

THE OBSCENE BACHELOR: HUMOR AND HORROR
IN GUY DE MAUPASSANT'S WRITINGS

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2011

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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In his novels, novellas and short stories, Maupassant presents a diverse caravan of characters: unhappily married women, privileged single men, hardy peasants, urban prostitutes and some indomitable free spirits. Such eclecticism distinguishes Maupassant's fiction from that of many of his contemporaries, especially the naturalists. Yet his social and professional life was different, too. Maupassant's youth could be described as fairly comfortable, and after service in the Franco-Prussian War as a noncombatant, he drew a modest salary in the French civil service. He dabbled in erotic poetry and began to write racy *chroniques* for newspapers. Once his novella *Boule de Suif* was published in 1880, when he was thirty, he began to earn a handsome living as one of France's most popular writers. He thus saw his era through the prism of a pleasant Norman childhood and an affluent Paris bachelorhood, eschewing all notions of marriage and family. He thoroughly reveled in his bachelorhood, which provided emancipation as well as amusement and vice. It brought in its wake a dynamic range of family ties, close

friendships and intimate relationships. This dissertation seeks to approach Maupassant's bachelorhood as an important factor—and marker—in his fictional imaginary, as lighthearted and lively a place as it is unsentimental and forbidding. Moreover, Maupassant is given to hectoring and moralizing in his writings, and some of this, too, can be linked to the writer's wide-open observation from his worldly experiences. In his tales of humor and horror, Maupassant presents a worldview that is naturalistic but not always dark and hopeless. The narrators in Maupassant's writings—often identified by him as unmarried men—present a constantly changing landscape of human struggle and mettle. And everywhere there is a strong dose of the erotic, in which human instinct can be a tragic but also joyful player in his characters' lives. It is the erotic that binds his early poems (many of them unpublished for years) to his popular and published *chroniques*, novels and short stories. Maupassant is a bold but sensitive eyewitness as he takes stock of the world around him. And his own rarefied bachelor cosmos—parts bourgeois, bohemian and libertine—must be acknowledged, for I believe its role in his works is significant. In acknowledging and observing this milieu, the reader might better discover the sensuous man and cultivated writer who embraced it.

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Introduction. THE OBSCENE BACHELOR

J'avais mené, dès mon adolescence, une vie de garçon. Vous savez ce que c'est. Libre et sans famille, résolu à ne point prendre femme légitime, je passais tantôt trois mois avec l'une, tantôt six mois avec l'autre, puis un an sans compagne en butinant sur la masse des filles à prendre ou à vendre.

—from the short story “L’Ermite” (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 687-688)

Guy de Maupassant wrote about the tortured and the dejected, the humble and the faithful, in what for him could be a faithless and amoral world. Two of his most well-known and oft-translated works are cases in point: The short story “La Parure” (in English, “The Necklace”) shows how Mathilde, the simple wife of a government clerk, decides to mortgage her family’s future in order to pay back a rich schoolmate for a lost piece of jewelry she later discovers is worthless. For Maupassant, the virtuous man or woman, even wrongheaded or miscued, rises to the occasion of duty and service. Mathilde is so guided by her moral compass that she will move heaven and earth to meet its obligations. The second of Maupassant’s well-disseminated works is *Une vie* (often translated into English as *A Woman’s Life*), which follows the lifelong travails of Jeanne, an abused wife and unappreciated mother. Despite all she has suffered and learned, Jeanne remains duty-bound to the end. Her long and sad existence might be summed up as nothing more, and nothing less, than the virtuous life.

If personal virtue can often be somber and soul-killing in Maupassant's world, his fiction rarely presents life in an amoral vacuum. Even when it appears that way, the consequences are all the more nefarious and grim: In the short story "Pierrot," seldom on any reading lists, Madame Lefèvre is a country bumpkin who can ill afford a mid-century French tax imposed on domestic dogs and cats. She does what others in her village have done without compunction: she casts her little dog Pierrot into the deep communal pit where unwanted companion animals are discarded and forgotten (to die eventually of starvation if they aren't consumed first by the pit's other desperate denizens). Madame Lefèvre discovers all too late that she truly loved Pierrot, but her decision is as irrevocable as it was immoral—Maupassant abandons her in front of the pit to listen each day for Pierrot's unique bark until she is sure he hasn't survived another day. In another little-known story, "Un fils," the grown son of an aging member of the Académie Française was not only sired out of wedlock but was the result of rape: the *immortel* had sexually assaulted an illiterate Breton chambermaid at an inn when he was a young man. His progeny has grown up to be a drunken, mentally challenged stable hand, and the old man feels nothing but remorse and shame for his deed.

What some critics and biographers have described as Maupassant's violent and erotic literary bent appears to be naturalism full-throttle and unalloyed, and it is very disturbing. In his novels, but especially in his short stories, Maupassant penned vignettes about unconditional love, selfless honor, thoughtless violence and rank depravity in such close quarters that they can intersect in a kind of jarring disorder. The human animal is, for Maupassant, just that: the male and the female, cast adrift, rely on instinct, the senses,

and their inherently animalian mettle in order to survive—or to overwhelm and destroy others in their path. At first blush, Maupassant’s fictional world would seem to be as “scientific” and Darwinian as Zola’s or the Goncourts’. Yet its scope is broader, its *champ littéraire* more significant. Among Zola and his entire “bande de Médan,” Maupassant’s world appears more wide open, eclectic, and even peculiar. If it is sometimes a dark and violent place, it is also vivacious, erotic, and full of sensuous delights. If it contains all that is abject—in the aristocrat, the peasant, the workingman—it also offers much that is surprisingly moral, decent and full of promise. For Maupassant’s fictional narrator typically calls the individual man or woman to account: he or she truly has a responsible role to play in a treacherous world, a role that addresses human suffering and can alleviate some of the treachery.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Zola had said that “le roman va devant lui, ne ménageant aucune surprise, offrant tout au plus la matière d’un fait divers; et quand il est fini, c’est comme si l’on quittait la rue pour rentrer chez soi” (*Le Roman expérimental*). Zola went on to codify naturalism as something not just fresh and *engagé* but militant and revolutionary, a literary force that would eclipse anterior modes of literary production, notably Romanticism. In *Émile Zola: D’un naturalisme pervers*, Jean Kaempfer sees naturalism’s ambitions as both “hegemonic” and “totalitarian” (53, 103): “Le naturalisme, au-delà de sa spécificité littéraire, annexe la science, envahit la morale et la politique; en-deça son extension n’est

pas moindre, puisqu'il imprègne les moeurs intimes de ses écrivains, se signifie dans leurs habitudes les plus menues; il colonise le siècle, et il détermine, jusque dans les détails, une manière de vivre" (Kaempfer, 70). Indeed, Zolian naturalism has moral ambitions, and it takes itself dead seriously. Not just a response, or an affront, to the Romantics, its calling card is so-called real life, so verisimilar that readers must recognize it as "real." The naturalist writer is charged with assessing, not just describing, life's struggle in deadpan but muscular prose. Zola thought that the naturalist novel should be "impersonal," for his naturalism was on a mission. It would document life without fancy and flourish. If Kaempfer says that naturalism "impregnates" the mores of its practitioners, Maupassant as practitioner was no exception. He saw much askew in the social contract—a contract Maupassant acknowledges if many other naturalists do not—and he approached it with all of Zola's scalding directness. His own life and experiences made it rather difficult to maintain a naturalist's impersonal detachment, however. The indulged son of an unhappily married couple who separated early, a young man who decided early to avoid marriage, who was affluent and feted at the age of thirty—all this encouraged him to sample the unconventional life. As a writer, he saw too many "woulds" and "shoulds" in naturalism, too much staid dogma, and he said as much in a letter he published in 1883 in *La Revue Bleue*. Thus did Maupassant take his leave from the naturalist school, for he was never one to hold to the party line.

Zola's *Le Roman expérimental*, formally released in 1880, had made the rounds the previous year as published essays, and Maupassant viewed it early on as rather overwrought—as grandiose as Zola's huge ego, if one is to believe Maupassant's letter

to Flaubert: “Moi, je le trouve [Zola] absolument fou.... ‘La République sera naturaliste ou elle ne sera pas.’ ‘Je ne suis qu’un savant.’... ‘L’enquête sociale.’ Le document humain. La série des *formules*...” (*Correspondance Flaubert-Maupassant*, April 24, 1879). His point of view here seems to reject Zola’s positivist grandstanding even though he himself subscribed to some of naturalism’s core goals: to inquire into the nature of human struggle and to seek to explain its complex workings, but in his case more as an active observer than a detached and impersonal chronicler. Maupassant the narrator seems emotionally involved in his stories and in his characters, and herein lies a difference with Zola. Throughout Maupassant’s works, some rather un-naturalist ideas come rushing to the fore in his narratives: the power of hope, bold acts of human goodness, and even the perseverance and survival of goodness itself. Human kindness and hopefulness are indelibly inked within some of Maupassant’s harshest fictional works; they seem to act more like place-markers in Zola’s: for example, in *L’Assommoir*, Gervaise’s goodness and even the joyful rites of her marriage with Coupeau are no match for human adversity, for both Gervaise and Coupeau (and their inherent decency) will be consumed by it. Yet in *Une vie*, the goodness and optimism of Jeanne remain intact until the end of her life: Maupassant presents joy and virtue as not only prepossessing attributes but durable ones. They are real, even eternal. And this is as true in the hardscrabble lives of modest people as in Jeanne’s *petite noblesse*. These are decent folk, and unlike Jeanne, not all of them are portrayed as victims. The madam of *La Maison Tellier* is a singularly magnetic and virtuous force, as is the sober demi-mondaine Madame Obardi in the novella *Yvette*. The loving newlywed Berthe in the short story

“L’Enfant” seeks to heal the pain in her new family when she accepts her husband’s bastard child into the household as her own.

In *Le Naturalisme français*, P. Martino notes that some critics see Maupassant distancing himself from Zolian naturalism with the publication of *Une vie* in 1883. Despite the protagonist Jeanne’s bitter adulthood—from *jeune mariée* to *petite vieille*—Maupassant’s telling of it includes this supplementary dimension of enduring verities, says Martino: “[L]e sentiment, la vertu tranquille, la bonté, si durement niés d’abord, se voient maintenant faire une place. Ce n’est pas là l’effet d’un principe nouveau; ces beaux sentiments, Maupassant les introduit comme des choses vues, et observées autrefois, réelles” (Martino, 130). Maupassant did not wish simply to seize on the abject or calamitous at the expense of all else in the human condition; life was too full and exciting, and it held much that was good. He not only marked time with life’s fleeting *douceurs*, he noted something more powerful and substantial: life’s purpose, its potential.

One essential facet of Maupassant’s more effervescent approach is his focus on the erotic. Some biographers have addressed the writer’s sexuality directly, others more carefully. For Paul Ignotus, writing in *The Paradox of Maupassant* (1966), Maupassant was obsessed with sex, a “sexomaniac, his mind [as] sex-ridden as his body, [and] he was obsessed with sex as a subject” (95, emphasis mine). A decade later, Michael Lerner’s *Maupassant* (1975) sees his erotics as a feature of the writer’s imaginary, adding: “they both represent [his] dehumanizing pessimism and the related insecurity into which his idealism sank” (104). Yet in *Maupassant, le clandestin* (2000), Olivier Frébourg is straightforward and philosophical. He views Maupassant’s hypersexuality as masking

feelings of fragility and vulnerability: “[A]u fond, les débauchés sont des pudiques....[Maupassant] se débraguettait la nuit, se corsetait le jour, n’a jamais rien lâché de ses sentiments....Le sexe chasse l’ennui” (151).

For Maupassant, sex is the instinctual act of the mature animal but also its linchpin in the natural world. It thus occupies—it *must* occupy—a privileged place in life. One is hard pressed to come away from a work of Maupassant’s and not be struck by human sexuality’s central place in the writer’s worldview, a worldview more humanistic and less misanthropic than Zola’s. For Maupassant was a humanist. The workings of sexuality, of course, could be inhuman and base and tragic in his eyes. Its ravages can be seen in the tortured face of a contrite *immortel* in “Un fils,” and in the reclusive small-town mayor in “La Petite Roque.” In the latter, Mayor Renardet has raped and strangled a teenage girl he came upon during a solitary country stroll, and once the import of his crime sinks in, he will take his own life.

A naturalist’s approach to the primal and the violent urge of sex is evident in Maupassant’s novels and stories—executed and calibrated to disturb and move. Likewise, he employs the erotic to charm and to titillate, for sexuality is also indispensable to human joy and connection. Though Maupassant’s erotic world encompasses rape, the physical abuse of women, unwanted pregnancy, and even sexual compulsion, these can’t impugn the essential goodness and rightness of sexuality. In fact, it is asceticism and the denial of one’s sexual nature that Maupassant scores repeatedly: the celibate widower Renardet in “La Petite Roque,” or else the two surly Roman Catholic nuns in the novella *Boule de Suif*. Such exceptions can only confirm the rule: Humans are sexual beings, and

they deny their sexual nature at their own peril. Would that everyone could experience it as the joyful and natural propensity it is instead of as a nuisance or a shame.

Maupassant's jocular short story "Le Signe" introduces the less than happily married Baronne de Grangerie as so coveting her divorced friend's sexual liberty that the baronne unwittingly (or dim-wittedly) prostitutes herself after imitating a working girl's come-hither nod—"the signal"—from her balcony, with drastic effects. In Maupassant's world, what has been carefully repressed will only bubble up to the surface later. Not only naïve curiosity but the innate need for human fulfillment transforms this high-born *étourdie* into a *cocotte*. Whether Maupassant was earnest or playful in his approach to the erotic, he saw it as the essential, and universal, facet of both physical interaction and spiritual well-being among humans.

THESIS: MAUPASSANT'S BACHELOR EROTICS

In his youth, Maupassant led a comfortable life from his parents' purse and then drew a modest salary from the French civil service. From age seventeen until his health declined in his late thirties, Maupassant devoted much time to social and sexual diversions. As a charter member of an informal group of young, unmarried cutups and fellow *canotiers*—baptized the "Société des Crépitiers" and later the "Société des Maquereaux"—Maupassant cultivated a life of unbridled sensualism, including dangerous male hazing rituals and orgies appropriate for Sade's monastery of Sainte-Marie-des-Bois in *Justine*.

The Maquereaux' heterosexual male bonding was that of a special affiliation, one that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has referred to as "homosocial." In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Sedgwick describes homosociality not as homoeroticism per se, but as an all-male cohort that derives its identity from "obligatory heterosexuality...built into male-dominated kinship systems" (I,3). Women's systematic exclusion from this cohort only reinforces homosocial apartness. One could link the Maquereaux (and their pranks) to Maupassant's later adherence as a successful writer to his era's reigning *sociabilité masculine*, a trend that merged nineteenth-century male professional life with a blustery fin-de-siècle male leisure. Maupassant's brief stint as a noncombatant during the Franco-Prussian War hardly interrupted his male-only affiliations; on the contrary, a man's war afforded an interlude no less exclusive (and no less hedonistic). After the war, the naughty-boy Maquereaux would take up right where they left off, touring the same bawdy haunts on the Lower Seine together. When Maupassant contracted syphilis in 1877, before his twenty-eighth birthday, he boasted about it in a letter to a fellow Maquereau, Robert Pinchon: "J'ai la vérole, la vraie, et j'en suis fier" (cit. in Frébourg, 90).

In the chief biographies of Maupassant written in the last two decades or so—those of Henri Troyat, Armand Lanoux and Michael Lerner among the warhorses—Guy's main social influences are said to be three bachelors who had pursued the same all-male exclusivity: his mentor Gustave Flaubert, of course, but also his long-dead maternal uncle, Alfred Le Poittevin, and the poet Louis Bouilhet (both dear friends of Flaubert's). Guy never met his uncle Alfred, but he knew all about him: Alfred was a fun-loving

bachelor who married late in life. Bouilhet was Guy's second mentor, a bachelor who later lived with a common-law wife. All three opted for a lengthy bachelorhood, as would Maupassant. Young Guy thus had his proper introduction to the bachelor-sensualist *sans entraves*, and he joined its freewheeling subculture where men acted out their erotic impulses and where pleasure was a mighty principle. At the time Maupassant's novella *Boule de Suif* came out in 1880, when he was thirty, Maupassant was earning a handsome living as one of France's most popular writers. He thus saw his era through the prism of an affluent bachelorhood, keeping notions of duty and family at a comfortable distance. This was neither the more contemplative bachelor life of Edmond de Goncourt or J.-K. Huysmans—nor was it the self-loathing one of Baudelaire, who scorned his dark room and bemoaned his female companion of an evening. Maupassant was from a younger generation; he thoroughly reveled in his bachelorhood, which provided amusement and vice as well as emancipation. The series of Paris apartments he occupied were well-appointed bachelor havens, all off the beaten track of contemporaneous bourgeois mores and “domestic” marriage suitable for men other than he. And, of course, there was Maupassant's private domain in Normandy, a “chalet” he constructed near Étretat on land given to him by his mother. It received the jocular nickname “La Guillette” from Guy's married friend Hermine Lecomte du Noüy (Troyat, 111-112).

Bachelorhood provided something else for Maupassant: social interaction with other nonconformists, notably bachelors; friendships with smart unmarried women and accomplished married ones; and adventures well outside the confines of his elite social class. In this dissertation, Maupassant's own fin-de-siècle bachelor milieu—as light-

hearted and lively a space at it is sordid and risky—must receive its deserved focus. If Maupassant’s fiction enters the reader’s line of vision and dazzles with its wit and brio, it exudes the air of Maupassant’s gaudy bachelor parlor—the one Edmond de Goncourt once described as “le bon mobilier de putain” (letter, Dec. 18, 1884). Maupassant’s erotically tinged fiction references this bachelor milieu, freighted as it is with the drama of pleasure, possession, abandonment, and its caravan of dissolute men and women who sometimes pursue their pleasures with the conviction of *philosophes*. These fictional characters are not always simple *dévergondés*, however: they live with their own demons, their private struggles, and their regrets; they stand out in Maupassant’s works as a multidimensional cast drawn from his rarefied world, during what some have called the bourgeois century. As Martino notes, “Peindre des hommes et les femmes qui ne sont pas ‘comme les autres,’ c’est précisément le contraire de la doctrine naturaliste; c’est à quoi, bientôt, Maupassant s’employa” (136). Not only did Maupassant write about these people, he was one of them. In this rich *champ littéraire* and marginal dimension that Zola and the Goncourts could never know so intimately, Maupassant lived and breathed. I would suggest that this is the key to discover why so many Maupassantian characters are not “like the others.”

I would also suggest that Maupassant, in privileging sex as the motor of so many human actions, projects this narrow bachelor subculture and mores onto the conventional reader, for his aims are also didactic. His natural cynicism, imbued with the life experiences of an uncommon group of people—vital, independent, their human foibles

intact—can quickly give way to highly moral commentary about a basic human need: to love, to bond with others, and to give both sexual expression.

I will argue in this dissertation that Maupassant cannot help but inject himself, and his special milieu, into what in many ways is still a naturalist body of work. So much of Maupassant's pen comes straight out of this bachelor realm: tales of prostitution, adultery, rape, frenetic liaisons and fatal passion portray a life lived at the margins, yet for the reader's edification, he also pays tribute to his unconventional characters' real-life courage, endurance and virtue. I would add that while Maupassant's fiction expresses emancipated values of the bachelor realm, he never shies away from lives lived outside the bachelor parlor: Indeed, his novels, novellas and short stories take on the world outside: the trials of parenthood, familial drama, individual sacrifice by men and by women, and a love best described as unconditional. Such themes are just as central to Maupassant's works as sexual egotism, cool betrayal or complicit self-destruction. Emphasizing this bachelor pen is a topic that, to my knowledge, has not been much explored, even though this bachelor life and associations have been cursorily mentioned—and passed over—by biographers. The writer's bachelorhood has often been explained away as something of a socioeconomic footnote. Frébourg, more direct than most, sees Maupassant's life choices as more deliberate: "une insoumission" and "une dissidence sexuelle et sociale" (155). Yet I see Maupassant, the man and the writer, as a bachelor bred, and I observe a strident "bachelorist" ethos and rhetoric in his works as well. Here resides a rich and wide swath of unconventional characters and experiences—strongly dependent, I believe, on his specifically late nineteenth-century bachelor milieu.

In my dissertation, this milieu will be sketched against the backdrop of fin-de-siècle social and political change. Maupassant, who came of age in the Third Republic, saw France's disillusionment after the Franco-Prussian debacle and the crushing of the sociopolitical experiment that was the Paris Commune. In the conservative aftermath of 1870s France, Maupassant sought to breathe free and flourish.

VANTAGE POINT: THE BACHELOR NARRATOR

Maupassant was suffused by a bachelor realm, and his original influences were his two living bachelor mentors. It was Flaubert, says Micheline Besnard-Coursodon in *Le Piège: Étude thématique et structurale de l'oeuvre de Maupassant*, who introduced young Guy to the Marquis de Sade. Maupassant embraced *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* and Sade's *esprit libertin*, which enjoyed renewed interest among late-century men of letters. Maupassant paid homage to "l'ombre du vieux marquis" in invitations to attend *A la feuille de rose*, *Maison turque*, the pornographic play he and his Maquereaux first staged in 1875 (Lanoux, 169). But Sade's works weren't just a bawdy exemplar for Maupassant; they promoted a freewheeling erotic ethic to be attained outside of marriage. The Sadean woman was as free to roam as any man, and in *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, Madame de Saint-Ange has the blessing and connivance of her own husband in giving free rein to her desires. La Saint-Ange's eighteenth-century aristocrat's "open" marriage and running libertine commentary squares with Philippe Mengue's assessment in *L'Ordre sadien*:

“une éthique de commandement (catégorique) comme *légitimation du désir...* C’est le ‘Jouis!—Oui!’ de la volonté de jouissance qui est la loi même du désir” (234).

Yet Sade’s “order” preserves in it an egalitarian dialectic, and Sade’s famous harangue in the fifth scene of *La Philosophie* (against rape and the subjugation of females, and for an eroticism that is totally consensual) finds a constant refrain in Maupassant’s works. Maupassant belittles the possessive husband and decries his undeserved imperium over the wife in marriage. If smart women can’t sue for divorce, as the Marquise de Rennedon does in the short story “Sauvée,” then adultery is the time-honored (and honorable) remedy for the unhappy wife. Maupassant, whom some are wont to affix with the label of misogynist, champions the unhappily married woman without exception, from Jeanne in *Une vie* to the widowed Madame de Jadelle in the short story “La Fenêtre.” Jadelle, an astute observer of men, interviews any and all suitors before she will ever dare tie the knot again. Beyond the simple exhortation for women to be less hidebound in an unhappy marriage is an essential libertine prescription: the unfulfilled but analytical wife is allowed to stray from the marriage bond. The miserable married lady in the short story “Madame Parisse” has a sexual adventure with a military officer, and he will always be the love of her life. In a more playful vein, the bachelor lovers in the stories “Cri d’alarme” and “Misti: Journal d’un garçon” are boy-toys strung along by unhappily married women (as Maupassant was at times himself).

Maupassant’s strong women are just as likely to be unmarried as married—and they often live full lives outside marriage. Prostitution, the nineteenth-century “scourge” that saw the development of multiple types in Maupassant’s time—from streetwalkers to

filles entretenues to state-defined subcategories of brothel work—can be liberating and ennobling in Maupassant’s works. Yet one must take issue with Charles Bernheimer in *Figures of Ill Repute*, who avers that Maupassant saw “all women as whores” and that “his portraits of all prostitutes are relatively banal” (309n). Once the reader casts the net beyond the ubiquitous novellas *Boule de Suif* and *La Maison Tellier*, one finds Maupassantian characterizations that are anything but trite portraits of patriotic *filles* and motherly madams. These women are the kind that regular brothel-goers such as Maupassant might have met himself, and they are compelling: the young prostitute in “L’Odyssée d’une fille,” raped by two gendarmes when she was a virgin of sixteen, ironically faces police raids as a Paris sex worker. In the story “Ça ira,” an aging female shop owner tells the narrator about her supplemental work as a prostitute to round out her wages as a milliner’s assistant, in an age when many a *fille du peuple* availed herself of sex work to survive in the big city. My dissertation will delve into the sweep of late-century prostitution in and around Paris, relying on works as diverse as Jill Harsin’s *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* and Alain Corbin’s *Les Filles de noce*. Maupassant’s fictional works about fin-de-siècle prostitutes include harrowing references to some of the wretched conditions described in these sources and others, and it would be a huge omission not to explore the harsh lot of these young women.

One is struck again and again by the emotionally involved narrator that Maupassant becomes in his fiction. In the novel *Bel-Ami*, when the working girl Rachel finds herself publicly shunned by Duroy, her former and longtime john, she will take him on publicly in front of his friends. Maupassant’s narration imbues Rachel with a self-

respect that will not countenance being dismissed as a lowly whore. In the story “L’Odyssée d’une fille,” the male narrator has run into a young prostitute on the street after she fled a police *rafle*. This is naturalism, yes, but Maupassant’s variant strain of it employs a kind of emotional storytelling that one does not often attach to naturalism. Moreover, Maupassant opens a number of his short stories with a bachelor narrator who recounts his experiences before a reunion of hardened *garçons*. This literary device has a lone male narrator first taking the pulse of the room, describing the privileged men convened, and then hitting them—his own captive audience—with tales from the other side: unmarried and unhappily married women, pregnant girls, boorish but sexually entitled bachelors and cruel husbands. The numbing variety of adult sexual misery—and sometimes bliss—is seen through the lens of Maupassant’s observant (and often first-person) accounts. As Maupassant’s bachelor holds forth, the experiential soon waxes polemical: naturalism with a bold and moralizing thrust.

I believe that it is crucial to see Guy de Maupassant’s bachelorhood as a potent force in the writer’s fictional worldview and as a realm peculiar to his era: affluent single men leading their lives as bachelor lives, who reveled intellectually in the eighteenth-century libertine corpus of Sade, Prévost, and Laclos, and who had few social constraints imposed on them. Maupassant’s world was one of outsiders, of “bohemians.” For he surrounded himself with a diverse social set beyond his elite coterie of bachelors, bourgeois publishers, literary mentors, and formidable *salonnières*. In this dissertation, Maupassant’s milieu will be compared to other unconventional milieux, including the bohémias of nineteenth-century Paris. Jerrold Seigel’s *Bohemian Paris* situates no less

than three old Paris bohémias, bookended by the 1840s and the 1920s. Maupassant's bohemia of the 1870s and 1880s might be seen as the one in the middle, and it must be explored—notably its ties to the material era and moneyed elite of Maupassant's time.

Guy de Maupassant chose to frequent a broad and eclectic bunch, and from it he chose his friends and intimates. Well documented is his liaison with the *androgynous* Gisèle d'Estoc, the young woman of impeccable bourgeois upbringing who lived her own life as a budding artist and writer. Her short memoir of her time with Maupassant, *Cahier d'amour*, may or may not be a fraud, but her life was not. And whatever flaws bedevil a second dubious memoir, *Maupassant par son valet de chambre*, written by Maupassant's longtime manservant, François Tassart, there is credible commentary from Tassart about Maupassant's bachelor *quotidien*, his trips afield and vacations abroad. The general biographies of Troyat, Lerner, Lanoux and Frébourg all broach the accounts of Maupassant's common-law wife, Joséphine Litzelmann, and the three children from their relationship. Some extant documentation of the writer as an affectionate father and loyal son are at odds with his reputation as an egocentric misogynist. Yet it is evident that he supported his household dutifully from 1883 until his death from syphilis ten years later. And Guy gave regular financial assistance to his mother, Laure Le Poittevin Maupassant, whenever she requested it. When all these accounts are mined, a more sensitive Maupassant comes to stand beside the portrait of the macho poseur interested in little other than sexual conquests. The writer actually spent much of his time in female company, and he became beholden to, and smitten by, women: from Gisèle d'Estoc to influential society ladies like Hermine Lecomte du Nouÿ, fashionable Parisian

salonnières such as the comtesse Emmanuella Potocka and Geneviève Straus and admiring but gutsy correspondents like the painter and sculptor Maria “Moussia” Bashkirtseff. At the close of his life, it was some of these women who made an effort to see Maupassant in his final days of delirium and suffering. His own formidable mother, Laure, who outlived Guy by twenty years, would not attempt to visit him at the very end.

Maupassant’s bachelor “lifestyle” can be seen as a confluence of overlapping relationships that supplanted traditional marriage for him in every sense. The professional and moral support of male mentors who themselves had rejected legal marriage, Guy’s own liaisons with emancipated women, his secret household, the sensual time-outs on his own in the South of France or in North Africa—all are documented in general biographies like Troyat’s and in intimate recollections such as Tassart’s. Yet none have linked them to Maupassantian literary subjects and themes.

In addition, if Maupassant’s bachelor realm can be objectified as a kind of parallel universe in his time, it must also be situated amid the ferment of late nineteenth-century France. The economic, moral and political clout of the bourgeoisie in Western Europe had helped to introduce and solidify domestic marriage among the urban affluent, as Randolph Trumbach has shown in *Marriage and the Egalitarian Family*. This “affectionate marriage” with children had become the social paradigm for educated and affluent Frenchmen of Maupassant’s era. All else was met with suspicion and even hostility. Both Jean Claude Bologne’s *Histoire du célibat et des célibataires* and Jean Borie’s *Le Célibataire français* confirm the dubious reputation of nineteenth-century French bachelors as contrasted with bourgeois *pères de famille*. Amid the worrisome

phenomenon of perceived French cultural and demographic decline, some conservative demographer-moralists engaged in virulent commentary. Mid-century reactionaries like Dr. Garnier and Adolphe Bertillon weren't the only ones calling for men to marry; late-century sociologists such as Émile Durkheim also promoted domestic marriage as a moral panacea for the modern man. As Judith Surkis notes in *Sexing the Citizen*, “Durkheim notably insisted on the importance of domestic life for *men's* moral well-being, not women's” (136).

Not that all this conservative brouhaha was exactly tumultuous for Maupassant himself, ensconced in his bachelor lair. Still, Bologne and others have noted, the contemporary demographer-moralists sought to humble the bachelor and curtail his bachelorhood, for they perceived a social restlessness abroad in society. For all the moralists' carping, however, their written rants betray a feeling of sheer alarm and dread amid rapid change in sexual mores. In *Sexual Moralities in France 1780-1980*, Antony Copley situates much of the social and sexual stagnation in France to the seventy years of the Third Republic (1870-1940), that happy hunting ground of reactionary critics: “If France was indeed to undergo a profound change in attitudes toward sexual morality in the century after the 1870s,” says Copley, “it did so belatedly,...largely [leaving] the Third Republic untouched” (101). But Michel Foucault, in his first volume of *Histoire de la sexualité*, cautions against seeing the entire nineteenth century as a static age of staid bourgeois conformity, especially in sexual matters, for much was evolving beneath the surface of public bourgeois propriety. The moralists felt this, and they reacted in kind.

Maupassant's erotically tinged themes, some arch but others scalding, emerge, as he did, in the stodgy Third Republic. They take on contemporaneous bourgeois mores while indicating, belowground, an era *en ébullition*. And they provide a survey of fin-de-siècle attitudes that will engender the Belle Époque, that time of great economic, cultural and political change—and more conservative resistance. Perceptions of women's roles were also under stress, and Maupassant eludes to this in his works: here are women as entrepreneurs or full partners with their husbands; or he describes how entitled husbands assert their dominance over their wives to the full letter of French civil law. His bachelor narrators, typically earnest and *embourgeoisés*, are his keen observers of this century in social motion, and in their unique role as social outsiders, few subjects will be left out of bounds.

If the self-identified bachelor narrators in the short stories “L'Armoire” and “Le Marquis de Fumerol” recount their tales before all-male social gatherings, the unidentified narrators in other works seem strangely likeminded: biased toward the good but downtrodden, they become obviously and emotionally invested in those who evince virtue in disadvantage. Over and over, they see marriage as more than a burden. In *Une vie*, Maupassant's narrator disparages wedlock as an obstacle to both Jeanne's and Julien's fulfillment. In *Bel-Ami*, the unnamed narrator mocks outright and *a priori* the marriages of the bachelor Duroy's two adulterous lovers, Madame de Marelle and Madame Walter who, it is implied, have cause to seek love elsewhere. Maupassant's *parti pris* against conventional, “affectionate” marriage is strikingly hostile, as his narration ties in real-time custom and law to sketch touching tributes to the suffering

husband and wife. The divorce reforms of the Loi Naquet (1883) are understood in the wife's bold—and only recently legal—actions to leave her husband in “Sauvée.” And in “Le Legs,” Maupassant unsubtly derides the husband who would invoke his prerogatives in the Code Civil of 1804 and 1828 to deny his wife her bachelor friend's inheritance.

THE BACHELOR AS MORALIST, IN POETRY AND IN PROSE

The erotic, of course, is but one theme in Maupassant's works. The hypocrisies of the conventional life, its dishonesty and corruption and exploitation, are a few others. Yet the erotic infiltrates Maupassant's other themes: the nature of violence, malfeasance, parenthood, mental health and stability, and survival itself. All become more dramatic and more credible through the prism of his erotics, which constantly channel the social attitudes and mores of an era. Not limiting himself at all to bachelor rakes and noble prostitutes or sneaking adulterers, Maupassant engages in a thematic approach that shadows the natural world and its human participants, drawn from every station in life. Taboos like incest are not off limits. For the bachelor realm is ripe for conversation; the bachelor himself is privy and open to the larger world. The Maupassantian *dîner de garçons* as a literary hook is rare in nineteenth-century French literature; the author's dinner talk roams far and wide, beyond bachelor comforts and smugness, to delve into the sex drive—their sex drive—with all its psychological and spiritual fallout in their lives and those of others. Maupassant's bachelor narration, therefore, seems to thrive on such

open inquiry. It lends itself to eclectic subjects and storytelling while it moves beyond the naturalist's cool documentarian pen.

The adolescent Guy de Maupassant dreamed of being a poet and a playwright, and his early unpublished poems and plays are now generally available in print. They include the rowdy play *A la feuille de rose*, *Maison turque* and a score of poems, including sensuous odes on female pulchritude (the sedate "Le Mur") and coarse paeans to sassy *grisettes* (the porno yarn "69"). Ironically, it was a tame but suggestive poem (the Seine-infused "Au bord de l'eau") that got young Guy in trouble with the obscenity codes of the late 1870s. Maupassant was soon pursuing subject matter both sensitive and raw, and through a discourse dependent on nature's constants: sexual instinct and sexual urge, and its dramatic consequences in human events. The sexual violence of his poem "Vénus rustique," for example, anticipates the powerful moral clarity of his short story "La Petite Roque." The poem itself is a startling beginning that foreshadows the wide-ranging novels and novellas of his later "legitimate" works—here light and jovial, there squalid and sordid—and the approach he will retain to the end. Maupassant's career as a chronicler-columnist in newspapers and literary reviews overlapped the years of his unpublished works and some of his published ones. It too shows a writer well attuned to the cares of his readers, many of them women, who hungrily awaited his take on more than chic Parisian fashions and beautiful people.

Guy de Maupassant's wide scope of poems, plays and chronicles can be seen as evidence of an enduring interest in the welfare of women, children, misfits—even pets—all vulnerable and noble in his view. His narratives become a plea for humility from men

who are more jaded and privileged, as in “L’Attente,” where a mother forever abandoned by her beloved grown son can only await her death. Maupassant’s scope of human suffering, especially that of women and girls, is harshly naturalistic yet life-affirming. He also shows some men, albeit more rarely, acting out of altruism and decency, like the bachelor who offers his love and his home to the unmarried single mother in “Histoire d’une fille de ferme.” Not infrequently his characters’ simple, affirmative choices and deeds work to soothe and settle the natural disorder around them: a cast-off farm girl gains not only a husband but a second chance, and a tiny marquise wins not just independence and material support but self-respect in her new life.

Maupassant’s fictional works, charged with the erotic as they are, dispense with matter-of-fact realism or naturalism. In fact, they more closely resemble *contes moraux* as vital as Laclos’ *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, a work Maupassant always saw as a masterpiece of moral suasion. But the moralist in Maupassant will not be squelched either. His fiction appears as unsubtly *engagé* as that of Laclos or Flaubert or Zola. Here, however, Maupassant’s informed, omniscient narrator speaks his mind, and it is the mind of a bred-in-the-bone bachelor. He has seen it all, hasn’t he? His stolid brothel owners, striving *filles du peuple* and cuckolded husbands take their place in line, along with a throng of spoiled-rotten bachelors who sometimes get their comeuppance. This literature, anchored as it is in eroticism, privileges sex but strives to make more intimate connections. For Maupassant, the erotic is much more than sexual implusion. Humans’ sexual nature might be all basic instinct, but even when delinked from instinct by civilization’s bells and whistles—social trappings or legal obligations—it remains

serious business for everyone. It is powerful enough to create more than its share of human drama, misery and joy. In Maupassant's natural world, the erotic is always an actor in a leading role. I will argue that in Guy de Maupassant's works, he teases out the erotic so that it takes center stage not as a fact of life, but as a verity, one that is sometimes joyful and hopeful, and even eternal.

Chapter I. THE MAKING OF A BOURGEOIS BOHEMIAN

Edmond de Goncourt is appalled in the spring of 1877 when he pens a new entry in his journal: “Young Maupassant,” he writes, has joined an all-male cast for a performance of the pornographic play he co-wrote with Robert Pinchon, *A la feuille de rose, Maison turque*. The actors, half dressed and taking on the roles of both men and women, scamper through the spare set of a Turkish brothel throwing fistfuls of condoms and essentially contravening contemporaneous norms of public propriety rather than of morality. Maupassant and his cohorts seem to have purposely gathered a mixed audience for their hi-jinx. “Le monstrueux,” complains Goncourt in his journal, “c’est que le père de Maupassant assistait à la représentation.” Not only is the elder Maupassant there; so are Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant’s longtime mentor, and several masked society ladies (whom Goncourt fails to mention). And if Flaubert pronounces the play to be “very fresh,” Goncourt cannot abide a spectacle he calls “cette salauderie” (all quoted from his *Journal*, May 31, 1877).

Seven years into the Third Republic, these were spirited times for young men of letters. In fact, the word “republic” has been mentioned in the Constitution for all of two years—introduced into the French Assembly as a secondary amendment in 1875 (Lanoux, 101). True, the reactionary gentlemen of the *Ordre Moral*, the monarchist-conservative coalition that helped bring the dour old soldier Mac-Mahon to power in 1873, would eventually be defeated by the republicans in the parliamentary elections of late 1877—amid “large-scale public politics...slogans, speeches and nationally recognized issues,” Seigel writes. These issues included Mac-Mahon’s dissolution of Parliament in May and

widespread resentment against the conservative power politics of the aristocracy, the *grande bourgeoisie*, and the clergy (Seigel, 227-228). The political atmosphere in France was volatile to say the least. Moreover, if press censorship was beginning to relax in these early years of the Third Republic vis-à-vis the Second Empire (Zeldin II, 548), other forms of censorship were not about to disappear.

Censorship of the press and of cultural products has a rich tradition in France. The sole province of the Church until the mid-seventeenth century, censorship became the purview of the crown during the eighteenth, says Anne Goldgar in her essay “The Absolutism of Taste”: “The number of censors grew rapidly...from 41 in 1727 to 178 by 1789,” as they sought to ferret out all that might threaten church, state, or “good morals” (88-89). If censorship of the press was eventually banned by the French state in 1881 (thanks to the dogged efforts of Jules Ferry and others), notable exceptions were made for calumnious libel and obscenity. The historical compendium *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia* duly notes that a special provision of the 1881 censorship ban expressly preserved legal sanction for “outrage à la morale publique et religieuse et aux bonnes moeurs” (854). Obscenity, whether in print or not, was thus fair game for the state throughout Maupassant’s lifetime. Also still on the books was a decree from 1874 that had restored a censorship bureau just for the production of plays, and “which had functioned under the Second Empire...though now ‘inspectors’ [were named] ‘examiners’ ” (Goldgar, in *Theatre and State in France*, 222).

As if skating out on this thin ice just for the thrill of it, some youthful *littéraires*

were determined to make mischief—and Guy de Maupassant was one of the mischief makers. *Feuille de rose* was fictional and farcical, and a play much in keeping with his risk-taking nature. Yet it anticipated the twenty-seven-year-old Maupassant's bold approach to writing. Quite at ease pushing his own envelope, Guy was also writing outré poetry and plays. Unlike his mentor, Flaubert, who rebuked the moral rot of the dominant French bourgeoisie, and unlike Zola, whose grim novels *L'Assommoir* and *Germinal* saw the French working class as the collective victim of heredity and a cruel capitalism, Guy de Maupassant's literary themes were apolitical and more “slice of life”—attuned to human foibles, comic or tragic sexual impulse and, above all, innate self-interest. Zola, young Guy wrote to his friend Paul Alexis late in 1877, was “une magnifique, une éclatante et nécessaire personnalité. Mais sa manière est une manifestation de l'art et non une somme. Pourquoi se restreindre?” (cit. in Lanoux, 108). Maupassant did not wish to restrict himself, or limit himself to lofty themes like social and economic inequality.

Young Maupassant, the product of a spectacularly carefree upbringing, was one of two sons whose parents had discovered their noble roots: Frébourg says that Laure Le Poittevin insisted that her future husband, Gustave de Maupassant, recuperate his title of marquis as a condition of their marriage. (He did comply, before a civil tribunal in Rouen, in 1846.) The aristocratic particle *de* is of a piece with the life their firstborn son, Guy de Maupassant, enjoyed; it conferred connections and status. Frébourg quips: “Petits-bourgeois, ils se prenaient pour des aristocrates” (27). The family lived more like comfortable bourgeois, with Gustave working as a stockbroker after his own father's

financial ruin. Gustave remained with the Paris Bourse long after his separation from Laure around 1860 (Troyat, 23).

Young Guy was the uncrowned prince of his doting mother's household. In addition to her maternal attentions, there was special pardon and dispensation for Guy. In fact, Laure preferred him to her son Hervé, born six years after Guy. The younger boy was apparently flawed: "ombrageux, brouillon et un peu court d'esprit" (Troyat, 42). If a few biographers discount any favoritism on Laure's part (Dahhan speaks of "le même dévouement et la même affection," p. 83), they appear to be in the minority. Laure was vexed but less than censorious when the eighteen-year-old Guy was expelled from his Catholic boarding school in 1868 for various infractions: He had composed unpius poems and, worse, founded a "secret" society—l'Oasis—a club "certinement plus bacchique qu'erotique" (Dahhan, 215.) Soon after, he enrolled at the Lycée Corneille in Rouen, sitting for the *baccalauréat* the following year and passing it. In 1870, young Maupassant began the study of law in Paris but in July he decided to volunteer for the Franco-Prussian War. The privileged young man went back to Rouen—the bivouac of the privileged—as a noncombatant managing field supplies and rations. As Frébourg notes, "Maupassant n'a pas l'intention d'y jouer les héros, les yeux tournés vers la ligne bleue des Vosges" (79). By 1871, France had been defeated by the Teutonic horde, and Guy paid a volunteer to replace him for the duration of his military service (Troyat, 36). Never in combat himself, he had certainly witnessed it. With these searing images in his head, his vocation was sealed: he wanted to be a writer.

Maupassant the young adult would continue to bask in the glow of the indulgent troika he knew as a boy—Laure, Gustave de Maupassant, and a second, more important, Gustave: Flaubert. The novelist was Laure’s friend but first he was her brother Alfred Le Poittevin’s dearest companion and confidant. “Gustave Flaubert et Alfred Le Poittevin s’aiment. Leur correspondance, un pacte d’amour” (Frébourg, 30). For Guy, few came close to Laure de Maupassant as such a friend and confidant, which she remained well into her seventies and just before her son was felled by a final illness. Guy’s father, the distant Gustave, who kept Guy from combat, was later to help him land a couple of bureaucratic sinecures with the French state, notably with the Ministry of the Navy and Colonies: Gustave had intervened after Guy received a negative response to his own letter of inquiry (Frébourg, 88). Flaubert, the close family friend, encouraged (and promoted) Guy’s considerable literary gifts. And then there was the poet Louis Bouilhet, Flaubert’s closest friend since Alfred’s death in 1848, a bachelor who helped Guy refine his adolescent talent. Thus did the young Maupassant enjoy rare good fortune and the aid—even the aiding and abetting—of this extraordinary *tutelle*. Now in his twenties, Guy could combine these considerable resources with opportunities for adventure and thereby extend his mischievous adolescence.

In 1873, young Maupassant was a typical French functionary in his Navy post, mostly pushing papers in the stultifying ministry—“de la médiocrité asphyxiante où il baigne du matin au soir” (Lanoux, 40). By night and on his days off, he frequented a band of literary bohemians. Frébourg describes Guy as a young man who split his leisure time between solitude and raucous company. He certainly was a social animal among this

motley group of refined pranksters, risk-takers, and miscreants who pursued the underbelly of Paris with the gusto of Baudelaire (but with none of that poet's scorn).

From La Bohême—the real eastern Bohemia was to the Frenchman exotic and untrod—comes *la bohème* with a grave accent, the French term for the gypsylike underworld of poor painters and entertainers first noticed as a distinct milieu in the 1840s (Seigel, 5). Poor artists, writers and others chose the simple life of the Paris *bas-fonds*, and Montmartre was one of them. These include the endearing ruffians sketched in Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1845-1846) or in his play, *La Vie de bohème* (1849, performed 1851). If Murger's characters are often *débraillés*, theirs was not the bohemia of early twentieth-century Paris. Seigel draws a heavy distinction between Murger's *bohème* and the one that flourished before and right after the Great War, celebrated by André Warnot and Francis Carcot. The latter is in fact the storied Montmartre bohemia one thinks of today—actually more tied to commerce and sometimes intersecting with crime, corruption and prostitution. It was, Seigel adds, “a world of equivocal and sometimes dangerous figures...as brutal as it was colorful” (342).

Bohemian strivers in the 1870s and 1880s were of neither world. Many aimed for professional success under the sponsorship of an aristocrat and, increasingly, a refined bourgeois. Frébourg offers the noteworthy example of the painter Jean Béraud (1849-1935), Maupassant's friend and contemporary who was heavily sponsored and promoted by *grands bourgeois* (136). For decades, such bohemians had seen the ascendancy of this new class that would eventually cement its hold on cultural life in Western Europe. If the aristocracy still held sway to influence society and the arts, Graña says, France was

slowly witnessing “the liquidation of the Old Regime’s spiritual apparatus, its traditional control of culture, letters, etiquette.... This, and the social changes that followed, allowed the historical middle-class traits of calculation and pragmatism to assert themselves, not only as an unmixed way of life, but as a dominant one” (Graña, 61). In France, Balzac’s *Comédie humaine* had delved into the commercial power and cultural influence of the bourgeoisie in the 1830s and 1840s. If the Revolution of 1848 and the Paris Commune of 1870 may be seen as explosive “anti-bourgeois” intrusions, the century increasingly belonged to the new-money class both economically and culturally. The bourgeoisie had shown its clout by 1789, for its cultural influence was felt soon after—in ways subtle (the guttural bourgeois *r* had replaced the rolled *r* of the aristocrat in standard French) and more significant: Graña notes that the grande bourgeoisie, like the nobility, began to sponsor artists and writers, purchased their products, and hosted elegant literary salons, “where writers could meet publishers” (30). And the “bohemian of letters,” says Seigel, had long come to see this class less as an enemy and more akin to a loyal opposition:

Only in the nineteenth century did the bourgeoisie, with its peculiar combination of individualist ideology, revolutionary heritage, and longing for stability and tradition, assume the position in society that allowed Bohemia to take form as its reverse image and underside. (25)

The striving mid-century writer (in fact, all creative artists) found that they were in demand by a new-money class that was highly literate and searching for distraction. It

now avidly purchased books, magazines, and newspapers. And it brought its own economy-minded tenets to the fore: commerce, competition, publicity. Not only the splendid *haute* bourgeoisie, but what might be termed today the middle and lower-middle classes, were literate consumers of reading material. (The republican politician Léon Gambetta duly noted this wider range of the bourgeoisie when he coined his famously snide expression “les nouvelles couches sociales”; cit. in Seigel, 228.) This “greater” French bourgeoisie engendered an open market, encouraging creative types to be more astute and practical than ever before and embodying a new French bohemia, “une bohème aussi différente de celle de Murger que, plus tard, celle de Carco” (Lanoux, 92).

Young Maupassant thus encountered, and fit in with, this literary “middle bohemia” of the 1870s and 1880s. It was a departure from the days of the young Baudelaire, whose ardent separatism from society was expressed by hiding out in his apartment at the Hôtel Lauzun in 1844. Graña says Baudelaire had “banished from his aristocracy all those employed in professional duties” (143). Maupassant, on the other hand, was being assimilated by a literary bohemia that bowed to a new social order and *les usages* of the bourgeois age. Not that the newer bohemians dispensed with older bohemian ways at society’s fringe. Maupassant, like Baudelaire, would never forsake his contempt for trite conventions that circumscribed choice. Graña also notes “Baudelaire’s realization that a self uncommitted to the world was a self free to use the world for experience’s own sake...and an opportunity for sensuous investigation” (130). And Guy de Maupassant, too, abhorred the “woulds” and “shoulds” of conventional society. He too found time away from it: not infrequently, he sought out mischief and unbridled license

as he canoed with his friends on the Seine and founded new “secret” all-male societies.

In his Société des Crépitiens, later known as the Société des Maquereaux (a wink to the Paris skin trade), he supervised the violent hazing of initiates: for one, “Moule à b.,” it ended horribly: “On masturbe le récipiendaire avec des gants d’escrime et on lui enfonce une règle dans le rectum. Quelques jours plus tard, le malheureux meurt” (Troyat, 52). Both Troyat and Lanoux repeat the worst rumors about the Maquereaux (that this initiate later died from Maupassant’s creative rituals), and Lanoux adds: “[O]n garde peu de doutes sur la véracité des détails...les grandes beuveries, les blagues obscènes et scatologiques correspondant à l’aspect bravache...de Guy” (Lanoux, 93-94). Despite their brutality (with its obvious homoerotic and sadistic overtones), there is no indication that the group faced any legal consequences or even a cursory investigation. Several of the Maquereaux went on to collaborate with Guy on *Feuille de rose*, their literary coming-out (Lerner, 98). His co-conspirators on the play included Robert Pinchon, the son of a respected professor at the Lycée of Rouen, and Octave Mirbeau, the successful playwright, novelist, journalist and satirist. (Mirbeau later called Maupassant a cold craftsman rather than an artist, for Guy never “loved” anything—“ni son art, ni une fleur, ni rien! C’est la justice des choses qui le frappe”; cit. in Troyat, 260). This band of brothers canoed to the outer reaches of the Seine and its brothels: Frébourg notes that the river’s banks, and especially Chatou, were already known to attract artists as well as wealthy sportsmen and demi-mondaines. Maupassant and his companions often separated to spend an hour with a *filie* or take refreshments at La Grenouillère, the raucous tavern

sketched by Monet in 1877 where couples danced and men sought out unattached women (Frébourg, 100). During these bohemian meanderings Guy contracted syphilis—the *mal du siècle* and the so-called dark side of bohemia—in early 1877 (Lerner, 68).

NEW BOHEMIANS IN THE BOURGEOIS CENTURY

As far from the unheated *mansarde* of the 1830s or the reclusive artifice of 1840s *dandysme* as possible, the 1870s saw a newfangled *bohème*. Maupassant invited everyone to the performances of *Feuille de rose* in Maurice Leloir's small studio: Flaubert, Zola, Goncourt, Turgenev, and two years later he renewed the farce at a different studio on the rue de Fleurus (Lerner, 98-99). Guy even publicized his play using a *truc* of the age, the advertising flyer: "Il lance des invitations libellées sur papier à en-tête du ministère de la Marine et des Colonies" (Troyat, 58). Guy's public relations coup also won him attention from some startling places, for Flaubert was barely able to dissuade the proper Princess Mathilde de Bonaparte from attending Guy's 1877 performance. Princess Mathilde's literary salon would indeed serve Maupassant's ambitions when he began to drop by in 1879, thanks to the intercession of Flaubert and Edmond de Goncourt (Lanoux, 112-113). These heady years between 1871, when Guy rejoins civilian life, and 1880, when he strikes gold with his novella *Boule de Suif*, saw him comfortably straddling two worlds: the literary bohemia of his fellow Maquereaux and an elegant literary establishment that, despite aristocratic pretensions and even credentials, has a distinct *air embourgeoisé*. It

is during the 1870s, Seigel says, that literary café-cabarets bring the bourgeois to the bohemian, rather than just vice-versa. These cafés were simpler bohemian haunts in the 1840s (Baudelaire would hang out at the Café Momus, sometimes as a disheveled wreck and on other occasions *en dandy*). In 1878, Émile Goudeau started up Les Hydropathes, the forerunner of the famous Chat Noir of the 1880s and '90s early Belle Époque (Seigel, 217). Maupassant would be attracted for the reason Goudeau hoped everyone would be: this was a respite from the routine of the bourgeois age. “Le commis Maupassant de la Marine” felt just as stultified in his job as had Goudeau, a menial clerk. These café-cabarets were already trying out seductive gimmicks as well—brisk entertainments, staff in costume, and a looser ambiance for its part-bourgeois clientele (Seigel, 239-240).

Despite Maupassant’s anti-bourgeois rants—in his letters and in his youthful works—he didn’t mind finding himself among one particular group of bourgeois movers and shakers who frequented the café-cabarets: publishers. Guy’s personal brand of *espièglerie* might be more at home among the cutting-edge bohemians who thronged these places, including the loudmouthed *fumistes* of the 1870s, but Goudeau had brought bourgeois and bohemian together: the impresario knew that his café would promote cross-pollination of ideas and métiers in a bold new way. Goudeau also felt strongly that “*fumisterie* could be transformed from an expression of social hostility to a mode of bringing obscure...poets into the light of public recognition” (Seigel, 221). Thus, Goudeau wished to mix everybody up for good effect. And why not let other poets in on one’s literary interests and activities? The Hydropathes café had its own eponymous newspaper, *L’Hydropathe* (before merging with the Chat Noir in 1881). The newspaper

that became an outlet for writers really began as a bulletin board, with its creative members' publication dates and other commercial details. And the 1870s and 1880s cemented the success of widely read literary journals and magazines. Their different styles matched a core audience: "sérieux au *Gaulois*, parisien au *Gil Blas*, insolent au *Figaro*" (Lanoux, 138). Maupassant's eclectic journalism and fiction writing could find a home in these highbrow publications, which offered up Parisian gossip and serialized fiction. (*Gil Blas* welcomed the naturalists and published "contes licencieux," says Louis Forestier; *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1325, n. 3). Thus did literary bohemians of Maupassant's generation not eschew the literate bourgeoisie—the two sometimes found common ground—but learned about public relations, which served their raw ambition.

While Maupassant pursued new publishing contacts, his networking was already under way through mentors and acquaintances in the literary establishment. One such acquaintance later became a friend: Catulle Mendès, the editor and publisher of the magazine *La République des Lettres* (Lerner, 83). Mendès later became Guy's partner in erotic adventures *à quatre* and once suggested to Guy that they both become freemasons (Maupassant emphatically refused; Troyat, 63). But Mendès is better known for agreeing to publish Maupassant's salacious poetry compendium, *Des Vers*, in 1876. This would prove to be life-changing for Guy, for it was one erotic poem, "Au bord de l'eau," that was republished in the *Revue Moderne et Naturaliste* in 1879, attracting the attention of the magistrates at Étampes. At the age of twenty-nine, Maupassant found himself the object of their lawsuit on the grounds of obscenity (Lerner, 108). Flaubert's efforts with the court saved young Guy—but also won him new attention. The reading public now

wanted to know who the brash writer was. The market had brought with it a fortuitous wrinkle: adverse publicity, the hidden balm that piqued commercial interest and boosted sales. Lerner notes that Maupassant's poems might have garnered paltry notice in 1880, but within weeks, Guy's novella *Boule de Suif* had gained the imprimatur of Zola's circle.

The so-called Médan group had convened at the Trapp café for the first time in April 1877: Guy had joined Paul Alexis, Henry Céard, Léon Hennique and Joris-Karl Huysmans to honor Flaubert and Zola (Troyat, 66). In his Médan home over the next few years, Zola proved to be the patient, avuncular and welcoming parent. Mme. Alexandrine Zola was downright motherly too, plying the men with *paupiettes* and other filling *cuisine bourgeoise* (Lanoux, 110-111). The group's eventual collaboration, *Les Soirées de Médan* (1880), completed Maupassant's professionalization. The literary education of Guy de Maupassant would be long and fraught perhaps, but eminently good-natured and fortunate. The genius had to be brought out of this genius. If Flaubert and Bouilhet had been affectionate and encouraging, Guy's young contemporaries in the Médan group were be cooler and sometimes devastatingly frank.

One aspect of the Médan group proved to be not only a boon to publicity but a real marketing advantage for Guy: the literary "school" called naturalism. Lerner says that young writers in the 1870s were often interested in Zola's school, with its analytical approach to science, sexual instinct, and "corrupting environments" (113). All of this surely fascinated Maupassant. Zola, rich and celebrated, impressed Maupassant, who had willingly become associated with the Médan group. Goncourt speaks in his journal of these "young men of realism or naturalism: Huysmans, Céard, Alexis, Mirbeau and

Maupassant.” But from the beginning of this association, Maupassant had shied away from the realist-naturalist label. Already in 1877, he had written to Paul Alexis: “Je ne crois pas plus au naturalisme et au réalisme qu’au romantisme” (cit. in Frébourg, 111). By 1883, Maupassant had formally dismissed the concept of Zola’s literary search for a *vérité absolue*, in a letter he published in *La Revue Bleue* (Lerner, 129). Nevertheless, young Guy’s association with Médan—however brief or superficial it was—clinched Guy’s commercial success. Maupassant enjoyed extraordinary media attention through Zola’s *école branchée*. It introduced Maupassant to such bourgeois publishers as Arthur Meyer, who accepted some of Guy’s articles for his newspaper, *Le Gaulois* (Troyat, 98).

By the dawn of the Belle Époque, commercial fiction depended on a confluence of market-driven cause and effect. In France, as elsewhere in the industrialized world, market values were reflected in the bold graphics and seductive colors of the *affiche publicitaire illustrée*: “The *fin de siècle* was the classic age of the advertising poster—another consequence of the expansion and transformation of the market for consumer goods” (Seigel, 230). The serialization of novels and short stories stimulated sales of the real item. In the world of literature, the commercial writer was king. Maupassant had developed and won a following—a true fan base—at the age of thirty. Among those who bought his stories of illicit eroticism and Darwinian desperation were his well-known core readers: literate women. Troyat cites the French dramatist Georges de Porto-Riche, who said that Guy now commanded such a following: “Les femmes le recherchent, elles l’adulent” (121). Other writers, a few perhaps envious, had fun with the idea: In his

journal from May 26, 1886, Edmond de Goncourt delights in Jean Lorrain's mocking tribute to Maupassant in the roman à clef *Très Russe*: There, Lorrain describes the Maupassant-like character Jean de Beaufrilan, an *écrivain à femmes* who is "l'étalon modèle littéraire et plastique du grand haras Flaubert, Zola et Cie, vainqueur à toutes les courses à Cythère, primé jusqu'à Lesbos, couru et hors concours" (Lorrain, p. 69).

The 1880s brought bourgeois success to Maupassant, the glamorous Guy "invited by the hostesses of the *salons* of Paris and the Côte d'Azur to enhance the significance of their list of guests and decorate their dinner tables" (Lerner, 192). If Maupassant deserved literary fame and fortune by dint of talent, Zola had obtained his comfortable home at Médan through a more time-honored manner: hard work. Young Guy had found with "Flaubert et Cie" a group not only far away from the dull philistines in his ministry offices, but a sort of beaten path of literary ambition. The crowning moment of public relations for Maupassant was being able to publish his short work *Boule de Suif* in Zola's naturalist volume, *Les Soirées de Médan*. On May 25, 1880, Zola wrote a flattering article on Maupassant. And later that year followed the publication of *La Maison Tellier*, Maupassant's paean to a kind madam and her brood of sweet-tempered *cocottes*.

It might be mentioned that these first two works are salacious more than obscene; they tell of women who sell sex but who have other cares on their mind. But obscenity, prosecutable in 1880, was sanctioned even after the 1881 censorship ban. In fact, *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia* duly notes that "naturalist writings were an obvious target" and that "there were clearly people in the late nineteenth century who were obsessed with moral order and the provisions of the 1881 act" (854). But, Troyat says,

“La République de 1880 est devenue tolérante” (103). What was winced at and what was formally prosecuted were two different things. In Maupassant’s case, the bohemian bad boy of the naughty Maquereaux and *Feuille de rose* was from now on a fashionable man of letters, a bourgeois bohemian.

A MAN’S CENTURY: THE NEW MALE SOCIABILITY

It has been said that Maupassant, the “women’s writer,” loved the company of women. A few biographers counter that he liked the conquest of females more than female company itself. Whatever the verdict, if one believes his casual correspondence he did downplay women’s intellectual gifts and their professional prospects. And like other affluent men of his generation, he sought a degree of distance from women: he was of the generation embracing a new trend of all-male socializing that had swept France by the time he entered his twenties. In *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*, Robert Nye says that male sociability in France can be traced back to the freemasons, and that by the early nineteenth century *cercles* and *sociétés de plaisance* brought together men of similar social and professional stature (130). These groups came to define acceptable male behavior, often sanctioning a certain boorishness in which “the woman was ever present in the frankly misogynistic discourse that passed then, and passes still, as a staple of male *camaraderie*” (131). This was the redoubt of “homosociality” touched on by Eve Sedgwick in *Between Men* and *The Epistemology of the Closet*. Indeed, a good dozen short stories of Maupassant’s actually begin with a male narrator, often named, who

offers up an erotically tinged tale or anecdote before a cigar-smoking male heterosexual *cercle*.

French heterosexual male social groups had come in for a foreign influence of sorts in the nineteenth century: In their book *That Sweet Enemy*, Robert and Isabelle Tombs review some four hundred years of Franco-British relations—the mostly bitter and rarely sweet—and how one nation occasionally did influence the other culturally. Of all of Britain’s cultural exports to France, none is more fascinating than those affecting masculine fashion and demeanor. The British “gentlemen’s club” is one example (the word *gentlemen* is in the plural, a telling indication of a new social interaction among men, in the absence of women). Such clubs had come into vogue in Britain much earlier, around 1750. For decades after, the very idea of an all-male club was patently un-French and “alien to the French tradition of the *salon*, organized by women. [A gentlemen’s club] is one sign of the development of ‘separate spheres’ for the sexes” (R. and I. Tombs, 327).

The Jockey-Club de Paris, founded at Chantilly in 1834, was a chic knockoff of the venerable English Jockey and Pigeon Shooting Club, formally organized in 1825. The current Web site of the British Jockeys (www.jockeyclub.uk) stresses the passion for horse racing, but off-premises male pursuits (like racing’s unofficial adjunct, betting large sums of money) were important, too. Joseph-Antoine Roy’s *Histoire du Jockey-Club de France* says the French Jockeys relocated to the Hôtel Scribe in the late 1860s, matching the socially elitist aura of their British counterparts: both brought together men of “business, the professions, and all facets of racing,” an exotic and British fit for Paris.

The Goncourts’ journal is peppered with entries that mention the Paris Jockey

Club (including ten written by Jules in the 1860s when he was the journal's main contributor). The Paris Jockeys' all-male rituals were enjoyed not only by bourgeois moguls of finance and industry but also by some in the French literary establishment, and the newly successful Maupassant followed Flaubert, the Goncourts and Zola in attending its "meetings" at the Scribe. Little is known of their doings, except that all of these figures, including Maupassant, refer to it in passing in their correspondence. It is evident, however, that the Paris Jockeys' meetings do not bear the remotest kinship with those of freemasonry, France's traditional all-male bastion; the Jockeys dispensed with secrecy and ritual. Instead, the Jockey-Club de Paris was a fixture of a bourgeois age when more Frenchmen defined themselves by their profession. Quite a few would be drawn to such an "affinity group" of successful men, and one imported from what Hannah Arendt once called the "most bourgeois of nations," Great Britain.*

Just as an earlier generation of French gentlemen had reinterpreted the stylish form of the dandy (replacing the sober attire of the British Beau Brummells with the peacock colors and preternatural form of a Barbey d'Aurevilly), so did the Paris Jockeys affix their own Gallic cultural stamp on things: they set aside a special watering-hole, the Café Grand, beneath the Jockey-Club de Paris. The café would be run by women, and attendees could enjoy an exclusive club of business that was a bit less stridently Anglo-

* Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, ed. by Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books/Knopf, 2006), p. 83. Arendt has otherwise written: "The general history of Europe in the nineteenth century may be described in its most tragic aspect as the slow but steady transformation of the *citoyen* of the French Revolution into the *bourgeois* of the pre-[World War I] period" (*The Jewish Writings*, p. 345).

Saxon. Nevertheless, a British institution of male exclusivity—and arguably not the most progressive of models—had been transplanted successfully to France. (Maupassant’s passing reference to the Jockey Club in *Bel-Ami* is duly annotated by Louis Forestier in the Pléiade edition: the club, Forestier says, was “le plus ‘chic’ et le plus fermé des cercles de Paris” (*Oeuvres complètes, Romans*, 1423). Maupassant and his young bourgeois bohemian contemporaries knew no Paris without the Jockey Club. The pampered youngster who experienced male bonding in the secret societies of l’Oasis and the Maquereaux—and also with his two bachelor mentors, Flaubert and Bouilhet—was comfortable in this all-male element. True, successful men of letters did mix with women in one important Paris institution: the literary salon. After 1880, the salon was still often organized by women, especially the wives of bourgeois Jewish achievers like Rothschild, Fould, Pereire, Kann, Worms (Dahhan, 24). And though Lerner notes that Maupassant began to “concede more and more time to the claims of [these] high-ranking hostesses” (177), the salon was one very French exception to the rule of masculine sociability washing over from the English Channel.

All-male social clubs had helped to limit *la mixité* in France: if the Jockey-Club de Paris excluded women except for hostessing duties in its downstairs tavern, it reflects the greater reach of sex segregation and exclusion by mid-century. In Jean-Paul Aron’s *Misérable et glorieuse: La femme du XIX^e siècle*, Alain Corbin’s essay on prostitution characterizes the bourgeois century as supporting a virtual network of exclusive male homosociality: “L’ascension du rôle des cafés...et, plus encore, des cabarets...la

création de chambres de commerce, la diffusion de la presse d'opinion... la modernité politique passe, pour l'heure, par la ségrégation des sexes" (in Aron, 48). For many Parisian men on the professional ascendant after 1850, the segregated Jockey Club was no longer a "foreign" notion at all.

BACHELORHOOD, DUTY, DEMOGRAPHY: A FRENCH LAMENT

By mid-century, notes Jean Claude Bologne in *Le Célibat et les célibataires*, bachelorhood had become more noticeable among affluent men in France. Whether bachelors had increased in raw numbers in France by Maupassant's time is hard to say, and the phenomenon seemed more evident in Britain, where affluent bachelors lived more openly (and where they had been subject to special "excise duties"—a sort of bachelors' penalty—for decades; R. and I. Tombs, 43). In France, there was a wariness of bachelorhood during the 1870s, and for several reasons. In *Le Célibataire français*, Jean Borie focused in on this discomfort, observing that it had begun to transcend the *idée reçue* of the bachelor as libidinous rake lurking at society's margins. Now, after mid-century, the bachelor embodied those margins. "C'est justice," explains Borie, "car...le célibataire est une création de la famille...Mieux qu'exilé, il faut l'appeler marginal" (65).

It was also in the 1870s that French demographers and social theorists had begun to dismay at France's falling fertility and demography. Vital statistics were now accurately recorded by European governments since mid-century, Lorimer notes, and between 1876 and 1880 France had the lowest average birth rate in Europe (25.3 per

1,000 population)—exceeded even by Ireland (25.8) just decades out of its great Potato Famine, and well below that of Germany (30.2) and other European nations (Lorimer, 77 177). If the Franco-Prussian War, like the American Civil War, was “modern” in terms of the new military technology of “killing machines,” it had a terrible effect on the civil population. In *Le Problème de la population en France*, Rabinowicz puts the total decline in France’s population between 1866 and 1872 at two million—from 38.2 million to 36.1 million. He also cites the abandonment of farms for newly teeming cities, the loss of Alsace and most of Lorraine (where signs and ads now appeared in German), a sudden drop in civil marriages in most regions and massive civilian deaths from epidemics of typhus and influenza (20, 244). This was enough to alarm staunch republicans and monarchists alike. It was a humiliating defeat—a *débâcle psychique*: “From having been the dominant military power on the Continent for a quarter of a millennium, France was on the verge, or so it seemed, of sliding into the status of a second-rate power” (Nye, 79).

The upheaval of the Paris Commune must also be considered: thousands of *communards* were killed during May 1871’s “Bloody Week.” Robert Tombs, in *The Paris Commune 1871*, offers a total figure of 10,000 killed in combat or executed, conceding that his number is conservative; he notes the oft-quoted figure of 17,000 to 20,000 given by the investigative journalist Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray but dismisses the estimate of 30,000 (“greatly exaggerated,” he believes) claimed by the republican writer Camille Pellatan (Tombs, 180, 204). Nevertheless, such carnage to suppress the elected government of a city of almost 2 million can’t be dismissed; at the end of Bloody Week, 147 *communards* were gunned down during skirmishes in Père Lachaise cemetery, and

scores of others received prison sentences or exile. The coordinated violence unleashed against the Paris Commune simultaneously quashed dissent and contemporaneous notions of French egalitarianism for years to come. The Commune had exploded amid France's perception of its foundering birth rate and wholesale political and cultural decline. The mood, notes Frébourg, was despairing (80). France appeared then (as it looks now to some contemporary French pundits) on the verge of international irrelevance, its political influence reduced and its cultural *essor* impaired.

Indications of falling demography can look dire—not unlike the recent news reports about negative population trends in Germany, Spain, Italy, Japan and Russia—and some social scientists and statisticians hear a death knell: During Maupassant's young adulthood, French social experts of many stripes became occupied (Corbin says “obsessed”) with the causes of demographic decline, and some would go trawling far beyond the events of 1870-1871. Indeed, France's “pro-natalist lobby,” as Copley calls it, remained active, and politically influential, up until the dawn of World War II (112).

Negative conceptions of bachelorhood would seethe along the sidelines of a growing demography debate, as pro-marriage bias joined with anti-bachelor rhetoric. Borie cites the doctor-demographer Adolphe Bertillon (1821-1883), whose son Jacques (1851-1922) was also a demographer as well as Maupassant's contemporary. But where the younger Bertillon was a statistician, Bertillon *père* was also an ideologue. Adolphe's lengthy article on marriage in an 1872 medical dictionary set out to distinguish married men from the male degenerates who “live under the regime of celibacy” and were, the

elder Bertillon alleged, twice as likely to become suicides, mental cases and violent offenders in society (cit. in Borie, 77).

The view that French bachelors might be more guileful than Vautrin, Balzac's *garçon terrible*, did seem more plausible. The bachelor now faced a different kind of scrutiny—not to mention antipathy—in a Catholic country like France. Borie also mentions the shift in expert opinion about sexuality, a significant departure from the old *Encyclopédie* view of “sex equals irresistible instinct.” In the bourgeois century, social commentators embraced “sex equals duty” as their new sociocultural mantra. Borie sums it up thus: “Il n'est dans cette euphorie qui se félicitait que la nature ait mis le plus de plaisir là où il y avait le plus de devoir, mais au contraire en soulignant d'un trait épais le mot *devoir*, avec la plus sourcilleuse austérité” (62). From Adolphe Bertillon to Dr. P. Garnier, Borie traces the almost clinical obsession with dutiful conjugal relations, as opposed to “le grand bazar érotique”: fornication, masturbation and prostitution. (He jocularly illustrates the mid-century social zeitgeist in Dr. Bénédict A. Morel's 1857 theory of interlinked scourges: “Toutes les perversions...sont contiguës et, une fois entré dans cet enfer, on passe, comme naturellement, de l'une à l'autre”) (70).

What is more evident in such preachy rhetoric is the collective sense that creative professionals had eschewed childbearing in the bourgeois century, much to France's detriment. Even early twentieth-century demographers like Rabinowicz mildly scold nineteenth-century men of letters such as Lamartine, Vigny, Musset, Baudelaire and Rimbaud for their lack of progeny (286). He ultimately pins the blame on the failings of a comfortable class: “Comme l'aisance engendre la stérilité, de même que la pauvreté

pousse à la fécondité” (288). As late as 1897, he notes, fertility rates among affluent women in Paris would be noticeably below those of women in other vibrant European cities like London, Berlin and Vienna (280). All of this pointed to a self-absorbed, individualistic urban affluence peculiar to Paris after mid-century. The economic and artistic growth of the city during the Second Empire had allowed, even encouraged, a good many young people there to snub tradition. Paris was exuberant, permissive, different. But when France was thought to be in a demographic freefall, the demographer-moralists pounced on marriage.

Camp, in *Marriage and the Family in France Since the Revolution*, enjoys Rabinowicz’s longer view of the demography scare from his perch in the twentieth century. He finds that “nuptuality”—the number of newly wed compared to the marriageable-aged population as a whole—actually increased in France until 1878, then dipped very slightly until the turn of the century (34). (He lists a number of contributing factors, none of which have much to do with moral turpitude: the post-1873 economic depression, compulsory military service of five years, a reduction in peasant labor due to cheap U.S. grain imports and, forgotten in the annals of French agriculture, an epidemic of phylloxera in wine-growing regions.) For Camp, the drop in late nineteenth-century nuptuality isn’t dramatic—and marriage, he says, will bounce back with a vengeance early in the next century. Camp concludes that much of the demography debate had been overwrought, and he chides the demographer-moralists for seizing upon the deleterious effect of alternative lifestyles: “[W]e suspect that there is much less bohemianism in France than the novels from Stendhal to Sagan would lead us to imagine. The novelist’s

truth is not necessarily the demographer's" (Camp, 132). Other researchers simply dismiss outright any suggestion that France ever faced a surfeit of the unmarried. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Kertzer and Barbagli note, the never-married as a proportion of the population are no more represented in France than elsewhere in Europe: single people then comprised 10 percent of adults in France, Italy, England and the Hapsburg Empire; 11 percent in Sweden; 15 percent in Belgium (302).

For Rabinowicz, the demographic decline in France is linked to a different phenomenon: live births among married couples, a rate that will dip throughout much of the late nineteenth century: "C'est donc *la fécondité* des mariages qu'il faut étudier" (264). After the deprivations of the war, he says, even married peasant couples decided to forgo large families (241). Thus, the decision to avoid childbearing was actually made within marriage. One demographic study states that fertility in marriage dropped by about 40 percent in France between 1800 and 1914, but it stresses the "conscious choice" by couples as well as single people who recognized the socioeconomic strains of unplanned procreation.*

Nevertheless, the French demographer-moralists' pro-marriage musings, anti-bachelor rhetoric and misogyny were a strident but effective way to call the nation to order after its humiliating defeat, wrenching social displacement and steep drop in total population. Marriage, not bachelorhood, promoted social order amid this century's

*Martine Segalen, "Exploring a Case of Late French Fertility," in Gillis et al, eds., *The European Experience of Declining Fertility* (Cambridge, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 227.

“intellectual revolt against authority and dogma of all kinds” (Lorimer, 213).

The mid-century French moralists found their fin-de-siècle echo of sorts in the German physician and author Max Nordau. His book *Degeneration* (1897-1898) not only distills the bourgeois century’s view of marriage (“this bulwark of the relations between the sexes afforded by definite, permanent duty,” p. 414) but disparages the poet or novelist who doesn’t uphold the social contract. After dismissing Henrik Ibsen and his bevy of unhappily married women, Nordau reserves some venom for “degenerate” French writers from Baudelaire to Huysmans to Zola, and he even mentions Maupassant (“Before he was placed in the lunatic asylum where he died, [he] ended by turning more and more towards the psychological novel,” p. 474). Nordau’s book, with a reactionary’s vehemence, attacks French men of letters who have transported genius into a netherworld of moral degeneracy (and who, he claims, often lived there). Within the pages of Nordau’s book is the bourgeois century’s discomfort with a literary elite that could so shamelessly undermine the family-state model.

The leaders of French commerce and industry also favored this model. Camp says that larger companies in the nineteenth century were “becoming more interested in the morals of their workers,” paraphrasing the French historian Philippe Ariès’ assessment that “the single man was becoming more suspect, thought to be less stable, more likely to succumb to radical ideas,” while “the family man ‘leaves hostages.’ He is quiet and submissive” (Camp, 60). Apparently, business interests along with conservative (and monarchist) social critics were convinced of an insidious fallout from bachelorhood and from a professional class that, Camp says, “may have less respect than others for the

conventions” (132). Social critics in the 1870s were probably put off by the bold new nonconformity that seemed to verge on effrontery—a visceral reaction to the Second Empire, to the carnage of war and to years of calibrated state repression. The nonconformists were, after all, a generation of youthful survivors. Whether they also embraced republican ideals or not (and Maupassant did not), they perceived the unfolding of a freer era. And in the Third Republic, they demanded room to breathe.

A VERY PUBLIC BACHELORHOOD

Guy de Maupassant could certainly be the poster boy for this “in your face” unconventional era: he had, in near-meteoric fashion, gone from working stiff in the 1870s to well-paid author by the early 1880s, all along renouncing neither his marital status nor a certain nonconformist insolence. He moved from what Troyat dubs a “caverne de garçon” at 2, rue Moncey—“une petite chambre au rez-de-chaussée, avec une seule fenêtre ouvrant sur une courette obscure. Peu de meubles...” (53)—to a cramped apartment on the rue Duloy. He resigned from his ministry post in 1883 to become a full-time writer, and then took a sumptuous suite at 10, rue Montchanin, “the dining room in deep red, the lounge in Louis XVI blue, the bedroom in yellow, the conservatory in olive green” (Lerner, 182). Whether as *jeune trublion* or *bourgeois cossu*, Maupassant had often been indulged: his seven-hour-per-day civil service job was finagled through his father, and as for the color-coded suite Guy now occupies, it had previously belonged to his first cousin, the artist Louis Le Poittevin.

Guy's latest digs couldn't escape the attention of Edmond de Goncourt. "Cré matin," he writes in his journal, "le bon mobilier de putain...Figurez-vous, chez un homme... [C]e n'est pas juste à Dieu d'avoir donné à un homme de talent un si exécrationnel goût" (*Journal*, December 18, 1884). But Guy's over-the-top décor featured all the studied grandeur the thirty-four-year-old bachelor had long admired. Maupassant's trajectory resembles that of Duroy, his scheming protagonist in *Bel-Ami*. This novel's sketch of riotous Parisian excess in the 1880s includes a handsome young parvenu, grand bourgeois families with their cult of new money, and the vulgar *filles* who haunt performance venues at intermission. Over the years, Duroy beds compliant *bourgeoises* and will end up marrying one of them. He is a run-of-the-mill clerk for the French railways who dreamed of better. And, Borie notes, he would fit to a tee some moralists' idea of the self-serving bachelor: "l'étrange passivité de ce séducteur...ce pseudo-maquereau...d'une psychopathologie de Don Juan" (49). Maupassant's own remarkably "passive" social and professional ascent has been described here: the menial job, the move to ever fancier quarters, an astute observation of society, his social skills and connections, numerous friends in positions of power. The rise of both novelist and his fictional young *arriviste* is firmly set against the backdrop of the 1880s, the first murmurs of the Belle Époque, the affluent era of purchasable commodities, conspicuous affluence and the emerging industry of leisure. The bourgeoisie had by now truly become that wider swath of "les nouvelles couches sociales," buying luxury goods and art—and devouring books, especially popular fiction.

The fin de siècle knew Maupassant not simply as one of its *écrivains à femmes*

but as the bourgeoisie's writer, one who could expertly frame its social situations and concerns—not just the pursuit of material success but one's place in good society and one's constant vulnerability there. But Maupassant's deft hook was knowing how to entice and entertain this fickle readership. Lerner notes that “the conventional bourgeois of the towns and cities savored the slight taste of naughtiness in Maupassant's works with a sly relish” (173). Guy's first “bourgeois” work is probably the novella *Boule de Suif*, which features Mlle. Élisabeth Rousset, a prostitute sitting among bourgeois passengers on a stagecoach stranded near Dieppe during the Franco-Prussian War. Maupassant's heroine *is* naughty, but her fellow passengers are dishonest and immoral, and harshly judged; the author's tone here is utterly didactic, his bourgeois readership the intended target. This “targeted” fiction—storytelling with a message—infused his works as it did his journalism: Maupassant's chronicles, for example, take aim at the bourgeois tendency to “rank” the professions (in “L'Échelle sociale,” 1881), or the narrow provincialism that he said afflicted far too many Parisians (in “Pot-pourri,” 1883). Here, Maupassant was reaching out to his readers. Perhaps they didn't realize it, but he was speaking to them and their class. He knew them well. Whether in his ostentatious apartment or on the town, Maupassant lived much as his bourgeois readers did, with their show of success and material excess. As a writer, he had adopted core bourgeois values of commerce. But he couldn't abide the hypocrisy and the bourgeois sense of entitlement. If the plump *Boule de Suif* is done in by a few bourgeois couples (in cahoots with two Roman Catholic nuns), *Duroy* looks like Maupassant's revenge. *Duroy* takes on the bigwigs of Paris finance and uses them—and their wives—to advance. For Maupassant and for *Duroy* (erstwhile

clerks, both of them), the self-made man is the man on the make. The mercantile 1880s will provide both with plenty of easy opportunities.

If, as Seigel avers, fin-de-siècle Paris begins by the 1870s to “shade off” into the Belle Époque, an apex of material development and cultural production (215), there was no greater marker of its affluence than the purchase of leisure. Heretofore, leisure had been a cottage industry, the marginal pursuit of aristocrats and some bourgeois before its development as mass consumption in the 1870s and 1880s. Now, in Paris, grand cafés with outdoor seating took over entire boulevards; ads hawked soda water and tooth powder—all the new commodities of the wider middle classes. There was an explosion of periodicals, of new performing arts like bawdy theatricals, opéra bouffe and, in the café-concerts, popular song and dance (the commercial beginnings of *la chanson française*). “The slow rise of literacy and the growth of a consumer public took place side by side” (227). More of leisure could be commodified—including sex, as Charles Bernheimer details in *Figures of Ill Repute*, his work on the image of the nineteenth-century prostitute. Bernheimer notes a new, remarkably commercialized prostitution in the late nineteenth century. For him, a “new” prostitute has embraced Baudelaire’s ideal of garish, heavily made-up female beauty, a male dictate of the painted lady as external *objet*: “By making herself up to resemble a work of art...and by decorating her neck, arms, and ears with jewels and shining metals, woman produces herself as a ritualized image, a commodified cultural idol” (97-98). Thus, Bernheimer continues, this gaudy image is “prostitutional.... It imagines the entire city as a field of its wandering prostitutional desire” (98).

A LANDSCAPE OF PROSTITUTION, FIN DE SIÈCLE

Some fin-de-siècle prostitutes portrayed by Maupassant have thoroughly adopted this exteriorized pose. They are less the cosseted “interior” demi-mondaine like Prévost’s Manon Lescaut, summoned by her client, a tax collector, to service him *chez lui*, in eighteenth-century fashion. Rather, they can be the fin-de-siècle harlot nodding from her balcony in Maupassant’s short story “Le Signe.” Her gaze is regal as she cocks her head and advertises herself openly. Maupassant analyzes this lady’s gaze: “si vague, si discret... hardi et gentil” (*Contes et Nouvelles* II, 272). This is a prostitute for the advertising age, and “Le Signe” evokes this other side of prostitution in France.

Decades earlier, the bourgeois century had diversified sex work and sex workers, and the French state took notice with its own nomenclature and bureaucratise: By 1830, the *maisons closes* had been the trend in purchased sex. Those on the police rolls, referred to as *maisons de tolérance*, were structured for the bourgeois century; their whereabouts were ascertained, their activities “tolerated” but regulated by the police. Dahhan sums up the concept: “Ces maisons sont dites de tolérance car elles sont tolérées par les préfets qui délivrent une ‘tolérance’ à la responsable. Elles se regroupent souvent dans les quartiers réservés. A la fois discrètes et reconnaissables par des symboles ou des noms évocateurs, elles sont parfois répertoriées dans les guides” (92).

Whether officially *maisons de passe* (inns with rooms reserved for prostitution but having no permanent tenants) or the decidedly down-market *maisons de rendez-vous*

(lodgings with furnished rooms rented, and used, by the poorer prostitutes), any could become a *tolérance*. All were open for business, and the French state observed them with one eye closed—and a passel of paperwork. Bernheimer and Corbin trace the French state’s notion of “tolerance” back to early nineteenth-century practitioner-activists such as Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, a doctor interested in public hygiene who joined France’s Public Health Council in 1825. In his two-volume report, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* (1837), the good doctor thought prostitutes to be “inevitable as refuse”; civil regulation was therefore the only sober response to them. Although Antony Copley in *Sexual Moralities in France, 1780-1980* describes Parent-Duchâtelet’s book as “a paeon to the police” (87), Corbin in *Filles de noce* stresses the book’s “empirical” exhortation for doctors and policemen to be of mature years, preferably married, and of an “elevated” morality so as to treat the prostitute with dignity (29). For Bernheimer, this was hardly an enlightened view: tolerance had “developed naturally from the Augustinian dictum that prostitutes have a place in society, albeit the lowest one,” in that they prevent “socially disruptive violence” (Bernheimer, 28, citing *De ordine*). And Corbin laments the prostitute’s “place” as befitting a man’s world, “la sexualité vénale imposée par l’homme, tissée de phantasmes masculins, figée dans ses formes immuables” (in Aron, 42). And prostitution, he adds, is no more part of the social evolution of women than it is women’s idea in the first place. The métier was created—and is delegated—by men.

Amid the sex trade’s diversity of “in-house” models and developmental stages, the 1870s presented a sea-change, as more prostitutes roamed the streets of Paris in this strikingly outdoor era. Alain Corbin, in *Les filles de noce: Misère sexuelle et prostitution*,

emphasizes not only the emergence of a new middle-class male clientele for prostitutes (thanks to rising incomes as well as military conscription in the 1870s) but the arrival of a more “public” prostitution that was fostered by the so-called Haussmannization of Parisian thoroughfares and an explosion of street life in what had become a cleaner, safer and more dynamic city (Corbin, 301). Corbin’s separate essay in Aron’s collection *Misérable et glorieuse* sums up the new ambiance: “[L]a rue désencombrée, les terrasses de café qui envahissent la chaussée, l’éclairage au gaz puis à l’électricité permettent à la prostituée de circuler inlassablement” (in Aron, 54).

Not that more “interior” prostitutes were nearing extinction when Maupassant published *Boule de Suif* in 1880; far from it. Virginia Rounding’s book *Grandes Horizontales* places the “golden age” of the Paris demi-mondaine within the eighteen years of the Second Empire (1852 to 1870), noting that demi-mondaines endured among all the brothel girls and street girls (3). Thus, while the independent *fille du trottoir* hadn’t replaced the *fille entretenue* and *fille de maison* in the late bourgeois century, her role was more apparent in the sex trade. Rounding stresses the sheer number of female sex workers who could be subject to regulation: “Registered prostitutes or *filles soumises*... either worked independently [as a] *fille libre* or *isolée*, or as a *fille en carte* ([with] the obliging identity card)” (11).

By the time the adolescent Maupassant began to visit prostitutes in the late 1860s, solo sex workers were a phenomenon that Corbin and others see as something of a leading edge in the trade, in which the prostitute went to the very places where men

congregated and sought leisure.* Comely Boule de Suif herself has the self-possessed bearing of a free agent. And in *Bel-Ami*, the freelance working girl Rachel boldly pursues Duroy, one of her regular customers, among the bourgeois couples in a crowded popular music hall. Rachel represents not only freelancing but the subset of intrepid independents who sought out their customers in broad daylight. Bernheimer's book includes a halftone of Degas' bold 1880 painting *Pauline and Virginie Talking to Admirers*, with its new, extroverted pose for this prostitution of leisure (162).

The mid-nineteenth century saw the coexistence of all these varied forms of prostitution—the independent street girl and the brothel girl. And the advent of the Belle Époque and the new affluence encouraged brothels catering to the new-money clientele; these grander brothels take on a bourgeois male stamp: their homey interior of gauzy middle-class comfort is fit for an affluent man of business, finance or the arts. If some brothels looked like home, most still followed a business model. In Maupassant's novella *La Maison Tellier*, the Tellier brothel is an enterprise so vital that it is knitted into the social and commercial fabric of a small Norman village (it is next door to the church). Maupassant describes the house's sex workers practically in advertising jargon, as product: “un échantillon, un résumé de type féminin...la *belle blonde*...la *belle Juive*... [la] petite boule de chair...” (*Contes et Nouvelles I*, 258-259).

* W. Scott Taine also describes the fin-de-siècle prostitute as thronging the new centers of male leisure: “[T]he decades after 1870 witnessed an elaborate efflorescence of café prostitution.” In *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability and the French Working Class, 1789-1914* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), p. 188.

“In-house” prostitution had not only followed bourgeois commercial dictates; it promoted a bourgeois business hierarchy as well: a director (often a directress, or *matrone*), one or two female supervisors, and regular customers who made houses part of the era’s reigning *sociabilité masculine*. Here, Corbin notes, men socialized together in a space embodying the bourgeois century’s “triumph of the male”: business, tobacco, brothels (in Aron, 48). Bernheimer repeats the frank accounts about Flaubert as willing sexual performer in front of soused male friends in the bordello, offering a withering observation of the century’s male bonding as strikingly homoerotic: intercourse, he says, had “become a communication not between man and woman, but between man and man” (131). In the age of male sociability, brothel girls would also assure a niche market for patently Sadean encounters. Maupassant, of course, describes his Tellier house as the village oasis—a place where each girl owned her dignity. Yet many *maisons de tolérance* were simply “miserable,” Dahhan says: “Elles accueillent soldats, marins, ouvriers ou étudiants pauvres. Les filles sont au bas de l’échelle” (94). Perhaps never before in France’s history, and never since, has prostitution been so integrated into French society as it was in the late nineteenth century. This was promoted, Corbin suggests, by the era’s built-in bourgeois strictures: virginity for young women of the upper classes, the commonplace sexual initiation of upper-class young men by prostitutes, and the tendency of male students, artists and soldiers to defer marriage (50). For many of these young men, visits to the brothel had become normative; for ever more poor, working-class women, the brothel was their employer.

LE MÉTIER AND THE FRENCH STATE

If the backstreet *fille de joie*'s work was joyless, a brothel girl also faced the scrutiny and once-over evaluations of her directress and intimate exams from the state authorities.

Initially, "regulation" of French brothels involved the Police des Moeurs (a Napoleonic-era administration under the auspices of the préfet de police) checking rowdiness, and public health bureaucrats monitoring squalid conditions. In *La Vie quotidienne dans les maisons closes, 1830-1930*, Laure Adler says that regulation of in-house prostitution had been an evolving work in progress. Prostitution was first and foremost restricted to the brothel: "L'article 2 de la loi de 1829 stipule que les filles publiques ne pourront se livrer à la prostitution que dans les maisons de tolérance" (58). Each girl had to register at the nearest police precinct. Over the next decades, state regulation of brothels would develop a generic protocol: registering brothel girls at the *dispensaire de salubrité*, alerting the administration of the girls' comings and goings, avoiding public scandal, and barring the employment of minors (93). Adler adds that a brothel girl circa 1851 went through the local police precinct before she dared to reclaim personal items in her old brothel and bring them to a new house (141).

But in 1878, Corbin notes, Pasteurian studies would prove the long-hypothesized bacterial transmission of disease, including "the certainty of contagion" from venereal microbes (in Aron, 45). Amid the 1880s syphilis scare, a different kind of regulation of prostitutes would be advocated in France. Syphilis and gonorrhea had been confirmed to be separate maladies since 1838, but the dramatic effects of primary, secondary and

tertiary syphilis were especially dreaded in the sex trade. Bernheimer speaks of a “neoregulation movement” against this scourge, which continues, in its various permutations, until early into the next century. In the 1880s, the goal of neoregulation is “containment and marginalization of prostitutes through pervasive medical control.... Health officials shift the ultimate authority for disciplining prostitution from police to medical scientists” (Bernheimer, 235). Prostitution is work, and syphilis threatens the income of the *fille publique* (Adler, 221). In-house prostitutes were subject to fairly regular screenings. Oversight of freelancers, on the other hand, was desultory at best. The fluid world of the freelancer left a number of *clandestines* largely unencumbered by the state and effectively kept out of their loop.

The authorities had become so preoccupied by clandestinity (freelancing being thought to be the greatest threat of spreading syphilis) that all working-class girls became suspect. According to Jill Harsin in *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, medical statisticians such as P. A. Didiot “advocated a special surveillance for all women who worked in cafés and restaurants.... Waitresses [and] every woman whose job required contact with the public [were] open to suspicion” (248). However, freelancing was an alternative to brothel work for one good reason: regulation was scant and porous for the freelancer, but organized (if occasionally slipshod) for the brothel girl. Indeed, the regulation of brothels seemed more logical, for they were perceived as manageable. Brothel prostitutes registered—and would be rounded up anytime they shirked their duty. In the early nineteenth century, doctors had gone to the brothel; by mid-century, many in-house prostitutes traveled to the *dispensaire de salubrité* once a week (where early in the

century they paid a tax for the privilege, one not rescinded in some outlying *départements* until the early years of the Third Republic).

Regulation of brothels would serve the bourgeois sense of order while appearing to safeguard society's interests. As Corbin says about the brothel, “[L]e règlement intérieur [est] plus rigoureux....En marge du code pénal s’élabore à Paris puis dans les principales villes de province, un subtil système de punitions administratives et d’hospitalisation obligatoire” (in Aron, 45). If the independent prostitute was slippery enough sometimes to avoid *la rafle*, and ultimately the French state, the brothel girl was a sitting duck for unannounced police visits to monitor registration. In *Sexual Moralities in France, 1780-1980*, Antony Copley underscores this “arbitrary nature of [police] power” in regulating French prostitution. “The system was never to be subject to legislation. It derived legality from a very eclectic set of regulations...which authorized the police to enter places notorious for debauchery” (88).

At the dispensary, the prostitute was examined and possibly confined there or in a hospital. In Maupassant's short story “Le Lit 29,” an infected former camp follower and prostitute is confined and awaits her death. Yet such hospitalization in the Belle Époque more often meant isolation for disease, not end-of-life care, as described in Harsin's *Policing Prostitution*. Prostitutes, she says, were always dismissed as incubators of disease. The stakes were high in the *tolérances*, as *matrones* were known to paint the genitalia of infected girls showing signs of syphilis. Losing one's job, re-registration as *une syphilitique*, a life of abject poverty—these were worse than the proletarian misery many girls had left behind. Harsin takes a sober view of prostitutes, who, she says,

typically came from deprived “popular” backgrounds and who were not all angels—for example, the *filles publiques voleuses* who supplemented their incomes with petty thievery, on or off the job. Harsin still notes the willingness of many young women to submit to state regulation since its inception: “The professionalism of the métier was underlined by the fairly high degree of compliance with the requirements of the system” (218). Professionalism, of course, doesn’t necessarily mean passivity; Harsin describes the vigorous reaction by some prostitutes to teams of police officers conducting a *rafle*. “The prostitute could make the arrest as unpleasant as possible by ‘vomiting insults,’ biting, or breaking windows at the police post” (195). More than their typical professionalism, Adler lauds their human “qualities.” She sees in them a basic decency, and strangely echoes Maupassant’s generic description in *La Maison Tellier*. “Elles sont également bonnes, généreuses, solidaires, bonnes mères et bonnes nourrices” (Adler, 105). Bordello life was often pretty uneventful—Harsin calls it “tedious”—a fact that actually might have seemed attractive to a working-class woman (Harsin, 297).

The class inequalities of the Industrial Revolution were reflected in the Paris sex trade: many working *filles prolétaires*, their mostly bourgeois and petit-bourgeois customers, and paternalistic (and adversarial) regulators who were state functionaries: policemen and physicians. From the time of Dr. Parent-Duchâtelet, Adler says, relations between policeman and prostitute had been “strange”—draconian or whimsical, depending on the confluence of personalities and incidents—but late-century run-ins between the two had become open and public. In 1882, the French abolitionist Yves Guyot, an opponent of state regulation for prostitution, gave the violent tactics of the

Police des Moeurs as one further reason to favor abolition of regulation (other objections were mistaken arrests, corruption and kickbacks, and squalid conditions despite medical follow-ups): “Tout Parisien a été témoin d’une de ces scènes sauvages et immondes. Des agents qui se ruent sur les femmes fuyant, éplorées et en criant; des tables de café bousculées, les coups tombent sur ces malheureuses” (cit. in Adler, 212). Abolition of regulation in France received an early boost in 1874: Josephine Butler, a British opponent of her country’s Contagious Diseases Acts, made Paris her “first stop on a European tour meant to publicize opposition to...regulated prostitution and...the degree to which this system represented a threat to working-class women everywhere” (Harsin, 324).

The police were not only the prostitute’s adversary, but the bane of procurers and pimps as well. No males other than patrons were admitted to the *tolérances* (one notable exception is the *matrone*’s husband), so this tended to exclude many a procurer or pimp—those who “could turn bordellos into veritable dens of death for patrons with money” (Harsin, 300). Once again, a brothel’s male clients needed protection: in the bourgeois century, they are the agents of TRAVAIL, FAMILLE, PATRIE, a genuine social construct as much as a contemporaneous aphorism. The clients were shielded from ruffraff and protected by the law. The onus, in the *tolérance* and on the street, was on the *fille soumise*—an ironic term that meant both submissive to men and compliant to registration (its counterpoint, the *insoumise*, was a bureaucratic word for one who tried to evade registration). In the brothel, however, the *fille soumise* fulfilled the letter of the law, and even if she was treated by the French state less severely than the *clandestine*, she

could be hauled off to the prison-hospital of Saint-Lazare at a moment's notice if she showed signs of disease.

Saint-Lazare became the women's prison of Paris in 1794, according to a 1948 article by Paul Blum, the onetime *chef de clinique* at Saint-Lazare: "Little by little [it] became the abode of all sorts of women convicts: criminals, thieves, spies, prostitutes.... Among them there were so many infected with venereal disease that a special infirmary became indispensable, built between 1824 and 1836 [and] used to segregate the women infected...from the rest" (Blum, "The Hôpital Saint-Lazare in Paris," 151-152). By 1932, Blum adds, all the prisoners had been transferred to La Roquette; only the disease clinic remained, until it was incorporated into what was to become a full-fledged hospital in 1937 (152).

Thus was Saint-Lazare a prison-infirmary throughout the bourgeois century, and a slipshod affair at that: In *Grandes Horizontales*, Rounding notes that sanitary officers shipped prostitutes off to Saint-Lazare not only for disease but simply "for infringement of the rules": "Saint-Lazare was a source of terror, reputed to be filthy as well as harsh" (Rounding, 14). And Harsin writes that "[its] administration made no real effort to cure their reluctant patients of a disease that was life-threatening," simply "waiting until the 'primary symptoms' had disappeared and they were no longer contagious" (Harsin, 274). Girls showing primary symptoms, whether in compliance with the state's *en carte* registration requirements or not, could still be seized by the Police des Moeurs and whisked out of the *tolérance* and off to Saint-Lazare or La Salpêtrière. But it was the

examinations, the prodding, the mistreatment by medical staff that were almost as harrowing for the brothel girl. A diagnosis of syphilis during regular visits to a dispensary meant isolation and daily inspection thereafter. By any standard, inspections in the early Belle Époque were inadequate: “Une fois sur deux jusqu’en 1887 on pratique...la petite visite, c’est-à-dire l’examen sans spéculum et les conditions d’hygiène sont déplorables” (Adler, 229). Exams afterward become more thorough, but confinement at Saint-Lazare was relentlessly degrading, with its beds without curtains, its unwashed wards and filthy latrines (Harsin, 258). And this was a hospital in Paris; far from the Île-de-France, hospitals for prostitutes were like a “prison stay,” the medical treatments administered like a severe form of punishment (Adler, 235).

The French medical establishment—marshaled to work with the police force to regulate prostitution since early in the century—had medical police and its own branch of specialized lawyers, *la médecine légale*. This was typical of the organization and *dirigisme* of the French state in social as well as political matters. But its energies were not concentrated on sick prostitutes, but in heading off syphilis in the *dispensaire*. Harsin describes the utilitarian exam rooms “divided into stalls by a series of partitions which...were never quite high or quite low enough” (214). The police in France helped to sow confusion in the dispensaries when, in 1884, the Prefect Comescasse “announced the expansion of the [Paris] dispensary at no extra charge to the city,” utilizing “volunteer doctors that brought swift complaints from the medical profession” (Harsin, 271). Such administration on the cheap contributed to laxity and reduced the quality of medical oversight and follow-through in the mid-1880s—along with arbitrary and corrupt police

work, and suspicions that exams still being done on premises of some *tolérances* were masking “primary” venereal markers. But that other vector of syphilis—the male customer—was rarely in the sights of the police or the medical authorities.

Not only was the brothel competing more with the freelancer, but another factor did not bode well for limiting the spread of venereal infections: the lesser role of the *femme entretenue*, the kept woman: “Dès les années 1870, le phénomène...va considérablement diminuer. Changement de moeurs, transformation du capitalisme...les hommes du monde hésitent à se faire plumer par une cocotte qui a besoin d’un train de vie de plus en plus fastueux” (Adler, 47-48). Men of Maupassant’s generation were more likely to avail themselves of the riskiest girls of all: the café prostitutes or even the night prowlers of the bohemian dives along the Seine downriver from Paris. The latter is most certainly where Maupassant contracted syphilis at the age of twenty-six. His March 1877 letter to Robert Pinchon, a collaborator on his bawdy *Feuille de rose*, is a crude diatribe spiced with Guy’s typical male bravado:

J’ai la vérole enfin, la vraie, pas la misérable chaude-pisse, pas l’ecclésiastique cristalline, pas les bourgeoises crêtes de coq, les légumineux choux-fleurs, non, non, la grande vérole, celle dont est mort François I. Et j’en suis fier, malheur, et je méprise par-dessus tous les bourgeois. Alléluia, j’ai la vérole, par conséquent je n’ai plus peur de l’attraper! (cit. in Troyat, 51)

Notwithstanding his bitter invective against “all the bourgeois,” Maupassant—like his father, Gustave, and his brother, Hervé—had caught a disease associated with prostitution, which he wasn’t about to give up. Prostitution was more a social convention in Latin countries like France, where unfettered sexual access for men (and the braggadocio that accompanied it) was expected. Yet if prostitution was also thriving in Victorian England, it was often viewed there as more of a male vice and less as a rite of passage. This cultural reality seems to be intrinsic to the French state’s *laissez-faire* attitude toward the male clients of prostitutes. In mid-century, however, some activist doctors were advocating a state-organized prophylactic response to young, unmarried men at risk of contracting disease. In 1855, for example, Dr. G. Lagneau had proposed to “extend surveillance to all celibate civil servants and to young men who entered the *Grandes Écoles*, but these proposals bowed to bourgeois sensibilities. The men were not to be subjected to the indignity of regular examinations by doctors of the administration [but]...were to present a certificate of good health from [their own] doctor...and only upon entry into the office or school” (Harsin, 260).

In the end, regulation for males would never be promulgated, and French abolitionists would raise one more hackle about the selective strong-arming of prostitutes—and only prostitutes—in the war against syphilis. But abolition of regulation in France had been fraught from the beginning. The French police had successfully kept prostitution out of the written penal code; it was in their administrative purview, and not subject to the meddling of activist doctors or citizen-reformers. The French abolitionists, mostly anti-clerical and republican, then looked to the Third Republic for allies, but their

efforts, Harsin says, fell far short of the mark, even into the twentieth century. The police in France were formidable—and they would ultimately prevail. “The failure to pass a law having direct bearing on prostitution—the Marthe Richard Law, abolishing controlled bordellos, was not passed until after World War II—was discouraging” (334).

In all, late nineteenth-century regulation in France was always limited by the scientific knowledge of the era. There was no cure for venereal infections—mercury and arsenic wrecked the body without overwhelming the spirochete. Besides isolation and the warehousing of working-class women in the sex trade, one could only strike fear into men. Bernheimer mentions Alfred Fournier, a neoregulationist of the early 1880s who used persuasive dramatics to combat syphilis. “He dwells on frightening descriptions of innocent bodies covered with grotesque lesions...and generates anxiety by developing an ever-increasing list of possible sources of infection...pipes, coins, linen...kissing a crucifix” (235). This was not just programmed hysteria, but a reflection of the scientific and medical limitations of the era. Harsin confirms that “the stigma attached to venereal disease was so great that it reached into the medical schools...Medical students in general were not tested on the subject for fear of embarrassing them” (257).

Yet it is ironic that men with syphilis continued with their lives while working-class prostitutes faced quarantine. The infected *fille publique* was temporarily removed from society but permanently branded with an amended registration card: “ils apposent sur leur cartes respectives ...en même temps que sur le cahier de section...un timbre indiquant leur état de santé et la maladie...” (Adler, 122). Many young women simply fell out of the regulatory system and became *clandestines*, the ones whom young, mostly

uninfected males would patronize. Neoregulation, therefore, appears to have been a show horse for the state rather than an effective means to control contagious and fatal diseases. The system had the outward appearance of bureaucratic stealth and administrative thoroughness, but it was abusive, corrupt, discriminatory and sometimes relentlessly violent. It was also a money pit to the state, as it focused largely on a female *Lumpenproletariat* that in many cases would leave the *métier* altogether by age twenty-five. The British would come to see the downside to the regulation of prostitution, and they repealed their Contagious Diseases Acts in 1886. Harsin credits Josephine Butler, who had provided a “positive, coherent outlet for all those who disliked the *régime de mœurs*” (324). Bernheimer, too, describes Butler’s “progressive and positive” contribution toward freedom from “arbitrary arrest, demeaning medical exams, and the dehumanizing exploitation of the bordello” (211).

But France was France. Its thousand-year legacy of bureaucracy, its state *dirigisme* coupled with bourgeois *utilitarisme*, had gone on to propagate regulation and ever more regulation. Perhaps Anglo-Saxon cultures indeed encouraged more *souplesse*, not to mention more debate and reform, *vis-à-vis* France’s administrative logjams and intractable politics. Butler had actually brought a government over to the idea of aiding—of all creatures—the prostitute, and in a sexually squeamish monarchy at that. Harsin says that France, unlike Britain, lacked a “single, prominent leader,” but she also ascribes the survival of neoregulation in France to the French abolitionists themselves, divided into philosophical camps and unable to face a complex political landscape.

Somehow the British saw the prostitute as more human—and the idea that many non-prostitutes could be so easily arrested, branded as harlots and publicly humiliated was simply untenable in Britain. The French state, unlike the British, had never actually passed laws against the sex trade, but through its functionaries, bureaucrats and the strong arm and legerdemain of the police it had created something worse: a deeply discriminatory and rather un-republican system of social regulation.

A *MÉNAGE* IN THE BOURGEOIS CENTURY

“Common-law” marriage, as French as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thérèse le Vasseur, became more common in the bourgeois century—if not among the bourgeois themselves, certainly among the creative elite and the working class. Maupassant’s short story “Une surprise” depicts the jocular dilemma of having an aging uncle—who is also a priest—come calling on two happily unmarried brothers in late-century Paris. His nephews, both modest *commis*, are now living together with their female companions in a couple of small rooms when the uncle rings without warning. The girls are obviously proletarian types who make the story a situation comedy of *moeurs fin-de-siècle*. Maupassant actually frames “Une surprise” with a bit of sociocultural commentary, revealing a social phenomenon of the big industrial cities: *ménages* of convenience.

The Catholic social commentator Paul Bureau would have agreed. His morally strident tome *D’indiscipline des moeurs* (1927; translated into English as *Towards Moral Bankruptcy*) records that “*ménages libres*,” as he calls them, arrived in Paris in mid-

century and derived from some rural conventions in outlying areas of France (he mentions the Yonne and the province of Burgundy). They were “inaugurated by the industrial workers...and made [their] way to higher social grades” (94). The concept of shacking up in France was certainly not new, he avers, for the Civil Code of 1804 noted “free unions” even if it did not legally recognize them. For him, *ménages libres* were indeed a result of the dislocations of nineteenth-century French life, with so many people migrating daily to the industrial cities. Angus McLaren’s *The Trials of Masculinity* confirms that by the 1890s “it was estimated that there were about forty thousand ‘unions libres’ in the city of Paris alone” (68). Bureau takes on the government and the secular-minded society of Maupassant’s time as the main culprits for this still very working-class phenomenon. Both had declared war on the Roman Catholic Church, cementing a “close alliance between the *doctrine libératrice* and the...free-thinkers and rationalists”; and in 1877, he adds, France had essentially “eliminated conservatives” (277). He is referring, without mentioning them, to the monarchists and to *Ordre Moral*, who were voted out of power that year. But like Maupassant’s narrator describing the two female companions in “Une surprise,” Bureau confirms the sheer power of economics over the disadvantaged young women flooding into Paris after mid-century. Indeed, the effect of *ménages libres* on French society became so significant over the next decades, adds Bureau, that in August 1914 the French state decided to pay “the ‘companion’ [of a soldier] the same pension as the lawful wife in case of the death of her mobilized ‘friend’ ” (97). If the bourgeois (and republican) ferment of the late nineteenth century did not exactly encourage young people in the ways of common-law marriage, it did foster the

socioeconomic conditions for it. By the First World War—hardly a decade after the 1905 separation of church and French state—these *ménages* had been acknowledged by the state as a social fact of life, in a land that many a Catholic critic like Bureau still wished to think of as *la fille aînée de l'Église*.

The *ménages* of “Une surprise” are something Guy de Maupassant lived himself, according to most of his biographers: among all the *filles* and amid all his liaisons, Maupassant did take a common-law wife, Joséphine Litzelmann. “Il l’aurait connue et séduite alors qu’elle était donneuse d’eau à la source Marguerite, à Châteauguyon. Une aventure parmi cent d’autres. On s’ennuie tellement dans les stations thermales” (Lanoux, 174). From this *ménage* came three children whom Maupassant never acknowledged: Lucien Litzelmann (born in 1883), Lucienne (b. 1884) and Marguerite (b. 1887). Maupassant’s chief mentor, Gustave Flaubert, had scrupulously avoided *ménages* as well as personal commitments of any kind. (Flaubert’s brief liaison with the writer and *salonnière* Louise Colet was fraught, and she described Flaubert’s thoroughly bachelor milieu in withering terms: it was, she told him, “le monde des étudiants, des viveurs, des jureurs et des fumeurs.”)* Yet Maupassant’s other mentor, Louis Bouilhet (1821-1869), had been in a long-term *ménage*. Bouilhet was a poet and the archivist of the Rouen Library, “un doux et grand raté, un Bovary de la poésie” (Paul Morand, cit. in Frébourg, 72). He frequently had the adolescent Guy over to his home on the Rue de Bihorel to read and critique the youngster’s verse. Guy could not help but meet Bouilhet’s companion

* In a letter from Colet to Flaubert (November 9, 1847), in Flaubert, *Correspondance*, vol. 1, p. 482.

and his three children. This choice of life, which had integrated the creative classes, would go beyond bohemian quarters very fast, as Bureau points out. Once the phenomenon hit the working man and the bourgeois at the turn of the twentieth century, it had to be formally acknowledged in French law—in the intimate area of survivorship.

For the lower classes at least, French law had long promoted the idea of marrying one's common-law wife and legally recognizing and legitimizing the offspring from this union. In *Family, Class, and Ideology in Early Industrial France*, Katherine A. Lynch confirms the banalization of these *ménages* among the French working class in the Industrial Revolution. While such households could be hushed up among the comfortable elite, extramarital unions with children among the striving classes were well known to the French state because they were thought to contribute to poverty and neglect. The Société de Saint-François-Régis, a private welfare society, encouraged common-law couples to marry using friendly visits and moral suasion. These efforts were lauded by the French state, which had been hard pressed to find a solution in industrial cities such as Lille: “When asked...to discuss the causes which increased the legal recognition of children in the Nord, the prefect cited marriages concluded as a result of the society's efforts as the primary cause” (Lynch, 107).

Yet Maupassant came from the moneyed elite, and regularly contributed money to the Litzelmann household. He was certainly under no pressure from friends, family or the state to marry—or even to recognize his three children (and he never did). Lanoux, writing in 1967, lays the blame for Maupassant's evasion of duty right at Laure de Maupassant's doorstep: “Il existe des mères abusives....Les femmes autoritaires, déçues

par le mariage, et qui bouclant trop longtemps les cheveux de leurs garçons en font des clients naturels de Sodome ou des célibataires, séducteurs forcenés *dont elles se font les complices*” (Lanoux, 253). But one might counter that Maupassant, famous and comfortable in the mid-1880s, had little desire to fill out documents at the Hôtel de Ville and ruin his perfect bachelor life. Guy had always pitied the married family man and never wished to join his ranks. Guy had made his choice long before his mother could contemplate one for him. His little *ménage* would remain both secret and convenient.

The bourgeois century’s mercantile values had threatened French tradition; they had even obliterated it in myriad ways, both grandiose and subtle—from the rise of the parvenu who could re-create himself in a matter of years, to the widening of the sex trade and the preeminence of a new, rough-cut masculine sociability. At the same time, the new century had perhaps reinforced sexual apartness and inequality; it certainly recognized and preserved the rights of privileged men in their most private sphere. With the advent of these *promiscuités*—in the French sense—of people, business and trade, the refreshed republicanism of an industrial age, Guy de Maupassant could find his way to success and, for a writer, rare fortune. This “man of talent,” as Edmond de Goncourt had to admit, had been a bourgeois bohemian in training—thanks to his indulgent family and his many mentors and friends. As the late nineteenth century shifted inexorably into high gear, so did the tireless Maupassant. Already suffering the effects of secondary syphilis in the early 1880s, Guy de Maupassant evinced nevertheless an incredible energy level on the town and at his writing table. The *écrivain à femmes* had done extraordinarily well.

Chapter II. AVOWED BACHELOR IN THE BOURGEOIS CENTURY

In nineteenth-century France, few affluent urban men risked the social opprobrium of bachelorhood. Throughout the century, Frenchmen of most classes typically married between their twenty-sixth and twenty-ninth birthdays (Kertzer and Barbagli, 301-302). An extended bachelorhood much beyond the age of thirty was simply a renunciation of social norms for most men in the bourgeois century. Educated men in France without great wealth were no exception. They were now professionalized, and the professional man took a wife and settled for a domestic life. Indeed, over this century the very nature of the private sphere, for professional men as well as for their wives, had undergone a sea change, with the transformation of marriage providing the salience.

In *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family*, Randolph Trumbach traces the history and consolidation of what he calls “domesticity,” a new family model in the middle and upper classes of a husband and a wife typically living together with their children but no other relations. Trumbach says that domesticity had swept the great aristocratic families of England by the early eighteenth century; some historians have even considered it key to the economic transformation of Britain, in advance of continental Europe:

By another name—the nuclear family—it has been put forward as one of the contributing factors of industrialization....It is slightly easier to suggest that domesticity may well have contributed to political stability....It can help provide, perhaps, a new answer to that old question, Why did England have no revolution? For it seems likely that romantic marriage and the close association of parents

with their children had made little headway in France or Italy.” (Trumbach, 287-88)

Trumbach later confirms that while the domestic family arrived much later on the continent—at the earliest, the beginning of the nineteenth century—it eventually took hold among both aristocracy and bourgeoisie and ultimately superseded older family models. Meanwhile, Antony Copley, in *Sexual Moralities, 1780-1980*, links the positive reception of the new domesticity in France to the enduring tenets of eighteenth-century humanism and even to its perceived Britishness: “A change in expectation [of marriage] came with the Enlightenment. This was in part the impact of Anglophilia; the French sought to imitate the English ideal of conjugal love, of domesticity” (13).

One of Trumbach’s important points is how the new domesticity gradually helped secure a “place” for middle- and upper-class women: as wife but also as household manager and as an equal partner with her husband. For many women, this was both a better time and a worse one: No longer a weak link in the extended family, they became a partner in a nuclear family. Yet women were still deemed unfit for most professions. (Indeed, the modern concept of universal education for girls was contemplated, and legislated, in France only toward the end of the bourgeois century, notes Dahhan: “[En] 1879, la loi impose à chaque département d’entretenir une école primaire de filles”; 27.)

The monogamous family had thus enshrined a domestic role for the wives of affluent men that meshed nicely with their husbands’ “industrial” routine: six days in the office and one day of rest, an orderly system that met the rhythms of modern business.

Few professional men could shirk this new domestic arrangement—husbands at work and wives going about their domestic errands during the week—any more than they could snub the modern economy itself. In *Family Life in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1789-1913*, David Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli have underscored the socioeconomic primacy of domesticity, qualifying it “as among the most innovative cultural sites of the nineteenth century [and] the bourgeois realm *par excellence*. It provided the necessary foil to ‘public life’ and was equally crucial for the establishment of bourgeois political and cultural hegemony” (201). One by one, the domestic family infiltrated all of France’s upper classes—bourgeoisie as well as tiny aristocracy and larger nobility—and beyond the effects it would have on a woman’s “place” or her sense of self, one little-known but important corollary is the range of social pressures it duly placed on the affluent, better-educated nineteenth-century man.

BACHELORS AND OTHERS

Quite a few urban Frenchmen in the bourgeois century had felt the heat from the new domesticity. Businessmen and *boutiquiers*, diplomats and small-town functionaries, even writers, editors and publishers—those who sought to influence, who hustled for a living or owed some unspoken allegiance to social conformity—were married with children. But in contrast to an earlier era, these husbands paid their tribute to the domestic space, and to their wives’ key role in it, by increasingly accepting the wife’s oversight of this space. For the married professional man, new social constraints on his professional and

sexual behavior had established a beachhead; he now found himself in a more circumscribed realm. Kertzer and Barbagli actually describe it as something else: a “moral” realm.

It had become a world of particularity, accessible by invitation only. It was a world dominated by women and children....Economic theory beginning in the eighteenth century portrayed a market place governed by the amoral dictates of rational calculation....It was necessary to locate bourgeois morality elsewhere. The family home took on new significance as a site where morality prevailed (201-202).

This was enough to help prime not so much a male backlash as a compensatory stratagem: the growth of masculine sociability. Affluent Frenchmen of the eighteenth century had sought camaraderie in social *cercles* or *sociétés de plaisance* (Nye, 128), but the new, professionalized gentlemen’s clubs of the nineteenth century provided more: a place to talk shop and also a necessary buffer from a domestic realm that could be stultifying. After all, if the married professional man could arrange for wild-oats mischief in his after-hours club or in a *grande tolérance* (described by Corbin in *Les Filles de noce* as a sedate brothel of well-heeled respectability “where silence and discretion reigned”; 89-90), the professional man, unlike the aristocrat who also patronized *grandes tolérances*, was expected home in the evenings to a place he often did not control. The defenders of French domesticity, the reactionary demographer-moralists of the 1870s,

hadn't concerned themselves with the professional husband's after-hours: They did, however, embrace and defend the new urban family model, one as regimented as the urban workplace (and one that, as they saw it, promoted social cohesion and a healthy uptake in national population tables).

Interestingly, it is the social restraints of this new domestic model that modern sociologists have keenly observed about sexual mores in the bourgeois century. In *The Civilizing Process*, the German sociologist Norbert Elias wrote of a transformed "bourgeois-professional" economy that had insinuated itself into new professional and social mores, many heretofore unimaginable:

For many aspects of the emotional economy, bourgeois functions—above all, business life—demand and produce greater self-restraint than courtly functions, [and] by the standard of bourgeois society, the control of sexuality and the form of marriage prevalent in court society appear extremely lax. (Elias 1, 186)

Elias gives as an example the concept of extramarital relations, which even for husbands now garnered the supercilious disapproval reserved for other forms of sexual "license." With the married couple as the only socially and economically sanctioned sexual relationship, all others were willed out of existence. If a modern Western nation like France can be considered sexually "restrained" in the nineteenth century, this is to some degree tied to the French state's socioeconomic interest in, and legislation of, domesticity.

Kertzer and Barbagli mention the “considerable magnitude” of family law reform in France under the Revolution—to the degree that “by 1815 there was, arguably, little else to accomplish” in comparison to many other Western nations (109). The Bourbon Restoration reversed much of these reforms, they add, and it would take the fall of Mac-Mahon and the *Ordre Moral* in the mid-1870s before the French state even contemplated a return to Revolutionary concepts of family law. Bourgeois France tried now to play catch-up, the two authors have described, wrestling with the Catholic Church, monarchists, the agnostic enlightened and, of course, the bourgeoisie itself.

By the time Guy de Maupassant turned thirty, in 1880, monogamous marriage and the nuclear family were already viewed by the state as a unified moral concept to be tightly regulated—part of the state apparatus, in fact—and no longer seen merely as a sacred rite or a means of legal certification for children. True, say Kertzer and Barbagli, the Catholic Church and the *Ancien Régime* had long meddled in the area of family law, and the Revolution’s emphatic secularism was to unleash a flood of “progressive” legislation.

Divorce is a case in point: In 1792, the Revolutionary government adopted a form of “no-fault” divorce that was the most permissive in Europe. This progressive legislation was short-lived; Zeldin delineates the problems that were to ensue for divorce reform in France: restricted under Napoleon, this aspect of family law was completely reversed under the Restoration and long remained a dead letter: “In 1816...divorce was abolished altogether and it remained so until 1884” (Zeldin, 358).

Indeed, the fraught area of divorce law was finally broached again—or, rather, it

was resuscitated—in 1884, with the bourgeois Third Republic’s Loi Naquet. The efforts and ultimate success of the free-thinking Jewish chemist Alfred Naquet might appear modest by today’s standards, but the social significance in Maupassant’s era was considerable. Kertzer and Barbagli sum up the Naquet law in one fell swoop: Under it, divorce could be granted to one spouse on account of the other’s mental breakdown, adultery, extreme violence or moral turpitude—but not merely on the grounds of mutual consent. In addition, “the wayward spouse could not marry his or her paramour (a disability removed in 1904)” (Kertzer and Barbagli, 141). Like any other facet of marriage and the family in the 1880s, divorce had been influenced and shaped by archconservative, pro-domesticity politicians and factions. Marriage, with its roster of cause and effect, was more than a contract indeed, and not to be approached blithely. As traced by Kertzer and Barbagli, the late bourgeois century saw a legislative push in progressive family law to reform divorce and to extend the rights of married women (141). With the Loi Naquet, however, domestic marriage was viewed as an arrangement between mortals; if it was blessed in heaven, it could sometimes come to an end on earth. Nicholas White says as much in his introduction to *The Family in Crisis in Late Nineteenth-Century French Fiction*: “However unrecognizable as an adequate divorce law it might appear to a late twentieth-century audience, the Loi Naquet did articulate an admission on the part of the French state that the family unit was not indissoluble” (5). At times there seemed to arise something of a national consensus in these matters, but the reform of family law in France remained onerous and the debates heated. And, too, there were those who opted out of marriage altogether.

A LIBERTINE BACHELORHOOD

Guy de Maupassant, from a noble family of modest resources and even straitened circumstances, had observed the bourgeois-professional routine as a state functionary and he didn't like it—during his five years with the Ministère de la Marine and then, after a short break in 1879, for one short year at the Ministère de l'Instruction publique des cultes et des beaux-arts. Frébourg describes Guy's fellow employees—pleasant, married and dull—who eventually figured into some of his fiction: “Ils prennent le tramway, ont des horaires fixes, des journées parfaitement cadrées. De leur vie, ils ont écarté l'imprévu, la flamme” (91). A doctor's note attesting to Guy's compromised vision—“[qui] peut fort bien correspondre à un diagnostic de syphilis de système nerveux dans 80% des cas” (Troyat, 100)—had helped land him this plum job at Instruction publique. This final year was more endurable now that Guy was ensconced among one of the French state's more humanistic confines. And for years, he had also snagged part-time jobs writing short *chroniques* for newspapers and magazines.

At age thirty, Guy had not changed his opinion about marriage one iota from his days as a peach-fuzzed *canotier*. If anything, his attitude hardened mightily. Both Maupassant and his mentor Flaubert had no intention of allowing any legal domesticity to rein in their natural instincts. Their biographers often emphasize a kindred and iconoclastic bachelor mind-set: “Indéniablement, Flaubert et Guy se ressemblent. Même aspect physique de solidité, même aversion pour le mariage, même goût pour les filles de

maisons closes...même haine du bourgeois...” (Troyat, 91). Neither man adhered to the rules of bourgeois morality, and certainly objected to their onerous extension in the bourgeois state. The potential stress on their polygamous natures was a curse and a scourge. Guy had disparaged the intrinsic unfairness of marriage toward men in one of his *chroniques*: “Donc le mariage crée peut-être une situation anormale, et à laquelle le mari ne se résigne jamais, une situation qui mettrait éternellement la conscience en lutte avec l’instinct, avec l’amour” (“Le Préjugé du déshonneur,” *A Selection of Chroniques*, p. 73, emphasis mine).

Maupassant’s hostile stance on marriage made it into his fictional works at numerous points, but marriage’s curb on male sexual instinct was only part of its problem. Even more iniquitous to him was his observation that many spouses entered into marriage expecting the perfect idyll. True, Maupassant conceded, marriage could be a sublime friendship: In the short story “Hautot père et fils,” the elder Hautot worshipped his late wife so much that he honors her in death by vowing never to remarry. (Hautot’s much later relationship with another woman is never legalized, for no woman could settle in and replace the adored wife in “her” home.) Still, much more frequent in Maupassant’s fiction is the notion that marriage is a loveless affair, its toxicity more than ensured in the case of bourgeois “partnership.” In “Un soir,” Maupassant’s narrator runs into an old school chum in Algeria. His friend, once a budding man of letters, has happily banished himself there after leaving his wife. The impetus: Right after their marriage, she had become the domestic partner from hell:

Je lui communiquai mes projets d'avenir qu'elle blâma. Elle ne me croyait ni poète, ni romancier, ni auteur dramatique, et pensait que le commerce, quand il prospère, peut donner le bonheur parfait. (*Oeuvres complètes* II, 1078).

The central figure in this story sounds something like Maupassant himself—an aspiring writer who had seen the social pressures of bourgeois Paris. In “Un soir,” the husband pleases his wife by becoming a bookseller, while she ends up as the store’s publicist-cum-*salonnière* and its reigning tyrant. She gets out and socializes; he does the grunt work. She has time for an affair with an old marquis; he literally slaves in the cellars of commerce—a most proper workaholic husband, and the perfect cuckold. “Le mot mariage,” the narrator opines, “veut-il dire renoncement à toute indépendance, à toute liberté?” (1080). This sensitive Maupassantian protagonist, having lowered himself to the meretricious rat race, is burned. Yes, the rustic life in Kabylia might be the ultimate escape from urban domesticity.

More often than not in Maupassant’s world, the human heart grows ever darker in bourgeois marriage. Fortunately there is divorce, and after the 1884 Loi Naquet, the right of divorce is reflected in Maupassant’s fiction. Several short stories assume the Naquet reforms as a given: For example, the short story “Un cas de divorce” first appeared in *Gil Blas* in 1886. Here, an idealistic young man becomes disillusioned just a few years into his marriage, for he has gotten to know his wife. She disgusts him now, and he becomes indifferent, then violent and, finally, quite mentally disturbed. She sues him for divorce, and her lawyer will close his arguments by comparing this increasingly demented husband to King Ludwig (he resembles, the lawyer says, “le roi bizarre qui regna

platoniquement sur la Bavière. J'appellerai ce cas: la folie poétique"; *Oeuvres complètes* II, 777). The husband agrees to a divorce. For both spouses, this marriage had been an error—he was deceived, she was mistreated. It is only right that the state dissolve it forthwith.

Divorce is more often than not the valiant recourse of unhappy wives. The short story "Le Signe," also an 1886 feature in *Gil Blas*, opens with the Marquise de Rennedon snoozing late, "seule, tranquille, de l'heureux et profond sommeil des divorcées" (*Oeuvres complètes* II, 725). And her friend, the married Baronne de Grangerie, patently envies the marquise's new marital status ("Maintenant tu peux choisir"; 727.) And how did la Rennedon obtain her precious divorce? The key is found in another story, "Sauvée," with the same female characters. There, the reader learns, the marquise had patiently and stealthily arranged for the sexual entrapment of her husband, and it worked like a charm. "Délivrée! libre! libre! libre!" she exults before a dumbfounded Baronne de Grangerie (651). She is free now. In these stories, Maupassant advocates for women's happiness and freedom, for in certain ways the married woman is even more disadvantaged and vulnerable. For Maupassant, marriage is less a bond than total bondage for both wife and husband; it is equal-opportunity misery. And in the bourgeois century, even these fictional aristocrats are feeling the harsh yoke of domestic "partnership."

Years later, and in a different frame of mind, Maupassant had contemplated marriage. Léon Fontaine, Guy's friend from his lycée days in Rouen and a fellow

canotier and cutup, claimed in a letter that Maupassant would seriously consider marrying a certain “comtesse X” in 1887: “Je tiens de lui-même, quelques années avant sa mort, que le célibataire endurci, le solitaire refrigné qu’il avait toujours été, était décidé à unir sa vie à celle d’une femme, si elle devenait libre” (cit. in Lanoux, 252). And in 1891, Guy’s manservant François Tassart reported a similar admission in his memoir, *Nouveaux souvenirs intimes de Guy de Maupassant*: “[I]l a pu faire le serment, sur l’autel du célibat, de ne pas prendre femme; mais il m’a dit un jour, après un séjour à Aix-les-Bains et un voyage en Suisse, qu’il avait vu une jeune femme qui, selon lui, réunissait les qualités morales et physiques d’un littérateur...qu’elle serait dans ce rôle difficile une perfection” (Tassart, 73).

For a *littérateur* as demanding as Maupassant, combining “all the sufficient moral and physical qualities” would have been a tall order indeed. Besides, by the mid-1880s, Maupassant had been feeling less robust, already adopting abstemious resolutions. He had written as much to his correspondent Marie “Moussia” Bashkirtseff, a painter-sculptor and the daughter of a Russian *maréchal* whom Frébourg notes “sera célèbre pour son *Journal* posthume” (161). After she sent Guy an unrealistic portrait of him she had drawn, showing a detached man of pleasure, he corrected her: “Je ne fume pas; je ne bois ni bière ni vins, ni alcools. Rien que de l’eau” (cit. in Dahhan, 127). The advice of Guy’s doctors in 1884, Guy would follow it to the letter until his final illness and death in 1893.

As a mostly vigorous and independent man almost up to his final illness, however, Guy de Maupassant had other things than marriage on his mind. In fact, he continued to pursue the polygamous life with gusto. His uncle Alfred and his brother

Hervé, longtime bachelors both, may have forsaken bachelor ways in their thirties, but not Guy. His years as a *chroniqueur* had allowed him, financially and spiritually, to plan a permanent leave from the drudgery of state file rooms. He had begun to make good money with his first success, the 1880 novella *Boule de Suif*, and as a full-time writer he moved into his showy bachelor pad at 83, rue Dulong, XVII^e. Troyat observes:

“L’argent coule vers lui de plusieurs sources à la fois. Il profite de cette aisance pour aider largement sa mère qui, véritable panier percé, ne peut se contenter de cinq mille francs de revenue dont elle dispose” (Troyat, 119). Guy willingly helped his mother and then, just like her, typically spent the rest of his disposable income. He needed the money: He sometimes set up two bachelor lairs, says Dahhan: “Il lui arrivait de louer deux appartements, peu éloignés l’un de l’autre, l’un consacré à sa vie publique, professionnelle, officielle, et l’autre aux dames” (31). Lanoux asserts that the sturdy, laconic Tassart managed Guy’s “official” residence as attentively as any wife.

A sober or resigned bachelorhood might be the lot of some older nineteenth-century writers—Goncourt was sober and Turgenev resigned—but Maupassant lived his bachelorhood as almost a political act. Flaubert had sought comfort with Louise Colet for one brief year, but otherwise had even briefer relationships or hired brothel girls. Guy de Maupassant’s mature years were more bustling to say the least, and more, well, complicated. Already in 1880, he had begun his common-law *ménage* with Joséphine Litzelmann, the uneducated village *donneuse d’eau* with whom he sired three children between 1883 and 1887—Lucien, Lucienne and Marthe-Marguerite Litzelmann. At the

end of 1880, Maupassant received his fan letter from the androgyne Marie-Paule-Élisa Courbe Parent-Desbarres, a.k.a. Gisèle d'Estoc, and would begin a frenetic sexual relationship with her in 1881. Though Troyat believes their affair actually started three years later, he too describes a young libertine girl who greatly preferred women but had experienced much drama with them: “Abandonnée par son amie Emma Rouër, écuyère au cirque Médrano, elle la provoque en duel et s'en tire avec une égratignure au sein gauche” (Troyat, 245). Gisèle and Guy saw each other throughout the 1880s (she was turned away in her final attempts to see him on his deathbed). Then, in 1883, Guy hired the vigorous aide-de-camp Tassart to take care of his household on the rue Dulong. And it was Tassart who accompanied Guy during all his freewheeling journeys to North Africa, remaining in his employ for ten years until Maupassant's death.*

This layering of concurrent relationships—multiple “lifestyles” decades before this term enters the English language—is striking and worthy of scrutiny. It is hardly mistaken to see Guy de Maupassant as a man of his century, living in bourgeois comfort with his heirloom furnishings from the Ancien Régime. One quote attributed to Guy, gently mocking Flaubert, is: “Bel-Ami, c'est moi” (Dahhan, 31), but some Maupassant scholars have taken issue with the facile concept of Guy as a writer-dandy wallowing in fin-de-siècle excess. Frébourg, in 2000, criticizes such a reductive thesis in Lanoux's exhaustive 1967 biography, *Maupassant le Bel-Ami*: this “canotier de la littérature hissé

* François Tassart, six years Guy's junior, perhaps outlived all of Maupassant's contemporaries. He died in 1949, at the age of ninety-three, having lived through the Franco-Prussian War, World War I and World War II.

soudain au rang d'écrivain nouveau riche" (Frébourg, 143). To be fair, Lanoux gives ample time to the three little Litzelmans, all unrecognized by Maupassant, to the petulant Gisèle, and to Guy's lusty bachelor adventures at home and abroad with a nod and a wink from the valet Tassart. Also like Frébourg, Lanoux emphasizes the *mentalité Ancien Régime* that seduced Maupassant from a tender age. He too sees Maupassant's singular life as perhaps in the seventeenth arrondissement but squarely in the eighteenth century. Lanoux mentions the literature of the age and "l'admiration que Maupassant vouait à un XVIII^e siècle libertin assez personnel, puisqu'il comptait, dans l'ordre de ses ferveurs, d'abord l'Abbé Prévost, puis Choderlos de Laclos, puis le marquis de Sade, et seulement ensuite Rousseau, Diderot et Voltaire" (Lanoux, 169).

Both Gustave Flaubert and Louis Bouilhet had nourished young Guy's passion for libertine ideas and libertine fiction. Thanks to their efforts, Guy adored *Manon Lescaut* (he wrote the preface to a new edition in 1883) and *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. Of the latter libertine novel, Guy told the poet and novelist Tancred Martel that it was one of the great moral tales: "On le tient pour un livre immoral....Au contraire, il est, selon moi, la plus forte leçon de morale qu'on ait donnée à la gent femelle" (Martel, "Souvenirs et impressions," *Le Figaro, supplément littéraire*, Sept. 5, 1925, cit. in Vial, 420 fn.). But Sade also figured into the Flaubert-Bouilhet canon, and scandalous escapades were discussed with relish. In a letter to twenty-six-year-old Guy, Flaubert jested about a recent *scandale médiatisé* in the arrest of the libertine comte de Germiny, who had exposed himself in a public urinal. Quipped Flaubert: "L'âme du Vieux se répand sur la

Capitale” (*Correspondance* 39, January 10, 1877). Dahhan notes that both Flaubert and Maupassant happily entertained themselves with the works of Sade then making the rounds *en cachette* (71). Guy perused much of the marquis’ *oeuvre bannie*, and he became a devotee of Sade’s wit and some of his wisdom. Already in April 1875 he paid homage to the libertine author in the formal invitation summoning friends to a first showing of *A la feuille de rose, Maison turque*: “Cher monsieur et Ami, la solennité est enfin fixée au lundi 19 du présent mois. Ne seront admis que les hommes au-dessus de vingt ans et les femmes préalablement déflorées. La loge royale sera occupée par l’ombre du grand marquis” (cit. in Troyat, 58). At a rather tender age, Guy was already imbued with *la philosophie libertine*. What is noteworthy is that, like Flaubert, Guy was not averse to libertinage as an expressive adjunct to a nineteenth-century bachelor life. Maupassant, wild and fancy free, found much in Sade’s narratives to be applicable to his own very un-domestic realm.

IN SADE’S SHADOW

Guy’s first exposure to Sade is thought to be the marquis’s short *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, a veritable primer of “expert” libertine advice for both men and women. This fast-paced pornographic tale features a well-versed libertine woman, Madame de Saint-Ange, who largely steals the show from her three male companions-in-lust. Perhaps it is because she is a woman in a man’s world, or that her spare-no-details instructions to a willing pupil, the fifteen-year-old virgin Eugénie, promote something of a feminist credo.

Sade often relied on women as preferred narrators and describers, from Thérèse to Juliette. In *Writing the Orgy: Power and Parody in Sade*, Lucienne Frappier-Mazur notes how female narration and female characterization had been a feature of libertine tracts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, yet she sees little in Sade's female narrators that really privileges women: "[T]he presence of these female voices in Sade is overdetermined.... Sade seeks to appropriate the feminine, and his writing demands a passage through the feminine—be it a phantasy of incest with the mother [or] a rivalry with the maternal as genitor" (144). Nevertheless, Sade's Madame de Saint-Ange narrates her libertine world with sparkling self-assurance, taking pains to emphasize her leadership role in it. And while the tender Eugénie does loathe her own mother enough to contemplate murdering her, she is in essence the budding libertine who seeks to excel and to surpass her teacher. Taken together, the two women are more than narrators; they are libertine equals to any man. The sacrament of marriage certainly hasn't gotten in Madame de Saint-Ange's way either: Her husband is an understanding libertine who allows her lots of wiggle room. Eugénie's father, who happens to be one of la Saint-Ange's favorite playmates, is a devoted libertine married to Eugénie's pious mother (a woman perhaps even more tiresomely Roman Catholic than Sade's own wife, Renée-Pélagie).

The obscene narrative covers all the libertine bases—sexual freedom, marriage, contraception, prostitution and adultery—before ending in a Sadean rant. If Sade's libertine harangue brings in such disparate concerns as the death penalty, Republicanism

and incest (Madame de Saint-Ange enjoys trysts with her brother), Sade also expresses a bold view of female sexual emancipation, and one that Maupassant will adopt *grosso modo*: “Jamais un acte de possession ne peut être exercé sur un être libre; il est aussi injuste de posséder exclusivement une femme, qu’il est de posséder les esclaves; tous les hommes sont nés libres, tous sont égaux en droit, ne perdons jamais de vue ces principes...” (*La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, cinquième dialogue, p. 133).

After all, more than one of Guy’s fictional creations, like the Marquise de Rennedon, had gone to extraordinary lengths to reclaim their freedom. Yet Sade doesn’t eschew marriage so much as he wishes to incorporate it into the libertine life. Laclos’ Madame de Merteuil may have waited until a circumspect widowhood to enjoy the charms of many men, but Sade’s Madame de Saint-Ange doesn’t have to. The marquis’ narrative had to be eye-opening to young Guy in the bourgeois-domestic era, for these married libertines dwelled in a rarefied, elitist sphere with more limited social rules and fewer moral constraints. And Guy de Maupassant was, if anything, an elitist: He disdained the common man, universal suffrage (appropriate, he suggested in chronicles such as “La Lysistrata moderne” and “Va t’asseoir,” for only a few men and for no women), and the uncouth modern lines of the Eiffel Tower (in February 1887, he signed a letter denouncing it). For him, the lofty, literate aristocrat was best fit to rule the world and not the hoi polloi, who brought it down a few pegs.

Maupassant was equally loath to accept bourgeois marriage’s closer domestic ties—and closer quarters—for husband and wife. In his own life, Guy was much more attuned to the efficiently imposed privacy of the aristocratic household. In *The*

Court Society, Norbert Elias described the stark physical separation between aristocratic spouses both in residence at Versailles and in their *hôtel particulier* in Paris. In the *hôtel*, Elias emphasizes “this equal but wholly separate disposition of their private apartments” (Elias 2, 49), in which the common areas at the center manifest the public side of the marriage, but where separate residential wings assure separate private lives for husband and wife. The concept of marriage and family in the Ancien Régime was most emphatically *not* that of bourgeois-professional domesticity:

It must be enough to point out that in reality “family life” in the sense used by bourgeois society is in no part of the objective of a marriage in court aristocracy. Rather the primary object of marriage in this circle is to secure a continuation of the “house” which is in keeping with the rank of the [aristocratic] husband. (Elias 2, 50-51)

Thus, two concepts of marriage can be seen in stark opposition: the aristocratic “house” as distinguished from the bourgeois “home”—the bourgeois century having created a concept of marital intimacy that imposed new social constraints on bourgeois married couples. Nicholas White stresses “a bourgeois concept of privacy...ultimately related to the reorganization of domestic space such that the individual or the couple might have a room of their own. The marriage bedroom in nineteenth-century France became, as [Michelle] Perrot puts it [in *A History of Private Life*], ‘the approved altar for

the celebration of sexual rites' '' (11).

All of this was unacceptable to Maupassant; the bifurcated structure and private spaces of an earlier aristocratic era were more in line with Dahhan's description of Maupassant's two Paris dwellings. For Guy, the cozy quarters of the newfangled domesticity would cramp any man's style. The nineteenth-century French novel had long emphasized a comfortable distance between husband and wife: In Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* (published in 1830), Madame de Rênal carries on an affair in her isolated *chambre* with her children's tutor, Julien Sorel, with narrow escapes from her husband who sleeps in a distant bedroom. The Rênals might be of the *petite noblesse*, but they enjoy all the old degrees of marital separation in the *grande*. Yet Balzac in *La Cousine Bette* (1846) shows the deleterious effects of the new bourgeois domestic space, for the Hulots—the baron is of the latter-day *noblesse d'Empire*—are torn asunder by the baron's infidelities (even if he chose to carry them on off-site). The *baronne* even wishes to know the names of her husband's paramours—a noticeably modern approach to the situation.

The “pre-domestic” household was far more forgiving and permissive, even complicit, and it lent itself deliciously to libertinage. In his biography of Sade, Maurice Lever details how the Marquise de Sade often colluded with her husband so he could stay one step ahead of the law and at least one pregnant mistress. Lever goes on to append this observation: “In the eighteenth century marriage was no obstacle to libertinage. How many husbands abandoned their wives immediately after the wedding night so as to continue living their fantasies! The man who had several mistresses the night before his wedding found his way back to them the night after. Such habits were so commonplace

that marital fidelity and unwavering love seemed ridiculous” (Lever, 118, emphasis mine).

The form of marriage afforded by domesticity, what Trumbach sometimes calls “affectionate” marriage, was ridiculous and unnatural to Maupassant. But the easy life proffered by the French nobility in the previous century could be duplicated in the confines of one modern realm—his bachelor realm. The uninhibited sexuality of Maupassant was well-known to his friends and considered rather exotic. Flaubert, Zola, Huysmans, Dumas fils, Léon Hennique—all knew about his sexual exploits from Guy himself, and fellow “Maquereaux” such as Robert Pinchon and Léon Fontaine had certainly heard them *ad nauseam*. Dahhan adds that, just like Queen Hortense of Holland with her own son, the future Napoleon III of France, “Laure de Maupassant partageait les secrets d’alcôve de son fils et les excusait avec beaucoup d’indulgence” (80).

Edmond de Goncourt’s *Journal* is none too kind to Maupassant, yet it provides credible evidence of Guy’s singular brand of sexuality. Goncourt’s entries evince a caustic bitterness toward Maupassant that, some have said, reeks of professional envy: By 1881 or so, Maupassant’s literary star had risen above Goncourt’s own considerable accomplishments, even though Goncourt was almost thirty years Guy’s senior. Yet Goncourt’s journal entries about Guy seem today not so much prejudiced as plausible. In November 1892, in the last months of Maupassant’s final illness, Goncourt makes a Sadean link, repeating Paul Bourget’s “anecdote sur notre sadique confrère”: the “partouze à quatre” between Guy, two women, and Catulle Mendès (Goncourt, *Journal*, November 17, 1892). The woman who had arrived with Mendès got into a murderous

rage and was able to secure Guy's revolver and fire off one shot. No one was hit, but Guy did suffer a wound to his hand in wrestling the weapon from the lady's iron grip.

Goncourt's chosen term "sadique confrère" is not merely a spiteful label here; it seeks to delineate Maupassant's sexual exoticism. Guy's life was, after all, an open book—of planned orgies, outdoor couplings, voyeurism, and *grasses matinées* of the sort even la Saint-Ange could admire. One of Goncourt's entries from the end of January 1893, almost five months before Maupassant's death, reports Hennique's recollection of Guy: " 'Pète-moi dans la bouche!' Oui, j'ai entendu cela de l'autre chambre où Maupassant était couché comme moi avec une fille, et il s'étend sur le sadisme de l'être et sa puissance d'érection" (*Journal*, January 30, 1893).

If Goncourt had been all too happy to record these pearls for posterity, recent biographers have not minced words about Maupassant's rapacious sexuality, and most mention a Sadean link. Certainly Maupassant never signed on to the violence and mayhem of the "purist" Sade, who excused infanticide and lauded matricide. But the literary Sade's violence is so grandiose, so over-the-top, that it can seem practically vaudevillian, as when young Eugénie decides to punish her pious mother for all time by sewing up her vagina. In this and other works, the marquis' descriptive asides are abrupt and downright zany: *Justine's* noble Thérèse, after detailing the unspeakable tortures she and others endured at the hellish Sainte-Marie-des-Bois monastery, observes nonetheless that the pastry was good and available 24/7. If Maupassant and his two mentors didn't find all of this arch and hilarious (and I would argue that they probably did), as bachelors they were impressed by the basic Sadean exhortation to satisfy one's instinctual drives

without qualms, without remorse, without duty, and especially without bourgeois codes of squeamishness. And the absence in Sade of a meddling *maîtresse de maison*—or of a meddling *maîtresse* for that matter—pointed to the previous century’s freer spirit. Maupassant pursued his own heterosexual emancipation *sans bornes*. Like the eighteenth-century libertine, he also ascribed to a brash elitism, a sense of noble entitlement and quiescent amorality at odds with the wan bourgeois-domestic lives of so many of his literary friends and associates.

THE COMPANY ONE KEEPS

The androgynous Gisèle d’Estoc, whose hungry gaze and erotic track record will bewitch Guy, was what Maupassant preferred in a woman. From a good bourgeois family, she had adopted a libertine life as an adolescent (she was seventeen when she met the thirty-year-old Guy). She had seen and done it all before, this Eugénie, and Guy was pleased. Frébourg says of her: “Ce n’est pas une nymphomane toujours insatisfaite mais une charnelle,” a woman who once wrote to an old flame: “Je préfère les aventures compliquées, mes vices sont tellement odieux qu’ils dépassent de beaucoup la possibilité du pardon” (cit. in Frébourg, 157).

In addition to Guy’s continued desultory forays into sex for hire, Gisèle occupied quite a few of Guy’s days and nights in the 1880s, survived him fit and fiddle, but succumbed to leprosy around 1905, according to Jacques-Louis Douchin’s introduction to the Estoc memoir, *Cahier d’amour*. The memoir itself is suspected by some

biographers to be a hoax, and older Maupassant scholarship pays scant attention to the memoir or to its alleged author. (André Vial's 1954 *Guy de Maupassant et l'art du roman*, for example, makes only elliptical references to Gisèle, though it provides footnotes for Madame Litzelmann and for one Marie Bidaut, who met Maupassant when she wasn't yet twenty and, in 1949, past the age of ninety, still wept at the mention of his name; Vial, 186, 415, 417). The Estoc memoir does seem studied at times, as it name-drops libertine authors such as Crébillon fils and describes Guy as the moody sort who could go from gentle soul to tempestuous suitor in a heartbeat: "Il se faisait câlin comme une femme! Et puis il devenait terrible, comme un fauve, [d]'une force herculéenne..." (Estoc, 20). Gisèle also observes him busy with the *beau monde* of bourgeois bankers and *salonnières*. The latter were formidable and, for Guy, indispensable.

One *salonnière* who may have been as important to Guy as Gisèle herself was a married *honnête femme* named Marie Kann, "la plus captivante de ces filles de Sion...elle habite avec [sa soeur] l'élégant hôtel du maréchal de Villars, 118, rue de Grenelle" (Troyat, 151). She was smart and effervescent, part of the Paris movers and shakers who were drawn to Guy after his literary coming-out with *Boule de Suif*. Frébourg dubs Kann the "maîtresse officielle de Maupassant," a woman who claimed she received no less than 2,500 letters from Guy over so many years, and burned every single one (164-165).

Probably not an *amitié amoureuse* at all was Maupassant's friendship with Geneviève Straus, the widow of the composer Georges Bizet and now married to the attorney Émile Straus. Introduced to Guy by Madame Kann herself, Geneviève was also smart, Jewish and a *salonnière* (Jewish hostesses were among the most progressive in

Paris); she famously invited to her home not only Guy but a young *lycéen*, Marcel Proust. Madame Straus is said to be Proust's model for the Duchesse de Guermantes (199).

Maupassant has a bit of fun with these hostesses in the guise of Madame Walter, the wife of the newspaper magnate in *Bel-Ami*. Virginie Walter is fortyish and attractive, an *honnête femme* with an *honnête* first name and an impeccable, low-key kind of flirtatiousness when chatting with Duroy, her husband's handsome young employee. She, too, invites a *beau monde* into the splendor of the Walters' magnificent Paris apartment—to fete her husband's acquisition of what he believes is a masterwork painting, *Jésus marchant sur les flots* (*Romans*, 435). By this time, Duroy has already seduced Madame Walter in his bachelor pad. (“C’est mon appartement de garçon que j’ai repris... pour quelques jours... pour avoir un coin où nous puissions nous voir,” he bellows as she first enters his modest rooms; *Romans*, 404). Maupassant was not the predator Duroy is, and the *salonnières* he knew were hardly the dimwits Madame Walter can be, but here the role of the *grand bourgeois* hostess is vividly and memorably drawn.

Yet one of Maupassant's fictional *salonnières* is no joking matter—certainly not to Maupassant. In the novel *Notre coeur*, Michèle de Burne is a rich twenty-something widow who holds court over a stable of young male artists and intellectuals, all of whom want to be hers. Maupassant describes her as “modern,” but she is more like an alpha female who rules men rather than the other way around. As well she should: Married off too young to the much older M. de Burne—“un vaurien de bonnes manières, un de ces tyrans domestiques devant qui tout doit céder et plier,” and a brutal “maître absolu”

(*Romans*, 1034)—Madame de Burne now intends to remain forever single and free.

Meanwhile, she steals the heart and soul of André Mariolle, a bachelor free spirit in the social and philosophical mold of Maupassant.

If Guy's private reputation was generally thought to be dodgy more than predatory, his works were in every bookshop after 1880. He was all the rage as he crisscrossed the city to see his patrons, often upstanding bourgeois-industrial couples. Their foibles were reported back to Gisèle in all their narcissistic hypocrisy (*Estoc*, 23). Even discounting Gisèle's memoir, Guy did not consider himself of their world; he kept it forever at arm's length, for they were not to encroach upon his bachelor realm or disturb his liaison with Gisèle or his *ménage libre* with Mademoiselle Litzelmann.

Off and on he visited Joséphine Litzelmann and his three children, a household he is said to have supported in full, and perhaps from beyond the grave. Lanoux cites the many accounts written by the three children in their late adulthood; they always loved him, and Lanoux quotes the moving account of the sleuthing of one journalist, Auguste Nardy, who finally tracked down Guy's elder daughter:

Voici maintenant Lucienne Litzelmann, modiste en chambre,
82, rue de l'Assomption, à Paris, en 1927: "Une femme très sensible.
Elle est brune, un peu forte, a les mêmes yeux que Marguerite [the
youngest daughter] et la même ressemblance avec Laure de
Maupassant." Quand elle reçut Nardy, elle fondit en larmes. "Il me

gâtait. Il me choyait... il nous aimait... Notre mère a beaucoup souffert après sa mort.” (Lanoux, 250)

Laure de Maupassant, and even François Tassart, Guy’s valet, knew of the Litzelmanns and shunned them after the writer’s death, according to many accounts: Obviously, Lanoux says, Maupassant presaged it all, for Guy asked a certain “colonel de Lys” to deliver a regular envelope of cash to Joséphine in the event of his premature death (251). Here, Maupassant’s *ménage* was more like the honorable aristocrat’s “second family.” In *Sexual Moralities in France 1780-1980*, Copley and others note that the *ménage libre* was a proletarian social phenomenon during Maupassant’s time. It was “[that] traditional working-class form of concubinage, idealizing its freedom, its element of romantic love, thus scorning bourgeois formalities of legal and arranged marriages” (110).

But men of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie also formed similar households outside their legal marriages. One can also see the Litzelmanns as an arrangement fit for the aristocratic man of letters, for this supposedly “lower-class” cohabitation jibed with Maupassant’s priorities: Guy’s mother, brother, sister-in-law, and niece were in so many ways his real nuclear family, the one that took up his time and his energy, while the Litzelmanns functioned as this aristocrat’s second household—discreet, convenient, hidden.

Again, this saga is part of the multilayered life of Maupassant. For he also lived alone in the larger apartment with Tassart, whose recollections became a self-penned

memoir. *Nouveaux souvenirs intimes sur Guy de Maupassant* would appear to be heavily edited (some biographers doubt that the undereducated Tassart could have written such polished lines), but it does record Guy's lusty adventures solo in the south of France and North Africa with Tassart not too far away. Putting order where there was much bachelor untidiness, Tassart described Guy as every bit the companionable and social type, and the two took off for adventures in Maghrebian climes, whence Guy's sundry comments about the local women. Some were poor and offered themselves for money; others observed the Muslim strictures against contact with male strangers, especially their French overlords. Still others were women on the make, libertines of the desert, including the girl in Maupassant's eponymous story "Allouma." Here, a French colonist in Algeria recounts his long liaison with this female Muslim free spirit who enjoyed his company but unceremoniously dumped him one fine day. He can't get her out of his mind, and Guy won't get North Africa out of his.

From Algiers to Berber Kabylia and on to Morocco, Guy and François were struck by North African warmth and hospitality. Maupassant viewed Islam as no better or worse than Western faiths. He also seemed far removed spiritually from the cultural biases of his compatriots during a time of vigorous European colonization. His only real ethnic prejudice, Tassart recalls, was reserved for the German-speaking peoples ever since the debacle of "soixante-dix." Guy had remarked to Tassart about the eternally aggressive character of "les barbares d'outre-Rhin": "Après nous viendront d'autres générations. Cette existence qui est la nôtre et qui doit appartenir à chacun, ils en feront

fi. Aussi l'horreur de la guerre et celle de l'Allemand me suivront-elles au-delà" (Tassart, 133-134).

Tassart's memoir describes bullfighting in Oran, rampant seasickness on their boat's approach to Gibraltar, impromptu trips on Guy's homebound yacht *Bel-Ami*, and nonsexual encounters with women of all ages. Tassart offers a pretty chaste narrative—in sharp relief to Gisèle d'Estoc's short and saucy little tome. Just as Tassart's spit-and-polish male presence contrasts with Estoc's rough femininity, by most accounts it would seem that Maupassant avoided any overlap between the two households. It is as if François and Gisèle, and Mademoiselle Litzelmann and Madame Kann and the others, might, in tandem, disturb Guy's well-oiled machine. Better to keep everybody apart.

Guy's own children remembered him showing up in their lives semi-regularly and always alone. The Litzelmanns were a *ménage libre* with a perennially absent common-law husband. He would not be tied down to a single private sphere, and by weaving in and out of each *sans inconvénient*, he continued to inhabit his loose, extended aristocratic household until his death. This was freedom. As for Estoc, Frébourg says, "Gisèle et Guy vont s'aimer sur un mode très XVIII^e siècle pour conjurer le XIX^e. L'un des grands jeux favoris de Guy consiste à travestir Gisèle, organiser un dîner mondain et pousser d'autres femmes très convenables dans leur lit" (159). The couple, he adds, were "primitifs, pansensuels."

Gisèle was probably also Guy's once-in-a-lifetime passion. Léon Fontaine remembered being present when a distraught Maupassant, shortly after his definitive breakup with Gisèle, burned all of her old love letters in his chimney. Perhaps the divine

marquis would not have approved of such a focused passion, whether eminently physical or not, but I see in Maupassant's libertine patchwork and "networking" the full embodiment of libertine emancipation. And much as on Sade's own sublime, aristocratic estate, women were cordially invited to sign on—not as human possessions to be coveted like a wife but as partners in a loose game. Maupassant did not seem to mind that a woman could take the pro-active role and excel at it, too, for Gisèle became his master, initiator and emancipated spirit in real life. If Guy could belong to the wider world, so could Gisèle. Whether Guy objected or not, the seventeen-year-old Gisèle gave herself the same license to roam as did Sade's fictional fifteen-year-old, Eugénie. Gisèle, who had grown up in a bourgeois home (Frébourg, 157), had rejected it for something more unpredictable and thoroughly transgressive.

Gisèle—and all the others—were part of Guy's intimate network, but his bachelor sphere also made room for other feisty women. There was his correspondence with the painter, sculptor and *femme du monde* Marie Bashkirtseff. "Moussia" was a consumptive, a semi-invalid who knew her days were numbered. She was also, Lanoux says, "capricieuse et snob, insupportable et émouvante....Elle souhaitait léguer son journal à un écrivain...[sa] seule chance de survie" (185). She shared Maupassant's verve, and an exasperation with the bourgeois milieu in general. In her journal, she fumed:

Je me ferais bien communarde, rien que pour faire sauter toutes les maisons,
les intérieurs de famille!...On devrait l'aimer, son intérieur ; il n'y a rien

de plus doux que de s'y reposer...mais se reposer éternellement!

(cit. in Anne Martin-Fugier, "La Maîtresse de maison," in Aron, 119)

Moussia was Guy's pen pal for six short months in 1884. Their letters were platonic ones, tender ones, but combative as well. Was Maupassant tempted to correspond with Moussia because she was exotically and haughtily Russian? In his short story "En voyage," written the previous year, Maupassant's narrator meets Marie Maranow, a Russian countess who, like Moussia, is on her way to the South of France to alleviate the symptoms of a "maladie de poitrine." Here, Maupassant waxes gracefully about Russian women: "Elles ont quelque chose de méchant et de séduisant, d'altier et de doux, de tendre et de sévère, tout à fait charmant pour un Français" (*Contes et nouvelles* I, 811). No wonder he was drawn to Moussia, as Troyat notes: "Guy a la sensation d'être engagé dans un assaut d'escrime, à fleurets mouchetés. Ce jeu l'amuse et il saute à nouveau sur sa plume" (128). Guy and Moussia never met once in all this time, but Troyat notes that the correspondence came to an abrupt end in April 1884. He had stopped writing after Moussia's witty remark that Guy was a celebrated "mangeur de femmes," to which he took umbrage. "Her teasing aroused his irritation," Lerner surmises. "Sensitively aware of his contradictory nature and suspicious of her intentions, he clearly did not like being called 'a devourer of women' in so facetious a way" (Lerner, 188). Maupassant, the bachelor-about-town, a sensitive and wounded animal? He did seem to get over it, proposing a meeting in late April that was duly recorded by Moussia in her journal. By that time, however, she was far too ill to accept (Troyat, 134).

Maupassant preferred women with spunk—intelligent and cultivated, but with the will to take him on. In Maupassant’s time, smart women like Moussia could take command of their relationships through one deft and properly paced form of communication: flirtation. Georg Simmel’s 1911 work *On Women, Sexuality and Love* addresses flirtation earnestly. Guy Oakes’ introduction notes that some critics of this book, including Georg Lukács, saw a work too infected by the cultural attitudes of Kaiser Wilhelm’s Germany (71). Yet Simmel’s analysis of women’s place in society is a striking assessment of gender roles in the bourgeois century. Flirtation, Simmel says, took its place in relations between the sexes, especially in view of the bourgeois century’s “separate spheres.” For Simmel, flirtation helped the well-born nineteenth-century woman combine a dynamic of aggression and withdrawal to gain power. A man of this class, in turn, could engage with a woman on more of an equal footing; she was authorized to be somewhat bold, and he could be permitted a more receptive role. Here, flirting was not frivolity; in fact, it could be serious business. It was a power play in which the woman, more often than not, ran the show. In a man’s world, she could define the level of, and advancement toward, more intimacy. (And “intimacy” does not mean sexual conquest, although it can, and therein lies some of its power.) As Simmel notes, “As long as the man still takes [flirtation] seriously, it intersects with the sphere of reality...Here flirtation completely relinquishes the role of an instrument or a mere provisional entity and assumes that of an ultimate value” (144).

Flirtation was not simply a recourse for smart women of a certain class but a strategic one whenever and wherever they could mix with men. Simmel takes the pulse of

the bourgeois century when he says that a woman's motive here is "the fascination of freedom and power," for "normally there are only one or two occasions on which the woman is in a position to decide the fundamental questions of her life" (141). With flirtation, she can turn the tables and place the man in a state of doubt—under stress of greater or lesser degree—to create greater equality.

The women in Maupassant's life had deployed flirtation in subtle ways: Both Marie Bashkirtseff and Gisèle d'Estoc had introduced themselves to Guy with well-turned letters of introduction—to which he responded immediately. Yet flirting was at its most serious in face-to-face social relations, as within the literary salon—one place where men and women met, and where one woman, the *salonnière* herself, reigned supreme. In addition to Marie Kann and Geneviève Straus, Maupassant fell under the spell of other Parisian *salonnières*: Emmanuela Potocka was an Italian princess married to the Polish count and *diplomate dévergondé* Nicolas Potocki (Frébourg, 163). She was as formidable as any *salonnière* Maupassant had known: the Princess Mathilde and Léonie Brainne when Guy was a young poet, or Madame Kann and Madame Straus after he became a successful writer. But the Comtesse Potocka became a friend and a correspondent. This spirited woman lived mostly apart from her husband (no domestic partnership, this), but the count always showed up assiduously for her sumptuous "dîners des Macchabées" that attracted a roster of *esprits affranchis*, eventually including Maupassant (Lerner, 193, 195). For Guy, the correspondence with Emmanuela Potocka was not just an epistolary game, however. He hoped for something more from her, and made time for more than just letter-writing. The countess, a bit older than Guy, was

considered to be a seductive woman—many men came away entranced by her, say Lerner and Troyat. Maupassant found her just as alluring.

Lanoux describes Potocka as “aventureuse, droguée, indépendante, fantasque, dangereuse, allumeuse et froide” (177). Her *faible* was morphine, but she had become a powerful and influential social figure in the 1880s (Lanoux, 261). Late in their friendship, Maupassant had even proposed that they do some traveling together, writing, “[E]t je maudis les conventions sociales qui s’opposent à ce que je vous prie de m’accompagner” (cit. in Troyat, 189-190). She had been a major force in the promotion of *Une vie* in 1883, and their correspondence spanned the 1880s (Lerner, 194). The countess, like Bashkirtseff, was both flirtatious and indomitable. When Potocka and Maupassant canoed to an island near Cannes for a leisurely visit, the mischievous countess hid in the brush and disappeared. In a letter to a friend, Guy says he next saw her “nue se baignant dans l’eau verte et dorée d’une grotte” (cit. in Frébourg, 164). The Comtesse Potocka, later abandoned by her husband, finished her days destitute in 1930, her rat-bitten body discovered with that of her dog in her Auteuil home.

Another long-lasting friendship—and just as loyal—was the one between Maupassant and Hermine Lecomte du Noüy. She had dabbled as a short story writer and later abandoned her husband, a French architect who worked in Romania (Lerner, 181). She was every bit the *bobo* that Guy was, this “jolie bourgeoise [qui] cachait un esprit artiste et bohème” (Lanoux, 229). Their relationship has been described by Maupassant biographers as probably intimate. She was a friend and a confidante until the end of

Guy's life. Her comments in a letter about Maupassant's final weeks, when the writer suffered from dementia, may be among the most striking ever recorded on the subject:

Il était assis dans la cour d'asile, sous le ciel bleu, mais combien pâle, vieilli, affaibli; je distinguais ses traits flétris, ses yeux rouges et éteints...Il se caressait inconsciemment le menton. (cit. in Lanoux, 266)

This was perhaps more than the devotion of a good friend. It was more like the caring attention of a blood relative—the same that Guy had shown to his younger brother Hervé. Lerner's poignant account of Guy's visits to Hervé's bedside as he lay dying of syphilitic dementia at the age of thirty-three, detailed in his letters to the Comtesse Potocka (246-247), foretells all of Guy's sufferings at the end of his own life.

The women in Maupassant's life were typically this steadfast and loyal—just as they were indispensable to his career. And these were smart women, educated and enlightened; they had strong opinions and shared them with him. More often than not, they shirked bourgeois conventions as much as he did. They were partners—and lovers—in this bachelor's life. The world of the Paris literati flowed and receded, waxed and waned; some, like la Potocka, had occupied the city's poshest *hôtels* before ultimately facing obscurity and even an abject poverty. But Maupassant never saw that place reserved for lesser writers or aged *salonnières*. His was a honeyed existence, a comfortably elitist journey until his final illness. Guy de Maupassant, raised to be a proud

aristocrat, would not countenance the bourgeois-domestic life. As a bourgeois bohemian, however, he eked out a space where he could be bourgeois where it counted and noble when it suited him. Bachelorhood—an affluent and public bachelorhood—was his retrograde but ennobled space apart. If life is a series of choices and regrets, an affluent life can surely soothe the latter's sting. And it certainly helped that people approved of one's life's work, that one's parents helped to smooth out the harsh creases in a young adulthood. Maupassant's formidable mother had, like Queen Hortense or Madame de Sade, made a tacit agreement not to meddle in his private life. Maupassant followed one of the sweeter paths—a complicated road but a purposeful one—and sought an aristocratic and libertine redoubt off the beaten path. Whether he had re-created a Sadean world or not, his was definitely a space—domestically, anachronistically—just as devoted to the creed of emancipation. It had taken a lot of work, but Guy de Maupassant had planned it out to the last detail.

Chapter III. EARLY WORKS: THE OBSCENE BACHELOR

Guy de Maupassant was well-known during his lifetime as a prankster and a class clown. Zola, in an 1897 speech dedicating a posthumous monument to Guy in the Parc Monceau, captured Guy's spirit, calling him "l'enfant bien portant et rieur de la maison."*

Maupassant had been an incorrigible rule-breaker since his days at the Jesuit *collège* in Yvetot in the 1860s (the Jesuit fathers permanently expelled him in 1868), but he would hit his most outlandish stride as a young man of the 1870s.

A la feuille de rose, Maison turque has been cited here as a work that embodies Guy's verve and his gift for public outrage. Performed in 1875 and 1876, *Feuille de rose* has been roundly dismissed as a jocular romp or a shamelessly bawdy "farce"—a term that is inadequate to describe a work that is both pornographic and utterly obscene. In the play that Guy and his friends cooked up, Mayor Beauflanquet of "Conville" (a reference to Flaubert's Yonville-l'Abbaye, among other things) and his wife stumble into a Turkish-themed brothel (a witty allusion to Frédéric Moreau's final scene in *L'Éducation sentimentale*). The *Maison turque* is a brothel full of bad girls and served by a pubescent valet, Crête de Coq. Lerner translates the valet's name simply as Cock—"Phallus"—yet the boy's name is more accurately rendered as "Venereal Wart," which is what a *crête de coq* is. (The *Petit Robert* notes that *crête de coq*—literally "cock's comb" in French—has done double duty as sexual slang since the 1830s.) Such crude sexual lingo pervades *Feuille de rose*, and some biographers still would prefer not to go there.

* Émile Zola, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1966-1969), vol. XII, p. 716.

The discomfort is hardly misplaced: No one considered publishing the ribald play until 1945, almost seventy years after its second rousing performance. Yet *Feuille de rose* underscores the raw pornographic direction of Maupassant's early works. The prostitutes of the Maison turque (the pushy Raphaële is played by Guy) are festooned with painted-on genitalia and brightly colorful venereal spots and sores of all kinds—the telltale ravages of sex for sale. On a fundamental level, and despite Guy's graphic *mise-en-scène*, the play banalizes sexually transmitted disease as a fact of life in the bourgeois century. In November 1876 Guy wrote to Flaubert about what some commentators believe were his primary symptoms of syphilis: “Vive les homéopathes!...Il m'était revenu des Herpès—et, sans lotions extérieures, je les ai fait passer avec 12 granules dans une bouteille d'eau, et cela en 3 jours, ce qui ne m'était jamais arrivé” (Flaubert-Maupassant, *Correspondance*, November 17). Dahhan emphasizes the preponderance in the 1870s of “un véritable fléau”: “[I]l y eut une recrudescence du mal en Europe au cours des années 1875-1878; on pouvait fixer entre 5 à 8.000 [*sic*] le nombre de nouveaux cas de syphilis à Paris par an. Aujourd'hui: environ 4.000 [*sic*] par an pour toute la France” (Dahhan, 194).* At the end of 1876, or perhaps early the following year, the health authorities confirmed Maupassant's syphilis and advised him to take a “treatment” at Loèche, Switzerland (Frébourg, 90). While in Loèche, Guy took time off to visit a nearby brothel.

Feuille de rose also showcases a pornographic mind-set that was integral to male bourgeois sociability at this time. Aron has described successful men meeting to discuss

* Paris had 2 million people in the late 1870s; the population of metropolitan France today tops 63 million.

women and sexual peccadilloes as something of a nineteenth-century phenomenon (90), and the subject will be broached later in this chapter. Yet for Maupassant and his male cohort, sex talk enlivened the verbal parlor game during their homosocial reunions *entre garçons*. The dour Edmond de Goncourt has recorded the playful vulgarity of the literary elite in his journal, stressing that Maupassant became most adept at it: “Huysmans parlait des surprises qu’ aime à faire Maupassant aux gens, femmes et hommes...c’était de se peindre un con dans le nombril avec figuration des poils et des grandes et des petites lèvres, ou de se peindre des chancres formidables sur sa queue toute vermillonnée” (*Journal*, February 5, 1888). Maupassant’s model for outrageous obscenity, however, appears much earlier in the Goncourts’ journal: it is Gustave Flaubert.

A BACHELOR BRED

When Flaubert wrote to friends about the “obscene Guy” and “Guy the pornographer,” he revealed something of himself—specifically the exuberant *esprit de garçon* he cultivated with close bachelor friends, among them the poets Alfred Le Poittevin and Louis Bouilhet. A prolonged bachelorhood like theirs could only abet this diversion of lewd quips and sexual escapades. From the early 1840s until his death in 1880, Flaubert held court in his bachelor realm, and in the 1870s Guy was tapped into the guild. The decade of the 1870s was a crucial time for young Guy—the beginning of his literary output while under the sway of this late-century bachelor sensibility. He was initiated into a milieu that proffered more than just literary mentoring and fatherly advice. Flaubert and company

enjoyed erotic pranks, even while visiting brothels together. Bernheimer, noting that the youthful Flaubert “frequented prostitutes throughout his life [and] had all the ‘bonnes adresses’ ” (130), mentions the novelist’s first-person confession that is recorded for all posterity in Edmond de Goncourt’s journal: “Ma vanité était telle, quand j’étais jeune, que lorsque j’allais au bordel avec mes amis, je prenais la plus laide et tenais à la baiser devant tout le monde, sans quitter mon cigare” (*Journal II*, 162). Similarly, writes Frébourg, young Guy is said to have demonstrated his own sexual prowess for the connoisseur Flaubert: “Maupassant l’aurait même emmené dans un bordel et lui aurait montré qu’il pouvait satisfaire une femme six fois de suite” (108).

The poet Alfred Le Poittevin, who died in 1848—two years before his nephew Guy was born—was known to all as “le Garçon.” In their years as students of the Lycée of Rouen, Gustave Flaubert and Alfred were cutups but fierce romantics of the heart. These years would be a time of painful disillusionment for both. Youthful traumatism or a more adult “Bovarysme”? Flaubert has intimated that he learned of the cruel deceptions of the human condition in these tender years. As did Alfred, “ce Byron qui n’a pas mûri... violemment déçu à la sortie de l’adolescence” (Lanoux, 17). Humor assuaged the youngsters’ bitterness: For example, a witty note from seventeen-year-old Gustave to Alfred conferring mock awards on their schoolmates reveals a madcap *esprit de garçon* that never flagged.* Alfred had been the founder of a pranksters’ group, l’Hôtel

* Some of the “awards”: “Continuité du désir sodomite, 1^{er} prix (après moi): Morel. Bandaison dans la culotte, 1^{er} prix: Morel. Masturbation solitaire, prix: Rochin...” Letter to Alfred Le Poittevin (undated, 1838), in Flaubert, *Correspondance*, part 1, 1830-1851 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 26.

des Farces, in the early 1840s. Flaubert would speak longingly of “les farces du vrai Garçon”—vulgar set pieces that both astonished and delighted him. Alfred, the bright young man from a good family, lived like a bohemian rake. Thus, when Alfred finally severed his ties with a raunchy bachelorhood in 1846, at age thirty, to wed Guy’s aunt, Louise de Maupassant, Flaubert was utterly inconsolable (Frébourg, 31). He pleaded with Alfred to reconsider, convinced that the announced marriage was a pitiable *échappatoire*.

Alfred Le Poittevin died just two years later (“ayant usé sa vie dans les excès de toutes sortes,” opines Troyat, 249), and Flaubert mourned him as deeply and as inconsolably as a lover would (Lerner, 70-71). Even short separations from his “Carissimo,” his intimate since the days of the lycée in Rouen, had been trying for Flaubert. Guy, the son of Alfred’s sister Laure, in many ways replaced the witty Alfred for Flaubert—who always remained enthusiastic about young Maupassant’s talent for shock and awe. Maupassant, up to no good with his gang of misbehaving “Maquereaux”—with their outrageous vulgarity, dissipated adventures and sense of bachelor privilege—appeared to follow Le Garçon Alfred’s playbook. But Guy had a chance to meet and bond with Flaubert’s other close bachelor friend, Louis Bouilhet, a scruffy and corpulent poet and his companion from Rouen (Troyat, 25). Bouilhet had also been Flaubert’s intimate since school days, and the two men’s old letters brim with confidences of a bachelor sort. Flaubert had taken care to write Bouilhet on a visit to Italy in 1851: “Naples est un charmant pays par la quantité de maquereaux et de putains qu’il y a. Il y a un quartier garni de garces qui se tiennent sur leur porte....J’ai passablement baisé

à Naples et d'assez jolies filles. Maxime [Du Camp] a attrapé un rhume de culotte" (April 9, 1851, in Flaubert, *Correspondance*, part 1, p. 773).

Flaubert and Bouilhet were worldly men, and young Guy came to see much of life through the prism of theirs. Yet Flaubert and Bouilhet were accomplished in their own right—published writers—and Laure de Maupassant astutely chose them to help her talented elder son Guy, an ambitious poet; she had no compunction about asking them to take him under their collective wing. If Flaubert has been called “l’ermite de Croisset,” most knew him as no ascetic, before or after his brief affair with Louise Colet. Laure was no prude; she knew very well about hard-living men of letters: Her brother, Alfred Le Poittevin, had been the quintessential *poète dévergondé*. In January 1869, Laure used her clout with Flaubert, convincing him to approach Bouilhet: “Guy est en ce moment chez Monsieur Bouilhet, pour le prier de se joindre à nous” (Laure de Maupassant to Flaubert, in Flaubert-Maupassant, *Correspondance*, January 14, 1869). Bouilhet was already in his late forties: “célibataire farouche, amateur de farces épicées, détracteur du bourgeois, il a pour son art une passion maniaque” (Troyat, 25).

Guy de Maupassant’s erotically charged works never emerged from a vacuum; they proceeded from his sexual adventurism—and from that of his literary friends and mentors. Young Guy had just been expelled from the religious *collège* at Yvetot in May of the previous year, and had enrolled at the Lycée Corneille in Rouen. Guy had become a kind of pupil of Bouilhet’s, of his poetics and his humanism. Bouilhet was not only a sensualist but a generous man as well. He encouraged and nourished the adolescent Maupassant’s love of poetry, women, and pornography. Guy readily brought his own

poems to Bouilhet, for the older man had written lewd (and discreetly published) poems as well as more spiritual (and legitimately published) ones. “It is clear,” says Lerner, “that Guy was quite early on in his literary experimentation influenced by the licentiousness of much of Bouilhet’s verse” (41). The *lycéen* would arrive at Bouilhet’s Rouen home to find the unkempt, sweet-tempered man there with Léonie, his adored companion, and one of their children.

Young Guy could sometimes find Flaubert there as well, the two older gentlemen talking and drawing on cigars. Or he met them at the rigorous “atelier de Croisset” for further instruction. And the three enjoyed Rouen’s Saint-Romain Fair together, where Guy bonded with the two older men: “Il est des leurs. Saint-Romain, phase essentielle de l’adoubement” (Frébourg, 75). And everywhere there was the shadow of Alfred Le Poittevin. Maupassant had heard all about his mother’s brother, and long admired all the dusty old photos of the lithe and frail bachelor. During the six months under Bouilhet’s wing, while he completed his secondary studies at the Lycée Corneille in Rouen, Guy read Bouilhet’s own salacious poems and received gentle criticism and prodding from the flighty gentleman. But Bouilhet’s health deteriorated throughout the winter of 1869. After what Lerner describes as a “complete nervous breakdown” (44), one of Guy’s mentors was dead in July, at age forty-eight. Guy had just turned nineteen and decided to register for law studies in Paris. He still struggled to absorb Flaubert and Bouilhet’s *système*: art for art, a heavy dose of required literary toil, loyal male friendships, and an appreciation for the erotic. Young Maupassant, says Lanoux, had been writing since the age of fifteen, but usually with a surfeit of frustration: “Certes, Flaubert et Bouilhet l’ont

doté d'un solide sens critique, mais il n'y a pas que de l'exigence: une difficulté naturelle de s'exprimer" (78).

Throughout his twenties, Guy concentrated on poetry, playwriting, and farces. In February 1877, Guy finagled his famous interview with Sarah Bernhardt (Flaubert's professional tentacles were long) and suffered one of his most crushing professional blows: He pushed his play *La Trahison de la comtesse de Rhune* (a saga of the Hundred Years' War with a countess, a *cocuage*, and the defenestration of said countess after her affair with an enemy officer). By most accounts, Bernhardt politely passed on it (Lanoux, 80-81). Young Maupassant was the promising writer who had produced nothing of promise. From his 1873 farcical-fantastical short story "Le Docteur Héraclius Gloss" to the 1877 debacle with Bernhardt, Flaubert and Laure evinced some real concern for Guy's literary progress (Lerner, 78). All along, though, Guy continued to privilege erotic themes—from the playful to the sensualist to even the hard-core pornographic. His revealing comment to Flaubert written one month before meeting with the divine Sarah sums up his direction—and some newfound optimism: "Je travaille trop en ce moment....Mais l'impudicité du bon public me réjouit" (Flaubert-Maupassant, *Correspondance*, January 8, 1877).

PORNOGRAPHY—AND *PORNOGRAPHOS*

Pornography itself—bawdy verse, prose tales about sexual adventures, obscene sketches and illustrations—was fully developed in France in the late nineteenth century.

According to Lynn Hunt, crediting Iain McCalman in her introduction to the essays in *The Invention of Pornography*, what was born in the sixteenth century as an homage to classic Greek and Roman concepts of eros was promoted by libertines over the next two centuries but did not reach relatively large numbers of men until the nineteenth century. “After the 1820s, pornography for sexual arousal was bought by male aristocrats, professionals and clerks but not by the working classes” (42). In the eighteenth century, French pornographers had also been productive—and among their works had been calumnious diatribes with a pornographic hook. John Phillips’ essay “Old Wine in New Bottles,” from the compendium *International Exposure: Perspectives in Modern European Pornography, 1800-2000*, describes the obscene *libelles* of the Ancien Régime that slandered the Catholic church and the French monarchy: among the most famous, and most lurid, were those launched against Marie-Antoinette soon after her arrival from Austria (128). These were cheap illustrated pamphlets—the word *libelle* derives from the Latin *libellus*, “booklet.” This was character assassination of the high and mighty, Phillips adds, and the pamphleteer’s essential goal was political as well as satirical. There were also a great number of generic, collectible erotic drawings and writings purchased and passed among the enlightened men of the eighteenth century. By the early nineteenth century, Hunt writes, these “collectibles” had crowded out and even replaced political scandal-sheet porn in France; even by the late 1790s, most porn was “devoted to sexual arousal” (43).

Pornography expanded significantly in Western societies during the bourgeois century—a reflection of evolving sexual mores that, in Western Europe and

North America, were no longer determined by courtly traditions or rural isolation. Michel Foucault has cautioned about thinking of the nineteenth century as one of sexual constraint. On the contrary, he says, it was a time of erotic discovery and (his term) “prolixity”: Literate, inquisitive people had become players in an *enchaînement*, an irresistible coordination of forces, that encouraged the study, dissemination and purchase of sexual information—often under the watchful eye of an increasingly powerful and meddling state.*

Annie Stora-Lamarre delves into all this prolixity in *L’Enfer de la III^e République: censeurs et pornographes (1881-1914)*, about the 900-volume “Enfer” collection of erotica that was housed in dedicated rooms of the Bibliothèque Nationale after 1880. These works, most from the nineteenth century, included older pornographic images ranging from Greco-Roman pastiche to fanciful libertine nostalgia. The French state, she says, considered each work to be indecent but nonetheless “un objet constitutif du patrimoine national français”:

La bibliothèque a pour vocation de garder, de conserver tous
les imprimés. La constitution de fonds de la collection publique

* “Cet enchaînement, depuis le XIX^e siècle surtout, est assuré et relayé par les innombrables profits économiques qui grâce à l’intermédiaire de la médecine, de la psychiatrie, de la prostitution, de la pornographie, se sont branchés à la fois sur cette démultiplication analytique du plaisir et cette majoration du pouvoir qui le contrôle.” In Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité: La Volonté de savoir*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 66.

prime sur les intérêts privés du collectionneur....Seul le chercheur, l'érudit ou l'expert, le bibliothécaire peuvent résister au péril du livre pornographique....Loin des "masses" et des foules, le livre appartient à ceux qui ont un jugement et un goût sûrs. (Stora-Lamarre, 9).

When pornography collided with the nineteenth century, it was transformed in another essential way: it went to market. Men were, and remained, pornography's target audience and principal purchasers. Erotica became a commodity in the bourgeois century, and Stora-Lamarre's related essay "Censorship in Republican Times" from Sigel's collection *International Exposure* stresses the niche market for pornography in this age of affluence. A new male leisure class with disposable income was traveling widely, its expanded horizons (and appetite for erotica) owing much to the steam locomotive: "Open tracks went from 1,900 km in 1850 to 23,000 km in 1880, allowing obscene writing easy access to cities, where new postal routes anonymously carried their 'infamous' lots" (Stora-Lamarre in Sigel, 53). Tastes were evolving as well. The characterizations of women—always a central focus in what was still largely a heterosexual male form of leisure—became more wanton in the bourgeois century: Whereas eighteenth-century pornography often portrayed women as fresh-faced *honnêtes femmes* on a quest of sexual discovery, "the 1830s became a time of exalted and morbid heroines...perversion-turned-woman" (51).

No wonder censorship continued to rear its head in France throughout the bourgeois century. Though the anti-republican high horse represented by the Ordre Moral was crushed, the anti-censorship reforms of Jules Ferry in 1881 did not affect the state's pursuit of defamatory and "immoral" works. In spite of dogged censors, clandestine publications on the lookout for new pornographic products proliferated in France. Hunt notes in her introduction to *The Invention of Pornography* that French production rivaled only Britain's in quantity and scope. Besides, "French pornographic tradition was central to European tradition....Translations from the English and especially the French pornographic classics constituted the core of available pornography in Spain, Germany, and the Dutch Republic as well as other European countries" (Hunt, 21). As for the production of erotica in the French-speaking world, Belgium held a special place: Stora-Lamarre writes that as the French state's censorship apparatus worked valiantly to curb production in France, Brussels became French-language porn's default nexus during much of the nineteenth century; erotic publisher Jules Gay moved his business there, as did Baudelaire's publisher Poulet-Malassis (Stora-Lamarre in Sigel, 49-50). Hunt also references the "Enfer" collection and its rich diversity of French-language and foreign erotica—the "suggestive names of the authors and publishers" among its works, and the manufacturing done well outside French territory during the Second Empire, in Amsterdam, in Brussels and even in stolid, Protestant Geneva (50).

Such was the world of published and unpublished erotica that Maupassant already encountered as a roughhouse adolescent and as an adult. Pornography, later to

become the stuff of middle-class and middlebrow leisure in the twentieth century, was if anything firmly established among the French male elites in the late nineteenth. In fact, among affluent men in business and the arts, this erotica of arousal became significant, almost indispensable, in the new *sociabilité masculine*. It was a social lubricant as potent as tobacco and bawdy houses. Men of letters particularly enjoyed the fun of parsing the subtleties between art and prurience, establishing (or demolishing) pecking orders from high- to lowbrow. Flaubert, Alfred Le Poittevin and Louis Bouilhet—bachelors of the same generation as Maupassant’s parents—shared in this male social trend of pornography as leisure. Thus, Maupassant came of age when pornography was rife (albeit hidden between blank covers). In the bourgeois century, however, pornography served another need as well: it was a form of release—a way of coping with the disconnect between bohemian writers and bourgeois society’s inescapable social strictures. This, says Lerner, had been its function for Flaubert, Bouilhet and Alfred Le Pottevin:

It is as if the rebellious and voyeuristic aspects of pornography provided a sort of vulgar relief from the chaste sublimity of their intellectual and artistic idealism; at the same time, its pessimistic, dehumanized view of sexual relationships was a measure of their disillusionment with life. (Lerner, 91-92)

In such an environment, Maupassant took his lead from the audacious *garçons* he admired and headed into daring literary territory: erotic writing. What he heard back from his two literary mentors, Flaubert and Bouilhet, was not reserve but all-out

encouragement, a rousing call for young Guy to push the envelope as he saw fit. A few years later, at Maupassant's first performance of *Feuille de rose* in April 1875, Flaubert was still egging on the twenty-four-year-old playwright in a letter, addressing him teasingly, but unabashedly, as "Lubrique auteur, obscène jeune Homme" (Flaubert-Maupassant, *Correspondance*, April 30, 1875). Frébourg observes that both mentor and young protégé shared this love of the louche. "La blague, la pornographie pimentent la conversation des deux amis. Tradition inaugurée par le 'garçon' flaubertien" (109). In the following winter of 1876-1877, Flaubert had assembled a coterie of literary men in his Paris apartment every Sunday afternoon: Edmond de Goncourt, Alphonse Daudet, Hippolyte Taine, Ivan Turgenev, Émile Zola. Maupassant was their twenty-five-year-old mascot. Amid erotica's undertow, all were unfazed by the racy direction of Maupassant's early writing samples (often read aloud). Flaubert had also boldly announced young Guy's literary predilection to other open-minded friends in the literary world. A February 1876 note to the *salonnière* Léonie Brainne, a publisher's widow to whom Guy dedicated his novel *Une vie*, mentioned this along with concerns for Guy's frail health: "Mon petit disciple Guy de Maupassant continue à faire des chefs-d'oeuvre de poésie érotique. Mais j'ai peur qu'il n'ait une maladie de coeur assez sérieuse" (Flaubert-Maupassant, *Correspondance*, note, 101). (The feisty Mme. Brainne was one who kept up a lengthy correspondence with Guy; she is recalled for publicly humbling him in Zola's own home after Guy bragged of unceremoniously dumping a lady friend so he could accompany another to the opera: "Elle se mettait à blaguer le Maupassant décontenancé"; Ed. de Goncourt, *Journal*, April 10, 1883.)

Maupassant, a.k.a. Guy de Valmont (the “Valmont” moniker is actually an old family name on his father’s side but also a playful tribute to Laclos’ rakish viscount) was writing verse on many subjects. Still, his poems were often tinged with erotic themes. These are works that retain one classic notion of European pornography: prostitutes roaming the world of men. Interestingly, a nice chunk of nineteenth-century pornography still hewed close to its Greek root *pornographos*, or “writing about prostitutes.” Hunt emphasizes a debt to the past: “Conversations about whores or between them were perhaps the favorite devices of early modern pornography, and they were frequently used to reveal the hypocrisy of conventional morality” (40). More important, however, prostitutes were narrators of their erotic encounters, providing description, exposition, and something approaching a female point of view.

Kathryn Norberg’s essay “The Libertine Whore” in Hunt’s collected *Invention of Pornography* describes how the concept of *pornographos* began to evolve during the eighteenth century: For one thing, obscure libertine pornographers were rejecting traditional literary prototypes of the prostitute—exemplified by Prévost’s demure Manon and Restif de la Bretonne’s sweet Zéphire—and preferred brash and petulant *filles*. These are working girls who enjoy glamorous lives; they are businesswomen, not gentlewomen. “The libertine prostitute doesn’t adhere to the new [post-Enlightenment] notion of womanhood. She is not modest, dependent, loving or maternal; she does not believe in romantic love....Rather, she is a public woman...” (Norberg, in Hunt, ed., 240, emphasis mine). And Norberg gives ample credit to Sade for helping to distill the “public” image; his libertine heroine Juliette is decidedly hardened and “unfeminine,” and so too are the

girls in *Les Cent-vingt Journées de Sodome*. In mid-eighteenth-century *pornographos*, a more aggressive type had come into her own. In the hustling world of the bourgeois century, however, *pornographos* would reflect the girls on the street—the kind Maupassant’s generation knew and patronized.

Young Guy had begun visiting brothels assiduously since the age of seventeen, around the time of his expulsion from the Yvetot *collège*. This reached a rather feverish clip in the 1870s, as he canoed weekly with his “Maquereaux” to enjoy the Seine’s downriver delights. As always, Guy sought out the “down-market” girls—spunky but uncumbersome. Elegant types were simply unthinkable: “Maupassant n’entretint jamais de femmes et ne se ruina jamais pour une belle courtisane” (Dahhan, 103). During these years of employment at the Ministère de la Marine, young Maupassant spent most all of his free time downriver. “Guy vient y coucher deux fois par semaine, fait du canot à l’aube avant de gagner, par le train, son bureau du ministère” (Frébourg, 95).

These frenetic times provided him with more than just sensuous and forbidden experiences; they were grist for sparkling narratives. With these roaming girls of the Seine the muses of his *pornographos*, writing itself became another outlet for his erotic nature and worldview. “Maupassant fut un écrivain hormonal,” says Frébourg. “Le style et le sexe participent de la même énergie” (151). The lush, high-risk bohemian redoubts of bachelor leisure a few miles northwest of Paris altered and honed Maupassant’s writing. Gradually, with erotics pushed to the fore, Maupassant focused not on the world, but on worldliness.

A BRASH YOUNG REPORTER ABOUT TOWN

Worldliness was certainly the stuff of Maupassant's parallel writing career: that of *chroniqueur*. The year 1878 was significant, for Zola, among others, encouraged Maupassant to begin taking assignments from *Le Gaulois*, *Le Figaro* and, eventually, *Gil Blas Illustré*. All three were bourgeois standards that paid him by the piece. *Gil Blas*, the latest arrival, strived to be cutting-edge: Founded in 1879 by the newspaper mogul Auguste Dumont, it combined current events, fashion, and novel serializations (Stora-Lamarre in Sigel, 55). Maupassant's own tongue-in-cheek references to the paper appear in the short stories "Essai d'amour," "En wagon" and "La Revanche," all of them evoking the paper's risqué reputation. (In the Pléiade edition, Louis Forestier annotates each mention and, in "La Revanche," observes that female readers of *Gil Blas* would have been considered "assez libre d'esprit" (*Contes et nouvelles* II, 381; 1425 fn.).

Maupassant had been hired to comment on social trends in Paris, and bourgeois women curious about the wider world were a part of his *grand public*. The articles he wrote did not only provide some extra income for the fabulously spendthrift young Guy, but also placed his name in a byline. Guy dashed off a note to Flaubert in August 1878 about his new journalistic pursuits: He had tried to write a few *chroniques* for *Le Gaulois*—with little energy, he said. He was much more concerned about the pay at another paper, *La Réforme*: "M. Francolin me déclare ce matin qu'il ne peut me donner que 30 centimes par ligne...c'est pitoyable" (Flaubert-Maupassant, *Correspondance*,

September 25, 1878). Who gave him pecuniary advice? Zola. He advised young Guy to up his per-line rate considerably with these publishers. Zola, like Flaubert, always saw Maupassant as the charming mascot.

Female readers of *Le Gaulois* and *Gil Blas* were drawn to the young reporter's *chroniques* because they incorporated gossip, topical news and juicy quips about powerful people. Yes, Guy could certainly write muscled prose about literature, art and haunting experiences from the Franco-Prussian War, but he could also go off on tangents and include some biting social commentary. In his *chronique* "Madeleine Bastille" for *Le Gaulois* in 1880, he praised the efforts of mistresses and *demi-mondaines* among all the great ladies of France who supported the arts and education during the Ancien Régime. Other articles took on topics that were anything but mundane: How did men and women really get along today? What are some of the tensions between them? An 1881 *chronique* in *Gil Blas* titled "Galanterie" saw average bourgeois women bonding too often with their priest or even a monk, albeit platonically. In one hour in the confessional, Maupassant opines, the man of the cloth hears a woman's deepest secrets and becomes more of a constant companion than her own husband. "Il est l'apôtre des femmes...aux mains fines, aux doigts caressants, à la peau soignée....Il a des baumes pour toutes les plaies.... Sur tous les détraquements cérébraux il verse sa métaphysique...souple...mais frénétiquement idéaliste" (cit. in *Selection of Chroniques*, p. 97). A young woman has thrown herself into the river, Maupassant adds, out of love for her parish priest. Why? These better-groomed male figures were perhaps the only ones who gave women

attention, affection, sympathy, validation. “Galanterie” was a sharp rebuke to sleepy and sloppy husbands—and Maupassant’s female readers ate it up.

Maupassant, a misogynist? His female readers in the bourgeois century didn’t think so. Women’s needs—and men’s abject failure to acknowledge them—were his frequent subtheme. He thought a woman had rights even when she failed, even when she “sinned.” In “Le Préjugé du déshonneur” for *Le Gaulois* in 1881, he broached a subject few dared to write about: unfaithful wives and their murderous husbands, who were typically let off by all-male juries for violent crimes of passion and “honor.” Fulminating at the injustice of it all, Maupassant dismissed a double standard he saw among male peasants and bourgeois alike. If women are subject to instinct and drives like any other human beings, why is adultery fine for men but not for women? “Le mariage est institué par la loi tel qu’il existe....Il est cependant permis de le discuter. Constatons d’abord que beaucoup de philosophes, parmi les plus éminents, affirment que nous sommes polygames et non des monogames” (cit. in *Selection of Chroniques*, p. 73). Maupassant is stubbornly adamant: “Je suis pour la femme qui tombe et contre le mari qui tue” (p. 75). That this young reporter cared enough to address women—directly or indirectly—was noticed. Maupassant not only liked women, he acknowledged them in print. Hired as a roving “generalist” to describe expositions and *vernissages*, he quickly showed more eclecticism and daring, and women became his regular readers.

By 1880, Guy and his sharp wit had received a warm welcome almost everywhere, from literary *salon* to newspaper office. As Maupassant made a job transfer from the Ministère de la Marine to the Ministère de l’Instruction publique and on to full-

time writing, he had moved from state sinecures to the good life. Through it all, though, Guy had retained a stubborn reverence for poetry. No one—certainly not a journalist—could ever win his respect like a fine poet.

READING THE POET-PORNOGRAPHER

In his 1897 Parc Monceau homage dedicating the statue of Maupassant, Zola implied that Guy had his brushes with failure and that *Boule de Suif*'s triumph in 1880 had come as a relief to his friends: "Ce fut une de nos grandes joies; car il devint notre frère, à nous tous qui l'avions vu grandir sans soupçonner son génie."* Indeed, many of Maupassant's biographers consider his early poems and plays—unlike his *chroniques*—to be stale, sloppy, hackneyed. One might think that Guy's erotically tinged verse would have been made for success in the mid- and late 1870s, for erotica had then become fashionable. Stora-Lamarre describes the dizzying accessibility and moderate prices for pamphlets and "licentious volumes" alike. Pornography was out of the box. Racy but legal papers such as *Gil Blas* also made their debut. As for "extra-legal" publications, there was a collection called *Le Nouveau Parnasse satyrique du XIX^e siècle*, printed in Brussels, where salacious literature could find a home (this is discussed later in this chapter). If young Guy's erotic poems received little attention in their time and on their own merits, they nevertheless foreshadowed much of what Maupassant poured into his commercial fiction

* Zola, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. XII, p. 717.

a few years later. His verse, shot through with the musings of the sexual vagabond, emphasizes the kind of female company a vagabond keeps. This female company fills one basic category: “working girls.” Whether they roam solo or congregate in groups, sex for sale is their unmistakable milieu. Perhaps the most commented-upon of all young Guy’s poems is “Au bord de l’eau” (miming the phonetic structure of “Au bordel,” according to some commentators). First published by Catulle Mendès in *La République des Lettres* in 1876, this poem is a veiled recounting of sex along the Seine. True, Maupassant’s “Au bord de l’eau” could hardly be called pornographic today, but it did rankle in the 1870s with its depiction of a simple laundress as emboldened woman.

Maupassant set up his erotic scene amid the village *quotidien*: it is laundry day near the Seine, and a young woman ditches her wash to pursue the male narrator himself:

Ainsi qu’une Vénus de marbre, elle avançait

Très droite, et sur ses reins, un peu se balançait (*Vers*, lines 15-16, p. 38).

The laundress is aggressive as she approaches the “je” of the poem—a rather shy young man, really—and the poem’s narrative becomes erotically charged. She may be “la première au lieu du rendez-vous” (line 61), but soon this woman loses her predatory nerve, just as the male client turns the tables and regains his manly self-confidence:

Alors, fermant mes bras sur sa hanche arrondie

Auprès d’un arbre, au bord de l’eau, je l’emportai

Elle que j'avais vue impudique et hardie,
Était pâle et troublée et pleurait lentement (*Vers*, lines 68-71)

As “erotic” verse, the poem often relies on temporal details and euphemism (“Pendant cinq mois entiers / J’ai caressé cette fille superbe, ignorante et lascive,” lines 98-100). Lust sidesteps the outright erotic scenario (“[E]nvahis par une fièvre étrange / Nous hâtons sans répit cet amour qui nous mange,” lines 157-158).

“Au bord de l’eau” is often cited by biographers not because of its salacious content but because of a lawsuit: When the poem was republished as “Une fille” in *La Revue Moderne et Naturaliste* in 1879, one year before *Boule de Suif*, it earned young Guy unwanted attention. The *Revue* was run by Harry Alis, an avant-garde editor and publisher who took delight in skewering the bourgeoisie. The Parquet d’Étampes decided to go after Maupassant in order to reach Alis: Alis’s other literary paper, *L’Abeille d’Étampes*, had had the gall to publish the poem in the Parquet’s own backyard. After a judge condemned the poet on grounds of obscenity and moral depravity, Guy’s reaction was close to sheer panic; in an undated note to Flaubert in early February 1880, he pleaded with his mentor for help: “J’arrive d’Étampes, où j’ai subi un long interrogatoire du juge d’instruction....J’aurai besoin d’une lettre de vous à moi, longue, réconfortante, paternelle et philosophique” (cit. in Estoc, 85). The letter Flaubert composed—“long, fatherly and philosophical” it is—appeared in the newspaper *Le Gaulois*, and convinced the court to drop the suit. Troyat mentions that Flaubert was still revered in France in

1880 for more than his fiction: in 1857, he had fought state charges of moral turpitude brought against him for *Madame Bovary*, and had done so with sufficient grace and dignity. Although Flaubert narrowly won his case, he had triumphed in the court of public opinion; in 1880 the legal pursuit of *Madame Bovary* was widely viewed in bourgeois Paris as a complete travesty. It has been speculated that young Maupassant's "Au bord de l'eau" was chosen by ambitious magistrates as a test case in the waning days of state censorship. Unfortunately for them, Flaubert's *plaidoyer* was decisive in demolishing their suit against Guy.

"Au bord de l'eau" might be considered sensualist verse but, arguably, it might have been tolerated by many a nineteenth-century *salonnière*. This poem's collage of encounters seems gauzy and dated, recalling a scene from *Madame Bovary*: One of Maupassant's fade-outs is similar to the erotic interlude between Emma and Rodolphe in the woods:

Et nos bouches, nos sens, nos soupirs se mêlèrent
Puis, dans la nuit tranquille où la campagne dort,
Un cri d'amour monta, si terrible et si fort
Que des oiseaux dans l'ombre effarés s'envolèrent (*Vers*, lines 88-91)

But Maupassant speaks here of "nos bouches, nos sens, nos soupirs"—the man and woman in his poem relate to each other as *nous*. Emma and Rodolphe, on the other hand, remain strangers of the third person, and the scream of the birds in their midst is a

disembodied one. Flaubert's scene of sexual congress is a union of bodies but not of souls; Maupassant's "Au bord de l'eau" strives toward a degree of real intimacy.

Other poems by young Guy, however, employed less ethereal wing-flapping and more hard-core images. One might call these "experimental"—poems that would be read before all-male social gatherings. "La Femme à barbe," written in March 1876, shows a young man who is a bit nonplussed about a girl he pursues. She looks and dresses like a man, and the poet is at the same time bewildered and attracted.

Un frisson singulier me courut sur la peau

La fille était fort laide et cet homme assez beau (Dahhan, lines 12-13, p. 41)

This masculine creature is every bit as aggressive as he is—she both initiates and controls their tryst, prefiguring Maupassant's casting of women as equal predators to men:

A peine fûmes-nous arrivés dans ma chambre

Elle ouvrit ma culotte et caressa mon membre...

Et dans son vagin sec elle enserra ma pine

Sa grande barbe noire ombrageait sa poitrine (Dahhan, lines 27-28, 39-40)

If the narrative and rhyme scheme are often this trite, the poem is a curiosity for its striking sexual ambiguity. Maupassant, known to mentors and friends alike for his alpha-male bravado and a macho detachment with women, broaches an idea not typically

contemplated in the bourgeois century: “Et je crus que j’étais baisé par un garçon” (line 42). “La Femme à barbe” might be an anomaly, but it is no curiosity; it documents Maupassant’s attraction to “ambiguous” women. By 1884 at the very latest, Maupassant had taken up with one Gisèle d’Estoc, an androgyne who had written him a fan letter. She had forsaken her bourgeois past for a life on her own. Gisèle affected a masculine bearing and pursued women as well as men, with Maupassant encouraging her pursuits with all the élan of a voyeur.

Guy’s liaison with Gisèle first came to light in the 1930s through the journalistic exposés of Pierre Borel, which he later compiled in a book, *Maupassant et l’androgyne* (1941). Long rejected or disparaged by Maupassant biographers, Borel’s assertions are now considered more than credible (the same can’t be said for Estoc’s memoir, *Cahier d’amour*, still suspected by some to be a hoax). Borel describes Gisèle as a nonconformist who fled Nancy as a young girl (perhaps disowned by her good bourgeois family) to pursue the sculpting life in Paris, where she also wrote *chroniques* for small Paris papers (Borel, 45). Smart and strong-willed, her articulate fan letter to Maupassant in December 1880 (Lanoux says 1881) bowled Maupassant over—and their “pansexual” relationship soon began in earnest. It lasted at least four years.

Maupassant was mesmerized by this woman’s masculine strength and feminine grace. In *The Image of Man*, George L. Mosse notes how much the image of the androgyne fascinated in the nineteenth century. It had also evolved: “If before 1850 the androgyne had been a symbol of fraternity and solidarity, by the end of the century it had been transformed into a symbol of vice and sexual perversity” (92). This was also a

reflection, he adds, of the “clear-cut division” between male and female spheres that developed through much of affluent bourgeois society.

Maupassant’s roving eye had certainly taken in the old *pornographos* of the previous century with its *tribades*, lesbians whom prostitutes cavorted with—a libertine pornographic device to heighten male fantasy (the more women, the better) and to transgress the concept of unsullied womanhood (a contemporaneous *idée reçue*) with a more shamelessly wanton female type. In *L’Enfer de la III^e République*, Stora-Lamarre underscores the prominence of lesbian images in the French pornographic canon: “Dans ces sources littéraires, les auteurs célèbrent...le plaisir qui excite les “tribades en furie,” alors qu’à l’inverse, l’homosexualité masculine, elle, très peu décrite, apparaît comme un des grands tabous de ce type de littérature” (Stora-Lamarre, 31).

Neither Gisèle nor Maupassant’s “femme à barbe” is like the monstrously super-female *tribades* with their often outsize female genitalia. Rather, Maupassant was perhaps flouting one convention of the bourgeois century—stratified male and female characterization in the pornographic narrative. Maupassant seemed to prefer the previous century for his own brand of *pornographos*: His poems strive to depict women as something other than passively “feminine” objects in the service of men. For him, women can be bold, self-assertive, rapacious—and also as detached and disinterested as any man. In “Sex for Thought,” a review of newly published works from France’s vast “Enfer” collection (*The New York Review of Books*, December 22, 1994), Robert Darnton points to the eighteenth-century porno tract *L’École des filles*, a work that “revived the ancient myth that men and women were divided halves of the same androgynous whole, which

seeks forever to reunite” (Darnton, 68). Maupassant does not shrink from an older erotic concept; he unabashedly pursues it.

In his poem “Une conquête,” a young man thinks he has met the perfect woman. He is determined to follow her, in his fantasies, to watch over her during her leisure days abroad. She is “une merveille,” this *honnête femme* whom the naive male subject rushes to deify. He will protect her from all perils:

Il la suivait alors aux pays étrangers
Ensemble ils visitaient les plaines de l’Hellade
Et comme un chevalier d’une ancienne ballade
Il l’arrachait toujours à d’étranges dangers (Vers, lines 41-44, p. 21)

But this elegant lady is something else: a free-living woman. As the young man stares out wistfully upon the Seine, she suddenly turns up with a group of rowdy *canotiers*, no longer the sweet maiden in a First Communion dress:

Elle était avec eux et buvait une absinthe!
Il demeura muet. La drôlesse sourit
L’appela.— Lui restait stupide. Elle reprit:
“Ça, tu me prenais donc, nigaud, pour une Sainte?” (Vers, lines 129-132, p. 24)

Après la toquade, the bitter truth: you, sir, have been duped. This man is not the *je* of Maupassant's other poems but a deluded and naive *il*, and this "he" is categorically shunned by the poet as unworthy of the respect of other men. Whether Maupassant spotlights the elegant comtesse de Rhune or this *canotiers'* companion, he dispenses a cautionary tale about the toxic lure of feminine airs. Seeing is not believing. The conquest in "Une conquête" is this bawdy woman's, and Maupassant is persuaded to take her cynical view: Doesn't everything in love come down to the sex act? He advises men to act on the instinctual, not the sentimental, or else be shamed:

J'approuve le bon sens de cet adage ancien,

Quand on n'a pas de grive, il faut manger un merle (*Vers*, final stanza, p. 25)

But a woman's free sexuality is also apparent in "Le Mur", a racy poem about two lovers' tryst in the outdoors after a summer concert. Among the retiring spectators is yet another shy young man and an audacious girl:

Un rire aigu me fit tourner la tête

Et j'aperçus soudain la dame que j'aimais (*Vers*, lines 44-45, p. 16)

This young woman is not bashful ("Votre bras, et faisons un tour de parc," li 48); now, as later, she is "moqueuse, effrontément jolie" (li 105, p. 19). The two lovers gently spar in the moonlight, and it all must lead we know where:

Déjà je la prenais, impétueux et fort

Quand je fus repoussé par un suprême effort (li 113-114, p. 19)

Soon, however, the lady acquiesces to his desire and hers, the two shadows cast against the wall become one and, inevitably, “Le rossignol chantait dans un arbre” (li 140).

Maupassant’s poetry did include nonerotic subject matter—his 1881 collection *Des Vers* takes on everything from advanced age (“L’Aïeul”) to a crushing anxiety attack (“Terreur”)—but over and over he brought his pen back to humans’ instinctual need and life force: sex. Essentially an impulsive and ephemeral act in the Maupassantian scheme, sex had become the constant undercurrent in Guy de Maupassant’s world. For him, moreover, women are as much convinced cynics as he is. Part of the male comfort with prostitution is that women and men see eye to eye about the role of sex: It is an appetite and a powerful one, but it requires no lofty illusions to get under way and no sentimental attachments to be assuaged. In fact, emotional baggage simply makes it a chore.

Maupassant’s poem “69” is pure pornography: Dahhan describes it as “tout un programme [et] tout aussi grivois et obscène” (42). Written in March 1877, the verses of “69” are not subtle. The poet roughly addresses his freelancer (“Salut, grosse Putain”) and tells her that he, the client, has already determined *le programme*:

Nous allons, s’il te plaît, faire soixante-neuf

J’ai besoin de sentir, ainsi qu’on hume un oeuf,

Avec l'âcre saveur des anciennes urines

Glisser en mon gosier les baves de ton con (Dahhan, lines 13-16, p. 42)

But rather than offering an overbaked porn narrative of cunnilingus, the poem shifts to a stream-of-consciousness inventory of body parts: “tes gros tétons, ton gros cul, ton gros ventre” (line 5), and Sadean descriptions of genitals and bodily fluids: “les baves de ton con” (line 16), “ta bouche à chicots, pareille aux trous d'égout,” and the client's “gland nerveux” (line 26).

Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, in “Truth and the Obscene Word in Eighteenth-Century Pornography,” another essay in Hunt's collected *Invention of Pornography*, has described the harsh cascade of words as a staccato and shrill convention of modern porn. Now, a verbal tirade had come to dominate the erotic narrative like an invasive species: “As fetish, or simulacrum of a part object, the obscene word not only represents, but *replaces*, its referent. It acts as a substitute for, indeed sometimes as an improvement over, its referent...[It] is the thing itself” (Frappier-Mazur, in Hunt, 221). Erotica had certainly become more direct, relying less on a pre-modern “classical” aesthetic as it developed into a modern commercial product.

But, one might ask, is Maupassant's crescendo of body parts in “69” just the harsh erotic terminology perfected in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries? For modern effect, Maupassant did throw in a couple of sops to his century's erotic rule book: a stream of obscenities and the male narrator. But “69” suggests a distinctive literary

antecedent: the *blason anatomique* of sixteenth-century French emblem poetry, in which the female body was the focus of the poet's adoration. In *The Rhetoric of Sexuality and the Literature of the French Renaissance*, Lawrence Kritzman sees the Renaissance *blasonneur* as a "poet-architect" on a "libidinal quest," employing his "masculine gaze" in an "imaginary projection of the reality of his desire onto a [female] object that is narcissistically subjectivized" (Kritzman, 97-98). And he offers up Clément Marot's *blason* on the female breast as an example: the captivating purity of a virgin's breast is depicted in a language of superlatives: "de satin blanc tout neuf" (cit. in Kritzman, 101).

Marot composed a poetic *contreblason* as well, describing in stark contrast the effects of decay that inexorably lead to this "tetin...de quelque vieille Chèvre morte":

Tetin au grand vilain bout noir
Comme celui d'ung Entonnoir
Tetin qui bramballe à tous coups,
Sans estre esbranlé ne secoux
Bien se peult vanter qui te taste
D'avoir mis la main à la paste
Tetin grillé, Tetin pendant,
Tetin flestry, tetin rendant
Vilaine bourbe en lieu de laict,
Le diable te fait bien si laid! (cit. in Kritzman, 103)

The female, whose youth is exalted in the *blason*, shows her waning female pulchritude in his *contreblason*. In “69,” Maupassant revels in his *cocotte*’s overripe and weathered body. The poem strikes a nineteenth-century pose insofar as it bows to prevailing bourgeois tastes: a salty modern vocabulary of *gros mots* and a male narrator-consumer whose erotic *ébats* are prepaid and preplanned. It also employs a down-and-dirty “naturalist” inventory—genital odors and bodily fluids—that emphasize the sex act’s biological means and ends: “Ça, monte sur ton lit sans te laver la cuisse; / Je ne redoute pas le flux de ta matrice” (lines 11-12). Yet the narrator is smitten by everything about this female body—its feminine contours and pungent anatomical earthiness are eroticized. Maupassant was a nineteenth-century pornographer whose aesthetic gaze is closer to that of the *blasonneur*. His male gaze calls forth an array of anatomical minutiae—a catalog—that Kritzman terms “a verbal mass, a *copia verborum* whose proliferation of details mimetically reflects the artisan-like attention that links it to the aesthetic” (101). Maupassant merges the sublime notes of the *blason* with the decayed accents of the *contreblason*.

And Maupassant also drew from the eighteenth-century libertine canon. His approach to the aging *fille* was as an erotic “discovery”—perhaps here, a rediscovery—employing decidedly animalistic vocabulary and imagery.* This prostitute’s “larges

*In an essay on eighteenth-century libertines’ representation of the body, Claude Reichler stresses “un lexique de la bestialité dans une intention avilissante.” From “La Représentation du corps dans le récit libertin,” *Éros philosophique: Discours libertins des Lumières* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1984), p. 74.

gargouilles / Ont fait éjaculer trois générations” (line 1), her navel is “noir et creux comme un antre” (line 6). Maupassant was a cataloguer who adopted the erotic poetics of another age. In the latter decades of the bourgeois century, “69” seems something of a literary throwback.

RETRO *PORNOGRAPHOS*

In the bourgeois century, the male narrator and his coarser story line gained the upper hand in both pornography and *pornographos*. Frappier-Mazur notes in this development “the relation between male narrator and narratee [who] talk to each other over the body of the fictitious woman. It may also be one of the factors accounting for an undercurrent of hostility toward women in pornography...” (208-209). Maupassant’s erotic verse was male-point-of-view and appears to be outwardly hostile (women as sworn adversaries of men), but the poet simply recognized what century he lived in, its commercial homogenization and its polarized male and female social spheres.

Yet I would argue that Maupassant shunned the male narration described by Frappier-Mazur. He did not degrade these women; he conceded that women have a power over him that transcended his own sexual desire. In “69,” he addresses the woman warmly, with an affectionate *tu* (and in many of his erotic poems the male-female couples are *nous*). Is this an affectionate *tu*—or is it the familiar, vulgar, contemptuous *tu* of the lower reaches of the sex trade? This poem appears to evoke the former: The prostitute here is older, robust and in command, and the male narrator feels not contempt toward

her but a good-natured familiarity. Theirs is indeed a fraternal romp. The truly “pornographic” trysts of other poems have left him feeling sad and dispirited, and the violent pursuit of a woman against her consent is not erotic; in fact, it nips all eros in the bud.

This seems to be the crux of Maupassant’s long and ponderous “Vénus rustique,” written in 1878. His Venus is no prostitute here but Woman incarnate: She roams village and countryside, not the worldly woman at all but an unself-conscious *pucelle*, receiving caresses from children and old men until the day a brash herder pursues her for sex. This is an anachronistic setting for the late nineteenth century, with a nymph frolicking in nature until the satyr spots her. This is not Sadean; it predates Sade. It is an homage to Ancient Greek erotic imagery, in which the herder feels all the male entitlement of Zeus assaulting Leda or Aristaeus chasing Eurydice. Even if the step-by-step struggle for sexual supremacy is (in terms of erotica anyway) ancient, the point of view is modern. Maupassant’s poem is a narrative of mortal combat, and Venus, who valiantly tries to fight off her pursuer, is felled:

Puis, comme elle luttait, il se rua sur elle

En la frappant du poing pour qu’elle consentît

Et le silence épais des neiges amortit

Quelques cris, comme ceux des gens qu’on assassine (Vers, IV, lines 149-152)

Having violently rejected him, Venus pays with her life. She was beautiful, so the herder stalked her as would a predatory animal:

Elle avait la Beauté, lui la Ruse; il fallait
Qu'un des deux succombât. Deux Puissances égales
Ne règnent pas toujours. Deux Idoles rivales
Ne se partagent point le ciel... (Vers, IV, lines 215-218)

There is no erotic afterglow in this narrative: instead, there is considerable postcoital distress. Venus is immediately forgotten by her pursuer—after the sex act, she is dead to him, just as the physical act is quickly over and just as quickly forgotten. This male, a bachelor herder, is again alone: “Mais le pâtre, enfermé dans sa hutte isolée / Sent une solitude horrible autour de lui” (Vers, IV, lines 254-255).

“Vénus rustique” is Maupassant’s stab at serious poetics. It expresses the male animal’s deep-seated desire as well as his dark sense of isolation. It is a revealing work of the sexual vagabond, in which verse alone can communicate the emptiness of the heart. And this poem is written in a detached third person (Venus as *elle*, the herder nothing but *il*). Frappier-Mazur’s bonding male narrator and narratee don’t talk over the body of the dead Venus. If anything, smirking faces and winking glances are absent; this is neither the narrative approach nor the erotic philosophy of Maupassant. There is even another concession to the past: Venus, as Woman personified, is in danger from the marauding male, who may feel it is his instinctual prerogative to assault her.

And another poem, “Un coup de soleil,” similarly ends in rape, when the male narrator discovers his desire, unchecked, has made him into an assassin:

Un nuage de sang, rouge, couvrit mes yeux,
Et je crus la presser dans un baiser farouche.
Je la serrais, je la ployais, la renversait...
La pressait sur mon sein d’une étreinte si forte
Que dans mes bras crispés je vis qu’elle était morte (*Des Vers*, li 15-17, 23-24)

As Robert Darnton points out in his review of the “Enfer” collection, early-modern pornographic works “expressed the assumption that women were in constant danger of rape, especially when exposed to men of superior power or status” (Darnton, 69). Maupassant presents this as a harsh reality: the rape in “Vénus rustique” is tragic; it is anything but a playful “modern” porno prop.

For Maupassant, poetry could be subtle but forthright—it was always his first choice of literary expression. In this year, 1878, Guy considered himself above all to be a poet (a *chroniqueur* of fashionable trends was merely a sideline, albeit a paid one). “Vénus” distills an erotic philosophy; while it outwardly alludes to the “weaker sex” and a nineteenth-century concept of separate spheres for men and women, it departs from some of *les usages* of the bourgeois century. Juxtaposed as the sexes are, Woman is a force on her own and she is wise to remain vigilant. But she does have the right to consensual relations and should be able to circulate freely in the world. Like Sade’s

Juliette, Maupassant's erotic woman should be able to take charge. In the strictest sense, Maupassant's *filles* mesh with Norberg's view of Sade's libertine women, "a world... constructed where sex was less important than sexuality, and sexual pleasure did not necessitate the denigration of only the female participants" (Norberg, in Hunt, 251).

Still, Maupassant's *pornographos* would seem to counter another argument Norberg makes: "The libertine whore," she writes, "was clearly waning in the Revolution and did not survive the Restoration. The advent of the new doctrine of sexual differences rendered the independent, philosophical prostitute obsolete. Juliette, it seems, had no nineteenth-century successors" (Norberg in Hunt, 252). But what, then, are Maupassant's free women—in verse and later in his prose—if not independent and philosophical?

Maupassant's erotica is, more often than not, a throwback, his *pornographos* noticeably and significantly retrograde. Frébourg believes it is not only his reaction to a conventional and puritanical Third Republic but that it shows an affinity with the previous century's more progressive sexual ethos—one that did not deny or circumscribe desire in women: "Maupassant, homme du XVIII^e siècle, de l'ancien régime, lecteur de Sade et de l'abbé Prévost, aspire à une libération des femmes" (155). This attitude undergirds his poetry, as it will his later prose fiction, with a permanent erotic theme: the domination of each man and woman by sexual implusion.

Sexual instinct was an important tenet of naturalism. The Flaubert biographer Jacques-Louis Douchin, in his introduction to Gisèle d'Estoc's memoir *Cahier d'amour*, about her liaison with Maupassant, proffers a "naturalist" label on Maupassant's early poems. They contain, he says, "le naturalisme le plus pur et le plus dur: primauté absolue

du désir physique dans les relations entre les sexes, exaspération et violence de l'instinct...jusqu'au meurtre, alliage du sexe et du sang" (Estoc, 13). Maupassant nevertheless always rejected this naturalist label—formally in his 1883 letter published in *La Revue Bleue*, but much earlier on in an 1879 letter to Flaubert. There, Guy lampooned the naturalist "school" and even Zola himself:

Que dites-vous de Zola? Moi, je le trouve absolument fou....Son article sur les poètes contemporains et sa brochure *La République et la Littérature*. "La République sera naturaliste ou elle ne sera pas." "Je ne suis qu'un savant"!!! (Rien que cela! Quelle modestie.) "L'enquête sociale." Le document humain. La série des *formules*. On verra bientôt sur le dos des livres: "Grand roman selon la formule naturaliste."

(*Correspondance Flaubert-Maupassant*, April 24, 1879)

Maupassant would abide no *formules*; they thoroughly rattled him. And one might argue that Maupassant does not approach or include sexual instinct as one tenet of naturalism; sexual instinct is his theme, with little variation.

It is as if Zola himself had drawn many of his female characters to be as erotically driven as men—all passionate and sometimes ruthless Thérèse Raquins. While Maupassant may have refused the naturalist label, he was impressed by Zola's effervescent female characterizations: Thérèse, Gervaise, Nana. Flaubert communicates

Guy's admiration to Zola in an 1878 letter: "Guy de Maupassant m'a parlé avec *enthousiasme* du premier chapitre de *Nana*. Il trouve que vous n'avez jamais rien fait d'aussi beau!" (cit. in Flaubert-Maupassant, *Correspondance*, note, 147).

As touched on in chapter 1 of this dissertation, Guy had strived to be a dynamic storyteller within the Médan group. If the novella *Boule de Suif* was to be his refined and well-received end product, the younger men in the group had been critical of the drafts of this work as hopelessly clichéd and sentimental. Maupassant cited for Flaubert some of these individual critiques at publication time: "Zola—bien, mais ce sujet aurait pu être traité de la même façon et aussi bien par Mme Sand ou Daudet. Huysmans—pas fameux ... peu de style. Céard—lourd, très lourd, pas vraisemblable..." (Flaubert-Maupassant, *Correspondance*, April 23, 1880).

The literary education of Guy de Maupassant had been long and fraught, but eminently good-natured and fortunate. The genius had to be brought out of this genius. If Flaubert and Bouilhet had been affectionate and encouraging, Guy's young contemporaries in the Médan group could be cool and devastatingly frank. In his biography *Maupassant le Bel-Ami*, Lanoux is just as blunt—and lucid—about Maupassant's verse. When Guy's poems were finally published in a collection in 1880, he says, Guy was still clueless about where his talent lay; he had preferred undistinguished poetics to cutting-edge prose. But, Lanoux emphasizes, Maupassant's less than sterling and mostly forgotten verse had played its minor role:

Quelques semaines plus tard, le recueil sur lequel il compte tant, *Des Vers*, paraît chez Charpentier. L'accueil est excellent. Tout s'ouvre d'un coup, prose et poésie.... Il se trompait. Ce n'est pas la nouvelle qui préparait les vers, mais le contraire. Maupassant ne sera jamais plus qu'un poète d'éventails.”

(Lanoux, 120)

Maupassant was a writer but much less of a poet. His unsuccessful early works—the farcical play and the ponderous poem—had set him up on an experimental road that led to commercial fiction. He wanted to transcend freighted literary terms like naturalism and realism. By depicting most adults, including women, in thrall to an insatiable life force that often got the better of them, Maupassant went beyond the scope of Zola's aesthetic tenets.* He saw sexual instinct as the elephant in all our rooms, a force that can bring on mischievous fun or strike fatal blows.

Maupassant's erotics got their airing when he published such soft-core poems as “Au bord de l'eau” and “Vénus rustique” in his 1880 collection, *Des Vers*. His real *pornographos*, of course, had to wait until the next year, when some of his obscene verse appeared in a new version of *Le Nouveau Parnasse satyrique du XIX^e siècle*, a collection that earlier published his mentor Bouilhet. Louis Bouilhet had included his own risqué poems in the original 1864 tome, printed in Brussels by Poulet-Malassis (the publisher of

* Zola's treatise *Le Roman expérimental*, which appeared in 1879 (magazine serialization) and 1880 (book form), went into the tenets of naturalism.

Les Fleurs du mal) and secreted into France. Stora-Lamarre, in *L'Enfer*, writes that the later *Nouveau Parnasse*, printed in Brussels in 1881 by Henri Kistemaekers, ran not only naturalist verse from the “bande de Médan” but Catulle Mendès’ *Le Crime du vieux Blas* and Maupassant’s story “Mademoiselle Fifi” (172).

By then, though, Maupassant had won raves for *Boule de Suif* and was now lost amid the hubbub around his newest novella, *La Maison Tellier*.

THE WOMAN’S WRITER

The prostitutes of Maupassant’s salacious play *Feuille de rose* are independent girls—loud and proud. Crête de Coq, their fuzzy-cheeked young male valet, is assigned to watch over them like a mother hen, getting them to wash their stash of condoms and to keep the place in some semblance of order. The valet whines bitterly about his responsibilities in this, a subservient but indispensable role. Again, Maupassant winked at *les usages*. Roles of primacy and service in the *Maison turque* might be apparent—the brothel is mostly a female sphere—but in other ways the gender roles are upset. After M. and Mme. Beauflanquet appear out of the blue (the mayor and his wife are perfect comic props who don’t realize they have stepped into a brothel), the girls take control of them and everything else.

In Maupassant’s world, women can and do take charge. Sometimes they had no other choice: social and economic realities in the case of decent Jeanne in the novel *Une vie*; patriotic revenge on the part of the prostitute in the short story “Le Lit 29”. But in

Maupassant's works, the natural world of sex (and passion) is never foreign to the female psyche. Rather, desire is universal in its intensity. Women, he knew, were astutely aware of this, and he communicated it directly to his female reading public. Maupassant's lusty tales of average and even "lowly" women had an authenticity that struck his female readers. The women of the Tellier brothel, for example, were mothers who often missed their children. Jeanne's hardships in *Une vie* were real for women, and Maupassant's empathy for Jeanne apparent (in the English-speaking world, the novel has often carried the title *A Woman's Life*).

Maupassant's most unforgettable female characterization might be the working girl Boule de Suif—a patriotic prostitute and a symbol of the unconventional life who is distressed that proud France had become a *pays conquis*. Maupassant's first successful piece of fiction found a female protagonist as steadfast as the girls in his erotic poems, as earnest as the *courtisanes* in his history-drenched *chroniques*. Boule de Suif held out longer against the Prussian officer than did her fellow passengers, who were pressed for time. She is ultimately undermined and defeated by the bourgeois passengers on her coach. They used her transgressive profession for their own selfish ends; they are the ones who ultimately submitted to the foreign conquerors, for Boule was willing to resist until the end.

In a sense, Maupassant had been lucky. Having abandoned his 9-to-6 job, he moved on to material and financial comfort; strong literary friends from Mendès to Flaubert to Zola had kept at bay all kinds of potential social and legal opprobrium. Yet Guy had always hungered to be in the public sphere, and the shameless, over-the-top

libertine girls of “Au bord de l’eau” and *Feuille de rose* had set him on a course. Toned down a tad, with an eye for commercial production values, his literary style meshed with the new tastes of a bourgeois and growing female reading public.

Guy de Maupassant ought to be considered one of the great women’s writers of the nineteenth century. With the mad rush for *Boule de Suif* and *La Maison Tellier* and their portrayal of female integrity in the most unlikely places, Maupassant was begged to write more newspaper *chroniques*—now as consistently off-color and provocative as his novellas. Assiduously read by le Tout Paris, Guy was a phenomenon, a celebrity. And this celebrity knew how to choose his venues wisely: Maupassant relegated his youthful hard-core poetry to the background (in *Le Nouveau Parnasse satyrique*, it was reserved for a quasi-total male audience). At the same time, he was able to highlight the erotic again and again with his real *grand public*: women. Publishers and readers alike flocked to his “legitimate” works, and when he was barely thirty years old. All parties had been satisfied.

Chapter IV. HUMOR AND HORROR: TALES OF THE BACHELOR-SENSUALIST

Three months before he died, Flaubert had penned a compliment to Maupassant on what would be the young writer's first widely published work. "Il me tarde de vous dire," wrote Flaubert, "que je considère *Boule de Suif* comme un *chef-d'oeuvre*... [n]i plus, ni moins, cela est d'un maître" (*Correspondance Flaubert-Maupassant*, Feb. 1, 1880). If Flaubert and many others were charmed by Boule, it would be myopic to see her merely as the "good" prostitute and patriot. Élisabeth Rousset is more than that: she is an unmarried woman living by her own wits, in a century when women of all classes did not typically do so. Thus can the bourgeois married women whom Élisabeth meets on her fateful stagecoach journey through Normandy look askance at her from their higher station in life: "Elles devaient faire, leur semblait-il, comme un faisceau de leurs dignités d'épouses en face de cette vendue sans vergogne; car l'amour légal le prend toujours de haut avec son libre confrère" (*Contes et nouvelles I*, 91-92). Maupassant implies that Boule's marital status alone is less than honorable, not just her métier. Indeed, the only unmarried women besides Boule on the coach are two sullen Roman Catholic nuns—here, a cynical part of the bourgeois fabric and totally in league with the married couples. Even though Boule is kind to the other women and more resourceful than they (selflessly sharing the cut-up roast chickens, pâtés and sweets she had packed for her trip), she remains forever apart from them, marginalized and alone.

Thus did Guy de Maupassant, with his first successful works of fiction, begin to roll out a diverse cast of characters including unmarried and marginal protagonists—women and men—arguably more of them than any other writer of his era. Maupassant's

on-the-margins bachelor realm had naturally embraced these “others”; he knew them as outcasts living in a parallel universe that was his own, with its benefits and quiet degradations. These were some of the true misfits of the bourgeois century, for Maupassant knew that choosing to remain unmarried was to take the path of resistance and to earn less dignity than any husband or wife.

Marriage—often the domestic kind for the bourgeois and a practical one for the manual classes—was expected, despite a relatively high percentage of single adults in late nineteenth-century Paris. Jules Michelet had juxtaposed these two marriage models in *Le Peuple* (1846), unfavorably contrasting the egocentric bourgeois couple with the partnered workingman and his wife. In the latter arrangement, said Michelet, the husband actually looks forward to coming home after his long day: his wife is not waiting impatiently for him to take her on the town but to share his life and help alleviate his harsh existence. This Michelet calls “happiness” and “true marriage” (*The People*, English transl., 167). He later expanded on this theme in *La Femme* (1859), which among other things scolded Frenchmen of means for failing to treat their wives with due respect. “La fille de France,” he opines, “ne devrait pas craindre celui dont pourtant elle est la maîtresse absolue. Et pourtant elle frémit” (ch. 6, 563). Michelet seeks to improve affluent marriages everywhere by proposing one of comity that borrows mightily from the proletarian partnership. He believes that the bourgeois husband and his wife can be friends and associates rather than separate solitudes. He even suggests a more dynamic role for a wife that is something close to that of a paraprofessional:

Ce qui la soutiendra [l'épouse] le plus, c'est que tout bonnement tu l'associes à ton métier. Cela est praticable dans beaucoup de carrières....Quel admirable compagnon, quel utile associé....Elle veut travailler avec toi. Eh bien, prends-la au mot, n'y mets pas les ménagements de la petite galanterie, mais l'amour fait profond. Sache qu'à ce premier moment, elle est très capable d'effort, d'application suivie, qu'elle fera tout pour être aimée. (ch. 8, 580)

Maupassant and his male *cercle* would probably be horrified at the thought of a husband and wife spending more quality time together but, like Michelet, Guy had observed the distance and the discord in many a marriage among the comfortable classes. His fiction catalogues this over and over: his short stories especially show married couples living lives apart and at cross purposes. Maupassant's solution, however, is not new and improved marriages but the renunciation of marriage. He had met so many men and women living outside the institution, and he saw them as living rich and full lives. What readers take away from his novels and stories is a view of the unmarried life that is stunning in its complexity, and also in its unwillingness to caricature.

AN UNMARRIED WOMAN: INTIMATE SCENES

Already known for the saucy novellas *Boule de Suif* and *La Maison Tellier*, Maupassant habitually returned to his portraiture of unmarried women from all walks of life—and beyond the sex trade. For example, the irrepressible and divorced Marquise de Renedon

comes alive in three separate short stories. Best friend and confidante to the flighty and unhappily married Baronne de Grangerie, la Rennedon came by her divorce thanks to the Loi Naquet—and owing to her own brilliant cunning and resourcefulness. In “Sauvée,” she has planned every minute of her dull husband’s entrapment (after failing to induce him to abuse her in public and thus clinch her case in the courts). Carefully stage-managing her husband’s infidelity before his friends—and his attorney—she is poised to snow the family law bureaucrats as well. She will get her divorce.

“Saved” from marriage? If the Marquise de Rennedon is savoring her divorce in another story, “Le Signe,” her friend the Baronne de Grangerie is coveting it. Maupassant portrays married women not only as badly married but living bleak lives. Among his first published works, *Une vie* (1883) was to be Maupassant’s monument, Troyat says—the novel Guy thought would make people compare him to Flaubert and Zola (109). The novel about Jeanne, a very unhappily married lady of means, took off and sold well despite initial public perceptions of it as indecent literature. (Hachette had once halted sales of *Une vie* in bookstores dependent on train stations; Troyat, 117). In *Le Regard et le signe*, Henri Mitterand likens Jeanne’s sufferings in the novel to those of many privileged married women in Restoration France. But, Mitterand is quick to ask, “Les mœurs avaient-elles beaucoup changé en 1880? On peut en douter.... Une vie de femme, dans ce monde de préjugés et de pouvoirs archaïques, c’est donc en fait la mort à petit feu, par étouffement, par asphyxie progressive de la sensibilité, de la confiance.... Le titre [*Une vie*] est à prendre comme une antiphrase” (Mitterand, 161-162). In *Breaking the*

Chain, Naomi Schor's feminist reading of *Une vie* is more pointed: the novel details the loss of one's proper identity, for a married nineteenth-century woman has none. "The heroine is no longer (never was?) the titular of her life; Jeanne's life does not belong to her" (Schor, 51).

Maupassant, writing in the bourgeois century, also saw marriage as a raw deal for women. And in fundamental ways, it certainly was: Marie-Henriette Faillie's book on the Code Civil in Balzac's works covers some of the severe laws affecting Frenchwomen throughout the bourgeois century (some not moderated until well after World War I). Article 213 of the Code Civil of 1828 laid down the law on the married woman, amended only in 1942: "La femme [doit] obéissance à son mari" (cit. in Faillie, 203). And in Article 776, she could not inherit property—that of her husband or anyone else—unless the husband or a judge formally agreed to his wife's right of succession: "Les femmes mariées ne peuvent pas valablement accepter une succession sans l'autorisation de leur mari ou de justice" (cit. in Faillie, 213). Thus, if French civil law in the nineteenth century infantilized women in the legal sense, fathers or husbands could carry it out to the letter if they wished. In Maupassant's short story "Le Legs," a dead bachelor has left his considerable estate to the wife of another man. Although the couple were his oldest and dearest friends, their attorney reminds the husband of his legal rights in the matter: "Il est bien entendu, monsieur, que madame ne peut accepter ce legs sans votre consentement" (*Contes et nouvelles* II, 343). Embarrassed by the bachelor's gift, the husband decides to deny his wife her inheritance. In his novels and short stories, Maupassant confirms

married women living lives that don't belong to them. Marriage promotes something like a spiritual fossilization in women, who accept and even advocate its harsh imperium. In "Le Marquis de Fumerol," for example, a dying bachelor's married sister defers to her dull husband, who rejects the man and his bachelor ways.

Maupassant's single female characters, on the other hand, seem to be a class apart—more vital than these *honnêtes femmes* because they must live their lives with smarts and resourcefulness. Freedom from convention (and from men) does come at a price, though: unmarried women must navigate a cruel world in the late nineteenth century, and Maupassant's stories evoke their difficult course. Thus does the madam of the *La Maison Tellier* create a secure place for the women in her brothel. If the Tellier house is a romanticized view of prostitution, it functions as a mini-welfare state of sorts, providing maternal oversight and a tight support network. "Madame" has ensured a social safety net by creating a communal space. (When she wishes to attend the First Communion of a beloved niece, she closes down the brothel and all the girls accompany her.)

The sex trade is not always this subsidized idyll. The free-agent sex worker in "L'Odyssée d'une fille" began her slide into street prostitution after being taken advantage of by two gendarmes as a girl of sixteen. Years later, she still fears the police and their frequent street raids. As she tells Maupassant's married male narrator: "Oui! ici, monsieur, c'est dur de vivre. On ne mange pas tous les jours, allez" (*Contes et nouvelles* I, 1003). Indeed, sex work can be harrowing, a pure hardship, and Maupassant won't settle for one-note portrayals of vivacious brothel girls. Even when the working girl is a

flirt, the financial pressures to prostitute herself are strong. In the story “Ça ira,” a tobacconist tells the narrator about her days working for a Paris milliner; all the female workers in his employ complemented their meager wages with a bit of prostitution. Maupassant describes a “coeur d’ouvrière, cet épervier de trottoir qui chasse par les rues, le matin, en allant au magasin, le midi, en flânant nu-tête, après le repas, et le soir en montant chez elle” (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 575).

Maupassant avoids other *idées reçues* of the nineteenth-century male writer: the taciturn old maid. In “Mademoiselle Perle,” a servant girl who grew up in an affluent household is now, in her forties, its head domestic. In spite of her silly clothes, “elle n’était point ridicule, tant elle portait en elle de grâce simple, naturelle, de grâce voilée, cachée avec soin” (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 673). Maupassant’s Perle is, refreshingly, no *vieille fille revêche*; she has broken the heart of her employer, M. Chantal, who wished to marry her in their youth. As it was socially impossible for both, he married one of his class—and cries tears of regret all these years later. Mademoiselle Perle, the winning old maid, has a hold on him still, and her youthful charm endures.

Maupassant’s unmarried female characters retain a depth and a dignity that other writers of his time didn’t typically confer upon them. In “Mademoiselle Fifi,” the brutalization of the prostitute Rachel by a hotheaded young peacock of a Prussian officer, dubbed “Fifi,” leads the girl to murder him. Hidden in a church tower by the village priest, she is protected by him and an entire village; Maupassant’s feeling toward her is never less than total sympathy. Maupassant often seems to champion the unmarried woman, even to follow her logic. In “L’Enfant,” a young girl kills her newborn child out

of shame and the village doctor speaks in Maupassant's stead, castigating not her but the larger society: "D'infâmes préjugés, un faux honneur, plus abominable que le crime, toute une accumulation de sentiments factices, d'honorabilité odieuse, de révoltante honnêteté poussent à l'assassinat" (*Contes et nouvelles I*, 981). The same physician-narrator tells of a widow who had performed her own late-term abortion, again out of shame. Maupassant sees women's lives as stressful and significant—and continually threatened by unwanted pregnancy and motherhood.

The rural servant girl in "Histoire d'une fille de ferme," impregnated and abandoned by the vulgar farm hand Jacques, will find refuge as the wife of a much older farmer. This is one of Maupassant's rare happy endings (or happy marriages, for that matter). Rose marries a gentle man in a world of ungentle men, and he adopts her *fils naturel* as his own child. This Rose appears to be modeled after Rosalie, Jeanne's pregnant servant in *Une vie*. She was sent away to marry simple Désiré Lecoq, a kind soul who treats her with a respect Jeanne never got from Julien (and who gives his name to Denis, Rosalie's out-of-wedlock child with Julien). In the short story "L'Aveu," on the other hand, young Céleste is harangued by her own mother when she becomes pregnant by Polyte, a fat and worthless wagon driver. Despite the story's comical scenes of an illiterate peasantry, with its cornpone country accents, Céleste's predicament is as dire as the other characters'. Her burden—shame—is benighted and unjust. As Frébourg emphatically warns those who have likened Guy de Maupassant to his fictional Duroy, "Maupassant n'est pas Bel-Ami," for the latter is simply "un salaud. Il n'y a ni justice ni

morale (Frébourg, 143-144, emphasis mine). Indeed, Maupassant the writer is all justice and all morality. Knowing that it's a man's world, Maupassant shows the unmarried woman facing untold social hardships with courage and resolve. She has few rights but many responsibilities. Often, and incredibly, she is able to pick herself up and move on.

If only she could prevail under shame's harsh regime. The pregnant servant girl in "Histoire vraie" is told she must leave her bachelor employer—this story's narrator and the man who impregnates her—to marry another man he has paid off. Beaten by her new husband and abused by her mother-in-law, she pleads with the bachelor to take her back. He will not, and she and her child will die of grief and neglect. After listening silently to this narrator's cynical yarn, his friend and listener seems just as unmoved: "Tout ce que vous voudrez, mais des femmes comme ça, il n'en faut pas" (*Contes et nouvelles I*, 462). The narrator too has no remorse, no qualms, no second thoughts; he only regrets that the sham husband will now inherit from their deal. Maupassant is brutally direct when he writes of his own kind. The affluent bachelor living in Paris or in a country château would seem to be a rare breed of amoral rascal, attuned to his pleasures and mired in self-absorbed indifference—especially to the women he seduces and abandons. These educated, enlightened men have little in the way of a code or conscience. Interestingly, in one harrowing story after another, Maupassant points the finger at many of his own—bachelors all—who wreck other lives and, in doing so, help undermine the fragile social contract.

ENTRE GARÇONS: A ROGUES' GALLERY

While many of Maupassant's single female characters are harried but decent human beings, unmarried men are invariably less than noble. In a wide catalog of unmarried male characters, the reader observes men who are sensual without scruples, who operate unchecked in a man's world. A valet in the short story "Madame Baptiste" repeatedly rapes the eleven-year-old daughter of his employers, while she will be forever shunned by her village—"[une] petite fille...marquée d'infamie, isolée, sans camarade, à peine embrassée par les grandes personnes, qui auraient cru se tacher les lèvres en touchant son front" (*Contes et nouvelles I*, 655). Yet most of Maupassant's bachelor rogues are not servants; they are men of Maupassant's own class, worldview and intellectual gifts. In many ways, they are smart but failed human beings, men who fall prey to weakness and sloth. They are also subject to their private demons, and invariably come up short. Indeed, many of Maupassant's affluent and unmarried male characters seem rather worse off for the wear.

In the short story "La Petite Roque," the central figure is not the eponymous adolescent girl who ends up raped and killed in the woods, but her assailant. Mayor Renardet, the mayor of tiny Roüy-le-Tors, is a forty-year-old man of solitary strolls and strong, sensual appetites. The mayor's surname, Renardet, or "little fox," is an indication that he operates like the fox in a fairy tale— with stealth and cunning. As a widower, he is overwhelmed by lust when he happens upon little Roque; he forces himself on the girl

and, amid her screams and his panic, strangles her to death. “La Petite Roque” becomes a horrible tale shot through with a psychologist’s clinical notations: Maupassant describes Mayor Renardet as the village Hercules—“un gros et grand homme, lourd et rouge, fort comme un boeuf” (*Contes et nouvelles* II, 621)—who becomes unhinged after a significant period of social and sexual isolation. When the mayor cracks, he perpetrates an unspeakable crime. Yet Guy de Maupassant analyzes the mayor’s acts in ways both moral and scientific. The latter concerns the power of the male sex drive, for Renardet, “dans l’affolement d’une ivresse irrésistible, dans une espèce de tempête sensuelle emportant sa raison” (641), has joined the ranks of rapists and murderers. Early on in the story, Maupassant had foreshadowed both the mayor’s psychological stress and his human frailty: In spite of his high position in the village, Renardet suffers the heartrending isolation of a widower, with a lack of female prospects to match his age and elevated social condition. When little Roque’s crumpled body turns up along a riverbank, the investigating doctor, Labarbe, profiles the unknown killer. He is probably a stranger and a vagabond—and, with “the appearance of a smile,” the doctor identifies the assailant to be a celibate male: “[S]ans femme. N’ayant ni bon souper ni bon gîte, il s’est procuré le reste. On ne sait pas ce qu’il y a d’hommes sur la terre capable d’un forfait à un moment donné” (624).

Such is the only motive imaginable from a physician who knows more about the human condition than do most people. Maupassant ennobles the doctor and emphasizes his professional and analytical edge—“ancien chirurgien militaire, qui passait pour très capable dans les environs” (622). And so Renardet, *sans femme*, is the victim of an

unnatural life. With no sexual outlet whatsoever, no man is capable of reining in his sexual nature. After the mayor rapes and murders, he becomes tortured with guilt. He keeps imagining the young girl's face at the time he was assaulting her, and ultimately he can't face another dawn. Taking his own life becomes the only way to expurgate the violent crimes of rape and murder. It is Maupassant's moral and virtuous solution.

Maupassant claims that if little Roque did not directly entice Renardet, she attracted him *malgré elle*. It was Nature in all her cruelty, "comme si une fée impure eût fait apparaître devant lui cet être troublant et trop jeune, cette petite 'Vénus paysanne' née dans les bouillons du ruisselet" (638). Little Roque is none other than the virginal ingénue of Maupassant's earlier and sensuous poem "Vénus rustique," the earthy young girl who didn't know of her propensity to irritate—and be crushed by—the powerful male instinct. "La Petite Roque" has cautionary tale written all over it. It is a rather less cryptic version of Charles Perrault's "Le Petit Chaperon rouge," the classic fairy tale from his 1697 collection *Contes de ma mère l'Oye*. In that story, the lone wolf prowls the woods until he stumbles upon a distracted Little Red Ridinghood. But whereas Perrault targeted a reading audience of noble young girls, Maupassant's moral message in "La Petite Roque" is for mature audiences. For Maupassant was also a moralist. His message here is for the wolves, the inveterate loners on the prowl. Mayor Renardet tried, and valiantly, to live the lie—celibacy—but his efforts have resolved themselves horribly.

His lie is certainly antithetical to the banter of Maupassant's male characters in the short story "Les Tombales." As a forty-year-old bachelor narrator holds forth before four other men, it is apparent that all of them pursue an active sex life in Paris. For these

“hommes du monde mûrs,” the company of women is a given. “On a toujours un vague désir de faire une visite à une jolie femme quelconque,” the narrator allows. “On choisit dans sa galerie, on les compare dans sa pensée, on pèse l’intérêt qu’elles vous inspirent, le charme qu’elles vous imposent” (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 1249). In “Les Tombales,” the bachelor narrator had met a cunning young woman who seeks out her lovers in the cemetery, feigning grief so as to reel in an unsuspecting gentleman. Even if such women have ulterior motives, and “elles vous enlèvent toute envie de visites” (1239), for the narrator of “Les Tombales” they are indispensable.

Maupassant extols the well-balanced bachelor for his robust sexuality. His harsh judgment for the Renardets of this world is pointed: Celibacy and asceticism work nothing but evil into the male psyche. Food, camaraderie, sexual comfort—these are the basic needs of the successful man. And how the worldly, successful gentlemen of “Les Tombales” would pity Mayor Renardet! Maupassant offers a view of sexuality that is at home in the parlors of *la sociabilité masculine*. In the all-male parlor in “Le Verrou,” in which four “garçons endurcis” talk of sex and sexual adventures, women are the necessary adhesive for psychic health and well-roundedness, and the default setting of Maupassant’s sexual politics: “A force de mépriser les femmes, ils ne pensaient qu’à elles, ne vivaient que pour elles, tendaient vers elles tous les efforts, tous les désirs” (*Contes et nouvelles I*, 490). An active life, in the company of women, comes up constantly in Maupassant’s fiction. Men who manage the instinctual are contrasted with the ones who do not (and who will be paid back in kind by Nature).

In Guy de Maupassant's correspondence with Gustave Flaubert, their letters frequently recall the masculine politics of both "Les Tombales" and "Le Verrou." In one letter, when twenty-eight-year-old Guy complains of women with the same quips and asides of the *garçons* in "Le Verrou," Flaubert responds like a tough schoolmaster: "Vous vous plaignez du cul des femmes qui est monotone. Il y a un remède bien simple, c'est de ne pas vous en servir" (*Correspondance Flaubert-Maupassant* 59, Aug. 15, 1878). The back-and-forth teasing and braggadocio by Guy and his mentor firmly underscore the impossibility of the celibate life, an unwonted existence in the self-possessed masculinity of the late nineteenth-century male elite. Maupassant, like Flaubert, promotes a vigorous male sexuality and warns against the foibles of a dull and abstemious bachelorhood. In his stories, however, Maupassant goes one better, stressing that a thoughtful and enlightened strain of libertinage is his preferred model.

Though Maupassant writes about married men, his fictional male characters are just as likely to be unmarried, never-married, or soon-to-be-unmarried. Mayor Renardet may have denied himself, but the wise bachelor of an older generation than the mayor would never contemplate such a life. In "Le Marquis de Fumerol," the narrator is Roger de Tourneville, a member of a *cercle masculin* who delights in recounting the final days of his maternal uncle, the aged Fumerol. The marquis is an old libertine whose servant has summoned his very proper family to his deathbed. They are stunned to find two ladies-in-waiting, his "bonnes amies," who appear to be prostitutes. The old man, nearing death, still cuts a strikingly handsome figure: "très beau, très solennel, très chic, ce vieux viveur" (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 809). Maupassant's tragicomic touches reflect his own

view of a meddling society, as the young Roger accedes to the freethinking marquis' demand to expel the Catholic priest who had dropped by to offer extreme unction. While the old man's two female "friends" noisily munch omelets near the deathbed, it is stubborn bachelor rebellion to the bitter end, as the two women sit by his armchair, "pour le protéger contre les entreprises criminelles de la Famille et de la Religion" (811).

Maupassant, like Flaubert, took a few potshots at this bourgeois monster with two heads. The family and the Church worked in tandem to impose marital "order" on everybody. Marriage deadened a woman's soul just as domesticity softened up her husband. It was a nasty business, almost a church-state conspiracy. The Marquis de Fumerol had lived his life at many removes from his sister's conventional *ménage*. The couple are thoroughly put out with Fumerol, but their young son Roger will take the side of his uncle. The priest is sent packing, and a stock Protestant pastor—dull and dingy in his Calvinist frock—follows suit. After the two hawkers of Religion are cast out of the marquis' bachelor temple, Roger even gives the female hangers-on their walking papers (the two aren't "good" prostitutes but parasites). Ever the *frondeur*, Maupassant takes up his pen as editorialist-polemicist against social pressures, this time those imposed on the unmarried man. In "Le Marquis de Fumerol," the confirmed bachelor is an atheist and a devotee of eighteenth-century Enlightenment values, so his libertine worldview lends a rare dose of probity. Like Guy, who was all of the foregoing, the marquis chose to live apart—keeping a distance from family and colleagues and tolerating no intrusions until his final hour. Only now does the marquis deign to follow family protocol.

Conventional mores are inimical to the Maupassantian bachelor's free will, and the intelligent bachelor deals with them only *in extremis*.

This is a proper bachelorhood. On the other hand, unmarried men who enjoyed the sanction and respect of conventional society are offered up again and again as misguided, perverted, or worse. In the novel *Une vie*, the abbé Tolbiac dons the robes of the Roman Church; yet if he is the spiritual shepherd of the local flock, he is also the greatest anti-social threat to his community. As the abbot comes across a dog giving birth to her litter, he is moved to attack and crush them one by one. "Et il acheva, d'un talon forcené, le corps saignant qui remouait encore au milieu des nouveau-nés piaulants" (*Romans*, 141). Troyat suggests that the priest is so hermetically sealed away from nature that nature becomes his sworn adversary: "Il manifeste une horreur morbide pour les exigences de la nature" (Troyat, 116). The celibate man at war with nature becomes a public enemy; Mayor Renardet and the abbé Tolbiac, both with respected positions in their communities, have refused their deepest natures and become monsters. Worse than marriage and domesticity for men is the absence of an ongoing male sexuality. This can only undermine and destroy the human soul. To be both human—and humane—is to acknowledge that one is a sensual being. For all the respect Renardet and Tolbiac have garnered in the world, they do harm to it.

If Maupassant sees sex as salubrious, necessary, and the natural exercise of one's humanness, there is also still one basic rule: it is consensual. This is actually classical libertinage at its core, with men and women in control of their sexual nature. It is never imposed on others at will.

MORALITY AU MASCULIN

Mayor Renardet's haunting images of little Roque are the wages of the unnatural life. Never mind that the mayor is, like Maupassant and like the Marquis de Fumerol, an intelligent freethinker intellectually marked by the eighteenth century: "Il [Renardet] gardait pour toute croyance une vague philosophie faite de toutes les idées des encyclopédistes du siècle dernier" (*Contes et nouvelles* II, 641). Despite a reasoned mind, he was unable to square it with his needs, and "sa vie devint intolérable" (643). To observe Maupassant's bachelor characters is to recall Maupassant's philosophical and libertine education. From the tortured mayor to the dying marquis, these are all men of Maupassant's eighteenth-century temperament. Somehow, though, many of them have misunderstood and misapplied the writings of the old *philosophes*. Freedom also belongs to the adolescent little Roque, who was certainly robbed of hers at the hands of an "enlightened" killer. And Maupassant, ever the editorialist, reminds male readers that women remain free people.

Maupassant showcases members of a privileged male class who were somehow acculturated to behave as opportunistic sexual predators. But to be considered all the while in the lives of such men are their female victims—human beings all, who were made invisible in their suffering. The cramped misery of the sex worker is not the worst horror of the short story "L'Armoire." In this jolting tale (again told by a male narrator before an educated male social circle), a prostitute's twelve-year-old son must hide in her clothes closet just feet away from where his mother plies her trade. On discovering

the boy, the narrator says he could not go through with the tryst—as the prostitute adamantly defended herself as a mother: “Qu’est-ce que tu veux?” she asked him. “Je ne gagne pas assez pour le mettre en pension, moi. Il faut bien que je le garde” (*Contes et nouvelles* II, 407). The bachelor narrator fled the scene in horror.

Again, the reader has entered the domain of the Maupassantian morality tale, for if male sexual privilege is a given, so are the foul effects of sex on the cheap. Violence and abuse of women *and* children are rampant in Maupassant’s erotic tales, and the soulless perpetrators come in for a good drubbing. More striking is the notion of rape as a prosaic male right. “Un fils” is Maupassant’s disturbing evocation of rape as exploitation by dint of socioeconomic class. In the story, one of the Académie Française’s elderly *immortels* recounts his rape of a Breton chambermaid when he was still in his mid-twenties. He had run into the young girl, who spoke no French, in a hallway and had thrown her into his room on a whim. He assaulted her after a silent struggle. “Elle me regardait affolée...n’osant pas crier de peur d’un scandale, d’être chassée sans doute par ses maîtres d’abord, et peut-être par son père ensuite” (*Contes et nouvelles* I, 419). She returns to his room later, emotionally spent and pleading for his leniency. She remains with him there until he grows bored and eventually abandons her. But the chambermaid becomes pregnant, giving birth to a son who will grow up mentally handicapped. Once the narrator discovers years later that he has fathered the boy (now a drunken stable hand), he is shattered. “Et je partais le coeur broyé, après avoir laissé à l’aubergiste quelque argent pour adoucir l’existence de son valet” (424).

But the conscience of contemporaneous male entitlement will not be moved in

“Un fils.” The narrator’s friend, an old senator who has listened silently to the *immortel*’s story, comments wistfully: “C’est bon vraiment d’avoir vingt-cinq ans, et même de faire des enfants comme ça” (425). If Maupassant had divorced himself from this sexual code, he knew that many in his late nineteenth-century bachelor realm had not. He was aware that the wild and frenetic eroticism championed by some of his peers entails a tragic dimension that is out of the purview of the French courts. Who are the ones to reform such behavior? The marauding men themselves. Maupassant speaks the language of Sade’s “good” libertine in the fifth act of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*: “Jamais un acte de possession ne peut être exercé sur un être libre” (*Oeuvres complètes*, 5th dialogue, 113). Although Maupassant’s moral rebuke might fall on deaf ears, like those of the fictional senator, the writer aims to teach a lesson to the emancipated elite. These short stories should be approached as disturbing *contes moraux*, as Maupassant sees sexuality as good but subject to moral restraint. Male sexual instinct is never a party to slavery and torture.

In fact, sexuality without constraints has catastrophic effects. The short story “L’Ermite” is one melodramatic example, and it makes its own devastating point. In the story, some young men are keen to meet an intelligent old hermit who has sworn himself to social isolation after years as a *viveur*. The hermit becomes the narrator of his own “sinistre aventure”: he had renounced dissolute bachelor ways after bedding a saucy *fille du peuple* two times. When he casually asked her about the portrait of a man on her mantel, the girl replied that it is of the father she never knew. On closer inspection, the narrator discovers it is his portrait; he remembers his earlier liaison with this girl’s mother

(whom he had abandoned). Facing incest with his own daughter, eternal abstinence becomes the narrator's self-imposed punishment: He retires to a hovel in the South of France.

“L’Ermitage,” like “Un fils” and “L’Armoire,” is meant to shock, but whom? These horrid episodes can be read as stories for gentlemen. Introduced by single men in the domain of a masculine social circle, they are to be taken as frank revelations of sexual excess. Maupassant fully acknowledges the sordid and the squalid in his milieu, and he questions the values of his late nineteenth-century male intelligentsia. If high-born Jeanne is raped on her wedding night—“Voilà donc ce qu’il appelle être sa femme,” she cries to herself. “C’est cela! c’est cela!” (*Romans*, 48)—how much worse is it for women of the struggling classes, habitually harassed or assaulted with an even crueler indifference? Just as the drunken and mentally defective stable hand in “Un fils” is the result of rape, so, it turns out, is the timid young boy who spends hours in his mother’s clothes closet in “L’Armoire.” As each story begins on a light-hearted note, amid male braggadocio and guffaws in a smoky drawing room, the narrator shifts to a tone ever more earnest and grim until it gives way to horror and despair. Compared to his beloved morality tale *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Maupassant’s short stories operate as *faits divers*—smaller, more compact expositions of moral turpitude and its consequences. Like Laclos, Maupassant renders a judgment that is harsh and final. And throughout Maupassant’s fiction, never is his judgment harsher than when it is directed toward the privileged, literate and enlightened bachelor.

MARITAL MISERY AND THE ADULTEROUS WIFE

Maupassant's married couples have marital relations—and therein lies the problem. Such a preprogrammed regimen cannot fit the nature of the human animal, he believes, and imposed monogamy is the recipe for disaster. Adultery is one remedy, but it is more suited to the young and attractive. For the married couple after a certain age, a brash creativity must replace infidelity: in “Au bois,” an older couple are arrested after they make love in the open countryside. (They are let off by the mayor of the nearby town with only a mild rebuke.) This middle-aged woman jump-starting her marital relations seems logical to Maupassant, but desperate times can require more desperate measures. After all, Maupassant admits, the bourgeois century has wrought a poor selection of available men to marry. In “La Confidence,” the Marquise de Rennedon derides her mercantile century for its paucity of quality men. “Tous les hommes, dans notre monde, sont des palefreniers ou des banquiers; ils n'aiment que les chevaux et l'argent, et s'ils aiment les femmes, c'est à la façon des chevaux, pour les montrer dans leur salon comme on montre au bois une paire d'alezans” (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 526). Husbands are nothing but “mannequins” nowadays, she adds, for they have been denatured by the times. Wives must be more pro-active than in the past, and la Rennedon certainly is in the story “Sauvée.” Her tiresome husband, caught in flagrante with the pretty female domestic la Rennedon had hired as irresistible bait, now faces an expensive divorce.

For Maupassant, too, a married woman with a lover is as natural and right as a

husband who takes a mistress. And the male lover must be ready to sacrifice as much as any long-suffering mistress. Adulterous devotion is a two-way street. In “Étrennes,” the wife of “[un] homme du monde” tells her lover that her husband is cruel and violent. Although the lover pleads for her patience and reminds her of her unimpeachable reputation as a married lady, he soon gets over his hesitation and vows to abandon friends and family to be with her. Only then does this married woman come clean and admit her ruse: her tale of an abusive husband was all talk—she is perfectly willing to continue their double life; she just wanted to ascertain his code of honor. The lover offers up a speech on the Maupassantian code, praising this married woman’s sacrifice: “Elle donne tout, son corps, son âme, son honneur, sa vie, parce qu’elle a prévu toutes les misères, tous les dangers...c’est pour cela qu’elle est respectable dans son infidélité conjugale” (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 873). Women often accommodate family and society to remain in both, so it is fair and just that they be able to seek a respite from marriage. Maupassant had himself been the swain of married women like Hermine Lecomte du Noüy, and he reveled in the lover’s outlaw image. But even outlaws are duty-bound, and “Étrennes” is a Maupassantian exhortation for men to be honorable “third wheels.” Adultery is only good when it works, and it works when the parties outperform the married couple in patience and devotion. This code of honor also bears fruit for the honorable male: women will find a secure place in the adulterous relationship, encounter less stress with their legal bonds, and save their energy for the extralegal ones.

It is all a question of morality, and Maupassant was no stranger to a moral code. For one thing—and hardly the case with other bachelors he knew—he is reported to have

taken responsibility for his *ménage* with Joséphine Litzelmann, supporting her and their children until his death. But ethics would seem to pertain to adultery as well—for legal and extralegal participant alike, and for both sexes. Maupassant was quite willing to remind the reader that some married women in adulterous relationships stray from his honor code. In the aptly named story “Cri d’alarme,” Maupassant’s narrator receives a letter from a virtuous *garçon* whose affair with an unscrupulous married woman has gone sour. After she became tipsy with him one afternoon, she revealed details that showed her to be two-faced and utterly vile. The young man rages in his letter: “Bien que garçon, et résolu à rester garçon, je me sentis tout à coup l’âme d’un mari devant cette imprudente confidence. Je me sentis l’ami, l’allié, le frère de tous ces hommes confiants et qui sont, sinon volés, du moins fraudés par tous ces écumeurs de corsages” (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 842). The bachelor lover in the story “Misti: Journal d’un garçon” similarly allows that noble and decent husbands do exist. “J’ai encore un faible, c’est d’aimer les maris de mes maîtresses....J’ai soin, si je romps avec la femme, de ne pas rompre avec l’époux. Je me suis fait ainsi mes meilleurs amis” (*Contes et nouvelles I*, 1153).

The bachelor in the story “Rouerie,” a minister of foreign affairs, has taken up with a married woman who soon announces that she is pregnant with his child. The bachelor contributes money for the maintenance of his “son,” only to discover that the story is a hoax. The lovely lady is promptly dumped, but not before justifying herself: “Croyez-vous qu’une pauvre petite bourgeoise de rien du tout comme moi [l]’aurait retenu...si elle ne lui en avait pas donné un peu à garder?” (*Contes et nouvelles I*, 678). Even when Maupassant affectionately mocks women, he refuses to scorn or pity them.

Too often finding themselves in dire straits in what is a man's world, women scramble to improve their lot any way they can.

More often than not in Maupassant's world, however, women remain woefully disadvantaged in marriage, even with the greater degree of financial security in it. Still, they are typically subject to egocentric husbands who rule the roost. The outwardly benign gentleman farmer in "Première neige" dismisses his wife's plea to purchase a heating stove after four brutal winters on his Norman estate. He relents only when her lungs fail and she has shipped off to the South of France to recover. But her illness is, unbeknown to him, a terminal one. This story that begins as a pastoral yarn becomes a tale of wife abuse, which Maupassant analyzes slowly and deftly: how she indulged a man she had married to please her parents, how he shared his hunting experiences but paid little mind to anything she said or did. In the late nineteenth century, a husband controls his wife's destiny. He can legally refuse her not only a heating stove but anything else she wants or needs. Did his wife expose herself to the cold to gain a stove or to contract illness and flee her bad marriage? Whatever the reason, now she is happy to die: "Ce sera fini pour elle, fini pour toujours....Elle sourit, et respire tant qu'elle peut, de ses poumons malades...et elle songe" (*Contes et nouvelles I*, 1095).

Men can put off marriage, as did the husband in "Ma femme" who recounts to his male *cercle* the circumstances of his shotgun wedding long ago. He thought he would remain a lifelong bachelor, but after a night of drinking he stumbled into a girl's bedroom at his inn. The girl's father, catching him in sticky circumstances, demands a duel or the man's hand for his daughter. The bachelor soon finds himself in a church and later the

marital chamber. He now has full control of an attractive girl he has never met (“j’étais le maître maintenant”; *Contes et nouvelles* I, 664), and the marriage, for him, has turned out better than most. Women, on the other hand, make out poorly in this marriage “lottery,” as the writer labels it (I, 665); there are few happy endings for women, who often find themselves with husbands whom they revile. The poor Marquise de Renedon might be a comical (even vaudevillian) character, but in “La Confidence” she is miserable nonetheless, totally in despair each time she must face her conjugal duty. “Comme ça me faisait une vraie révolution de le voir entrer chez moi en chemise et en caleçon,” she says (*Contes et nouvelles* II, 527). As the physician-narrator in “Une ruse” puts it, too many wives experience a maddening physical routine—“tous les dégoûts du mariage, qui n’est, suivant un homme illustre, qu’un échange de mauvaises humeurs pendant le jour et de mauvaises odeurs pendant la nuit” (*Contes et nouvelles* I, 560). Maupassant’s take on married men’s inadequate attention to their bodies and personal habits can be harsh and “naturalistic” (he was in fact known to be rather *soigné*), and he bemoans the attractive woman who oftentimes marries down in the physical sense. Another unfortunate wife is the protagonist of “Madame Parisse,” a pretty woman married to “un de ces petits hommes à bedaine et à jambes courtes, qui trottent menu dans une culotte toujours trop large” (II, 705). Even more than men, women are driven to unfaithfulness to save themselves. For Madame Parisse, a one-night stand with a military officer garrisoned in her village will be life’s unique diversion for this woman of impeccable Victorian morals. Maupassant describes an older and still-beautiful Madame Parisse haunting the streets of her village like a ghost, daydreaming about her once-in-a-lifetime brush with romance.

In “Une ruse,” the physician-narrator who had decried the institution of marriage has helped a wife remove the corpse of her lover from her home (he apparently had a heart attack in her bed). They speedily extract the man’s body from the woman’s bedroom and conceal any hint of impropriety before the distraught woman’s bourgeois husband returns from his *cercle*. Whereas another writer’s dénouement here might have been sniggering or flippant, Maupassant’s becomes a loving and moving tribute:

[E]lle s’empara violemment du peigne, et elle rajusta la chevelure avec douceur, comme si elle l’eût caressée. Elle refit la raie, brossa la barbe, puis roula lentement les moustaches sur son doigt, ainsi qu’elle avait coutume de le faire...[elle] regarda longuement et désespérément cette face morte qui ne lui sourirait plus;...elle l’étreignit à pleins bras, en l’embrassant avec fureur. Ses baisers tombaient....Puis, s’approchant de l’oreille...elle répéta, dix fois de suite, d’une voix déchirante: “Adieu, chéri.” (*Contes et nouvelles* I, 563-564)

For Maupassant, romantic love often intrudes on marriage from the outside; it rarely comes to flower within it. Adultery, like a panacea for the age, rescues the badly married but vital woman so that she can finally know true love. Maupassant is not unwilling to sermonize about this either. In “Jadis,” a young girl recounts a news item to her grandmother, a “coeur de femme née encore au grand siècle gallant” (*Contes et nouvelles* I, 183). According to the report, a ruthless wife has horribly burned the face

and eyes of her husband's mistress. And if revenge wasn't sweet enough, the wife is acquitted by the courts. But the eighteenth-century grandma who has listened intently to this tale is outraged. Marriage, she reminds the girl, is just a legal institution; love is quite another matter. When the granddaughter still comes to the defense of marriage ("On ne peut aimer qu'une fois"; I, 183), this sends her grandmother over the edge. "Vous êtes devenus une race de vilains, une race du commun. Depuis la Révolution le monde n'est plus reconnaissable" (I, 183-184). In the end, the young girl holds fast to her deluded romantic ideal of unsullied matrimony, while the old lady assures her she will be a miserable woman one day. For Maupassant, these two women are stand-ins for what he saw as the diametrically opposed mores of the libertine and bourgeois centuries. For him, it is the latter era that is sick and benighted.

If adultery is more conducive to love than is marriage, Maupassant's thoughtful nineteenth-century married woman regrets her lost years with a wretched husband. Unfortunately, she also has time to digest and dissect her bad marriage—as does Jeanne toward the end of *Une vie* (1883). Maupassant leaves Jeanne sometime in mid-century, as she takes stock of her many disappointments and disillusion in the bleak comfort of an early nineteenth-century *petite noblesse*. Even Jeanne's beloved "Poulet," her only child, has left her to make a new life for himself in America. Her most cherished bond in the world has loosened his ties to her and moved on.

Likewise, Maupassant's short stories of the 1880s show many married women of a more affluent class in this heightened stage of critical analysis. Their lives, dark and desolate to the core, become a woman's self-meditation on her limited options and how

to avoid unspeakable misery. Thus does the widowed Madame de Jadelle make a deal with her prospective second husband in “La Fenêtre”: She won’t tie the knot a second time without a trial run to see if they are compatible. The appraisal of marriage she voices openly to the perplexed man is a Maupassantian harangue: “La plupart des mariages deviennent rageux et criminels, parce qu’on ne se connaît pas assez en s’accouplant. Il suffit d’un rien...pour faire deux ennemis irréconciliables, acharnés et enchaînés l’un à l’autre jusqu’à la mort” (*Contes et nouvelles I*, 897). Her suitor will seduce Madame de Jadelle’s chambermaid, fail the test and hastily decamp on Jadelle’s orders. Here, a smart, experienced woman knows the legal constraints placed upon her by her own century, and tries to swing things her way. She has no intention of letting this calculating scamp gain control of her property—which he surely will once the marriage papers are signed.

Maupassant is fully behind Madame de Jadelle, a woman who gets wise to her future husband. She is more than aware that he would be in control of everything, including the hired female help—much as Julien does in *Une vie*. Knowledgeable about their century’s harsh sexual order, nineteenth-century women must attack it from within, and many of Maupassant’s fictional women become both practiced and astute.

The story “L’Inutile Beauté” is a case history of the oppressive and the retrograde. The wealthy Comtesse de Mascaret is a woman who is still beautiful despite having given birth to seven children by age thirty. She accuses her husband of keeping her pregnant and unattractive out of jealousy and spite. The count retorts by reminding her of his rights: “Mais vous êtes à moi, je suis le maître...votre maître...je puis exiger de vous ce que je voudrai, quand je voudrai...et j’ai la loi...pour moi” (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 1209).

Informing him that one of the children is not his—her unique revenge, she says, for his abuse—he leaves for several years of rage for him and freedom for her. But the countess' confession is a lie. When the Comte de Mascaret realizes this, he comes away with a brand-new attitude toward his wife: he respects her. For Maupassant respects women; he acknowledges their unique burden in the natural world and sees their very worth degraded by society's harsh demands on the female sex. Maupassant vents his moral outrage about this in the character of a young bachelor, Roger de Salins, who has long admired the countess from afar. "Les pauvres femmes!" Salins tells his friend. "C'est toute la jeunesse, toute la beauté, toute l'espérance de succès, tout l'idéal poétique de la vie brillante, qu'on sacrifie à cette abominable loi de la reproduction qui fait de la femme normale une simple machine à pondre des êtres" (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 1216).

THE WAGES OF INDEPENDENCE

Who has imposed this draconian vestige of Old Testament law on the modern wife? The modern husband, who still demands the obedience spelled out in Genesis: "[And] he shall be your master" (NEB, Gen 3:16). While Guy de Maupassant is sometimes considered to be the macho, anti-feminist writer par excellence (mocking everything from women's professional accomplishments to late-century rumblings about their right to vote), his readers and critics might do well to go beyond the man's male bluster and female conquests and enter the social and sexual ethics of his fiction. There, the weak and ridiculous female and the enlightened, superior male are not so easy to find. Maupassant

typically bucks literary cliché, stereotype and *dicton*. What is on offer instead is his scorn for a stark, biblical arrangement for women, a dramatic prescription for female tribulation he sees folded into the pages of the Code Civil itself: marriage becomes unworkable or ruinous, trial or *supplice*. Marriage for a wife too often embodies the burdens of the Old Testament command, a command reflected in France's Code Civil since the beginning of the bourgeois century. As for the unmarried life, it does require women to live by their wits or perish, but such at-risk experiences in life often help make her resilient. Many women, he notes, can and do learn to thrive on their own.

Maupassant's men are typically less fortunate, and some hardy and vigorous males will collapse in abject self-destruction. Men can destroy themselves and others, and sex is often the catalyst and subtext. And men destroy with their jealousy and rigid intolerance. In "L'Attente," a wealthy widow has lived for two people—a beloved son by her late husband and a married man she adores. She had fought tooth and nail against this extramarital relationship, she tells her attorney: "Croyez-vous, monsieur, qu'on puisse toujours résister, toujours lutter, toujours refuser ce qu'on demande avec des prières, des supplications, des larmes, des paroles affolantes...? Quelle force il faudrait, quel renoncement au bonheur, quelle abnégation, et même quel égoïsme d'honnêteté, n'est-il pas vrai?" (*Contes et nouvelles* I, 1061). Once her son discovers as a young man the true nature of her mother's relationship with someone he had admired, he walks out on her forever. Finally renouncing her lover, the woman awaits both her son and her own death. If Victorian values of marital honor are eviscerated in "L'Attente," this woman's sacrifice—she had refused to accept her lover until her widowhood—is still not enough

to please a self-centered masculine world. The attorney-narrator recounts his story, as usual, “entre hommes, après dîner, dans le fumoir” (1059), for his male social circle needed to hear it. He tells the men as well that he had left the widow’s home “en pleurant comme une bête” (1064).

Maupassant takes the same tack in “La Veillée”: a brother and sister, a magistrate and a nun, are crying uncontrollably at the wake of the elderly mother they both adored. Soon, however, the old woman’s adulterous love letters are discovered in a desk—written by a man who was not their father: “Mon adorée, je t’aime à en perdre la tête. Je sens tes lèvres sous les miennes... ta chair sous ma chair. Je t’aime, je t’aime!” (*Contes et nouvelles* I, 448). The scene is snatched right out of *Une vie*, in which Petite Mère’s adulterous affair is similarly revealed to Jeanne. (“J’ai passé une nuit de délire vainement,” writes the lover to Jeanne’s mother. “J’avais ton corps dans mes bras, ta bouche sous mes lèvres, tes yeux sous mes yeux”; *Romans*, 125.) But whereas Jeanne is depressed by her discovery, the grown children in “L’Attente” and “La Veillée” are turned upside down by theirs. Here, romantic love outside of marriage was deeper and, sadly, more faithful than the love from one’s own children. If the two siblings in “La Veillée”—a coldly utilitarian man of state and a piously shallow woman of the church—are a tad overbaked, the symbolism is intended. In a kind of church-state show of hypocrisy, two grown children can renounce a lifelong devotion to their mother and leave her wake in a muffled rage.

Yet the very vows of marriage can poison the parent-child relationship, as happens in the story “Humble drame.” An elderly widow who has raised her son almost

single-handedly is closed out of his life forever when he marries a jealous Englishwoman, who loosens the man's spiritual bonds to his mother. "Oh!...oh!...monsieur," cries the old lady to the narrator, "Si vous saviez...dans quelle détresse je vis...dans quelle détresse" (*Contes et nouvelles I*, 1018). Here, it is not women who "marry" into a new family who become strangers to their loved ones; rather, it is men weakened and softened by the routine comforts of marriage who forget their previous lives and loves, and who easily learn to turn their backs on them for all time.

From an early age, the lowly rank of women in the bourgeois century make them vulnerable—to their husbands, children, in-laws and strangers but also to the vagaries of life. In much of Maupassant's fiction, marriage is not the security blanket promised by society and the state, but an institution that leads to a new degree of precariousness and exposure. Thus do many of the writer's married female characters develop a unique *système*—of patience, prescience, guile, even theater—in order to arrive at the next level of security or emancipation. His single female characters, on the other hand, are on their own, and therefrom derives their apprenticeship with strength. Maupassant's fictional males, on the other hand, are rarely under this intensity of psychological stress. Their self-centeredness alone can be their final undoing. The bachelor often does not see through the haze that is his freedom, for personal freedom will never be an issue; it is not always real or palpable to one who is truly free. But the physical and moral pressures on womanhood in Maupassant's fiction seem to descend from the sky with destructive precision, and at a moment's notice.

Maupassant's fictional female protagonists appear as grand as his male characters seem frail and flawed. Maupassant's writings present of litany of female travails at a certain point in the late nineteenth century, a time when the expectations on womanhood seem to be more regulated and calibrated than in the century before or hence. If this is an illusion, it is still true that in novels like *Une vie* and in countless short stories, the writer presents a world of untold pain and challenge for women. Women are often the ones tested, and Maupassant—the man's man—knows they have seen and carried life's harshest burdens.

Chapter V. MAUPASSANT: THE WRITER AS SENSITIVE “NEW MAN”

Guy de Maupassant wrote from a special vantage point: that of the libertine bachelor whose eroticism was awakened early. Well into his adult life, Maupassant never had to abandon his youthful, freewheeling and sensual trajectory; his celebrity and financial independence saw to that. This allowed him not simply to put off marriage but to forsake it entirely, just as his mentor Gustave Flaubert had. And thus Flaubert’s pursuits of hard work, leisure and erotic adventures could remain his principal pursuits as well.

Maupassant’s sensualism was fortified and accentuated all the more by the company he kept in his emancipated world. In a sense, he was “anchored” there—comfortably ensconced in his bachelor dwellings (a Paris apartment, an estate in Normandy and even a pied-à-terre for the *ménage libre* he temporarily set up with Joséphine Litzelmann), constantly moving among an eclectic range of free spirits and bourgeois movers and shakers.

In fundamental ways, however, Maupassant could be seen as a “new man,” the bourgeois masculine archetype described by George Mosse. In *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, Mosse distills the type of Victorian masculinity that came to define the nineteenth-century male of the middle and upper classes, and one that is recognized to this day in “typical” masculine traits. Mosse speaks of “the construction of a masculine stereotype” (23)—a male ideal assimilated to the English gentleman and influenced by the German gymnastics movement of the eighteenth century. This male figure—strong and ramrod straight, cool and disciplined, hygienic and fit—is also honorable and morally upright: “The male body, beauty, and morals are linked once

more; together they symbolize ‘manly courage’ and a ‘manly spirit.’ ” (41).

Such a figure, with the physical bearing of the arms man and the sangfroid of the duelist, was in stark contrast to the contemporaneous image of woman: more likened to a child, it was all emotionality, subordination and lack of physical control (75). Marie-Henriette Faillie’s book on the Code Civil in Balzac (cited in chapter 4 of this dissertation) underscores how married women’s lives were pointedly circumscribed in the Code of 1828. And Robert Nye, in *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France*, notes that the original Code Civil of 1804 had mandated an infantilized image for all adult women: they “could not serve as guardians or legal witnesses; in the manner of perpetual minors they were subject to the authority of the father, husband, or, lacking those, an officer of the court” (Nye, 55). This image was embraced well into the Third Republic, and by many of Maupassant’s generation. It is conspicuous in his short story “Le Verrou”: Four die-hard bachelors convene at a regular get-together, the “dîner du Célibat,” where embroidered on their ceremonial tablecloth is an old adage in Latin, *Mulier, perpetuus infans*. Below is a citation from Vigny: “La femme, enfant malade et douze fois impure” (*Contes et nouvelles* I, 490).

While Mosse does describe a parallel “new woman” emerging in Europe and North America after World War I—independent, educated, more assertive—she has been associated (and unfavorably) with the so-called crisis in masculinity, mocked in the post-war media as a “flapper” or a “garçonne” (Mosse, 147). Yet if many Frenchmen were traumatized by the evolving status of women during the long Third Republic, the mostly bourgeois women’s movement in France hadn’t rocked many boats. Nye, pointing

to a study by Karen Offen, says these feminists advocated primarily for the family, for maternity and for supplemental benefits (Nye, 81).^{*} They also fought for the right of divorce (Copley, 113). Yet amid fears of falling demography, “[French] feminists were rather less insistent as a group than their English or American counterparts on the need of women to obtain full legal and political equality.... This early orientation was more or less unique in Western feminist movements” (Nye, 82). This wasn’t the feminism of 1848, which had been influenced by more radical voices. In fin-de-siècle France, it was still a *new man’s* world.

Without exception, Maupassant’s biographers have ascribed to him this sober, dispassionate, new masculinity, one that cut a figure of quasi-military virtue and repressed emotions. This was certainly the image the mature Maupassant broadcast to the world, and in *Maupassant, le clandestin*, Frébourg’s physical description reads more like an appraisal: “A trente ans, Maupassant ressemble à un sous-officier s’engageant dans la coloniale. Moustache flamboyante, carrure large, teint cuivré, biceps viril, cheveux épais, regard noir, tendre. Une force comprimée dans un corps de taille moyenne” (115). The cliché of Maupassant as a narcissist and a slacker is tempered by this countervailing image: an earnest man of honor and of order.

^{*} Citing Offen, “Depopulation, Nationalism and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France,” in *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 648-676.

AN HONORABLE BACHELOR

In much of continental Europe during the bourgeois century, fencing and dueling remained time-honored marks of cultivated manliness. Both were part of the total package of the new man. Nye devotes two chapters of *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor* to the arms man and duelist. During previous centuries the elite domain of a small aristocracy, the honorable sword (and now the pistol) had been democratized in the nineteenth and embraced by many professional men along with the new *sociabilité masculine*. If dueling itself had largely disappeared from the culture of Britain in the bourgeois century (Nye, 27), it held its own in France. Forbidden by the Roman Catholic church, dueling was more than tolerated by the Third Republic, especially “after 1880 or so [when] prosecutions were exceptional [and] duelers no longer felt obliged to cross into Belgium or Switzerland to conduct their affairs of honor” (Nye, 174-175). French and Italian duels, overwhelmingly fought with a sword, were more frequent but less fatal than those of traditionally martial Germany, where the pistol was often preferred (184).

Like other affluent French men of letters during the Third Republic, Maupassant was a practiced man of arms. He did not like the duel, but he acknowledged its traditional place (Lanoux, 266). Maupassant kept arms in his home: Edmond de Goncourt famously recorded how the female companion of Catulle Mendès had put her hands on Guy’s revolver, firing off shots in a fit of rage against both men during an erotic encounter (*Journal*, Nov. 17, 1892). Maupassant had at least one close encounter with the duel: biographers recount his 1886 challenge to the novelist and chronicler Jean Lorrain after

Lorrain created the strutting Beaufrilan, a withering caricature of Guy in the novel *Très Russe* (Troyat 161; Lerner, 204). Lorrain quickly disavowed any link between his character and Guy, and the duel was off. It was all in the service of honor, just as honor compelled Lorrain to join the small group of mourners for Maupassant's funeral in 1893.

For Guy and for many other literary men, there was duty in the duel, in its utility to settle perceived slander, that confirmed and completed the new man's dignity. At stake was not merely personal honor but, in an era of professions, a man's social standing. The editor, publisher and decadent writer Mendès was "a practiced combatant," and in the 1890s he challenged everyone from the theater director Aurélien-Marie Lugné Poë to the literary critic Jules Huret (Nye, 123 and 213). Another of Guy's friends and collaborators, Harry Alis, died in a duel in 1895, barely two years after Maupassant's death (Frébourg, 121). He was the publisher who in 1879 had championed Guy's poem "Au bord de l'eau," restoring suggestive verses Mendès had seen fit to excise three years earlier in *La République des Lettres* and running an unexpurgated version in *La Revue Moderne et Naturaliste*. (It earned Guy his lawsuit in Étampes.) Dueling would stubbornly endure among the French professional elites until after the Great War, says Mosse: into a new century, it was still a great equalizer in the new man's quest for dignity and respect (22).

Troyat attributes the core traits of the arms man to Maupassant via Guy's own dashing male prototype in the novella *Yvette*: "un homme à la mode, Jean de Servigny, qui, comme Maupassant, affectionne 'le gymnase, l'escrime, les douches et l'étuve' " (136). There is indeed much of Maupassant in Servigny; he embodies not just hygiene, but the new man's code of honor, detachment and *maîtrise de soi*. This is what one might

call masculine grace; devoid of excessive joy or sorrow, it was in stark juxtaposition to woman's perceived lack of control. Even feminine "charm" was deigned to be emotional and to appeal to the emotions. Such was the triumph of a new male-female social dichotomy considered almost synonymous with the bourgeois century, a social regime embossed with its own peculiar protocols: "[T]he standards for the ideal of manliness had been put in place and its countertype [woman] designated against the background of the rise of bourgeois society with its demands, hopes and fears....The manly stereotype remained astonishingly constant from its beginnings into recent times" (Mosse 1, 76).

One significant social protocol for the affluent new man was marriage, a locus of manliness, duty and discipline. Meanwhile, the mid- and late-century French physicians, cultural activists and demographers had sounded an alarm—self-righteously but also cogently—against vice, demographic decline and the threat to social order. Those who saw the need to get France's moral house in order (discussed in chapter 1) had others to blame for contemporaneous social scourges and a national scandal: falling birthrates. The French bachelor, often painted as an affluent, idle Parisian without duties and responsibilities, proved an easy scapegoat. For one thing, he could be portrayed as "outside" the family, even though he was typically part of one and less an outsider than a bogeyman contemporary moralists could inveigh against. Borie seizes on this irony in *Le Célibataire français*: "[T]out est famille!...le célibataire y appartient sans conteste: elle est son origine. Alors? Pas de drame? Aucun. C'est bien le propre du célibataire de n'être pas un personnage tragique: il fait des manières, il a ses manies, mais il ne fait pas d'histoires. Simplement, il n'a plus nulle part de territoire à lui" (Borie, 114). The

Marquis de Fumerol, Maupassant's wizened bachelor character, was the opposite of course—he *was* a man of drama. Having taken leave of his entire family, the marquis only summoned them back to his deathbed. Maupassant was no Fumerol. True, Guy had staked out his *territoire à lui*, his double life, but he spent considerable energy—and time—taking care of his immediate family, especially his mother. From 1885 on, says Lanoux, “[Maupassant] entretient pour la plus grande part une Laure qui n’est pas une femme à se contenter de la pension maritale. Il aide Hervé dans son installation d’abord, dans la maladie ensuite, et fait vivre sa femme et la petite Simone, gâte ses nombreuses maîtresses, assume les charges de Joséphine Litzelmann et de ses enfants” (Lanoux, 305).

For his married younger brother, Hervé de Maupassant, Guy simply took over. In the fall of 1889, Guy was the only one in the family who could deal with Hervé and his worsening dementia. The symptoms were probably syphilitic in origin, and by then Hervé was “completely unmanageable and a danger to all” (Lerner, 241, 245). Guy, himself beginning to suffer pains from tertiary syphilis, had Hervé placed in an asylum late that year against his brother's pleadings. It was heart-wrenching for Guy, the only family member present, “a pathetic scene that must have had an enormous impact on such a sensitive soul and devoted family man as Guy and would not have failed to have left its mark on his declining health” (245). Four years later, upon Guy's death, the writer's entire estate went to Hervé's wife and their only child, Simone. And he had already made support arrangements for Joséphine Litzelmann and her three children. Indeed, the unmarried man vilified by some of the first French sociologists was just as likely to be a family man in every sense—save one.

The bourgeois bohemian Maupassant strayed from the new order in this one sense: he never married. If the new male of the affluent professions was now fully invested in the domestic family, a slavish adherence to the expectations of a bourgeois man was not for Maupassant. Throughout the 1880s, his wealth and celebrity allowed him to make his own happy home. He worked assiduously but independently of others, and his free time was his own. Yet Albert-Marie Schmidt in *Maupassant par lui-même* stresses the bourgeois over the bohemian, the midnight oil over the *grasse matinée*: “Il répugne aux excès de table...[II] se lève chaque jour vers huit heures...écrit jusqu’à onze heures, puis...se livre à une minutieuse toilette, au cours de laquelle il s’inonde d’eaux de senteur” (Schmidt, 100-101). For all that has been written about Maupassant as an “étalon modèle littéraire”—Jean Lorrain’s snide allusion to Guy in *Très Russe*—Maupassant was serious about work, his family and his public image. His indispensable contacts among elite publishers and formidable *salonnières* were reason alone to tend his image. These were mostly a bourgeois lot—even the Princesse Mathilde observed a certain *grand bourgeois* quietude. It is true that Maupassant was known in the salon as something of a cutup and a braggart: Lanoux crystallizes his *espièglerie* as “l’aspect m’as-tu-vu et mufle, le cynisme et la provocation. Maupassant a tout intérêt à choquer” (266). Guy certainly did enjoy being in the spotlight; in the salon he was ever the consummate bachelor narrator spinning yarns, reveling in the raised eyebrow or the uncomfortable gaze. Goncourt had written venomously of Maupassant’s grinning public persona. Guy, holding forth before a stunned audience of guests in Marie Kann’s salon, recounted the time he had helped remove the bodies of drowning victims from the Seine:

[II] parle longuement de ses *repêchages* en Seine et de son goût pour les *macchabées* du fleuve parisien, à cause des laideurs originales qu'ils revêtent. Il s'étend, il s'appuie sur...la dégustation de ces cadavres, avec la préméditation—c'est très sensible—d'agir sur la cervelle des jeunes femmes qui sont là et d'y caser sa personne de narrateur, qui fait peur, dans un coin de cauchemar. (*Journal*, Dec. 7, 1885)

Guy de Maupassant was now famous, of course, and indulged by his hostesses in the 1880s as much as he had been a decade earlier by his famous mentors and his solicitous parents. So Maupassant sparred with this quietude, carrying his gleeful bohemian mischief into the bourgeois decorum of the salon.

When he desired intimacy, however—the people he wanted with him, not just around him—he fled to the un-bourgeois disorder of Paris. His real intimates were free-living folks, socially and also philosophically, who gave little heed to bourgeois society—rejecting it outright (as Gisèle d'Estoc did from the age of seventeen) or never being a part of it to begin with (as did the country girl Joséphine Litzelmann). Maupassant carefully enlisted these precincts from the frazzled margins of fin-de-siècle society for his fiction, taking his characters from the social crucible of his own life. It wasn't enough to pit France's comfortable classes against the proletariat (which he did); he had known the Norman peasantry intimately from his childhood at Étretat, and since

his Paris days he had frequented the spit-and-polish bourgeoisie right alongside the bohemian rabble.

All of them, he knew, lived full and complete lives: all could be sundered by their ordeals or take them on with courage and aplomb. Thus, in Maupassant's fiction, a shameless harlot of the eponymous novella *Boule de Suif* could be a fervent *citoyenne* and patriot; a good wife and loving mother, Madame Roland, could give birth to Jean, the son fathered by a man other than her husband in *Pierre et Jean*; and Petite-mère, the beloved mother and grandmother in *Une vie*, could stash away love letters from a secret adulterous affair, the only true love of her life. Moreover, one could be most comfortably situated in life and yet be bereft of human love and empathy: Maupassant's ogres are male, privileged and self-absorbed: not only the homicidal mayor in "La Petite Roque" but the haughty country squire who kills his wife through sheer neglect in "Première neige." These two stories offer stark examples of the subtle use of literary means to polemical ends: scolding anyone and everyone with the caustic intent of a bourgeois demographer-moralist. For a writer often sorted and boxed into the cool, dispassionate realist-naturalist camp, Maupassant delved into the socioeconomic era of the new man, never afraid to exhort, to discredit or to harangue.

Through the lens of his time—and also his bachelorhood—this can be stunning. For within his Balzacian sweep of social commentary, Maupassant presents a full menu of fin-de-siècle social and economic milieux in France. And if the writer sees the human animal as the only creature who insists on immoral choices, he nonetheless stakes out a rule-bound moral high ground over and over in his fiction. Here is where Maupassant's

“big picture” of human existence and human injustice departs from realism and naturalism and enters another dimension. In *The Culture of Western Europe*, George Mosse mentions Georg Lukács’s vehement rejection of naturalism in literature, taking the naturalist writer to task for being “isolated from the totality of life” (207). Mosse emphasizes Lukács’s point that human actions and their consequences can’t and mustn’t be limited to social environment, with personal struggles tritely observed *in situ*. Such an approach closes out the other currents of life that typically, even naturally, intervene: positive human connections with family members, with neighbors, or with events themselves. In Maupassant’s “totality of life,” *l’aubaine* is as consequential as *la guigne*.

Some of this can go missing in Zola: Gervaise’s fragile socioeconomic environment hastens her moral downfall, helping to poison the well for her daughter Nana. The Goncourts’ kindly Germinie sinks into the realm of vice and regret until she can’t find her way back to the level-headed woman she had once been. The erotic, too, is enmeshed as these women crash and burn; as a life force, sex can have a hand in the soul’s destruction. Maupassant, however, employs a more sweeping lens to seize a totality of life. Amid considerable environmental cruelty in Maupassant’s world—one’s birth, upbringing and milieu are not for naught in his fiction—environment is not so intractable that it must overwhelm every other aspect of life. Amid Maupassant’s Flaubertian pessimism are forces, noble ones, that can be mustered. Among those forces are self-analysis and self-correction. Moreover, sexuality is as salutary a force as it is baneful. Maupassant typically marshals the erotic, charging it with positive as well as negative energy.

The reader is also struck by something else in Maupassant's fictional universe: its moral underpinnings and its moral choices. These challenge the socially privileged and the unconventional alike. Maupassant is a bachelor and yet he reproves the heartless bachelor, punishes the entitled gentleman who has the face but not the soul of the honorable man. And there is little room in his vision for amorality either; to remove oneself from a moral dilemma is immoral. Lanoux is one biographer who speaks of Maupassant's "littérature de responsabilité": "[il] n'hésite pas à dire que ce sont les cyniques, les jouisseurs, ses personnages des contes mondains, en somme, et lui-même dans la mesure où il leur ressemble, qui créent la pègre" (129, emphasis mine).

Maupassant knew the lofty state of bourgeois and bachelor entitlement and how it could easily become corrupted, immoral, harmful.

THE BACHELOR AND HIS PROGENY

Looking out from a photograph insert in Lanoux's *Maupassant le Bel-Ami* is a face shot captioned "le fils de Maupassant, Lucien Litzelmann." It is a photo of a smiling older man with a striking resemblance to Guy de Maupassant. Most biographers do not dispute that Maupassant entered into a common-law marriage with Joséphine Litzelmann and that the couple had three children together between 1883 and 1887. Lucien was only ten years old when Maupassant died in 1893. Lanoux writes that, on December 11, 1903, the Paris newspaper *L'Éclair* claimed the paternity in an unsigned exposé on page one, and it quoted Lucien Litzelmann as insisting that Guy supported the household as it moved from Montargis to Clermont-Ferrand and on to Sens (Lanoux, 249-250). The newspaper

L'Oeuvre followed soon with its own account (Frébourg, 156). Lanoux's book is a good decade older than that of Lerner, who is seemingly unconvinced of the story: he claims "there is no evidence" of the paternity, that it derives from "oral tradition in the area" around Sens where the family lived, and that "given the busy and varied life Maupassant led, the whole episode—sensational as it may be—seems most unlikely" (Lerner, 237). Frébourg writes, quite dismissively, of Maupassant's "alleged son" (156). Yet most biographers generally accept the Litzelmann story as a given; the background notes by Louis Forestier in the Pléiade edition of Maupassant's complete works assume that the children were his. Troyat gives the story credence, too. In his book, the Litzelmanns were simply a chapter in Maupassant's peripatetic life: although Guy's relationship with Joséphine Litzelmann was long over, his sense of responsibility to her did not end. "Il n'a pas de remords, puisqu'il aide financièrement cette femme qui n'est plus rien pour lui" (Troyat, 223). Biographers from Lerner to Lanoux to Frébourg link the Litzelmanns to Maupassant's recurring theme of *la bâtardise*. Out-of-wedlock births were a fin-de-siècle reality, "aussi répandue à l'époque que la syphilis" (Frébourg, 156). Married men had had a role, too: Léon Richer, a fierce campaigner for divorce in the 1870s, believed that marital separation laws in France led affluent married men to set up extramarital households, thus compounding illegitimacy (Copley, 115).

Bachelors and their bastards are not necessarily abject and naturalistic in Maupassant's worldview. In the short story "Mouche," five hardy bachelor *canotiers* share the same female companion for friendship and, it would appear, sex. The five men are autobiographically identified as none other than Maupassant's fellow bachelor

Maquereaux: N'a-qu'un-Oeil, Petit Bleu, La Tôque, Tomahawk and Joseph Prunier (the respective nicknames of Albert de Joinville, Léon Fontaine, Robert Pinchon, Henry Brainne and Guy himself). Mouche becomes pregnant by one of them—it could be any of the five—and throughout her term they treat her lovingly. When the child finally arrives, but stillborn, Maupassant finishes the tale with his often-cited quip (a punch line is more like it): “Console-toi, petite Mouche, console-toi, nous t'en ferons un autre” (*Contes et nouvelles* II, 1178). The irregular morals of these characters make this story something of a *conte scabreux* for its time, but Maupassant, the sizzling salon narrator, jumps at his chance to unsettle his reader—and to impart a message that is wholesome and moral: the five bachelors have put up a common front of protection just when the unmarried Mouche is powerless and vulnerable.

At the same time, the author sermonizes his reader on the perfidy of bourgeois sexual monogamy and hypocrisy: the *canotier* N'a-qu'un-Oeil had thought Mouche was his only love, but she has willingly cheated on him. Maupassant has been here before: his teasingly salacious poem “Une conquête” skewered another hapless *canotier* who loved another lady of the Seine with multiple partners. In the poem, she had been unapologetic: “La drôlesse sourit / l'appela. —Lui restait stupide: Elle reprit / “Ça, tu me prenais, nigaud, pour une Sainte?” (*Vers*, li 129-132). Mouche, though, is a more sweet-tempered version of the hard-living, absinthe-swilling *drôlesse* of Maupassant's poem. Yet in “Mouche,” as in “Une conquête,” the narrator takes the free woman's side, castigating his century and taking its measure: “Quelle est la courtisane en vogue qui n'a pas une douzaine d'amants, et quel est celui de ces amants assez bête pour l'ignorer?” (II, 1173).

Again, this is the author's libertine message founded on Sade's egalitarian premise in male-female relations. Nonetheless, it is out of the question that the pregnant Mouche could or should ever be abandoned, whether by the jealous N'a-qu'un-Oeil or the other could-be fathers. Someone has fathered this child, and the child shall have a father. If this story's hook is comedic and its erotic philosophy Sadean, the narrative does not conceal the author's intent: his routinely firm position on social ethics and responsibility. The five lads are steadfast and loyal, and Maupassant emphasizes that they do not constitute any bachelor *pègre*. And there is a subtext: a child born out of wedlock is neither accidental nor expendable. In *Le Piège, Étude thématique et structurale de l'oeuvre de Maupassant*, Micheline Besnard-Coursodon has emphasized the naturalistic traps in Maupassant's "obsessive" erotic universe. One of the neatest traps, she avers, is the one woman sets for man: *l'amour-piège*. Ensnaring him with the sexual allurements that nature has allotted her, the female makes the male a progenitor in spite of himself: "à la femme perverse qui trompe et ensorcelle, s'ajoute la nature-piège maléfique" (86). Nature's dirty little ruse becomes procreation's triumph—a concept right out of Schopenhauer, one of Maupassant's philosophical masters. In "The Metaphysics of the Love of the Sexes," from *The World as Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer calls the sexual impulse "a voluptuous illusion," one which "appears as a malevolent demon that strives to pervert, confuse and overthrow everything" (book 3, chap. 44, 339).

As for the bastard child in Maupassant's world, however, Besnard-Coursodon reduces him to the throwaway result of this natural trap—and, literally, to a footnote:

“[L]’enfant illégitime intéresse Maupassant dans la mesure où il n’est pas voulu par les parents, et où il représente à la fois le hasard des fécondations et la loi impitoyable de la nature. Le bâtard est donc une conséquence du piège que son existence dénonce.” (75, note 70)

The accidental child is certainly an inconvenience for most of Maupassant’s fictional progenitors, for whom the out-of-wedlock child—their child—is something like a subspecies. Yet Maupassant doesn’t relegate these bastard children to the small type; they are life-size, human in their essence and worthy in their need. For him, the bastard can’t be passed by or passed over.

At the very end of the story “L’Enfant,” Berthe promises her new husband that she will help raise the child he had sired with his mistress, now deceased. The novel *Une vie* ends with Jeanne vowing to bring up her grandson after Poulet flees to a new life in America and his wife has died. More important, Julien’s own bastard son with Rosalie will be provided for through Petit-père’s largesse. Not only does Julien discover that Rosalie won’t be banished, he learns that some common property will be transferred to the boy, thus reducing Julien’s total fortune. He explodes with anger in front of his father-in-law and Jeanne: “Vingt mille francs! Vingt mille francs pour un bâtard!” (*Romans*, 103).

Where are the fathers in all this? Maupassant never censures these men’s lack of sexual restraint—it is commonplace, he opines, even banal—but he rejects the contempt

they show for their own progeny. In the selflessness shown by both Berthe and Jeanne, he shines a harsh light on the selfish man. For Maupassant, sexuality's life-giving powers cannot be cavalierly dismissed with a wink. The anguish of the abandoned mother and the economic lot of her child are never remote from his narrative. In "Un fils," the boy who is probably the result of rape lives a miserable life as an adult stable boy, sleeping with the animals. The naturalistic wretchedness of his plight is only partly mediated when the old man from the Académie Française, his father, leaves money for his material support. It is a token of the most basic human justice that cannot begin to meet the father's moral burden. In addition, the father's behavior is morally clarified: in "Un fils," the running commentary between the two old men is striking. The *immortel* and his friend, a senator, recount the underside of male entitlement, casual encounters and unwanted children. Both of them have perpetuated this underside. The *immortel* himself comments that too many men have sired children they will never know about, evoking the harrowing range of bachelor privilege:

De dix-huit à quarante ans, enfin, en faisant entrer en ligne les rencontres passagères, les contacts d'une heure, on peut admettre que nous avons eu des rapports avec deux ou trois cents femmes....Les femmes...*publiques* possèdent un ou deux enfants dont elles ignorent le père, enfants attrapés dans le hasard de leurs étreintes à dix ou vingt francs....Qui sont les générateurs? —Vous, —moi, —nous tous, les hommes dits *comme il faut* ! Ce sont les

résultats de nos joyeux dîners d'amis, de nos soirs de gaieté, de ces heures
où notre chair contente nous pousse aux accouplements d'aventure.

(*Contes et nouvelles I*, 417)

The two old men's discussion of rape as a trivial affair is a précis of the bachelor credo during Maupassant's era, one he now exposes to his readers. Above all, Maupassant scolds the bachelor for not only rejecting his children but for allowing these little ones to grow up hard and to become hard themselves. The *immortel's* words are obviously Maupassant's: "Les voleurs, rôdeurs, tous les misérables, enfin sont nos enfants" (I, 417). Maupassant is a bold *donneur de leçons*; while he acknowledges a pleasure principle in human sexuality, his stories underscore the sheer power of the erotic and the creation of human life. This creates a dilemma but also a duty for the male progenitor. In "Un fils" Maupassant takes a sociological approach that ranges beyond Besnard-Coursodon's thematic trope of a "déterminisme vitaliste" (82), the purely organic effect of chance fertilizations on the world as discussed openly by the two men in "Un fils." On the contrary, Maupassant seems to reject a merely "naturalistic" determinism here, for he takes on—in emotional language—the responsibilities of men to the offspring of their casual couplings; such men, he says, are also blind to the bitterness and hardship they visit upon their unknown children. Maupassant treats none of this with the documentary cold shoulder of naturalism, but preaches to men he knows, taking a very hard line. His stories emphasize the casual relationships of the male elite and rarely the *unions libres* of the workingman—the type of common-law household that Maupassant himself had supported. Instead, the author rebukes his affluent bachelors for exploiting and

discarding their women and children after ephemeral encounters of seduction, prostitution and sexual assault. Maupassant urges a code of honor and responsibility for his affluent elite of predatory aristocrats, landowners and professional men.

The two older men in “Un fils” are representations of this shameless elite and its amoral credo. Both men have operated as scoundrels, for both describe past adventures of an opportunistic kind as routine, even pleasant. The one who probably fathered a child through a violent encounter with a girl from a rural milieu was able to flee back to his higher station, his honor and self-respect intact. Maupassant sees this as iniquitous, a moral breach, and one that harms all of society. Maupassant presents his remedy in order to save the children born of such behavior—“nos enfants”—and to bolster the social contract: it is nothing less than a call to personal sacrifice.

Much more salutary is the fate of the child in “L’Enfant.” Jacques Bourdillère is a bachelor who reluctantly but finally finds a woman he can love. When this “sensuel et viveur” brings home the baby he fathered with an old flame, now dead, the new Madame Bourdillère, Berthe, lovingly accepts the child into her home. Her husband will now be a good father to his son. Personal sacrifice, accepted initially by Berthe in her husband’s stead, must override convenience in the case of the bachelor and his offspring. *La bâtardise*, Troyat believes, was “avec l’eau, le soleil et l’amour, une des obsessions majeures de Maupassant” (227). “L’Enfant,” he adds, was so well received in 1882 that it was adapted ten years later as a play called *Musotte* by the dramatist Jacques Normand. In the play, Bourdillère’s older mistress is transformed into a loveable *grisette* named Musotte. Maupassant was called in to help rework some scenes—proving to be a

demanding scold at the same time his health was beginning its first serious decline. Guy's imperious supervision went forward nonetheless, and the performances in 1891 were a critical success: "Le public mondain est sous le charme" (227).

Callous abandonment, by either or both parents, is apparent in another story, "L'Abandonné," in which the *fils naturel* is the result of an adulterous affair between Madame de Cadour and M. d'Apreval, two well-born lovers married to other people. They couldn't acknowledge the boy, Pierre, and arranged for him to farm a small piece of land they had purchased for him. When the two finally visit Pierre for the first time, he is a crude Norman peasant and family man of forty. His lack of any culture is a severe blow to both of his parents, who did not raise him in their midst. The title of the story says it all: it is Maupassant's firm judgment, and sentence, that grudging if generous financial support for an illegitimate child—but with no intimate contact—is immoral and comes at a stiff moral price. The *honnête femme* who gave birth to this simpleton is shattered, and Maupassant indicts her in her own words: "Oh! Comme je me sens coupable vis-à-vis de lui! Doit-on craindre le monde en ce cas-là? J'aurais dû tout quitter, et le suivre, l'élever, l'aimer...Oh! ces pauvres êtres abandonnés, comme ils doivent haïr leurs mères!" (*Contes et nouvelles* II, 228, emphasis mine).

But the abandonment by the father is a sin as well—Maupassant refuses to lay all blame at this mother's doorstep; it is shared. M. d'Apreval had taken his leave of the entire matter and refers to Pierre as "cet homme" (II, 225). He also offers a seamless string of excuses: "J'ai une femme et des enfants, comme vous avez un mari," and stresses the heavy weight of "l'opinion" (II, 226). The couple's market talk with

Pierre's sullen wife and daughter underlines the social and cultural gulf between them, and it anticipates the arrival of the disheveled wretch who is Pierre. Later, M. d'Apréval's hectoring manner with Madame de Cadour rings hollow: he had spent good money on this farm, "C'est une dot que n'ont pas tous les enfants de bourgeois" (II, 232). For Maupassant, this *honnête homme* is feckless and heartless: that his responsibility is to be measured in francs and *sous* is indecent. But the father who shirks his duty will be paid in kind. In the story "Duchoux," the never-married Baron de Mordiane had seduced a married lady during her husband's long absence in the colonies. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son, whom Mordiane has supported into adulthood: "[il] avait payé d'abord les mois de nourrice, puis les mois de collège, puis les mois de fête, puis la dot pour un mariage raisonnable" (*Contes et nouvelles* II, 997). The baron also gives in to curiosity and makes a visit to his son, now a rustic *père de famille* in the Midi. The baron's son and grandchildren are uncouth, and yet it is when he sees in them quiet little resemblances to his dead lover of old, a good woman who always called him "mon aimé," that he will unravel. The baron de Moriane flees back to Paris and to his male *cercle*.

The story "Un parricide," however, is a bastard tale from the other side. If it recalls similar stories, its singular ballast is a grown child's rage and final vengeance. Georges has become a talented local carpenter whose main clients are a bourgeois couple, his real parents. Once Georges meets them and realizes the unspoken relationship, he becomes all too aware of their mendaciousness, their flight from responsibility and from love. Maupassant's first-person account becomes Georges' own life story *en vrac*, retold

before a criminal court. Georges has grown up as the local *bâtard*, a terrible burden in itself, and despite a kindly mother figure (his wet-nurse), his life has been one long humiliation. He follows his parents into the night and murders them, for he sees them as criminals. He tells the court: “Ce crime, c’est contre moi qu’ils l’ont commis. Je fus la victime, eux furent les coupables...Ils devaient m’aimer: ils m’ont rejeté” (*Contes et nouvelles* I, 555). Maupassant describes Georges as quite the republican firebrand, his recent political activism stoked in part by his hard life. Maupassant’s anti-republican politics are clearly inserted here—the harsh lot of the socially dispossessed may contribute to the rage (and political activism) of the contemporaneous populist rabble. In the end, the natural father’s lack of affection for Georges, even upbraiding him for not appreciating his material advantages, precipitated the murders. Georges’ final words to the court are those of Maupassant: that the rejection of one’s own child, in his childhood, is as grave a moral offense as any: “Ils ont accompli contre moi l’acte le plus inhumain, le plus infâme, le plus monstrueux qu’on puisse accomplir contre un être” (I, 556).

In both “L’Abandonné” and “Un parricide,” the two sets of parents never embrace their child. Both sons have grown up without authentic bonds to their natural parents and are cast adrift. They are permanently lost. Yet other parents, much less affluent and privileged, are more generous of spirit, and Maupassant lauds them. “Histoire d’une fille de ferme,” for instance, pinpoints a rural environment harsher than in the previous stories. And, too, the child’s illiterate and unmarried mother is at the center of the narrative. The peasant Rose has just lost her own mother and has given birth to a shiftless young farmhand’s baby within days of the burial. After she leaves the baby with some country

folk, she must return to her job at the farm and to the attentions of her middle-aged employer. He is a forty-five-year-old widower with some stubborn notions of male privilege. Not knowing about Rose's previous relationship or her child, he proposes marriage but rapes Rose before she's made her decision. Once he does learn about the child, though, he is transformed. The sexual violence here is distressing, indelibly linked to Maupassant's youthful observations of the harsh realities of Norman peasant life. But also significant is the rural social structure itself: this child is desired and needed, and in "Histoire d'une fille de ferme," he gains a home and a solid routine. And he will become socialized—he will be part of an intimate web of social connections. This is more than a roof over one's head: if the *bâtard* can be raised among his own, he might grow up to be decent. The widower, unbeknown to himself perhaps, takes on a nurturing role. As did Maupassant, notes Lanoux. Among the accounts and interviews that flowed forth in the early twentieth century, Guy's middle child, Lucienne Litzelmann, recalled a real father whose affection was sincere: "Il me gâtait. Il me choyait...il nous aimait" (Lanoux, 250).

Sir Francis Galton, in *English Men of Science: Their Nature and Nurture* (1874), originated the terms "nature" and "nurture" to distinguish one's heredity (genetics) from one's social conditioning (environment):

Nature is all that man brings with himself into the world; nurture is every influence from without that affects him after his birth...[W]hen nature and nurture compete for supremacy on equal terms in the sense to be explained, the former proves the stronger. (12)

Indeed Galton, his first cousin Charles Darwin, and many scientists of Maupassant's era, often imbued with positivism, stressed nature over nurture, science above socialization. Galton was particularly interested in heredity and its effects. In *DNA and Destiny: Nature and Nurture in Human Behavior*, R. Grant Steen notes that in a 1865 article, "Hereditary Talent and Character," Galton "proposed that human society could be improved through 'better breeding' " (35). It was Galton, notes Steen, who later coined the term "eugenics" in *Inquiries into Human Faculty* (1883). In Maupassant's era, the men of science were pursuing "real" science, observable facts. The human "spirit" was to be discounted.

Zolian naturalism and its "experimental" approach were influenced by positivist medical science. Indeed, it was after his readings of medical works—Claude Bernard's *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* and Dr. Lucas' treatise on "degenerate" heredity—that Émile Zola formulated his theory of the pro-active novel. The naturalists saw heredity as central to "nature," restricting "nurture" to social environment or class conditions. It was a political *parti pris* that had little acquaintanceship with sociology or psychology; these two fields, after all, developed in the late nineteenth century (and flourished after the dawn of the twentieth).

Here is where Maupassant breaks with Zola and much of the "bande de Médan." His expansive view of human *nurture* is rather more than just sociological: it allows for family dynamics influenced by parental love, character formation and emulation, even friendship—rather progressive ideas for the decade of the 1880s. Gabriel de Tarde, a fin-de-siècle criminologist and one of the very first sociologists, stressed the importance of emulation in the positive development of the human psyche. In *Les lois sociales: esquisse*

d'une sociologie (1899), Tarde focuses on the indispensable influence and salutary effect of the parent or guardian as a role model.*

In Maupassant's fiction, a mother's protection, a father's love, and a stepmother's decency are not also-rans in the business of nurture; these guardians also transmit something to their charges—character, humanity—that is as crucial as any vagaries of socioeconomic milieu and class. Their example remains powerfully present amid poverty on the farm, or in so-called corrupt environments. Maupassant says the illegitimate child can be made whole through proper nurture—and that a prostitute can be a good person.

YVETTE: LOVE AND HONOR IN THE DEMI-MONDE

Yvette is an odd novella of bachelor privilege, among other things. The voluptuous Marquise Obardi, introduced near the top of the narrative, is not a marquise at all but a courtesan named Octavie Bardin who runs a sumptuous *maison* of sorts, the quintessence of fin-de-siècle glitz and leisure. It's full of Frenchmen and foreigners of noble blood and of the professions, who socialize, gamble and purchase selectively from a diverse array of female company. Madame Obardi's eighteen-year-old daughter, Yvette, lives upstairs.

* He writes: "Let us return, then, to the fundamental social couple...not the couple consisting of a man and woman in love, for this couple, in so far as it is sexual, is a purely vital phenomenon; but rather a couple composed of two persons, of either sex, one of whom exerts a mental influence upon the other. I maintain that the relation between these two persons is the one essential element in the social life...." (G. de Tarde, *Social Laws: An Outline of Sociology*, trans. Howard C. Warren (New York, Macmillan, 1899), p. 39.

She's a naive and innocent girl who's read lots of novels and wants to be the *honnête femme* portrayed in these books—i.e., happily married and respectable. But as the dashing bachelor Jean de Servigny tells his young friend Léon Saval on the way to the place one night, Yvette is destined for no such thing; no nobleman, bourgeois parvenu or workingman would ever take her as his lawful wife. Wholesome or not, she is part of Madame Obardi's demi-monde and won't be welcome in a higher tier. She will end up a courtesan just like her mother.

Maupassant's narrative, which at several points conflates with wry commentary from Servigny, offers interesting moral counterpoints. On the one hand, Maupassant/Servigny opines, Yvette is a fresh innocent growing up in this worldly place, “un merveilleux rejeton d'aventurière, poussé sur le fumier de ce monde-là, comme une plante magnifique nourrie de pourriture” (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 237). He does have a point: Madame Obardi's is a noisy den of thieves and miscreants, where a cross-section of men chat amiably and where more than a few (ten, according to Servigny) want Yvette, each hoping he will be her first. On the other hand, the chivalrous Servigny intends to beat the others to the prize. Not at all the marrying kind, he avows, he will nonetheless “love” Yvette and respect her as his courtesan. Meanwhile, this scatterbrained daughter of a street-smart demi-mondaine must be convinced that her mother's life will make her a happy woman.

Yvette is a piece of propaganda from the start, continuing with Maupassant's editorial line about prostitution's inherent decency as put forth in the earlier novellas *Boule de Suif* and *La Maison Tellier*. In the latter, sex work was “un bon métier” and the

Tellier house was “une ressource” in its Norman village (*Contes et nouvelles I*, 256, 260). In *Yvette*, the well-run Norman brothel has simply been transported to the boulevards of Paris: like the village madam herself, Obardi is also a *fille du peuple* who, through force of character and intelligence, has landed a devoted male clientele. Young Yvette does not grasp it all yet, but with Maupassant/Servigny’s help, she will see the light. For starters, Madame Obardi must give her daughter a proper Maupassantian dressing-down about the alternatives. Yes, she’s a courtesan, she says, but there are far worse fates in life:

Quand on n’est rien qu’une bonne, une pauvre fille avec cinquante francs d’économies, il faut savoir se tirer d’affaire, si on ne veut pas crever dans la peau d’une meurt-de-faim; et il n’y a pas deux moyens pour nous, il n’y en a pas deux, entends-tu, quand on est servante! Nous ne pouvons pas faire fortune, nous, avec des places, ni avec des tripotages de bourse. Nous n’avons rien que notre corps, rien que notre corps. (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 287)

There’s little doubt where things will go from here. Sweet Yvette has inherited her mother’s economic destiny and must realize that it is her own. As another proud courtesan reminds her bachelor client in Maupassant’s story “L’Épingle”: “La misère et moi ne ferons jamais bon ménage” (II, 523). Servigny himself proves to be a dutiful and honorable gentleman, but in a novella that Troyat calls “une histoire douce-amère” (136), a courtesan is still a courtesan and this still remains sex work. To the extent that it is,

Servigny has to level with Yvette, which he does while “proposing” to her at the same time:

“Ma chère petite, il faut prendre son parti des choses les plus pénibles. Je comprends votre douleur, et je vous promets...”

Elle balbutia:

“Vous êtes bon...” (II, 307)

Meanwhile, the other couple in this novella has consummated their love at the same time Servigny is courting Yvette: Servigny’s bachelor friend Saval has taken up with the older Madame Obardi. The lady is utterly smitten, staring out longingly at the boulevards from her bedroom window while murmuring “Je t’aime! Je t’aime!” (II, 274).

Louis Forestier’s backmatter notes in Maupassant’s *Oeuvres complètes* praise the narrative’s descriptive richness—among the novellas, “une des plus étoffées de Maupassant” (II, 1385). Troyat calls *Yvette* “une de ses oeuvres les plus achevées” (136). The detail is certainly there, including Maupassant’s nostalgic description of the wilds of Chatou for Servigny and Yvette’s first unchaperoned outing and visit to the dancing crowds living it up at La Grenouillère tavern.

The novella can rankle, moving as it does (and rather swiftly) from a realm Maupassant refers to as “le temple de la Chair” and “la prostitution dorée” to something of a tale of courtly love. In *Yvette*, the two couples’ gauzy dialogues of mutual adoration serve as a *doux parler*. Here one feels currents and accents described by Moshe Lazar in

his essay “Fin’ Amor,” in *Handbook of the Troubadours*: an “ideology of love, a code of secular ethics, a sinless joy of living” (62). The courtly narrative described by Lazar praised a love outside marriage and was dependent on the troubadours’ unique narrative code: “verbal love games, separations, frustrated sexual expectation, temporary satisfactions and stolen looks and kisses, fear of competing lovers, etc.” (74). Servigny’s courtship of Yvette includes these salient elements. At the Obardi house, Servigny and Saval have taken faux titles of nobility (Servigny is “le duc de Servigny”). Yvette insists on the mischievous nickname “Muscade” for Servigny, and this prepares the reader for a series of verbal jousts. Throughout Servigny’s long project of seduction, young Yvette deftly joins the repartee, encouraging him with the coy airs of the Occitan court lady: “Persévérez, Muscade, soyez dévoué, empressé, soumis, plein de soins, de prévenances, docile à mes moindres caprices, prêt à tout pour me plaire” (II, 253). Being the jealous type, Servigny has already made his inquiries about Yvette’s other suitors: “Or, de qui pouvez-vous être amoureuse?” As he rolls off the names of a Russian prince, a French viscount and an Italian knight—all Obardi regulars—Yvette rejects each one outright for the good Servigny (II, 252).

But is Servigny all that good and honorable? Is he nothing more than a slick opportunist and *dragueur*? Lerner assesses him thus, finding the men in *Yvette* “narcissistic, sex-conscious personalities” who embody “some of the traits of the protagonist of *Bel-Ami*” (201). Yet these two men are not predators, nor does Maupassant present them that way. They are a different male prototype entirely. Although Servigny does boast of his qualities every chance he gets, Maupassant’s narrator lauds this man

behind the slim, elegant and frail carapace. In the novella, Servigny is less a rake than a “new man” of sober habits: “égoïste par principe et généreux par élans, il mangeait ses rentes avec modération et s’amusait avec hygiène” (*Contes et Nouvelles* II, 235). As for Jean’s sidekick, the stolid Léon Saval, he is also quite a commodity: “trop beau...trop fort, il péchait un peu par excès de tout, par excès de qualités” (II, 235, emphasis mine). Thus far, Yvette has been the lady fair—until she and Servigny take their promenade to La Grenouillère. The tavern, she avers, is no place for *honnêtes femmes*, and she seems to have realized that she can’t be one of them. “Vous m’y conduirez, n’est-ce pas, Muscade? Et nous ferons beaucoup de tapage avec les canotiers” (II, 261). The pair later bathe in the Seine, exchanging shy glances but modestly keeping their distance.

Throughout this long courtship, the “duc de Servigny” is never less than attentively *courtois* (“A votre service, mam’zelle”), and he praises his lady’s ruse rather than her beauty: “Je pense que vous êtes une personne de grand sens, de grande pratique, ou, si vous aimez mieux, de grand sens pratique, qui sait fort bien embrouiller son jeu, s’amuser des gens, cacher ses vues, tendre ses fils, et qui attend, sans se presser... l’événement” (II, 279). Before the main event, however, the reader witnesses Yvette’s ultimate moment of distress. She simply won’t accept her meretricious lot in life, and buying up all the vials of chloroform from medicine shops around Paris, she tries to end it all. After inhaling the vials, she nonetheless awakens to Servigny’s smiling face—and another lecture. He promises her that he’ll be loyal and affectionate, better than a bourgeois husband, and that she will be happy.

If this novella about the making of a courtesan affects a loftier idiom, the two bachelors themselves are never less than upright. Respectable and dutiful, both Servigny and Saval can and do patronize the demi-monde. It is a routine part of the affluent bachelor's life, and Madame Obardi both demands and enforces a superior code of behavior. Such is the case as well in a pedestrian village brothel—as Frébourg notes about the Norman madam: “La Maison Tellier régule les mœurs, la température, l’ordre public” (154). For Maupassant, it is the pernicious interference of the state (the police *rafle* in “L’Odyssée d’une fille”) or the invading horde (the vile Prussian officer in “Mademoiselle Fifi”) that bring odium upon prostitution. Maupassant’s men of honor would never think of doing so, for they see prostitution as more than a livelihood; it creates a protected space, an interpersonal sphere, a social oasis.

It is interesting to note that *Yvette* started out as a serialized piece, first in the staid *Figaro* in 1884 and later in *La Vie Populaire*. Although the novella teases and titillates the reader, its ethical and moral parameters are pretty tame, even conformist. For example, Madame Obardi’s world is couched in an exalted, bourgeois-friendly language, a high-flown rhetoric of love, duty and responsibility to others. Also in *Yvette*, Maupassant musters the figure of the likable and honorable man, and the writer’s aim appears to be moral suasion. Servigny and his friend triumph here as decent men and wholesome bachelors—the boys next door—and who is the reader to doubt it? *Yvette* paints a portrait of Maupassant’s kind of woman, but also his kind of man, showing his readers something of himself. In serving up these two sober gentlemen along with a morally upright mother and her well-raised daughter, he ennobles a marginal society that

middle-class men and women are wont to prejudge but might now see differently. In an era where marriage was expected, Maupassant's four never-married protagonists in *Yvette* are morally affirmed, and in no uncertain terms: the men are as decent as the women are respectable.

Yvette is a good example of the rhetorical armor in Maupassant's bachelor worldview—*courtois* and, even within the dodgy demi-monde, comforting and nonthreatening. Appearing one decade into the Third Republic, this novella showcases the gentleman bachelor—Maupassant's offer is really a two-for-one—and the clever, personable woman who steals his heart.

CHRONICLER OF THE BACHELOR COSMOS

Jean de Servigny is an archetype of what Maupassant the new man tries to be at all times: generous and solicitous but disciplined and in control. Maupassant had his issues with the last two: Gisèle d'Estoc was perhaps his undoing; even after their furiously passionate romance ended, he was an emotionally spent man. Frébourg says that the relationship with Estoc was spiritually exhausting. "Gisèle veut le posséder. Elle lui fera des scènes, le traitera de lâche, l'accusera de lui avoir volé une lettre.... Toutes les grandes liaisons de Maupassant n'eurent pas ce flamboiement charnel" (160-161). After he returned personal effects to her, he had to leave Paris to recuperate. Troyat is one biographer who plays down Estoc's *emprise*, though he does concur that Maupassant had become much more vulnerable in love: "Homme de proie dans sa jeunesse, il est devenu la victime de

femmes dans son âge mûr” (246). Besides Estoc—a four-year relationship according to biographers like Lanoux (389-90)—he was emotionally tossed and blown by minor mistresses and correspondents. His mature and vigorous thirties were more and more a time of spiritual *recueillement*, and this is reflected in some sober and sobering short stories.

If *Bel-Ami* was his take on a sly and self-confident bachelor opportunist, Maupassant also wrote about the predatory female and her *amant empressé*. In “Cri d’alarme,” a kind and gentle bachelor is repelled by the moral character of his cynical and married mistress. He is not only overwhelmed by her, he has become her possession. In the story “Les Tombales,” one hoodwinked bachelor after another falls for a wily courtesan’s feigned dramatics in a cemetery as she weeps before the grave of her putative husband. Each man she meets feels her pain, and each takes the poor “widow” in. Her ploy succeeds over and over again, but Maupassant never blames this *femme galante*. Gullibility in these sensitive men is their Achilles’ heel. One courtesan who has definitely learned this is Jeanne de Limours, the gold-digging demi-mondaine who steals a bachelor’s heart in the short story “L’Épingle.” A hairpin is all that a once-affluent man has saved from a long relationship gone wrong. Sure, he had supported the woman, but he was desperately in love. Soon bled to the bone, the man finally saw la Limours packing her bags for gentler climes. Long after she has decamped, Maupassant’s narrator visits the gentleman in distress. From his gloomy exile, the besotted bachelor assesses his financial ruin: “Je possédais quatre millions qu’elle a mangés de son air calme, tranquillement...C’est Manon Lescaut revenue. C’est Manon, qui ne pourrait pas

aimer sans tromper, Manon pour qui l'amour, le plaisir et l'argent ne font qu'un" (*Contes et nouvelles* II, 522-523). The woman had always been unfaithful ("Est-ce que nous sommes mariés?" she sneers), while the bachelor was ever her monogamous stooge. That she once tried to gouge out his eyes with her hairpin is beside the point—he wants her back. He has decided to liquidate his holdings and seek out her company once again.

"L'Épingle" first appeared as a magazine feature in *Gil Blas* in 1885, in the thick of Maupassant's torrid affair with Estoc. The story is a reminder of the dangerous fallout when passion overwhelms reason. As Maupassant's tale moves onward, from comedy to parody, the writer mocks the contemporaneous man about town. Here, an elegant and worldly-wise Parisian bachelor who has dropped the names of aging singers, dead actresses and expiration-dated *filles entretenues* is nothing but an uxorious wretch. The black-hearted Madame de Limours has unleashed as much angst as yearning, and the bachelor was hooked before he knew it. Borie's quip in *Le Célibataire français* finds resonance in Maupassant's bachelor cosmos: "Les femmes qui s'intéressent au célibataire sont en général, non des vieilles filles mais des mangeuses d'hommes (voyez *Là-Bas* de Huysmans)" (176). Unlike Madame Chantelouve, however, Madame de Limours worships only lucre. Yet she is every bit the woman of prey. In Maupassant's story "Cri d'alarme," the bachelor is thoroughly horrified when his lovely married mistress confesses her double-dealing ways. Discovering that she is a fraud who also treats her husband with boundless contempt, he breaks with the lady—but not with the woman's husband. It takes an honorable man to know one: that relationship will survive.

Maupassant had had married lovers, but when he sought prostitutes, he shunned

the *femme entretenue* for the *fille*. In much of his fiction, his bachelor narrators tend to go for simple, levelheaded girls and for relationships with few strings attached. The novella *Les Soeurs Rondoli*, set entirely in Genoa, is a good example. Frébourg has described the Italophile Maupassant's love of Mediterranean lands in general and Italy in particular. Perhaps Guy's lengthiest trip there was a three-month sojourn in Venice, Rome and Naples in early 1885, accompanied by two bachelor friends. Having probably already broken with Joséphine Litzelmann but long involved with Gisèle d'Estoc, this tour of Italy was "une vie de garçons en goguette" and "une noce" (Frébourg, 127). *Les Soeurs Rondoli* evokes this sensuous land, and Lanoux calls attention to autobiographical touches in the short story: The narrator, Pierre, is very much a Maupassant-like "Casanova boulevardier" (Lanoux, 226). *Les Soeurs Rondoli*, actually published a year before Maupassant's bachelor tour, imagines a more intimate idyll. Passing through Genoa with a bachelor chum, Paul, the narrator Pierre meets Francesca, who agrees to keep him company in his hotel during his stay. After Paul finds the loving pair simply unbearable, he leaves them in a huff. Pierre is smitten, but he carelessly leaves town without saying a proper, courteous goodbye to Francesca. Bothered by this, he returns to the port city a year later to look the girl up. Madame Rondoli reports that Francesca is now living in Paris with a successful painter. As consolation, however, she will agree to let her younger daughter, Carlotta, be his companion. The mother has no reservations about this arrangement (she has long lived off her daughters' sex work, her jewelry and clothes tokens of the girls' livelihoods).

In this snapshot of bachelor sex tourism that is *Les Soeurs Rondoli*, there is

intimacy, even constancy, in Pierre's return to Genoa. And he is moved to learn from Madame Rondoli that Francesca wept when he did not show up at her door one last time. In Maupassant's erotics, disrespect in love is to be admonished.

In "Le Verrou," Maupassant's bachelor narrator and *convives* are, like the writer, generous, personable and empathetic. Amid the men's erotic storytelling and their Schopenhauerian analysis of the puerile female (almost a blow-by-blow exposé of Schopenhauer's essay "Of Women"), they admit that they cannot live without women. Their *cercle* has been decimated by marriages and death (where there were fourteen bachelors, only four remain). They nevertheless remain vibrant in their dotage; Maupassant's bachelor isn't prone to pondering a monastery the way Durtal does in *Là-Bas*. Yet there is a bittersweet tension in "Le Verrou," a willingness to concede some vulnerability in the bachelor cosmos. Maupassant addresses this more directly in his bachelor protagonist Bertin's depression in *Fort comme la mort* and in the pitiful character of the poet-chronicler Norbert de Varenne in *Bel-Ami*. The latter tells young Duroy all that he must fear about his later years. Varenne is a sophisticate who had been a womanizer and a man of the boulevards. Yet his long monologue to Duroy becomes a meditation on a certain bachelorhood—a rude interruption in the novel rather than an interpolation. The aging bachelor, cautions Varenne, awaits death in death's own time. He pleads with Duroy to wake up and live his life differently:

Mariez-vous, mon ami, vous ne savez pas ce que c'est que de vivre seul,
à mon âge. La solitude, aujourd'hui, m'emplit d'une angoisse horrible:

la solitude dans le logis, auprès du feu, le soir. Il me semble alors que je suis entouré de dangers vagues, de choses inconnues et terribles....Quand on est vieux, ce serait bon, tout de même, des enfants. (Romans, 301, 302)

Varenne is simply a pitiful man, thinks Duroy, who dismisses the lecture outright. Even though Duroy does eventually leave the bachelor life behind (and on the arm of young Suzanne Walter in a bourgeois marriage), Maupassant doesn't totally buy the gloomy perspective of Varenne, a solitary man. Maupassant seems to acknowledge that youth and success are not enough, but Varenne has let himself become detached from life's intrusive effervescence. As a bachelor, Maupassant was ceaselessly plugged into the world. Like the bachelors convened in "Le Verrou," Maupassant thrived on interaction and connections. The mischievous and spoiled boy never abandoned his overactive life as an adult. Maupassant and his *cercle* are the antithesis of Varenne, a gloomy Baudelairean poet-recluse. But the writer looked deep within himself and into his bachelor milieu. He is convinced that the bachelor—*his* bachelor—lives in society and lives either with it or against it. The bachelor knows all about social bonds and love, which are essential to him, part of his human spirit. The bachelor can evince the sterling qualities of the manly protagonist in *Yvette* or the ignoble egotism of the young gentleman traveler in "Un fils." For Maupassant, the affluent bachelor realm is a diverse and fraught place. Its boundaries are fluid and ill defined, and Maupassant stresses this fluidity. It is in every way a *cosmos*—a universe—of order as well as disorder. It is a

stunning social advantage for him, however, for he has found a bright alternative to marriage in a conventional and stultifying time.

Amid the anti-bachelor rhetoric of his era—more vehement perhaps than at any time before or since—Maupassant also offers a strikingly open and honest view of bachelor transgressions, which he sees as sins. “Sins” is an apt word, even for an agnostic humanist like Maupassant, for he sees grievous offenses perpetrated by more than a few of his own. Totally candid about the bachelor miscreants, he still takes pains to showcase some exemplary men in his vast cosmos. His commentary is often peremptory and rarely detached. His stance on parents and children, men and women, and even pets and their masters is firm, his rhetoric strong but spare. The bachelor is prey to his fears and his vulnerability by dint of his outsider status. But this is someone else’s concept and image. In the real world, the clever bachelor is pro-active and involved as some others don’t have to be. Maupassant insinuates himself into his bachelor narratives. If the erotic is given top billing, it entices (and teaches) the reader about the significance of a basic drive inherent in natural law.

Montesquieu began his work *De l’esprit des lois* (1748) by famously enunciating several *lois naturelles* long considered to be at the core of human existence from its beginning, before human societies, customs and jurisprudence. For human beings, these are essential drives: the need for peace and security; the search for food; and the search for sociability and sex:

D'ailleurs, ils y seroient portés par le plaisir qu'un animal sent à l'approche d'un animal de son espèce. De plus, le charme que les deux sexes s'inspirent par leur différence, augmenteroient ce plaisir; et la prière naturelle qu'ils se font toujours l'un à l'autre, seroit une troisième loi. (*Oeuvres complètes* II, 236)

For Maupassant, the sexual impulse is a natural drive that presents challenges to everyone; it is also a puzzle, part of the joy and burden of living. His erotics—his bachelor erotics to be precise—provide an indelible image of a “natural” but humanistic milieu that takes the reader by surprise. Maupassant brings his reader into a verisimilar bachelor cosmos that might constitute a netherworld to some. But the reader becomes one more among the captive audience in Maupassant’s salon. The writer’s trump card is the contemporary and the topical, and it can be harrowing or uplifting.

It is not for nothing that Guy de Maupassant earned his living as a chronicler at the time of his big success with *Boule de Suif* in 1880. His chronicling life continued well into the 1880s, where he continued to be a kind of lifestyle editor for several Paris papers. A delightful touch in the novel *Bel-Ami* is Duroy’s realization that he is not alone on the staff of his newspaper, *La Vie française*. Here is one time the reader gets an authentic notion of what Maupassant’s parallel métier was: Along with contributions from the feature writer Duroy and from the poet-chronicler Norbert de Varenne are those of “Domino Rose” and “Patte Blanche,” two society ladies who update and digest aspects of *la vie mondaine*, with assorted commentary and opinion. The narrator makes it plain that

these two women do more than simply *parler chiffons*; they deal in ribald innuendo and scandal. Duroy is stunned to learn from his employer's wife, Madame Forestier, that Patte Blanche is in truth a *vicomtesse* of advancing age: "Moi qui voyais, en pensée, une jeune femme comme vous ! C'est ça, Patte Blanche? Ah! elle est bonne! bien bonne!" (*Romans*, 296). Patte Blanche is a chronicler and a very good one, as was Maupassant, who had used a few choice pen names himself: Guy de Valmont, Maufrigneuse and his old nickname from the Maquereaux, Joseph Prunier (Troyat, 72). The name Patte Blanche is telling: the expression "montrer patte blanche" comes from the fables of Aesop and La Fontaine and refers to being properly authorized to gain access to a place. Any chronicler worth his or her salt must get on the inside, and that is a privilege as well as a chore.

Maupassant had to know the world and get on the inside. His readers were to be schooled in the real world, for the chronicler's craft is didactic as much as journalistic. And the writer literally never stopped being a chronicler: Lanoux notes that just months after the publication of *Boule de Suif*, Maupassant was still quite active in this métier, "un journaliste boulevardier...il trousse chronique sur chronique" (213). He never lost his love for the chronicle, and it is at the crux of his fictional pen.

Contemporary Paris was the subject of most of Maupassant's chronicles, and this interest is reflected in a number of short stories set in and around the city. In "Une surprise," Maupassant offers a window into young bachelor life in the Paris of his time: Two affluent young brothers cohabit with two proletarian girls and must hide this *ménage*, which is going on right under the nose of their visiting uncle. Much about Paris

life was beyond the radar of fin-de-siècle conventional bourgeois readers, and they wanted to know what it was. These readers lived in a crackling and momentous time, one with a booming economy, rapid industrialization and no war. This era offered delights to pique everyone's curiosity. If one of Maupassant's novels might be considered a historical novel of sorts (*Une vie* spans the beginning and end of the Restoration and reflects those mores among a Norman *petite noblesse*), in many of his other novels, and in his short stories with few exceptions, the subjects are contemporary. They observe and analyze the way a raconteur might but as a chronicler often does—with spitfire topicality.

The world of the fin-de-siècle social pariah is a major theme of Maupassant's fiction. He would finally pen the topical stories that others only whispered about. *La bâtardise*, a phenomenon of the elite (“Un fils”) just as much as of the struggling classes (“Histoire d’une fille de ferme”), is an important theme in Maupassant's work. Syphilis, the *mal du siècle*, was part of his life and that of his characters' lives (“Le Lit 29”). Prostitution, from the street *grisette* (“L’Odyssée d’une fille”) to the courtesan (*Yvette*), is a study in earnestness, delving into the sex trade at its most miserable and at its most luxurious.

And there are the bachelors, lots of them. Amid the scoundrels are an excellent number of solid male specimens, joyful men of ethics, honor and strong opinions. If the aging *garçons* in the story-within-a-story “Le Verrou” cite Schopenhauer and dismiss women as children, they are only rehashing Maupassant's philosophy from his 1880 chronicle “La Lysistrata moderne” (there, he shoots down any idea that women should ever be full, voting *citoyennes*). If Maupassant's literary style is often beheld as the

junction of simplicity and elegance, his rhetoric can be bombastic and over-the-top, taking on a wide range of sensitive and untouchable topics with clarity and purpose. The bachelor's strengths and sins are part of this writer's vast topical repertory. The lifelong bachelor is not afraid to share details about his cosmos, to upbraid his sordid characters and to irritate his readers. He lectures them all about the minimal obligations of humanness: one does take in one's own child, one honors one's mother and one does fall hard in love. Some of this was with a chronicler's teasing asides, but for the honorable man and moralist in Maupassant—a man of the outside writing about the outside—it felt like his solemn duty.

Conclusion. THE RHETORICAL BACHELOR

In the novel *Notre coeur*, the young Michèle de Burne is not just any *salonnière*. Yes, she is witty and brainy, captivating and charming, but so are other women in Maupassant's glittering universe of 1880s Paris. That she is a widow who once suffered at the hands of a brutal husband is one Maupassantian nod to naturalistic squalor, and it is important to the story. One more of the author's female characters—like Jeanne in *Une vie*—has known sexual violence in the marriage bed. The much older M. de Burne, a “vaurien de bonnes manières,” had been Michèle de Burne's torturer for five years. She had endured it nonetheless, “demeurée sans révolte devant cette révélation de la vie conjugale, énoncée sous la volonté despotique et suppliante du mâle brutal dont elle était la proie” (*Romans*, 1034). The death of M. de Burne, cut down unexpectedly by a brain aneurism, is the event that allows Michèle to flourish. His death will be her deliverance. If Michèle becomes no libertine Madame de Merteuil in her widowhood, her social life shifts into high gear and she intends to enjoy the many advantages of life without a husband. The salon she began as a young trophy wife survives, and she becomes the center of interest, conjecture and even lust among the young men who frequent it.

Yet Madame de Burne is not a woman to pity, and she gets none from Maupassant. In fact, it is André Mariolle, the very Maupassant-like *monsieur à rentes*, a thirty-seven-year-old intellectual who dabbles in fencing and poetry, who seems to garner the narrator's compassion. For Mariolle is pitiful, having fallen for Michèle's charms to

the point of neurasthenia. This man who has seen women as his playthings finds it quite taxing to be played. He sits alone weeping like a small boy in the little bachelor pied-à-terre he rents in Auteuil and richly furnishes for Michèle. She has a reputation to protect, and must visit him furtively; Mariolle acknowledges the fin-de-siècle social restraints on a young widow, and he waits for her faithfully and discreetly outside his door, in fair weather and in foul.

Mariolle slowly discovers that Madame de Burne is a formidable woman, an alpha female of considerable fortitude (and strong opinions) who literally leaves him waiting up for hours. Mariolle is incapable of dominating this woman. He loves her and he would die for her: she becomes a capitalized *Elle* in Maupassant's novel, a woman who rules men by her beauty—and Mariolle by her intelligence and sensual powers. He is thoroughly smitten as he sets off on an emotional course that is all downhill:

Cet accablement, il savait, ne venait point de fatigue: il venait d'Elle, de cet amour pesant sur lui comme un poids intolérable; et il murmura:
"Quelle misère! Pourquoi me tient-elle ainsi, moi qui n'ai jamais pris de l'existence que ce qu'il fallait prendre pour la goûter sans en souffrir?"

(*Romans*, 1150)

Michèle has been far less taken with him. Her words of love, limited to "Je vous aime bien" or "Je vous aime beaucoup," sicken him. Angry to the point of rage, Mariolle had sent Madame de Burne his *lettre de rupture* before retiring to tiny Montigny-sur-Loing in

the Forêt de Fontainebleau. Though he has found some small consolation in the arms of his demure servant, Élisabeth, his love for Michèle is overwhelming. Besides, he is racked by jealousy: Michèle is living it up in her salon whether he is in attendance or not, while another male habitué informs him that she is being wooed to a frenzy by an Austrian count, the petulant and insufferable Rodolphe de Bernhaus.

Mariolle eventually begs Madame de Burne (in elegant eighteenth-century epistles) to take him back, and she will deign to travel all the way to his rustic cottage to exact his beta male's submission. Michèle can well afford to be snarky in *Notre coeur*, and she is: "C'est gentil, votre ermitage. On est heureux là-dedans?" (1173). She needles him about the sweet servant girl Élisabeth, who has been doing double duty as his housekeeper and mistress. Michèle de Burne finally decides she will take André Mariolle back all right, but under her terms; so long as he understands where she is coming from (affection), and where she won't go (love), he can be hers again.

The short story "La Femme de Paul" offers another prime example of an uncowed, capitalized *Elle*. The young Paul Baron is squiring his female companion, Madeleine, to the rowdy La Grenouillère tavern—Guy's youthful haunt on the Seine downriver from Paris—and the couple appear to be in love. Yet Madeleine is neither Paul's wife nor his "woman." When two lesbian couples soon arrive by boat at La Grenouillère (to the hoots and stares of those gathered along the riverfront), Paul is shocked by the women: he pointedly tells Madeleine that all four of them should be arrested forthwith on morals charges. But Madeleine defends them: "Est-ce que ça te

regarde, toi? Sont-elles libres de faire ce qu'elles veulent, puisqu'elles ne doivent rien à personne?" (*Contes et Nouvelles* I, 297, emphasis mine). Always a subtheme in Maupassant's works is how a woman is free when she is able to avoid marriage and family. Such a woman truly "owes nothing" to anyone.

Madeleine knows one of the women, Pauline, and soon disappears with her for hours. Paul later discovers the two trysting in the woods near the tavern. "Il n'osait appeler, sachant bien qu'Elle ne répondrait point; et il avait aussi une peur affreuse de les découvrir tout à coup" (I, 304-305). Moments later, Paul drowns himself in the black depths of the Seine. If the very title "La Femme de Paul" would seem to relegate Madeleine to the possessive case, she is not the one possessed; Paul is. In fact, it is his own spiritual possession that precipitates his suicide. Paul, imminently replaceable by Pauline, the feminine form of his own name, would rather take his life than do what André Mariolle has: accept a woman as something closer to his equal. "La Femme de Paul" dazzles with its nonconformist atmosphere worthy of Maupassant's bachelor cosmos: La Grenouillère tavern and the adjacent Île de Croissy draw quite a mix of Parisians and others—whole families, fun-loving single women, muscle-bound *canotiers* and a contingent of *filles publiques*—a bourgeois bohemia on the banks of the Seine. For Maupassant, Madeleine won't repudiate this world, her world, and ultimately she doesn't. In fact, after Paul's body is brought up from the Seine, Pauline consoles Madeleine, telling her that the tragedy is not her fault, that men will do "stupid things," and inviting the distraught girl to her all-female household. Madeleine was never "Paul's woman,"

Pauline suggests, and she must try to banish all this from her system: “Va, nous te guérirons” (*Contes et Nouvelles I*, 308).

Michèle and Madeleine are atypical among the female characters in Maupassant’s writings: most of these fictional women aren’t capitalized *Elles* at all, but lowercased *elles*. They all “owe” something—to husbands, to companions, to children. They face ordeals from which they rarely come away unscathed (and are indeed worse for the wear). As depicted by Maupassant, and across all social classes, the lot of the nineteenth-century woman is harsh, patently miserable. Even when the Maupassantian woman prevails, her narrator constantly confirms her lower station as a given, her subservience as expected. Michèle de Burne might rule the roost in her salon, but the truth is that she has escaped her previous existence (literally and figuratively) through a stroke of good luck. Not many women in Maupassant’s world can manage such narrow escapes.

Maupassant’s fiction also shows women on an inferior track in society, with bare-bones educations that infantilize them and help ensure their economic exclusion. In the novella *Yvette*, the young courtesan-in-waiting has still received a typical education for girls and has been nourished on novels. Like other girls, the sweet protagonist Yvette—“cette liseuse de romans engagée” (*Contes et nouvelles II*, 239)—has many of the scatterbrained illusions of an Emma Bovary, hoodwinked into imagining her life as an *honnête femme* of means. For Maupassant, as for Flaubert, many women are naive, under-schooled daydreamers, deficient in both intellect and accomplishments. Maupassant sees them facing their limited prospects, whether in prostitution or in

marriage, with careworn trepidation. Yvette, forever stuck in courtesan mode, will actually have it somewhat better than the lady in the short story “Ça ira,” who tells the narrator how she (along with every working-class shop girl she knew) balanced meager wages with sex work. This frank and raw depiction of women trudging down narrow “female tracks” is at home in realism and naturalism. Maupassant, a pessimist at heart, set out to evoke real life, real environments and real human conflicts, and his fin-de-siècle female characters—rich and poor—struggle, and try to press forward.

In an eponymous April 1880 *chronique* about his collaboration on *Les Soirées de Médan*, Maupassant rejected naturalism as a “school” but not its aims, especially when measured against that earlier school, Romanticism. In the entire “bande de Médan,” he observed “une réaction inconsciente, fatale, contre l’esprit romantique” (“Les Soirées de Médan,” Maupassant.free.fr, accessed Nov. 20, 2010). The Romantics, he wrote, had sought to jettison the writerly *grand siècle* completely for their utopist literary vision. In this, Maupassant unabashedly sided with Zola and company, all of whom felt scorn for what they saw as Romanticism’s frivolous idealism. Their fiction would have other priorities: “Nous avons donc ce seul objectif: l’Être et la Vie, qu’il faut savoir comprendre et interpréter en artiste.” In this *chronique*, Maupassant scolds the Romantics for having tried to sanitize and prettify the real world—“de faire la vie plus belle que nature, comme si on pouvait l’imaginer autre qu’elle n’est, de mettre du ciel dans ses livres.”

Maupassant’s portraits of prostitutes are highly naturalistic, and these female protagonists (rarely are they otherwise) are depicted with a rawness that evokes the

hardships of Nana, Germinie and Éliisa. In Edmond de Goncourt's *La Fille Éliisa* (1877), a country girl begins a slow, dramatic trajectory to brothel girl and finally to prison-hospital inmate. Éliisa loses her dignity as well as her soul, as her mother absconds with the girl's last paltry savings. Maupassant's women are similarly vulnerable, their burdens insurmountable. The former servant girl in "L'Odyssée d'une fille" is reduced to earning an abject living on the streets of Paris after she is raped as a teenager by two country policemen. The sex worker in "L'Armoire" plies her trade in her small apartment while her young son hides there to wait out each sexual assignation. Both stories end as they began: neither woman will escape their life track. These portraits are distressing, and hardly the "banal prostitutes" Bernheimer has dismissed in *Figures of Ill Repute*.

Even Maupassant's more light-hearted short stories offer mordant observations on women who resort to prostitution, making them curious bellwethers of the contemporaneous feminine condition. In "Aux eaux," the elegant Marquis de Roseveyre plans to spend a month at the hot springs of Loèche, in Switzerland (the same resort the syphilitic Guy visited on the advice of doctors). The fictional Roseveyre narrates his tale in journal-entry format, laying out the plan he's hatched to find an unmarried woman of some poise and class to accompany him there as his "wife." At long last he finds Berthe, a singer from the Paris Conservatory who may one day become a great star. In nineteenth-century Europe, budding female singers on their way to greatness weren't marriageable and often survived through the intimate patronage of a wealthy male admirer or two. Balzac had described this social phenomenon in *La Cousine Bette* (1846), when Josépha Mirah, a prima donna from the Académie royale de musique, had to accept

a string of *protecteurs*. Josépha describes her life to an incredulous Baronne Hulot, who had sought out and questioned the young singer about her suspected liaison with the baronne's own husband:

Que pouvais-je faire de plus? Dans la carrière du théâtre, une protection nous est nécessaire à toutes au moment où nous y débutons. Nos appointements ne soldent pas la moitié de nos dépenses, nous nous donnons donc des maris temporaires.” (*La Comédie humaine* VII, 380)

Maupassant's ambitious Berthe is little different; not yet set for life as Jeanne de Limours is in the story “L'Épingle,” Berthe accepts Roseveyre's offer, hoping the marquis might become a *mari temporaire*, her patron. She escorts him to Loèche and its nearby alpine attractions, and the couple becomes a hit among their aristocratic company at the luxury resort. But despite accolades from everyone they meet (and some mutual attraction between Berthe and Roseveyre), the day of reckoning arrives: the marquis wanted a short-term companion, nothing more, and Berthe will lose his “protection” and the respectability that his company has brought her. She tearfully bids farewell to Roseveyre: “C'est...c'est...c'est donc fini d'être une honnête femme” (*Contes et nouvelles* II, 1269).

The Maupassantian Marquis de Roseveyre is not a bad sort, but this is Berthe's station in life, an arrangement that has been the lot of the artistic woman since the Ancien Régime. Even Roseveyre allows that perhaps this is a bit unfair. “Pauvre Berthe!” he sighs. “Combien d'autres étaient nées pour être des femmes honnêtes....Combien de

femmes honnêtes étaient nées pour êtres des filles, et le prouvent” (II, 1270). Almost without exception, the feminine in Maupassant’s writings cleaves to the reality of fin-de-siècle gender relations. This is further expanded and enunciated in Maupassant’s supercilious and off-the-cuff observations about female “faults.” In *Notre coeur*, Mariolle/Maupassant disparages Michèle’s “female” writing style in her letters to him—a style that has been the bane of French women of letters, he says, from the *spirituelles* to the *précieuses*. He jauntily notes how women cannot avoid writing unnuanced pap, however graceful the verbiage: “La femme ne travaille pas ses termes: c’est l’émotion directe qui les jette à son esprit; elle ne fouille pas les dictionnaires. Quand elle sent très fort, elle exprime très juste, sans peine et sans recherche, dans la sincérité mobile de sa nature” (*Romans*, 1119). And here Maupassant homes in on the stratified social position of women, one that has precluded them from mastering nuance as men have had to do—“par des habitudes professionnelles, par l’habitude d’employer la plume pour toutes les affaires de la vie” (1118). Michèle de Burne’s frilly prose is Maupassant’s potshot at woman’s shortcomings. Even when women aren’t imbeciles (and Michèle certainly isn’t), they are nonetheless impaired.

Maupassant is no feminist; through his lens, and that of his contemporaries, women seem beyond edification. Their natures flighty and their brains non-analytical, they are unequipped to tackle life directly, on its own cruel terms. And so the “weaker” sex must resort to stealth and subterfuge: for example, the misery of marriage drives women to despair—and to craftiness: a young baroness can divorce her oafish husband

only by arranging his sexual entrapment in the short story “Sauvée”; a small-town matron, timid as a wren, has the affair of a lifetime in “Madame Parisse”; and an affluent woman plans her own self-destruction in order to flee a cold husband in “Première neige.” Whether with humor or with horror, Maupassant’s vision of gender relations—all human relations—remains overtly pessimistic. Environmentally, Maupassant ranges far and wide, from the Norman farm to the Paris salon, and every kind of woman’s life is spotlighted, and lamented, with due pathos.

The female as *frondeuse* is not always the stuff of naturalism, but it is a common thread in Maupassant. In their misery, his female characters have a propensity to rebel. In the novella *Boule de Suif*, the prostitute Élisabeth defies the Prussian officer who asks her to bed; only when he threatens to confine her fellow stagecoach passengers to their inn can she be vanquished. In the story “Mademoiselle Fifi,” however, the prostitute Rachel kills the prim, narcissistic Prussian *sous-lieutenant* nicknamed “Fifi”—and then makes her successful escape into the night. This is not naturalism as Zola and Goncourt might pen it. Maupassant’s female characters have more than a little fight in them, even when all seems lost. And the downtrodden do defend their honor: the prostitute in the story “L’Armoire” pointedly tells the narrator, her prospective john, that she is doing the best she can to raise her son.

Maupassant’s characters talk, they explain themselves—excuse themselves and blame themselves. And in letting them talk, Maupassant doesn’t allow the sordid details of their lives to wash over and annihilate them as if they never existed—the way literary naturalism often condemns its most vulnerable. His is a different rhetorical approach, an

acknowledgment that human struggle can be undertaken in quiet ways, just beneath the maelstrom of daily living. Maupassant's women are also prone to be risk-takers: in "Aux eaux," the *cantatrice* Berthe must increase her material chances to better her lot. In "Les Tombales," the grieving "widow" cases a Paris cemetery for susceptible and available men. In "Madame Parisse," the shy protagonist risks the opprobrium of her small town in order to know real love, which she has not found with her husband. All of this comes against the backdrop of penury and isolation to which many a woman seems fated. In Maupassant's fiction, female destiny, writ large, is inferior and bleak. But here, too, Maupassant doesn't underestimate human mettle, human cunning, and in doing so he departs from programmatic naturalism. Here, women sometimes have a voice that goes beyond the understated empathy of many contemporary writers.

Other voices of the vulnerable are heard from, too: in the story "Un parricide," the carpenter Georges Louis, born and raised an illegitimate child, sets the court straight about why he clubbed his parents to death: they had refused to recognize him as their own. He has punished both of them for this abandonment. The voice of struggle is typically a direct one in Maupassant's writings, and his narrators (often bachelors) go beyond chilly documentarianism. If Maupassant's world remains Darwinian, one of haphazard destruction at every turn, the rhetorical methods he employs seem bolder and the swath of contemporary life more pungent. The good widow in the short story "L'Attente" pours her heart out to her attorney about her grown son; her boy has abandoned her for all time after discovering the romantic relationship she pursued long after her husband, his father, has died. And yet he will never forgive her. In "Une ruse,"

when a married woman's lover has a fatal heart attack in her bed, the woman enlists the family doctor to help remove the body from the home before her husband returns. In letting the woman bid her final, vocal farewell to her dead lover, in front of her doctor, Maupassant shines a bit of light into naturalism's dark room. For the reader, the people inside Maupassant's room become clearer and more discernible; they are allowed to vent, to give free rein to their feelings of love, anger, frustration, abandonment. It is ever still an awful world, of course, but Maupassant wants to give it a richer, fuller dimension. If he never ceases to be a fin-de-siècle man and writer, his rhetorical style is one of open observation, a bachelor's untrammelled view of life as a stirring, heartbreaking journey.

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	“Allouma”	“L’Épingle”
	“L’Armoire”	“L’Ermite”
	“L’Attente”	“Étrennes”
	“Au Bois”	“La Femme de Paul”
	“Aux eaux”	“La Fenêtre”
	“L’Aveu”	“Hautot père et fils”
	“La Confiance”	“Histoire d’une fille de ferme”
	“Cri d’alarme”	“Histoire vraie”
	“Duchoux”	“Humble drame”
	“L’Enfant”	“Jadis”

“Le Legs”	“Première neige”
“Le Lit 29”	“Rouerie”
“Madame Baptiste”	“La Rouille”
“Madame Parisse”	“Sauvée”
“Mademoiselle Fifi”	“La Veillée”
“Mademoiselle Perle”	“Les Tombales”
“Ma femme”	“Un cas de divorce”
“Le Marquis de Fumerol”	“Une ruse”
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