

Biography of Andre Gide (1869 - 1951)

Andre Gide, a French novelist, essayist, poet, diarist, and dramatist, was born in Paris in 1869. His father, a professor of Roman law at the University of Paris, died when Gide was only eleven years old. Consequently, Gide was raised by his domineering and highly protective mother, a strict Calvinist whose family background was Norman and Catholic.

Gide attended the Ecole Alsacienne and the Lycee Henri IV in Paris, but frequently required private tutoring at home because of his delicate health. As a young man, Gide traveled to the Middle East in an attempt to break away from the stifling Calvinist atmosphere of his home. There, the exotic locale and surroundings inspired him to pursue previously denied sensual pleasures. In Algiers, Gide discovered and celebrated his bisexual inclinations for the first time. However, his early religious training continued to haunt him, and he became obsessed with resolving the struggle between the puritan and the libertine in his nature.

After he returned to France, Gide married his cousin, Madeleine, with whom he had been in love since he was thirteen years old. Their attachment was deep and unremitting, and Gide described it as “ the devotion of my whole life, “ but the marriage was traumatic for both of them. Madeleine’s strict

Christian values often conflicted with Gide's unconventional lifestyle. Many of his mature works were inspired by the difficulties that he experienced in this relationship. Straits is the Gate and The Immoralist, in particular, portray characters who are carried to destructive extremes of behavior, similar to those that Gide saw in himself and in Madeleine. All of Gide's works are in some way reflections of his emotional struggles, and critics agree that one source of Gide's genius lay in his ability to translate the contradictions and complexities of his nature into art. Three works which describe the conflict in Gide's personality are The Notebooks of Andre Walter, The Counterfeiters and The Fruits of the Earth.

Gide's most ambitious and stylistically elaborate achievement was the novel The Counterfeiters. The Counterfeiters is an experimental novel, the form of which is derived from patterns in music. In it, Gide attempted to reproduce the unstructured chaos of everyday life.

Although Gide was well-known and respected among his fellow writers, Gide was unrecognized by the general public until the 1920s. His belief that life should be lived to its emotional and intellectual fullest, made him famous. His belief also influenced on the generation of Camus and Genet. In 1947, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

Synopsis of the novel

When seventeen years old Bernard Profitendieu discovered an old love letter of his mother and found out that he was an illegitimate son, he left a scathing letter for the man whom he had considered his real father and ran away from home. He spent that night with his friend, Olivier Molinier. Olivier told him that his uncle Edouard, who was a writer, would arrive from England the next day.

Bernard who had watched the meeting between the two, picked up the checkroom ticket that Edouard had dropped and claimed the bag. In it he discovered a large sum of money and a journal. Then he read the journal without scruple. In Edouard's journal, he also found Laura's supplicating letter.

Then he called on Laura. Laura was disturbed by the young man who knew so much about her affairs, but his action become understandable when Edouard arrived and Bernard admitted that he had taken of the bag. Bernard said that he had stolen it as a means to get in touch with Edouard. He asked Edouard to accept him as his secretary.

A few days later, Bernard wrote to Olivier about his new position. Olivier was jealous of Bernard, whom he felt had taken his place in Edouard's

affection. Then, he tried to take revenge by taking an editorial assignment which is offered by comte de Passavant.

In the meantime, Bernard fell in love with Laura. When he confessed his love, Laura refused him. She tried to make Bernard understand by showing him a letter from her husband who begged her to come back with her and Vincent's child. She also reminded him that she was going to have a child. Finally, Bernard was able to accept Laura's refusal without being emotional. He only asked Laura to appreciate his love.

At that moment, Olivier is in Italy with de Passavant and wrote a letter to Bernard. In this letter, Olivier writes about the wonderful journal they intended to publish. Bernard showed the letter to Edouard, who failed to realize that the letter disguised the boy real feelings of jealousy and hurt.

Bernard, although still working as Edouard's secretary, had enrolled in the Vedel school and was living in the Vedel household. The Vedels were Laura's parents and Edouard's close friends. Staying in the Vedels reminded Bernard of his family. He compared his family and the Vedels.

Later, when Olivier returned to Paris, he got in touch with Bernard. The meeting between them is cold. As they parted, Olivier invited Edouard and Bernard to a party which de Passavant was giving that evening. That party was an orgy. Olivier became drunk and quarrelsome. Edouard led him from the

room and Olivier feeling ashamed, begged his uncle to take him away. Olivier spent the night with his uncle. Getting up later, Edouard discovered his nephew lying on the bathroom floor unconscious, with the gas jets turned on. Edouard nursed Olivier until the boy recovered.

A few days later, Edouard received a call from Profitendieu, Bernard's foster father. Ostensibly, he had called in his office as magistrate to ask Edouard to speak to his nephew George, who was suspected of passing counterfeit coins. But it soon became evident that the real object of his visit was to inquire about Bernard. Since the boy had left home, Profitendieu was worried about him. He very much wanted to have him home once more.

When Edouard met Bernard, he told him of the interview with Profitendieu. Some time later, regretting the harsh letter he had written, the hatred Bernard had for his foster father had changed to sympathy and fondness. He decided to return home to his former family.