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Jacques Forestier, the central character of Cocteau's famous first novel from 1921, is a parasite and dilettante who responds readily to beauty in both sexes. Leaving his provincial family he comes to Paris to study for his degree. Indulging in a life of dissipation with a group of students and their mistresses, he falls in love with Germaine, a chorus girl kept by a rich banker. The affair, doomed from the start, forces Jacques to come to terms not so much with society as he finds it but with himself.

## The Miscreant Details

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# From Reader Review The Miscreant for online ebook

## Rhys says

I love Cocteau's epigrammatic prose style. It's heady and addictive and enthralling. This novel (his first, dating from 1921) is a masterpiece. The actual story is fairly slight, merely an account of a love affair that goes wrong among a couple of denizens (he more sensitive and less pragmatic than she) of a semi-Bohemian corner of Paris in the early years of the 20th Century; but the way the tale is told is truly exquisite. This fine edition includes many of Cocteau's unique drawings. A wonderful novel, tragic but luminous.

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## Erin Tuzuner says

Exquisitely French, Cocteau's one liners, insights, and descriptions are beautiful.

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## Charles Comenos says

Adolescent nonsense saved by decent prose.

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## Steve says

**The Miscreant** , by Jean Cocteau

Jean Cocteau (1889-1963) wrote *Le grand écart* in 1923, shortly before he started *Thomas l'imposteur* and already under the influence of Raymond Radiguet (please see my review of *Thomas l'imposteur* for further background:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...> ),

so this novel, too, is an emotionally reserved narration in the style of the psychologizing and moralizing classic French authors of the 17th and 18th centuries and has many autobiographical elements. Cocteau always had a poet's eye, and it makes itself apparent in this text. He amuses himself and the reader with word play in this book, written with the serene elegance of his mid-period style. The story is not told quite as linearly and simply as it was in *Thomas l'imposteur* , and there are layers of irony, at least initially. There is also a heavy sprinkling of striking metaphors, such as

Un somptueux tir de foire, en miettes, c'est Venise le jour. La nuit, elle est une négresse  
amoureuse, morte au bain avec ses bijoux de pacotille.

(An ornate state fair shooting stand, in pieces, that's Venice by day. By night, she is a passionate Negress,

dead in the bathtub wearing her cheap trinkets.)

which may not be everyone's cup of tea; but I like them, even though I am not at all certain what these metaphors are trying to communicate besides "ornate", "in ruins", "tawdry".

Jacques Forestier is a young and skinny bisexual who loves to do the opposite of what one expects, but always with a little twist. Those aspects of himself he finds unattractive, he emphasizes. Despising the kind of superiority which always pretends the negation of whatever the received opinion is, he adopts the received opinion, but modifies it so that those who share the received opinion don't recognize it. Jacques has an animal elegance, an artificial naturalness, is an aristocratic man of the people who despises the aristocrats and the people. Politically, he wants to be at the point where the extreme right touches the extreme left... So, you see, Cocteau is having some fun with Jacques. Jacques arranges to be wherever everybody else is not and, from that vantage point, observes all. This is all quickly forgotten.

Poor little Jacques is lonely and in heat, so he must go to where other people are, at least physically. As in *Le livre blanc*

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

the search for love doesn't go very well for him, but for different reasons. The same is true for the little band of colorful, somewhat unlikely young characters thrown together by chance, straight, bi, gay. But this book has a great deal more charm and spirit than *Le livre blanc*. It is full of the witty little *formules* I enjoy reading:

Elle ressemblait à Germaine comme au marbre son moulage en plâtre. C'est dire qu'elles étaient pareilles, sauf tout.

(She resembled Germaine like the plaster cast does the original marble. That's to say they were alike, except in every way.) There's no way to reproduce this little *bijou* in English, sorry.

The core of the book is the relationship between Jacques and Germaine, which has the same structure as one of the relationships of the protagonist in *Le livre blanc* - she is an "actress" being kept by an older, rich man and Jacques catches her in bed with her girl friend. Unlike *Le livre blanc*, the story in this book is told with some sympathy and warmth; the initial irony of the opening is dropped while Cocteau revisits his own memories. In fact, the young Cocteau had such a relationship, and it apparently made quite an impression on him since he revisited it multiple times in his work.

Though this is a rather unusual love story, the emotions, the blindness, the obsession felt during the first love of a young man are the same here as in "normal" stories. The total paralysis when he realizes that it is over and all of his senses stop functioning, then the flood of incredible pain, denial, pain. And the distance between such emotions and those of a much more experienced person - in this case Germaine - is real and well evoked. This is the *grand écart* of the title. Behind it all, Cocteau demonstrates that while all relationships are accidental, their outcomes are inevitable.

There is yet more to this richly endowed little book. You really should consider reading it.

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## Justin Labelle says

The Miscreant, Cocteau's first novel, while flawed, consistently manages to entertain.

Written in the 1920s, it could work as a companion piece to Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* or Callaghan's *That Summer in Paris*. Content wise, it is arguably influenced by Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and surely influenced Perks of being a Wallflower.

Cocteau's prose captures young, passionate love. Like many "good" love stories, it is primarily the account of Germaine, Jacques and Osiris. One has looks, one has passion and the other money. The novel unfolds as a very soft Bildungsroman.

The paragraphs are a little haphazard, and unlike Bowen's quote on the cover, I'd describe the prose as a hummingbird-like rather than butterfly-like.

The story unfolds at a quick pace and there's plenty of quotable lines and passages.

That being said, many of the characters remain mere images. Two-dimensional representations of stock characters used at the author's whim to induce conflict.

This is a good, but not great book. Some of its wonder may have been lost in translation. I regret not reading it in french, but could only find an english copy.

Cocteau renders mood and dialogue in a convincing way, only it lacks of the magic from his films and some of the wonder found in his later novels.

Some memorable lines:

"She had her own room. They went to bed there and adored each other for the last time. Did Jacques foresee it? Not in the slightest. Neither did -. They were right, as they were often to make love afterwards"

"A road can sometimes look so different on the way out and on the way back that traveller, coming home thinks he is lost."

"When everything is moving at once, nothing appears to be moving"

"She was afraid of the caretaker...not in the case the caretaker would think "another one", but in the case she would be shocked to see that she no longer went in alone".

"The heart lives in confinement. Hence its outbursts of melancholy, its fits of deep despair. Ever ready to pour out riches, it is at the mercy of its membrane. What does it know the poor blind thing? It watches anxiously for the slightest sign that would relieve the tedium. Thousands of nerves bring the news. Is the object for which its help is sought a worthy one? It does not matter. It pours itself out trustingly, it drains itself dry and if it is ordered to stop it writhes and gasps its last. Jacques heart has just been told to start. It did so with a beginner's clumsiness and enthusiasm"

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## Randal says

Elizabeth Bowen described this book as "butterfly-like," and there is an ephemeral quality to both the story and its style. I found some scattered sentences to be very evocative. For example, "Memories of human beauty stayed with him like wounds." and "In reality, he was leaving a dry skin floating on the Grand Canal, like a snake's slough hanging on a wild rose bush, as light as foam, slit at the eyes and mouth."

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## **Shan says**

Meet Cocteau where he is, don't expect him to be like anyone else. His sentences are filled with insight. Read his prose, watch his films and look at his art to capture the full effect.

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## **Cookie says**

4.5 stars

An excellent read.

Very strong at the beginning, I considered that the story weakened with the relationship of Germaine and Jacques which left me unfazed. I found the characters at his précepteur's place much more interesting than the rather flat love story.

The style is a delight - though I found hard on some occasions to understand some bits. I think that is to be blamed on the fact that J.Cocteau's writing here is very situé: that is he uses metaphors and alludes to things that a modern reader might not know.

I particularly enjoyed how Cocteau writes homosexual love/attraction into his story : that is to say, seamlessly. Boys love girls, boys love boys, girls love boys, girls love girls. It's so simple. Unlike many other authors, it is not treated as a huge theme/issue. It exists, it is there and that's it. Simple. If only the world was like that.

This story broaches a lot of interesting themes amongst which beauty, the influence of beauty on us.

All in all a refreshing read!

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## **Ella says**

This book and its analysis of the human condition is both harsh to the point of being scientific and utterly poetic. Jacques seems to get no sympathy from anyone, not the mysterious narrator or Germaine, even his own mother is partially ignorant of his suffering. A true representation of the loneliness of adolescence.

Also, one of the few novels with pictures that you can read and still feel intellectual.

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## **lysa says**

my second read from jean cocteau's oeuvre, i am beginning to develop a love/hate relationship with his writing style, punctuating scenes from the novel with poetic metaphors that lend some truth to his character's sensibilities.

these 'interruptions' only work when when you have experienced or actually have knowledge of what he is referring to in his metaphors. it makes you more in tune with his character's way of thinking. but i find that most of them are lost on me as this book is dated and what worked then to readers of that period probably has no effect now. in addition, these metaphors tend to break the narrative, making it a bit tiresome for me to get back in the right mind frame to continue where we had left off.

all in all, i enjoyed this book of young jacques forestier,who got swept up in a passionate love affair with germaine the chorus girl, that was essentially 'doomed from the start'.

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### **Stéphane says**

Le style de Cocteau est unique et splendide. Une narration singulière pleine d'images audacieuses mais qui semblent tellement évidentes : "la mer trop courte et qui ôte toujours à une plage ce qu'elle donne à l'autre", "pour vivre sur terre il faut en suivre les modes et le coeur ne s'y porte plus",...

Le récit est celui d'une entrée dans l'âge adulte et d'un coeur brisé pour la première fois par l'amour pour une femme volage et inconstante. La teneur est éculée mais la manière rachète tout.

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### **Tyler says**

I read this because I saw the last two paragraphs quoted in a Belle and Sebastian video. (Is that lame?) If you've seen Cocteau's films, you might be expecting something a little more like a fairy-tale. This book is pretty solidly in the arena of coming-of-age novels, although because of the time and place it chronicles (France in the early 20th century), it has a little exoticism than, say, *The Perks Of Being A Wallflower*. Cocteau mocks the ideal of the tortured teenage poet while providing plenty of flowery slogans for those who aspire to such goals.

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