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Peace and Conflict in *Two Friends*: A Naturalistic Short Story

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Abstract: *As a mover and shaker man of letters, the French short story writer Guy de Maupassant penned hundreds of groundbreaking stories, yet sundry of them are still eclipsed owing to the rarity of reviews. Two Friends (1882), one of his eloquent works, is a pertinent case worth reading and analyzing. As a corollary, this article comes to terms with Two Friends to uncover the story's narrative structure, point of view, setting dimensions, historical context, style, and symbolism to cognize readers about the significance of this piece of work that comes to grips with two dialectical phenomena which are peace and brutality. This juxtapositional datum in human nature echoes how realistic literature in the 19th century represented societies by shedding light on divergent issues in Two Friends and conversing about the impulse that thrusts Guy de Maupassant to tell about the faith of two commoners living in Paris. This investigation indulges realism in Maupassant's work through the projection of commoner characters entangled with the dire reality of armed conflicts. Besides, naturalism discloses the reasonable forces of the environment and innate heredity that navigate the characters' actions. This will inform us about how war sometimes has the repercussions of foolish decisions or human greed, out of which innocent human beings are the overt victims who pay a heavy price.*

Introduction

Guy de Maupassant is coeval with the Franco-Prussian war, so *Two Friends* signifies the impact of war on many of his storylines. As a French clerk during the war, Maupassant employed his expertise and vivid experience to represent war realistically. He sticks to the principles of realistic literature in the 19th century as he zoomed in on ordinary people and how the latter were vehemently influenced by their rulers; be that as it may, the writer seems to foster the naturalistic method that prevailed in the late 19th century as well. This becomes apparent when Maupassant implicitly employs scientific approaches to illustrate different points in the plot development.

The narrator in *Two Friends* is omniscient since Maupassant tells the story from an all-knowing vantage point. He identifies what his characters know, want, and feel from the prelude to the epilogue. As a narrative mode, Maupassant uses scenic presentation based on describing detailed people, actions, places, and objects as in: "His hands in his trousers and stomach empty [...] Monsieur Sauvage, a stout, jolly, little man" (Maupassant, 1993, p. 27).

Literature Review

French literature played a vital role in shaping realistic fiction during the 19th century, giving credit to figures like Victor Hugo and Gustave Flaubert; henceforth, literature zoomed in on real-life veracities of ordinary characters who grapple with life necessities and difficulties, yet the portrayal was from subjective and observatory perspectives (Lukács, 1971). Other French successors such as Emile Zola and Guy de Maupassant commingled the realistic representation of society with the scientific approach, resulting in naturalism as an emerging trend after realism. The main gist of naturalism was to explain the forces and facts that thrust people in the fictitious story to act or react in particular ways (Abraham, 2005).

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As a naturalist, Maupassant often uses objective descriptions and details to show the association between his stories and the real world. He conjures elements like psychology, society, politics, instinct, and other factual data to create this connection. This method is dominant in naturalistic writing, as it emphasizes logical or factual cause–and–effect relationships throughout the plot (May 1981).

Maupassant uses the traditional narrative structure that was prevailing in the 19th century, which is often referred to as Freytag's pyramid (Freytag, 1863). The story opens with an exposition introducing the besieged Paris as the physical setting during the Franco–Prussian war. This setting, combined with the bleak tone of the environment, foreshadows the dramatic moments to come. The protagonist, Morissot, meets his confidant, Sauvage, as the story begins to unfold. Then, the story develops to a rising action when the two friends drink wine and resolve to go fishing in a banned area during wartime. Gradually, events reach the climax when the peers are captured by the Prussian soldiers, interrogated, and endangered. The story then shifts into falling action when Morissot and Sauvage are shot to death. The resolution depicts the indifference of the Prussian commander, who orders his cook to fry the fish found in the victims' creel. Afterwards, their corpses sink to the bottom of the Seine River, reflecting the cold brutality of war (Maupassant, 1993).

This narrative structure reinforces the two-fold themes of struggle and concord in the story. By resorting to Freytag's pyramid, Maupassant juxtaposes the characters' heydays against the cruelty of war, contrasting times of serenity with abrupt shifts into unease and suffering. Then, the resolution embraces tranquillity again to highlight the nature of life that fluctuates between rest and unrest (Pizer, 1993).

Two Friends has been the topic of a few literary analyses that usually shed light on the thematic dimensions of the story, such as loyalty, friendship, and brutality in Lothe's (2016) work, while Rice (2015) casts light on the story's dense messages and themes despite its brevity. Besides, Constantakis (2010) provides sufficient analysis of the characterization perspectives.

The seminality of this paper becomes visible after scrutinizing the literary style and historical background of *Two Friends*. Grover (2017) speculates that this short story employs naturalistic techniques since it emphasizes the impact of the environment on individuals as a *force majeure.* This aspect is particularly illustrated in the discussion of the historical context and its influence on the story's development. Notwithstanding, the study further discusses the naturalistic features of this story through its adoption of literary realism and the implied psychological analysis of characters as a scientific method.

Research Method

Two Friends remains a categorically unfamous short story that entails close investigation, especially from an aesthetic perspective. This qualitative paper uses a formalistic approach to tackle a variety of literary elements in *Two Friends* as a case study (Harmon & Holman, 2009).

The formalistic approach is used to analyze the formal aspects of fiction by extracting ideas from its formal elements, like point of view, setting, characters, historical context, symbolic elements, and style, to name but a few. These will be closely scrutinized to understand their role in conveying the story's in–depth messages (Harmon & Holman, 2009). Adopting this methodology allows the reader to identify the circumstances during the Franco–Prussian War and be appraised about the literary traditions and aesthetics that characterized French literature in the late 19th century.

Findings and Discussions
Setting

The setting serves to unfold the place and time where the story events revolve to provide the reader with further information and truths about the characters as well as the writer. These veracities include geography, history, culture, and mood details. In relation to this short story, France is geographically neighbouring Germany; historically, France and Germany are rival imperialist countries tangled in war, and culturally, they were pioneering, civilized, and advanced.

Two Friends is set in Paris as the physical space where the story takes place. Paris is significant for

Maupassant as he spent several years serving in the French army. This implies that Maupassant knows the place and its details painstakingly. Paris is depicted as a gloomy and lifeless place. This suggests that the

reader is about to break into a bleak story. Paris also represents France's centre of power, where decisions are made. However, in the story, the capital is portrayed as an impotent and powerless city (Maupassant, 1993). This datum shows a clear idea about the life of characters in this city, and thus, readers recognize that people in Paris undergo melancholy and anguish.

The central conflict of the story dates back to the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) (Howard, 2013). This incident illustrates the dreary status quo of Paris along with Paris dwellers. This period reinforces the story's realism by exposing the characters to the harsh realities of war. Literature about war does more than inform similarly to non-fiction; it creates imaginative facts about war through imagery and drama. This approach allows readers to become emotionally and sensually engaged in the narrative (Brosman, 1992). Maupassant, in this regard, revisits war to reveal its destructive impact on people and the sacrifices they endure to survive or defend their nation.

Historical Context as an Impact

The story is set in a period of war between Prussia and France (1870-1871), notorious as the Franco-Prussian War; thus, it emanates from a realistic point of view, as that armed conflict did truly exist.

Being anxious about the victorious wars of Prussia against Denmark and Austria in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, the French sovereign of the 2nd Republic, Napolean III, came to terms with Prussia as the overt and most threatening enemy to France. Be that as it may, Napoleon's tension peaked when Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, one of the successors of the Hohenzollern dynasty, accepted the Spanish proposal to be on the throne of Spain. According to France, this dismal news means that Prussia is gaining more power in Europe and overtly rivals French continental superiority over Europe (Britannica, 2023). France, under the reign of Napoleon III, declared war in July 1970. At that time, the Prussians were under the sovereignty of King William I along with the Prussian chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, who hankered for war to coalesce Prussia with the pending German states. Respectively, France was completely defeated in 1871, and its emperor was detained by the Prussian troops and disposed of proportionately. The war ended with the creation of the French Third Republic and the coalescence of German states into an even Empire (Wawro, 2003). Guy de Maupassant witnessed the Franco-Prussian war with his own eyes. As such, war themes prevailed in many of his short stories that tackle the dire repercussions of war on French civilians, including misery, torture, death, despair, and melancholy pursuits. Some of his masterpieces that describe these dire effects include *Baul de Suif*, *Two Friends*, and *A Duel*, which reflect the serious corollaries of the armed conflict between Germany and France in the 19th century (Das, Mahanta, & Anjan, 2022). Maupassant served as a clerk in the Franco-Prussian war, equipping himself with a wealth of material on war issues (Constantakis, 2010).

The historical context is significant and incumbent for discerning different social, political, or cultural circumstances at certain historical times. Therefore, historical contextualization builds the bridge between the author and reader insofar as the second can identify or digest divergent veracities about the former. When readers are wary of the historical context, they can approach "the political and social thought which shaped the author's ideas when the text was written, and the political and social thought which shape ours as we read" (Beard, 2001). The historical context thrusts readers to dig further into the story setting, which is generally categorized by time and space (Beard, 2001). For instance, Louisiana was a colony in America in the 17th century, while Louisiana State is today one of the states in the Modern USA. Thus, the historical conditions change the storyline in different ways commensurately with their spectrum of historicity.

War Impact on Characters

The friendship between Morissot and Sauvage unravels the brutality of states and governments that disregard human virtues in favour of political and economic hegemony, leading to the tragedy of their nations. Thus, the concept of friendship unfolds the severe consequences of rulers' wrong decisions to win subjective triumph. Maupassant sets *Two Friends* as a tragedy, drawing parallels with Shakespeare's drama and its heroes' flawed actions. There is no doubt that Maupassant's Hamlet is Napoleon III, who imprudently declared war against Prussia and led his populace to chaos (Howard, 2013).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau links barbarism to corrupt civilization via his concept of 'the noble savage,' although he does not appreciate that savage. This concept implies that human beings in the natural state were enjoying a genuine life devoid of sinister social whims, meaning that primitive Man was noble by instinct. Rousseau lamented the human wrong exploitation of civilization, even though he confesses that civilization is a desired progress since Mankind is moral and progressive by nature; yet, the way humanity harnessed technology and science was conducive to some forms of corruption and immorality, as seen in wars, social stratification, and increased subjectivity, which he terms as "the fatal enlightenment of civilized man" (Ellingson, 2001, p. 82).

In the story's context of the Franco-Prussian War, technology is portrayed as a discovery with severe drawbacks. Rousseau argues that distorted civilization represents a new form of slavery. In instances like colonialism and imperialism, the colonizers enslave their 'subject other'; in the example of capitalism, people are incarcerated under the will of moneymaking, social mobility, and superiority. He seems to agree with Aristotle's speculations on the "natural slave," suggesting that Enlightenment gave credit to aristocratic nobility, in its political connotations, to the detriment of natural nobility, which was tied to the 'state of nature'. In other words, lower social classes have become naturalized slaves under the ruling of certain powers (State, Law, Government, etc.) (Peiker, 2006). This viewpoint is shared by Maupassant when he writes, "[Morissot & Sauvage] would never be free," implying that civilization and its political pursuits lead to a new form of slavery (Maupassant, 1993, p. 30). Nevertheless, Rousseau does not advocate for a return to primitivism but rather proclaims that civil societies need a social contract that would steer human regeneration into an ideal model (Ellingson, 2001).

The characters themselves are used in the story with significant symbolism. It is often quoted that Rousseau's father was a watchmaker at some point in his life; likewise, Morissot performs the same job in this fictional story (Wokler, 2001). This coincidental resemblance may suggest that Maupassant was influenced by Rousseau's philosophy. Another emblem that reveals Rousseau's influence on Maupassant is the character of Sauvage, who hints at Rousseau's 'noble savage.' Sauvage is introduced as a kindhearted and joyous person, referring to the instinctive purity and peace with which humans are created.

Style

Being influenced by his French compatriot and lighthouse, Emile Zola, Maupassant is typified as one of the pioneers of naturalism. This literary movement shares sundry similarities with realism. Both naturalism and realism object to romanticism's portrayal of human supernatural power, fantasy, picturesque life, and suchlike peculiarities in favour of representing the mundane everyday circumstances that can occur anywhere or run across anyone (Abrahams & Harpham, 2009).

Notwithstanding, realism and naturalism split in some objectivity-bound subtleties. Realism writers come to terms with reality through a physically detailed description within a particular social setting and context. Hence, they approach reality with what they observe and comprehend. Naturalism, on the other hand, maintains similar purports, yet naturalists painstakingly indulge scientific elucidations to their subject matters (Pizer,1993). Emile Zola, the founder of literary naturalism, accentuates that the entire human being encounters and metamorphoses are driven by two determining forces, 'heredity' and 'environment' (Abrahams & Harpham, 2009). Heredity alludes to the human instinct faculties (sexual desire, fear, hunger, etc..) while the environment is the playground (family, community, nation, etc...) where the different human specifics meet and interact, resulting in a helix of actual stories to voice both from realistic and experimental lenses.

As a naturalist, Maupassant used an implied observatory approach that sprouts from serving in the French army during the war. He is, therefore, an eyewitness who explains the environment in France during conflicts. Besides, heredity and environment were indirectly tackled in the story. The idea of the impulse to go fishing illustrates the human instinct to amuse after grim moments. "What good times we used to have! said Morissot" (Maupassant, 1993, p. 28). Herein, Maupassant digs into the human psychological traits that propel oneself to escape life stressors. Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor 1992 define escapism as an interruption of the routines and monotony of daily life. Likewise, Lee Longeway describes 'escapist behaviour' as a kind of self-protective tendency to halt the passive state of reference or hardships humans endure (Longeway 1990).

In *Two Friends*, Morissot and Sauvage contest death to fulfil their desires to go fishing and enjoy the same amusing feeling they used to cherish in their environment before the Prussian invasion, disregarding any hazardous aftermaths. Psychologists call this attitude 'the power of craving'. The power of graving denotes that individuals psychologically run after activities that yield relief, relaxation, and joy via different activities that become a strong and indispensable habit under their rewarding fallouts on individuals (Duhigg, 2012).

Symbolism

Two Friends is filled with symbolism and intricately dispatches psychological and emotional meanings. Animals are employed tragically as emblems of fertility, production, and life. For instance, the fish that Morissot and his pal catch not only symbolizes leisure but also represents normalcy, life, and fertility. Characters in the story opt for contra destruction and despair aftermaths that normally ensue from social and political unrest at large (Smith, 2015).

In many literary works, the absence of birds symbolizes a lack of freedom and harmony. *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* (1865) is a pertinent example of Walt Whitman's use of birds as allegories of love. The poem mourns, through the song of a hermit thrush and other birds, the death of the American president, Abraham Lincoln (Pound, 1930); hence, the bird in this poem symbolizes life and felicity. Likewise, the turtle dove is frequently Shakespeare's symbol of devotion, passion, and perfection, as in *The Phoenix and the Turtle* (Bates, 2022).

Concerning *Two Friends*, the departure of birds in Maupassant's short story signifies the absence of the previously highlighted virtues in Paris during the war. Moreover, the missing birds denote the austerity of life during wars, depicting the setting as a place stripped of its natural charm and peace. Birds are also allegories of characters' souls that are almost dead. (Johnson, 2018).

Rats in British fairy tales are omens of misfortune. *The Ratman* is a famous legendary story that describes the ghastly features of these rodent species; it tells the story of the ghost of a dead old man who takes revenge for his betrayal. Another example is *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, a legend that associates wizards with mice. In the context of *Two Friends*, rats epitomize death and torture. Rats are customarily used in literature to represent disastrous times. In Albert Camus's (1947)' *The Plague*, for instance, rats foreshadow disease and hunger in Oran City. In the same vein, George Orwell's novel *1984* portrays rats as a means of torture against the character Winston.

In *Two Friends*, the starving rats prefigure that the only prey left to devour are Parisian people. Thus, those rats indicate the predator that fraught Paris citizens with despair and fear. Rats in *Two Friends* further allegorizes the hapless people, exposing their vulnerability and senselessness of life, as rats by nature emblemize the underground life. (Greenfield, 2020).

Conclusion

Two Friends looms like an iceberg that hides its enormously giant bottom under water. Even though it is a short story, it takes the reader into countless facts that pertain to French history in the late 19th century. By fostering a formalistic method, it was feasible to find the link between Maupassant's aesthetics, which were influenced by both the naturalistic movement and the political *status quo* in France under the sovereignty of Napolean III, allowing us to digest how the environment affects our intellect and art.

The idea of heredity and environment that prevails in naturalistic literature visibly illustrates human actions following the psychological and political implications of societies within a specific historical context. The will of people to liven up and enjoy a decent life is sometimes obstructed by authoritative, greedy, or unwise leaders who drive their populace into the abyss.

Two Friends' moral lies in evoking the drawbacks of war on humanity and the state of chaos that arises from it. One of the perplexing outcomes is the psychological disorder and socio-political anarchy that the reader notices in this short story. Maupassant's narrative transcends wartime events; it functions as a commentary on the weakness of humans when challenged by calamities.

The story's features replicate many-sided intellectual facts, such as Rousseau's scrutiny of civilization along with the devastating impact of wrong political decisions on citizens, demonstrating that humanity is vehemently influenced when propaganda, subjectivity, and greed become attributes of decision-makers. Maupassant, in this regard, sounds transcendentalist as he blames humans' wrong grasp of the universe's logic. Therefore, *Two Friends* implements a universal approach to human culture that is divinely inclined to peace and coexistence among moral creatures.

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