

## Biography of Andre Gide

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This biography of Andre Gide was researched from various sites on the Internet, including Wikipedia, Nobel website, and others.

A 2000 biography by Alan Sheridan runs over 700 pages . It was criticized by some reviewers as being too detailed about his sexual life. Some excerpts from this biography were available on other web sites, and I have included some quotations in these biographical notes.

Andre Gide was born in Paris in 1869 into a middle class Protestant family. His father , a Paris University professor of law, died in 1880. His uncle was a political economist. His paternal family traced its roots to Italy. The Guidos moved to France and other northern European countries after converting to Protestantism during the 16th century. Gide was brought up in fairly isolated conditions in Normandy. Due to poor health, he was largely tutored at home.

He became a prolific writer at an early age, publishing his first novel, The Notebooks of Andre Walter, in 1891 at the age of 21. In 1893 , Gide travelled around North Africa, and it was there that he came to accept his homosexuality. He befriended Oscar Wilde in Paris, and in 1895, the 2 of them met in Algiers. Wilde did not introduce Gide to homosexuality, but he did introduce him to sex with young boys, the details of which Gide elaborated in his journal. In his journal, Gide distinguished between adult-attracted "sodomites" and boy-loving "pederasts", categorizing himself as the latter.

*"I call a pederast the man who, as the word indicates, falls in love with young boys. I call a sodomite...the man whose desire is addressed to mature men. The pederasts, of whom I am one ... are much rarer, and the sodomites much more numerous, than I first thought. ... That such loves can spring up, that such relationships can be formed, it is not enough for me to say that this is natural; I maintain that it is good; each of the two finds exaltation, protection, a challenge in them; and I wonder whether it is for the youth or the elder man that they are more profitable."*

Gide's novel, Corydon, which he considered his most important work, was a defense of pederasty, for which he received widespread condemnation. In a 2015 article in The New Southern Gentleman on Gide, the author stated, "Corydon is a brave attempt by a gay man to defend being gay. Given the time at which Gide published this work ... it is a work of extraordinary courage."

Gide's works were placed in the "Index of Forbidden Books" by the Roman Catholic Church in 1952.

In 1895, after his mother's death, he married his cousin Madeleine Rondeaux, but the marriage was unconsummated. In 1896, he became the youngest mayor of La Roque-Baignard, a commune in Normandy. In 1908, Gide helped found the literary magazine Nouvelle Revue Française. In 1916, when he was 47, Marc Allegret, 15 years old, became his lover. This young man was the son of his good friend and former tutor, who had also been the best man at his wedding.

Gide knew everyone in literary circles in France and many other European countries, and became an inspiration for writers such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. In 1923, he had daughter with Elisabeth van Rysselberghe, a woman much younger than him whom he had known for a long time, as she was the daughter of his closest female friend, Maria Monnom, who was the wife of his friend the Belgian painter Theo van Rysselberghe. This was possibly his only sexual liaison with a woman. His daughter Catherine is his only descendant.

In 1924, he published an autobiography called If it Die. (?)

Elisabeth, the mother of his daughter, eventually left her husband to move to Paris and manage the practical aspects of Gide's life. They had adjoining apartments built for each other. She worshipped him, but they no longer had a sexual relationship. His legal wife Madeleine died in 1938, and he later explored their relationship in his memoir Et Nunc Manet in Te.

In 1926-7, he traveled with Marc through the French colonies in Africa. He related these travels in a journal called Travels in the Congo and Return from Chad, in which he criticized French business interests in the Congo and their exploitation of the natives, which he compared to slavery. The book was influential on the anti-colonialism movement in France.

During the 1930's, he espoused communism, although he never joined the communist party. As a distinguished writer and communist sympathizer, he was invited to speak at Maxim Gorky's funeral and to tour the Soviet Union as a guest of the Soviet Union of Writers. This tour cured him of his love affair with communism and the USSR, which he subsequently denounced in his book Return from the USSR. In his 1949 anthology The God that Failed, Gide described his early enthusiasm for communism: *"My faith in communism is like my faith in religion: it is a promise of salvation for mankind. If I have to lay my life down that it may succeed, I would do so without hesitation."* Elsewhere in this same book, he wrote, *"It is impermissible under any circumstances for morals to sink as low as communism has done. No one can begin to imagine the tragedy of humanity, or morality, or religion, and of freedoms in the land of communism, where man has been debased beyond belief."*

In 1942, he went to Tunis where he lived until the end of WWII. He received the Nobel prize in literature in 1947 "for his comprehensive and artistically significant writings, in which human problems and conditions have been presented with a fearless love of truth and keen psychological insight." He was deeply moved and honored to have received this recognition and intended to travel to Stockholm to receive the award, but was too ill. His acceptance speech was read by the French ambassador to Sweden. He devoted much of his last years to publishing his journal, which ran 1300 pages. He died in Paris in February 1951.

Gide's surviving letters number in the thousands, but it is his Journal that his biographer, Alan Sheridan calls "the pre-eminently Gidean mode of expression," citing The Counterfeiters, where Edouard's journal provides an alternative voice to the narrator. When asked which of his books he would choose if only one were to survive, Gide replied, "I think it would be my Journal."

I close with some quotes from Gide's Journal:

*"The only drama that really interests me and that I should always be willing to depict anew, is the debate of the individual with whatever keeps him from being authentic, with whatever is opposed to his integrity, to his integration. Most often the obstacle is within him."*

*“It is better to be hated for what you are, than to be loved for what you are not.”*

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