

## Stivale on Fagley (2014)

Fagley, Robert M. *Bachelors, Bastards, and Nomadic Masculinity: Illegitimacy in Guy de Maupassant and André Gide*. Newcastle-on-Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014. Pp. 219. ISBN: 978-1-4438-6698-9

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The choice of foci announced in Robert Fagley's title is a heretofore neglected intersection that allows the author to bring forth issues of class, gender (particularly men's studies), and social constructs in the context of the works of two prolific writers from different generations and literary lineages. Specifically, Fagley explores the linkage between bastardy and bachelordom, both statuses creating disturbance in the heterosexual bourgeois framework of fin-de-siècle France. Whereas Guy de Maupassant's "treatment of illegitimacy reflects his particular idea of realism, André Gide's bastards and bachelors embody the modernist nature reflective of his later work" (7). Moreover, Fagley derives the "nomadic" focus of his study from the bastard's existence "outside the institutions of the State which favor 'legitimate' families and regulate morality and sexuality" (8). He rightly points out the State's contradictory (as in, double) standard on male promiscuity, moderating male behavior through the marriage institution and yet allowing males' immoderate behavior outside marriage. To examine these intersections, Fagley develops a fruitful critical apparatus from Deleuze and Guattari, Michel Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Robert Nye, Todd Reeser, and my own work on Maupassant.

The book is organized in three main sections. In the first (four chapters), "Bachelors, Bastards and Seduction," Fagley situates the two focal writers (chapter one) as "eternal bachelors," a status in conflict with the Third Republic's "growing fear of degeneration and depopulation [...] fed by nationalism and the increasing influence of psychiatric theories of mental illness and hereditary defects" (23). This fin-de-siècle understanding of *illégitimité* included the technically legitimate men who nonetheless occupied a (for the era) threshold status, hence the broad range of connections of illegitimacy found in these "bastard narratives." Focusing mainly on Maupassant's "Histoire d'une fille de ferme" (chapter two), Fagley considers the "enfant naturel" from several perspectives: rural domestic as victim of sexual manipulation; the patriarchal oppression of otherwise capable rural women; the inherent interplay of nature, animality, and madness; and the vexed (indeed, limited) role that love plays within this nexus of relations.

Study of bourgeois codes of honor in relation to extremes of male sexuality (chapter three) reveals extreme deviations from the moderate sexual middle. Maupassant's "Un million" portrays the question of honor in relation to bourgeois codes regulating procreation and inevitable clashes with the necessary recourse to triangular illegitimacy. In counterpoint, Maupassant's "Un fils" displays honor distinctly placed in question by what Fagley calls "the Wild Oats Rape Defense," i.e. an implicit exposé of the extreme dangers of promiscuity, for the woman, certainly, but also for men (albeit for quite different reasons). Turning then to the Gidean bachelor (chapter four), Fagley studies the *célibataire par excellence*, Édouard, from *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, who exemplifies the Gidean "pederast bachelor" and his propensity for "trading one boy for another when they grow too old and 'manly'" (62). This apprenticeship process constitutes not merely the display of Gide's "ideal of pederasty," but also of his questioning of "the social stigmata faced by both the bastard and the pederast" (67). The purpose of this final section, then, is to show how, in contrast to Maupassant's views on illegitimacy, Gide sees in illegitimacy "the prospect of refuting the seemingly impervious authorities that dictate sexual, political and literary legitimacy" (81).

The second section, cleverly titled "Counterfeit Author(ity)," continues the study of *Les Faux-monnayeurs* (chapter five), focusing on questions of authority and authenticity as related to the image of false coins, and on different forms of counterfeiting related to bastardy and sexuality. The coin metaphor serves as a nexus for understanding a number of Gidean characters, from *Les Faux-monnayeurs* and the main character from *Les Caves du Vatican* (chapter six). Returning to Maupassant's bastards (chapter seven), Fagley argues that they "are on the whole much less 'willfully authentic,' and more passively subject to circumstance" (125). Not only questioning legitimacy itself, notably the tendency to "pass off" a bastard as legitimate, the realist Maupassant prefers to reveal all that is hidden, not just the child's false identity but also the circumstances of parental responsibility. After studying several exemplary tales, Fagley finally turns to the novel *Pierre et Jean*, seeking the inherent drama of hidden bastardy, usually with an emphasis on maintaining the secret and thereby protecting the bourgeois social order.

Bastards facing social challenges are the foci in section three, "Bastard Freedom: Between Nomad and Outlaw," and they not only take advantage of inherent freedoms offered by the bastard status, but also have recourse to different forms of vengeance and violence. As Fagley argues, "The freedom of the bastard [in Gide and Maupassant] favors the practice of what I call 'nomadic' practices of masculinity, but also opens the door to anomic and potentially sociopathic behavior" (153). Again,

several Maupassant tales reveal such behavior (“L’orphelin,” “Un parricide,” and “Le champ d’oliviers”). Fagley then considers the “fortunate bastards” in Gide’s works, notably Bernard in *Les Faux-monnayeurs* and Lafcadio in *Les Caves du Vatican*. Whereas the former seeks ultimate reintegration into the paternal and patriarchal fold, Lafcadio maintains his nomadic bastard identity not just in terms of his geographical displacements, but especially morally, with the notorious *acte gratuit* (the railway murder of Lafcadio’s brother-in-law) pointing to an ethically untethered stance.

While I admire this study greatly, I note a few mostly minor scholarly quibbles, an important one likely outside the author’s control: no translation of French texts, whether of literary works or critics cited. No doubt, the matter of page length had to be weighed against the matter of providing greater access to non-Francophone readers, but in my view, Fagley’s topic certainly merits the widest audience possible, not only for the complex subject itself, but especially for the masterful manner in which he treats it. In any event, for French language readers, Fagley has developed a critically well informed and analytically deft understanding of topics of great import for our understanding of French culture and literary engagement at a fin de siècle to which we still turn, possibly now with greater nostalgia than ever.

**Volume:** 44.3-4

**Year:**

- 2016