination readily succumbed to mirage in those days and generously invested my uncertainties with the colours of enchantment. Now that I see more clearly, I am a little disappointed.

I lay down under my mosquito-net with a kind of frenzy (which ended by giving me a bad headache). I cannot remember having ever brought to

the reader to pay careful attention to who is speaking and to be conscious of the changing perspectives.

23. Even if there are more descriptive or “objective” passages in Travels in the Congo, these do not suggest a third-person perspective.
bear on any text a keener, a more sensitive, a more perspicacious—or a hungrier—attention. (Gide 1957, 253)

On the one hand, the description of the reading experience allows Gide to blot out the disturbing and frustrating elements of the day’s journey. Earlier in the same journal entry, Gide had described the nauseating smell of the place where he had slept, the monotony of the country he had seen, and an encounter with the swollen corpse of a drowned man. On the other hand, the description of the reading experience allows Gide to reflect on his state of mind, noting how his evaluation of Browning had changed, how his imagination is able to compensate for his misunderstandings, and how attentive and sensitive his mind becomes during reading. We must also note the strong physical sensations that accompany Gide’s sense of heightened attention and visual perception in this passage: the frenzy of reading, the subsequent headache, and the great hunger that he has for the books. The passage is followed by a quotation from Milton’s *Samson*, where Samson laments that the sense of sight is not distributed across the whole surface of the body like the sense of touch (“Why was the sight to such a tender ball as th’eye confin’d?”), and by Gide’s remarks pertaining to his great desire to take a walk after the passage on a whaleboat. Thus, the description of the reading and the Milton citation illustrate the power of fiction to imagine alternative models of bodily configuration and sensual experience. Further, by multiplying perspectives the description of the reading experience enables Gide to move from the outside world to his inner experience. In other words, by allowing him to present different states of his mind, the subtle changes in his mind, and different sensations, the reading experience deepens the subjectivity of the description.

The importance that Gide gives to La Fontaine, Milton, Conrad, and Goethe suggests the potential of fiction to create a sense of a mind and an illusion of reality that captures the traveller, but that may also help the traveler to understand himself. We may perhaps think of the relation between *The Counterfeiters* and Gide’s journal about writing this novel in the same way, as a ceaseless dynamic between reality and fiction in which the two opposites constantly inform each other. In his journal about novel-writing, Gide wanted to show how his novel both borrowed from and transformed actual reality. Furthermore, he made explicit the interdependence between his novel and journal-keeping by publishing the *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* almost simultaneously with *The Counterfeiters*. The interdependence between the two books, and their respective genres, is also mirrored in the structure of *The Counterfeiters*, where journal- and novel-writing alternate constantly.
Poetics of the Novel

What, then, is the significance of the dynamic between third- and first-person narration, which characterizes Goethe’s and Gide’s novels, for the travel journal, in which the writer-traveller remains the sole observing consciousness and voice of the text? The argument that I will develop at the end of this chapter is that Gide’s poetics of the novel, especially his interest in the multiplicity of individual perspectives and voices, profoundly informs his reading experience during the journey and that this is exemplified, among other ways, in how he writes en route about novels, Conrad’s novella, and other literature, such as Milton and La Fontaine.

As I have shown above, Gide not only underscores the immersive qualities of fiction in his travel journal, but also structures much of his travel experience with the help of literature. Furthermore, in his travelogue, Gide continues to inquire into the relation between mediated reality and the facts of reality, or between imagination and the resistance of facts—themes that are central to The Counterfeiters—even if he never poses questions about travel writing or journal-keeping as a genre. In his commentary on the literature that he reads, however, Gide postulates two versions of immediacy: the immediacy of travel and that of reading, which may shed some light on the way he conceived the purpose of his travel journal. On the one hand, in the entries in his travel journal Gide focuses on the immediacy of the travel experience, by which I mean the immediacy of life as the simultaneous flux of things and events. Such immediacy has the potential to rejuvenate the traveller, even renew him physically, putting an end to apathy, as happens, for instance, when Gide feels the joy of a child chasing some unknown insects in Brazzaville at the beginning of the journey (Gide 2002b, 25). Insofar as the travel experience is not only told, but is also an intimately felt experience of reality, and one that cannot be wholly captured in any narrative or description, Gide thus conceives travel and travel writing as a way to register the action that is “close” to reality, the experience that imposes itself on the observer. Such a perspective is evident in the writer’s desire to penetrate profoundly into Africa—“to enter profoundly, intimately, into the heart of the country” (1957, 61) (“pénétrer profondément, intimement, dans le pays”; Gide 2002b, 97)—and in the many

24. The full passage reads: “What we want is precisely to leave the beaten track, to see what one does not see ordinarily, to enter profoundly, intimately, into the heart of the country” (Gide 1957, 61) (“Ce que nous voulons, c’est précisément quitter les routes usuelles; c’est voir ce que l’on ne voit pas d’ordinaire, c’est pénétrer profondément, intimement, dans le pays”; Gide 2002, 97).
references to the screens of civilization that tend to blur his vision. Gide is
eager, for instance, to leave behind the “French” Dakar, and the film that civi-
lization interposes (“écran de la civilisation”) in Brazzaville, as well as his boat,
since the boat makes the landscape seem like décor and hardly real (2002b,
35). At times, as we saw earlier, Gide is also irritated at the porters who deny
him, by their mere presence, direct contact with the nature of Africa.

We come across the same hope of discovering some nonmediated reality
in pure expression in *The Counterfeiters*, especially in Edouard’s poetics of
the novel and his contradictory wish to let the reality dictate the novel to him
instead of having to plan its composition (Gide 2002a, 185; Gide 1966, [169]).
The question of mimesis—the outspoken subject of Edouard’s novel—essen-
tially involves the relation between the reality as it appears to the writer and
the reality that is translated as literature, or as Edouard himself puts it, “the
struggle between the facts presented by reality and the ideal reality” (“la lutte
entre les faits proposés par la réalité, et la réalité idéale”; Gide 2002a, 185). The
novel’s author-narrator refers to these ideas as the incompatible requirements
in Edouard’s thinking. The author’s own metaphor of novel-writing as a form
of open-ended travel reiterates the view.

The embedding of Edouard’s poetics of the “pure novel” in the excerpts of
his journal in *The Counterfeiters* is paradoxical in the sense that this theory
evokes competing notions of what is possible to achieve in novels. In prin-
ciple, Edouard, echoing Gide in his *Journal des Faux-Monnayeurs* (entry for
November 1, 1922), argues for the possibility of a pure novel. By the “pure
novel” Edouard and Gide mean that the novel should cast aside all elements
that do not specifically belong to it, such as “outward events, accidents, trau-
matisms” that can more accurately be shown in the cinema, or realistic dia-
logue that the phonograph may record more faithfully. Furthermore, Edouard
argues in *The Counterfeiters* that “even the description of the characters does
not seem to me the business of the pure novel (and in art, as in everything
else, purity is the only thing I care about)” (Gide 1966, 71). Later on, Edouard
points out that the novel is perhaps the most lawless of literary genres (Gide
1966, 182–83). The statement may discount the possibility of any poetics of the
novel, while it is again part of a general critique of the predominant fo-

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25. However, what Edouard sees as being most specific to the novel, beyond the narra-
tion of action, description, and dialogue, is left frustratingly open. It is nearly impossible to
draw out any coherent poetics of the novel from the fragments of Edouard’s journal, other
than perhaps by way of negation. Edouard is also intentionally inconsistent. Whenever he
is asked about his plan for the novel, he talks about it in a new light. The inconsistency was
Gide’s way of pointing out that Edouard was bluffing and afraid that he would never finish the
Edouard’s and Gide’s debate about the pure novel can be rephrased as a problem of immediacy. In The Counterfeiters, the strategy of superposition between third-person omniscient and first-person narration, framed as a juxtaposition between (fictional) reality and the nonfiction journal, reflects this problem: it invites the reader to imagine that the two modes of narration—the novel and the journal, or Edouard’s fictional journal and the author’s actual journals—complement each other while also trying to improve upon each other. Thus juxtaposed, the third-person novel and the first-person journal illuminate each other’s specific limitations and potential for creating an illusion of immediacy.

At the end of his travel journal, Gide returns to the question of pure genres, having just read in recent French journals and periodicals some unnamed contributions to the ongoing debate about “Poésie pure” (Gide 2002b, 494–495). Despite the fact that Gide thinks it is “extraordinary and somewhat vain,” the debate about pure poetry spurs the writer to defend the purity of literary genres against their “confusion.” Poetry, as Gide sees it, should focus on what is specific to it, conveying meaning, but in an “essentially untranslatable” form, by way of its sonorous and rhythmic nature, and not succumb to calls to be like music or painting. “Symphonic poems,” writes Gide, make him run away from concerts. The same journal entry ends with a reference to The Counterfeiters, which is the only mention of the novel in the travel journal and, for this reason, important. The novel is thus indirectly associated with the question of specific genres.26 At the very end of this reference, Gide mentions some unfavorable reviews (“quelques éreintements”) of his novel, which he has seen in the same magazines and laconically points out that this must mean that The Counterfeiters has come out (the novel was published in book form in February 1926 when Gide was still in Africa).27 Thus,
while the seeds of a journey to Africa may have already been planted in this novel, the travel journal in turn closes with the writer’s muted reaction to the controversial reception of his novel.

The contradiction concerning true representation in Edouard’s theory of the novel reflects similar concerns about verisimilitude voiced elsewhere in The Counterfeiters or in Gide’s travel journal. For instance, the characters who leave European civilization behind, including Vincent, Lady Griffith, and Alexandre Vedel, seem to want to realize, even if it means self-destruction, the full potential of the principle of immediacy, that is, the immediacy of experience. Their desire to travel is intimately related to a desire to renew perception, to enhance sensual pleasure, or to experience another form of reality, and possibly to become wealthy. Likewise, Bernard’s interest in Arthur Rimbaud as someone who presumably exits from literature via action is similarly motivated. In Gide’s travel writing, in turn, it appears that the writer-traveller has momentarily resolved the problem of mimesis, since he projects an image of himself as someone who by nature is not a counterfeiter, a producer of factice (false, fake) as are the novelists in The Counterfeiters, but someone who is capable of immersing himself in the reality of the world around him. During the journey, Gide is able to see more clearly and accurately—despite the disappointments, exhaustion, and the harsh realities of colonial rule that gradually became more and more disturbing to him—since the reality under observation is inevitably close. The travel experience appears to be immediate and the world of travel something that is seen and felt, instead of told.

On the other hand, we are left with the paradox that so much of Gide’s travel experience is mediated by literature and that at some level Gide is also aware that he has a more intense relation with the literature he reads than with anything else. The journey helps him to read more intensively, that is, to transport himself more completely into the world of fiction. However, Gide’s (re)readings, and especially novel-reading, also suggest that the experience of travel lacks intensity in some important way and that perhaps journal-keeping is in need of another kind of immediacy, the immersion in the world of fiction, the world as a text. The readings thus not only blot out the monotony or the heterogeneity in his experience, heighten the joys of travel, or guide him in how to pay better attention to what he sees, but also affirm the reality around him, as an experience of reality that to a significant degree is indebted to imagination and his literary sensitivity. Gide’s remarks on Heart of Darkness, Goethe’s Elective Affinities, Milton, and others illustrate how effectively

first published in La Nouvelle Revue Française in a serial form from November 1926 to April 1927.
fiction may mediate the experience of reality, but also how his mind works through imagination, by generously investing his uncertainties “with the colours of enchantment.”

A further complexity in this regard involves the thorny issue of first impressions. Gide displays sensitivity to nuances of reference, for example, one foggy morning in October of 1925, when he claims that bad weather in Africa turns the mind towards memories, whereas in France a grey sky would inspire the mind to read and meditate. However, the statement is clearly contradictory in that Gide is constantly inspired to read during the journey, regardless of the weather, and he hardly reflects on personal memories of any kind in his travel journal. In effect, the monotony of the forest or the bad weather enables Gide to read “in rapture” and appreciate certain texts, such as La Fontaine, Milton, or Conrad, differently and more fully than at home. Furthermore, what is important from our perspective is that some of Gide’s entries suggest that his mind and imagination have the power to alter his observations of reality. For instance, Gide writes that his imagination of Africa had been so lively and powerful that he is no longer sure whether he remembers the town of Bangui as it really is or as he first imagined it (Gide 2002b, 95). Thus, his first impression had the capacity to alter profoundly the reality of perception, yet, at the same time, the freshness of this perception could never be maintained in a longer reflection:

Tout l’effort de l’esprit ne parvient pas à créer cette émotion de la surprise qui ajoute au charme de l’objet une étrangeté ravissante. La beauté du monde extérieur reste la même, mais la virginité du regard s’est perdue. (Gide 2002b, 95)

However much the mind tries, it cannot recapture that emotion of surprise which adds a strange enchantment to the object. The beauty of the exterior world remains the same, but the eye’s virginity is lost. (Gide 1957, 60)

Gide’s concern is that the immediacy of the first impression cannot be reclaimed. The same dilemma connects the otherwise different experiences of travel and reading fiction. Both travel and fiction have the capacity to make life seem new and unfamiliar, but both can also easily lose this power. The novels and other favorite readings, however, which can be read over and over again, seem to provide the traveller with a temporary antidote to losing the freshness of the first impression. What happens in the journal, in spite of the writer’s outspoken claim here, is that the rereading of La Fontaine, Milton, Conrad, and Goethe revives for Gide at least the meaning and intensity of
these books, if not also the experience of travel in new places, and thus prolongs the sense of the first impression.

Gide’s difficulty with the presumed lack of individuality in landscape and people perhaps becomes more understandable in the same light, with regard to the author’s stress on and search for renewed perception and sensitivity to nuances of reference. The assumed absence of the Africans’ individualization, however, which Gide elaborates on in more detail after about three and a half months of travel, also runs contrary to his poetics of writing, and of the novel in particular, where he prioritizes the effect of multiplicity and counterpoint in specific, individual perspectives. Moreover, besides killing fresh perception, the experience of the Africans’ nondifferentiation undermines the principle of sensitivity that Gide holds in high esteem, as exemplified in his discussion of the fables of La Fontaine. Furthermore, the remarks on African monotony and uniformity, which may equally concern the landscape and the people, are in stark contrast to the notion of poetical existence and the experience of travel that could allow the raw particulars of reality to impose itself freely on the traveller.

In Bosoum in December 1925 Gide writes that African children, especially in the first villages that he visited, looked the same and were indifferently likeable, that the village huts were all similar, and that the people in these villages seemed to him to be “dromes of human cattle” (“un bétail humain”), all uniform in their looks, tastes, habits, and potential. Moreover, he explains that the landscape did not have a single feature that attracted his attention or made him feel as if he simply had to see it. Contrasted with Gide’s earlier remarks on the fascinating qualities of the natural surroundings, such as the purity of the air, the beauty of the light, or the delightful warmth, the monotony that the traveller’s frustrated gaze discovers in the people and the landscapes clarifies for him the value of differentiation:

Cette notion de la différenciation, que j’acquiers ici, d’où dépend à la fois l’exquis et le rare, est si importante qu’elle me paraît le principal enseignement à remporter de ce pays. (Gide 2002b, 196)

This notion of differentiation, which I have acquired here, and from which proceeds the sense both of the exquisite and of the rare, is so important that it seems to me the principal thing I shall bring away from this country. (Gide 1957, 137–38)

In this passage, Gide sees the black African as inseparable from his group, characterized by a certain primitive mentality that both attracts and terrifies
him. For instance, during a night spent in the village of Baboua, in November 1925, Gide depicts the village dance by way of its attractive “stupidity”:

On n’imagine rien de plus morne et de plus stupide que cette danse, d’un lyrisme que plus rien de spirituel ne soulève. . . . Telle est l’expression de leur ivresse, la manifestation de leur joie. Au clair de lune, cette obscure cérémonie semble la célébration d’on ne sait quel mystère infernal, que je contemple longuement, sur lequel je me penche comme sur un abîme, comme Antoine sur la bêtise du catoblepas: “Sa stupidité m’attire.” (Gide 2002b, 176–77)

It would be impossible to imagine anything more dismal and more stupid than this dance, unrelieved as it was by any breath of spirituality. . . . This is how they express their emotion—manifest their joy! By the light of the moon this obscure ceremony seemed the celebration of some infernal mystery; I stayed gazing at it for a long time, fascinated by it as by an abyss—like St. Anthony by the stupidity of the catoblepas: “Sa stupidité m’attire.”

(Gide 1957, 122–23)

The traveller is again on the verge of experiencing terror, facing the mystery and the mythical hell of Africa, similar to the moments when he had sensations of suffocating and even of being cannibalized (see Chapter 1).

When Gide was revising the travelogue and came upon his notes on the Africans’ supposed lack of individuality, he could not help feeling that he had to explain himself. Perhaps also hearing the racist undertone in his remarks, Gide argues in a footnote, which he added to the manuscript, that the implications of the notes on non-differentiation of the individual and the herd (“tristes troupeaux humains”) now appear to him certainly exaggerated. Trying to justify himself, furthermore, Gide explains that at the time he wrote these notes, his team had hardly emerged from the frustrating “limbo” of the forest into which they had plunged (Gide 2002b, 220n1).

Gide’s description of the black Africans in these passages amounts to a trivialized version of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl’s refuted ethnographic theory about prelogical primitive mentality. Soon after his return to France, Gide read Lévy-Bruhl’s La Mentalité Primitive that he then cites, retrospectively, in several footnotes that he added to the travel journal. In the footnotes, Gide refers to the notion of a primitive mind, in contrast to the Western mind, and

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28. See also Fraiture (2007, 228) who claims that in his attitude towards the Africans Gide oscillated between contempt and paternalistic kindness or admiration.
the idea of unity between the natural and the supernatural, to explain some of the observations that he had made during the journey. For instance, Gide justifies his observation that the relation of cause and effect seemed not to exist for the Africans with a reference to Lévy-Bruhl (Gide 1957, 241). Similarly, he explains in another footnote, where he cites at length Lévy-Bruhl's ideas on the indispensable role of magic in primitive mentality, how these ideas also explain the seeming lack of affection among a group of Arabs and black Africans who watched a man drown in a river almost before their eyes. Yet Lévy-Bruhl's theory also functions as a kind of correction to negative occidental stereotypes of the Africans, for instance, the Europeans' tendency to exaggerate “the lasciviousness and sexual precocity of the blacks, and the obscene signification of their dances” (Gide 1957, 138) (“la salacité et la préco-cité sexuelle des noirs et l’obscène signification de leurs danses”; Gide 2002b, 196), even if this does not prevent Gide from employing some of the same images elsewhere in his travelogue, such as in the description of the attractive stupidity, or the stupid lyricism, of a village dance. Gide further notes that he had made “the foolish mistake” of not reading Lévy-Bruhl before his return, since this would have spared him “numberless errors and shed light in many dark places” (1957, 241) (“Ils m’eussent épargné nombre de bévues, éclairé bien des ténèbres”; Gide 2002b, 335). The observation may not be so sincere, however, since prior to having actually read Lévy-Bruhl, Gide was already employing a similar, nontheoretical notion of primitive mentality to express his views of black Africans.29 Lévy-Bruhl's theory is but another means by which the writer is able to give, retrospectively, a more authoritative formulation to his preconceived notions and observations. In this sense, there is also a clear difference in Gide's use of Lévy-Bruhl and Conrad as authorities on Black Africa in that he reread Heart of Darkness during the journey; the novella informs the very motivation for his travel from beginning to end and from the entries to the footnotes.

With the benefit of hindsight, we may, speculate upon whether the pleasures that Gide derives from evening readings, or from bath-taking, pure air, 

29. Pierre Masson has pointed out, rightly I think, that Gide is never racist nor does he despise the indigenous Africans, but that the overt sensuality in his descriptions of Africa and the Africans recalls earlier forms of exoticism such as Loti's caricatures of Jean Peyral and his lover Fatou-gaye (1983, 20). Gide's preconceived notions of the black Africans' sensuality and their hyper-sensibility with regard to superstitious beliefs were also confirmed during his meetings in Bosoum with a colonial administrator, Yves Morel, whose remarks about the natives seemed to Gide "especially just, as they confirm the result of my own observations" (Gide 1957, 138).
warmth, and the elegance and attractiveness of certain Africans, are always sincere. The intensity of some of his descriptions about black African men in particular seems to point to homosexual experiences and desires that the writer could not express outright in the journal (despite being open about his sexual orientation in the second part of *If It Die* two years earlier). What we know, for instance, from Gide’s later confessions in *So be it: or, The chips are down* (*Ainsi soit-il*, 1952), or from Marc Allégret’s posthumously published travelogue, *Carnets du Congo: Voyage avec Gide* (1993), some of Gide’s evening pleasures might indicate sexual encounters and the exploitation of young African men. In *So be it*, Gide is explicit, for instance, about nighttime encounters with a boy called Mala in the secrecy of the writer’s mosquito net. Gide explains that his memories of the “most perfect” sensual pleasure, as in the memory of “sweet” Mala, who is mentioned only in passing in *Travels in the Congo*, as having a perfect figure, and being a *companion de luxe* (2002b, 444), are always accompanied by the sense of being surrounded by a landscape that absorbs him:

> C’est bien aussi pourquoi mes souvenirs de volupté les plus parfaits sont ceux qu’accompagne l’enveloppement d’un paysage qui l’absorbe et où je me paraisse me résorber. Dans celui que je viens d’évoquer de ces transports auprès de Mala, ce n’est pas seulement le beau corps pâmé de cet enfant que je revois, mais tout l’alentour mystérieux et formidable de la forêt équatoriale. (Gide 1952, 151)

This is why my most perfect memories of sensual delight are those enveloped in a landscape which absorbs it and in which I seem to be swallowed up. In the one I have just evoked of those transports with Mala, it is not only the beautiful swooning body of the child I see again, but the whole mysterious and fearful surrounding of the equatorial forest. (Gide 1960, 126–27)

The passage about Mala in *So be it* gives a clear sexual meaning to Gide’s depiction of the immensity of the forest and his need to feel enveloped in this immensity. Here the author, once again, resorts to his formula of sensualizing and eroticizing Africa through the young male body. The traveller’s mind thus continues to be projected onto the environment, and the environment is projected into his mind, but the emphasis of this mutual implication is quite different from the original description in the travel journal.
Conclusion

Reading Gide’s major novel *The Counterfeiters* side by side with his *Journal* and the two African travel books illustrates the effects of the game of generic mirroring, borrowing, and transformation between these works. *The Counterfeiters* stands out in Gide’s oeuvre as a unique formal experimentation with the novel structure and character building. Partly due to the novel’s elaborate narrative situation that combines alternating third- and first-person narration at different levels, *The Counterfeiters* appears to draw less from the author’s life and autobiography than his other works of fiction. However, the many themes and references that the novel shares with the travel journal, including the question of “demonic” impulses and the metaphors of novel-writing and novel-reading as a journey, invite comparisons and suggest a sense of continuity across the fiction/nonfiction divide.

As I have discussed at length above, Gide structures much of his experience in Africa with the help of fiction and constant reading (both fiction and nonfiction). His readings and interpretation of Conrad’s works upon the journey thus reveal how the travel experience can encourage a new (subjective) evaluation of the referential value of fiction. I will later return to the question of the reappraisal of a text’s referentiality from the perspective of hypothetical genres and ask how the author’s, the narrator’s, or the character’s evoking of possible or counterfactual genres, such as claims about fiction having specific potential as nonfiction, may function as an important dimension of cross-generic interplay.