



The Immoralist

André Gide

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André Gide is a very famous French author. He was the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947. *L'immoraliste* was one of his more famous novels and was originally published in 1902, early in Gide's career, but he had already published close to a dozen other books by then. This is the story of how a man's personality changed after he had a close brush with death due to a serious illness, and how he formed a new vision of both the society he lived in and of himself as well. It is also the story of his wife, Marceline, and their developing relationship.

The narrator of the story is Michel, who is an academic from Paris who was an expert in languages. In fact he was a philologist, which Wikipedia defines as "the study of literary texts and written records, the establishment of their authenticity and their original form, and the determination of their meaning." Thus, his life revolved around the past. He followed his father into this field, and through him developed his own reputation in the field and found critical acclaim.

Michel begins by calling his closest friends, who have not seen him since his wedding to Marceline, to his side in a faraway land. He explains why he did this, "The only relief that I am looking for is to speak to you, for I am at a point in life where I cannot go on. It is not from fatigue, but I do not understand any longer. I have a need...I have a need to speak, I tell you." His story is the book.

He traces his personal transformation from a person whose life revolved around the past into one who rejects that and who cares only for the present and the future. In addition, he changes from being a sort of egg-head intellectual into a person who is acutely aware of his feelings and his physical body. He also tells about his life and travels with Marceline, and how she cared for him during his illness, and how he... I think I will stop there and not give too much away in this description. The book is rather short, so readers will not have to wait long to find out what happened.

Why is Michel immoral? I think he shows immorality at times on several levels, but that is a question the reader should keep asking himself as he reads through the book. I personally don't see anything obvious and glaring here, so it comes out in hints here and there. Other readers might disagree.

I hope readers enjoy this translation of a famous classic French novel by a Nobel Laureate.

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