



Gay History & Literature

Essays by Rictor Norton

Cocteau's White Paper on Homophobia

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Jean Cocteau never officially acknowledged his authorship of the homosexual novel *Le Livre Blanc*, even though he allowed it to be included in the authorized bibliography that accompanied his *Complete Works*. Perhaps Cocteau did not wish to hurt his mother, but this persistent anonymity in the history of homosexual literature is typical of the curious bold- yet-cowardly paradox of the homosexual imagination, similar to E.M. Forster's suppression of his homosexual novel *Maurice*. On the one hand, Cocteau was compelled to write the work as a vindication of his own self-worth, as proof of his integrity. But on the other hand it was written in 1928 when coming out would have been regarded as ostentatious as well as a serious tarnish to his literary reputation.

During the same period Marcel Proust had "boldly" written a work in which he disguised his boyfriend Albert as the heroine Albertine, upon the premise that one can say anything one wishes as long as one reverses the gender of the pronouns. He was of course mistaken: one cannot say anything one wishes if one is forced to lie. [André Gide](#) was virtually the only French writer of the period who *nearly* came out, but even he was more than coy in the homoerotic passages in his works. So we can note and then dismiss Cocteau's action as one "typical of the circumstances of his age." It is typical, however, that Cocteau's anonymity was a deliberate design suited to his purpose. The title of the book — *Le Livre Blanc* — is equivalent to the English phrase "White Paper," and the purpose of the book is to present an *impersonal and objective report*, "compiled by committee" as it were, rather than a personal narrative.

Cocteau's intention has largely been ignored by most readers and critics, who respond to the work as though it were a "confession" of his homosexuality rather than a "white paper" on homophobia. It has been read as an apology rather than as a challenge, and scholars have busied themselves with biographical speculation rather than sociological analysis.

Each episode in the novel is an illustration of social injustice, and Cocteau's message is quite clearly stated:

My misfortunes are due to a society which condemns anything out of the ordinary as a crime and forces us to reform our natural inclinations.

And his sociological comments about homophobia are both penetrating and revealing, as in his evaluation of his father as a typical latent homosexual:

There exist pederasts [the French apply *pédé* to all "queers" regardless of age-preferences] who are unaware of their own nature and live to the end of their days in a state of uneasiness which they ascribe to poor health or a jealous nature. ... My father was no doubt unaware of his inclination and instead of pursuing it he strenuously followed another without knowing what made his life so unbearable. ... Had he even discovered his tastes or found the opportunity to develop them, he would have been astonished. At that period people killed themselves for less. But no; he lived in ignorance of himself and accepted his burden.

The point of this passage is not to analyze homosexuality or to provide a sensational personal account of how a young man may become homosexual due to his father's latent homosexuality, but to expose the subtle workings of homophobia in the lives of people.

Even the opening pages of his book indicate that its proper subject is not **homosexuality**, but **homophobia**. Most readers are startled by the erotic details of the first scene — the vision of the farm-boy bathing naked in a pool, the sunburned face and hands contrasting with the whiteness of his body like "sweet chestnuts bursting out of their husks," the penis in the midst of the "dark patch" of his pubic hair — which causes the narrator to faint in an ecstasy of joy and fear. Readers are so shocked — or titillated — by this description that it colors their reading of the remainder of the story. Thus ***Le Livre Blanc*** has achieved a wholly unwarranted reputation as an underground erotic classic.

The first portion of the book is designed not so much to record the first stirrings of desire, as to record the first experiences of homophobia. It is not insignificant, for example, that the pool in

which the farm-boy bathes "did not belong to the chateau" — that is, it is **outside the limits** of "the park," the proper social sphere whose boundaries, set up by his homophobic father, the hero will transgress. The pool represents an outcast space of potential homosexual experience, just as the homosexual himself is a pariah, an out-law. The narrator faints because his blood pounds "as though I had committed a murder," when he is startled by a hare while out hunting. By fainting, he has indeed accomplished the murderous goal of his hunt to annihilate his homosexual desires — out of sight, out of mind.

This is one of "the three incidents" of his childhood that are impressed upon the narrator's memory, partly because they are **homoerotic** incidents, but mainly because they are **homophobic** incidents. The narrator's guilt has already been firmly internalized by the time of the "first incident" with the farm-boy, but in the "second incident" we see how that guilt is supported by external pressures. The narrator recalls seeing two naked gypsy lads climbing trees and joyfully gambolling about, symbolizing an example of homosexual freedom and exuberance and lack of convention. This is contrasted with the repressive homophobia of his nursemaid, who is "terrified" by the scene and sternly admonishes the young narrator to avert his eyes. He nevertheless takes a peek, and "my disobedience gave the scene an unforgettable aura." It is the aura of homophobic oppression and the possibility of rejecting that oppression.

The "third incident" of this series of childhood memories illustrates the wider social ramifications of homophobia. The narrator recalls being fond of their table servant Gustave, whom on one occasion he had the courage to grope. Gustave's homophobic reaction is first embarrassment, then repulsion. This prompts a counter-reaction, a typical "heterosexual" subterfuge whereby the narrator seeks an excuse to become intimate with Gustave by showing him a picture of a woman he has drawn. But the ruse does not work, and a few days later Gustave is dismissed for stealing some wine. This is not a mere accident of the narrative, but symbolically underscores the father's own inner conflicts and repression.

The episodes concerned with the narrator's experience in the Lycée Condorcet illustrate how homophobia in one's peer group not only instills guilt and shame in the homosexual, but also contributes to his alienation from society. The homophobic attitudes in the young peer group are fostered by the agents of society, in this case by the "sarcastic teachers." They keep an eye out for boys who may be playing with themselves at their desks or simply have an erection in the nature of things, and then "suddenly question a boy who was on the point of orgasm," sadistically forcing him to stand up and stammer an answer "while trying to turn a dictionary into a fig-leaf." And of course the other boys reinforce the teacher's shame-instilling technique by laughing at the boy's predicament, making him even more embarrassed.

Instead of encouraging the recognition of masturbation as a joyful and natural discovery proper to adolescent development, the atmosphere of this "educational" institution brands it as a "vice" to be practiced furtively: "Nothing but pockets with holes in them and soiled handkerchiefs." Thus school becomes a memory of sordidness: "The classroom smelt of gas, chalk and sperm."

Cocteau is one of the first authors to record how this kind of commonly experienced school situation paradoxically causes young homosexuals to be more prudish than their fellows. The narrator is "nauseated" by this situation of furtive masturbation not because it is a "vice" — as the other boys believe it to be — but because "it was the cheap parody of a type of love that my instinct respected." Such "clandestine play" degrades his ideal of homosexual love because it is more shameful than celebratory, and consists more of mockery than respect.

The Dargelos episode at the school — in which masturbation-as-a-vice is extended to include mutual masturbation and exhibitionism — is again more revealing of homophobia than homosexuality. The narrator's first puppy-love is for Dargelos, a boy of uncommon beauty, virility, and arrogance, symbol of "the man" whom all the other boys are trying to become, who cynically exploits their admiration by exhibiting his genitals to them in return for their gifts of stamps and tobacco. When the narrator tries to explain to one of his classmates that his admiration goes beyond this, the other boy typically fails to comprehend this love and homophobically assumes that what the narrator desires is merely cheap sex:

"You're silly," he told me. "It's easy. Invite Dargelos one Sunday, take him behind the trees and that'll do the trick!"

"What trick?" There wasn't any trick. I muttered that it wasn't a question of the kind of pleasure that could easily be had in class and I tried in vain to describe my dreams in words. ... I realized that it was impossible to make myself understood. ... My urge would not be to amuse myself for five minutes but to live with him forever.

Cocteau treats with light irony the romantic extremes of the young narrator's first infatuation, and the narrator literally falls sick when the equally uncomprehending Dargelos rejects him. But the emphasis is upon the clear lack of love and compassion among his homophobic classmates. "Without actually describing my suffering as love, I sense that it was very different from what went on in the classroom and that it would find no response there." When Dargelos dies, only the narrator weeps upon hearing of this tragedy, and the other boys continue their ways "as normal."

Homophobia is intensified when the boys' voices begin breaking and they take up shaving and smoking:

Onanism gave way to boasting. Postcards circulated. All these young things now turned towards women as plants turn to the sun. It was then, in order to follow the others, that I began to falsify my nature. As they hastened towards their own truth they dragged me towards falsehood. I pretended to share their enthusiasms while having to overcome my feelings of shame. In the end this self-discipline made my task fairly easy.

This is quite a remarkable description of how homosexual self-oppression develops in the young person, through the inculcation of guilt, shame and anxiety. However, even though playing a dual role builds up tension and anxiety and negative self-conceptions, practice makes perfect and it becomes an easy habit.

Cocteau may not have been the first gay man to note this damage, but he was one of the first to chart its progress in the adolescent and to note how it is formed to meet the expectations of the peer group. And he correctly perceived that the heterosexual truth which promotes homosexual falsehood is itself a falsehood of a different order: braggadocio, over-assertive masculinity, unwarranted claims to heterosexuality. Virtually nothing really "happens" when the boys go to the brothels to prove themselves, for they are too shy when they actually confront a real live whore. Cocteau humorously but unsparingly satirizes the trivial adventures of these budding heterophiliacs.

As is too usual, the narrator tries to go straight, but his first heterosexual romance with the prostitute Jeanne is fraught with various kinds of deceit, due largely to the homosexual's necessary self-concealment within homophobic culture. The irony is that Jeanne herself is deceiving him, not with other men, but with another prostitute named Berthe, for she herself is basically a lesbian. When he discovers this, he leaves her — supposedly enlightened by the realization that his relationship with her was basically homosexual in so far as her "masculine part" appealed to his "feminine part." Cocteau has unfortunately succumbed to the feminine versus masculine ideology about the nature of male and female homosexuals (as effeminate men and butch women) — a view that is always oversimplified and often mistaken. Fortunately Cocteau does not develop this theme much further — unlike Proust, who was convinced that male homosexuals were women in men's bodies and even constructed a patently idiotic theory about "autofecundation" to account for it.

The narrator then takes up with another prostitute named Rose, but very soon he falls in love with her pimp Alfred. Alfred "resembles the farm-boy and the Gustave of my childhood." He is absolutely male: "his body was more like the one I saw in my dreams than the young, powerfully equipped body of an adolescent: a perfect body, rigged out with muscles like a ship

with ropes, its limbs appearing to open out like a star around that fleece where there rises, in contrast to woman, who is built for concealment, the only thing about a man which cannot lie." Cocteau again succumbs to an ideological interpretation of gender, specifically the silly theory that women's mostly-internal genital organs mean that they are "built for concealment" — a curious biological metaphysic held by far too many men, homosexual and heterosexual alike. But it is prompted by his newly awakened conviction that concealment of his gayness is wrong. Many a gay man has tried to conceal his gayness in a prostitute's or wife's vagina.

The affirmative value of his love for Alfred prompts an anti-homophobic resolution:

I realized I had taken the wrong turning. I vowed that I would not get lost again, that in future I would go straight along my own path instead of going astray on someone else's, and that I would listen more to the dictates of my senses than to the counsels of morality.

Unfortunately the decision to accept oneself — however just and true and self-liberating — by no means guarantees happiness or fulfilment. We are still bound by the strictures of the homophobic culture that encircles us. The relationship of the narrator and Alfred is "strengthened by deceit," for they conceal their affair from Rose. Secrecy has the merit of intensifying private passion, but the inability to express affection in public ultimately breaks down the relationship. "Alfred, who was lazy, began to find lying wearisome." The narrator comes from a slightly upper-class background, and he is better enabled to play dual roles because he is used to the polity of the facade. But Alfred comes from the underworld background, where virtually nothing remains a secret for long, and the dual role is a strain for him. He attempts to leave Rose for the narrator, but he has already been too well conditioned to his lifestyle. He returns slobbering to Rose out of habit. The ties that bind a pimp to his prostitute (a heterosexual chain) are too strong to be broken by the terrifying freedom offered by a homosocial lifestyle.

The narrator escapes his disappointment by plunging into the promiscuous variety of the underworld of prostitution. But the world of the Faubourg Montmartre is an ultimately unsatisfying feast of aperitifs. No appetizers of physical gratification pass untasted, but the whole does not add up to a solid meal. Homophobic society is so well constructed that more-or-less permanent relationships are reserved for conventional heterosexual pairs, while fleeting impermanence is prescribed for all others. There is no intermediary neutral zone where people can freely discover themselves and each other, and self-determine their own arrangements without regard to the expectations of others.

Here the narrator meets a young sailor, and their relationship is one of tenderness — the kind of intimacy generally forbidden by the street life. "Our encounter was not like those he was used to: brief moments of self-gratification." Here we are given an exemplum of the kind of deceit — prompted by homophobic culture — which denies us the right to love by giving us only the right to lust. The sailor responds to the narrator as if the latter were a life-belt approaching him in an open sea, but there is no real conversation between them because true intimacy is something the sailor has been conditioned never to express out in the open. The narrator resolves to leave him:

No, I thought, we don't belong to the same order.
He's already beautiful enough to move a flower, a
tree or an animal. Impossible to live with.

The logic of this decision may seem callous as well as satiric, but part of the meaning is that the sailor, by trying to be the archetypal hustler, has become an **object** of beauty rather than a subject: merely one of the desserts on the menu of the Faubourg. He is an icon before whom one can burn incense, but with whom it is difficult to share oneself.

The sailor resembles Tazio, the symbol of the boy-god Eros in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Like Tazio, his body is physically perfect except for one flaw; the former has decaying teeth, and the latter has a broken nose. Like the birthmark in one of Hawthorne's tales, this single flaw represents their link with humanity, but nevertheless there is too much of the deity sublimated within them to be attainable by mere mortals.

On the sailor's chest is tattooed the phrase PAS DE CHANCE in blue capital letters. It means that he is fated to be "unlucky" — just as a leatherman in one of Thom Gunn's poems has tattooed on his shoulders the words "Born to be Unlucky," signifying resignation to defeat. Cultural homophobia is incorporated into the homosexual subculture by this kind of taboo ritual. The ritual of submission is a means of **containing** despair, of giving it limits in order to prevent total helplessness. It is a typical rite of inversion, often found in Genet's novels, by which one celebrates precisely that which is condemned so as to mitigate its harmfulness. By accepting bad luck as our "fate," we are better able to stoically cope with life — though of course this also prevents us from challenging homophobia.

It is difficult to gauge precisely at what points Cocteau is deliberately exploiting symbolism. The episode with the sailor is a miniature **fabliau** centering upon an allegorical tattoo, the central moral being that of "doom" or "fate." On a less explicit level, however, the episode mirrors one of the "three episodes" of his childhood memory. The sailor is named **Tapageuse**, meaning "timid animal" — just as earlier the narrator had been frightened by a "hare," and it perhaps is symbolic that as he leaves Tapageuse he

sees a man emerging from a door carrying a shotgun — just as he himself had carried a gun long ago. Whether deliberately symbolic or not, the impression in both incidents is that he is fearful of part of himself and therefore represses part of himself.

Margaret Crosland in a brief criticism of the novel, superficially misunderstands this and other episodes, as have all critics. She says:

Each episode ends in death or heart-breaking separation. The general impression is that homosexual love is doomed to failure, disappointment, treachery or death, but there is no feeling, even implicit, that these sufferings represent punishment in any way.

Crosland is responding to the novel within the traditional framework of homophobic expectation. She entirely fails to appreciate the point that homosexual love is not **inherently doomed** but **doomed by external forces**. Homosexual love in itself is not "fated" to disappointment: it is homophobic society that decrees this fate. As the narrator makes explicit in a later passage: "Why had I not foreseen this new trick of fate which persecutes me and conceals beneath other guises a destiny which is always the same?" The conflict is between the external "fate" of homophobia that persecutes the internal "destiny" of homosexual desire. When Crosland observes that "the narrator tries to behave well but never succeeds," she seems to accept without question the prejudice that the misfortunes of homosexuals are due to an inherent weakness in their own characters, rather than due to their strength in holding onto their basic nature in the face of insuperable odds. Basically, Crosland has missed the message of the novel. Traditional literary criticism fails to comprehend homosexual literature because it fails to comprehend homophobia.

The narrator then moves on to the darker pleasures of an **établissement de bains**, a combination sauna and brothel. Cocteau makes it clear that this establishment represents only one part of the gay world: "equivalent, in the love of man for man, to clandestine rendezvous and meetings with whores in the love of women." Though the sauna is an overtly homosexual establishment, it actually performs an important function for heterosexual culture: "Most of the customers were rich industrialists who came from the north to satisfy their needs and then rejoined their wives and children." Again the subject of this episode is not homosexuality, but homophobia. The buyers and the sellers in this establishment totally fail to comprehend the nature of friendship or love, and regard mere physical gratification as something separate from the personality of daily life. It is simply an adult version of the furtive masturbation and "tricks" or boys' schools.

The narrator of course realizes that this degrades his ideal of

homosexual love, and is filled with "bitterness" as well as "satiety." But then he flies off to the opposite extreme — from hell to heaven — and becomes a religious neophyte. The motivation for conversion is homophobic self-disgust:

I wanted to see only too quickly proof that I had taken the wrong road. ... Normal love, I thought, is not denied me. Nothing prevents me from founding a family and returning to the straight and narrow path. ... I will fight against the devil and I will be victorious.

By so starkly and melodramatically stating the narrator's feelings, Cocteau underlines the narrator's error of judgment. Coupled with the narrator's self-disgust is an even more basic need for self-justification. He enters a church not so much because he wishes to renounce his ways, but because he needs to be forgiven. When he prays to the Virgin Mary he has already decided that homosexuality is not really as bad as society thinks:

What men see to be indecent, surely you see it as we see the amorous exchange of pollens and atoms! I will obey the orders of your son's ministers on earth, but I know very well that his goodness does not stop with the chicanery of Father Sinistrarius and the rules of an old criminal code. Amen.

(The old criminal code is Leviticus and its anti-sodomy statutes; Sinistrarius wrote an incredible treatise about witches, demons and homosexuals.)

Homosexual behavior is of course the most overt — and in some ways the most superficial — manifestation of the entire gay personality or sensibility, and this personality cannot be transformed by religious conversion. One can become celibate, but one cannot renounce one's desire. Thus the homosexual religious convert can never escape the conflict between (1) the need to chastise and purify "the sinful self" created by the self-disgust of homophobia, and (2) the need to affirm that very same self, for it is the authentic self. The narrator never "succeeds" in achieving ecstasy by sublimating his emotions toward Christ the great brother-figure, for he has gone through too much experience and has already passed through various stages of self-acceptance.

For a while he tries celibacy, by spending his time in solitary rides in a row boat (no temptation in sight). On the symbolic level of the novel, he has gone to the primordial pool which was on the edge of his father's estate. He in a sense becomes the farm-boy bather that he saw there, and, like Narcissus or Hyacinthus, he makes love to Apollo the sun-god while masturbating:

The sun is an old lover who knows his role well. He begins by holding you down all over with firm hands. He puts his arms round you. He seizes hold of you, throws you down, and then suddenly I would find

myself coming to in a stupefied state, my belly soaked with a liquid resembling mistletoe berries.

His homosexual auto-eroticism again prompts homophobic disgust — "I hated myself" — but again he cannot deny his true self, and "in the end my prayer was reduced to a plea for forgiveness." Forgiveness comes personified in the form of a young man whom he discovers bathing in the nude — yet another manifestation of the powerful image of the farm-boy of his childhood memory. He falls in love with this man named "H" and adopts the typical rationalization of the homosexual Christian (by which modern gay Christians still attempt to harmonize their homosexuality with their Christianity): "God loves me. In loving one another, we prove to Christ that we know how to read between the lines, which are inevitably those of a severe legislator."

But the narrator's love for H, like all his other loves, "seems doomed to failure." It is as though homosexuals are indeed "a race accursed," though again we must realize that the substantive question is: Cursed by whom? And the answer, again, is: By cultural homophobia. The relationship of the narrator and H is turbulent and heart-rending and pitiable — because H is doomed to also love women. Actually, he is not really bisexual, and he doesn't really love women: he seeks them out in order to relieve his own homophobic self-disgust, and because he believes that "the masculine" must subjugate "the feminine" in order to remain "manly." H's confession to the narrator is a paradigm of the pseudo-bisexual:

There was both woman and man in me. The woman was subject to you; the man rebelled against this subjection. I didn't like women. I sought them out to sidetrack myself and prove to myself that I was free. The vain, stupid man within me was the enemy of our love.

As a result of this homophobic/sexist conflict, their relationship is fraught with lies, deceit, jealousy, confrontations, ultimatums, and even violence.

Eventually H dies from the use of narcotics supplied by his Russian mistress. "The addiction was too far advanced for him to turn back" could well be a comment on the compensatory bisexuality by which homosexuals succumb to society rather than affirm their gayness. Like Alfred returning to Rose, H is strangled by his umbilical cord to a homophobic and sexist culture.

In spite of his immense grief, the narrator feels unable "to turn again to the Church," for during his affair with H he had sought out, but been denied, consolation from this essentially homophobic institution. Cocteau's deep bitterness toward the Church is kept well under control, but is all the more effectively expressed through simple understatement and irony, as in the

following dialogue with Abbé' X:

"Monsieur l'Abbé," I asked him, "do you love me?"

"I love you."

"Would you be glad to learn that at last I feel happy?"

"Very glad."

"Well, know that I am happy but in a way that the Church and the world disapprove of, for it's friendship that makes me happy and for me friendship has no limits." ...

"My dear boy," the Abbé told me in the vestry, "if it were only a question of risking my place in heaven, I wouldn't be risking very much, for I believe that God's goodness surpasses what we imagine. But there is my place on earth. The Jesuits are watching me closely."

We embraced. ... I thought how admirable was the economy of God. It gives love when one lacks it, and, in order to avoid a pleonasm of the heart, refuses it to those who have it.

The style of *Le Livre Blanc*, as of all Cocteau's fiction, is exceedingly sparse, and the last few pages of the narrative are a bit unsatisfactory. One has the impression that Cocteau is rushing toward a conclusion, perhaps because the events were too painful for him to recount at length. In the space of a single page he gives us the mere outline of the narrator's attempt to get married in one last futile effort to go straight — the ultimate perversion of the homosexual personality. But instead he falls in love with the brother of his fiancée, and again we see the repeat of a familiar pattern. Because of the sexist dialectic, the brother loves himself, hates his sister, and is jealous that the narrator insists on marrying her. He spitefully reveals to her that the narrator is homosexual; the narrator strikes him; and the brother kills himself. Probably one reason for the brevity of this passage is that Cocteau does not quite want to show how brutal his homophobic hero has become. The narrator "hasn't the courage" to tell the sister about his love for her brother, and the homophobic secrecy which he requires from the brother (in contrast to the secrecy earlier required from him by Alfred) precipitates the catastrophe.

The final page of the book is a sudden cascade of the morals of the tale — none of which condemn homosexuality, all of which condemn homophobia. The final two lines have often been quoted by members of the gay movement, for they were the cornerstone of the modern gay liberation spirit in its struggle against liberal blandness:

But I will not agree to be tolerated. This damages my love of love and of liberty.

A very fine statement, but the action accompanying it is precisely the opposite of the modern gay activist. Instead of demanding

freedom and taking a resolute stand, the narrator decides to "withdraw from this society" because of the "vice of society" — i.e., homophobia.

It is a curiously weak response, characteristic of the sense of yearning to escape experienced by homosexuals in the 1930s, when they did not yet realize that they were against the wall with no place to flee for refuge. However unrealistic this exile might be, the narrator's decision is nevertheless squarely founded upon a rejection of the homophobic judgment of society: "in exiling myself I am not exiling a monster, but a man whom society will not allow to live, since it considers one of the mysterious cogs in God's masterpiece to be a mistake." He hopes that someone may publish these memoirs precisely so that society may understand this fact: that *homophobia* is the problem, not *homosexuality*.

But twentieth-century Western society is so thoroughly heterosexist in its structure that it has not accepted this analysis of the situation. And the book leaves us with a bitter aftertaste, and impression of Cocteau's essentially defeatist attitude: "The world accepts dangerous experiments in the realm of art because it does not take art seriously, but it condemns them in life." So in terms of its relevance for social change, *Le Livre Blanc* is probably all for naught: after the martyrdom of its hero, there are only ashes.

Cocteau's analysis of homophobia is not quite "pure" or politically correct. But in 1928 it could hardly be well-founded upon the central premises of gay liberation. It is also typically French: even today the most active members of the French homophile movement are exceedingly conservative, and Arcadie, for example, was formally denounced by the more militant Dutch gay organization COC (which officially denied Arcadie members entry into its gay clubs). Many modern French homosexuals since Cocteau's time have allowed themselves to be slapped on both cheeks while pathetically muttering, "I am not a monster."

Cocteau, like his hero, did in effect exile himself from society, by cultivating a paradoxical style and surrealistic imagery inaccessible to most people, and by generally refraining from social reform commitments. The more liberated French gay usually rejects Cocteau's aloofness in favour of Gide's sincerity. But in spite of the maudlin self-pity that swamps the last few pages of *Le Livre Blanc*, the book as a whole constitutes one of the first — and still one of the most accurate — extended analyses of homophobia in literature. Whether or not Cocteau's analysis will ever be appreciated for what it is, remains a moot point.

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