

## ANALYSIS

"Emmanuele! Emmanuele!" (1963)

Caroline Gordon

(1895-1981)

"It is something more than a short story; it is perhaps a critical essay made flesh. And in it we see belied Wayne Booth's contention that Miss Gordon rejects fiction that deals with ideas. 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' is hardly a short story of the same kind as most of her others; it is distinctly a 'conte a clef,' based on the life of Andre Gide. Indeed, the parallel is worked out in very great detail. 'Emmanuele' was, in fact, the name that Gide used in his *Journal* and in *The Notebooks of Andre Walter* to refer to his wife, Madeleine Rondeaux. Moreover, the journal he kept, the letters he wrote to her which were burned, and the residence in Normandy are all aspects of the historical Gide's career. Raoul Pleyol, the poet-diplomat, is of course Paul Claudel; and the name itself would give away the identification even without the reference to the exchange of letters between the two men and certain actual passages, like 'I grasp your hand,' which are to be found in the correspondence.

Nevertheless, the events of Gide's life do not appear in the story without some transmutation. The burning of the letters, which took place in 1918, is here shifted to a later period in Gide's life, somewhere around 1936 or 1937, just before the death of his wife. The central intelligence of the story is an American professor and poet, Robert Heyward, who is acting as secretary to the famous poet Guillaume Fay. In his adulation for the man he serves, he sees Fay's every gesture and every word as great gifts to the world which he, as a near stranger, is privileged to witness at first hand.

Heyward does not realize that what he takes for confidences from Guillaume are very simply part of the writer's public disclosure of himself, the only subject of his art. Robert Heyward is no more privileged than anyone else, and as Fay's secretary he is merely a first reader, no more. As variant of the fallible narrator (as such a point of view is called in *The House of Fiction*), he provides the story with an occasion for gathering the various high points of Gide's psychological biography. Heyward is probably based on several young men who served as amanuensis to Gide during his career and this strategic use of a narrator allows Miss Gordon to pull together widely separated events in the life of the French writer and to make of them a compact symbolic whole.

This kind of fiction may, at first, prove puzzling. Can we, after all, regard the story as fair? It implies that Fay (or Gide), is utterly destroyed by his wife's burning of his letters to her, and we know from Gide's actual biography that, as shocking an event as it was, it did not destroy him. On the contrary, he continued to live and write; and he and his wife carried on much the same life for some eighteen or so more years, little altered from their earlier relationship and perhaps even deepened by their mutual acceptance of each other. It is impossible not to think of Gide when we read about Fay, and yet Miss Gordon seems to have damned him against the evidence of his own life.

One critic, James Rocks, sees the story as a commendation of Fay's aim, the duty of the artist first to confront himself. He concludes that Miss Gordon (and our) sympathies are supposed to lie with Fay, despite the evidence in her criticism and other stories which seems to indicate that she is opposed to the tendencies of his entire career. I think it is perverse to see Fay as anything other than a lost soul; but in order to understand the point of view which makes both condemnation and sympathy possible, we may turn to Dante, another Christian writer for an example....

Miss Gordon uses many events and persons of her acquaintance in her fiction, but she does not always use them as overtly as she does here.... She is not in 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' writing the kind of fiction which is typical of her work. She incorporates in it two different techniques. One is evident from the title, which is an echo of Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!*, the story of a young man journeying through his past from a vantage point outside his familiar world. Quentin Compson, in that novel, seeks to piece together a

meaningful universe from the fragments he has gathered in the South and has taken north with him to Harvard. He is the intellectual and, in some ways, the poet who is both fascinated and horrified by what he sees. But the story is not his story, it is through him that this other world is disclosed.

Likewise, we may look at the example of Dante, who also journeys through his past as he ranges from Hell to Purgatory to Heaven, meeting on the way the human fragments of his cultural and personal past. Robert Heyward is a kind of Dante who, in the unfamiliar world of North Africa, is given a glimpse of the damned soul of Guillaume Fay as the poet is closed into the inferno of the self. In reading the last description of Fay in his dim study, as Heyward looks in on him, it is difficult not to recall one of the lost souls Dante encounters....

But the parallel from *The Divine Comedy* is clearer if we look at the portrait of Brunetto Latini, damned to an existence of constant movement in a rain of fire for his sin of sodomy (an aberration not unknown to Gide, as is made clear even in the story). Dante reverences the memory of his predecessor in the world of letters, and he is truly astonished to see his famous master in such a place. Moved by the fate of a man whom he calls his intellectual father, he gives his own tribute in the verses which describe Ser Brunetto, author of *The Treasury*, but victim of his perverse lust. As Dante sees Latini leave, he reflects that the poet runs 'like one who is winning, and not like one who is losing.' It is a poignant passage, which shows that even in damnation a man can preserve some of the impressive greatness which makes him unusual. Robert Heyward as the Dante of 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' has an equally jolting experience when he discovers that the man he thought was on the verge of facing and conquering the abyss has succumbed to it.

Why did Miss Gordon choose to write so blatantly about the Claudel-Gide relationship and the peculiar battle between them?... These two men represented something beyond themselves; they had become public figures in a special way, 'a living allegory, comparable to what Olympian myths must have been for the early Greeks.' It is as a living myth that Caroline Gordon adopts the biography of Gide. Just as Dante uses real persons in his poem not for personal but for symbolic statements, so she takes Gide as part of the cultural myth of the artist in the modern world. Fay is that aspect of Gide which is living allegory, and her critique of the French writer is as sympathetic, in its own way, as Dante's reluctant admission that even the greatest of poets cannot be saved from damnation if he does not adhere to the right forms of human behavior.

However, it is not for his homosexuality that Gide is condemned. Miss Gordon is not primarily concerned with that aspect of his behavior. In *How to Read a Novel*, she reflects upon the parallel between him and another French writer: 'As a man, Proust, too, was beset with homosexual inclinations, but as an author Proust held to the normal viewpoint, that is to say, the viewpoint of heterosexuality'... Gide's tragedy, as she goes on to say, is in his psychological insularity.... Guillaume Fay's failure is finally a failure of viewpoint... Miss Gordon allows Pleyol a critical viewpoint consistent with the character based on Claudel as she conceives him, but the viewpoint is also her own....

Fay's contemplation of his own mirrored image is the real sodomy which condemns him. By putting his 'real' self into the letters to his wife he had hoped to turn her into yet another mirror of himself, but he did not count upon the possibility that the mirror itself might be shattered and that the image it held would be dissipated forever. It is Gide's narcissism, on the one hand, and his technical timidity, his inability to write with conviction on the other, which condemns him in Miss Gordon's view....

Robert Heyward may be based in part upon Pierre de Lanux, Gide's secretary from 1907 to 1912, who has written sympathetically about his peculiarly Platonic marriage, these minor parallels are of no importance. They serve, like the other details, to fill out what would otherwise be a schematic allegory of the wrong-headed modern artist. 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' is not at all that kind of fiction. It is a demonstration of Miss Gordon's ability to write about ideas without losing touch with the solidity of the real world or rejecting the critical principles of fiction which require a convincing image of the universe in which characters may move. A regular progression of images and details organizes the story in terms of particulars and acts in counterpoint to the obvious procession of ideas.

There is the opposition between North Africa and Normandy... North Africa is, naturally enough, the dream world which Fay attempts to impose on the rest of the universe.... The artificiality of his art is also mirrored in the transplanted trees which would not take root in the French earth until some of the original soil was brought with them.... Fay's struggle is with the demon of the Symbolist movement, which was passed down through succeeding generations of the school. That demon is the passion to conquer chance and refine things away to a kind of total purity, a nothingness outside of contingency. Mallarme's famous dictum was to the effect that a flower must be suggested rather than named... Heyward does not understand Fay's aesthetic of symbolic nihilism... Like the heroes of Henry James, Robert Heyward is obtuse, somewhat naive, very easily impressed, and constantly out of his depth socially. But he possesses a freshness and directness of viewpoint that contrasts considerably with the heroic aestheticism of his employer....

Without realizing it, Heyward places himself closer to the attitude of Raoul Pleyol and Mme Fay. The flowers and the landscape would be there even if no one ever came along to witness them. Pleyol believes that all things exist to glorify God, and his is, naturally, a belief which counters the solipsistic tendencies of Fay.... Though Heyward is often a little too easily overwhelmed, he does assume that Africa is something real 'out there' which has an identity to communicate to him. Fay, on the other hand, exercises a God-like omnipotence over his creations; he shifts and changes the world to suit his needs, and expects the world to follow suit. It is he who communicates to the world, not vice-versa.

Heyward's point of view is important for the story, however, because it allows the figure of Fay to be elevated. Through the young man's eyes the events take on the look of the tragic. The quest for the abyss is something an American like him cannot truly understand, but his foreign and sincere eyes allow him to seize the force of Fay's destruction with full impact. Mrs. Rensslaer has known her cousin too long and too well to sense this tragic movement; Forrest Blair is at once too blasé and too American to appreciate it.

These differences are quite clear in the discussion among Mrs. Rensslaer, Heyward, and Forrest at dinner. She remarks matter-of-factly that Fay is possessed by a devil. Forrest with only mild seriousness reflects on the peculiarity of the situation. Heyward, who has already deduced his employer's strange capacity for suffering, tries to put himself in Fay's place by imagining what possession is like. (He has attempted to imitate his idol before in several ways, including his very different series of letters to his own wife.) Mrs. Rensslaer answers his inquiry by saying that being inhabited by a devil is not anything much. Heyward remarks that 'the Devil is the Ancient Adversary,' but she claims only that he is a 'created being who chose to be nothing rather than something.'

Forrest speculates about the Gadarene swine, wondering if they went over the cliff 'because they couldn't take it' or because the devils hurled them to destruction. Mrs. Rensslaer, in saying she does not know, quotes her husband: 'ours [is] the first age in all history when the educated classes [have] no theology.' Heyward has no theology, unlike Raoul Pleyol, but he is therefore capable of going through and following with an inner drama of response the tragic movement of Guillaume Fay's fall into the abyss because of this lack. Mrs. Rensslaer sees his destruction as inevitable, but she has no real feelings towards it and is unable to go through it with the unsuspecting sympathy that Heyward exhibits.

Pleyol, who is the only character of Christian viewpoint capable of meeting Fay on his own level, rejects the idea of a damnation by fate, though it seems to be a common thought to Mrs. Rensslaer, to Heyward (who only understands what that fate means at the end of the story), and to Fay himself. But he does sense the Luciferian vocation in his colleague; and he tells Heyward, 'There is a fascination in heights. Fay is not the first created being to feel it. I gave him up when I discovered that he loved the abyss better than life.' Heyward, who is shocked, asks, 'But if a man goes down into the abyss for the sake of his fellow men?... Does not even *your* creed allow virtue in that?' Pleyol's answer is equally direct: 'He will have spent his life for nothing. There is nothing at the bottom of the abyss....' Heyward, who has no theology, cannot understand Pleyol's position and he leaves surprised that such a person could be envious towards Fay's success....

Fay's failure, then, is ultimately one of love: he loves neither his wife nor the natural world. He does not really believe in the existence of either. There is no love between the husband and wife; she is a mirror for

his ego, a passive receiver of his letters to the world. He is a possessed man, in her eyes, and in her piety she determines to live with him for that reason. Finally she succeeds in exorcising the demon which possesses her husband, but at the price of his being. It is too much to say that Guillaume Fay is saved at the end of the story; the resolution does not have the kind of ambiguity that Miss Gordon criticizes in [Graham] Greene or that Mr. Rocks finds in it. Fay's tragedy is that he has indeed destroyed himself by feeding on his own substance.

But he does not go into the abyss without a witness, the young man through whom we have viewed the consequences of his love of the abyss. He goes to Mme Fay for the key to her secretary, expecting at last to receive the long-awaited revelation of Fay's true character and that of his wife as well. Paradoxically, it is not in the letters that he comes to understand; it is in the final dramatic encounter between the forces of piety and the demonic. When she does not answer his request, he notes a blackbird flying down from the plum tree and thinks indirectly of Bluebeard's castle. When she enters the back hall and pushes aside the curtains, he remains behind to hear 'a whimpering sound, such as might be made by a dog in distress...or some other beast, that has thought to escape, being forced over a cliff.' In this exorcism he receives the answer to Forrest's question; Fay, in attempting to escape the confrontation, has been forced into the abyss. He is a prisoner of the very self he sought to glorify. The revelation that Fay hoped to give in the letters was not his true self, the real image of Fay is in the Garadene swine, as Heyward witnesses in the plunge towards self-invited destruction. When the image of himself that Fay has sought to create is shattered, he has no alternative self to turn to other than the demon enclosed in darkness.

The striking technique of this story is evident in the skillful way that Miss Gordon handles the physical reality of her settings. Without softening the impact of her ideas, she produces a version of her own *Counterfeeters* that is neither inconclusive nor unreal. Two strands of imagery, one containing fruit, trees, and blossoms, the other eyes, water, and light, organize the story into something much more complex than a mere fictional presentation of an intellectual and critical point of view. We see both North Africa and Normandy through the experiences of Robert Heyward, and the more we delve into the contrasts in imagery, the more there is to enrich the basic tragic experience of the plot. From the first paragraph, we see a scene composed of bright colors enclosed by shadows, a languor which contrasts strangely with physical impressiveness, and an exoticism which is opposed by a more solidly practical world of meaningful actions. The Sudanese Negro, with his crushed orange blossoms, contrasts with Joseph, the one-armed veterinarian. Yet the commonplace in Normandy offers a richer experience than North Africa, though Heyward finds the former less interesting to write about in his letters.

But there is more than the opposition of the sun-struck south and the greyer region of the north; Mrs. Rensselaer returns to North Africa, but not to seek out a lost youth or to savor the constant array of colors, perfumes, and sounds. She comes back obviously to die where her husband died because she loved him deeply. Heyward does not know what North Africa is saying to him, but that is because it really has nothing to say. His delight in the natural world is direct; it does not suffer from the symbolist rarifications of his employer.

The constant reference to eyes in the story is surely the result of deliberate choice to illustrate the difference between Fay's artificial vitality and his wife's more lived and earned vigor. Fay cares about his wife's hands, but Heyward seems to be interested in eyes. When he looks at Mme Fay's picture as a young woman, he sees the intensity and vitality in her eyes. Fay can only reflect on the weathering hands. Heyward also notices his employer's eyes, which are not dark like his wife's, but certainly more sinister. They are described as 'so lambent that they looked almost yellow.' Gazing at them, Heyward is transported involuntarily back to his memory of a copperhead snake, the first hint of the deadly demonic power which lurks within. There are other interesting pairs of eyes, which have a particular meaning for Heyward; there are Mrs. Rensselaer's, which 'have no perfume,' and those of the Arab boy, which caress like the soft tangerine skin or the leather gloves. The exotic is, naturally, the more sinister, and the copper-colored cheeks of the boy should give us pause. And it is, finally, of the eyes of his wife Molly that Heyward thinks when he remembers her.

There are other contrasts: the 'leashed power' of Pleyol's body, which suggests a kind of power of imagination that is an extreme when juxtaposed with Fay's meandering of self-examinations. It is also

interesting that the two or three works of Fay which are mentioned deal with wandering, escapes, or voyages: *La Fuite de Lemnos*, *Le Frere Prodigue*, and *Heracles*, who 'is on board' near the end of the story. Constant references to light, flowers, and water, along with perfumes and sounds enrich and complete the intellectual and moral experience that Heyward is undergoing, and though it would be interesting to trace each of them in turn, a more succinct account will have to suffice here. There is a hint of Lucifer, the brightest of the angels, in Fay, and a shaft of light appears at almost every point in the story which reflects his demonism. The light is all, in its dazzling brilliance, that can be seen of the poet at times.

In a curious dream Heyward climbs a long flight of stairs to meet Fay, according to appointment, in a strange country. But Fay is not there; Heyward is told by a woman of indeterminate age that he has never been there, 'until Mrs. Rensselaer [comes] and [puts] her arm about the woman's shoulders and [leads] her away.' In the preceding paragraph, Fay's intelligence is described as being like a great beacon; but behind the beacon there is nothingness. Mme Fay looks at her husband, but Heyward notices that her glance moves towards the window: '*She does not see him! Is it because he is no longer there?*' he asks himself. As far as she is concerned, he is already gone; having burned the letters, she knows that she has destroyed the only identity which means anything to him. She can already look at him with the knowledge that he is a mere shadow, an illusion. The most telling example of her understanding of Fay comes just at the moment when Heyward looks into her eyes and reflects upon the permanence of the natural world: 'In the landscape of the face an eye is set like a lake, for exploration'... When he remarks that he doesn't believe 'there's anything [Fay] couldn't do if he set his heart on it,' she answers with a devastating, 'Yes...if he sets his heart on anything.'

For all his naivete, Robert Heyward loves the world and people. He sees the world as real and as a place to be experienced and enjoyed. He neither demystifies nor mystifies it; the world is simply there for him, and it will always be there. Fay, in his search for self-knowledge, is incapable of love. His poetry is a series of pastiches in which classical mythology is simply one more variation on the great theme of his self-love. He is the inheritor of the nineteenth-century goal of conquering the abyss. In the end, however, the abyss conquers him, not because of any fatality, but because the self must die just as surely as the body. By attempting to secure for his ego a spurious immortality, Fay makes its destruction all the more certain. Though he is the central figure of the story, he is most important for the effect he has on his young poet/amanuensis.

In Robert Heyward we see more than a logomachia between the principles of Raoul Pleyol and Guillaume Fay; he has his own experiences and his own ego to discover. And though he is not the hero of the story, his sensibility is the one which matters. By mixing enthusiasm and sympathy for Fay with a gradually emerging but clear knowledge of this tragic figure's damnation, he carries on the kind of critical examination which is required of each person. He is a central intelligence in more than one sense; as a lesser mind who only follows the great Titans, he is nonetheless responsible for accepting or rejecting the kind of life these Prometheans of the imagination have to offer.

Miss Gordon has exhibited much of the same sympathy in her refusal to accept the work of certain authors whom she admires as men or as intellectuals but deplores as artists. It is not at all fiction dealing with ideas, or even the novel of ideas which she rejects. It is, very simply, all fiction which denies the reality of the world, which suffers from lack of conviction and which argues from such indefensible abstractions as the absence of love or the indecisiveness of the human spirit. Ultimately, all her efforts seem to be directed towards an understanding, both of techniques and of theology. Even when she is less obviously concerned with aesthetics or moral questions, she touches deeply on those themes. In a story written immediately after the second World War and never collected into any of her volumes of short fiction, she explores the meaning of specific places and persons in the mind and heart of a young poet who has returned to Europe to seek out a few idyllic years from his past....

Both ['Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' and 'The Olive Garden'] are concerned with a young man who finds himself not in terms of his own actions but as a result of understanding the actions of another, whether it be Guillaume Fay or Deucalion and Pyrrha. These, for the purposes of their stories, are equally mythological characters, though the myth of Gide is one that is within living memory. Heyward, whose name suggests 'wayward' and hence a certain amount of aimlessness, is only half-hearted in his attempts to imitate Fay

directly. Though he actually loves his wife a great deal, he cannot hold to the kind of rigorous letter-writing carried out by his mentor. When he is allowed to contribute to the poem *Heracles*, his suggestion consists of no more than an exclamation point, an emphasis, so to speak, of something Fay has already said."

Robert S. Dupree

"Caroline Gordon's 'Constants' of Fiction"

*The Short Fiction of Caroline Gordon: A Critical Symposium*

ed. Thomas H. Landess (U Dallas 1972) 34-45, 47

"Emmanuele! Emmanuele! is...based on an anecdote Miss Gordon had heard about Andre Gide, but the implications of this story go farther and deeper than fictionalized biography. The protagonist...is a French man of letters named Gillaume Fay, who is seen through the eyes of a young American poet and college professor Robert Heyward. Heyward, who greatly admires Fay, becomes through influential friends the great man's secretary for a short time.

During a visit in North Africa with Fay, Heyward hears disparaging criticism of Fay from a cousin, a friend, and colleague of Fay's. The cousin finds Fay's practice of writing while seated before a mirror a form of perversion and maintains that Fay's marriage has never been consummated. The literary colleague contends that Fay's influence on contemporary letters has been poisonous. Heyward, however, cannot square these criticisms with his own sympathetic response to Fay and his writing.

Only after Heywood visits Fay's home in Normandy and meets Fay's wife does he begin to discover the truth. Fay's wife is, properly, an old woman; for she has spent herself laboring. Fay is youthful-seeming because he has never given himself to anything but self-love. After a short stay in the house of his patron, Heyward senses that these two people do not react to each other or do not seem to live in the same world; but he still does not understand the meaning of their separation. A conflict between Fay and Emmanuele, as Fay calls his wife, reveals the significant difference between them.

While Fay is working on a long poem about Hercules, and Heyward is typing it, Fay needs a phrase or two from some letters that he has ostensibly written to his wife. These letters were mentioned by Fay in his journal as love letters which are to be published after his death and which are to reveal a side of him never before exposed to the public. The letters are locked in a desk, and the key is possessed by Emmanuele. Instead of giving Heyward the key, as Fay had requested her to do, she herself goes to Fay's study; and, when Heyward a little later approaches the study door, he hears whimpering and crying and then Fay's voice saying, 'We can never get them back.... She burned them.'

When Heyward left to get the key to the desk, the shutters in Fay's study were open, the sunlight was pouring in, and Fay was looking young and jaunty. The shutters are later closed and 'Now it was dark. She must have drawn the blinds before she left. The old man's head and shoulders would show hunched against the pale-colored jalousies. Ever afterwards he was to think of that head as hooded, but the eyes, the eyes that gleamed so merry, so mottled! They would be black now--twin prisons in which a creature that had once sported in the sun would sit forever in darkness.'

When *Old Red and Other Stories* appeared...one reviewer complained that 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' was a pointless story since the details about Andre Gide on which Gillaume Fay was based were already well known. Such complaints miss the point. Miss Gordon has used facts about Andre Gide, not to say something about *him*, but to say something about life itself, something she had been saying in a number of other stories and novels. Gillaume Fay before his fall was a pagan creature who, his protests to the contrary, never really suffered because he never cared enough for anyone to suffer.

The famous love letters, written supposedly to his wife, were really addressed to himself; and the reason Fay whimpers and cries when he discovers that the letters have been burnt is that, for the first time in his life, he has lost something of value. The description at the close of the story of Fay sitting hunched and dejected is almost too allegorical a statement about the change that has taken place in him. His youthfulness and his jauntiness--the symbols of his paganism--have given way to marks of age and suffering. By being

made to suffer, Fay has left that demon world--the same underworld inhabited by a number of Miss Gordon's villains--and entered the human world."

William J. Stuckey  
*Caroline Gordon*  
(Twayne 1972) 129-30

"Louise Cowan cites the exchange between the two men of letters Heyward and Pleyol in 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' to show Gordon's distinction between an artist who perceives that his first duty is 'to confront himself' and one who feels that 'an artist's first duty is the same as any other man's--to serve, praise, and worship God.' Using James Joyce and William Faulkner as her examples, Gordon identifies these same opposing attitudes towards art among Gordon's contemporaries, holding that 'most Southern writers in general have regarded their task as the discovery of an already existent pattern in actual experience rather than as the imposition of an ideal pattern upon experience.'

Having inherited this southern predisposition to what Cowan calls the 'sacramental' view of the world, Gordon easily subscribed to T. S. Eliot's description of the artist as a medium, not as someone with a 'personality to express.' Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' emphasizes the essentially receptive, in some ways passive, role of the writer whose task is to continue to trace the meanings of western civilization through its inherited structures of belief and learning: 'The poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past... The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality'....

Caroline Gordon examines...artistic perversion in the short story 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' and, more extensively, in *The Malefactors*. In the novel, Carlo Vincent is surely guilty of this confusion about his proper role as artist. We learn that in the years before his suicide, he painted self-portraits, which Cynthia Vail describes: 'In the nude, or mostly in the nude. Sometimes he wears chain armor, sometimes a plumed hat.... In one he's St. George fighting the dragon...naked.' Tom surmises that Carlo himself realized that he 'took the wrong turn...or he wouldn't have left orders for those later pictures to be burned.' Like the writer in 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' Carlo Vincent's problem is self-absorption. Tom compares the painter's narcissism to looking in a mirror: 'The Great Essentist! Got off by himself to show what he could do and all he did was look in the mirror.' Revealing Vincent's artistic perversion, this imagery also recalls Guillaume Fay's habit of writing while facing a mirror.

Another artist figure in the novel commits suicide when he takes a wrong turn in his writing. Horne Watts, the poet whose career very explicitly parallels that of Hart Crane, is a homosexual whose search for relationship has repeatedly been unsuccessful."

Rose Ann C. Fraistat  
*Caroline Gordon as Novelist and Woman of Letters*  
(Louisiana State 1984) 39, 134

"In 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!'...she explores the relationship between Christianity and craft. She also illustrates her point that, unlike God, the artist cannot really create a world from nothing, but merely constructs an imaginary world from what God has provided. Caroline obtained the germ of the story through Walker Percy's suggestion that she read Andre Gide's correspondence with Paul Claudel, which, in turn, led to her reading of Gide's memoir of his wife. Her story's Guillaume Fay is loosely based on Gide, and her Raoul Pleyol was suggested by Claudel.

The central consciousness of 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' is not that of Fay, however, but Robert Heyward, a somewhat naive associate professor of English who 'wrote poetry "on the side".' Through an old friend, he obtained the position of Fay's private secretary in North Africa for the remainder of his sabbatical. Heyward is in awe of Fay as a consummate artist who lives for his craft. In particular, he admires the way Fay, for the past thirty years, has written to his wife each day at noon, whenever they have been separated. Heyward wants to emulate Fay and tries to write every noon to his own wife in America.

Heyward is so blinded by his artist worship that he does not heed various warnings about Fay's character. Mme. Rensselaer, a widow who is Fay's cousin, confides to Heyward that she refused to marry Fay in her youth on the grounds that a man who wrote every day in his journal while staring into a mirror

was not a good prospect. Instead, she married M. Rensslaer and was quite happy with him until he died. Another old and former friend, the diplomat-poet Raoul Pleyol, also warns Heyward about Fay. He perceives Fay's self-examination as a sinful narcissism because 'An artist's first duty is the same as any other man's--to serve, praise, and worship God.' These admonitions are reinforced by Fay's association with beasts and snakes in Heyward's subconscious mind.

On their return to Fay's country chateau in France, Heyward finally meets Mme. Fay. She turns out to be a worn looking woman who appears much Fay's elder, rather than the several years senior she actually is. Her appearance has been sacrificed to nurturing her garden and various needy people. Fay brings her some beautiful gloves from North Africa, but instead of using them to cover her weathered hands she gives them away to a secretary. Her laugh, though, belies her battered exterior; 'it might have come from a child who had laughed out in exuberance and might laugh again any minute.'

When Fay asks for the letters he has sent his wife over the past three decades, he learns that she has destroyed them, and he emits 'a whimpering sound, such as might be made by a dog in distress...or some other beast, that has thought to escape, being forced over a cliff.' The last lines reinforce the fact that Fay's selfishness has damned him; he has lost the angelic component of his nature and only the bestial remains: his eyes were 'twin prisons in which a creature that had once sported in the sun would sit forever in darkness.'

According to Caroline's account to her daughter Nancy, the wife 'found the letters false and burned them. It is the kind of thing only a saintly person could do...' As in the case of *The Strange Children*, only a Catholic reading provides the key to what otherwise would seem a puzzling act of philistine cruelty. Mme. Fay had lived up to Fay's name for her, Emmanuele, and tried to free him from his enslavement to himself. An artist who is false to his duty to God and his fellow man is only capable of producing a false art."

Veronica A. Makowsky  
*Caroline Gordon: A Biography*  
(Oxford 1989) 200-02

"According to Caroline, the title was supposed to sound 'like a cry of anguish.' It was the story of Guillaume Fay, a fictional rendering of the writer Andre Gide. Emmanuele of the title referred to Fay's wife: her name was Therese Gabrielle, but Fay called her Emmanuele in the daily letters he wrote her while staring at a mirror. Those letters were to be his secret journal, published after his death. To Fay's horror, however, his wife did not save the letters but burned them....

Much of her work was done for her since she based her account on Gide's writings and correspondence. But she made the story her own by adding the perspective of Robert Heyward, a young poet and scholar who had gotten a job attending to Fay's correspondence. In awe of Fay, Heyward overlooked his employer's failings. He argued with anyone who suggested that Fay was not a great artist. 'An Artist's first duty is to confront himself,' Heyward said.

Caroline wanted to implicate Heyward in the tale: he was an unreliable judge of character, on the edge of the same abyss of self-exploration to which Fay had abandoned himself. Like Fay, he could only be saved by understanding that the artist's first duty was 'the same as any other man's--the serve, praise, and worship God.'

When Caroline finished the story, she could not tell if she had brought it off. She thought it was good, perhaps the best thing she had ever done, but she was too exhausted to trust her own judgment. Perhaps it was too complex for a short story. Caroline considered turning it into a short novel, but first she sent it to Allen for his opinion.

Allen did not like 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' The story was entirely different from any of Caroline's earlier works, and perhaps Allen also objected to the tale because, consciously or not, Caroline had woven autobiographical parallels into Gide's story. The young poet Robert Heyward and the character of Guillaume Fay resembled Allen in some respects. Fay's long-suffering wife, Emmanuele, had more than a

few similarities to Caroline. Allen would not have to read much into the story to see the warning beneath the story of Andre Gide. If Allen did not abandon his false companions and his introspective tendencies, he would destroy himself and his art, Caroline seemed to be saying. He needed to cherish and respect the true source of creative life, the life his wife embraced so heartily.

The admonitory tone of 'Emmanuele! Emmanuele!' may have been intentional. As she wrote the story, Caroline had become increasingly upset over Allen's behavior. Saying he was 'too lonesome' to stay by himself, Allen had moved out of the house they had rented in St. Paul and went to stay with one of his colleagues, Hunt Brown. Caroline thought it was ridiculous for him to be living in someone's guest suite while they were still paying \$170 a month to rent the house on Selby Street. Then she heard that Allen had gone on a short vacation with Natasha Spender. She was furious, and, once again, quite fearful."

Nancylee Novell Jonza  
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The name Emmanuel means "God is with us" and is one of the names given to Jesus. The French writer Guillaume Fay calls his wife by that name, indicating that he sees her as his savior rather than Jesus. This is because he expects her to publish his letters to her after his death, which he thinks will glorify him and insure his immortality as an artist. He has made an idol of himself, usurping God, as Lucifer tried to do. His letters glorifying himself contrast to the letters written by the apostles of Jesus glorifying Him, the actual Savior who died to insure the immortality of all who follow Him.

One morning when told by the American poet Robert Heyward what Fay is doing, Mrs. Rensselaer casts a look upward "as if asking Heaven what it thought of that." Later she says, "He is possessed by a devil." Implicitly Fay, based on Andre Gide, is *not* damned because he is homosexual, he is damned because he is a narcissist worshipping himself. This is an obvious implication of the fact that he writes facing a mirror. According to paranormal researchers, mirrors are often used as portals by evil spirits. Raoul Pleyol, who speaks for Gordon several times in the story, says of homosexuality, "I do not believe that Rimbaud" (like Fay a homosexual French poet) "was fated to be damned--any more than any other man." It is ironic that Fay is always looking into a mirror, since he lacks self-knowledge, like Heyward. As Pleyol says, "Do you think that a man sees himself when he looks into a mirror? He sees only the pose he has assumed." Yet Heyward naively thinks that Fay "dares to face himself."

Fay's "wife's name was never mentioned in his celebrated journal except casually." In the letter Heyward reads, Fay lies to his wife and says what he ought to be saying to Jesus: "It is fatuous to say that I love you better than my life. You are my life. I have no existence except in and through you...." Fay is a woman's name appropriate to a homosexual attracted to men, and in his case to Arab boys. *Fay* resembles the word *fey*, which in his case means unreal, unnatural and "doomed." Until the end of the story, Fay is fey, in "unnaturally high spirits," once thought to be an indication of imminent death. The wayward Heyward idolizes and almost worships Fay and hopes to advance his career by becoming his secretary, literally copying him when typing his writing. Throughout the story Heyward is deluded by the acclaimed narcissistic poet, misled by the false image of himself with which Fay has deceived the public. Under the influence of Fay, he is having "devilish dreams." When Fay tells Heyward, "You must take me as I am," Heyward recalls a moment from his childhood "when a snake suddenly reared itself above a fallen bough." It is a poisonous snake, and Pleyol calls Fay "a poisoner."

This story is essentially about the duty of an artist. Heyward thinks "An artist's first duty is to confront himself"--the view of Romantics and Postmodernists. On the contrary, Gordon the Modernist Christian has expressed the same view as Pleyol: "An artist's first duty is the same as any other man's--to serve, praise, and worship God." This would be the moral at the end of a Victorian story, but there is more here. Fay's devout wife has "the key to the secretary," both to the furniture and to the dupe Heyward. She teaches the naive American that her husband is a devil, that his eyes are now "black" like the eyes of a demon--"twin prisons." She saves Heyward from a delusion that might have doomed him too had he continued to see Fay as a model. Fay has a history of seducing people. In saving Heywood and in burning Fay's letters, just as he may burn in Hell, she lives up to the name Emmanuele by acting as a conscientious Christian rather than as

an accomplice to evil. After all, they were *her* letters. Heyward now is likely to respond as did Pleyol: "I gave him up when I discovered that he loved the abyss better than life." Just as Pleyol predicted, "He will have spent his life for nothing. There is nothing at the bottom of the abyss."

The aesthetics of Gordon the Modernist are the opposite of Gide's aesthetics, as she explained: "Andre Gide is a conspicuous example of another writer who destroys the form of his work by imitating the formless. [Yvor Winters the Neoclassicist who published Gordon's first story called this "the fallacy of imitative form."] His failure as a novelist springs, I suspect, from the same source as Miss [Gertrude] Stein's, an unwillingness or inability to accept reality--that is, to recognize the existence of a world outside his own consciousness." Gordon's self-effacement and detachment in tone is consistent with the traditional aesthetics of both classicism and Modernism, as expressed by James Joyce through Stephen Daedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails." This transcendence of self is also advocated to poets by T. S. Eliot and is essential in Christianity.

Michael Hollister (2020)