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Book review Margaux Fragoso. Tiger, tiger: a memoir

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Margaux Fragoso. Tiger, tiger: a memoir.

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The succesful book *Tiger, tiger* is an autobiography about the author's, Margaux Fragoso, years as a child, adolescent and young adult. Fragoso focuses her narration on her relationship with Peter, an elderly "pedophile".

The effect her story has had on me may be compared to the impact of an impressive movie watched on a cinema screen. The world evoked by the book stayed with me after I had finished it; I remained emotionally engrossed in it. This certainly underlines the literary quality of Fragoso's work, which is characterized by beautiful descriptions, a rich vocabulary, intelligent metaphors and an appealing overall structure. Its title refers to imaginative stories Margaux and Peter used to make up, and thereby to her creative talent as well.

Tiger, tiger is also important for its content. It describes what may go wrong in a relationship with someone who has "pedophile" feelings, if the adult partner has serious psychological problems and there is no one in the child's immediate surroundings to make sure that the relationship remains healthy.

Peter has had a rough life and he was abused as a child. Especially in sexual matters, he turns out to be extremely self-centered and selfish. Although he does not rape Margaux, he does manipulate her continuously and puts her under a lot of pressure to make her perform sexual acts she basically finds repulsive. He keeps on nagging about it until he gets his way. He deliberately makes her feel guilty if she does not give in. During the countless hand- and blow jobs, Margaux fantasizes about attractive boys.

Unlike many other "pedophile" relationships that do not involve rape, the man hardly ever tries to pleasure the girl in return. Margaux increasingly feels exploited and used by Peter. She develops very ambivalent feelings for him, while she continues to long for his love and affection. Peter remains largely unaware of her personal needs and because of his self-centeredness he does not seem to understand her personal development either. Margaux feels unhappy and unloved and she tries to compensate this somewhat by rather extreme sexual fantasies.

After some time, Peter also attempts to limit her relationships with his "rivals". All this leads to numerous fights that as Margaux gets older may take an increasingly violent form.

Around the age of 14, Peter even tries to choke the girl several times. The man has been suicidal for years and even asks her to kill him. Years later he finally takes his own life.

These shocking events take place against the depressing background of a problematic, “dysfunctional” family. Her father undermines Margaux's self-confidence by constantly putting her down and her mother is a psychiatric patient who ends up in hospital time after time.

It is hardly surprising that Fragoso has not developed a positive concept of “pedophile” relationships and “pedophiles”. In this respect, her book is not very different from books about violent types of sexual abuse. The authors regards the adult's “pedophilia” as the main problem. As she sees it, persons who feel attracted to minors suffer from an illness that inspires them to do awful, disruptive things.

This view is what could be expected if one realises that people are generally inclined to approach reality from their personal experiences. Even so, it amounts to an unrealistic caricature. One may compare Fragoso's attitude to that of a woman who has been in a relationship with a selfish man for years and who therefore concludes that all men are selfish and that this is caused by their “male nature”.

Many individuals have been abused, but there are also many individuals who as a child were willingly involved in a relationship with a “pedophile” and who cherish the positive memories of it without feeling harmed in any way.

(See: [Positive Memories \(http://www.ipce.info/host/rivas/positive_memories.htm\)](http://www.ipce.info/host/rivas/positive_memories.htm).)

Their relationships should not be confused with abusive relationships.

Here are a few differences between Fragoso's experiences and an average positive relationship:

Peter kept on nagging until Margaux satisfied him sexually, whereas in really consensual relationships the minor's personal boundaries (and wishes) come first.

Erotically, Peter was almost exclusively interested in his own gratification, whereas in voluntary relationships the child's satisfaction, including on an emotional level, is at least as important as the adult's satisfaction.

The relationship contributed to Margaux's isolation, whereas adults in willing relationships are aware of the minor's social and relational needs and take these into account.

The relationship was unbalanced, sexuality being its main ingredient for a long time, whereas eroticism in a consensual relationship is typically just one of many common interests.

Although Peter felt mainly attracted to young children, he made Margaux dream about a future together as a married couple, whereas adults in consensual relationships are as honest as possible about what the child may expect in the long run.

Peter did not like seeing Margaux grow up, whereas adults in willing relationships follow the child's development and adapt to it.

For these and other reasons, the relationship between Margaux and Peter was very far removed from a wholesome, truly consensual relationship. Therefore, it would be destructive if the book reinforced negative prejudices about “pedophile” relationships in general.

Let us hope the damage Margaux suffered through her relationship with Peter will not strengthen the caricature of “pedophilia” that has already been obstructing the rational debate about this issue for years.