

From the internet:

Plot for Alien Corn W. Somerset Maugham's 1931 short story

"A Jewish family that has assimilated into the English aristocracy is shocked when their oldest son rejects the accoutrements of nobility to become a concert pianist. A desperate bargain to determine his talent has unexpected, and tragic, results. He shoots himself in the belly."

Longer plot

"The title of W. Somerset Maugham's 1931 short story, "Alien Corn", refers to a passage in Keats' Ode to a Nightingale, in which the poet hears in the nightingale's note...

*"Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn."*

From the plot summary of an opera based on the story. The story deals with a group of Jewish exiles: the wealthy Bleikogel family, who came to England from Germany in the later nineteenth century. But there is little question of being "sick for home." By the time we encounter them in the later 1920s, all the members of the family have become quite prosperous, and the leading figure of the younger generation, Adolf Bleikogel, has renounced his religion, bought an English country estate, entered parliament, been made a baronet, and changed the family name to Bland, insisting that people call him "Bertie" and maintaining that the family has been English for generations. The one member of the family who does hear the nightingale's song is Bertie's son George. Feeling that his family is living a lie, he rejects his father's plans to have him join a good regiment and later stand for parliament in his turn. Instead, he wants only to become a concert pianist, and eventually wrings out permission to study in Germany. Once there, it becomes clear that his odyssey is more a search for his cultural roots than the simple development of his talent, but it is a journey that can end only in tragedy.

When Kay Mathias read these plot summaries she thought that the story sounded as if it was based on Robert Mathias' cousins: The Mond family, as both Ludwig Mond's sons were knighted. On the other hand it is coming to light from research that Jean Strouse has been doing; that letter written by John Singer Sargent to Alfred Wertheimer begging him not to pursue a life on the stage as it would embarrass his father, Asher Wertheimer.