

Study of several stories written by guy de maupassant essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



I have studied several stories written by Guy De Maupassant. In my essay I shall examine, in detail, two stories initially, and then later I shall expand, to other stories. The first story I have chosen is 'At Sea'. In this story there are two loyal brothers, who work as fisherman. In this harsh life, you must choose the most beneficial outcome; otherwise you are foolish, detrimental and may starve. In this story, one of the Javel brothers gets his arm caught in the nets. The other refusing to release the nets, forces the brother to have his arm amputated and also become gangrenous. 'Cutting the cable meant losing the net, and the net was worth money, a great deal of money', This is the 'having is keeping' attitude, in which these brothers live by, which is understandable in their hazardous, living conditions.

'At Sea' represents a different manner of poverty from the worldwide view. Not simply that the brothers need nourishment, but that everything is valuable. The 'Having is keeping' attitude is a strong theme throughout. After the older brother Javel ignores the pain his brother is going through. He chooses to allow his brother to have his arm torn off, and yet the younger brother refuses to let his arm rot. He uses it as a trophy, to parade it, showing to people how brave he is. Claiming he let his arm get torn off, for the sake of the nets, and some fish. 'No, I wont! It's mine, I'd have you know; its my own arm after all.' This was as if, he, too was proud of the 'having is keeping' creed. Words such as 'roughness' and 'ransacking' imply that 'At sea' is a very physical and hard life.

The story has black comic moments, as the brother buries his own arm in a coffin. 'The whole crew of the trawler followed the funeral of the severed

limb.' Although this may be found funny, in a sick way, others may have found it anti-clerical. The positioning of the incident, and the characters can be seen as a metaphorical hospital, the younger brother is in need of a donor, it is well known that family are the best donors. However the older brother refuses to donate and instead keeps his 'organ', therefore leaving the younger brother worse off, for the time being, but, fate takes a hand as he survives and continues on, proud of what has happened.

The second story I have chosen is 'Capture of Walter Schnaffs'. This story was based at the time of the Franco-Prussian war (1870-71). At the time France had suffered a humiliating defeat to the hands of the Prussians, which is now part of Northern Germany. The stereotype of a Prussian soldier is a fearless, vicious soldier, as seen in many movies as the ruthless Germans. An incident that occurs in the story, when Walter is searching for refuge, is that he appears at the window, of a house filled with French servants. The servants, when seeing the Prussian's helmet, run in terror.

'He appeared, wearing his helmet, silhouetted in the frame of the window... they all leapt to their feet and began struggling, pushing and fighting, to reach the door'. Compared to the real Walter Schnaffs this is ironic; he is a stout and feeble man, who would do anything to avoid death, even if it meant pathetically surrendering. 'He was a peace-loving, kindly soul, not in the least bellicose or bloodthirsty'. Prussian soldiers are well known for their callousness, and destructive nature yet Walter Schnaffs is shown as a family man, who keeps thinking about his wife and children. 'He could not banish

from his mind the thought of his family at home and the dangers that lay before them’.

De Maupassant’s work shows that he is fearless of exposing what happens in life. Within ‘ The Capture of Walter Schnaffs’ there are many themes pursued. He implies that being a coward is often the smartest thing to do, by being a coward Walter manages to devour a luxurious banquet, be safely captured by the enemy, kept out of harm’s way, and eventually returning to his family. ‘ He was smiling too, now that he knew that he was a prisoner at last.’ He also implies that the French are cowardly; when the French servants see Walter’s helmet, they flee in terror. ‘ Then they all leapt to their feet and began struggling, pushing and fighting, to reach the door... the men knocked the women down and trampled on them’. This was a surprising portrayal of the French after their humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, and his audience might be expected to vastly object to such an implication.

The story ‘ Vendetta’ is based in the small town of Bonifacio, which is a land in which the population believe it, is your duty to carry out the vendetta. Late one night Nicolas Ravolati knifes the widow Saverini’s son, and Nicolas escapes to Corsica that same night. She must carry out the vendetta and take vengeance upon Nicolas. Through this chain of deaths it is likely that the widow’s husband was murdered due the vendetta and has continued through generations. I consider that the descriptions of the island in which the widow Saverini lives on also convey not only the poverty that she lives in, but also the reckless principles of the Corsicans.

' The wind harasses the sea remorselessly, sweeping the barren coast sparsely covered with coarse grass'. She continues to live in these treacherous conditions and slowly trains her loyal dog, Frisky, to tear out the throats of dummies. Preparing for revenge, the widow had to starve herself, since she could not afford to feed both, so that she could afford black pudding. She simply did not buy any kind of meat; she bought black pudding, the meal that would bring out the savage instincts of Frisky, to be unleashed upon Nicolas. ' The old woman went to the pork butcher's and bought a long piece of black, blood-sausage.' At daybreak before the Vendetta was to take place, she visited the church, not only looking for forgiveness for what she was about to do, but possibly also a blessing. ' She prayed, bowed down on the stone floor, humbling herself before God, seeking support and help,'

De Maupassant suggests that being a survivor, is being better than a hero; if you were a hero, you may have fought bravely, however it is likely that you would die, and never see your family again. When the French attacks Walter's patrol, he lets his comrades die and hides in a ditch. ' A broad ditch filled with scrub under a covering of dead leaves, he dived into it feet first,' De Maupassant implies that family is more important than country, even if it means being invaded, at least you would be with your loved ones. He continues to openly laugh at the Frenchmen who vainly inflate what they have achieved; at how pathetic they are, mainly directed at the French Generals. This occurs after the French have reported back, after capturing a drunk, lazy and fat Prussian, pretending that they had wounded a large

amount of vicious Prussians. ' The enemy have fled, Sir; several of them seem to have been wounded.'

De Maupassant shows true character, by defying his own countrymen and revealing cowardice, laughing at ideals of glory. He could have been severely punished for his actions, but still he spoke of what he thought to be the truth. This publication is very dissimilar to other stories written about war. He writes with a lot less concern for the war itself, and structures the story with scenarios that at the time had obscene implications. Most war stories are based on the bravery, on behalf of men from your country. However De Maupassant shows little or no patriotism, offering an alternative view of the importance of survival.

Another story called ' Two Friends' written by De Maupassant greatly contrasts with ' The Capture of Walter Schnaffs'. In this tragic story, two best friends, M. Sauvage and M. Morissot are captured by the malicious Prussians, and are interrogated near Mont-Valérien. However, they refuse to release any information about any passwords, or plans to attack the Prussians. He chooses to have them both shot, and thrown into the river. Then Prussian officer says ' now it's the fishes' turn', he shows no remorse for his actions, completely differential from how the Prussian, Walter Schnaffs was portrayed. ' He would have to start all over again the hated life of anxiety, terror, fatigue and discomfort' and this shows that Walter Schnaffs was not a man of war.

On sight of the net of fish he mentions ' have these little fish fried at once, while they are still alive; they'll be delicious.' By doing this the Prussian officer proves that he is not only sadistic, but also it symbolises that after feeding ' The Sea' with the lives of two men, he is reimbursed by eating the fish. By writing ' Two Friends' De Maupassant implies that the French are capable of brave men, however in ' At Sea' he also implies that the French can be selfish, when the brother refuses to release the nets, but yet again the bravery of the French is portrayed by the courage of the younger brother. I believe that De Maupassant is trying to tell the readers that France does have both types of men, however the selfish type overshadows the brave. But after reviewing the entire story I also think that ' Two Friends' is a piece of propaganda against the Prussians.

Both stories contain a high level of detail, and the factual evidence that gives the readers the impression that these stories could be based on real events. ' The net is attached along the whole length of a pole cased in iron, which is lowered by means of two cables working on two windlasses fore and aft'. The imaginative descriptions add convincing actuality in some cases and in others the historical correctness is realistic. ' They reached the little market town of La Roche-Oysel, whose National Guard had accomplished this feat of arms'.

' The Capture of Walter Schnaffs' and ' At Sea' both underline the differences between peasant and higher-class lifestyles. In the Capture of Walter Schnaffs, Walter was probably conscripted to his army, since he has no want for harming others. Walter Schnaffs is not poor however, and enjoys

devouring food, and is not used to the hard-working conditions that he has been dropped into. He soon becomes peasant-like but still treats others inferior to himself. Whenever trouble occurs he runs to save himself, forsaking all others. 'An irresistible impulse to run away came over him,' however in *At Sea* when the brother is forced to have his arm amputated, he doesn't complain. The outcome would have been mutual, for anyone who it had happened to. These brothers are used to working for themselves, and will surrender less important desires.

De Maupassant writes in such a teasing and refined way. He has a style in which is very effectual, he leaves the reader to think for themselves. In many stories such as 'The Devil' where you are left to decide who deserves your sympathy, the money-wanting nurse or the begrudging son, who both argue over very little money, to look after the mother. In the end M. Rapet ends up murdering the old woman simply for the cost of one franc. However, although very enthralling, this is not the only popular style of writing. Authors such as Charles Dickens clearly imply which characters are 'good' and which are 'bad'. In *Oliver Twist* it is clear that Fagan is a harsh, cruel and opportunistic adult, whereas Oliver Twist is the kind, innocent youth.

In *Idyll*, De Maupassant gives subtle hints as to what you should believe, he always is giving and taking, and leaves you with thoughts of indecision.

There are two peasants travelling in the same train carriage, one who is a female is laden with food and wine, the one is a male who is starving alone. 'In the last carriage a stout woman and a young man sat facing each other'. The female consumes a hefty amount of food, directly in front of the other

peasant, without offering even a crumb. ' Opening her basket, she took out a hunk of bread some hard-boiled eggs, a flask of wine and some fine red plums. The she started eating' Her job is to feed the offspring of rich people with her own breast milk, and she begins to feel pain from the pressure of her breasts.

The tension increases and eventually the male peasant intervenes and ' helps' the woman by suckling excess milk from both nipples. ' He knelt down in front of her, and she bent forward, pushing the dark tip of her breast towards his mouth as if he were a baby.' This may have been deemed as soft pornography, since it is quite graphic. In the last paragraph, the truth is released, ' It's me as has to thank you, Madame. I hadn't had a thing to eat for two days.' The woman deciding not to share food, unknowingly shares a much more valuable asset. The woman was deceived, and she was ignorant to the male peasant's secret plan, whilst male pride is boosted; He is shown to have the last word, cunningly outwitting the female passenger.

However, the life of the wealthy is not that much different from the life of the poor, besides the obvious financial side of things, the relationships between the men and women are filled with distrust and materialism. The story ' His confession' there is a young man, named Captain Hector Marie de Fontenne that is ' serious, strait-laced and unsophisticated', he is married to a woman, named Mlle Laurine d'Estelle who are ' from different worlds', De Maupassant writes ' every action seems thoroughly planned, every nice step calculated, every word carefully weighed'. She is a deceitful woman, who takes advantage of the naïve Hector. One night Hector becomes very

drunk and is accompanied by some ladies. 'Saw to it that his glass was kept well filled'. When waking in the morning, he notices that he is beside a prostitute, he being a generous man 'emptied his purse onto the mantelpiece' and left for home.

On arrival, his reactions give away that something has happened, his wife immediately has suspected something, and soon interrogates him. 'If you don't tell me, there will always be something between us'. Eventually Hector tells her the story of what happened and she unexpectedly bursts into laughter. 'You... you... were unfaithful to me,' and she went off in a peal of laughter'. Hector had not suspected that Laurine was ever unfaithful to him; he thought she was a polite and pleasant person. She continues to laugh and mock Hector and within the last passage it mentions 'her laughter gradually subsided but kept bursting out again from time to time like the embers of a dying bonfire' and so with the laughter went whatever pleasure or security that was in the relationship, leaving the rest of their lives to be complicated and uncomfortable.

From the stories that I have read by De Maupassant there is either hidden moral to the story, or some simple propaganda. I think 'The Devil' was made to tell us how we should not care about insignificant money, but actually important matters. I think 'A Vendetta' was made to show us the different lifestyles in the world, and how poverty can affect people. I think 'The Capture of Walter Schnaffs' was made to mock the French Generals in particular, and how they exaggerate what they have done. I think 'Two friends' was made as propaganda against the Prussians, especially since it

was written so close to the war. I think ' His confession' was made for woman empowerment and to show how sophisticated the modern woman is actually like. Lastly I think that ' Idyll' was made to show the relationship between peasants and how everything they do is for them. Overall, De Maupassant has an anti-war stance and an ' every man for himself' attitude scattered through the stories.