The Immoralist Study Guide

The Immoralist by André Gide

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Introduction

André Gide's controversial short novel *L'Immoraliste* (1902; *The Immoralist*) describes a journey of self-discovery by which a young man becomes increasingly aware of his homosexual inclinations. *The Immoralist* is based on Gide's personal experience of discovering his homosexuality while traveling as a young man in North Africa.

The Immoralist is narrated by Michel, a young man who describes his marriage to Marceline, a woman he hardly knew, and lays bare the developments of his inner life during the first few years of their marriage. While on an extended honeymoon in North Africa, Michel finds himself attracted to young Arab boys. This experience inspires him to embark on a journey of self-discovery through which he eventually finds himself leading a double life: he presents a false facade to his wife, while going out on his own to follow his natural inclinations and experience his true inner being. Back home in France, Marceline announces that she is pregnant. Meanwhile, Michel finds himself increasingly drawn to healthy and attractive young men. Becoming ill from tuberculosis, Marceline suffers a miscarriage. Michel, motivated by a strong desire to return to North Africa, pushes her to travel with him, despite her deteriorating health. After she dies, Michel is left to grapple with the meaning of his own life, and to come to terms with his homosexual tendencies.

The central theme of *The Immoralist* is repressed homosexuality. Gide's narrative further explores themes of life versus death, mind versus body, and the process of self-discovery.

Author Biography

André Gide was one of the most important French writers of the twentieth century. He was born André Paul Guillaume Gide, 22 November 1869, in Paris, France, the only child of Paul Gide, a professor of Roman law, and Juliette Rondeaux Gide, a Norman heiress. When Gide was eleven, his father died of tuberculosis. Soon after, Gide developed a predilection for faking illness, and was often kept home from school, receiving an uneven education from private tutors. Upon passing his baccalaureate examination at the age of twenty, he determined to devote his life to writing. His first book, *Les Cahiers d'André Walter* (1891; *The Notebooks of André Walter*), is an autobiographical novel based on his youthful experiences.

In 1893, Gide made his first trip to North Africa, where he had his first homosexual experience. That year, he suffered from tuberculosis, though he soon recovered. Two years later, he returned to North Africa, where he met with the well-known homosexual Irish writer Oscar Wilde. In important conversations with Wilde, Gide was encouraged to admit his homosexual tendencies to himself and his friends. Gide's trips to North Africa became the basis of *The Immoralist*, in which Michel, the central character, travels twice to Algeria. The character of Menalque in *The Immoralist* is based on Wilde, and Michel's late-night conversation with Menalque in which his friend hints at his homosexual tendencies is based on Gide's discussions with Wilde. Gide's mother died in 1895. Soon after, he married his cousin, Madeleine Rondeaux. At the age of twenty-seven, Gide was elected mayor of La Roque, making him the youngest mayor in France.

The Immoralist, one of Gide's most important works, was first published in 1902. Like Michel in *The Immoralist*, Gide struggled in his marriage with feelings of genuine love for his wife that conflicted with his homosexual inclinations and his strong need for individual freedom. These tensions resulted in many years of estrangement between husband and wife. When she learned of Gide's love affair with a young man in 1918, she retaliated by burning all of his letters to her. In 1923, Gide's daughter, Catherine, was born to Elisabeth van Rysselberghe, a married woman with whom Gide had an extramarital affair. However, Gide's paternity of the child was kept secret from Madeleine. After a lengthy illness, Madeleine died in 1938. Gide's lifelong concern with individual freedom lead him to advocate for the social, economic, and political liberty of oppressed peoples throughout the world, and he is remembered as a great humanitarian. During World War I, he worked for the Red Cross, then in a convalescent home for wounded soldiers, and later offered shelter to war refugees. During the 1920s, he became an advocate for the oppressed peoples of colonized regions, as well as for women's rights and the humane treatment of criminals. In 1947 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Gide died in Paris on 19 February 1951, at the age of eighty-one.

Plot Summary

Part 1

Michel, the protagonist of *The Immoralist*, has spent his early adulthood as a scholar of ancient Greek and Roman cultures. He describes his marriage at the age of twenty-five to Marceline, a twenty-year-old woman whom he hardly knows. Shortly after their engagement, Michel's father dies. The newlyweds travel on their honeymoon to North Africa, a region that at the time was colonized by the French. During their travels, Michel becomes ill from tuberculosis. By the time they arrive in the city of Biskra, Algeria, he is gravely ill and close to death.

Throughout his illness, Michel and Marceline stay at a hotel in Biskra, where Marceline nurses him. Michel is so ill that he does not even leave their hotel room for a long time. As he begins to recover, Marceline brings Bachir, a local Arab boy, to play in Michel's room and cheer him up. Eventually, Michel recovers enough from his illness to go out for a walk with Marceline in a park near their hotel. When they meet a group of local Arab boys in the park, Michel feels that he would prefer to go there without his wife. He realizes that, as a scholar, he has been living the life of the mind, while neglecting his physical being. Finding a renewed sense of life and a new awareness of his physical senses, Michel determines to devote himself to improving his health.

As Michel's health continues to improve, he begins to take walks alone among the orchards of a nearby oasis, where he meets and befriends more Arab boys. He and Marceline begin to invite the Arab boys to their hotel lodgings to play and eat sweets. One day, Michel sees one of the boys, Moktir, steal a pair of his wife's sewing scissors. Instead of reprimanding Moktir, or taking the scissors away from him, Michel lies to his wife about why the scissors are missing. After this incident, Michel finds that Moktir is his favorite of the children.

After staying in Biskra for several months, Michel and Marceline decide to leave. They continue to travel in North Africa, Italy, and the Mediterranean region, passing through Tunis, Malta, and Syracuse. With his newfound health and excitement about life, Michel finds himself losing interest in his scholarly research. While staying in Salerno, Michel spends many days off on his own exploring the area, leaving his wife behind at their hotel. He becomes very focused on his body and his physical health. He soon finds himself leading a double life. Away from his wife, he continues to focus on his newly emerging sense of self and renewed excitement about life. In his wife's presence, however, he presents a false persona as a loving and attentive husband.

One day, Michel gets into a fight with a drunken coach driver, who had been driving recklessly while Marceline was a passenger in the coach. That night, two months after their wedding, Michel and Marceline make love for the first time.

Part 2

In the spring, the newlyweds return home to France. They spend the summer at Michel's childhood home in Normandy, in northern France, where he has inherited a large estate called La Morinière. Michel becomes acquainted with Bocage, his estate manager. When Charles, Bocage's seventeen-year-old son, arrives at La Morinière, Michel is immediately drawn to the young man, and the two of them go horseback riding together every day. Michel becomes increasingly involved in the management of his estate. Marceline informs him that she is pregnant.

In the fall, Michel and Marceline move back to Paris, where he begins his teaching post at the College de France. In Paris, Michel is bored by the demands of their social life. One day, he meets Menalque, a former acquaintance, with whom he strikes up a friendship. Menalque explains that he has traveled to Biskra and met many of the Arab boys whom Michel had befriended while on his honeymoon. One night, Menalque hands Michel the pair of scissors that Moktir had stolen from Marceline. Michel arrives home that night to find that Marceline has had a miscarriage and is gravely ill from tuberculosis.

When the academic year ends, Michel and Marceline return to La Morinière for the summer. Marceline becomes more and more ill. Michel, meanwhile, spends more and more time with the peasants on his estate. He even joins Alcide, the youngest son of Bocage, in secretly poaching game on his own grounds. He finds himself intrigued by the lives of the peasants, particularly those whose behavior is morally questionable. Although Marceline continues to be very ill, the couple decides to leave La Morinière and travel.

Part 3

Michel and Marceline travel throughout Switzerland, Italy, and North Africa. Marceline becomes more and more ill, while Michel finds himself increasingly full of health and vigor. They return again to Biskra. Michel cares for Marceline during the day, but after she goes to sleep, he goes out prowling the streets at night. He meets many of the children they had befriended two years earlier. However, the boys have become young men, and have gone on with their lives. Some of them have married and found work, while others have become criminals and spent time in jail. Moktir, the boy who once stole the pair of scissors, has recently been released from prison. Michel is disappointed that these boys have lost the health and freshness that had first drawn him to them.

One night Moktir takes Michel to a prostitute. Michel returns home from this encounter to find that Marceline is dying. After Marceline dies, Michel remains in Algeria for three months. During this time, he befriends an Arab boy named Ali. Ali eventually introduces Michel to his sister, who is a prostitute. Michel sleeps with Ali's sister on several occasions. However, Michel soon becomes bored of her, and feels that Ali seems to be jealous, so he tells the girl he no longer wants to see her. Ali continues to spend time with Michel, and to do various errands for him, "in exchange for the odd caress."

Afterward, when Ali's sister encounters Michel on the street, she teases him that he is more interested in her brother than in her, and that Ali is the reason he stays in Algeria. Michel's response, which is the closing line of the novel, is "Perhaps she is not altogether wrong . . ."

Part 1, Chapter 1

Part 1, Chapter 1 Summary

The Immoralist is the story of Michel, a young Frenchman who lives in the last years of the 19th century and whose quest for self-identity ultimately destroys his marriage, career, and wealth. The novel is known for being alarming for its homosexual theme in the time it was written in 1902 but by today's standards the story has little or no shock value. It is, however, an excellent study in the struggle between good and evil and convention and self will as Michel's inner struggles are revealed.

The novel begins with a letter written by a friend of Michel's to the friend's brother stating that he and two other friends named Denis and Daniel have found Michel in North Africa and have been able to speak with him. Michel's state of mind is in question although the friend asks the brother not to judge Michel too harshly after hearing his story for any man is susceptible to erratic behavior at certain points in his life. The three friends had not seen Michel for three years having been immersed in their own lives and family commitments but when Michel sent for them all three men came at his request. Michel has clearly changed in appearance and demeanor but the telling of the story will explain all that.

The friends find Michel at his home after traveling from France to Algiers, Constantine, and finally the city of Sidi b. M. in Tunisia. Michel greets his friends with no emotion or enthusiasm outside the house and waits until they are all assembled inside to embrace them. After dinner the four friends make themselves comfortable on the terrace overlooking the desert where Michel begins the story for which he has summoned his friends.

Michel thanks his dear friends for coming at his request and asks that they listen to his story and his need to tell it in order to be free. The last time the friends had seen each other was three years ago at Michel's wedding to a young woman of twenty named Marceline. Michel does not know Marceline very well when they marry as he does it to please his dying father who wishes that Michel will not be left alone in the world.

There is really nothing to bind Michel and Marceline and actually her Catholicism is a deterrent but Michel keeps his promise to his dying father and feels that he is prepared to marry Marceline and give her all of himself although in hindsight Michel understands how pitiful that vow was at the time.

Michel has lived the sheltered life of a scholar becoming a devotee of his father's Greek and Latin studies after the death of his mother when he was only fifteen. By the time Michel is twenty he is writing celebrated books credited to his father and it comes as a surprise to Michel one day to discover the wealth that he and his father have accumulated.

Michel's sheltered and sedentary life has contributed to his delicate health condition and he is grateful for Marceline's strength, which will soon be more valuable than Michel realizes. The honeymoon trip consists of a stop in Paris for shopping, then on to Marseilles, and finally the end destination of Tunis. The gravity of the marriage finally occurs to Michel aboard ship once the flurry of the activities subsides. Coupled with the grief from his father's death, Michel who is already delicate is weakened emotionally and physically.

While onboard Michel realizes that he has never had a break from studies and work for his entire life and vows to forego academia to discover his new life. Michel has never spent much time in the company of women so discovering Marceline is also a new adventure and realizing that his solitary life is now bound to another is a staggering thought.

During their honeymoon travels, Michel contracts tuberculosis and the route to their final destination is filled with a series of bleak hotels and somber, drafty rooms which drain the health and the spirits of the weakening Michel. One night having left a hotel in the evening on route to the next stop, Michel realizes that his coughs are now producing blood and he is immediately startled yet does not wake the sleeping Marceline preferring to hide his infirmity.

When the couple arrives at Biskra, Algiers, Michel is gravely ill yet manages to settle into his room and order tea for Marceline and himself. It is only then that Michel reveals his extreme coughing to Marceline who immediately faints and falls to the floor. Michel summons a doctor whose arrival is better timed to tend to Michel who is by now shaking with fever and chills. Michel falls into a fitful sleep and awakes to find Marceline at his bedside and through the next several days of consciousness, Michel grows to respect and love the woman he has married for her kindness and practicality in the attempts to nurse him back to health.

Part 1, Chapter 1 Analysis

The theme of self-awareness establishes itself in this section as Michel begins his exploration of himself and the world. Admittedly sheltered, Michel embarks upon the marriage at the same time his father dies so that the demarcation between childhood and adulthood is clearly drawn. Michel is intelligent and educated but napve in the ways of the world and the honeymoon voyage symbolizes Michel's passage into adulthood. The illness Michel suffers is also symbolic for it purges him of the essence of the person he used to be; in fact Michel almost dies from the tuberculosis so the recovery and the resulting new life are actually Michel's rebirth into the next phase of his life.

Part 1, Chapters 2 and 3

Part 1, Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

As Michel recuperates in the hotel, Marceline stays by his side and prays for a successful recovery. It is a long time before Michel has the strength to venture out onto the veranda for a few moments at a time but his weakened condition allows him to focus on the small things he has never really seen like the pattern of the sunlight filtering into the room or the breeze that gently blows in from the veranda. When Michel gains some strength Marceline surprises him one day by bringing a little Arab boy named Bachir to cheer him. Michel's ghastly appearance startles Bachir at first but eventually the boy settles down and Michel enjoys watching him play on the floor in the hotel room.

One day Michel receives a letter and some pamphlets on tuberculosis from a friend and Michel realizes that the course of treatment he has been following is not appropriate for a full recovery. Immediately Michel begins to eat heartier meals at more regular intervals and insists on fresh air in the room even at night. Michel begins an intense observation and fascination with his body foregoing any intellectual pursuits in favor of his physical recovery. Little things like changes in temperature and chills become fascinations for Michel whose sensitivity to water and temperatures becomes almost a sensual gratification.

Eventually Michel is able to take small walks with Marceline in a park near the hotel. Each day the walks continue and Michel becomes aware of more and more Arab children who gather in the park to see him. Soon Michel becomes so enamored with the children that he prefers to come to the park without Marceline so that she will not distract him from interacting with the children. One day Michel returns to the hotel room to find Marceline nursing a small Arab child who is so ill he appears almost deformed. Michel is repulsed by the strange little figure but also cannot help but notice his wife's maternal caring toward the boy.

Michel's health continues to improve but the nights are still filled with restless sleep and sweats. During the days Marceline tries to spend time with the solitary Michel and soon shows her husband some gardens she has found in a shady grove and the couple return for a couple of days and then one evening Michel returns alone and finds a handsome twelve-year-old goatherd who leads Michel to meet other boys of similar ages.

Michel returns to the groves for many days and finds other boys in other groves while Marceline walks on ahead preferring the clear sunshine to the shade of the gardens. Michel makes friends with some of the boys and gives them sweet treats and money and the boys follow Michel as if he is a pied piper. Marceline also brings boys to the hotel room and the couple entertains the boys each day with games and sweets and Michel can still remember all of them. One day as Michel reclines in bed facing a mirror he can see one of the boys, Moktir take a small pair of scissor from Marceline's sewing

table and place them in his garment. Instead of reprimanding Moktir, Michel decides that this boy is his favorite of all of them.

Part 1, Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

Michel's transition from an intellectual being to a physical one becomes evident as he devotes himself to his bodily functions and even notes that his intellectual pursuits will have to wait in favor of the corporeal ones. What begins as health-related fascination soon extends into sensual awareness as Michel explores his surroundings and his body's reactions to outside stimuli.

It is at this time that the first stirrings of attraction for boys appear in Michel who cannot help but notice the beautiful wrists and ankles of Bachir and almost demands that Marceline bring the boy to their room each day so that Michel may observe him. Michel's growing fascination with boys finds an outlet with the discovery of the boys tending goats in the many groves extending from the city. Michel also begins to lie to his wife telling her that he will rest in the groves while she takes her walks when in reality Michel is exploring as many groves as possible to see more and more shepherd boys.

The situation with Moktir stealing the scissors and becoming Michel's favorite of all the boys symbolizes Michel's growing urges to take what he wants in spite of the chances of being caught and Michel delights in Moktir's assertiveness.

Part 1, Chapters 5, 6 and 7

Part 1, Chapters 5, 6 and 7 Summary

After being at the hotel for about four months, Michel and Marceline make the decision to leave to avoid the coming harsh winter weather. On the couple's last night in Biskra, Michel walks the streets in the middle of the night and feels so alive that everything and everyone in the town seems dead to him not merely asleep. Returning to his hotel room, Michel is unable to sleep and reads a random passage from a Bible on the desk and reads Christ's words to Peter saying that when a man is young he binds himself and walks where he should but when he is old he should stretch out his hands.

Michel and Marceline leave the hotel at dawn the next morning and travel to Malta then to Syracuse where Michel tries to begin his studies again but finds that he is sickened by ancient history and culture. Even the sight of historic places and ruins, which at one time would have thrilled Michel make him ill now as he cannot tolerate the thought of anything decaying or dying.

Michel's pursuit of vitality increases the time he spends alone sunbathing naked and exploring the craggy area. These rituals continue for a couple weeks until Michel feels so vitalized that he jumps into a cold pond and emerges to rub his body with fresh mint growing nearby. Michel looks at himself for the first time in his life with joy instead of shame and realizes that he is beautiful, strong, and sensual.

From this day on Michel pursues physical exercise and decides to alter his appearance completely by visiting the local barber in the town square and having his beard shaved completely off. The clean-shaven appearance startles Michel not for the look of his face but because he thinks that people can now read his thoughts more easily. Marceline is mildly unnerved by Michel's new persona so he tries to remain as true to his old self in demeanor for her sake, while in her presence. Inside though, Michel knows that he is no longer the man Marceline married and cannot help but feel anticipation for each new day which brings a newfound joy.

Part 1, Chapters 5, 6 and 7 Analysis

Michel undertakes all the physical rituals of change which mirror his inner transition. It is becoming increasingly clear that Marceline is less important to his well being now that he has recovered from the tuberculosis. The rebirth Michel experiences is similar to the one each person undergoes to enter the world, naked and alone. Fortunately, Michel's new persona is one of positive energy and he restrains himself from wounding Marceline's feelings at this point.

If Michel's recovery had been his rebirth then the plunge into the cold pond was his baptism. Rubbed with the freshness of mint leaves, Michel's cleansing ritual marks the moment that he fully realizes the impact of his new identity. In addition, Michel changes

his beard and hair so that no semblance of the old person is still available to remind him of his old life.

Part 1, Chapters 8 and 9

Part 1, Chapters 8 and 9 Summary

Michel's newfound vitality fills him with energy and he opts to walk the road to Positano the couple's next destination where he will meet Marceline's carriage later in the day. As Michel approaches Positano he hears the sound of a carriage bearing down the road behind him and soon realizes that a madman is driving the carriage, which bears Marceline. Michel barely avoids injury as the carriage speeds past and he runs after the carriage and the horse collapses in front of him. Michel grabs the driver, severely beats him, and throws him into the carriage without a thought to his own safety. Marceline is impressed by this new side of Michel and climbs up onto the box by her husband who proceeds to drive the carriage to town.

Later that night, Michel and Marceline consummate their marriage for the first time and Michel describes the experience as, "a momentary laughter in which our souls united." As Michel watches Marceline sleep he is overcome with love for her and her fidelity in caring for him throughout his recent illness and wonders if he would be able to return the devotion should the situation be reversed.

The couple spends a few blissful days in Sorrento and decides to visit Rome and Florence before returning home to Paris. Michel receives a letter requesting that he fill a temporary teaching position at the College de France and upon accepting decides that he and Marceline should live at his family's country estate, La Moriniere in Normandy because it will provide more serenity for academic work.

Part 1, Chapters 8 and 9 Analysis

Michel has reached his peak of vitality now and is able to entertain the idea of letting intellectual pursuits back into his life so that both sides of his persona will now merge into a fully functioning person. Both Michel and Marceline feel the power of their marriage commitment especially when Michel rushes to her rescue in the speeding carriage and later when they consummate their marriage for the first time.

There are indications, however, that the happiness will be short lived in the foreshadowing of Michel looking at the sleeping Marceline and wondering if he would ever be able to care for her like she did for him if she were ever to fall ill. Michel knows his capabilities and limits especially now in his self-absorbed state of mind. The conventional mores, which used to drive Michel's life, have been overrun by the narcissistic Michel who will grow even more distant from his marriage very soon.

Part 2, Chapter 1

Part 2, Chapter 1 Summary

It is now July and Michel and Marceline arrive at La Moriniere where they are met by the old caretaker, Bocage who has managed the estate for many years. Soon after the newlyweds settle in Marceline tells Michel that she is pregnant and Michel feels a new tenderness toward her and spends almost every minute of the day by her side. Eventually Michel begins his academic work again but is soon distracted by the opulence and sensuality of the ripening crops and fruit trees on the estate. Bocage tries to explain the operation of the estate and the tenant farms to Michel who has no real interest in the matters but pretends so as not to offend the old man.

Soon Bocage's eighteen-year-old son, Charles returns from working on an experimental farm and he and Michel become comrades, inspecting the fields, riding horses, and discussing the changes that should be made on the properties. Michel is drawn to the robust young man and finds that his interest in the management of the estate increases due to Charles' interest in the same topic. Eventually autumn arrives and Charles must return to the experimental farm despite Michel's pleas to Bocage to allow the boy to stay at La Moriniere.

Part 2, Chapter 1 Analysis

The author uses many literary techniques throughout the novel to help describe situations with more visual imagery. For example, when describing the passing of the days during the languorous summer he says that, "night melted into morning and the days were yoked to the days." Obviously nights do not melt and days cannot be yoked to each other but the visual image created helps to communicate the author's intent with more lyricism than a mere statement of fact. The author also uses similes as in the example of explaining how Michel can tell what Marceline is thinking by looking at her face when he says, "Just as a breath of wind sometimes ripples smooth water, the slightest emotion could be read on Marceline's face..."

The technique of alliteration and repetition is also used as in the sentence, "The autumn was advancing." The author uses this sentence twice within a few paragraphs of each other to indicate the cadence with which the new season is approaching. By repeating it, the sentence implies more urgency and a quicker pace than if it were just stated one time.

Michel's homosexual tendencies are surfacing even stronger in this chapter with his infatuation with Charles. Michel's attentions are probably not as discreet as he may think as Bocage refuses Michel's request to let Charles stay at La Moriniere instead of returning to the experimental farm.

Part 2, Chapter 2

Part 2, Chapter 2 Summary

A few weeks later, Michel and Marceline return to Paris and move into a luxurious apartment found with the help of Marceline's brother. Michel approves exorbitant expenditures for furnishings and household items, which concerns Marceline but Michel hopes that the investment in their new home will mitigate his impulses to wander. At first Marceline enjoys the social activities available in Paris but her pregnancy and the household move exhaust her and Michel tries to alleviate some of the social obligations himself but finds that he has no patience for the inane conversations and trivial commitments. Michel longs for a life without these formal commitments and soon returns to his academic lectures.

As Michel is leaving his classroom one day he sees a friend, Menalque waiting to talk to him. It has many a long time since they last talked. Menalque is as irreverent and disdainful of Parisian society as Michel so the two men connect again instantly. During the course of one of their conversations Menalque reveals that he had been in Biskra not too long ago and found that Michel had also been there.

After asking about Michel among the locals, Menalque shares that he found out that Michel used to enjoy going to the park alone and preferred spending time with the Arab children over being with his wife. Menalque continues that he also met the boy named Moktir who had stolen the scissors in the hotel room and Menalque produces the scissors from his pocket and places them in Michel's hand.

Menalque thinks that the incident with the scissors in Tunisia proves that Michel has no sense of property. According to Menalque having possessions gives a man a sense of security and he senses that Michel would like to divest himself of the common things that bind a man to a common life. Menalque himself owns very little and has no regard for the past focusing only on what is happening at the moment.

A few weeks later Menalque appears at one of the open houses hosted by Michel and Marceline who takes an immediate dislike to Menalque who she senses has an ill effect on her husband. Despite this feeling of mistrust Michel agrees to visit with Menalque a few days later in preparation of his leaving the country for diplomatic duty for an undetermined period of time.

Although Marceline does not feel well Michel keeps his commitment to Menalque and joins his friend at his apartment where they stay up all night drinking wine and talking. Again Menalque urges Michel to alter his life by not dwelling in the past and in the acquisition of objects. According to Menalque each joy and sorrow must be abandoned immediately in order to make room for whatever new thing will come.

Michel grows weary of Menalque's diatribe and returns home in the early morning hours to find that Marceline has taken ill. Rushing to his wife's bedside Michel finds the doctor who informs Michel that Marceline had gone into premature labor and the baby is dead. Michel's ensuing grief is tempered by his attempts to care for Marceline who seems to convalesce quickly but within a few weeks Marceline develops am embolism as a result of phlebitis and teeters between life and death.

The long vigil of nursing Marceline back to health begins and Michel leaves her only to conduct his lectures at the college. One day Marceline motions to Michel that she would like her rosary and asks him to pray for her as she had prayed so devoutly for him during his convalescence. Michel's lack of religious belief does not allow him to make that kind of commitment to Marceline and Michel leaves the room leaving his wife in distress. Soon after, Marceline's embolism causes breathing complications and Michel now sees his wife as soiled and tainted.

Part 2, Chapter 2 Analysis

The author further tries to explain Michel's state of mind by introducing the character of Menalque who acts as a non-conformist foil to Michel's proper behavior. Menalque's urging Michel to divest of possessions and the accompanying false sense of security is a turning point for Michel who is eager for another life free of the complications and restrictions he now feels as a married man.

Marceline's tuberculosis and the death of their baby provide the catalyst that Michel needs to free himself from the life he no longer wants. Although it is highly unfair to Marceline that Michel wants to be free of her the author makes the point that a man like Michel who was raised in solitary pursuits is not suited for matrimony or family life and raises the question of whether that man should endure a false life or make the break in order to live the life to which he is destined.

To further elucidate Menalque's point on living for today without the burden of possessions or memories the author uses the simile, "each joy is like manna in the desert, which spoils from one day to the next; or like water from the fountain of Ameles which Plato says no pitcher could preserve." The author uses this literary technique to explain Menalque's point that each moment and memory can come but it must also leave and take its vestiges with it so that the person experiencing them will be free and open to the next thing to come.

Part 2, Chapter 3

Part 2, Chapter 3 Summary

With the coming of spring Michel moves Marceline to La Moriniere in hopes that the fresh air will help her recovery. Marceline had enjoyed La Moriniere before and reminds Michel that he does have responsibilities related to the estate and the tenant farmers there. Marceline's health seems to be returning so Michel is able to leave her for his walks around the property to assess the current situation.

Michel becomes fascinated with watching the workers on the farms and finds himself lashing out at Bocage for firing one of the men to whom Michel finds particularly attractive. Under the guise of supervising the work Michel spends each day with the men so that he can gaze at them.

The simple lives of these peasants is also intriguing to Michel who even joins Bocage's other son, Alcide in poaching activities on La Moriniere. Michel is particularly pleased when the woods need clearing and the woodcutter sends six strong men including two of his own sons. Michel finds that he is no longer attracted to Charles like he was during the previous summer, as Charles seems to have become more noble and less like a peasant during his studies during the past year.

The farming life is so appealing to Michel that he stays away from the main house as much as possible and prefers the barn to his own bed. During this time Marceline's health turns for the worse and one night she does not come down to dinner. Answering Charles' inquiry about her condition Marceline responds that she is cold and should have put on something warmer before now and she looks at Michel's face and knows by his impassive stare that she is dispensable to her husband. Typical to his style of addressing problems Michel wants to travel and proposes the thought of returning to Italy and five days later the couple departs.

Part 2, Chapter 3 Analysis

Michel's homosexual tendencies are prevalent now and although he attempts to hide them Bocage is aware of his master's predilections and fires one of the men to which Michel is extremely attracted. Although it is not necessary to directly supervise the daily work Michel goes to where the men are each day just so that he can watch them work. Michel does not bother Alcide because the boy is ugly and is disappointed when Charles is no longer the simple peasant boy he had been just a year ago.

Michel does everything he can to avoid his marriage and when he realizes the dire state of Marceline's health Michel suggests travel knowing full well that the exertion will most certainly kill her. Marceline soon knows her fate and when Michel tells her that she should have put on something warmer she replies, "I should have put it on before I started shivering, not after." With this statement Marceline acknowledges that she

should have left Michel before now but is now resigned to her fate. Driven by his homosexual urges and the Menalque's words ringing in his ears Michel is on a course, which will ultimately destroy everything he once cherished.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

Michel tries in vain to love Marceline but feels that what she represents to him is rest for a man who is not tired. In spite of his waning affections Michel keeps vigil at Marceline's bedside during their travels through Italy, Switzerland, and ultimately North Africa, where they return to the hotel where Marceline nursed Michel through his bout of tuberculosis.

After Marceline falls asleep at night Michel roams the streets and encounters many of the boys who he knew from a few years ago but Michel is repulsed because the boys are now men with families, or criminal records, and no longer represent youth and health. The little Arab thief, Moktir who took the scissors that dayhas recently been released from prison and is the only one who has maintained his beauty and Michel is still drawn to him.

One night Moktir takes Michel to a Moorish cafy and then later a whore house where Michel spends most of the night and returns to the hotel in the early hours of the morning to find Marceline convulsing and coughing up blood. Although he could have summoned a doctor Michel does nothing and Marceline dies a few hours later.

As Michel finishes his story to his friends he tells them that Marceline is buried now at El Kantara near a private garden she used to like. Three months have passed and it seems like ten years to Michel. Michel's self-imposed liberation tortures him and he cannot decide on his next course of action and needs the help of his friends to leave this place.

Michel wants to start a new life but confides to his friends that he has become friendly with a boy named Ali who runs errands for him every day and has even spent time with the boy's sister who is a prostitute. Ali catches Michel in bed with the sister and refuses to come back to Michel for several days but ultimately Michel agrees not to see the sister and to invite Ali back to his bed alone. The sister thinks that Ali is what keeps Michel in Tunis and Michel thinks that she may be right.

Part 3 Analysis

Ironically Michel's ideal vision of freedom has imprisoned him with guilt and the inability to decide how to live his life now. Thinking that he wanted to be free of possessions and attachments including Marceline, Michel manages to rid himself of all vestiges of his former life and now is paralyzed by the lack of them.

Michel's behavior seems reprehensible in this day in age because freedom now could come as the result of divorce but in the late 1800's divorce was not an option for an unhappy marriage. It is not clear if Michel's friends will take him away from Tunis because he is enjoying life with Ali who is the real tie to the city now. The friends may be

powerless in Michel's drama and may have served just to hear his confession so that he may start another phase of his life having experienced his rebirth and subsequent baptism.

Characters

Alcide

Alcide is the youngest son of Bocage, the caretaker of Michel's estate at La Morinière. When Michel learns that Bocage has been poaching on the estate, he decides to join the young man in secretly poaching on his own land.

Ali

Ali is a little Arab boy whom Michel befriends during his second visit to Biskra. Ali introduces Michel to his sister, who is a prostitute. After Marceline dies, Michel sleeps with Ali's sister several times, but soon notices that Ali seems to get jealous of his sister. Michel thus decides to stop sleeping with the girl in order to maintain his relations with Ali. When Ali's sister teases Michel that he is more interested in Ali than in her, Michel reflects, "Perhaps she is not altogether wrong . . ."

Ali's Sister

Ali's sister is an Arab girl who works as a prostitute. On his second visit to Biskra, Michel befriends Ali, who introduces him to her. Michel sleeps with Ali's sister several times after his wife's death. However, Michel decides not to sleep with her anymore, in part because he is bored by her, and in part because he feels that Ali gets jealous of his attentions to the sister. After this, Ali's sister teases Michel that he prefers the little boy to her, and that Ali is the reason Michel continues to stay in Biskra. Michel confirms that she may be right about this.

Bachir

Bachir is a little Arab boy whom Michel and Marceline befriend during their first visit to Biskra. Bachir is the first of the boys whom Marceline brings home to Michel to cheer him up while he is recovering from tuberculosis. On their second visit to Biskra, Michel learns that Bachir has gotten a job as a dishwasher.

Bocage

Bocage is the caretaker of Michel's estate in Normandy. Michel finds Bocage irritating because of his incessant demands on Michel's attention in reporting to him about the managing of the estate. Michel eventually realizes that Bocage is not altogether honest in his running of the estate.

Charles

Charles is the seventeen-year-old son of Bocage, the caretaker of Michel's estate at La Morinière. Michel takes an immediate liking to Charles, and the two of them spend their days together riding horseback around the estate. When Michel and Marceline return to La Morinière a year later, Michel finds that Charles has changed, and he is no longer attracted to the young man.

Daniel

Daniel is one of the three friends Michel summons to visit him in North Africa after Marceline dies, so that he may confide in them by telling his story.

Denis

Denis is one of the three friends Michel summons to visit him in North Africa, so that he may confide in them by telling his story.

Marceline

Marceline is Michel's wife. She is twenty years old when she marries Michel. Although their families had been friends when they were growing up, Michel and Marceline do not really know each other. While they are traveling in North Africa on their honeymoon, Michel becomes gravely ill with tuberculosis, and Marceline is very attentive and caring in nursing him back to health. When he starts to feel better, she brings Bachir, a little Arab boy, back to their hotel to play, as a means of cheering Michel up during his recovery. While the couple eventually befriend a number of Arab boys, Marceline prefers the sickly and weaker children, while Michel prefers the strong and healthy ones.

After they return to France from their honeymoon, Marceline becomes ill with tuberculosis, which she contracted while nursing Michel. While they are staying at La Morinière, Marceline announces that she is pregnant. When they move to Paris, she becomes increasingly ill, soon losing the baby in a miscarriage. While she is still very sick, she and Michel take off again to travel in Switzerland, Italy, and North Africa. Michel insists that they are traveling to areas where the climate will help to improve her health, but Marceline grows increasingly ill as they travel. After they arrive in Biskra for the second time, Marceline dies.

Menalque

Menalque is an acquaintance of Michel's who shows up at one of his university lectures in Paris. He and Michel immediately strike up a friendship. Gide based the character of

Menalque on his friend Oscar Wilde, a well-known Irish playwright of the time. In *The Immoralist*, Michel mentions that there had recently been a public scandal and lawsuit regarding Menalque; this refers to a widely publicized trial in which Oscar Wilde was accused of homosexual relations with the son of a wealthy Englishman. In *The Immoralist*, Michel asserts that the lawsuit and scandal against Menalque were absurd and unfair. When he greets Menalque after his lecture, Michel makes a point of hugging him in front of everyone, demonstrating that he is not ashamed to be associated with him.

While in Paris, Michel and Menalque have several late-night conversations. Menalque tells Michel that he had traveled in North Africa, following the path that Michel and Marceline had taken on their honeymoon. Menalque explains that he had questioned many of the Arab boys they befriended in Biskra, and that he became intrigued by Michel's behavior there. One day, Menalque hands Michel the pair of scissors that had been stolen by the boy Moktir. Menalque tells Michel that he believes in following one's natural impulses, regardless of the judgments of society.

Michel

Michel is the narrator and central protagonist of *The Immoralist*. Michel's mother died when he was fifteen. His father, a scholar of ancient Greek and Roman culture, raised Michel to follow in his footsteps in devoting his life to scholarship. When Michel is 25, his father becomes gravely ill, and Michel marries Marceline, a young woman whom he hardly knows, in order to please his dying father. Michel and Marceline spend many months traveling in Italy and North Africa on their honeymoon. However, they sleep in separate bedrooms and their marriage is not consummated until two months after their wedding. During the course of their travels, Michel becomes gravely ill with tuberculosis, but recovers under the loving care of his wife.

As his health improves, Michel finds himself focusing on his physical body and sensual experiences for the first time in his life. He experiences this profound change in himself as a sort of rebirth, an emergence of his true, natural self that had previously been concealed from him. At the same time, Michel finds himself attracted to healthy young men and boys in North Africa as well as at home in France. Although Marceline has a miscarriage and becomes increasingly ill with tuberculosis, Michel convinces her to travel with him through Europe and back to North Africa. Soon after they return to Biskra, Algeria, where they had spent much of their honeymoon, Marceline dies. Finally freed from all obligations to others, Michel remains in Biskra for several months. He sleeps several times with a girl prostitute, but soon discovers that he prefers the company of her little brother, Ali. Torn between his natural homosexual inclinations and the traditional societal values with which he was raised, Michel finds himself in a state of personal crisis. He contacts his three closest friends from childhood, begging them to come to his home in North Africa. When the three friends arrive, Michel proceeds to recount to them the story of his experiences of personal transformation, and to express his feelings of distress about how to proceed with his life.

Moktir

Moktir is a little Arab boy whom Michel befriends during his first visit to Biskra. One day, Michel spies on Moktir as he steals a pair of sewing scissors belonging to Marceline. Michel is fascinated by this incident, and decides not to reprimand the boy or take the scissors back. Instead, he lies to his wife about how the scissors were lost. After this incident, Michel finds that Moktir is his favorite of the boys. Later, when Michel is back in Paris, his friend Menalque hands him this pair of scissors, which had been recovered from Moktir. When Michel and Marceline travel to Biskra the second time, Michel learns that Moktir has become a criminal and has recently been released from prison. One night, Moktir takes Michel to a prostitute; when Michel returns home from this encounter, he finds that his wife is dying.

Monsieur D. R.

Monsieur D. R. is the addressee of the letter written by an unnamed friend of Michel to his brother. This letter opens the novel and serves as the frame narrative of the central story.

Unnamed Friend

The Immoralist begins with a letter, addressed to a Monsieur D. R., written by one of the three friends whom Michel had summoned to North Africa in order to tell them his story. The unnamed author of the letter, addressing the recipient of the letter as "my dear brother," explains that he has written Michel's story down on paper, as it was narrated to the three friends, and included his transcription with the letter.

Themes

Homosexuality

The central theme of *The Immoralist* is the growing self-awareness of a repressed homosexual whose natural inclinations are at odds with societal conventions. Gide's narrative is based partly on his own experiences as a young man whose sexless marriage came into conflict with his homosexual tendencies. Written nearly a century ago, *The Immoralist* describes Michel's process of self-realization in subtle, veiled terms. There is no direct reference in the novel to homosexuality, but only indirect hints regarding Michel's physical attraction to adolescent boys and his general lack of interest in maintaining a sexual relationship with his wife. However, the closing lines of the novel are the most direct indication of Michel's homosexuality: Michel loses interest in a female prostitute, and indicates that he prefers the "odd caress" of the girl's brother Ali.

Self-Discovery

Michel's narrative describes a journey of self-discovery. Until his marriage, Michel had lead a very limited and sheltered life as a young scholar living under the wing of his father, who was also a scholar. Michel's honeymoon travels with his wife to North Africa, however, open up new vistas to him, and he becomes increasingly aware of his own body and of physical, sensual experiences. As time passes, Michel discovers the emergence of his true inner self, which had previously been repressed. With his increasing awareness of his true nature, Michel finds that he must present a false outer appearance to his wife. Michel's late-night discussion with Menalque encourages his conviction that it is more important to live according to one's natural desires than to stifle the true inner self in accordance with societal conventions. By the end of the novel, however, Michel finds that his journey of self-discovery has left him feeling confused and uncertain about his life. As he tells his friends, "Knowing how to free oneself is nothing; the difficult thing is knowing how to live with that freedom."

Mind versus Body

As a studious scholar, Michel before his marriage had lived a life of the mind. In North Africa, as he is recovering from tuberculosis, however, Michel becomes increasingly focused on the life of the body. His interest in his physical being begins when he sees the fresh and healthful bodies of the young Arab boys. This inspires him to devote himself to improving his own physical health through diet and exercise. As he recovers from his illness, Michel becomes increasingly aware of physical and sensual experiences. One day he goes off by himself in the wilderness and sunbathes nude, then dives into a mountain stream, thus acting upon his desire to engage in physical experiences and to celebrate his physical being. As an expression of his newfound sense of self, he decides to shave his beard and let his hair grow long, thus outwardly

demonstrating the profound change that has come over him. Michel's interest in physical health is also indicated by the fact that he finds himself drawn to the most healthy and attractive looking Arab boys, while his wife tends to prefer the sickly and homely looking children.

Life versus Death

Life and death are also central themes of *The Immoralist*. During the course of the novel, Michel and then his wife are brought to the brink of death. While on their honeymoon, Michel becomes gravely ill from tuberculosis. Although he eventually recovers his health, Marceline later becomes ill from tuberculosis, which she had contracted while nursing him through his illness. Marceline's illness causes her to have a miscarriage, and she herself soon dies. Michel, in recovering from sickness, discovers a new sense of physical health and passion for life. Michel is a scholar of ancient civilizations, and so has spent most of his life studying dead peoples and dead cultures. With his new love of life, Michel loses interest in studying a dead past. As his story progresses, he finds himself desiring more and more to experience life to its fullest extent. He describes his new appreciation for life as a process or rebirth. Ironically, though his baby dies before it is born, Michel experiences a feeling of rebirth in his own life. As his wife is dying, Michel finds himself embracing and celebrating life.

Style

Preface

The Immoralist was first published in 1902 without a preface. However, in later editions of the novel, Gide included a brief "Preface" in response to the reactions of readers and critics to certain aspects of his story. In this preface, Gide explains that many people have misunderstood *The Immoralist* and criticized it unfairly. He states that he has been blamed for not ending his story with a clear moral condemnation of Michel's behavior. However, Gide insists that it was not his intent to provide moral conclusions to his tale, but to pose a problem. He asserts that the problem represented in *The Immoralist* is one commonly experienced by many men of his day. He states, "I don't pretend to have invented this 'problem'□it existed before my book came along," and that, regardless of the fate of the character in the novel, "the 'problem' continues to exist." Finally, Gide notes, "I am not trying to prove anything, merely to paint my picture well and set it in a good light."

Frame Narrative and Point of View

The narrative structure and point of view of *The Immoralist* is somewhat complex. The novel begins with what is called a *frame narrative*, meaning a brief explanation of the context of the central narrative. Thus, the first two pages of *The Immoralist* are written in the form of a letter from an unnamed man to his brother, a Monsieur D. R., explaining that Michel summoned his three longtime friends□Denis, Daniel, and "I"□to travel to his hotel in Sidi, North Africa, on an urgent matter. The letter states that Michel told his story to these three friends one night while lounging on his terrace. The letter writer indicates that he has written down Michel's story as it was told to these friends, and that this transcript of the story is enclosed in the letter.

Within this *frame narrative*, the main body of *The Immoralist* is a first-person narrative from the point of view of Michel. Michel thus opens his story by addressing his three listeners as "My dear friends," informing them that he is at a point of crisis, and that he is going to tell them the story of his life. Michel explains that he no longer understands anything about life, and that he needs this opportunity to talk with loyal friends about what he has experienced. Thus, the remainder of the novel is narrated in the first-person "I" form; except at several points Michel again addresses his three listeners in the second-person "you" form, in commenting on his own story.

Psychological and Confessional Literature

The Immoralist is considered one of the greatest early psychological novels. A psychological novel is focused primarily on the internal life and development of the individual, stressing thoughts, emotions, and character over plot and external events. *The Immoralist* is also regarded as one of the great novels in the *confessional* mode. A

confessional novel is a first-person narrative in which an individual character, whether fictional or autobiographical, describes personal experiences expressive of some internal moral or psychological conflict or dilemma. Michel in *The Immoralist* "confesses" to a group of three close friends the intimate details of his psychological development as a young man, and the conflicts he experiences between the expectations of his marriage and his yearning for personal freedom.

The Récit

Gide referred to the novel form of *The Immoralist* a "récit," meaning a "narrative" or "account." A récit is a brief novel with an essentially simple narrative focus in which a first-person narrator explores deep psychological and social dilemmas through a personal reminiscence. Gide's short novel *La Porte etroite* (1909) *Straight is the Gate* is also regarded as a récit, as is the novel *La Chute* (1956; *The Fall*), by the French existentialist writer Albert Camus.

Historical Context

France: The Third Republic

The Immoralist takes place in France, Europe, and North Africa during the 1890s. Michel's family estate is located in Normandy, a province in northern France. While teaching as a professor, he lives with his wife in Paris. The French government at this time was in the era of the Third Republic, which began in 1871, adopting the Constitution of the Third Republic in 1875. France's colonial holdings increased during the era of the Third Republic, and by 1900 France was the second greatest colonial power in the world, after Great Britain. The Third Republic was dissolved with the invasion of France by Germany during World War II, and French colonial holdings were greatly reduced during the post—World War II era.

North Africa

Many of the important events in *The Immoralist* take place during Michel and Marceline's travels in the region of North Africa. North Africa encompasses the modern nations of Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Libya. This region is also sometimes referred to as the Maghrib, which in Arabic means "West." The Atlas Mountains in the north, the Sahara desert in the South, and coastal regions along the Mediterranean Sea characterize the terrain of North Africa. The inhabitants of North Africa are primarily Arabic Muslims, who were subjugated and dominated by French and other European colonial powers beginning in the 19th century. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, France invaded, conquered, and colonized much of North Africa. France conquered Algeria in 1830. Tunisia came under French control between 1881 and 1883. France did not conquer Morocco until 1912. Libya, which had been within the domain of the Ottoman Turks since 1835, was invaded and occupied by Italy in 1931. Thus, the events of *The Immoralist* are set in the French controlled areas of Algeria and Tunisia. Biskra, the city in which Michel befriends a number of Arab boys and makes important discoveries about his own nature, is located in northeastern Algeria.

The political and national conditions of North Africa have changed greatly since the 1890s. In the post—World War II era, French colonial control gave way to national sovereignty. Libya, which had come under Italian and then British control, was granted national independence in 1951. Tunisia and Morocco were granted sovereignty by the French government in 1956. France at this point hoped to maintain control of Algeria. However, Algerians wishing to attain the same national independence granted to their neighbors had begun a rebellion against French rule in 1954. Finally, in 1962, after eight years of civil war, France admitted defeat and granted national sovereignty to Algiers.

Tuberculosis

During the course of *The Immoralist*, both Michel and his wife Marceline suffer from tuberculosis. While Michel recovers from the disease, Marceline, who becomes infected while nursing him, eventually dies from it. Tuberculosis is an infectious disease that reached epidemic proportions during the nineteenth century. Tuberculosis affects the lungs, making breathing difficult. One of the most dramatic symptoms of tuberculosis is the coughing up of blood, which Michel in *The Immoralist* describes in graphic detail. During the nineteenth century, there was no known cure for tuberculosis, and lengthy bed-rest or staying in temperate climates was often recommended. The bacteria which causes tuberculosis, *bacillus Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, was identified in 1882 by the German physician Robert Koch. Beginning in the 1940s, antibacterial drugs that can effectively treat and cure tuberculosis first came into use. However, tuberculosis continues to be a widespread disease today, killing some three million people per year, many of them in developing or third world countries where sanitation and medical care are inadequate.

Critical Overview

The first printing of *The Immoralist* in 1902 consisted of 300 copies, of which the majority were circulated among Gide's friends and his intellectual circle. While it caused a small scandal among this limited readership, subsequent editions of the novel brought Gide increasing controversy. Many critics regarded Michel's narrative as a celebration of behavior which society in general deemed immoral. These early reviewers regarded Michel's behavior in terms of selfish "individualism," thus avoiding all reference to homosexuality. Nonetheless, Gide was widely criticized for endorsing Michel's behavior, rather than condemning it. Gide, however, defended his narrative in a "Preface" to later editions of the novel, asserting that, as an artist, his intent was not to judge his character, but to represent a set of experiences common to many men. In the latter half of the twentieth century, as homosexuality became a more acceptable subject of public discussion, critics came to view *The Immoralist* as the tale of a repressed homosexual struggling to come to terms with his sexual orientation in a societal context of late-Victorian values. Albert J. Guerard, in *André Gide* (1951), asserted that *The Immoralist* "is one of the first modern novels to deal at all seriously with homosexuality." Alan Sheridan, in an "Introduction" to a translation of *The Immoralist*, published in 2000, observed that Gide's novel:

. . . examines the case of a man with wife and child, means and career, a man caught up therefore in a complicated network of overlapping relations and responsibilities, who comes to see his whole life as a hypocritical sham and, in pursuit of his true, authentic, homosexual self, abandons everything.

Thomas Cordle, in *André Gide* (1993) similarly remarked, "The central strategy of *L'Immoraliste* is . . . the dissolution of the heterosexual relationship and its replacement by a homosexual one." Cordle added, "The essential action of the story is this protracted conversion from the normal, socially sponsored sexual relationship that is inimical to Michel's nature to the forbidden relationship that satisfied his native desires."

However, Cordle pointed out, "Michel never fully recognizes that he is a homosexual." In the late-twentieth-century, *The Immoralist* became identified with a larger body of gay and lesbian literature. In 1999, the *Advocate*, a national gay and lesbian news magazine, listed *The Immoralist* as fifth on a list of the "100 Best Lesbian and Gay Novels," while in 2000, the *Lambda Book Report* named *The Immoralist* among the "100 Best Lesbian and Gay Books of the 20th Century." Following a different line of literary criticism, postcolonial critics in the late twentieth century criticized *The Immoralist* as an expression of European colonial attitudes toward the cultures of the Middle East. These critics argued that Michel's sexual attraction to young Arab boys in colonial North Africa must be seen in a broader cultural, political, and historical context of European subjugation of Arabic peoples. Regardless of judgments of the cultural, social, and political implications of *The Immoralist*, most reviewers agreed that Gide's prose style in this narrative is admirably spare and elegant. *The Immoralist* is further regarded as an important work in the development of the psychological novel. Gide's

skillful use of first-person "confessional" narration has been widely praised for its subtlety and complexity.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Brent holds a Ph.D. in American Culture from the University of Michigan. She works as a freelance writer and editor. In the following essay, Brent discusses scents, odors, and smells in Gide's novel.

Michel's experience of personal rebirth in *The Immoralist* is characterized by an increased awareness of his physical being. His sense of touch, taste, and smell become heightened, and each new sensation represents a celebration of life. The more alive he feels, the more he seeks out sensual experiences. As he explains, "The only way I could pay attention to anything was through my five senses." Throughout *The Immoralist*, Gide uses sensual descriptions, particularly the sense of smell, as an important indication of Michel's growing self-awareness and lust for life.

Michel first experiences his sense of smell as a celebration of life while traveling in North Africa and Italy on his honeymoon. The first instance in which he mentions the sense of smell is while he and Marceline are in Biskra, Algeria. As Michel recovers from tuberculosis, he finds himself more and more focused on his physical health. When he becomes well enough to take walks in the park near their hotel, Michel experiences a new sense of life welling up within him. During one of these walks, he enters the park "with a sense of rapture."

> The air was luminous. The cassias, which flower long before they come into leaf, gave off a sweet scent□or perhaps it emanated from everywhere, the light, unfamiliar smell which seemed to enter into me by all my senses and filled me with a feeling of exaltation.

This first powerful sensual experience of his heightened sense of smell represents for Michel a sign of the new life emerging within him. "Was this finally the morning when I was to be reborn?" he asks.

With Michel greatly recovered from his illness, he and Marceline leave North Africa to travel through Italy. In each new location, Michel experiences new fragrances that further awaken his growing lust for life. He frequently describes his experience of the smells around him as intoxicating and rapturous. In Salerno, he walks among a grove of lemon trees in a state of dreamy intoxication. His experience of the lemons is described in lush detail, exulting in their look, taste, and smell.

> The fragrant lemons hang like thick drops of wax; in the shade they look greenish-white; they are within reach, and taste sweet, sharp, refreshing.

In Ravello, Michel becomes bolder and more adventurous in his new celebration of life through physical and sensual experience. He wanders in the woods by himself, enjoying his new physical strength, focusing on the aesthetic qualities of his own body. He finds a remote clearing in the woods where he sunbathes nude, experiencing the forces of life through the physical sensations of his skin. With the heat of the sun's rays, he states,

"my whole being surged up into my skin." One day, he dives naked into a clear mountain stream and comes back to shore to bath in the sun. To enhance this rejuvenating physical experience, Michel adds the smell of fresh mint.

"There was some wild mint growing there," he relates. "I picked some, crushed the sweet-smelling leaves between my fingers and rubbed them over my damp but burning body."

While traveling from Ravello to Sorrento, Michel again experiences his sense of smell as a celebration of his excitement about life. As he describes their journey:

"The roughness of the sun-warmed rocks, the rich, limpid air, the smells made me feel so alive. . . . 'Oh joy of the body!' I exclaimed to myself."

Upon returning home, Michel and his wife stay for the summer at La Morinière, their estate in northern France. While there, Michel spends most of his time out roaming in the fields and woods, where he experiences a whole new range of smells that further inspire him to pursue his natural desires. He describes with exaltation the smell of the sea air, the odor of wet leaves, and the fragrance emitting from the crops as well as the earth itself. During the apple harvest, he describes the rich fragrances filling the air: "A sickly sweet scent rose from the meadow and mingled with the smell of the ploughed earth."

Interestingly, while Michel and Marceline spend the winter in Paris, Michel makes no mention whatsoever of any smells, odors, or fragrances, whether good or bad. This represents Michel's feeling of sensory deprivation while in the city, where he finds the social atmosphere stifles his quest for natural, physical experiences. When they return to La Morinière the following spring, Michel once again celebrates his strong impressions of the smells of country life. During the hay harvesting season, he observes:

The air was full of pollen, of scents, and it went to my head like strong drink. It was as if I hadn't breathed for a year, or else had been breathing nothing but dust, so smoothly did the honey-sweet fill my lungs.

As he spends more and more time with young peasant men on the estate, Michel begins to associate his sense of smell with his attraction to these vigorous youths. He becomes fascinated with the earthy existence of the peasants, and intrigued by their secret lives. The young man who fills him in on local gossip tells Michel stories that "gave off vapours of the abyss; I inhaled them uneasily, feeling my head spin." Alcide, the young man whom he helps to poach on his land, sleeps in the barn, and Michel even enjoys the odor of Alcide's clothes, which "still bore the warm smell of poultry."

During Michel and Marceline's second trip through Europe and North Africa, Michel continues to associate his sense of smell with his love of life. He hates being in Switzerland, because he finds the people lacking in vitality. However, as they leave Switzerland to enter Italy, he becomes aware of the vigorous sense of life associated with Mediterranean culture. He comments that traveling from Switzerland to Italy, "was

like exchanging abstraction for life, and even though it was still winter, I thought I could smell scents everywhere."

As they continue their travels through Italy, Michel continues to delight in the rich scents of the land and people. In Naples, he is drawn by the scent of the orange blossoms to go out prowling the streets at night, for "the slightest breath of wind carried their scent." In Taormina, Michel is so charmed by a Sicilian coach driver, whom he describes as "resplendent, fragrant and delicious as a piece of fruit," that he spontaneously kisses the man. In the ports of Syracuse, Michel finds that he is enchanted even by the unpleasant odors of life on the docks, "The smell of sour wine, muddy backstreets, the stinking market frequented by dockers, tramps and drunken sailors."

While Michel associates a strong sense of smell with the love of life, he likewise associates those who are repulsed by smells with death and morbidity. During their stay in Florence, Marceline becomes increasingly ill while Michel finds himself more and more invigorated. One day, enchanted by their fragrance, he buys a huge bundle of almond blossoms to bring home to his wife. He excitedly arranges the flowers throughout their hotel room. But when Marceline returns and steps in the door, she is nauseated and upset by the odor of the flowers, "a faint, very faint, discreet smell of honey." It is as if even this subtle fragrance of life is overwhelming to the dying woman.

The Immoralist has been widely praised for its elegant and affecting prose. Gide's vivid descriptions of Michel's sensation of smells, odors, and fragrances are brilliantly expressive of his celebration of life through sensual experiences.

Source: Liz Brent, Critical Essay on *The Immoralist*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #2

Dupler is a writer and has taught college English courses. In this essay, Dupler discusses the moral quandaries in a novel that contains a quest for freedom.

The title of André Gide's novel, *The Immoralist*, refers to a protagonist who consciously experiments with his moral boundaries. In the beginning of the novel, this protagonist, named Michel, is prompted by a serious illness to find a new way of living. His strained efforts to get well lead him to loosen or discard the moral fabric which once enveloped him. By the end of the novel, Michel has so adopted a philosophy of personal freedom, and challenged his belief system, that he seems adrift in a sea of uncertainty and experiences an intense solitude that he calls an "empty liberty." During the story, Michel gains firsthand experience of sickness and health, love and marriage, and life and death. During these deep experiences, the protagonist struggles both for his own truths and to affirm his life amidst his solitude and his increasing amount of freedom.

From the beginning of the story, the conflict between individual and culture is hinted at; the question arises, "In what way might Michel be useful to the state?" As Michel begins telling the story of his life, in retrospect, he shows the point of uncertainty to which he has arrived when he states, "I no longer understand anything." The story Michel begins to tell is his personal quest for freedom, which includes freedom from accepted moral laws, and that quest has left him in a place where he acknowledges, "the difficult thing is knowing how to live with that freedom."

When describing himself at the beginning of the story, before changes have occurred to him, Michel portrays his life as normal to the point of being almost unnoticeable. He has been a man of placid emotions and calm passions. He marries Marceline because his father is dying, and he believes that the marriage will please his father during his last days. Michel states that he did not love his wife at the beginning, and instead of passion he felt "a tenderness, a sort of pity" for her. He is very aware of the intricacies of social convention when he notes that his wife was Catholic and that he is Protestant. Michel is a successful academic, although his work has been published under his father's name. When speaking of himself, he notes how "the early moral lessons of childhood . . . exert an influence," and mentions an "austerity" that he inherited from his "mother's indoctrination" and his "puritanical childhood." Michel points out that he has friends, but that he "loved friendship more than the friends themselves," revealing the mental abstraction that permeates his bookish life. Michel notes his "thrifty habits" and the "detached" quality of his life. In short, Michel describes himself as influenced by the cultural rules in which he is immersed, so much so that he remarks that, "It never occurred to me that I could lead a different life."

Michel's illness produces deep inner questioning in him. The illness takes him to the edge of life and death, where he has to affirm his desire to live. In the throes of sickness, he realizes a "wild, desperate drive towards existence." The illness is representative of how restricted and contracted his life has become, and his efforts to overcome the sickness become efforts also to find a new and more vital way of living.

Michel becomes so debilitated that he has to learn to do basic tasks again, and he feels a "thrill of discovering life afresh" as he makes slow steps toward recovery. During his recovery, Michel organizes his life in order to "concentrate solely" on his cure, and he "would identify as *good* only those things that were salutary," a new change in his moral system. Michel decides that survival is simply a "question of willpower," and he begins living his life in a way that enables him to exert his will over his situation. Michel is exiled from his homeland by illness and by choice. Leaving his culture behind during his convalescence frees him from cultural constraints, and he realizes that he must seize this freedom. In his new situation, he states that his "salvation depended on myself," while the new life he envisions will be "an exaltation of the senses and the flesh," quite different from his previous life.

Michel's illness forces him out of his dualism between mind and body; he claims he does not have the "strength to lead a dual life," and that he would "think about the life of the mind later," when he is better. He abandons intellectual activity and begins a willful and organized program to strengthen his body and overcome his illness. As his body heals, he experiences a transformation. Michel discovers a "newfound awareness" of his senses; he delights in the feeling of sunshine on his body and of taking cold plunges in water. The countryside of North Africa becomes beautiful to him, which he describes with poetic and graceful language. He cuts off his beard and allows his hair to grow longer to reveal his "new self," and his body becomes muscular and tanned. He becomes "no longer the pale, scholarly creature," but a person who is determined to allow a "voluptuous enjoyment" of himself and "of everything that seemed . . . divine." Michel also changes how he views his body, seeing it "no longer with shame" that he perhaps inherited from his culture, "but with joy." By the second part of the novel, Michel's belief system has changed in the way that he views his mind and body; before, the life of the mind had precedence, but his transformative illness forces him to prioritize the health of his physical body.

Michel, throughout the story, strongly attests to the transformation that the illness brings about. He emphasizes the change in himself when he states that, "Everything that was painful to me then is now a delight." When he returns to France, he is "constantly reminded" of the change that has occurred to him, and he states that he "had only just been born." He further abandons his old life when he declares he would prefer to adopt a "provisional mode" of living, and he begins to experience life as "nothing more" than the "passing moment." Michel becomes a more advanced immoralist when he begins to rebel intellectually against his old way of thinking. He claims, "I started to despise the learning," and he made efforts to "shake off these layers" that he had acquired from his culture. He comes to believe that underneath a "secondary" layer of himself, put there by culture, there is an "authentic being" that is primal and vital, and that by getting back to that more essential part of himself he can make his life more "harmonious, sensuous, [and] almost beautiful." His personal philosophy becomes one of both striving for perfection and ridding himself of cultural programming, and he states, "How could I be interested in myself other than as a perfectible being?"

The transformation affects other areas of Michel's belief system. In one instance, Marceline prays for Michel during Mass, to which Michel responds, "There is no need to

pray for me." He rejects an appeal to God because he claims he does not want any obligations, while Marceline refuses to believe that he can heal without divine help. In another scene, further delineating the change in Michel's moral system, he observes one of the children, with whom he has made a friendship, steal a pair of scissors from his room. Assuming the boy has no idea that he has been observed, Michel allows the incident to pass without comment or reproach. Instead, this boy, named Moktir, now becomes Michel's "favourite," and this incident becomes "a strange moment of self-revelation." The scissors also have an interesting symbolism; this incident, of tolerating and even admiring the act of stealing, represents a break, or a cutting away, of some of Michel's morals.

Michel also questions his love for his wife. He analyzes his love for her, and he tries to will himself to love her more. Love becomes an act of self-creation for Michel, when he makes a promise to force his love to "grow with my health." He shields his inner reality with his wife, stating, "it was important that she didn't interfere with my new self-awareness." He mentions how he has to lie to Marceline about his feelings for her, and that he began to "enjoy this dissimulation" at the same time their love "deepened," a strange contradiction but one that tests his "new, unknown faculties" of pushing his moral edge. At one point, Michel declares that his "veneration" for his wife grew in "inverse proportion to my self-respect."

Michel also tests his morals when he goes to his family farm and interacts with the farm workers. Michel finds out that one of them is poaching from him, and rather than stop the illegal act, he becomes interested in it, condones and assists it, and eventually even pays one of the perpetrators unknowingly. By transgressing long-held agreements and codes of conduct, Michel gets taken advantage of and the workers become exasperated with him. In the end, the farm becomes uninteresting to Michel, he becomes alienated from the people who had been close to him, and he flees as "everything was unraveling" around him.

In the end, Michel meets suffering and illness again as his wife's health deteriorates. He seems to play a disturbing part in her decline, pushing them to repeat the exhausting journey that Michel had made to overcome his own sickness. In his quest to find what "man is still capable of," he becomes driven by an "irresistible demon." His narrative contains contradictions that reinforce his sense of confusion toward the end. He asks, "how many . . . conflicting thoughts can coexist within a man?" and decries his "insufferable logic." Of his wealth, he "grew to hate this luxury and yet enjoy it." Of people, he states that "the worst instincts . . . seemed to me the most sincere." He keeps his distance from other people, claiming that "the very things that separated me . . . were what mattered." His loneliness is palpable when Marceline dies; he states, "I no longer know the dark god I revere." Michel acknowledges his predicament and confusion in the end, when he states that consistency in thinking is "what makes a real man." Instead of seeing the potential of the future, which he once proclaimed, he ends his story by remarking on the "intolerably long, dreary days" that lie ahead of him, as he has freed himself from both constraints and safety nets.

Source: Douglas Dupler, Critical Essay on *The Immoralist*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #3

Remy is a freelance writer in Pensacola, Florida. In the following essay, Remy examines Gide's use of natural imagery to mirror his protagonist's psychic state.

André Gide's *The Immoralist* is a novel of exploration and discovery, albeit within a psychic realm. Michel, an accomplished archaeologist and scholar, embarks upon a journey of self-exploration that is guided by his subconscious as much as it is by any willful decision to abandon the social mores that have imposed themselves upon him. As the novel progresses, Michel's spirit remains rebellious, unbridled, and this spirit gathers in intensity with each layer of his former self that he casts aside. Throughout *The Immoralist* Gide incorporates natural images that mirror Michel's psychic state, especially the process of psychic renewal that results from stripping away the patina of education, family relationships, and respectability that have provided Michel with a foundation and direction for his life.

For Michel, a man whose mentality is tied to his physical surroundings (a fact attested to by his incessant wandering), environment plays a key role in shaping his attitude toward life, and for this reason much of the imagery Gide uses to represent Michel's psychic state is associated with nature. Early in the novel, after a brief stay in Paris, Michel and Marceline journey to Michel's farm, La Morinière, near Lisieux, which is, according to Michel, "the shadiest, wettest countryside" he knows. The farm, which had formerly been the domain of Michel's father, who is now deceased, offers Michel an opportunity to put his imprimatur upon the family's history.

With the aid of Charles, the caretaker's son, Michel tours the farm, inspecting its pastures and orchards and formulating a plan for the future.

From this orderly abundance, from this happy subservience, from this smiling cultivation, a harmony was being wrought, no longer fortuitous but imposed, a rhythm, a beauty at once human and natural, in which one could no longer tell what was most admirable, so intimately united into a perfect understanding were the fecund explosion of free nature and man's skillful effort to order it.

This plan is nothing less than grand in design, but Michel, his "old turmoil" having been displaced by a feeling of serenity, must assess the amount of energy he will bring to the task of reshaping the farm. He must plumb the depths of his psyche and determine his ability to combat the forces of nature, much less the sense of family history associated with the farm, if he wishes to demonstrate a "disciplined intelligence" over the land and all it produces.

With a characteristic transition that fosters a strong connection in the novel between actions and the ideas that motivate them, Gide employs imagery that places his protagonist's psychic state in bold relief. For example, when Michel finds Bocage, the caretaker who has known him since he was a child, beside a pond that must be drained and cemented to repair a leak, Gide describes the scene with images that are laden

with symbolic meaning. According to Michel, the pond had not been drained in "fifteen years," thus indicating a certain neglect that has resulted from the inexorable progress of time as well as human indifference. The pond is full of "very large" carp and tench (another bottom feeder) that had "never left the deepest parts" of the containment. The fish, like Michel's memories of La Morinière, are firmly established and will not give way easily. "Occasionally a great shudder ran over the surface, and the brown backs of the disturbed fish appeared," says Michel as memories, like the denizens that have surfaced, rise from deep within his subconscious. Moreover, the fish represent Michel's desire to master the "powerful savagery" that exists within nature and within himself, for he wishes to control the land with that "disciplined intelligence."

By wading in and joining the farmhands and their children in an impromptu "fishing party," Michel physically immerses himself in the land he claims as his own. Water, long a symbol for the unconscious because of its translucent qualities and interminable depths, becomes a medium for exploration as Michel and Charles, with mud-splattered faces, wade into deep holes and attempt to catch a large, slippery eel, itself a symbol for Michel's nascent freedom once the eel emerges from the pond's murky depths into the light of day. Gide's choice of imagery and symbolism may lack subtlety, but they nevertheless bind the novel's ideas with actions that the reader can easily interpret.

Later in the novel, once Michel has returned to La Morinière after a series of journeys abroad with Marceline, who now lies gravely ill, Gide employs nature's stark contrasts to underscore Michel's growing frustration and impatience at the responsibilities he must uphold. Once again, Michel, lord of the manor, inspects his property in an effort to distract himself from what he calls his "disheveled life," only to find that the farm now exhibits laxity instead of the organization he had witnessed there before. Burdened by the constant demands that have been placed upon him, Michel seeks the ordered harmony a farm embodies as an ideal, a harmony arrested from the surrounding wilderness, as well as the organic hierarchy that exists within nature itself.

Instead of finding woodlands that have had their timber cut according to a long-standing agreement, one that leaves no doubt as to how the wood should be cut, divided, and sold, Michel discovers that Heurtevant, the contractor, has allowed trees felled in winter to occupy the lot well after spring, the traditional time for harvesting, so that the forest's new growth must overcome these obstructions if the forest is to revive and replenish itself.

Similarly, Michel feels trapped by the responsibilities he must bear, especially those that result from other people's negligence. Though Michel breaks with the past, he cannot assert his independence completely because obstacles remain in his path. The new Michel cannot emerge because the old Michel, the one who was encumbered by family obligations, stands in the way.

Gide's use of these natural images attains greater symbolic importance when one considers that Michel, in search of "the old Adam" within him□an entity who cannot be suppressed by family, education, nor by Michel himself□has decided to abandon the past. In removing the "encrustations" that have, in his view, prevented him from

becoming an "authentic being," Michel compares himself to a palimpsest, a piece of writing that, upon close examination, reveals previous drafts or texts underneath. Each layer builds upon the other to form a composite text, a complete entity. Michel understands that, in order for him to uncover his true self, the one that lies beneath the "text" his life has composed thus far, he must remove each outer layer of his being until he reaches the core. "In order to read it," he muses, extending this metaphor, "would I not have to erase, first, the more recent ones?"

When considered in light of Michel's self-image, Gide's use of imagery from nature mirrors the idea of a palimpsest, for layers of soil, water, and timber are removed to reveal a landscape that represents a new beginning; layers are uncovered so that others may push through. The pond is drained so that it may be repaired and replenished; like the formal education that Michel rejects, the dark, murky waters of the pond are drained away to reveal what is at the core: a primal, pristine state represented by the large fish that swim along the bottom. Similarly, the felled trees in the woods around La Morinière represent a thinning, or removing, of old growth so that new growth may emerge. Combining ideas with actions that resonate throughout the novel, Gide presents the reader with images that create visually Michel's process of psychic renovation.

More than one hundred years after its initial publication, *The Immoralist* remains a novel of startling ideas and confessions. Gide's use of strong visual imagery, particularly that found in nature, serves as a metaphor for Michel's transformation from aesthete to debauched and broken hedonist. Thus, by mirroring his protagonist's psychic state with images from the natural world around him, Gide marks Michel's existential journey indelibly for the reader with each page turned and each layer of being uncovered.

Source: David Remy, Critical Essay on *The Immoralist*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

The Immoralist was adapted as a play written by Ruth Goetz and Augustus Goetz, first staged on Broadway in 1954. This production starred James Dean as an Arab teenager, Louis Jordan as Michel, and Geraldine Page as Michel's wife Marceline.

Topics for Further Study

The region of North Africa includes the modern nations of Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Liberia. Research and report on the political, social, cultural, and economic conditions of one of these nations.

Although tuberculosis was more widespread during the 19th century than it is today, it continues to be a deadly disease in areas throughout the world. Find out more about the disease of tuberculosis as it impacts today's world. How prevalent is tuberculosis in your own nation? In what regions is it most prevalent and most deadly? What efforts are being made to prevent and cure tuberculosis today?

The Immoralist is the story of a repressed homosexual man in the late 19th century, struggling to make sense of his natural sexual tendencies. Societal attitudes toward and treatment of homosexuals has changed in the century since Gide's novel was first written. Write an essay describing the societal attitudes and legal status of homosexuals in your own society. What is your own opinion of the status of homosexuals in today's society?

The Immoralist is a short novel in which the narrator describes a process of discovering aspects of himself that he was not previously aware of. Thus, it is a story of self-discovery. Write your own short story, narrated in the first person, in which the protagonist describes a process of discovering some aspect of her or his personality that he or she was not previously aware of. Describe in what ways this process of self-discovery affects the narrator's approach to life and relationships with others.

Compare and Contrast

1890s: The French government is in the era of the Third Republic, under the Constitution of 1875. France is a parliamentary democracy with a president and prime minister. Voting privileges are extended to all adult men.

Today: The French government is in the era of the Fifth Republic, under the Constitution of 1956. France remains a parliamentary democracy with a president and prime minister. Voting privileges are extended to all adult men and women.

1890s: The region of North Africa includes colonial territories of several European nations. Algiers and Tunisia are French colonies, while Libya and Morocco are colonial holdings of the Ottoman Turkish empire.

Today: The former colonies of the North African region include the four sovereign nations of The Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria (Algeria), the Republic of Tunisia (Tunisia), the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (Libya), and the Kingdom of Morocco (Morocco). All of these nations are members of the League of Arab States, a multi-nation alliance of Middle Eastern countries sharing economic, political, and cultural interests.

1890s: France is a major colonial power, second in size only to Britain.

Today: In the post-colonial era, most former French colonial holdings have been granted national sovereignty. France is a member of the European Union, a multination alliance sharing many social, economic, and political interests.

What Do I Read Next?

Gide's short novel *La Porte étroite* (1909, *Strait is the Gate*) is written in the mode of the *récit*, which Gide identified as a narrative form conducive to expressing some of his central literary themes. The first part of *Strait is the Gate* is narrated by Jerome, who recounts his love for his cousin Alissa, her refusal to marry him, and her early death. The second part of this story consists of Alissa's diary, which Jerome discovers after her death, and which explains their complex relationship from her perspective.

Si le grain ne mert (1926, *If It Die . . .*), considered one of the great works of confessional literature, is Gide's autobiographical account of his life from birth to marriage.

Gide's novel *Les faux-monnayeurs* (1926, *The Counterfeiters*) is one of his best-known works. It concerns a group of boys prone to getting in trouble, and depicts the responses of their teachers and parents to their misbehavior.

La Chute (1956, *The Fall*), by French existentialist author Albert Camus, is regarded as a *récit* in the manner of Gide's *The Immoralist*. *The Fall* is a first-person narrative in which Jean Baptiste Clamence, a former lawyer, confesses his feelings of personal guilt to various sailors at a bar in Holland.

The Ballad of Reading Gaol (1898) is a long poem by Gide's friend Oscar Wilde, written while Wilde was imprisoned on charges of homosexuality. Wilde criticizes the inhumane conditions of the British prison system.

In the biography *André Gide: A Life in the Present* (1999) Alan Sheridan argues that Gide's works addresses many themes and social issues, still relevant today, including responsibility, freedom, morality, sensuality, spirituality, and homosexuality.

André Gide, (1993, updated ed.), by Thomas Cordle, provides a critical introduction to Gide's life and work. Cordle examines the influence of the literary movements of symbolism, romanticism, and socialist realism on Gide's writings.

Further Study

Ahmida, Ali Abdulolatif, ed., *Beyond Colonialism and Nationalism in the Maghrib: History, Culture, and Politics*, Palgrave, 2000.

Ahmida provides a collection of critical essays by various authors on the history, culture, and politics of North Africa and Egypt in the nineteenth century.

Barnes, David S., *The Making of a Social Disease: Tuberculosis in Nineteenth-Century France*, University of California Press, 1995.

Barnes offers a cultural, medical, and socioeconomic history of tuberculosis in France during the nineteenth century.

Benjamin, Roger, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism and French North Africa, 1880—1930*, University of California Press, 2003.

Benjamin discusses the influence of North African culture on French art during the period of the French colonial occupation.

Fryer, Jonathan, *André & Oscar: Gide, Wilde, and the Gay Art of Living*, Constable, 1997.

Fryer examines the friendship between André Gide and Oscar Wilde in terms of homosexual identity and lifestyles during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

Hayes, Jarrod, *Queer Nations: Marginal Sexualities in the Maghreb*, University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Hayes examines representations of homosexuality in North African literature.

Merrick, Jeffrey, and Bryant T. Ragan, Jr., eds., *Homosexuality in Modern France*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

Merrick and Ragan provide a collection of essays on the history of homosexuality in nineteenth- and twentieth-century France.

Walker, David, *André Gide*, Macmillan, 1990.

A critical analysis of narrative techniques in Gide's novels.

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Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535