



RESEARCH PAPER

**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 which is worth reading and analyzing. As a result, 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. These juxtapositional facts in human nature explicate 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 talk about the faith of two commoners living in Paris. This will inform us about how war is sometimes the repercussion of foolish decisions or human greed while innocent human beings are the overt victims who pay a heavy price.

Keywords: French Literature, Naturalism, Peace, War, Realism

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Introduction

Guy de Maupassant is coeval with the Franco-Prussian war, so *Two Friends* signifies the impact of war on many of his storylines and convictions. 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. This becomes apparent when Maupassant implicitly employs scientific approaches to illustrate different points within the plot.

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 by 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 purpose of naturalism was to explain the forces and facts that thrust people in the fictitious story to act or react in certain manners (Abraham, 2005).

As a naturalist, Maupassant often uses objective descriptions and details to show the association between his stories and the real world, evoking facts like psychology, society, politics, instinct, and other data. This method dominates naturalistic writings to emphasize logical or factful cause-and-effect relationships throughout the plot (May 1981).

Maupassant uses the traditional narrative structure that prevailed in the 19th century, often referred to as Freytag’s pyramid (Freytag, 1863). The story opens with an exposition introducing the sieged Paris as a physical setting during the Franco-Prussian war, the bleak tone of the environment which foreshadows dramatic moments to come, and the hapless protagonist, Morissot, who meets his confidant fellow, Sauvage. 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. This trembling situation is followed by a falling action when the captives are shot to death. The epilogue that is the story’s resolution reveals the indifference of the Prussian commander to the end of the two friends, as he orders his cook to fry the fish they find in the victim’s creel with cold blood while Morissot and Sauvage’s corpses sink to the lowermost of Seine River (Maupassant, 1993).

Two Friends (1882) 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 tremendous force; this datum is illustrated within the discussion of the historical context and its influence on the story at loose. Notwithstanding, the study further discusses the naturalistic features of this story through its adoption of literary realism and employment of implied psychological analysis of characters, as a scientific method.

Research Method

Two Friends remains a categorically unfamous short story that entails a close investigation, especially from the aesthetic perspective. This qualitative paper uses a formalistic approach to tackle a variety of literary elements in *Two Friends* as a case study. As such, the analysis puts the limelight on the setting, historical context, style, and symbolism employed by Maupassant in this particular work. Adopting this methodology, allows the reader to identify the circumstances that took place during the Franco-Prussian War and to be appraised about the literary traditions and aesthetics that characterized French literature in the late 19th century.

Findings and Discussions

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 along with the writer. These veracities include geography, history, culture, and mood details. In relation to this short story, France is geographically neighboring Germany; historically, France and Germany were 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 quite well. Paris is depicted as a gloomy and lifeless place; this signifies that the reader is about to break into a bleak story. Paris further hints at France's center of power where decisions are usually made; nevertheless, the capital is sketched now as an impotent, dead, or powerless city (Maupassant, 1993). This datum gives 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 in 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 since the characters are exposed to the tough reality of war. War stories in literature are important, for they go beyond informing compared to non-fiction; they rather create imaginative facts about war circumstances in imagery and dramatic ways, insofar as readers get sensually and emotionally involved in the story (Savage Brosman, 1992). Maupassant in this regard revisits war to disclose its destructive impact on people and the sacrifices the latter undergo to stay alive 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 took place in reality.

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, Napoleon 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 1870. 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. France was completely defeated in 1871, and its emperor was detained by the Prussian troops and disposed proportionately. The war ended with the creation of the French Third Republic and the coalescence of German states into an even Empire (Wawro, 2003).

Maupassant witnessed the Franco-Prussian war with his naked eyes. As such, war themes prevail in many of his short stories that tackle the dire repercussions of war on the French civilians; this includes misery, torture, death, despair, and melancholy pursuits. To name but a few, *Baul de Suif*, *Two Friends*, and *A Duel* are superbly some of his masterpieces that describe the serious corollaries of the armed conflict between Germany and France in the 19th century (Das et al., 2022). What is more, Maupassant served as a clerk in the Franco-Prussian war and got equipped with extensive materials on war-related issues. This connotes that realism is mandatory in naturalistic literature (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 that 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 Modern USA. Thus, the historical conditions change the storyline in different ways commensurately with their scope of historicity.

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 favor 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 plainly hints at 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 out 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 both implied 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 behavior’ 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 fulfill 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 craving denotes that individuals psychologically

run after activities that yield relief, relaxation, and joy via different activities that become a strong and indispensable habit in virtue of their rewarding fallouts on individuals (Duhigg, 2012).

Symbolism

Animals as emblems of fertility, production, and life are employed in a tragic way. 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 symbols 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 figure 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 lack of those highlighted virtues in Paris during the war. 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 communicates 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 *The Plague* by Albert Camus, 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 symbolize the predator that fraught Paris citizens with despair and fear.

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 and literary traditions in the late 19th century. By fostering a formalistic method, it was feasible to find the link between Maupassant's aesthetics that are influenced by the naturalistic movement and the political *status quo* in France under the sovereignty of Napoleon III, allowing us to digest how the environment affects our intellect and art.

The idea of heredity and environment that prevails in naturalistic literature illustrates visibly the human actions following the psychological and political implications of societies within a specific historical context. The will of people to live 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 ensues from it. One of the perplexing aftermaths is the psychological disorder and socio-political anarchy that the reader notices when reading this short story. Therefore, *Two Friends* follows a

universal approach to human nature that divinely embraces peace and coexistence.

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