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# Exploring French Short Stories: Guy de Maupassant's Writing Style and Social Justice

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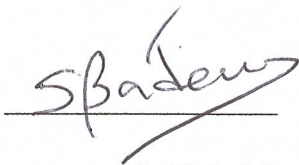
Exploring French Short Stories: Guy de Maupassant's Writing Style and Social Justice

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## **ABSTRACT**

This project explores the connection between French author Guy de Maupassant's pessimist writing style and his observations of 19th century French social classes. A literary analysis of two of Maupassant's short stories, *La Parure* and *Le Gueux*, determines key elements of pessimism, naturalism, realism and an unequal class structure, which discriminates between the peasantry, the working class, and the rich bourgeois. My research aims to demonstrate evidence that Maupassant uses a pessimistic writing style to advocate for social justice.

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## PROLOGUE

### INTRODUCTION

Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) is considered one of France's greatest short story authors, excelling in the French genre of *contes et nouvelles*. Maupassant inspired 19<sup>th</sup> century society with over three hundred short stories and six novels that deal with the mundane, the abstract, the psychological self, and relevant issues in society. Wallace explains,

“Maupassant achieved a great deal in the realm of art. He made a large imprint upon the politics of society of his time without inspiring a revolution or even directly being the author of a reform. What he did was to examine the platitudes by which his fellow countrymen lived in such a way as to cause others to reconsider them” (23).

In this way, Maupassant is able to critique and comment on society through narratives, leaving his imprint on the very fabric of society.

Two of his short stories, *La Parure* and *Le Gueux*, are among great examples of his writings. Both were published in the French daily newspaper *Le Gaulois* in 1884 yet depict social polarities. *Le Gueux* is a story about a crippled lifetime beggar named Cloche. Wandering small French villages, he begs for food but is given nothing from the townspeople. Starved and emaciated, he finds black hens and tries to kill them. Although he succeeds, the villagers take him and he is eventually arrested. Two days later, he is found dead. The next story, *La Parure*, is about a middle class woman named Mathilde Loisel, who has always dreamed of belonging in the aristocratic world despite coming from a poor background and marrying a modest clerk. After an invitation to a lavish ball,

she borrows an expensive necklace from a friend, only to lose it at the party. She and her husband purchase a new one after taking out many loans. After working to pay it back for ten years, she meets the friend who lent it to her, who explains that the necklace was actually a fake.

Both stories use the classic Maupassant twist, dark ending and share the similarity of being closely tied to social class. Guy de Maupassant's reputable pessimism clearly comes through: these stories deal with pessimistic events and emotions and his characters are victims of ironic necessity (faced with madness or other tragic events). For the purpose of this project, pessimism is defined as including attributes of hopelessness, helplessness, general negativity, and situations where the literary characters or the author impose a "glass is half empty" outlook. The question ensues as to why Maupassant chooses to depict such gloomy stories. Does Maupassant aim to use dark stories to entertain his audience, or is there a deep, philosophical message to the readers behind his storylines? Is there a social justice agenda Maupassant is trying to push? Maupassant's writings may be a natural reaction to the issues facing the Third Republic after it was established in 1870 as the new government. Perhaps Maupassant's pessimism is related to the realism present in late 19<sup>th</sup> century literature, which favored science and rationality and viewed the Church as an obstruction to human progress. Maupassant could have simply been a proponent of naturalism, a literary movement seeking to depict believable everyday reality. Regardless, a thorough understanding of Maupassant's life, work, influences, and writing style is important to understand why he chooses to write pessimist stories and how his brand of pessimism depicts social awareness and inspires social change.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Throughout the decades following Maupassant's influential career, various authors and scholars have attempted to grasp a greater understanding of Maupassant and his work. An important analysis of influences in Maupassant's life, writings, and the historical context in which he lived in is highly valuable to understanding his writings.

### INFLUENCES

Maupassant had many influences throughout his lifetime. Wallace argues that Maupassant's influencers directly affect his writing style, especially his choice of words, his construction, and the representation of characters (95). Therefore, it is important to understand his influencers to comprehend the kind of impact they exude. His mother, Laure de Maupassant, encouraged his writing career and cheered on his work. She becomes a female role model for Maupassant's vision and understanding of women (Wallace 51). Maupassant also fights in the Franco-Prussian war and sees some of the evil of humanity during this time. Afterwards, Maupassant lives a relatively comfortable life as an author, especially after the fame that surrounds the success of his novels and short stories. Still, he deals with living as an outsider- a non-Parisian- in the great patriotic city of Paris. His loneliness grows and with time, he learns about outcasts, misfits, and "the other" through his keen eyes and sensitive spirit, as all of these themes are translated into his writings.

Maupassant's literary mentor, realist author Gustave Flaubert, is among one of Maupassant's most poignant literary influencers. Flaubert provides an ideological writing framework for Maupassant as he "found that Flaubert's observations upon human frailty, on literature, and on how to write touched a sensitive chord in his soul" (Wallace 15). As



a protégée of Flaubert, Maupassant uses these observations to create realistic stories in which he crafts applicable details to convey human interactions, “He possessed a rare ability to understand the small, almost unnoticed episodes of human experience, and to so enhance them by his art as to make other men understand both the pettiness and the nobility of all human endeavor” (Wallace 23). Such humane actions are often described as being part of the realist movement, which aims to depict humanity “as-is”, without exaggerations, non-idealized, and non-romanticized. Although Maupassant desires to stray from realism, it bleeds through his writings largely due to the influence of Flaubert, “in the measure of the novelist’s more and more profound investigation of life, he imperceptibly and to a certain degree substituted psychological study for realism according to Flaubert’s formula (Roz 9806, 9807). Flaubert, a dark author himself, resounds in Maupassant’s writings. Maupassant continues Flaubert’s legacy through realism and adds psychologically present characters, revealing the psychology of the inner man.

#### THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MAUPASSANT

Maupassant often depicts the psychology of inner man. Maupassant depicts simple daily tasks and also details madness, anger, death, and other human crises—especially as his psychological state and more specifically, the progression of his madness unfolded. For example, in his late years he deals with suicide in his stories, which is manifested by his inner psychological turmoil. He develops madness along with syphilis, and by the end of his life he becomes very lonely. As his life and madness progresses, there is a parallel progression stemming from the wisdom of seeing a different and harsher reality. He starts writing more about loneliness, suicide, and death.

Maupassant's ability to write about many sorts of people and conditions is often attributed to his sensitive personality. For example, he explores the connection of madness with his audience, and fundamentally asks, "who is mad and who is sane?" Maupassant personally struggles with madness, but finds a way to relate with his audience through the relatable madness of his characters. Wallace explains, "Maupassant was able to conceive of that little bit of madness in us all because he was a little more than "normally" mad, and his characters have that human degree of madness which gives them reality and causes us to identify with them" (103). In this way, Maupassant combines his abilities of understanding people with his own autobiographical moments to create authentic yet relevant stories. In his narratives he relates he dictates critiques through his characters, "there is a notable tendency to make the narrator and one or two personages the transparent mouth-pieces of certain clear-cut opinions on women's rights, sexuality, patriotism, and conjugal morality" (MacNamara 294). Since he creates such relatable yet unpredictable characters, one wonders if the character is sane, if the author is sane, or if the reader himself is sane, and whose opinions Maupassant writes on. This curiosity inevitably leads to questions about society and social justice.

In speaking of the human condition, questions of justice and fairness come into play. Gerald Prince speaks on the theme of destiny in Maupassant's work. Prince argues that Maupassant creates unfavorable circumstances for his characters but gives them agency to interact with events. In this way, he gives his characters agency despite social circumstances, and much comes down to the characters' choices:

"Mais qui est responsable de ces malheurs, et quelle en est au juste la signification? La vie, certes, à son rôle a jouer (d'où la terreur et la pitié que peut

exciter le conte), la vie constitue une réponse. Il faut peu de chose, nous dit le narrateur (ou Mathilde!), pour se perdre ou se sauver (p. 1205), ce que le texte met en valeur en suggérant une multiplicité de développements autres: I 'héroïne aurait pu emprunter une parure moins éclatante..." (Prince 269)

Artine Artinian also argues that Maupassant is concerned with a type of literary homeostasis, "As for his pessimism, inherent though it is, it is frequently attenuated by his sense of humor, by his belief in the ultimate balance of things" (7). Therefore, one can argue that Maupassant may use pessimism fairly. His characters do not suffer for the expense of Maupassant's vision; they suffer through their own or through societal acts. Meanwhile, Maupassant attempts to maintain an overall balance through writing sensible and intentional narratives, exploring personal and social morality.

#### WRITING STYLE

Maupassant wrote many short stories, which are short, literary prose fiction that require great artistry (Pasco 411). His numerous short stories became Maupassant's best work, "Maupassant's success with the short story, while his novels never quite measured up, can perhaps be attributed to his inability to handle the large number of strands involved in really fine novels" (Pasco 418). Through his narratives, Maupassant fashions a picture of life without need for excessive background information or the numerous components of a larger novel.

Maupassant is often referred to as a dark and pessimist author. The exact meaning behind pessimism is often left unexplained, and Maupassant's writings are usually categorized simply as bizarre and dark without uncovering Maupassant's true intentions

for the text. Are his stories truly hopeless, are they autobiographical, or do they have a hidden message for society?

Maupassant operates under the umbrella of naturalism using attributes of realism and pessimism. Naturalism aims to capture “man’s accidental, physiological nature rather than his moral or rational qualities. Individual characters were seen as helpless products of heredity and environment” (Ed. Of Encyclopedia Brit). He was undoubtedly a naturalist writer, “Maupassant generally envisaged existence as meaningless chaos, man as victim of inexplicable forces and death as total extinction” (Lock 74). Logically, pessimism falls under naturalism, as naturalism opts for a pessimistic outlook to capture daily reality. Because pessimism is an unorganized concept, Firmin Roz illustrates Maupassant’s pessimism through patterns in Maupassant’s writings. Maupassant is cruel to his heroes: his pessimism includes unfavorable human struggles such as disease, madness, and death. For example, Roz notes that Maupassant’s writings possess a haunting thought loss, death, or some sort of unsatisfied ending (9806). Maupassant also writes narratives containing joyless humor (Roz 9805). Roz reasons that Maupassant’s pessimism is actually a product of his naturalism, and that his conception of life and art are closely related.

Edward Sullivan examines Maupassant through journalistic, stylistic, and moral lenses but develops Maupassant as a man of virtue through his realism. While he was a man of contradictions and conflicts, Maupassant clung to the beliefs that were part of his identity and those core principles made him the writer he became. Such notions Maupassant held include his dismissal of romanticism and idealism in literature and art. Maupassant was particularly against romanticism, which is an artistic, intellectual, and

literary movement that was highly influential during the 1800-1850s, 1850 coincidentally being the year Maupassant was born. Romanticism is characterized by its emphasis on “the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental” (Ed. Of Encyclopedia Brit). Sullivan explains that Maupassant rejects romanticism on a fundamental realist attitude: “he deplored the philosophical result, and, even more, the idealism of the romantics, by which he means their deliberate attempt to give a false presentation of observable reality, depicting life not as it is, but as they would like you to see it, deforming the truth by “idealizing” it” (17). Maupassant’s also excelled at the objective writing technique, in which he attempts to reveal the inner man by man’s outward acts (Sullivan 34). Sullivan argues that Maupassant uses this very conscious writing style to achieve his goals in describing realistic human encounters, as realistic encounters could not be possible through romanticized or idealized scenarios. Because Maupassant’s writing objectives are linked to his own moral compass, his writings are intricately tied to his ideals of morality, social class, and so forth.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Another key element of research to understand Maupassant is in the field of history, culture, and economy. Katherine Lynch highlights specific socioeconomic practices present in Early Industrial France. Lynch provides information on the class, ideology, and social policy of French culture (15). She specifically highlights the class differences between the bourgeoisie, the working-class, and the peasants. Lynch’s exposé of the local and national policies of the time in regards to abandoned children and orphans quantifies the issues Maupassant seems to have about the societal structure

involving orphaned or abandoned children in *Le Gueux* (114). With the different factions of the government in constant tensions, it was difficult to create and fund social policy. Furthermore, with the Catholic Church being involved in social programs, there was always a question about who should carry on such programs, the church or the state. In ideology, there two main groups in tension: moral economists and Social Catholics. Moral economists “tended towards a view of the world that advocated limited state intervention into public and private spheres in the interests of creating a moral and stable industrial society” while Catholics “were more ambivalent about state intervention, preferring the use of voluntary lay associations of believers in the movement to create a more solid and moral working-class family (Lynch 3). Since no one could effectively decide on which group should take care of the disenfranchised, the marginalized often remained that way, or received help that did not truly remedy the broken system.

The Third Republic is the system of government adopted in 1870 and the ruling government under which Maupassant wrote *Le Gueux* and *La Parure*. Its motto, « Liberté, égalité, fraternité », is one that is often recognized today. The major divisions of The Third Republic include the republicans and the monarchists. The republicans, the majority of them in the middle class, supported moderate social and political changes to establish the Third Republic apart from the Church. The monarchists were closely associated with the French Catholic Church, particularly their clergy and bishops, and many of the monarchists’ hierarchy were from noble families. Still, the typical French citizen was a French farmer. With that, Maupassant situates *La Parure* in a relatively higher social class and *Le Gueux* in a lower social class compared to the average French person, assisting his readers to understand life and society from a different viewpoint.

## METHODOLOGY

My first step was reading *La Parure* and *Le Gueux*, the primary texts, using close text analysis to study the literary devices Maupassant uses as well as to determine pessimistic attributes. Through close text analysis, I dissected the text, analyzing small portions and using them to build upon my analysis of the story. I searched for patterns in lexicon, syntax, structure, repetition, rhetorical devices, and intrinsic and extrinsic meanings, among others. I also determined which of these literary structures was pessimistic by analyzing ones that demonstrated patterns of hopelessness, helplessness, or general negativity. Although I analyzed the primary sources for this project in their original French language, I included some translated English words or phrasing in my writing to clearly demonstrate the original meaning of the text.

I used novelistic analysis to understand and study the purpose and meaning behind frequent images, scenes, and repetitions in each of Maupassant's stories and how they relate to the narrative. I used novelistic analysis to determine and analyze where and how Maupassant develops class criticism by looking for and analyzing any distinctions or descriptions Maupassant makes of social classes in the big picture of the narrative. This evidence was used to establish that the two texts separately supply class criticism. I then looked for any links between pessimism and class criticism to confirm or refute my hypothesis.

I used intertextuality to relate, find patterns, and discover contrasting and similar elements in both of Maupassant's short stories. The ability to analyze both stories together helps me to establish Maupassant's pessimism in both stories. I also looked for correlational links between Maupassant's pessimism and his class critiques. To do so, I

looked for displays of pessimism and class criticism throughout both stories to study their relationship.

I used New Historicism to examine and provide a historical and literary background for a greater historical understanding of Maupassant, his writings, his style, his critics, and his time period. This involved studying literature and historical documents that examined Maupassant's life, 19<sup>th</sup> century literature, history, culture, and social tensions. Next I read and analyzed my secondary sources in order to find historical and literary evidences for 19<sup>th</sup> century class structure and Maupassant's pessimism and class criticism. I also analyzed the French naturalist movement to understand how Maupassant's pessimism was appropriate for that literary movement.

This methodology has allowed me to critically analyze Maupassant's writings in a clear, concise, and organized method. With close-text analysis, I retain the author's intentions and reduce any temptation to extrapolate ideas that were not originally part of the author's intent. I will be analyzing both short stories with the same methodology to reduce errors in analysis as I establish that the two stories I am studying as pessimistic and provide class critique. In this way, I can argue for both pessimism and class criticism in the same way: by providing primary and secondary source evidence.



## ANALYSES & DISCUSSIONS

### *LA PARURE ANALYSIS*

Maupassant starts off with examining Mathilde's social standing and her history. She has no dowry and marries a clerk in ministry of education. This man, the husband, wants happiness and wants his wife happy. He has a modest and steady job. He is characterized as a flexible husband. He is said to sacrifice himself and his needs and wants for his wife. After she asks for four hundred francs for her dress, he gives his savings so that she can purchase a beautiful dress,

“Je ne sais pas au juste, mais il me semble qu'avec quatre cents francs je pourrais arriver. Il avait un peu pâli, car il réservait juste cette somme pour acheter un fusil et qui allaient tirer des alouettes, par là, le dimanche. Il dit cependant: Soit. Je te donne quatre cents francs. Mais tâche d'avoir une belle robe.”

(Maupassant *La Parure*)

In this way, the husband is characterized as a caring and unselfish man, willing to give to the wife to further her happiness. While he works outside the home, she seems disconnected to reality by wanting things outside their means. Maupassant martyrizes the man. The husband has to do things for Mathilde while she is focused on herself, and the clash in their priorities creates tension.

Maupassant uses the repetition of suffering, « elle souffrait » to convey Mathilde's suffering of not being rich and being part of the upper class. Maupassant seems to express that this suffering seems a bit exaggerated, especially as she is not happy with her current comfortable status. She ironically lives in the road “Rue des Martyrs” and spends her life daydreaming and wishing of a better life. Not only is she

unhappy she is also ashamed of her social standing, and that is clearly seen in her interaction with her friend Madame Forestier, a woman she perceives as “making it” in the social ladder. She is hesitant and embarrassed to even ask to borrow a necklace.

Madame Forestier’s characterization is important to the reader to demonstrate a sensible woman in a position of wealth. To Mathilde, she is nothing but an enviable picture of wealth and prominence. She allows Mathilde to borrow her necklace, but sensibly lends a fake necklace. She seems stable and happy throughout the story, in direct contrast to Mathilde. Madame Forestier is not overly attached to wealth, she more realistic of the world around her. She is more practical and knows she can’t afford real necklace.

Mathilde goes to the Ministry of Education’s ball and is the belle of the ball. She is carefree and dances with everyone. She does not seem grateful to her husband for the opportunity, she does not even dance with him.

Mathilde eventually realizes she lost the necklace. In shock, her husband goes on a hunt but comes up empty. Maupassant really hyperbolizes her shock and lack of responsibility. While her husband sacrifices himself to cope with the new changes, she remains the static character. He takes out a loan, and they both have to work extra jobs to pay the money back. While this is purely Mathilde’s fault, the husband is further martyred as he maintains a compliant persona towards his wife’s chaotic mind.

After losing the necklace, Mathilde and her husband go into poverty and she must now work outside the home. Mathilde comes face to face with her own shallowness. She becomes rough and hard, the opposite of her dreams. She comes to know hard work and strength required to live a hard life. Still, she does not change mindset, « parfois, lorsque

son mari était au bureau, elle s'asseyait auprès de la fenêtre, et elle songeait à cette soirée d'autrefois, à ce bal où elle avait été si belle et si fêtée. Que serait-il arrivé si elle n'avait point perdu cette parure? Qui sait? Qui sait? » (Maupassant *La Parure*). Her exterior is different but inside she is static and demonstrates no remorse. She still daydreams, as in the beginning of the story, and wishes she were living the life she had when she was at the ball and wore the necklace.

Maupassant's classic twist ending involves Mathilde finding out that necklace was fake. Madame Forestier tells her, after ten years of hard work, that the necklace was fake, « Oh! Ma pauvre Mathilde! Mais la mienne était fausse. Elle valait au plus cinquante francs!... » (Maupassant *La Parure*). Maupassant uses situational irony to convey the frustration of superficial wealth present throughout the story. Mathilde always wanted to appear richer and better than she really was, and when she actually thought she had done so and worked a decade for that mistake, she finally realizes that the night at the ball was also a fake social production.

## **LA PARURE DISCUSSION**

*La Parure* is a cautionary tale in which Maupassant warns about the dangers of a classist attitude in which “the grass is greener on the other side”. In *La Parure*, Maupassant studies the themes of rich vs. poor, greed vs. generosity, and the sensible woman vs. the shallow woman.

An important element of this story is Mathilde’s financial background. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prominent women had a dowry. It was important to enter into a good marriage to elevate their social standing. Mathilde grew up with a simple family, and even married above her means. Prince argues that Mathilde wants to be that which she is not in the social hierarchy, « Car Mathilde méconnaît la nature (le social) et sa propre nature et tente d’être ce qu’elle n’est pas » (Prince 270). Not only is she poor financially, she becomes the embodiment of being poor in spirit.

Although some may argue that this short story victimizes women and makes them vain and selfish, Madame Forestier provides an alternate view where she is characterized as a functioning example of a virtuous woman as she lives within her means and social status. Maupassant uses Mathilde and her inherent contrast to Madame Forestier to critique social shallowness and greed. Mathilde is in conflict with herself, with others, and with society. She wishes to deny where she comes from and become a princess in her own mind, leading to her downfall,

« Elle a cru pouvoir renier ses origines, rejeter Loisel et la position sociale qu’il signifie, être la princesse Mathilde. Elle a échoué, certes, mais elle aurait pu réussir. D’ailleurs, si le destin (la vie!) l’a emportée sur elle, elle a su, pense-t-elle,

l'emporter sur lui: n'a-t-elle pas réussi à tout dissimuler, à tout restituer? » (Prince 271)

Guy de Maupassant uses an almost humorous style of writing to depict social excess. Roz explains,

“Such is the individual humor of Guy de Maupassant, —a humor rarely joyous, without sparkling shocks of repartee; a humor tinged with bitterness and contempt, arising usually from the seriousness of ridiculous people and from the ridiculousness of serious people, and nearly always from the universal powerlessness to advance beyond mediocrity” (9806).

Maupassant creates his protagonist Mathilde into a very serious and yet very ridiculous woman. She wishes for what she can't have, and even when she is stripped of everything, she creates circumstances in her mind, which deem her powerless. Maupassant allows her to have negative events surrounding her to understand how Mathilde will react, yet she does not use the autonomy Maupassant gives her to elevate her mental status. Instead, Mathilde uses her choices to revert back to old patterns of wishing and wanting.

Maupassant critiques social classes in this way: he dissents the social movement of materialism and classism by hyperbolizing his characters and demonstrates how futile it is to adhere to what society considers to be powerful, popular, and important.

## **LE GUEUX ANALYSIS**

*Le Gueux* starts off in the French imperfect, « Il avait connu des jours meilleurs, malgré sa misère et son infirmité » (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 82). The French imperfect is a past tense that indicates an ongoing or repeated state or an incomplete action. Such a tense choice describes an ongoing state of despair for the beggar Cloche, the protagonist. Maupassant quickly adds the words “misère” and “infirmité” in the first sentence, which indicates not only a past situation but an ongoing one as well.

Maupassant continues to provide background for his character. Maupassant invokes the element of shock by describing a terrific incident where Cloche has both legs broken by a carriage. One may wonder if this is the worst that could happen to a 15-year-old boy, yet Maupassant does not stop the tragedy there. He describes the situation with a comparison, “sa tête semblait enfoncée entre deux montagnes” where Cloche’s head is likened to being pressed between two mountains. Maupassant demonstrates that his situation has a larger-than-life feeling, yet his « béquilles qui lui avaient fait remonter les épaules à la hauteur des oreilles » is a descriptor that makes Cloche seem very small, with his crutches forcing his shoulders up to his ears (82). Maupassant clearly describes a situation in which not only did the Cloche not cause his own situation, he also cannot fix the gigantic problem he is facing.

Maupassant describes the marginalization that Cloche faces. This is one of the beginning paragraphs of the short story in which Guy de Maupassant gives a brief history of the life of the main character Cloche, the beggar boy:

« Dans les villages, on ne lui donnait guère: on le connaissait trop; on était fatigué de lui depuis quarante ans qu'on le voyait promener de mesure en mesure son

corps loqueteux et difforme sur ses deux pattes de bois. Il ne voulait point s'en aller cependant, parce qu'il ne connaissait pas autre chose sur la terre que ce coin de pays, ces trois ou quatre hameaux où il avait traîné sa vie misérable. Il avait mis des frontières à sa mendicité et il n'aurait jamais passé les limites qu'il était accoutumé de ne point franchir. » (82)

Pessimism permeates this excerpt through patterns of hopelessness, helplessness, and the general negativity embodied in the text. Maupassant builds up a hopeless predicament for Cloche by carefully describing « sa vie misérable » of forty years, where he drags himself on wooden crutches. Maupassant demonstrates that, as a beggar, Cloche is at the mercy of the community around him, yet this same community offers him no prospects of a better life. The society that Cloche lives in doesn't help provide for his basic needs, « on ne lui donnait guère... on était fatigué de lui depuis quarante ans qu'on le voyait promener ». Nobody helped him and everybody had grown tired of seeing him. Maupassant demonstrates pessimism through Cloche's helplessness: he is deformed, has nowhere to go, and no one to turn to.

Maupassant enforces a hopeless scenario by emphasizing that this same predicament has gone on for years and building on that to predict his future. The timing of « depuis quarante ans », or day after day for forty years, insinuates that this has occurred for a long time. Maupassant also shows that Cloche is unable to move well physically and is scared of moving from the villages he grew up in. Staying in this same area means continuing the “miserable existence” with this population that won't help him survive. The outlook of the story is gloomy from the start.

Maupassant develops class critique in this paragraph by describing Cloche's social marginalization. Cloche exists in the outskirts of society and is compared to an animal. Maupassant describes him as having « pattes de bois », or wooden paws. Not only is he an outcast but also he is subhuman- an animal, “dragging his deformed and tattered person from door to door on his wooden crutches”. This paragraph can also serve as an anecdote to the fact that Cloche is powerless, as he cannot move physically or in his social status.

A common theme in *Le Gueux* is society's weariness and fear of Cloche. *Le Gueux* contains repetitions of instances where peasants are tired of seeing Cloche, « ...les paysans, las de le rencontrer toujours » (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 83). They want him to go to a different village, to be another's problem. There is a form of cruelty involved in how the peasants treat Cloche. They tell him, « On n'peut portant pas nourrir ce fainéant tout l'année » (84). They say they cannot feed the “lazy” the whole year. They taunt him in this way. Yet, Maupassant is compassionate with his “joyless humor” and continues, « cependant le fainéant avait besoin de manger tous les jours » (Maupassant, 94). Even though they call him lazy, Maupassant reminds the reader that Cloche still has basic needs just like everyone else. Maupassant creates a very human cloche, but some characteristics of humanity cannot live in Cloche because of where he is at in society. He cannot really know nor love anyone. He lives « sans connaitre personne, sans aimer personne » (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 83). Cloche is continually dehumanized: he cannot intimately know nor love anyone, yet this is not dependent on Cloche's actions but on how people view him. No one wants to let him in- psychologically or physically: he is deemed unlovable.



Although he encounters all sorts of people as a beggar, he hides from the police, which Cloche assumes he learned from the parents he never met, « comme s'il eut reçu cette crainte et cette ruse de ses parents, qu'il n'avait point connus » (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 83). Such a fear foreshadows his later encounter with the police at the end of the story. With such a pessimist and gloomy attitude against the police, Maupassant highlights their profession and critiques their role and function in society, specifically toward the marginalized. If they aren't actively helping Cloche then they are hurting him.

Maupassant stresses Cloche's social exclusion by including synonyms for emphasis, "Il n'avait pas de refuge, pas de toit, pas de hutte, pas d'abri » (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 83). Cloche has nowhere to live, another key aspect of his disenfranchisement.

The text explains that «il vivait comme les bêtes de bois» and describes another recurring theme of hunting (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 83). By being compared to a beast of the forest, he is not only reduced to an animal but receives the status of both a predator and a prey.

After two days, he has received no food. Les paysannes, or the farmers, shout at him to leave because they gave him bread three days ago. Maupassant reminds us that this is December and there is a cold wind, and « c'était en décembre, un vent froid courait sur les champs » (84). As the story deepens, the weather gets colder.

Maupassant gives life to Cloche's hunger, « la faim jetait une détresse dans son âme confuse et lourde » (84). Cloche's hunger is palpable, and Maupassant gives it life by making hunger a noun and allowing it to overcome Cloche's body.

After begging more, Cloche is given nothing. He goes to neighboring farms. He is completely hopeless, « C'était un de ces jours froids et tristes ou les cœurs se serrent ou

les esprits s'irritent ou l'âme est sombre ou la main ne s'ouvre ni pour donner ni pour secourir » (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 84). Day by day, Cloche's destiny is even bleaker. Not only are the days described as cold and sad, but also Maupassant's descriptions seem to fit into how Cloche feels inwardly. The day is said to be a day when hands do not open either to give money or food, which is the opposite of his need.

He finally finds a ditch in a land owned by Chiquet where he positions himself, « il alla s'abattre au coin d'un fosse » (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 84). « S'abattre » is a double entendre: it can mean “to collapse on” but it can also mean “to strike on”, and it is generally used as a verb to describe killing prey. His hunger is active, personified: it tortures and immobilizes him, « il resta longtemps immobile, torturé par la faim » (84).

The weather gets colder, with a « vent glacé », or an icy wind present (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 85). Cloche hopes from some sort of miracle from heaven and he miraculously sees some black hens wandering in search for food. He finds them like he has been for years now, looking for food slowly and surely, « elles piquaient d'u coup de bec un grain ou un insecte invisible, puis continuait leur recherche lente et sure » (85).

Cloche lets his hunger trump his logic, and takes a rock and hits a hen. He never even processed that this could be stealing; he was simply overcome with hunger. Unfortunately, the Farmer Chiquet found out and cuffed and kicked Cloche. Cloche is defenseless, « [il] ne pouvait se défendre » (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 85). Interestingly, Cloche has been a handicapped cripple most of his life, yet this is the time he feels utterly defenseless.

The town people show up and are tired and weary of Cloche. They hit him and hurt him. Maupassant really depicts the social abuses and violence against

Cloche, « Cloche, a moitié mort, saignant et crevant de faim, demeura couché sur le sol...il n'avait toujours pas mangé » (85). Here, Maupassant reminds us that after the beating, Cloche still hasn't eaten. Maupassant maintains a very believable story but allows that more wrong happen to Cloche. The police come, and Farmer Chiquet alleges there was an attack from Cloche, but Cloche cannot move nor defend himself. At the beginning of the story, Cloche has independence despite his handicap. Now, Cloche cannot move, he tries to climb on his crutches but there is no point to his effort, «Cloche ne pouvait plus remuer, il essaya bien de se hisser sur ses pieux, il n'y parvint point» (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 85).

Fear overcomes Cloche. Throughout the story, the villagers are afraid and weary of him. Now, Cloche is overcome by fear of the unknown, « La peur l'avait saisi, cette peur native des baudriers jaunes, cette peur du gibier devant le chasseur, de la souris devant le chat » (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 86). Leaving the farm, the villagers scorn at him and make fun of him. They seem so relieved that such a person was leaving their town.

He is a caged animal and cannot even utter words. After being belittled and dehumanized, he seems to have forgotten how to speak; he has lost his voice in the world, « Il ne prononça pas un mot, n'ayant rien à dire, car il ne comprenait plus rien. Depuis tant d'années d'ailleurs qu'il ne parlait à personne, il avait à peu près perdu l'usage de sa langue ; et sa pensée aussi était trop confuse pour se formuler par des paroles » (Maupassant *Le Gueux* 86). Even at the governmental level, nobody thinks of Cloche's needs, not even the police. Maupassant criticizes the police by characterizing them as incompetent, « Les gendarmes ne pensèrent pas qu'il pouvait avoir besoin de manger » (86). The next morning, when the police come to interrogate him, he is found dead on the

ground. After this twist ending, Maupassant ends the short story by highlighting the irony and in sarcastic humor exclaims, « Quelle surprise! » (86).

## **LE GUEUX DISCUSSION**

Maupassant's *Le Gueux* has many important themes. One of the most prominent themes seen is the idea of "the hunting vs. the hunted". Cloche, the beggar, is often victimized and is described as society's prey, an example of the rampant pessimism present in this story. At the same time, Cloche hunts for hens and is a hunter for his own survival. This dichotomy reveals that even though he is himself a hunter (of chickens), he is at the bottom of social hierarchy as he is not strong enough to withstand society's hunting of beggars and outcasts. He, then, continues to be at the bottom of the ladder, despite being a hunter himself. Not surprisingly, there is language that compares Cloche to an animal. If society is a hunter, then Cloche is the animal they hunt as prey. By comparing Cloche to having « pattes de bois » or wooden paws, and even of being like a « bête », Maupassant leaves no question of Cloche's victimization.

Maupassant uses the weather to manipulate the story's mood and as a foreshadowing tool, a clever tactic that progresses the story. Peter Lock, referencing Maupassant's "Amour", another story about the hunter vs. the hunting clash, explains,

"It may be said that what is habitually considered as "background" description becomes transformed, in this instance, into the "foreground" of the work, occupying a position of significance at least equal to that of the human protagonists. Moreover, not only the power of the story but also its final meaning is to be ascertained through analysis of its descriptive elements. Maupassant's use of detail, organization of motifs and concern with rhythmical patterning reveal preoccupations which carry the meaning of the work well beyond the suggestive alternation of the human and the non-human. (Lock 72)

In this way, Maupassant uses the environment's natural power to foreshadow or influence the story. At first, Maupassant makes no mention of any exact time or season except for the reference to « jour des Morts » or All Saints Day, when a priest picked him up out of a ditch, which is in November. As the story picks up, Maupassant mentions that it is December. Elements of cold and dread make the story to not be chilling physically but also psychologically for Cloche. People seem to react to him with the same level of coolness that the weather produces. At the same time, the villagers respond to Cloche like one would to the nuisance of the cold: unwelcomed and unwanted. The villagers cry out for Cloche to leave, « Te r'voilà encore, vieille pratique! Je s'rons donc jamais débarrassés de té ». Maupassant also places Cloche in ditches or constantly wandering from place to place, to demonstrate his marginalization and segregation. Location becomes an important evidence of the victimization happening to Cloche. In this way, Maupassant manipulates Cloche's surroundings and brings them into significance. The behavior of the environment is indicative of tension within the story.

Maupassant details Cloche's misery so clearly that there is nothing but pessimist attributes in the hopelessness of Cloche's situation. Although it is excruciating to accompany Cloche through all of this, there is evidence that Maupassant uses this to explore class criticism. Cloche's helplessness stems from many things. First, he is stuck in a closed system of oppression. If his past predicts his future, there is no redemption for Cloche. As a disabled person, one would think that his handicap would prevent him from achieving success. Still, Maupassant disproves this. Cloche appears to be an independent beggar, asking for alms without any specific help from the government or church. His crutches are of not perfect, but they do not hinder him from his begging. The two things

Maupassant considers as true hindrances to Cloche are hunger, which destroys his logic, and the policemen, which give him insurmountable fear. So, if Maupassant gives agency to his characters, as Gerald Prince suggests, then who is responsible for Cloche and his demise (Prince 6)? The severe injustice constantly portrayed seems to describe a social problem, in which society has a hand in killing Cloche. Then, Cloche is not merely a victim of necessity; he is murdered by the system.

According to the social class system described by Karl Marx, Cloche was a degenerate. Although the villagers were farmers and were not part of the bourgeoisie themselves, they probably viewed Cloche with the same level of cynicism as Hayes describes Marx having toward degenerates,

“Marx's analytic understanding of degeneracy was that a degenerate was not interested in making a living through being involved in the productive process, but rather aimed to make a living outside this process. More loosely, Marx associated degeneracy with vice, which he defined in fairly conventional moral terms. By contrast, a non-degenerate had an interest in being involved in production and, although obscured by the capitalist system, this interest was not merely an instrumental one, but included the aim of participating in production for its own sake” (Hayes 102).

Maupassant humanizes Cloche by describing a system where Cloche is stuck in, without being associated with vices. Although he was not actively involved in the production of the capitalist system, his main concern was of survival, which Maupassant stresses with the constant reminders of Cloche's hunger. The villagers don't assume that he needs help. They prey on him, even though they themselves are part of the working classes.

Maupassant clearly ignores the “correctness” of writing positively on the social production of society of his time and instead humanizes the one in the bottom of the hierarchal ladder. With the attributes of pessimism throughout the story, he conveys that there is a social problem.

Does society hunt for their own survival, as Cloche does? Perhaps Cloche’s very existence is threatening to society. Katherine Lynch examines how 19<sup>th</sup> century France dealt with orphans and unwanted children. The system was broken, and many children did not have the necessary means to grow up well unless they went to a state hospital. Many women gave up their children in hospitals and those were overflowing themselves. Cloche’s story is perhaps an allusion and a critique of the system that deals with unwanted or orphaned children of the Third Republic.



## CONCLUSION

This project considers Maupassant's contributions to the naturalist movement in 19th century France by highlighting the connection between Maupassant's writing style and social justice. In light of an unequal class system, Maupassant creates pessimistic yet highly realistic short stories that mirror and criticize current social trends, "Maupassant looks at life with a fearless, unflinching gaze, much of what he sees inspires movingly compassionate words. He was a true democrat in his defense of the weak, the humble, the mistreated" (Artinian 7). Maupassant's compelling narratives do not only recount factual or even embellished stories: Maupassant shares necessary stories that show the poor and disenfranchised; he shows the humanity in the suffering. This leads the reader to recognize privilege and have a greater understanding for "the other", or those different than themselves.

This project contributes academically by providing a greater understanding and appreciation of Maupassant's methods and literary contributions, which could be reproduced by modern writers to expose similar issues by intentionally influencing readers in favor of social awareness through dark prose.

For future research, more of his short stories must be analyzed to connect Maupassant's pessimism to his overall goals in writing. Studying more stories will provide a better picture of Maupassant's intentions for social criticism and social justice.

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