THE ROLE AND TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN THE RÉCITS OF ANDRÉ GIDE

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Yvonne G. Weinhardt, B. A.
Denton, Texas
December, 1973
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION ............... 1
II. L'IMMORALISTE AND LA PORTE ETROITE .... 10
III. ISABELLE ................. 28
IV. LA SYMPHONIE PASTORALE .... 36
V. L'ECOLE DES FEMMES, ROBERT, AND GENEVIEVE .... 47
VI. CONCLUSION .............. 73

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................. 85
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Women influenced much of Gide's life. In studying Gide, one finds that his work cannot be separated from his life. The austere Protestant background of his youth, the childhood scenes, and family relationships are ever present in his works. Enid Starkie claims that "Gide bore in his character and personality the stigma of a man brought up exclusively by women."\(^1\) Having lost his father near the age of eleven, he was raised by his mother and her close friend and companion Anna Shackleton. After his father's death, his mother demanded the same submission of André which she had formerly shown toward her husband.\(^2\) Shortly after his mother's death, Gide married his cousin Madeleine Rondeaux; she provided the inspiration and the support which he needed to bolster his self-confidence. Germaine Brée remarks, "The austere faith of his mother and the warmer faith of his wife, the


two people who influenced him most deeply, suffused his whole life."\textsuperscript{3} It is only natural that reflections of these two women should appear in several early works, such as \textit{L'Immoraliste} and \textit{La Porte étroite}. Enid Starkie claims that "every facet of Gide's relationship with his wife is to be found somewhere in his work"\textsuperscript{4} written during the first two decades of this century. Since women played a role of such importance in Gide's life, it seems prudent to study the feminine characters which he created to inhabit his fiction.

Though Gide's homosexuality is well-documented, the theme of homosexuality plays a relatively minor role as it affects women in the récit. \textit{L'Immoraliste} and \textit{Geneviève} are the only ones in which the theme appears. Therefore, the reader will find little discussion of this subject \textit{per se} in this work.

This study will include only the récit, the art form which has come to be associated with André Gide. The récits include: \textit{L'Immoraliste} (1902), \textit{La Porte étroite} (1909), \textit{Isabelle} (1911), \textit{La Symphonie pastorale} (1919), \textit{L'Ecole des femmes} (1929), \textit{Robert} (1929), \textit{Geneviève} (1936), and \textit{Thésée} (1946).

\textsuperscript{4} Starkie, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 26.
Though Gide has written eight récits, Thésée, the last one, will not be included in this study. Since it is a Gidian manipulation of the ancient mythological legend, the women play a relatively minor role. Furthermore this tale does not relate to the evolution of women which may be observed throughout the other seven récits. Though Thésée does contain three women characters, and Ariadne, who helps Thésée escape from the labyrinth, does sacrifice her life for him, Gide has not invented this character, and thus she does not fit in the role of one of Gide's own creations.

These stories, incidentally, take place in locales which Gide knew well, such as North Africa, Italy, Normandy (La Roque-Baignard in L'Immoraliste and Cuverville-en-Caux in La Porte étroite), and finally the Jura Mountains of Switzerland in La Symphonie pastorale.

In its simplest meaning, the récit is defined as a "relation orale ou écrite (de faits vrais ou imaginaires)." Lagarde and Michard explain the récit as an "oeuvre relativement brève . . . un 'narrateur' rapporte les faits et les éclaire par un effort d'analyse intime ou 'sympathique.'" Germaine Brée sees it as "the mirroring

---

in a mind of a succession of events which take on meaning only through the awareness of the character, his manner of singling out facts and relating them to each other." 7

Finally, Whartenby states that "each récit records the narrator's experience without the author's direct intervention and therefore requires the reader to adopt at least temporarily the narrator's point of view." 8

Gide, interested in the inner conflicts of his characters, thus chooses the récit or first-person narrative as a means of psychoanalyzing his protagonists. Robert Browning and Dostoevsky had used the dramatic monologue, and Gide adapted the technique to his purposes. 9

His récits resemble a stream-of-consciousness novel as the narrator relates his problems or shortcomings and, at the same time, exposes those of the other characters. The form would seem to be ideally suited to Gide's intellectual interests and introspective nature.

In each of the récits the reader does become involved emotionally with the characters, as Whartenby said. Justin O'Brien notes, "Gide has regularly asked to be read with the most profound and sustained attention and even

7Brée, op. cit., p. 79.
9Ibid., p. 106.
stated that he wrote to be reread; consistently he has
called for the reader's collaboration."\(^{10}\) Thus, while the
récit is characterized by its seeming simplicity, both in
form and in content, it is only in rereading the tales
that one truly identifies with the characters and that
one discovers the depth and complexity which lie therein.

One might point out here that for Gide the characters
in his récits are of prime importance. They are far more
meaningful than plot or setting. First of all, he must
identify with them before the récit can evolve. He explains,
"as soon as I am inhabited by a character to whom 'my
noble poetic faculty' . . . obliges me to give life, I owe
myself to him and have no opinion of my own. I am with
him. I am him."\(^{11}\) Gide is able to relate thus to both his
male and female characters. Justin O'Brien further explains
Gide's preoccupation with his characters by commenting:

The writer of Gide's type often creates a character in
order to have someone say things of which he would be
incapable; but he would be utterly incapable of
creating the character at all if he did not contain
at least a germ of that character within himself.\(^{12}\)

Gide is at his best when he includes a bit of himself in
his creation. On occasion he creates a character to

---

\(^{10}\) O'Brien, op. cit., p. 107.

\(^{11}\) André Gide, The Journals of André Gide, translated
p. 107.

\(^{12}\) O'Brien, op. cit., p. 7.
personify a moral problem which concerns him; subsequently he searches a solution through the development of his character. Gide offers the following formula for a characterization:

How many buds we bear within us . . . which never flower in our books! They are "sleeping eyes," as the botanists call them. But if, out of determination, we get rid of them all, save one, how it grows then, how it swells! how quickly it monopolizes the sap! To create a hero, my recipe is a simple one: Take one of these buds, put it in a pot - all alone - and an admirable specimen soon results. A word of advice: preferably select (if it is true that you have a choice) the bud that bothers you most. You get rid of it at the same time. This may be what Aristotle called the purgation of the passions.\(^{13}\)

Having once created the character, Gide remains somewhat aloof from him, and lets him think for himself. Gide thus prefers the first-person narrative form or the diary, in which the author seems to remain in the wings.\(^{14}\)

Regarding critical commentary on Gide and his works, David Littlejohn states that "Gide had to wait until after World War II for the tribute of clear-headed critical insight,"\(^{15}\) and he calls the period between 1946-56, the *golden age*, as the "most thoughtful and fruitful in

---


\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 74.

the history of Gide criticism." In short, from the outset of Gide's career, many articles, as well as many books, have been written about him. Some of the best known critics of French literature today have written studies of Gide's life and works. Germaine Brée, for example, has given a panoramic view of his works in Gide, in addition to an excellent study in a chapter in The French Novel from Gide to Camus, which she wrote in collaboration with Margaret Guiton. Another, Enid Starkie, has written a short and very readable criticism of his works in André Gide. Also, Justin O'Brien, who translated the four volumes of Gide's Journals, has written Portrait of André Gide, a critical survey of his life, his ideas, and his art. Last, Jean Hytier, in his work André Gide, has written the criticism which would most nearly satisfy Gide himself. He treats Gide from the aesthetic point of view, which is how Gide felt his works should be judged. All these critics, as well as many others, have included women characters in their discussions, though none has chosen

16 Ibid., p. 6.


18 Leland H. Chambers, "Gide's Fictional Journals," Criticism, X (Fall, 1968), 302.
to limit his study exclusively to them. Much criticism has been written about Gide's first two récits, *L'Immoraliste* and *La Porte étroite*. The critics have written relatively little about *L'Ecole des femmes*, Robert, and Geneviève, undoubtedly judging them to be inferior to his early récits. For the purpose of this study, they will prove most interesting.

In none of the vast criticism of Gide, then, has there been a concentrated effort made to study the women as a whole and their role in Gide's works. In view of the feminine influence which surrounds his own life and in view of his preoccupation with creating characters, a study of the women should prove interesting and worthwhile in terms of understanding and appreciating Gide's fictional output.

In this study, therefore, an attempt will be made to analyze the treatment of women characters in the récits, which will be taken in chronological order. Since these récits cover a period of some thirty-five years, this approach should enable one to compare and contrast these women clearly. In other words, *L'Immoraliste* and *La Porte étroite*, which Gide himself insisted belonged together, will be studied first collectively.\(^{19}\)

---

Then, Isabelle and La Symphonie pastorale will follow, each to be taken separately. Finally, the trilogy that critics usually group together, L'Ecole des femmes, Robert, and Geneviève will be considered as one.

In analyzing the women of these stories and their treatment in terms of their similar and contrasting qualities, one will attempt to consider their role, both as women and as members of society. Their dominant traits of personality will be identified and their religious attitudes, always a significant question with Gide, will be discussed. In short, this study will try to present a more or less total picture of the Gidian women in the récits, considered as a unit.

In conclusion, one may add that it is hoped that this study, with its particular approach, will contribute to a better understanding of Gide's characterization of women and thereby add to the fund of critical and scholarly work on Gide.
CHAPTER II

L'IMMORALISTE AND LA PORTE ETROITE

Gide claimed in his Journal that La Porte Étroite was the twin to L'Immoraliste and that the two had grown concurrently in his mind.¹ Justin O'Brien also notes, "Really the two novels ought to be published under a single cover in order to be read together as two aspects of the same problem. Whereas the one exposes the dangers of individualism, the other reveals the pitfalls of renunciation."²

These first two récits have thus been placed in the same chapter. Since these two have received more attention from the critics than any others, this part of the study will contain more second-source material than subsequent ones.

Concerning L'Immoraliste, Gide's first récit, Enid Starkie succinctly states that it is "the story of a man who destroys his own and his wife's happiness through his egotistical conception of personal liberty."³ Michel, the

protagonist of the tale, marries his wife Marceline only to fulfill his dying father's wishes. It is at first a loveless marriage. Michel, having had no prior interest in women, hardly realizes that Marceline might have a personality of her own. He relates, "je m'étiais marié sans imaginer en ma femme autre chose qu'un camarade, sans songer bien précisément que, de notre union, ma vie pourrait être changée." Michel narrates the story of his marriage to three childhood friends whom he has summoned.

The role of Marceline remains often in the background, though she makes a marked impression upon the reader. Michel is the central figure in the récit, though Marceline's presence is necessary to enforce his role. Fowlie finds that "she is never absent from the story, although she rarely counts as a character in the full sense. Marceline is more a warning than a woman, more an effulgence than a personage." Gide uses very few words to describe Marceline physically; she is merely pretty, blond, and robust.

6 Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, pp. 374-75.
This latter quality will contrast with Michel's weakened condition during his illness, as well as with the gradual decline in Marceline's health toward the end of the tale.

In order to fully understand Marceline's role in contrast to that of her husband Michel, it is helpful to understand the philosophy of the author himself. Justin O'Brien, who knew Gide well, has stated clearly along these lines:

The relationship with oneself was precisely what he was treating in all the works of that period. During the first ten years of his literary career, in fact, André Gide grappled constantly and almost exclusively with that problem. Like all the young, he ardently desired to know his true nature . . . In January 1892 he reflected: "I am torn by a conflict between the rules of morality and the rules of sincerity. . . ." By the end of April of the following year, the new man in him was rebelling against his puritanical upbringing and he was praying to God to help burst his narrow ethic and let him live fully.

Thus, Michel becomes the fictional character who epitomizes Gide's internal struggle. In order to emphasize his dilemma and his gradual flight from Christian morality, Marceline is to become the antithesis of his character. She portrays the Christian way of life; Wilkins calls her the "perfect symbol of orthodox Christianity." Ames

7 O'Brien, op. cit., p. 168.
expresses a similar view, when he notes that, "If Marceline had been less lovely or less wronged, if there had been no affront in Michel's behavior, the grievous conflict between ingrained convictions and sharp departure from them might not have been sufficiently etched." Gide himself states in his preface to *L'Immoraliste* that he has purposely endowed Marceline with moral and religious virtues.

Marceline depicts then the good and virtuous wife, who devotes her time to caring for her husband. When Michel contracts tuberculosis, it is she who inspires him to live. She is the model of an affectionate and loving wife. Michel acknowledges, "Je sais que ses soins passionnés, que son amour seul, me sauvèrent."

This devotion sometimes overpowers her husband, as when he adds: "... j'étais gêné, par sa présence. Si je m'étais levé, elle m'aurait suivi; si j'avais enlevé mon châle, elle aurait voulu le porter; si je l'avais remis ensuite, elle aurait dit: 'Tu n'as pas froid?'."

Being a devout Catholic, Marceline sincerely believes her husband's recovery is due to her prayers, even though Michel denies this theory. The critic Ames notes that

---

11 Ibid., p. 380.
12 Ibid., p. 388.
"he [Michel] felt compelled to harden his heart against her, since she . . . appealed to the God who would condemn his pleasure-philosophy." 13 Her religiosity becomes a source of irritation to him.

As Michel continues to improve from his illness, he becomes aware of changes within his own personality; he enjoys being free to perform whatever acts should come to his fancy. He derives a sensuous pleasure in basking nude in the sunlight, an act which depicts the beginning of Michel's latent homosexuality. All his overt actions in the tale are heterosexual. A native boy's stealthy theft of Marceline's scissors is equally exciting to him.

In contrast to her husband and his restless spirit, Marceline represents a more stable view of life and society. Fowlie notes that, "If Michel portrays the classical male principle of change and quest, Marceline reenacts the female principle of duration and conservatism." 14 Michel, after shaving off his beard as a further gesture of his search for freedom, remarks "... elle m'aimait trop déjà pour me bien voir." 15 Marceline may have noted the change, but in a later conversation

13 Ames, op. cit., p. 53.
14 Fowlie, op. cit., p. 51.
15 Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 403.
she says, "Ne comprenez-vous pas que notre regard développe, exagère en chacun le point sur lequel il s'attache? et que nous le faisons devenir ce que nous prétendons qu'il est." This thought will often be found in the récits of Gide. Marceline is thus in love with her mental image of Michel, so that she does not at first see the change that is occurring in her husband. Commenting on love in Gide's works, James Grieve believes, "... the lover's first concern is to become worthy of the love and approval of the person he claims to love. ... lovers are obliged by their own need of love to pass themselves off for what they are not." 17

Both Marceline and Michel aspire to a happily married life when they learn of Marceline's pregnancy. These hopes are shattered when Marceline suffers a miscarriage. Even though Michel is away from home this night, his initial reaction is one of self-pity: "... devant moi n'était plus qu'un trou où je trébuchais tout entier." 18 As Grieve has noted, "one is hard put to it to find in Gide a lover who finds happiness in his love." 19

16 Ibid., p. 464.
18 Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 438.
19 Grieve, op. cit., p. 168.
Marceline's health begins to decline during her pregnancy. All her solicitude for her husband will now be repaid with increasing self-sacrifice and mental anguish. Her suffering will keep pace with her husband's path toward immorality. Michel seems unable to return to his former life, even though he does accept a professorship at the Collège de France. His Parisian friends bore him; while in the country, he prefers the immoral types among his farmers and woodsmen. Michel, though conscious of Marceline's distress, seems powerless to arrest it. He admits, "Qu'est-ce que je fais donc pour sa joie? Presque tout le jour et chaque jour je l'abandonne; elle attend tout de moi, et moi, je la délaisse! . . . ah! pauvre, pauvre Marceline!"20

Gide is thus using Marceline and her virtuous submission to show the effects of the strong against the weak, the egotistical individual in contrast to the self-sacrificing one, a situation which Gide has often observed in society.

Ironically Marceline is the next to contract tuberculosis when her husband's health returns and his desire for pleasure and adventure increase. Fowlie has noted that

"Michel's triumphant movement of ascent is in direct contrast with Marceline's slow descent into anonymity and death."\(^{21}\)

Selfishly and under the rationalization of aiding Marceline, Michel drags her back to the scene of his convalescence and his nascent immorality. Michel notices that "Marceline m'accueillait toujours de même sans un mot de reproche."\(^{22}\) Elsewhere he notes, "... ce qui la fatiguait plus, j'ose bien à présent me l'avouer, c'était la peur de ma pensée."\(^{23}\) Marceline confirms this when she implores, "... je comprends bien votre doctrine ... mais elle supprime les faibles."\(^{24}\) Marceline seems powerless to change her husband's ways. Thus she merely accepts her fate with quiet resignation.

One of the most moving scenes of this récit occurs near the end of the third part. Michel leaves Marceline and later spends the night with a young Arab boy and his mistress. Michel returns to find his wife completely helpless and in a deplorable condition:

Marceline est assise à demi sur son lit; un de ses maigres bras se cramponne aux barreaux du lit, la tient dressée; ses draps, ses mains, sa chemise, sont

\(^{21}\) Fowlie, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

\(^{22}\) Gide, *Romans, Récits et Soties*, p. 463.


inondés d'un flot de sang; son visage en est tout sali; ses yeux sont hideusement agrandis; et n'importe quel cri d'agonie m'épouventerait moins que son silence. . . . Elle voit que je veux parler: "Ne me dis rien, ajouta-t-elle; tout va bien."25

Though receiving no real comfort by his presence at the time of need, she retains her quality of virtuous self-sacrifice with no remonstrance toward her husband. Michel tries desperately to place Marceline's rosary in her hand, only to have it fall again to the floor.

The one sustaining factor in Marceline's life has always been her religion. Here, at the end of her life, it seems as though she has even lost her faith in this belief; thus she has neither the strength nor the desire to hold on to her rosary. This scene symbolizes her final disillusionment.

Enid Starkie believes that

Gide retraces the stresses and strains of his life with Madeleine. The hero Michel has the same paralysis of the will before his wife. He tries to escape from his bonds but can only do so by hurting, indeed eventually killing, Marceline. It is emotionally necessary for Gide that she should die, as she symbolizes all the restraints against which he had been chafing.26

Marceline, once young and healthy, has been destroyed as surely as the flowers in the passage in which Michel

25 Ibid., pp. 469-70.
26 Starkie, op. cit., p. 30.
says, "Sans rien dire, je saisis ces innocentes branches fragiles, les brise, les emporte, les jette, exaspéré, le sang aux yeux."27 Though this passage describes Michel's frustration when Marceline cannot tolerate the odor of the flowers which he has brought to her, this lovely metaphor seems to epitomize what in fact happens to Michel's innocent young wife.

Turning to La Porte étroite, published, as was stated earlier, in 1909, one may cite Enid Starkie who has reduced its plot to one line: "La Porte étroite tells the story of a girl who destroys her own happiness and that of the man she loves but never marries through a false conception of virtue."28

Since a portion of the récit is autobiographical, many readers and critics have believed Alissa to be Gide's wife, Madeleine.29 It is true that certain family situations are used, such as Madeleine's mother's behavior, his courtship of his wife, and his puritanical background.

During the three years in which he wrote La Porte étroite, Gide spent much time reading Pascal and the Jansenists, an activity which explains perhaps his

27 Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 461.
preoccupation with mysticism. Gide himself is experiencing and probing Alissa's mental turmoil and her obsession with sainthood. O'Brien notes:

Since all the interest in the novel concentrates on Alissa, leaving Jerome the shadowy rôle of narrator and flabby foil to her noble aspirations, Gide could pour into her all his own abnegation.

... the heroine of La Porte étroite personifies another of his latent possibilities. And in like manner Gide here carries that potentiality to the point of excess, thus purging himself of it...

According to his original theory of subjective objectivity, he had first to become the person he wanted to portray - that is, simply to isolate the latent mystic in him until he was Alissa, obsessed with sainthood and defining virtue as resistance to love.30

Even though Alissa has the principal role in this récit, it is fruitful to examine the characters of her mother Lucile Bucolin and her sister Juliette. They are both influential in Alissa's life.

Lucile, a sensuous and beautiful Creole, represents a striking contrast to the subdued Protestant background of the rest of the family. Never able to adapt to the customs of the family, Lucile abandons her husband and children to depart with a young lieutenant.

Alissa, having discovered her mother's infidelity, will always retain a fear of love. Jérôme, her cousin, according to his original theory of subjective objectivity, he had first to become the person he wanted to portray - that is, simply to isolate the latent mystic in him until he was Alissa, obsessed with sainthood and defining virtue as resistance to love.30

...
also shocked by Mme Bucolin's behavior, pledges his life to the protection of her daughter. After Lucile's disappearance, both children hear a sermon which will influence the rest of their lives. Its main text is:

Efforcez-vous d'entrer par la porte étroite, car la porte large et le chemin spacieux mènent à la perdition, et nombreux sont ceux qui y passent; mais étroite est la porte et resserrée la voie qui conduisent à la Vie, et il en est peu qui les trouvent. 31

Both young people, being extremely sensitive and having the same strict Puritan background which encourages restraint as a virtue, will now aspire to pass through the narrow gate to a more perfect life.

Alissa and Jérôme spend many hours reading the Bible and memorizing passages from it. Their relationship seems to develop because of their common religious faith. Jérôme often marks passages in books which he wishes Alissa to read. These works influence her to pursue her quest toward religious abnegation. Alissa, realizing what Jérôme expects of her, tries to pattern her life to his expectations. She thus strives to be the person she believes Jérôme loves and respects. Both Jérôme and Alissa love "... an unreal someone who no longer exists." 32 James Grieve believes that "love, for Gide,

31 Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 505.
32 Grieve, op. cit., p. 172.
is a reciprocal misunderstanding, a lie one pretends to believe, a truth one cannot face." \(^{33}\)

As one critic has observed in this story of frustrated love, "It is Jerome's consequent passiveness . . . that eventually obliges the equally inhibited but more passionate Alissa to find some other outlet for her deep capacity to love." \(^{34}\) Jérôme, by avoiding her and taking so much for granted, suggests to her that they can never have a normal life of love. Alissa has inherited her mother's weakness for passion, a trait which she constantly fights. Had Jérôme been more aggressive, Alissa would probably have succumbed. It seems that the sermon supports one when the other falters. Germaine Brée further notes, "Alissa's attempt to reach holiness is a desperate gamble to achieve by sheer force of will the happiness that eludes her in her relationship with Jerome." \(^{35}\)

Alissa postpones their marriage year after year with many intervening separations. She first sacrifices her love because she realizes that Juliette, her sister, is in love with Jérôme, though he seems totally oblivious to this love. Jérôme considers Juliette as a friend and a


confidant; referring to her, he says, "... sa beauté, près de la grâce de sa soeur, semblait extérieure et se livrer à tous d'un seul coup." 36 Juliette is more of an extrovert than Alissa. Her role in the tale is perhaps to contrast with or point up Alissa. Juliette gives the impression of living in the real world; she is able to accept disappointments, though she is quite capable of making sacrifices, too. She agrees to marry Edouard Teissièrës, whom she has formerly ridiculed. The reader both pities and admires Juliette. B. Duchatelet observes, "Tandis que Jérôme et Alissa s'efforcent de passer par la 'porte étroite' Juliette a choisi la 'porte large' ... elle refuse la porte étroite et décide de partir, ouvrant toute grande la porte au bonheur." 37

Alissa next sacrifices her love of Jérôme to remain at her father's side. After his death there seems to be no reason why the two of them cannot be married; however Alissa still seems to flee reality.

By now Alissa has chosen Pascal and the Jansenists for her exclusive reading. Here "... she found a passive devotional contemplation congenial to her own spirit." 38

---

36 Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 502.
Alissa's diary is the crowning point of the récit. One critic states that Gide believes this to be the best piece of literature he has written.\(^{39}\) It is in the diary that one sees the conflict Alissa has endured between the passion which she has inherited from her Creole mother and the puritanical solace which she has provided for so many, like her sister, her father, and finally Jérôme. Her incessant struggle with the illusory idea of virtue is apparent.

Alissa begins her diary on her first trip to visit Juliette after the latter's marriage. For the first time in her life Alissa feels alone. She explains the purpose of her diary by noting, "Ce cahier doit m'aider à reobtenir en moi le bonheur."\(^{40}\)

It is only in her diary that Alissa can express her true feelings for Jérôme. She comes close to losing her self-possession in the following passage in which she is moved by Jérôme's physical presence. She is very conscious of the warmth and the tremor ("frémissement") of his body close to hers:

Jérôme lisait par-dessus mon épaule, debout, appuyé contre mon fauteuil, penché sur moi. Je ne pouvais le voir mais sentais son haleine et comme la chaleur et le frémissement de son corps. Je feignais de continuer ma lecture, mais je ne comprenais plus; je ne


\(^{40}\) *Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties*, p. 583.
Alissa believes Jérôme's love for her to be "... un amour de tête, un bel entêtement intellectuel de tendresse et de fidélité." Believing that Jérôme and she can never attain a life together on this earth, she determines to remove herself as a barrier between Jérôme and God. This is her supreme sacrifice; as she explains to Jérôme, "Mais, mon ami, la sainteté n'est pas un choix: c'est une OBLIGATION."

Only after her death does Jérôme realize to what extent Alissa loved him, that she would have succumbed had he been more aggressive. She selflessly notes in her diary:

entre Dieu et lui, il n'est pas d'autre obstacle que moi-même. Si... son amour pour moi l'inclina vers Dieu tout d'abord, à présent cet amour l'empêche; il s'attarde à moi, me préfère, et je deviens l'idole qui le retient de s'avancer plus loin dans la vertu. Il faut que l'un de nous deux y parvienne... permettez-moi, mon Dieu, accordez-moi la force de lui apprendre à ne m'aimer plus.

Whereupon Alissa consciously tries to make herself plain and uninteresting, to the point of removing her

---

41 Ibid., pp. 585-86.
42 Ibid., p. 559.
43 Ibid., p. 565.
44 Ibid., pp. 586-87.
piano and her wonderful collection of books. Jérôme, who rarely describes Alissa, is so startled by her appearance that he remarks, "... une nouvelle façon de coiffure, plate et tirée, durcit les traits de son visage ... un malséant corsage, de couleur morne, d'étouffe laide au toucher."\textsuperscript{45}

The last meeting of Jérôme and Alissa at the little gate in the garden wall is particularly poignant. During this visit she offers him the amethyst cross, a maternal heirloom which Jérôme had previously given to her, as a memento of their love; she asks him to give it to the daughter whom she hopes he will have someday. She then passes through the narrow gate alone. As Alissa had said once before, "C'est tout seul que chacun de nous doit gagner Dieu."\textsuperscript{46}

Alissa's choice has brought anguish to both Jérôme and to herself. O'Brien observes:

No matter how sympathetically and eloquently Gide presents Alissa's intense mysticism, he also makes clear how empty and useless it is. Besides thwarting Jérôme without his complete consent, it even fails to bring her satisfaction, and she dies miserably alone, abandoned even of God.\textsuperscript{47}

Though Marceline, Juliette, and Alissa have distinctive personalities, they also have certain traits in

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., p. 567.  \textsuperscript{46}Ibid., p. 510.  \textsuperscript{47}O'Brien, op. cit., p. 218.
common. They all portray a capacity for love, a sensitivity to others, an awareness of their duty, and the willingness to sacrifice themselves for others. At this stage of his writing Gide places woman in the role of providing the stability and virtue necessary to the family, a reflection perhaps of his own attitude toward his wife, Madeleine. Since Gide was a creature of dialogue and contradiction, and was always alert to new ideas, one may anticipate woman's role to be modified as the years pass.
CHAPTER III

ISABELLE

The récit Isabelle is quite different from L'Immoraliste and La Porte étroite. Whereas the first two contain certain autobiographical influences, Isabelle is, as Enid Starkie says, "... the least personal of all his works and contains nothing of himself or of anyone closely connected with him."¹

The locale is an estate in Normandy situated near Gide's own property. The abandoned estate has its own secret which Gide embellishes in his récit. Isabelle relates the story of "... family discord, a daughter who squandered family revenues, a child abandoned to servants, the estate burdened with debt, the ruin and final disintegration of a once-prosperous landed family."²

Gide chooses Gérard Lacase, a young doctoral candidate and would-be writer, to be the narrator of his récit. Gérard had visited the estate and its inhabitants in search of material for his dissertation. He recounts

¹Enid Starkie, André Gide (New Haven, 1954), p. 32.
his recollections of this visit to Gide and his friend Francis Jammes, the poet.

The reader may be reminded that a more detailed summary than usual of the récit will be included here as it is not as well known as Gide's first two, nor has there been anywhere near as much criticism written about it.

In studying the women of this récit, one encounters very briefly secondary characters prior to the appearance of Isabelle, the young girl from whom the récit receives its title. Upon arriving at the threshold of the château, for example, Gérard encounters Mademoiselle Verdure, ". . . une femme sans âge, sans grâce, épaisse et médiocrement vêtue." Though only the housekeeper of the estate, she has already received as much description as Jérôme gives the reader of Alissa. The following morning at breakfast, Gérard meets a delightful, elderly lady by the name of Mme Floche. She is the wife of the man who will help Gérard with his research. Gérard humorously describes her small stature with her head slightly askew upon her shoulders:

Mme Floche s'était levée de sa chaise, mais ne paraissait pas plus grande debout qu'assise . . . elle avait dû recevoir à un certain âge quelque

3André Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties (Paris, 1958), pp. 605-06.
formidable événement sur la tête; celle-ci en était restée irrémédiablement enfoncee entre les épaules; et même un peu de travers.\textsuperscript{4}

Mme Floche is a very sympathetic person, who immediately captures the reader's attention. She lives at the Quartfourche estate with her husband, her sister and brother-in-law, the baroness and the baron of Saint-Auréol, a crippled boy, Casimir, and Monsieur l'abbé, who instructs Casimir. It is soon apparent that it is Mme Floche who loves and takes an interest in little Casimir.

In fact, the baroness, who is the real grandmother of the child, pays little attention to him. She is an imposing figure, who is very much impressed with her title. Upon meeting the baron and the baroness, Gérard reacts as follows: "... au Muséum on les eût mis sous vitrine l'un contre l'autre sans hésiter; près des 'espèces disparues.'\textsuperscript{5}

Almost half the tale has passed before Gérard and the reader learn of the existence of Isabelle. Accordingly, various critics admonished Gide at the time of the publication of Isabelle for having treated the character for whom the récit was entitled too briefly; they also felt that he had withheld her entry into the récit too long.

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., p. 610. \textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p. 617.
Gide retaliated that he had thought of a prior title, 
*L'Illusion pathétique*, which he should have perhaps added 
as a subtitle, so that the reader might realize that the 
true subject of the récit is Gérard's deception when 
reality returns to replace his illusion. This point will 
be further clarified with Isabelle's appearance.

Gérard learns of the existence of Isabelle through 
Casimir, the crippled boy. When the lad shows him a mini-
ture of his mother, Gérard is captivated by her beauty. As 
the miniature is described, Isabelle receives more descrip-
tion than do either Marceline in *L'Immoraliste* or Alissa, 
in *La Porte étroite*:

> la jeune femme que j'avais devant moi et dont je ne 
> voyais que le profil, une tempe à demi cachée par une 
> lourde boucle noire, un oeil languide et tristement 
> rêveur, la bouche entrouverte et comme soupirante, 
> le col fragile autant qu'une tige de fleur, cette 
> femme était de la plus troublante, de la plus 
> angélique beauté.

Gide has at once aroused both Gérard's and the reader's 
curiosity, as Isabelle's spirit, not her physical presence, 
in spite of this description, seems to pervade the atmos-
phere of the old mansion.

---

6 Yvonne Davet, *Notice*, in Gide, *Romans, Récits et 
Soties*, p. 1561.

7 Gide, *Romans, Récits et Soties*, p. 632.
It is readily apparent that Gide uses much more description in this récit than elsewhere. In utilizing this form of narrative, Gide permits the narrator to adapt a personal style of writing to fit his personality. It is part of his theory of subjective objectivity in which "... he [Gide] had first to become the person he wanted to portray." Thus Gérard, a budding writer, dwells longer on descriptive passages, in the traditional manner of Balzac.

An interesting point to note about Gide's treatment of Isabelle is his preoccupation with color in her descriptions. For instance, in the first scene in which she appears in real life, she is attired in black, with the exception of a brilliant green ribbon at her neck. In the final scene, she will again have her green ribbon. Also, Lucile Bucolin chooses a red shawl to drape around her shoulders in *La Porte Étroite*. It would seem that brilliant colors connote women of questionable character, whereas, when Gérard visualizes Isabelle as the epitome of virtue, she is always attired in white.

What then is Isabelle's role in this tale? It is she who provides mystery and relevancy. Gérard, ensnared and

---

intrigued by the discovery of Isabelle, cannot leave the estate until he unravels her mystery. Being of a romantic nature, he creates a personality in his imagination to correspond with the face which he has seen in the medallion. Through his wishful thinking "... as though he shared Balzac's belief that moral qualities can model bone-structure, he [Gérard] has read into the beauty of a face the beauty of a soul."  

The reader will remember that Isabelle had planned to elope; however, losing courage, she sent Gratien, the family caretaker, to intercept her lover. Gratien killed the young man. Later Isabelle gave birth to Casimir.

Isabelle actually only appears in three scenes of the récit: once in the imagination of Gérard, and twice in reality. Gérard dreams that Isabelle is present in the family drawing room after dinner; suddenly he is shocked to discover that it is only a wax reproduction of Isabelle placed there in her absence. She is attired in white in contrast to the others who are in somber attire.

The climax of the récit occurs when Isabelle arrives for a nocturnal visit; Gérard observes this scene through an opening above the door. Gide cleverly places Isabelle's back toward him to increase the anticipation of seeing her.

---

Seeing Isabelle on her knees before Mme Floche, Gérard remarks, "... elle était d'une beauté très différente, plus terrestre et comme humanisée." With the sudden, dramatic entrance of the baroness of Saint-Auréol, Gérard is struck with the artificiality of both mother and daughter, in contrast to the disarming naturalness of Mme Floche:

J'étais comme au spectacle. Mais puisqu'elles ne se savaient pas observées, pour qui ces deux marionnettes jouaient-elles la tragédie? Les attitudes et les gestes de la fille me paraissaient aussi exagérés, aussi faux que ceux de la mère.

For Gérard to perceive his illusion, it is necessary for him to encounter the real Isabelle face to face. This scene occurs in the garden which Gide has chosen to accentuate the doom of the former proud estate, as one hears the woodsmen cutting down the grand old trees to salvage funds for a greedy Isabelle.

Isabelle's personality contrasts strikingly with that of Alissa. As George Painter has noted, "Through once refusing to give way to her temptation, Isabelle lost her only chance of virtue." Isabelle, in this respect, emerges as an indecisive, selfish, cunning person who is

---

10 Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 654.
11 Ibid., p. 656.
12 George D. Painter, André Gide (New York, 1951), p. 94.
herself unable to face reality, as proven by her recounting of the night in which her lover was killed. On the other hand, she reminds one of Marceline and Alissa in the sense that she sacrifices herself by leaving home in order to protect the reputation of her family. It is ironic how quickly the families of both Isabelle and her lover wish to suppress the scandal. Isabelle, incidentally, like other of Gide's women characters, has an appreciation of music and poetry, a characteristic that might indicate a sympathetic nature.

It is interesting to conjecture what Isabelle might have been like had she received more sympathy from her family or been born in another era. She might not have had to grovel for money nor lead a life of immorality. Later the reader will encounter a feminine character in another récit who actually proposes having a child out of wedlock.

Isabelle's role in this récit is to act as a foil to Gérard's romanticism, in the same manner in which Marceline's Christian morality emphasized her husband's immorality.

Woman's role in society and the possibilities other than the traditional role of wife and mother will continue to interest Gide as his later récits will indicate.

---

CHAPTER IV

LA SYMPHONIE PASTORALE

The reader will recall that the narrator of this récit is a Protestant minister who relates in a diary his experience with a blind girl whom he discovers in a household where he has been summoned for a pastoral call. His preoccupation with her education and development provides the nucleus of external interest of this tale. Gide places two strong female characters in this story, each of whom is interesting and unique. One is Gertrude, a blind girl, whose metamorphosis is of paramount importance to the story; the other is Amélie, the pastor's wife.

Gide first describes Gertrude as merely a living lump of humanity "... accroupi dans l'âtre, un être incertain, qui paraissait endormi; l'épaisse masse de ses cheveux cachait presque complètement son visage."1 Having found this strange creature, the pastor feels compelled by God to assume the responsibility for her protection. "Ce paquet de chair sans âme"2 scarcely resembles a human,

2Ibid., p. 880.
let alone a feminine being. "Ses cris n'avaient rien d'humain; on eût dit les jappements plaintifs d'un petit chien." By describing her as such a listless, unattractive being, Gide can thus make Gertrude's transformation strikingly similar to that of a butterfly which emerges from the chrysalis of an unattractive caterpillar.

Gertrude, whose previous world was limited to a somber life with an elderly, deaf woman, must now adjust to life in the midst of a family. The pastor, encouraged by his friend, Doctor Martins, assumes the task of bringing her out of her world of darkness. One may recall that at first she reacts only with indifference and hostility. Receiving no encouragement from her family, the pastor persists in his efforts and is finally rewarded by Gertrude's first smile of comprehension.

Possessing an avid curiosity and a vivid imagination, she progresses at a rate far beyond the expectations of her guide, the pastor. Gertrude demonstrates perseverance by learning all that she can: "Tant qu'elle ne s'en était point fait une idée nette, chaque notion demeurait pour elle une cause d'inquiétude et de gêne." Gertrude is able to perceive many feelings through her intuition.

\[3\text{Ibid., p. 881.}\]

\[4\text{Ibid., p. 894.}\]
She comments, "... est-ce que cela ne se voit pas sur le visage, quand ce que l'on dit n'est pas vrai? Moi, je le reconnais si bien à la voix." Her eyes will later confirm many of her early mental perceptions.

Another outstanding characteristic of Gertrude is her basic honesty. She often startles the pastor with her uninhibited questions and her abrupt comments, such as her disarming remark: "Est-ce que je suis jolie?" Later she surprises him by announcing: "Vous savez bien que c'est vous que j'aime, Pasteur." In another conversation she declares, "... vous n'avez pas le droit de me laisser ignorer."

Gertrude manifests the same love of nature which the reader has observed in both Marceline, as she takes walks under the palm trees of North Africa in *L'Immoraliste*, and Alissa, as she examines the foliage on her first visit to Nîmes in *La Porte étroite*. Gertrude is able to describe scenery which she has never seen other than through the pastor's descriptions or through her own imagination. The following passage contains a lovely metaphor which compares the prairies to an open book spread forth upon the

---

5 Ibid., p. 895.  
6 Ibid., p. 896.  
7 Ibid., p. 911.  
8 Ibid., pp. 921-22.
mountain's desk. The reader may also note her detailed description of pine branches which resist the forces of the wind. These branches are even described as "horizontales" in the memorable phrase "longues sombres branches horizontales qui se plaignent" which follows:

Il y a derrière nous, au-dessus et autour de nous, les grands sapins, au goût de résine, au tronc grenat, aux longues sombres branches horizontales qui se plaignent lorsque veut les courber le vent. À nos pieds, comme un livre ouvert, incliné sur le pupitre de la montagne, la grande prairie verte et diaprée, que bleuit l'ombre, que dore le soleil, et dont les mots distincts sont des fleurs . . . Au bas du livre, je vois un grand fleuve de lait fumeux, brumeux, couvrant tout un abîme de mystère, un fleuve immense, sans autre rive que, là-bas, tout au loin devant nous, les belles Alpes éblouissantes.⁹

All such passages undoubtedly reflect the author's love of nature, which he relives through his creatures.

In addition to nature, music adds much enjoyment to Gertrude's daily life. Her interest begins at a concert at Neuchâtel to which the pastor takes her to broaden her horizons. The orchestra's rendition of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony provides Gide with his title, La Symphonie pastorale. The pastor also introduces Gertrude to the harmonium in the church, where she passes many hours picking out chords and melodies. Ironically it is at the harmonium that the pastor will discover his son attentively

⁹Ibid., p. 910.
guiding Gertrude's fingers across the keyboard. The reader will see that the motif of music will appear in the récit significantly in relation to the women characters; more will be said about this theme as the study develops.

With all of her progress and knowledge of her surroundings, there is something artificial about Gertrude's life. The pastor carefully selects her reading material from the Gospels in order to shield her from any mention of sin and evil. Vinio Rossi pinpoints this thought by remarking, "Gertrude's education makes her, in effect, a creature living in an illusory world of goodness, beauty, and eternal happiness."\(^{10}\) Gertrude herself will later feel this void in her life when she states to the pastor, ". . . tout le bonheur que je vous dois me paraît reposer sur de l'ignorance."\(^{11}\) Gertrude, possessing, as was stated above, a straightforward personality, further expresses her anxieties: "J'ai longtemps réfléchi durant ces mois d'hiver; je crains, voyez-vous, que le monde entier ne soit pas si beau que vous me l'avez fait croire, Pasteur."\(^{12}\)

While blind, Gertrude can perceive only the good in the world, but once her sight is restored, she becomes

---


\(^{11}\) Gide, *Romans, Récits et Soties*, p. 921.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p. 922.
aware of the evil. It is the pastor's son Jacques who, during her convalescence, exposes her to the writings of Saint Paul. According to Justin O'Brien, Gide wishes to show that

spiritual blindness is so much more dangerous than the physical blindness. Subtly yet emphatically by repetition, he established a parallel between Gertrude's actual blindness, her state of innocence, and the Gospels on the one hand, and, on the other, lucidity, the state of sin, and the Epistles. 13

Gertrude's demise, though tragic, is at the same time noble. She proves herself to be far more sensitive to the feelings of others than the pastor. Having recovered her sight, she perceives the grief on Amélie's face and, realizing the pain she has caused her by inadvertently monopolizing her husband's love, she chooses to end her life.

Once again one may perceive self-sacrifice on the part of a woman. Gertrude's life ends futilely as did that of both Marceline and Alissa. She also resembles them in that she "constructs an imaginary person to fall in love with.... Gertrude, knowing only the pastor's voice, fingers and lips, creates the man she thinks she loves." 14


realizes that it is Jacques, the pastor's son, whom she really loves. However, hypocritically leaning on his own conscience, the pastor prevents this love from ever becoming a reality.

Amélie, in her role of wife and mother, provides a contrast to Gertrude. She is rational, self-disciplined, unimaginative, and hardworking in contrast to Gertrude who is imaginative, curious, lighthearted, and innocent. The reader must recall that everything in the récit is seen through the eyes of the pastor, who introduces his wife into the récit by sarcastically stating, "Ma femme est un jardin de vertus; et même dans les moments difficiles qu'il nous est arrivé parfois de traverser, je n'ai pu douter un instant de la qualité de son coeur." He ironically adds, "Sa charité même est réglée comme si l'amour était un trésor épuisable." In this récit there is very little description of the physical appearance of the women. Once again Gide has adapted the style of writing to the narrator. The pastor explains, "Un pasteur n'a pas à s'inquiéter de la beauté des visages ... Parce que la beauté des âmes lui suffit." Thus there is no more description of Amélie.

---

15 Gide, Romans, Récits et Sóties, p. 880.
16 Ibid., p. 880.
17 Ibid., p. 896.
than of Gertrude.

Amélie gives one the impression of being the stable, practical member of the household. Her husband's comment, "sa raison sans cesse lutte et souvent l'emporte contre son coeur,"\(^{18}\) reinforces the impression that she is not ruled by her emotions as her husband is.

Since Amélie customarily submits to her husband's whims, she has no other recourse but to accept the added burden of the blind child whom he brings home. Even the pastor admits, "j'avais déposé sur les bras d'Amélie une lourde tâche, si lourde que j'en demeurai d'abord confondu. Amélie n'éleva plus la moindre protestation."\(^{19}\)

Nevertheless, it seems quite natural that Amélie should resent the amount of attention which the pastor lavishes upon Gertrude. Twice she remonstrates, "Tu ne t'es jamais autant occupé d'aucun de tes propres enfants,"\(^{20}\) and again "Tu fais pour elle ce que tu n'aurais fait pour aucun des tiens."\(^{21}\) This last retort is made after the concert at Neufchâtel. The pastor points out also that Amélie has no appreciation for music, and in

\(^{18}\text{Ibid.}, p. 881.\)
\(^{19}\text{Ibid.}, p. 885.\)
\(^{20}\text{Ibid.}, p. 889.\)
\(^{21}\text{Ibid.}, p. 897.\)
addition "jamais il ne lui viendrait à l'idée d'aller au concert, lors même que celui-ci se donnerait à notre porte." Amélie is thus the first woman in the récit with no appreciation of music, a fact which Gide must surely label as a flaw in her character.

Gide portrays Amélie as a practical, forbearing wife, whose qualities in turn frustrate the pastor. He protests the fact that Amélie allows him to behave in response to his emotions and then often censures him for it. He adds, "Du reste elle ne me fit point précisément des reproches; mais son silence même était accusateur." Thus one might conclude that Amélie reacts as a dutiful and subservient wife while the pastor seemingly feels guilty because of her accusations.

It is evident that the pastor's and Amélie's marriage has settled into dull routine with each taking the other one for granted. Once again the reader finds an unhappy marital situation in one of Gide's récits. In evaluating his relationship with his wife, the pastor rather unfeelingly comments, "on dirait qu'elle répugne à tout ce qui n'est pas coutumier; de sorte que le progrès dans la vie n'est pour elle que d'ajouter de

\(^{22}\)Ibid., p. 897.  \(^{23}\)Ibid., p. 897.
semblables jours au passé."24 Poor Amélie! Concerned with her household and her children, how can she compare with Gertrude and her excited preoccupation with new discoveries in her daily life. During the couple's discussion regarding Jacques and Gertrude, Amélie's womanly intuition is evident when she exhibits no surprise upon learning of Jacques' infatuation. It is also evident that she has noticed her husband's attentiveness to Gertrude when she remarks, "S'il fallait que je t'avertisse de tout ce que tu ne sais pas remarquer."25

The pastor's irritation with Amélie reminds the reader of Michel's frustration with Marceline. Both men seem to resent their own feelings of guilt in contrast to their wives' silent virtue. When the pastor complains, "Tout ce qu'elle voit l'inquiète et l'afflige,"26 the reader may add, "And why not!"

Both Gertrude and Amélie love the pastor in their own way. Gertrude, young, vibrant, and enamored with life, adores the pastor with a mixture of gratitude and the same innocent love with which the pastor has purposely surrounded her. Amélie's love is less obvious and more

24 Ibid., p. 898.  
25 Ibid., p. 906.  
26 Ibid., p. 917.
restrained. She realistically accepts the pastor and his faults, while at the same time overseeing the regular activities of the household. Amélie is, nevertheless, not without emotion. Her hurt is obvious in the scene where the pastor raises his voice in exasperation with her, and she tearfully accepts his chiding.27

In spite of the difference in the personalities of Gertrude and Amélie, both personify submissive, self-sacrificing individuals in contrast to an aggressive and egotistical male. They thus fall in line with the other women of Gide's early récits, such as Marceline in L'Immoraliste, and Alissa and Juliette in La Porte étroite. It remains to be seen whether, after an interim of ten years, Gide's next récit will find his women characters faithfully following the same role.

27Ibid., p. 908.
With the publication of *L'Ecole des femmes* in 1929, Gide turns his attention to the problems of society and more specifically to the changing role of women. This récit comprises the first part of a trilogy, which also includes *Robert* and *Geneviève*. Each one recounts the engagement and married life of the same couple from three different points of view. *L'Ecole des femmes* is narrated by Eveline, the wife; *Robert*, by her husband Robert; and *Geneviève*, by their daughter Geneviève. Gide studies the interplay of the personalities of Eveline and Robert, as well as those of their children, throughout the three aforementioned récits, while placing a particular emphasis on both youth and the role of women. One recalls at this point Maurice Nadeau's comment on Gide's love of youth: "D'abord, il est hanté par la jeunesse, cet âge de la vie apparemment le plus libre, le plus dénué de responsabilités, le plus rempli de promesses riches et contradictoires."¹

As a young girl, Eveline shows an independent streak by aspiring to devote her life to the care of the sick or the poor. Her parents feel this whim will vanish when she meets the right young man. Their prediction soon becomes a reality. While on a trip to Italy with her father, Eveline meets Robert, a young Frenchman. Shortly after their return to Paris, they become engaged.

At the time of their engagement, Eveline and Robert agree to keep separate diaries or journals. This writing enables Eveline to release her inner thoughts, including both her aspirations and her frustrations; at the same time it enables the reader to perceive Eveline as her character evolves and as she psychoanalyzes her future husband.

By means of a clever introduction, Gide artfully informs the reader that Geneviève, after her mother's death, has sent him Eveline's diary in the hope that he will publish it. Geneviève also suggests the title L'Ecole des femmes, borrowing it from Molière's play of the same name. Perhaps she feels that her mother's story could be a lesson for other women. It certainly places immediate emphasis on women and their role in society.

Eveline's diary contains two parts: the first, written during her engagement, and the second, written twenty years later. The reader will see that the beginning, full of
youthful enthusiasm, contrasts sharply with the ending which is impregnated with disillusionment and despair.

In the first pages of her diary, it is apparent that Eveline idolizes and praises her fiancé. In contrast she tends to belittle herself by stating, "Je sais que je ne suis ni très jolie ni très spirituelle, et ne comprends pas bien ce que Robert a pu trouver en moi qui méritait qu'il s'en éprenne." By contrast she eulogizes Robert throughout many pages. In her initial appraisal of him she declares, "il a une conscience très nette de sa valeur . . . il était très ambitieux." Though he is a self-made man, Eveline chooses the adjective "distingué" to describe him.

Nevertheless, Eveline has ambitions of her own. She feels that one should have a goal in life. Having now chosen her husband and his aspirations as her goal, she determines that, "... je veux travailler à me cultiver le plus possible, aussitôt que j'aurai le temps, et m'efforcer de devenir chaque jour un peu moins indigne de lui." Had Amélie strived to do the same in La Symphonie pastorale, perhaps the pastor might have been more responsive to her.

\[2\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 1256.}\]  
\[3\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 1253.}\]  
\[4\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 1268.}\]
In spite of her ambitions, Eveline is not interested in monetary gains. With his mother's death, Robert receives a large inheritance; however, Eveline seems rather disinterested. She notes, "... je voudrais laisser la fortune à ceux qui ont besoin d'argent pour être heureux."\(^5\)

Being extremely observant, Eveline gradually remarks certain facets of her fiancé's business affairs: "il obtient aisément tout ce qu'il veut. Il a ses entrées partout et je ne vais avec lui nulle part sans voir aussitôt des mains se tendre vers lui ... je ne crois pas qu'il ait d'amis intimes."\(^6\) Eveline does not comment in a derogatory fashion; being naturally of an inquisitive nature, she merely wishes to know her fiancé better.

This young woman proves to be a very sensitive person. She easily senses Robert's disapproval since she writes, "Je lis dans son regard tout ce qu'il pense, et la moindre ombre de réprobation que j'y verrais me démontrerait."\(^7\) Eveline has willingly accepted Robert's attitude toward women, as she notes, "... c'est que ma vie entière doit être désormais consacrée à lui permettre d'accomplir sa glorieuse destinée."\(^8\) Later she adds, "Je lui ai longuement dit que je comprenais qu'il avait sa carrière, sa

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 1262.  \(^6\)Ibid., p. 1266.  \(^7\)Ibid., p. 1273.  \(^8\)Ibid., p. 1253.
pensée, sa vie publique, que ne devait pas se permettre
d'encombrer mon amour." In her efforts to please him,
she gives up her main talent, the piano, simply because
her husband does not like nor appreciate music. One may
remember that Juliette in La Porte étroite makes the same
sacrifice for her husband.

Parenthetically one might note, at this point, that
the theme of music, an important part of Gide's life,
appears several times in his récits. An accomplished
pianist, Gide often spent as much as five hours daily in
practice. He no doubt associates music with both the
sensual and the intellectual sides of his nature. Chopin,
for example, Gide's favorite composer, would appeal to
his sensual self, whereas Bach and Mozart would interest
the intellectual.

In light of Gide's musical interest, the reader may
appreciate the sacrifices which Juliette and Eveline have
made for their husbands. One may more fully understand
Eveline's position when considering the importance which
her husband Robert places upon the word "devoir"; it
comprises part of his authoritarian attitude toward women,
which will be even more apparent in his own récit.

---

9 Ibid., p. 1254.
10 Justin O'Brien, Portrait of André Gide (New York,
1953), p. 33.
Robert believes, "ce devrait être surtout le rôle des femmes de maintenir la pureté de la langue, parce qu'elles sont en général plus conservatrices que les hommes, et qu'en négligeant leur parler elles manquent à un de leurs devoirs." It would seem that correct usage of grammar is another duty of a good wife in the eyes of Robert.

Furthermore, Eveline is sympathetic with the problems of others. Interceding on behalf of a friend Yvonne, who has had a disappointing love affair, she asks Robert to arrange a job for Yvonne in a hospital. Robert, never devoid of business contacts, invites Doctor Marchant to dine with them in the hope of fulfilling Eveline's request. The ensuing episode provides Gide with the opportunity to introduce a commentary on woman's role in society. Having heard Robert's request, Doctor Marchant replies with what one might call the typical male chauvinist attitude of his time: "Conseillez donc à votre amie la tapisserie, ou l'aquarelle, puisqu'elle se refuse à nous faire des enfants comme ce serait son devoir, mais comme nous ne pouvons pas décemment l'y forcer."12

Eveline reacts explosively in her diary as she later contemplates the doctor's words. She resents woman's

---

11 Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 1273.
12 Ibid., p. 1275.
perpetual subordination to man's desires, and she vows, if ever she has a daughter, to imbue in her a strong feeling for independence. Or, as she states, in an important passage.

Mais de songer que tant de femmes, qui n'ont pas mon bonheur, se voient refuser le droit de prendre part à la vie, que leur raison d'être sur terre et de mettre en valeur les vertus et les dons qu'elles ont en elles, que tout cela soit subordonné au plus ou moins bon vouloir d'un Monsieur, cela m'indigne. Et je prends ici l'engagement, si j'ai une fille, de ne lui apprendre aucun de ces petits arts d'agrément dont parlait avec tant d'ironique mépris le docteur Marchant, mais de lui faire donner une instruction sérieuse qui lui permette de se passer des acquiescements arbitraires, des complaisances et des faveurs... chaque femme devrait pour le moins rester libre de choisir la servitude qui lui convient.  

This last line is ironic in that even in liberty there is subjection. Nevertheless this speech of Eveline's is enough to make a future Gloria Steinem proclaim: "Hear! Hear!" Eveline seems to anticipate a greater independence for women.

As the second part begins, twenty years later, Eveline is on the verge of leaving Robert, an act which represents a radical departure from the self-sacrificing behavior of Gide's early women characters. Having determined to leave, Eveline has as her prime concern not what others might say,

13Ibid., pp. 1275-76.
but how her son and her daughter will react to the news. For Eveline has strong maternal instincts.

She can no longer tolerate her husband's faults. One critic, commenting on Eveline says, "her powers of analysis are keen, but directed exclusively to the faults of others; her sin is not so much pride as vanity."¹⁴ She does not openly criticize her husband, as she reasons, "... ce n'est pas lui qui a changé; c'est moi. C'est le jugement que je porte."¹⁵ Once again one is confronted with an unhappy love affair in Gide. As James Grieve points out, "Probably the couple in L'Ecole des femmes, Robert and Eveline, show best the workings of that complacency and self-deception which, to Gide's mind, characterize love."¹⁶ Eveline realizes that Robert has the same qualities which first attracted him to her, but she now sees them in a different light. Above all, she resents his calculating manner; for every favor which he performs, he anticipates a profitable return for himself. She longs to see him just once perform a totally selfless act with no profit involved: "que j'aimerais le voir, ne fût-ce qu'une fois,

¹⁵Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 1281.
defendre une cause où vraiment il aurait à se compromettre, éprouver des sentiments dont il ne pourrait tirer avantage, avoir des convictions qui ne lui rapporteraient rien."\(^{17}\)

While condemning Robert, she tries to judge him with honesty and forthrightness. Eveline admits, "Robert n'est pas un hypocrite. Les sentiments qu'il exprime, il s'imagine réellement les avoir."\(^ {18}\)

Her diary provides solace in her time of mental anguish. It serves her "comme un ami discret, docile, à qui pouvoir enfin confier ma plus secrète et plus douloureuse pensée."\(^ {19}\) Alissa in *La Porte Étroite* and the pastor in *La Symphonie pastorale* also have found comfort by confiding in their diaries, one will recall.

Eveline is the first woman in Gide's récits to look at her husband objectively and question his authority in the household. She finds it difficult to accept "his authoritarian attitude toward her, his disdain of women, reason and human feeling."\(^ {20}\) In a dejected mood she voices Robert's attitude toward her: "Il ne me considère plus que comme une dépendance de lui. Je fais partie de son

\(^{17}\)Gide, *Romans, Récits et Soties*, p. 1284.

\(^{18}\)Ibid., p. 1282.

\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 1283.

confort. Je suis sa femme."\textsuperscript{21} She feels as though she has lost her identity. Completely discouraged and turning to her children, she discovers her only son Gustave to be a carbon copy of his father.

In her loneliness and disenchantment she naturally turns to the family priest. Having confessed her feelings sincerely, she leaves the interview with l'abbé Bredel more bewildered than ever. The priest sides violently with Robert, asserting that a wife should help her husband to conceal his faults. He adds, "Oui, c'est là votre devoir d'épouse chrétienne et de mère."\textsuperscript{22} This word "devoir" must seem odious to Eveline's ears. She is indeed pathetic as she says in a resigned way, "Ainsi donc, tout ce qui me reste à faire, c'est de me mettre au service d'un être pour qui je n'ai plus d'amour... d'un être dont j'ai connu trop tard la médiocrité; d'un pantin dont je suis la femme."\textsuperscript{23} Because Robert appears to be very religious and the priest believes him to be in the right, Eveline loses her faith in her religion. She cannot comprehend how the priest can ignore her sincerity and support Robert's hypocrisy. It is reminiscent of Marceline's disillusionment at the end of \textit{L'Immoraliste} and that of

\textsuperscript{21}Gide, \textit{Romans, Récits et Soties}, p. 1283.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 1288.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., pp. 1288-89.
Alissa in *La Porte étroite* near the end of her life. These patterns may also reflect Gide's own religious dilemma, as Ames states, "Upon the whole his utterance would indicate that he found Catholicism too aggressive and unscrupulous for tolerance to be in order."\textsuperscript{24}

Shortly after her conversation with her priest, she learns that Robert has been in an automobile accident. Believing this to be a warning from God, she rushes to his side, determined to remain with him as her priest has suggested.

As Robert begins to recover, Eveline again observes both hypocrisy and hypochondria in her husband; however this time both the doctor and Geneviève notice how Robert feigns frequent headaches. Eveline's newest anxiety revolves around the discovery that Geneviève does not love her father. Much soul-searching results on the part of Eveline. Having encouraged Geneviève to think for herself and to pursue her education, Eveline feels responsible for Geneviève's negative, unsympathetic attitude toward her father. Eveline is even more alarmed to detect a note of cynicism in her daughter's attitude toward marriage. Not only does Geneviève not plan to be

\textsuperscript{24}Ames, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-08.
subservient to a spouse, but she even suggests a relationship outside of marriage:

elle ne pouvait admettre le mariage s'il devait conférer au mari des prérogatives; que, pour sa part, elle n'accepterait jamais de s'y soumettre, qu'elle était bien résolue à faire, de celui dont elle s'éprendrait, son associé, son camarade, et que le plus prudent était encore de ne l'épouser point. 25

In a touching scene between the two women, Geneviève apologizes for causing her mother grief. Geneviève explains that she can no longer respect her father, nor does she see why her mother has remained faithful to him. Astounded by this remark, Eveline muses, "Si monstrueux que me parût ce retournement de nos rôles, j'ai protesté que l'idée de tromper mon mari n'avait jamais effleuré ma pensée." 26

Geneviève then frankly demands whether her mother has sacrificed herself for her children. Mockingly, Geneviève proposes a novel which she might write about her mother: "Les Devoirs d'une Mère ou Le Sacrifice inutile." 27 The titles are like those of the eighteenth century, which often echoed those of Molière.

And so Eveline's moral debate must continue. Even her father, who has resented Robert at first, now prevails upon her to remain with her husband. In typical Gidian

25 Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 1295.
26 Ibid., p. 1296.
27 Ibid., p. 1297.
fashion, Eveline's father, trying only to comfort his daughter, declares ironically that there are no perfect marriages.

Eveline's honesty is apparent as she finally confronts Robert with her mental predicament. Though Robert professes to love her, Eveline must be true to herself and to her conscience. She makes the final decision to leave him. Pursuing her childhood desire to help the sick, she enlists in a hospital where contagious diseases are treated, and there, while saving lives, ironically she loses her own. But, at least, she dies true to her convictions.

Robert is written as a response to L'Ecole des femmes by the husband in order to present his side of the story. Thus, the reader can now observe Eveline and Geneviève through Robert's eyes.

Robert still professes to love his wife, though he is now able to see her faults and to analyze their marital problems.

In addition, Robert believes the dissension in their marriage has occurred because each of them has initially placed the other one on a pedestal, thereby exaggerating

---

28Ibid., p. 1331.  
29Ibid., p. 1317.
the attributes which they possess. The reader has already noted Eveline's concern about the same situation. Each has a false conception of his counterpart; nevertheless, each needs the feeling of being wanted and loved. Robert, realizing the predicament, complains,

Est-ce ma faute à moi, si Eveline m'a d'abord cru plus de dons que je n'en avais, et peut-on faire grief à quelqu'un de ne point être Racine ou Pindare, simplement parce qu'une amoureuse le prenait pour tel? . . . ne pas voir l'autre aussitôt tel qu'il est, mais bien se faire de lui d'abord, une sorte d'idole.  

Later he realistically adds, "Aux premiers temps, son amour pour moi l'aveuglait sur mes défauts, sur mes manques."  

He feels that Eveline was also guilty of trying to approach his image of her, by noting, "Et, aussi longtemps qu'elle m'aima, elle s'efforça de ressembler à mon idole et s'orna des vertus que je lui croyais, qu'elle savait devoir me plaire."  

James Grieve believes that "Eveline, being clear-sighted, more radical and honest than Robert, has a good idea at times that love is a farce." Perhaps Robert is just not able to be so realistic!

---

30 Ibid., p. 1317.  
31 Ibid., p. 1343.  
32 Ibid., p. 1317.  
33 Grieve, op. cit., p. 167.
Robert firmly believes that the man should rule the household; he has the traditional view of the servile role of women. He admits that his very decided opinions on the role of women and one's devoir in life have alienated his wife. However, though wishing to rule his home, he never takes a firm stand. In retrospect, he admits, "Mon grand tort fut de lui céder, selon mon habitude, par crainte du despotisme et par horreur des discussions." Thus, in spite of all his high-minded ideas, it is he who gives the impression of being the passive member of the family.

In analyzing his wife, he says that he resents her growing independence and insubordination. He believes that "L'insoumission est toujours blâmable chez la femme." He has little respect for women as a group nor does he give them credit for having an original thought: "Je ne crois pas à la génération spontanée, surtout pas dans le cerveau des femmes; les idées qui s'y développent vous pouvez être sûr que quelqu'un d'autre les a semées." The reader may note the irony of this last statement, as Robert claims that l'abbé Bredel, his priest, is the one

---

34 Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 1315.
36 Ibid., p. 1322.
to advise him on the dominant role of the male member of the family unit: "... je ne sus pas exiger de moi cet acte d'autorité maritale, que pourtant me conseillait l'abbé Bredel, que tout mari bien affermi dans sa croyance doit oser." 37

Eveline's lack of submissiveness truly alarms Robert. It is this quality which he has initially admired in his wife; rather than an inherent quality, her submission, he finally realizes, was due to her love for him. Once her love has diminished, he notes a gradual independence rising within her. Robert believes, "cette soumission intellectuelle ... doit être celle de tout bon catholique." 38 He observes with consternation that Eveline "prétendit, au contraire, avoir suffisamment de jugement personnel pour pouvoir se guider elle-même et se passer de directeur." 39 Robert is observing Eveline at the time that her religious faith wavers, and she is no longer able to believe in the Catholicism to which Robert adheres. He, as a good Catholic, submits to the doctrines of his Church; however, it shocks him to see Eveline's determination to adhere to only what she knows to be true through her own sensory perception: "elle ne consentait plus à tenir pour

37 Ibid., p. 1326.
38 Ibid., p. 1324.
39 Ibid., p. 1325.
véritable rien qu'elle ne reconnaît vrai par elle-même . . . cette croyance en une vérité particulière mène droit à l'individualisme et ouvre la porte à l'anarchie."40

When Eveline becomes gravely ill, Robert has renewed hopes that Eveline will return to her faith in the Church. When l'abbé Bredel asks Eveline to repent and to receive the sacraments, with complete sincerity, Eveline states that she does not need to repent; she is at peace with her God;41 nor does she believe in eternal life.

Geneviève creates even more frustrations for Robert. He is not even sure whether she has not influenced her mother to assert herself, though he blames in part the liberal education to which Eveline has exposed her daughter, "... je vois le triste résultat de l'éducation 'libérale' qu'il plaisait à ma femme de donner à nos deux enfants."42

Robert and Eveline were not in agreement as to how to raise their children. Once again denigrating women, Robert writes, "Mais je crois que, pour les enfants du moins, le mal est encore plus grand lorsque c'est la pensée de la femme qui s'emancipe, car le rôle de la

40 Ibid., p. 1325. 41 Ibid., p. 1339.
42 Ibid., p. 1315.
Neither of the women of his household is prepared to submit docilely to this philosophy.

Robert feels that Eveline is superceding his role as head of the house by asserting her ideas on the education of the children; in his eyes their household roles seem reversed: "Que de fois j'ai senti que la position prise par Eveline retenait le vrai progrès de ma pensée en me forçant d'assumer dans notre ménage une fonction qui aurait dû être la sienne." 44

A new generation of women, the product of a liberal education, seems to have emerged in the récit Geneviève. In a letter accompanying her récit, Geneviève proposes her doctrine. The reader should note its very contemporary flavor, as it echoes the doctrines of the women's rights movements of the 1970's:

ce n'est que depuis la guerre, où tant de femmes ont fait preuve d'une valeur et d'une énergie dont les hommes ne les eussent point crues capables, que l'on commence à leur reconnaître, et qu'elles-mêmes commencent à revendiquer, leurs droits à des vertus qui ne soient pas simplement privatives, de dévouement, de soumission et de fidélité; de dévouement à l'homme, de soumission à l'homme, de fidélité à l'homme; car il semblait jusqu'à présent que toutes les vertus affirmatives fussent demeurer

---

43 Ibid., p. 1323.  
44 Ibid., p. 1324.
Having inherited her mother's quest for independence, Geneviève is the product of a new generation. In relating her opinion of her parents, she shows herself far more tolerant of her mother than of her father.

Geneviève has an admiration for her mother's diligence and forceful character which is in contrast to her father's lack of determination. Eveline encourages her daughter in her studies, often helping her with her lessons. Geneviève praises her mother's selflessness, her desire to be useful and to help others. She praises "cette pudeur extrême et cette modestie... on pouvait vivre près d'elle longtemps sans se douter de ses vertus." At the same time, Geneviève finds her mother to be lacking in self-confidence. Her love for her mother is thus counterbalanced by her disdain for her father. She notes in her diary, "Je la sentais en opposition constante avec mon père et ma résistance à l'autorité paternelle se fortifiait de ma soumission filiale envers elle."

Eveline, viewed through her daughter's eyes, appears to be a very wise and understanding mother, one who can

---

46 Ibid., pp. 1351-52.  
47 Ibid., p. 1384.
sympathize with her daughter's feelings. Noting that her daughter's interest in a friend borders on lesbianism, Eveline treats Geneviève in such a way that there is no resentment between mother and daughter. Eveline merely comments quietly: "Je crains que tu ne t'engages sur un chemin dangereux, que plus tard il te serait beaucoup plus difficile que maintenant d'abandonner." 

The reader has the impression that Eveline handles Geneviève's problem of lesbianism without consulting her husband. Robert, unimaginative and totally against his daughter's education, would undoubtedly have been unsympathetic to her problem.

The role of women in this récit is mainly centered upon Geneviève and two girl friends to whom she is attracted. They are fellow students at her lycée: Sara Keller, the daughter of a painter, and Gisèle Parmentier, the best student of her class.

In order to emphasize the impression which Sara has made on Geneviève, Gide employs in an untypical fashion a fairly complete description of her. The reader will remember that Gide usually expands his description when he wishes to show sensuousness, as in his description of Lucile Bucolin in _La Porte étroite_ and Isabelle, in the

---

récit of the same name. Geneviève describes Sara in the following manner: "De peau brune, ses cheveux noirs, bouclés, presque crépus, cachait ses tempes et une partie de son front... Elle était bizarrement vêtue, et l'échancrure de son corsage laissait voir une gorge formée."49 It is evident that Geneviève seems drawn to this young girl because of the sensuousness just described. Even though one has the impression that Eveline attempts to be broad-minded, she is understandably reluctant to have Geneviève associate with Sara, especially when she learns that Sara is a jewess and an illegitimate child. Even though Eveline is seemingly liberal in some of her ideas, she here adheres to the conventions of her society. Geneviève is the aggressor in the ensuing friendship. Sara, though the same age, seems more mature, self-confident, and uninhibited. She is the most ardent of the three friends for women's liberation. Her ideas of marriage seem particularly amoral at this time, as she proclaims openly, "je ne veux pas dire que je ne m'éprendrai jamais de quelqu'un. Mais sacrifier pour lui mes goûts, ma vie propre; ne plus m'occuper qu'à lui être agréable, qu'à le servir... C'est encore plus prudent de n'épouser

49 Ibid., p. 1352.
personne."50 One has the impression that she would always be able to find male companionship if she so desired.

Gisèle Parmentier, on the other hand, personifies an intelligent, ambitious young lady of the 1920's, who wishes to further her education. She sees a great future for women and believes it is possible for women to remain free within the confines of marriage. Gisèle seems to be the balance between Sara, who represents the avant-garde of the trio, and Geneviève, who is still impressionable and is in the process of formulating her ideas.

Upon the suggestion of Sara, these three friends, then, decide to form a league for the independence of women. They soon reach an impasse when they try to establish their basic principles.

Geneviève aspires to be a reformer. "Tout ce qui peut aider au progrès, tout ce qui peut aider l'homme à s'élever un peu au-dessus de son état actuel"51 interests her. It is pertinent to note that these passages of Gide were written in 1936 and assuredly foreshadow the current movement for the liberation of all minority groups. In relating her récit, Geneviève says that "si quelque jeune femme qui me lira trouve dans ce que j'écris ici un avertissement et si

50Ibid., p. 1368.  
51Ibid., p. 1361.
ce livre la met en garde contre certaines illusions dont j'eus à souffrir," she will then be satisfied.

Geneviève is very capable of self-analysis. She knows herself well enough to be able to identify herself with certain characteristics of Vauban,53 a famous military engineer of France. She notes that he is "'Etranger aux raffinements de l'esprit, et insoucieux de toute métaphysique.'"54 She adds to that thought: "Car je n'admettais pas, si jeune encore que je fusse en ce temps, que je ne pusse et dusse être utile."55 Her self-analysis continues when she notes, "... j'avais en ce temps peu de goût pour découvrir ce qui se cache sous l'apparence des êtres et méprisais la modestie."56

Furthermore, Geneviève enjoys reading such works as Clarissa Harlowe by Richardson and Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte. The latter work contains one of her favorite passages: "'Les femmes, on les suppose calmes généralement; mais les femmes sentent, tout comme les hommes; elles ont besoin d'exercer leurs facultés et, comme à leurs frères,

52Ibid., p. 1387.
54Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 1387.
55Ibid., p. 1387.  
56Ibid., p. 1389.
il leur faut un champ d'action pour leurs efforts."57 Geneviève cannot comprehend why women must have roles different from those of men. In a conversation with her friend Gisèle, she reveals her desire to instill in other women the will to search for and to utilize their full potential in society, when she states, "Je voudrais dire à chaque femme ce que, depuis quelque temps, chaque matin, je me dis à moi-même: IL NE TIENT QU'A TOI."58

The climax of the second part of Geneviève's récit occurs when she shocks her parents' friend Doctor Marchant by declaring that she would like to have a child by him. The reader will remember that the doctor has married Eveline's friend Yvonne, whom Geneviève regards as "modeste jusqu'à l'effacement. . . ."59 Geneviève explains her strange request of the doctor as "... la protestation contre ce que mon père appelait 'les bonnes moeurs.'"60 Doctor Marchant epitomizes the qualities which she admires in a man and in which her own father is so lacking: "... une valeur réelle, des connaissances solides et le parfait mépris des feintes et du faux-semblant."61 Thus she depicts her final revolt against her father and all for which he stands: "... un besoin de l'humilier, de le

57Ibid., p. 1391.  
58Ibid., p. 1399.  
59Ibid., p. 1389.  
60Ibid., p. 1405.  
61Ibid., p. 1388.
mortifier, de l'amener à rougir de moi, à me désavouer; un besoin d'affirmer mon indépendance, mon insoumission, par un acte que seule une femme pouvait commettre."62 Perhaps Geneviève is inadvertently rebelling against her father also on behalf of her mother. She undoubtedly feels that her mother's initial goal in life has been sacrificed for her husband and family. Her mother, at the last, admits to Geneviève that she has been in love with Doctor Marchant, a secret which she has never revealed to anyone else.

Having surveyed the three récits in this trilogy, perhaps one can see why Enid Starkie, writing of them, says, "... they were undertaken to ask the question of what woman can expect in a modern world."63

As one looks again at the women of these specific récits, Eveline emerges as a sincere, selfless, maternal individual, who nevertheless demonstrates an independence and aggressiveness indicative of a new trend in society. Her personality and her actions depart radically from Marceline in L'Immoraliste and from Amélie in La Symphonie pastorale. Germaine Brée notes likewise that, "With his

62 Ibid., pp. 1405-06.
new social concern in mind Gide had proposed boldly to take up the whole question of feminism." Thus Eveline launches this endeavor. Eveline's daughter Geneviève, Gisèle Parmentier, and Sara Keller represent a succeeding generation who are seemingly more dominant and rebellious in their thoughts. In Geneviève the reader glimpses a foreshadowing of the women's liberation movement and the sexual freedom of the 1960's and the 1970's.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Having examined the first seven of Gide's récits, the reader has observed a variety of women. Though the narrators of the first four stories are men, the women play important roles.

Marceline in L'Immoraliste is depicted as a very competent and devoted wife. Though she appears rather infrequently throughout the story, as one assembles, bit by bit, her total portrayal, she becomes a pillar of strength to whom Michel, her husband, clutches for life. Gide does not give a long description of her as Balzac or Flaubert might do. Her description, which is brief, must be assembled piece by piece. An orphan of twenty years at the time of her marriage, Marceline is robust, blond, very pretty, and a Catholic. Her devotion to Michel and her confidence in his recovery are impressive.

The reader has compassion for Marceline, particularly when all her love and attention are repaid by neglect at the time of her own illness. Michel seemingly is unable to console her. In his words: "La maladie était entrée en
Marceline, l'habitait désormais, la marquait, la tachait. C'était une chose abîmée."

Gide prefers to describe Marceline in greater detail as she loses her health. She thus dies a tragic but impressive figure, not soon to be forgotten by the reader.

*La Porte Étroite* contains three distinct women personalities: Lucile Bucolin and her daughters Alissa and Juliette. Though Lucile appears briefly, her presence permeates the entire récit. Gide chooses his words carefully to describe her, stressing her "corsages légers et largement ouverts." He employs a full paragraph to describe a portrait of her in which he highlights her sultry beauty in an aesthetic manner. Her sensuousness pervades the entire récit. Though usually portraying his women characters by means of dialogue or of their journals, Gide augments his descriptions when he wishes to show sensuousness, such as in his delineation of Lucile in *La Porte Étroite*, of Sara, in *Geneviève*, and of Isabelle, in *Isabelle*.

Juliette, more lively and more striking than her sister in *La Porte Étroite*, chooses an unhappy marriage.

---


2Ibid., p. 497.

3Ibid., p. 498.
when Jérôme seemingly rejects her love. Her role in the story provides a raison d'être for Alissa's sacrifice.

Alissa's external description is very limited. As a child, Jérôme is impressed by her "expression presque triste . . . la ligne de ses sourcils, si extraordinirement relevés au-dessus des yeux." Germaine Brée calls Alissa "a prodigal who ventures out alone toward a definite high-minded goal, an ideal goal." 5

The reader, often emotionally involved, follows Alissa's love for Jérôme, which she sacrifices successively for Juliette, for her father, and finally for Jérôme himself. She represents the epitome of virtue and is portrayed at the end of the story as "the victim of those destructive elements that Gide felt were inherent in all absolute Promethean idealisms." 6 Alissa, as Marceline before her, is finally disillusioned with her religious faith. Her diary, revealing her inner turmoils, ends with the words: "Je voudrais mourir à présent, vite, avant d'avoir compris de nouveau que je suis seule." 7

Isabelle, another Gidian heroine, is presented to the reader through the eyes and the words of Gérard Lacase, the

---

6Ibid., p. 162.
7Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 595.
narrator. In this tale Gide tries to free himself from his own past and "his personal moral predicament."\(^8\) Isabelle does not appear until Chapter Four of the récit. Gide gives a fairly complete description of her as she appears in a miniature. The anticipation of seeing her in real life grows in both Gérard and the reader. Isabelle is finally observed through an aperture above the door. Gide again prolongs her appearance by describing her back as she kneels before her aunt. He adds an interesting descriptive touch, by placing an emerald green ribbon around her neck, which she surreptitiously removes when her aunt's head is turned. It is interesting to surmise the significance of this bit of color on an otherwise sombre attire. The ribbon appears again in the last scene of the story when Gérard revisits Quartfourche. Isabelle, this time seated under a tree, again has a green ribbon beside her. In the original scene the rich color perhaps symbolizes her waywardness. Typically, Gide leaves the interpretation of the possible significance of this detail to the reader's imagination.

Though Isabelle departs from the virtuous, self-sacrificing roles of Marceline and Alissa, Isabelle makes

a sacrifice in her own way. Having had a child out of wedlock, she leaves her home in order not to bring further disgrace to her family.

In *La Symphonie pastorale* Gide presents two powerfully portrayed, contrasting women. One, Gertrude, the young blind girl, represents innocence and trust. Perhaps because of these qualities, she falls in love with the pastor. When her sight is restored, she sees this love in its proper perspective, and realizing the hurt which she inflicts on others, she sacrifices herself by committing suicide.

The other, the pastor's wife, Amélie, represents a dutiful woman, who possesses little imagination and no appreciation of music. Yet, she is a sympathetic character who accepts her husband and his weaknesses. Her practicality establishes the foundation of their home. She is also imbued with strong maternal instincts.

Eveline and Geneviève, her daughter, are present in the three récits *L'Ecole des femmes*, Robert, and Geneviève, as well as Geneviève's friends, Sara and Gisèle. It is here that one may observe the true evolution of Gide's women characters. Though Eveline marries Robert planning to make her marriage the goal of her life, as Marceline and Amélie have done, she has a more independent and skeptical nature. Thus her love soon turns to disapproval and disdain.
for her husband, reactions which seemingly never would have occurred to Marceline or to Amélie.

Geneviève neither respects nor loves her father. She cannot tolerate his seeming hypocrisy. In her own récit, she proclaims a plea for women's rights. She has no intention of meekly following in the traditional pattern of womanhood. Thus the role of women has evolved immeasurably from the submissive Marceline. Gide has portrayed all these women characters so sympathetically that perhaps even at the time of writing L'Immoraliste, he foresaw a day when women might make their lives more productive and develop their own interests rather than being simply submissive, passive beings.

Pierre-Quint comments that Gide saw the family primarily as a patriarchal institution: "The father, occupied outside the home, knows nothing of the inner life of those near to him. The mother is absorbed by household cares, wherein she is supposed to find all her happiness." He continues:

Amongst the severe, devout bourgeoisie, the class most depicted by Gide, the young girl has scarcely evolved and is in many respects exactly what she was in the nineteenth century. . . . The girl herself, if she belongs to the upper classes, has, more or less

---

consciously, a single preoccupation: a husband. The rest of her unemployed existence is merely a pastime.  

This attitude is true of the women of *L'Immoraliste*, *La Porte étroite*, and *La Symphonie pastorale*; however, Eveline and her daughter, Geneviève, are not willing to accept this premise. Eveline, desirous of furthering her education and caring for the sick, and Geneviève, believing that women should have a future beyond motherhood, belong to a new breed of women whom Gide observes about him. In fact, he resembles an author of the 1970's rather than of 1936 in his portrayal of women.

Gide, through the use of dialogue and, occasionally, of personal diaries, has portrayed living and vibrant women. They have progressed from being dependent, subservient, passive, and virtuous in the early récits to being ambitious, aggressive, not so moral, and independent in the later ones. They are all presented sympathetically and compassionately.

What role does religion play in the lives of these women? First of all, Germaine Brée has noted, "Gide, a Protestant, withstood trends that made converts to Catholicism of some of his closest friends."  

---

11 Brée, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
women characters include both Catholics and Protestants. Germaine Brée adds that "Gide's religious evolution . . . had real repercussions on his work and even molded it to a certain extent."\textsuperscript{12} Once again, Gide's personal life is reflected in his literature.

Marceline of \textit{L'Immoraliste}, a devout Catholic, believes in the power of prayer, which she feels has restored her husband's health. However, having lost her baby, her own health, and finally her husband's support when she most needs it, she rejects her rosary, the symbol of her religious faith.

Alissa of \textit{La Porte étroite}, a virtuous Protestant, sacrifices her love for Jérôme, as she believes she is an obstacle in his path to God. Guérard calls her diary "a remarkable document on religious torment, faith, and humility."\textsuperscript{13} At the very end, feeling that she has lost even God, Alissa dies alone without any religious consolation.

Gertrude of \textit{La Symphonie pastorale} learns of religion from the pastor and his interpretation of the Gospels. Raised to admire freedom and lack of restraint, which are conducive to the love and beauty Gide identified with

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 25.
\textsuperscript{13}Albert J. Guérard, \textit{André Gide} (Cambridge, 1951), p. 123.
\end{footnotes}
the Gospels, Gertrude is subsequently exposed to the harsh teachings of Saint Paul by Jacques, the pastor's son, a convert to Roman Catholicism. Seeing her life in a new perspective, Gertrude confesses to the pastor, "Pour moi, étant autrefois sans loi, je vivais, mais quand le commandement vint, le péché reprit vie, et moi je mourus." Gide himself found the teachings of Saint Paul to be restrictive and disciplinary in nature. He is quoted as saying: "When I seek Christ I find the priest and behind the priest, St. Paul."

Eveline of L'Ecole des femmes, Robert, and Geneviève begins her marriage as a good Catholic. After twenty years of married life and of observing her husband's religiosity, her religious enthusiasm wanes. During a conversation with her priest, she is disillusioned to find that he supports her husband. She thus loses faith in both her husband and her religion. She even denies a life after death in the fear that she may encounter her husband again in the next life.

Geneviève, on the other hand, has no religious faith. Though her mother had encouraged her education, it had not

---

14 Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 929.
included religious instruction. She readily admits that those who believe in the Catholic faith state their convictions with confidence.\textsuperscript{16} Geneviève must demonstrate her faith merely in her actions and her desire to make her life beneficial to others.

Of the four other women discussed earlier, Marceline, Alissa, and Eveline die without the sustaining power of their religion. Gertrude dies because of the teachings of Saint Paul. Nevertheless, during most of their lives, these women have been guided by religious principles. Gide felt that the Christian faith influenced modern characters and their destinies, so he made his characters also judge their actions by Christian values.\textsuperscript{17} And yet, as Germaine Brée has noted, "In each récit the main character is so individual that no general moral precepts can be infallibly deduced from his story; it is always open to discussion."\textsuperscript{18} It would seem that Gide deliberately wants the reader to participate in the development of the récit and to react to it.

\textsuperscript{16}Gide, Romans, Récits et Soties, p. 1389.
\textsuperscript{17}Brée, op. cit., p. 26.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 211.
In discussing Gide's récits and characters in general, Jean Hytier has made the following observation:

All are narratives of disappointment. All touch us, distress and irritate us; but intellectually they show us characters imprisoned in a formula, captives of a rule, a law, a convention or a habit, and victims of themselves. They have all chosen and have found themselves prisoners of a choice — of a choice whose distinguishing mode is, respectively, harshness, narrowness, facility, or deception.¹⁹

Certainly many of his women were captives of a convention or victims of themselves.

In 1931 Gide announced: "Religion and the family are the two worst enemies of progress."²⁰ This statement is understandable when one realizes that he feels that nothing should restrict the actions of the individual, such as religious or social conventions. Scanning all of Gide's women, one is not surprised to find that the author should finally create characters such as Eveline and Geneviève who are personally courageous enough to withstand external pressures in order to commit themselves to their convictions. Gide here foresees new-fashioned women who seek their rights and identity in today's society.


²⁰ O'Brien, op. cit., p. 324.
Gide himself "has variously appeared as a profound religious thinker and a devil's henchman, an apostle of sincerity and a crafty purveyor of guile, a broad humanist and an egocentric introvert, a moral teacher and a calculating perverter of youth."\(^{21}\) In his sympathetic portrayal of women, he has shown himself to be sincere, as well as a humanist and a moral teacher.

Indeed, and in conclusion, one might add that if one were to select a single word to associate with André Gide, it would have to be "sincerity." Webster states that "sincere" means "absence of hypocrisy." Certainly this definition must bring to mind André Gide, his life, his literature, and, in this study, his treatment of women. Germaine Brée believes, "Sincerity, as Gide understood it, consisted first in never allowing himself to evade facts, and more particularly those facts which elude reason. . . ."\(^{22}\) Surely as controversial a personnage as Gide may be, he will undoubtedly remain one of the outstanding writers of the twentieth century, and the women of his récits will live on as powerful fictional creations.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 10.
\(^{22}\) Brée, op. cit., p. 192.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Articles


Chambers, Leland H., "Gide's Fictional Journals," Criticism, X (Fall, 1968), 300-312.


Encyclopedia Articles


Dictionaries