For posterity dubbed “l’Insaisissable Protée” by Germaine Brée, André Gide has been considered a model of literary and spiritual reinvention. His travel accounts *Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad* are traditionally viewed as departures toward social and political interests, enlarging a highly personal and closed perspective characterizing earlier works. The introductory framings of these travel texts reveal an ambivalence of positioning. Alternately calling forth Joseph Conrad and John Keats as inspirational predecessors, Gide’s intention of “beginning” in sub-Saharan Africa is problematized. Through the integration of these elements within the text and their reflection at the conclusion, Gide undermines the trope of the *récit de voyage* as a chronicle of exploration and discovery while struggling between a redefinition of the colonial relationship and its veritable reinforcement.

The importance of narrative framing in the Gidean text is indisputable. *L’Immoraliste*, for example, is preceded by three writings on the text: a dedication, an epigraph, and a preface. The epigraph, extracted from a Biblical passage, casts ambiguity upon the possible interpretations of the qualifier “admirable” applied to “créature.” Excised from its contextual reflection concerning man in his relationship to God, it complicates the very innocence to which the first-person narrator Michel lays claim throughout the account of his dislocations in Europe and North Africa. The author’s preface functions, also, to disassociate himself from the first-person narration and to qualify the *récit*, responding...
to critics and cautioning his narratee.\(^1\) In addition to these distancing effects, the beginning is further framed by a communication from Michel’s friend, re-stating the problem of the protagonist and establishing antecedents to the exposition of a current dilemma.

Narrative preparation and correlated levels of removal from the immediacy of the text remain of notable importance in Gide’s other African volumes *Voyage au Congo* and *Le Retour du Tchad*, where an enigmatic epigraph combined on a single page with a dedication situate the entries to follow. His selection of these two elements underscores a double vision in the author’s initiation to the “other.” While analyzing each of these components, I will consider the textual integration of these phrases highlighted at the beginning of the *récit*, their reflection in the conclusion of the text, and the coexistence of these two approaches in Gide’s records of his travel to sub-Saharan Africa. In studying a few of the concluding structures of the text, I intend to reinforce the assertion of Edward Said: “Beginning is basically an activity which ultimately implies return and repetition rather than simple linear accomplishment” (*Beginnings* xiii). Throughout the text, the struggle for a redefinition of colonial structures can be discerned even while the gesture for reform simultaneously reinforces the problematic relationship of the colonizer and the colonized.

“A la mémoire de Joseph Conrad”

With the dedication of his own texts set in Africa, Gide reveals the point from which the work starts, erecting homage to his model, Conrad.\(^2\) Gérard Genette particularly insists upon the public nature of an acknowledgment of intellectual and artistic affinity in this narrative structure placed at the inception of a work of art (*Seuils* 126). In citing

\(^1\) The flexibility of Gide’s paratexts is also remarkable. A preface, for example, was added to his 1897 *Nourritures terrestres* some ten years later, following Gide’s travels to the Congo. This addendum modulated the liberatory message of the original text embraced by his readership.

\(^2\) Although the tribute to Conrad appears in the first edition of the travel accounts, it is absent from the original manuscript. This may suggest that Gide’s travels confirmed the impressions recorded by his predecessor seeking the “heart” of Africa.