

Potrayal of women in the select short stories of guy de Maupassant

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Guy De Maupassant's women characters. Maupassant's personal life was not a happy one and his own experience of life is brought out through the characters like the strong mother who repents for her sins in "The mother and son", the story "The Father", shows the women characters to be more powerful in the bond than the men characters. The characters Berthe and Ravet prove to be loyal to their husbands in the story "A Wedding Gift". The women in "The Diamond Necklace" are self-centred creatures who control the men with their sexuality, and end up damaging the men's life. Thus, he has portrayed good and bad characters through his stories and also tells about the strengths and weaknesses of women.

Keywords: women, family, infidelity, mother, weakness, self- centred

Introduction

"He is a better writer than you think," Malcolm Lowry once said of Guy de Maupassant. This comment, made to David Markson, indicates the conundrum Maupassant present to readers.

Guy De Maupassant was born on August 5, 1850 in Normandy, France. His father and mother were separated when he was eleven years old, and Maupassant was raised under the influence of his strong domineering mother. His stories are often autobiographical in nature and are based on the life he has seen and lived.

Many modern critics have found rich material for the study in the women characters in his stories. Not fewer than sixty of Maupassant's stories had a less number of female characters or no female characters could be found, and the critic Mary Donaldson – Evans concentrated on the connections between the role of women in the tales and the author's clear "contempt for the concept of God."

In almost all his short stories, women play a major role. And all his female characters are portrayed as intelligent, adorable, faithful, lovable, truthful, and matured, at the same time they have some flaws like ignorance, short temperance, dishonesty etc.

Mary L. Poteau– Tralie traced Maupassant's increasingly pessimistic portrayal of mother characters in particular. Whereas, his early tales contain a primarily idealistic vision on motherhood – by referring to the roles as "a unique and privileged position." In contrast his later works focused on the horrific versions of motherhood, involving in infanticide, sexual promiscuity, and madness. According to Poteau-Tralie, this increasingly negative characterization was directly related to Maupassant's deteriorating mental and physical health also his growing pessimistic view of the world.

In Mother and Son, the character of the mother is beautifully sketched by Maupassant. She is the protagonist and this character has some reflection of his mother. She is depicted as a lady who is bold enough to meet the challenges in her life. Also she repents for her sins. The story opens with a narration of the mother to a lawyer, she says that in her young age she was in love with a person but her family rejected him as he

was not rich enough. She was compelled to marry another person. And they had a son, after few years of marriage, her husband died. Suddenly, she met her lover and he felt pity on her and they both brought up her son. Some years passed happily, in one point of time, when the son grew up, he came to know about their relationship and he ran away.

When the mother knew this, she insisted her lover to bring back her son home. She said "I forbid you to come near me or to see me again unless you find him. Go away!" Select Short Stories of Guy De Maupassant (SSG 30). She had a strong hope that her son would return home one day. From that time, she was alone in her house for twenty years expecting her son's return. The missing of her son made her to a nervous attack and made her to wait for a peaceful death. "A sum of five thousand francs is left to you as a fee if you do not succeed, and of a hundred thousand francs if you do succeed. I want you to find my son after my death."(SSG 26).

The above statement makes clear that the mother is ashamed of her behaviour, so she wants the lawyer to find the son after her death.

"My child, my dear, dear child, be less harsh toward poor women! Life is already brutal and savage enough in its dealings with them. My dear son, think of what the existence of your poor mother has been ever since the day you left her. My dear child, forgive her, and love her, now that she is dead, for she has had to endure the most frightful penance ever inflicted on a woman."(SSG 31). In the end of the story, she repents for her sins and she proves to be a good character.

In 'The Father', Francois Tessier is a person who is much attracted towards the girl whose name is Louise. Her character is depicted as clever and intelligent.

Charles J. Stivale argued that Maupassant is subverted in traditional, social and gender hierarchies, as the women characters typically proved more powerful in the bond than the men characters.

She is matured enough to handle the situations in life. As a teenager, she knows the attitude of the men. He works as a clerk in the Bureau of Public Education. Every day, Tessier travels in an omnibus where he meets a girl. As the story moves on, they became friends. One day he asks her to come

for lunch. When she goes for lunch she made it very clear that there must not be anything beside friendship. She says, "I do not want you to deceive in me, and I shall not go there with you, unless you promise, unless you swear – not – to do –not to do anything – that is at all improper."(SSG 162).

In several places, she is afraid of men. She even maintained a distance with them and she is afraid of her virtuousness also. She says "I do not want you to be deceived in me, and I shall not go there with you, unless you promise, unless you swear – not to do – not to do anything that is at all improper." (SSG 162).

In every instance, Monsieur Francois tries to move very close with her but she exclaims that "Oh! Monsieur Francois, after what you swore to me!"(SSG 164). But he keeps on torturing her by his love but she remains firm and said "No I cannot, I cannot." (SSG 165).

At one point of time, they cannot resist and she threw her arms to him. After some days when he came to see her, she whispered something to him and he disappeared from the house. She confessed her misfortune and threw herself at her mother's knees and some months after, gave birth to a boy. She is depicted as a woman who had a strong hope and who had recovered from a bad side of life. Thus after the misfortune, she looked more self- possessed and dignified.

In 'A Wedding Gift', Berthe is portrayed as a soft person. She is innocent to some extent. On the very night of their marriage, when Jacques received a letter saying that he has to leave that night to some place, she remains ignorant and faithful; by not asking any questions to him. She remained patient till the whole thing is explained by her husband. When her husband returned home with a child and revealed that the mother of the child was dead, without saying a word, Berthe seized the child to kiss and hug it and she asked him " Did you say that the mother was dead" at that point, she decided to bring up the child. Jacques also told Berthe that they broke since summer. Berthe readily forgets everything and she forgives whatever her husband has done before.

On the other hand, Ravet the lover of Jacques is a courageous woman, when she is in her death bed she is very particular that the child must have someone to take care of and she makes Jacques arrive at her place and made it a point that Jacques takes care of the child. She said "I am going to die, dear. Promise to stay to the end. Oh! don't leave me now. Don't leave in my last moments!"(SSG 150). Even though she knows that she is going to die she makes sure that Jacques needs to be with her in her last moments. Almost all the woman is faithful to their husbands in the stories of Guy De Maupassant.

The women in "The Diamond Necklace" are self-centred creatures who control the men with their sexuality, and end up damaging the men's life. The main character is Mathilde who is extremely pretty. She is not a wealthy person, and is married to a clerk. Mathilde is very unhappy with her life, and wishes she could have more luxuries. The author says: "she dressed plainly because she could not dress well, but she was unhappy as if she had really fallen from a higher station; since with women there is neither caste nor rank, grace and charm take the place of family and birth. Natural ingenuity, instinct for what is elegant, a supple mind are their sole hierarchy, and often make of women of the people of the equals of the very greatest ladies."(SSG 92.)

The woman in the story, Mathilde Loisel, was not honest with herself. She did not accept her existence. She sought an

aesthetically pleasing lifestyle, and felt that she would give anything, even her life to have it. Since, she did not realize the fact that she had a loving husband and a secure lifestyle. She was not happy with her surroundings and possessions. She felt secure to have such a beauty and grace with no class to go with it. She dreamt of things that were simply not meant for her and she overlooked the things she has.

"She thought of dainty dinners, of shining silverware, of tapestry that peopled the walls with ancient personages and with strange birds flying in the midst of a fairy forest; and she thought of delicious dishes served on marvellous plates and of the whispered gallantries to which you listen with a sphinx-like smile while you are eating the pink meat of a trout or wings of a quail."(SSG 93).

When she wants to go for a party and she does not have anything to wear. She wanted a new dress for a Chancellor's party; so she got a dress from her husband's savings. This was not enough so, she also had to have beautiful jewellery because there is nothing more humiliating when it looked with poor in the company of rich women.

Mrs. Loisel learned what poor was when she lost the necklace. She lost her youth and financial security. She also lost her pride, but in doing so, she gained her personality. At the beginning of the story she was extremely shallow and she gained a sense of self-worth and self-respect. She also gained respect for her husband.

Throughout the story she changes from being superficial to having a deep sense of worth. Mathilde lied to her friend to keep her pride but showed honour in wanting to replace the necklace. Towards the end of the story, the reader can see where the hard work has taken her beauty, and social graces. Although she lost her youth, she gained a different perspective on life and realized everything and she wanted was in front of her and she threw it all away to get more. At the end of the story, her respect for the working class is evident.

Mathilde met Jeanne after the loss of her necklace. If she had been honest with her, and told about the necklace then may be this would not have happened. All of the things she tried to present herself as having, and all the luxuries she wanted were lost because she was not honest. If Mathilde had notices the wealth of things around her, then she may not have had to go through the hardships that befell her. She had her health, her beauty, financial comfort and a loving, giving, wonderful husband. Thus in conclusion, she lost everything because she did not recognize the abundant life she led.

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