Boule De Suif

by
Guy de Maupassant

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Author's biography

Henri Rene` Albert Guy de Maupassant was born on the 5 August 1850 in Tourville sur Arques. It is believed that Maupassant was born at Chateau de Miromesniel, although it is speculated that his parents moved from their humble house in Fe`camp to the imposing Miromeniel mansion to give their first-born child a high-sounding birth place. His parents separated when he was eleven years old, and he lived all of his early years in his native Normandy. Maupassant was born with the gift of a photographic memory, and this innate talent helped him to remember the nuances of Norman people that later made his stories so descriptive.

In 1869, Maupassant moved to Paris to study Law, but by the age of twenty he volunteered to serve in the army during the Franco-Prussian War. After the war he joined the literary circle headed by Gustave Flaubert. The famous writer was a friend of Maupassant's mother. Flaubert introduced his new protégé to other writers, including Emile Zola, Ivan Turgenev, and Henry James. Flaubert was wholly impressed with Maupassant and became obsessed with teaching the young Maupassant the art of seeing although the young author was grateful for Flaubert's instruction and doting, he was much more lighthearted and cynical than his mentor.

During the Franco-Prussian War Maupassant worked in the Intendence or military supply corps at Le Havre. After his father obtained a post for him at the Ministere de La Marine in Paris and later he moved to the Cabinet de l’Instruction Publique. During these years as a civil servant Maupassant made many influential friends among the literati of Paris. In 1880 he published his first volume of poems, Des Vers, which was well received by his literary friends but caused a public furore for its outspoken descriptions of sexual passion.

During the years between 1872 and 1880, Maupassant spent much of his time hating his work as a civil servant and all of his free time writing and chasing women. He made his literary mark in 1880 with the publication of his greatest masterpiece, "*Boule de Suif*". The title translates as "*Ball of Fat*", but in the most English translations the title is left in Maupassant's native tongue. During the 1880s, Maupassant penned over three hundred short stories, six novels, three travelogues, and one volume of verse. From this incredible body of work, Maupassant created many remarkable stories, including the novels *'Une Vie'* in 1883 and '*Pierre et Jean*' in 1888.

Although many of his stories were considered immoral - his subject matter was frequently centered on sex, adultery, prostitutes and food and drink - a small portion of his corpus was dedicated to short horror stories. From this smaller, later, body of his work, no story was more terrifying than his harrowing tale of madness, "*Le Horla*", published in 1887. Many of his horror stories spawned from the impact of syphilitic infection he contracted during his raucous twenties. From the course of the infection, Maupassant began to lose his sanity. The infection and madness eventually took permanent hold of Maupassant's mind, and on January 2, 1892, he attempted to slit his own throat. Following his attempted suicide, Maupassant was committed to an asylum in Paris, where he died a year later. Due to his "*immoral*" subject matter, Maupassant did not receive adequate praise from English-speaking literary circles until the latter half of the twentieth century, yet it cannot be denied that his work was influenced, and has been imitated by, countless authors across the globe.

It is for this *contess or* short stories that Maupassant is venerated. The short story was the perfect vehicle for the love of form and rigorous concern for style that Maupassant shared with Flaubert. Masterly craftsmanship is evident in the fine structure of his tales where his unerring eye for drama is balanced by his instinct for simplicity, and all is expressed in a style that is scrupulous, lucid and concise. A master of distillation, Maupassant can illuminate an entire code of values by means of a few telling details, yet he states clearly rather more than he implies, living little open to interpretation. There is a sensuous quality to his careful portrayal of people, and he excels at natural description that is simple and direct. Story such as *Clare de Lune, The Olive Orchard and Madame Tellier's Establishment* reflect this talent, andcountless others show his particular appreciation of the beauties of Normandy.

Maupassant's very broad personal experience enabled him to hone his powers of observation. He writes of ordinary people of whom he had first-hand knowledge such as the farmers, fisherman and peasants of his home province, Normandy; of tradesman, shopkeepers, civil servants, prostitutes and soldiers. Focusing on ordinary situations in the lives of these people, he reveals envy, greed, hypocrisy, selfishness, vanity and cruelty. He depicts the petty limitations, the dissimulations and the pretentions inherent at different levels of society. Yet beside the meaner inclinations of humanity, honour and integrity and generosity of spirit feature too and Maupassant's humour is frequently evident, especially in his Norman stories. Despite his detached and apparently clinical portrayal of people as he finds them, Maupassant's writing has an underlying passion. He is accurately perceptive about the kind of conditions that impoverish the human spirit and induce the worst behavior, suggesting tolerance and sympathy. Much of his work is populated by the gentle poor, characters whose existences are governed by desperation to keep up appearances. Employed in government departments for many years himself, Maupassant often writes of the hampered lives of civil –servants. The appalling irony of human contradictions is a theme that links much of his work. One of his most famous stories, *The Necklace*, is a fine illustration of this. Linked by a trenchant irony and by a preoccupation with the frailty of human nature, its susceptibility to illusions, and by the futility of so many lives Maupassant's stories are laden with philosophy that is masked by the simplicity of their presentation. Maupassant has been called immoral and pessimist, but he is one of the finest story-teller of all time. Very soon after this he began to show signs of general paralysis, a side effect of the syphilis he had contracted as a youth. He veered between bouts of sociability and depression, which seems to have been a family affliction – both his mother and brother (who finally killed himself) also suffered from depression. Nevertheless he worked incessantly and his out put was prodigious. In 1892 he attempted suicide and was then incarcerated in an asylum where he died of his paralysis in July 1893. He is buried in the cemetery on Mont Parnasse. Maupassant is widely regarded as master of the short story, rivaled only by Chekhov.

Guy de Maupassant is the master of the short story. His short stories reflect his remarkable diversity, with stories that vary in theme and tone, and range from tragedy and satire to comedy and farce. With the simplicity of style that masks complete philosophy, Maupassant can illuminate an entire codes of values by means of a few telling details. He exposes the brutality of war and the hypocrisy it spawns, and depicts the petty limitations, the dissimulations and the varieties inherent at different levels of society. His stories are linked by trenchant irony and by a preoccupation with the frailty of human nature and the futility of so many lives.

Boule de Suif: Plot Summary

'***B**oule de Suif*'opens with a description of French soldiers retreating from the advancing Prussian army. They are fleeing through Rouen as the Prussians begin to take hold of the city. Many Prussians are boarding up with towns people and, in general, acting quite respectable in the townspeople's hopes. Outside in the streets, they are gruffer and carry themselves with a stronger, more ostentatious air. Many who attempt to flee the city are held captive or turned back. However, some individuals are given permits to leave Rouen. Ten such individuals have gathered together in the courtyard of a hotel to ready themselves for their trip out of Rouen to Le Havre. From Le Havre the travellers will cross to England if the Prussian army continues to advance. Gathered together at the coach are the driver and ten passengers: Comte and Comtesse Hubert de Bre`ville, Monsieur and Madame Loiseau, Monsieur and Madame Carre` - Lamadon, Cornudet, Boule de Suif, and two nuns. The first six are of a higher social class, either extremely wealthy or members of the government or both. The man travelling alone Cornnudet, is a democrat and a political leftist opposed to the aristocratic government. The woman traveling alone Boule de Suif, is a fat, appealing prostitute. The two nuns are simple and spend most of time praying.

The passengers board a chilly train, the floor of which is covered with straw, and begin their long journey through the night and cold to Totes. Everyone begins to reach a point of breaking, as the trip is painstakingly slow and they are filled with discomfort from hunger and thirst. Unfortunately, no one but Boule de Suif has brought provisions for the trip, and since the wealthy, respectable travellers have deemed her immoral and caste insults at her, they are hesitant to ask for food and wine. Eventually, Monsieur Loiseau breaks the silence and asks for some food. Boule de Suif swiftly and happily complies, eventually feeding everyone in the coach. The respectable individuals have a change of heart in regard to Boule de Suif. Now, after being fed, the higher social class is happy to pay respect to the plump prostitute.

Eventually, the coach arrives in Totes. In Totes, Prussian soldiers greet the passengers at their coach, an even that makes everyone quite nervous. Luckily, their documents appear to be sufficient to allow them to continue their travels. The passengers and the driver intent to stay in Totes one night and depart for La Havre in the morning. While having dinner at the inn, Boule de Suif is called up to talk to the Prussian commandant. He propositions her, which she angrily and gallantly refuses. All of the other passengers are outraged by the commandant's indecent proposal. The next day, the passengers rise to see that their coach has not been harnessed. It soon becomes apparent that they will not be able to depart Totes until Boule de Suif has sex with Prussian commandant. At first, all of the other passengers support her decision, as it would be morally unjust and unethical to support forcing a woman into such a painful sacrifice. However, as the days go by, her fellow passengers begin to scheme a way to coarse Boule de Suif into sleeping with the commandant. The only person still oppose is the democrat Cornudet.

After keenly manipulative speeches at dinner and final monologues from Comte Hubert and the Old Nun, Boule de Suif caves to the Prussian commandant's proposal and the other passengers' coarsen, and on the fifth night in Totes she sleeps with the enemy. The following morning, nine passengers rise early to pack and collection provisions. Yet given her long evening of pleasing the Prussian commandant and saving her fellow passengers, Boule de Suif has been left with no time to pack food or drink. She is forced too hurriedly board the coach. With the coach safely back on the road heading toward Le Havre, no one has the decency to thank Boule de Suif for her sacrifice. In fact, they scorn her and call her shameful. No one extends the courtesy she offered to the passengers on the road to Totes. Baul de Suif is left to cry in hunger and thirst, while the others feast and insult her. Pained from the previous night's events and the cruelty of her fellow passengers, Boule de Suif is reduced to tears, sobbing into the night as the coach creeps alone to Le Havre.

Characters:

Boule de Suif

Boule de Suif is the title character of Maupassant's short story. She is one of ten passengers in a coach, bound for Le Havre, which is leaving Rouen to flee from the advancing German army. She is traveling alone. Her birth name is Mademoiselle Élisabeth Rousset; however, it is her appearance that has earned her the nickname, Boule de Suif, or in English "Ball of Fat." Boule de Suif is a short, perfectly round, fat little woman with plump, sausage-like fingers, shiny skin, and enormous breasts. Her face is reddish and round with black eyes and large lashes, a small mouth with nice lips, and tiny teeth. Boule de Suif carries herself with dignity and a freshness that makes her attractive and desirable. It is well known that she is a prostitute, and although she is sought after, her seemingly honourable travel companions deem her an immoral woman, even then she helps them on several occassions. Without Boule de Suif as their companion, the entourage would have suffered greatly, as they all forgot to bring provisions for the long trip. During the first leg of the journey, the sophisticated prostitute provided her condescending companions with food and drink when the group was near fainting from hunger. Next in

Totes, which was already occupied by Germans, Boule de Suif compromised her own categorical imperative - not to have sex with a man against her own wishes - and slept with the Prussian commandant to free herself and her companions. If she had not made such a utilitarian sacrifice or, even worse, if she had not been on the coach at all, then there was a chance that the German officers would have kept them indefinitely in Totes or possibly even raped the female travellers. Boule de Suif is emotionally damaged from the event that saved her companions, but she is even more deeply hurt when they turn against her, once again regarding her and actions as immoral: On the trip out of Totes, Boule de Suif is hurried and does not have time to pack provisions, but none of the other passengers will share food with her, speak with her or thank her in any way.

Madame Carre-Lamadon

Madame Carre-Lamadon is one os the ten travellers in the coach bound for Le Havre. Her husband and companion is Monsieur Carre-Lamadon. She is a small, dainty, pretty woman who is much younger than her husband. The officers in Rouen were comforted by her beauty and presence. In the coach, dressed in furs, the young wife faints from hunger, only to be rescued by the two nuns and a glass of Boule de Suif's claret.

Monsieur Carre-Lamadon

He is one of the ten travellers and husband of Madame Carre-Lamadon. He, like the Comte, is a member of the superior social class. He holds a substantial position in the cotton business, owning three spinning-mills. In addition, he is a member of the Legion of Honour and the General Council, where he serves with Comte Hubert**.**

The Coachman

The Coachman is the driver of the coach containing the ten passengers. The driver does little besides navigate the coach to Totes. After they spent one night in Totes, the Prussian commandant tells the coachman that the travellers are not allowed to leave. The travellers are disturbed by this news and the coachman tells them that he has been instructed to stay in Totes until the commandant says otherwise. After this, the coachman is nonexistent until the travellers are granted leave from Totes four days later.

Cornudet

Cornudet is travelling alone. He is a well known democrat, and thus his social and his liberal beliefs are a threat to all 'respectable people', such as the Carre-Lamadon, Hubert de Brevilles, and the Loiseaus. He has a long red beard and loves to drink beer. Cornudet has spent a good portion of his fortune inherited from his father, a retired confectioner. Although he is a democrat who professes to be eagerly awaiting the coming republic, Cornudet is quite lazy, politically active only in that he frequents democratic bars. For some unknown reason, he believed that he had been recently appointed perfect. Yet when he tried to take up duties, no one recognized his position, and he was forced out of the office.

Cornudet is generally quite harmless and accommodating and is a thoroghly kindhearted man. In Rouen he worked to organize the fortification ofthe town, and upon leaving he hopes his skills can be used in Le Havre. Throughout the story, Cornudet is in verbal opposition with respectable men and women with whom he is travelling. He disagrees with their politics and their social views. During the first night in Totes, Cornudet tries to persuade Boule de suif to sleep with him. She refuses his advances because she believes it would be shameful with all the Prussians about. Given this patriotic spin, Cornudet complies, kisses Boule de Suif on the cheek, and returns to his room. Cornudet is the only one of all the travellers that is unflichingly outspoken about the shameful act of coercion the travellers impose on Boule de Suif in forcing her to have sex with the commandant to benefit their own desires. Yet, in the end, even Cornudet, like others, denies Boule de Suif food, sympathy and appreciation as they leave Totes.

Madame Follenvie

Madame Follenvie is the innkeeper in Totes. She and her husband, run the inn, which has been taken over by Prussians. The ten travellers stay at their inn with the German soldiers. She does not appreciate the German soldiers, first of all because they have cost her so much money and second because she has two sons in the army. She is a pacifist at heart, not appreciating any killing whatsoever. Cornudet praises the lady because he is also opposed to the aristocracy.

Comte Hubert de Breville

Comte travells with his wife, the Comtesse. He dressed like Henry IV, hoping to accentuate a resemblance to the king, because it is a family legend that King Henry IV impregnated a de Breville and gave her husband a governmental position, accelerating their family's standing in the social classes. When Boule de Suif first tells her companions of the commandant's offensive, immoral proposition, Comte Hubert is the most disturbed and outspoken - even as the others begin to wish Boule de Suif would sleep with the commandant - stating that no woman should be called upon to make such a painful sacrifice. Oddly enough, it is his final prodding that convinces Boule de Suif that she should, for the good of the others. Although he carries himself with an air of chivalry, Comte Hubert is just as self-centered and self-righteous as other, despicable passengers.

Madame Loiseau

She is wine merchant in the Rue Grand-Pont. She is a tall, thick, bull-headed woman. Her voice is annoyingly shrill, and makes quick decisions. She is never courteous to Boule de Suif, even after the prostitute feeds her and her husband. She is also the first to call the prostitute shameful after she sleeps with the commandant and saves the travellers from captivity in Totes.

Monsieur Loiseau

Originally the clerk at the winery, he makes his fortune by turning around the floundering company of wine. He makes terrible wine and sells it at a very inexpensive price. He is considered a jovial scoundrel, almost a crook, because of his low-quality wine. His attitude is noted throughout the story. In the coach, he looks hungrily upon Boule de Suif, both of her body and her food. Later, when Boule de Suif finally complies and sleeps with the commandant, he is so excited that he buys everyone champagne and makes jokes about what is going on upstairs in the commandant's chamber.

The Old Nun

The Old Nun is travelling with her companion the Punny Nun. She says very little during the entire story, spending most of the time praying over her beads. Near the end, it is the Old Nun that gives the religious approval to Boule de Suif regarding her indecision as to whether or not to sleep with the commandant. She states that the church has no trouble granting forgiveness when the act committed is for the glory of God or the benefit of others. The Old Nun's words may have been crucial in Boule de Suif's decisions to go against her categorical imperative and commit the difficult, but utilitarian act of sleeping with the enemy.

The Prussian Commandant

The Prussian Commandant is staying in the best room at the Follenvie's inn. Although he is scarcely seen, the commandant is obviously egotistical and self-centered, as he does not allow the travellers to leave even though they have documents from his superior authorizing their safe passage. He sends comments down to the travellers through

Monsieur Follenvie. Most frequently, he inquires as to whether or not Boule de Suif is yet willing to sleep with him. At one point, the Prussian commandant allows for a meeting with the *'respectable men'*[1]to discuss their departure, but he quickly turns the men away. All the commandant desires is to conquer Boule de Suif and then let the travellers go ahead with their journey.

The Punny Nun

The Punny Nun is very slight, with a pretty, but sickly face. She has a narrow body that appears to be devouring itself. She has little impact on the course of the story.

'Boule de Suif': Themes, style, historical context and critical overview:

The main theme focuses on French resistance to the German occupiers during the war. During the first half of the story, the narrator explains the background of each of the occupants, with particular emphasis on the petty bourgeois Democrat, Cornudet, who is said to have devised all manner of defences for Rouen. The overriding theme is that while the occupants talk a great deal about resisting the invaders, they are ultimately running away in a cowardly fashion rather than staying in the town. This first section of the story also establishes that the most fiercely patriotic passenger is Boule de Suif herself, an insignificant and unpopular character in Rouen, while the aristocrats and bourgeois are portrayed as happier to betray their country in order to end the war and return to their comfortable lives. In this respect, Maupassant praises the patriotic fervour of the inhabitants of the provinces, in sharp contrast to other French writers of the period who accused provincial French citizens of being apathetic and cowardly. Boule de Suif's personal resistance grows throughout the story; when the coach is stopped by the Germans at the village of Totes, the other passengers meekly follow the officer's orders while Boule de Suif refuses to co-operate as easily. Boule de Suif's resistance to the officer's sexual advances again shows her patriotism, something which is noticed by the other characters, who comment that although it is Boule de Suif's job to sleep with man; she patriotically refuses to allow herself to be conquered by the German officer.

Like Maupassant's other short stories on the Franco-Prussian war, he tends to stereotype the German soldiers. The troops holding Rouen are hinted at as dull and slow-witted. The German officer at the inn is portrayed in the same way as Maupassant depicts German officers throughout his stories; the officer is shown as being arrogant, morally dubious, and unfeeling. The description of the officer in his room at the inn suggests that he is pointlessly destructive, uncultured, and boorish. At the same time, there are passages that describe how German troops get about their daily life and long to return home to their own families.

The theme of class barrier is also tackled in the story. Throughout the story, Maupassant portrays the inhabitants of the coach in various disparaging ways. The aristocratic Comte and Comtesse are revealed to be weak and cowardly in spite of their position as the chief dignitaries of Rouen. The manufacturer and his wife are constantly portrayed as greedy and materialistic, and the manufacturer's wife in particular is always shown to be shocked whenever her husband spends any money. The petit bourgeois wine-seller and his wife are shown as corrupt and morally reprehensible, the most likely of the party to betray their country simply to return to a life of greed in peace. The two nuns travelling in the coach are at first portrayed as quiet and subservient to God, and later show themselves as fiery, patriotic, and doing more for their country than the other occupants of the coach: the nuns claim to be travelling to a military hospital to treat wounded French soldiers, thus offering the deciding argument towards persuading Boule de Suif to abandon her resistance. The narrator offers to excuse their crafty argumentation as accidental stupidity, but the nuns' base behaviour as they fail to share food with the courtesan raises a question mark if not necessarily on their story then on their altruistic motivation. Cornudet is repeatedly shown as a man who is little more than a drunken, lecherous, and cowardly man who is not prepared to stand up for his vicious anti-German beliefs when the time comes. In contrast to all of these is Boule de Suif herself, revealed to be the most fiercely patriotic, kind-hearted, and morally admirable character, which Maupassant contrasts with the hypocrisy and snobbery of the other travellers. Despite being shunned by the other occupants at first, she gladly shares her picnic basket with the hungry occupants of the coach, but at the end of the novel, when she has no food for the other half of the journey, the coach's other occupants refuse to share their food with her, an ingratitude made even worse by the fact that it was Boule de Suif's personal sacrifice that allowed them to leave. Her self-sacrifice in sleeping with the German officer underlines her personal courage and the blind hypocrisy of the other travellers; the travellers go to great lengths to persuade Boule de Suif to sleep with the officer in order that he will let the coach continue its journey, and the travellers fill Boule de Suif's head with arguments, arguing that it is for the good of the country, that it is not morally wrong to sleep with the officer in order to let the travellers leave, and that the longer she waits, the more young French soldiers will die as the nuns are not there to look after them. When Boule de Suif gives in and sleeps with the officer, the rest of the travellers throw a party without her, and when the coach finally leaves the next morning, they treat her with utter disgust and contempt despite the fact that she has freed them, and that it was they who induced her to lose her dignity.

Naturalism

Maupassant hails from the naturalist school of thought. Naturalism in literature describes a type of work that tries to apply analytic principles of objectivity and separation to the literary study of the human being. In opposition to realism, which focuses on technique, the naturalist author takes a philosophic position. The objects of study, human beings, are creatures that can be studied through their relationships to their surroundings. Maupassant's characters are no exception. Boule de Suif is understood not through her inner thoughts and feelings, but through her actual words and actions. She is revealed through Maupassant's ability to report the tales that create an insightful depiction of the prostitute. Her inner thoughts are unneeded because all of her being is available through her relationship to others and her environment. Through this type of objective study, naturalist authors believe that the underlying forces that reign over human beings may be unearthed. Maupassant was incredibly adapted at this type of revelation because of his photographic memory and keen ability to express and depict scenes and dialogues with exceptional clarity.

Social order and scandal

Maupassant uses the social order to create a hierarchy inside the coach. The entourage is composed of differing social orders: two nuns, a prostitute, a democrat, and respectable, socially elite individuals. The nuns are dedicated to God. Appropriately they engage in very little regarding scandal or squabble in the social order. The prostitute is a fringe element of the social order, dedicated to hedonism and immoral earnings. The democrat, a political leftist, is available to voice opinion against the aristocratic government and the respectable, socially elite travellers. The respectable travellers looked down upon the lower social classes. However, Maupassant, with keen naturalist eye, unfolds several scandals. Maupassant uses the social order and scandal to unearth the heart of his characters through their interactions with each other.

Promiscuity and Moral Confusion

Although Boule de Suif is an antihero, her promiscuity does lead to her own moral confusion. Oddly enough the prostitute possesses the most exemplary code of ethics. She has set for herself rules and maxims that she holds with categorically imperative conviction. She desires to stand up for what she believes. Her work as a prostitute is an example of bringing pleasure to someone else, in a sense increasing the collective happiness. However, this type of utilitarian behavior is a troubled spouse to an ethnic composed of axioms and imperatives. Boule de Suif runs herself into this debacle when she is morally troubled by the prospect of sleeping with the enemy to free herself and her companions. On the one hand, Boule de Suif has lived her life bringing utilitarian pleasure to a vast number of people. On the other hand, she has troubled using the same skills to bring to a life a different kind of utilitarianism, namely freeing her companions from the Prussians. Maupassant effectively uses promiscuity to unleash a cornucopia of moral confusion.

The Prostitute as an Antihero

The antihero is a central character who lacks traditional heroic qualities. Antiheroes are not strong or physically powerful. Rarely do they muster up great courage to defeat a monster. Antiheroes are usually outside the social norm, and they appreciate their position. The title character in Maupassant's 'Boule de Suif' is no different. She is an exceptional antihero. She is not physically powerful. In fact, she is quite short, fat and soft. She is certainly outside the social norm, as she is a prostitute- a profession not only considered fringe, but immoral. On a final and most potent note, Maupassant's Boule de Suif cannot commit to one set of ethics. She waffles between categorical imperatives and a flexibility that is loosely bound to utilitarian principles. Nonetheless, her actions are heroic because she does them for the benefit of others. In the end, Boule de Suif saves her companions entitling her to her antihero status.

The Franco-Prussian War

The Franco-Prussian War raged between 1870 and 1871. The war was essentially fought between France and Germany, although Germany was unified under Prussian control. France eventually lost the war to Germany. The underlying cause of the conflict was Prussian statesman Otto Edward Leopold von Bismarck's desire to unify Germany under Prussian control and eliminate France's power over Germany. On the other side, Napolean III, emperor of France from 1852 to 1870, wanted to regain national and international status lost as a result of various diplomatic setbacks, most notably those suffered at the hands of the Prussians during the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. Lastly, the military strength of Prussia, as we revealed in Austria, added to France's desire to dominate the European continent.

The war was precipitated by y a series of feather-ruffling events that would eventually lead to Germany unifying itself under Prussian leadership to wage war against the French. The prince of Hohenzollern-sigmaringen, Leopold, was pressured by Bismarck to accept candidacy for the vacant Spanish throne. This move alarmed the French, as they were wary of a Prusso-Spanish alliance. The French sent an ambassador to speak with William I, the king of Prussia, demanding that Leopold withdraw his candidacy. Although angered, William I agreed to their demands.

Unfortunately for the French, Napolean III was not content and was determined to further humiliate Prussia. A French foreign minister was dispatched to William I, demanding that the king issue a written apology to Napolean III. This was the final straw. The king rejected the French emperor's demands and immediately gave Bismarck permission to publish the French demands. Bismarck edited the document so as to inflame both the Frenchman and the Germans. France's egotism not only instigated war, but it had a dramatic psychological effect on the Germans, rallying them to unify under Prussia's cause.

The French were quickly and soundly defeated in multiple battles, due exclusively to the military superiority of the Prussian forces. From the earliest moments of the Prussian invention, it was apparent that their forces were far too powerful for the French forces. During this time, most French troops and many citizens began a steady retreat toward the coast of the English Channel. Maupassant witnessed this mass exodus and his keen eye and photographic memory enabled him to absorb and store a vast collection of images and memories spawned his masterpiece ‘Boule de Suif’. As a soldier in the retreating French forces, he had affront row seat for the emotional responses to war and the results of aristocratic narcissism, both of which play key roles in his character development and plot construction.

Critical Appreciation

The literature of Guy de Maupassant while widely read, has received little in the form of critical study. It may be that Maupassant’s large readership has made it of little interest to critics, in that much of what is considered popular is often consider unworthy of analysis. It may be also that Maupassant has received little attention from critics and academics because his subject matter was considered immoral for many decades. Regardless of the reason, his lack of attention is seemingly unmerited, considering the scope and clarity of his writing. However, Maupassant's own talent may be the reason so many critics had turned their backs on his work.

Although much of his work was banned or condemned for being immoral, this did not slow his popularity. However, it did slow his publication in the United States. It took many decades before any one was willing to publish his stories of sex, prostitutes, and madness on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Eventually, it became apparent that, at the bare minimum, Maupassant possessed an amazing ability to create characters of great depth and stories of immense clarity, even if the paradoxical protagonist where an immoral, heroic prostitute.

Twentieth Century Views

The aim of this writing is to present some of the best in contemporary critical opinion of major critics, providing a twentieth century perspective on the changing status in an era of profound re-evaluation.

1. Albert H. Wallace
2. Anthony Martinelli
3. Laura Carter

1. Albert H. Wallace.

In the following essay excerpt, Wallace argues that Maupassant's admiration and love for women and disdain for men is a common theme in Maupassant's works.

The Growth of a Favouring Prejudice

Maupassant was not showing us a Romantic "femme fatale" when he repeatedly told tales in which the woman gained ascendancy over the man. His admiration for women grew out of personal contact and observation, not from fear inspired by a superstitious cult. Among the strangely few men who enjoyed Maupassant's unstinting admiration, most had chosen celibacy and so were relatively safe from acts of weakness that so often characterize a husband's behaviour and which would have lowered them in his esteem. Flaubert, of course, was so far in the vanguard of this select few as to be the god of the microcosm.

To Maupassant, marriage was a form of servitude which the female refused to accept because she recognized it as such, and to which the male submitted while deluding himself with the notion that he was free, the master. The calm demaneur and un-flinching resolve of Maupassant's mother inspired early his admiration for woman and caused him to question the myth of male superiority. Madame de Maupassant's influence upon her son can never be accurately evaluated, for the more one ponders his work the more one is struck with her presence in the character of heroine after heroine. Far more accurate assessments can be made of the influence of Maupassant's father in shaping the son's prejudicial view of husbands as self-centered weaklings who deserved cuckolding, and of the role his disappointment in his father had in determining him to seek in Flaubert a father who was not weak or unworthy of the charge.

Paradoxically, we find Maupassant writing, near the end of his days, in favour of marriage. The cruel spark of loneliness ignited this twilight mania in a man who had spent most of his career satirizing or openly denouncing the institution. Celibacy confirmed the strange and haunting terror that was typical of Maupassant's bouts with insanity. He speaks of his terror of loneliness in a letter to his mother:

> *I fear the arriving winter, I feel alone, and my long, solitary evenings are sometimes terrible. Often when I am alone seated at my desk with my lamp burning sadly before me, I experience such complete moments of distress that I no longer know where to turn.*

It should be stated that Maupassant did not always write with the aim of inciting sympathy for the married woman's plight or excusing her extramarital affairs. *Une Famille* typifies a number of stories whose aim is clearly to decry how marriage destroys friendship between Old man cronies and to express his repugnance at how the wife is always certain to drag her husband down to her level. However, these stories, with their strange male prejudice, lack the power of which speak with the admiration of woman. What vitality they have results from a sudden and ephemeral anger, and not from the slowly nurtured conviction that lends the moving power and lasting vitality to his writing which praise woman.

War Demonstrates Woman's Superior Courage

The magnificent courage and nobility of woman in time of war and defeat inspired what many consider to be his greatest story, *Boule de Suif*. War was a fact of Maupassant's life. This makes his praise of woman's behaviour as contrasted to the less admirable, often even cowardly behaviour, of her counterpart the more striking. But it does not seem out of character to the one who has opened his eyes to the apparent philogyny in his other works. Philogyny is not merely a tone in Maupassant, it is the basic trait of his attitude concerning the human species.

The prostitute Rachel, in *Mademoiselle Fifi,* behaves in the way that epitomized for Maupassant the *effective* disdain of the conquered. Woman can deal with a derisive effectiveness above man’s capacities, Maupassant believes, because their long-suffering experience as prisoners of male conventions has taught them the mastery of derision. “*You think you’re raping the women of France,*” sneers the proud Rachel to the sadistic Mlle Fifi (William d’Eyrik), “*As for me! Me! I’m not a woman, I am a whore, that’s indeed all the Prussians need or deserve*” . Her stabbing of him and the ringing of bells which had remained silent in the face of his ironic threats to have the townsmen's blood or be the cause of their ringing again are almost anticlimactic, following as they do in the wake of her success in making the Prussian feel the littleness ascribed to him and his kind by those he had conquered but could not break.

The Comtesse de Bremontal's sensitivity, in the unfinished *L'Angelus,* her love of poetry and her melancholy surroundings are all reminiscent of Laure de Maupassant. Abandoned too by a husband whose seigniorial, Norman bravado presents to his whimsical mind the going off to serve as a higher calling than remaining with his pregnant, defenceless wife, the Countess behaves with disdainful composure in the face of threats by the Prussian officer who has taken over her house. So effective is her contempt that the Prussian suffers the ignominy fatal to all conquerors' pride. Maupassant had great plans for this novel to be entitled *'L'Angelus'*. It was to be his masterpiece in the genre. His dedication to the project and the magnitude of the idea he had in mind can be guessed at from notes sketching what was to follow the events described above: the Countess' boy child would be born on Christmas a cripple in one of the chateau's outbuildings, his disfiguration the result of his mother's having been brutalized by the Prussian. The religious sources are perhaps a little too obvious, but it must be kept in mind that the story came to him as something that had to be written only when he was already hopelessly in the grip of his tragic malady. No one can say what turn he might have given the theme had he been in good health.

"*Philogyny is not merely a tone in Maupassant, it is the basic trait of his attitude concerning the human species*."

The tragic fate of lovely Irma of *‘Le Lit 29’* has none of the mawkish sentimentality of so many stories of its kind. While showing us how war so tragically truncates those seemingly perfect love affairs, Maupassant demonstrates how it is the male’s weakness and imperfections that are really responsible for their failure. The lady killer, Captain Epivent, was happy to rattle his medals truculently against an enemy who had had the gall to rape his woman and then take her life, and to hurl threats towards Germany in case of any future incursion. But when he found that his beautiful former mistress was alive and had syphilis, it was another matter; for in order to protect the noble image of himself he sought to foster he would have to go through the troublesome formality of paying her a solicitous visit. The visit began on an ironic note which demonstrated clearly the selfless contrast of her love for him: she expressed pride in his medals and avoided complaining about her own wretched condition. Only when he presses her did she reveal the patriotism that had prompted her to refuse treatments for the infection a Prussian had brought her: she had taken it upon herself to spread the infection against the hated army of occupation, using her beauty as a lure. It was what she could do to avenge her country’s lost pride. She had known she would end up here, but it had been worth it. “*And I also infected all of them, all, every single one, the most I was able*” . The Captain left with the intention of never returning. But he could not play the hero before the people. Though he ignored her letter of entreaty, he had to go to save face when the hospital chaplain came after him. Maupassant’s description of her contempt for her former lover removes any doubts as to his dedication to emphasizing the sharp contrast between the pusillanimity of the male with his illusory strength, and the strong courage of the female with her alleged frailties. Irma’s choice of the name for the man she was dismissing was forged in the mind of a creator burning with a sense of outrage at men blinded to the truth by their stubborn, ego-inspired antifeminism, “*get away from me, capon! More than you, yes, I killed more of them than you, more than you*” . She died the following day.

Berthine of ‘*Les Prisonniers’* is a healthy peasant girl whose vengeance against the invaders is blunt, unsophisticated, and as final as a wily Norman peasant’s business transactions. She allows them in her house, tricks them into her basement from which escape is impossible, and then convinces them that surrendering to the local constabulary, ignominious though it may be, is the wisest choice for them. Evidence that Maupassant did not deem a male capable of this sort of clear design and execution is the fact that he presents an exceedingly satirical and damaging picture of the ostentatious, bungling militia commander who joyfully accepts total credit for the capture.

One sees the same admiration for the concise manner in which woman exact their vengeance against the enemy in the story about the madwoman – insane with grief because she had befriended the Prussians, being innocent in politics, until she had learned their army had killed her son – and how she beguiled her Prussian “guests” into affixing their signatures to a document before incinerating them in her house as they slept soundly, sure of her friendship. She wanted their signatures as proof to their loved ones that they were dead and that she and she alone had been responsible for their deaths. Her steady dedication to her purpose is the quality with which Maupassant often endowed his women: it is consistent with his depiction of woman as uniquely capable of the kind of discipline necessary to overcome the greatest obstacles.

The high place *Boule de Suif* occupies in French literature is merited, for it presents with almost unparalleled power woman's courage and resolve to survive defeat and personal degradation. This story provides the clearest and most moving presentation of Maupassant's admiration for female strength in times of dire disillusionment. Defeat breaks the souls of most of the men it tries. And even those strong survivors of the initial shock, upon viewing the tragic shambles of their fellow being's broken spirit, often knuckle under to despair. The very few who can look upon defeat and its waste and still remain whole are the real heroes who cause others to pick up their pride and begin again. A person familiar with Maupassant's life and work will know why he chose a prostitute for this almost superhuman accomplishment. But one must see his treatment of woman in the proper light and must be familiar with every line he wrote about her to reconcile his ambivalence regarding woman as a general class, for the question continually arises as to how he could have set a course in his own life which seemed oriented upon degrading her. We must conclude that the women he met in the bordello he found to be the consummation of all the qualities he considered important and admirable: we have Boule de Suif as evidence. It is also quite evident that choosing a prostitute was the best way for Maupassant to continue his effective needling of society's pride in its conventions, in particular the ones that tended to assign a priori the virtues of acting heroically to the male and faintheartedness and ineffectual sentimentality to the female. And even more pointedly he could mock the conventional stigmatizing of prostitutes as socially destructive and morally inferior. The lovely figure we see emerging from the wretched world that spawned, abused, and reviled her, even giving her the derisive name, Boule de Suif, to mock her, is the brainchild of a loving and admiring creator, whose philogyny is evident.

Maupassnat knew that the ebst milieu in which to test individual greatness was a world disillusioned with itself – a world of defeat where wound-licking is often the last vestige of struggle. Boule de Suif comes upon a scene where people are more concerned with adapting to defeat and calling it by another name than with refusing to be servile. It is a world where her refusal to accept the defeat the others took for granted both sets her apart from the common herd and brings her into conflict with it. She would not have been able to utter their eloquent idealistic clichés, but she possessed idealism and the courage to pursue it. Maupassant wastes no time in stamping her with the mark of superiority. The coach has scarcely begun its journey before his concise artistry has revealed to us that the other passengers, and especially the women with their conventional morality leading at best to the delusion of the rectitude of their ambitions for peace and material prosperity, are indeed impoverished human spirits with whom this brave, engaging prostitute contrasts sharply. The author thus wins our esteem early and causes us to be more wary of the others.

Loiseau, the wine merchant, spouts the kind of clichés typical of the articulate among the society with which Maupassant found himself at logger-heads. His pronouncements which removes the other women's hypocritical compunction against accepting food from a prostitute is the type of thing one finds in Flaubert's *Dictionnaire des idees recues.* And Boule de Suif's ignorance of their absurd clichés sets her above them in our minds. Her fellow passengers are shown from the beginning to be people with nothing for the desperate times but talk. Boule de Suif would never articulate the accepted idea that "in such cases all men are brothers and should aid one another", but she would so act. Maupassant with this brief incident has shown us the larger meaning of his story, and how the meaning of his story transcends the boundaries in which he had given it light. He could not have been more effective in drawing the line between the others and Boule de Suif. The latter returns what she takes from life and more, and in so doing she is neither a conventional prostitute nor a conventional human being; she is a woman and a superior human being.

Later, at the inn, in the scene in which the other travelling companions quarrel over what they think would be the right thing for Boule de Suif to do, the latter herself has figuratively ascended to an empyrean where the pettiness of her erstwhile companions is not permitted to trouble her deliberations upon her course. Maupassant shows considerable artistry in the symbology of having Boule de Suif upstairs in the inn, separated from the others physically by some *small* distance, while the distance of her spiritual separation is so vast, as vast as the distance between positive and negative. With the use of this symbol the author is able to reemphasize what he is saying with the whole story. The terrible pettiness of rationalizing to which we all resort brands itself upon our mind as they deliberate: “*Since that’s what the slut’s trade is, to do that with any man, I find she has no right to refuse one anymore than another*” .

Maupassant makes us see the real question that we all must face with such startling clarity that we know we are in the presence of a master. Through Boule de Suif’s unerring understanding of what it means to give herself to the enemy, we come to understand what it means for us to give ourselves to the enemy. And, moreover, we learn that most people in giving themselves to everything give themselves to nothing and that the enemy will settle for nothing but the greatest individual as his price. Maupassant, like us all, mourned in the face of the realization that so often the sacrifice of the greatest only causes those who benefit from the selfless act to respond by a show of their utter unworthiness. He chose a woman to show us his admiration for the unique strength of the great. And as if to dismiss the male race from consideration for such a role, he depicts the self-anointed revolutionary and the only one of the other travellers who hesitates to throw Boule de Suif to the wolves, as incapable of action when it counted. He talks: “*I’m telling you all, you’ve just done an infamous thing*!” . And the next day Cornudet, the revolutionary, eats with the others from whom only inefficacious words had ever separated him and continues deluding himself by singing the “*Marseillaise*”. Maupassant thereby is able to register again biter disappointment and cynicism regarding the behaviour in general of his countrymen. If *Boule* *de Suif* is truly Maupassant’s masterpiece, it owes the honor to an insistent admiration for woman which receives its finest artistic expression and compression in the story. The theme is not new, nor does it end here. Philogyny is omnipresent in his writing.

2. Anthony Martinelli

***M**artinelli is a Seatle-based freelance writer and editor. In this essay, Martinelli examines how the main character's dialogue and actions create a confused ethic of both ontologism and utilitarianism, the two major schools of philosophical thought of the nineteenth century.*

In *Boule de Suif*, Maupassant tells the tale of Boule de Suif, a short, plump, inviting French prostitute, who is fleeting the advancing Germans during the Franco-Prussian War. Although seemingly immoral by profession, Boule de Suif actually adheres to a code of ethics. By the very nature of her profession, Boule de Suif feels as though she is spreading happiness through her service: Her clientele leaves with a greater level of satisfaction, thus adding to the greater good. In addition, Boule de Suif has several imperatives that she makes her best attempt to stand behind. Boule de suif believes that these axioms should never be broken, namely that there should always be a different means to achieve the same end that would not require doing acts in opposition to her imperatives. Unfortunately, Boule de Suif, by following two codes of ethics – one utilitarian, the other onto-logical – lands herself in the ethically uncertain apex between these two opposed moral philosophies.

Utilitarianism is probably the most famous normative ethical dogma in the English-speaking history of moral philosophy. The doctrine's purpose is to explain why some actions are right and others are wrong. Although it had roots in philosophical history and although it is still widely appealed to by many modern philosophers, utilitarianism reached its peak in the late eighteenth century and the first twenty five years of the nineteenth century. The leading philosophers in this school of thought were Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. In its earliest formulation, utilitarianism was simplistic. It was hinged to an idea called *The Greatest Happiness Principle*. This basic tenet of utilitarianism purports that the ultimate good is simply the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. Happiness, is seen as the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain. Thus, utilitarianism judges all consequences by the amount of pleasure derived from each consequence. This, of course, leaves no concern for the means to the end of the consequence: no examination is given to duty or what is right or good; the aim is purely targeted on the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Utilitarianism, if strictly followed, leaves little room for any sort of law, let alone ethical categorical imperatives. Bertrand Russell writes in *'A History of Western Philosophy'*, "*In its absolute form, the doctrine that an individual has certain inalienable right is incompatible with utilitarianism, i.e., with the doctrine that do most to promote the general happiness.*" Russell is summarizing one of the greatest difficulties with utilitarianism, not only in relation to governmental law but also to any law in general. Utilitarianism has a democratic feel, in that a majority of people feeling happiness is similar to a majority of people approving of initiative, thus making it a law. However, as this statement implies, and with the definition of utilitarianism, a law would be considered inconsequential if breaking the law – something wholly undemocratic –

created greater happiness than not. Herein lies the paradoxical problem inherits in both utilitarianism and Maupassant's character, Boule de Suif.

Yet neither Boule de Suif nor utilitarianism can be wholly scrutinized without a keen examination of the ontological code of ethics described by Immanuel Kant. Kant is a nineteenth-century philosophical giant. Kant cannot be contained by any one distinct *ism* because his philosophy is incredibly profound and complex. His theories arose out of the stagnating doctrines of two of the most important philosophic theories: rationalism and empiricism. Kantian ethics were grounded in his definition of pure practical reason. For Kant, pure practical reason is concerned with a priori grounds for action and, most important to his ethics, moral action. For Kant this implies that there is an priori moral law – a dogma that is already grounded and indisputable – with which all people should act in accordance. From this law springs moral maxims. Kant calls these laws *categorical imperatives*, which define morality through objective requirements, independent of individual desires. Kant states in *'Grounding for the Metaphysics of morals'*.

The practical [application of the categorical] imperative will therefore be the following: act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.

Herein lies the second calamity of Boule de Suif. Not only has she treated herself as a means to an end, but so also have her passengers. Through the passengers' act of coercion, Boule de Suif is placed in opposition to Kantian moral law. In addition, the passengers commit the greatest immoral act in that they are using Boule de Suif's physical body to achieve their own desired end.

With a clearer understanding of both utilitarianism and a Kantian ontological ethic, Boule de suif's plight begins to take shape. Boule de Suif lives through a moral code drenched in utilitarianism. Through her profession alone, Boule de Suif is married to utilitarian code of ethics. It is her job to deliver happiness in the form of sex to her clientele. If she is adequately doing her job, the people whom Boule de Suif services should leave her, reentering society with a greater happiness and thus contributing to the pool of greater happiness for the greatest number. This alone upsets Kantian ethics in that Boule de Suif is using her physical body as a means to an end, that is, the physical happiness of another individual.

However, this trouble goes even deeper because Boule de Suif also acts in accordance with her own set of a priori imperatives. Most prominent are her axioms, established in relation to patriotism. For example, when the Prussian officer orders the passengers to exit the coach, Boule de Suif and Cornudet stay inside. Maupassant writes, "*They were anxious to preserve their dignity, conscious that in encounters of this kind everybody is to some extent the representative of his country,* *and both were disgusted at their companion's obsequiousness.*" Boule de Suif is enraged that her companions are so subservient to the occupying Prussians. She sees their weakness as an immoral action. Yet, on the other hand, Boule de Suif is easily swayed. Although she is opposed to bending under the oppression of Prussian demands, she is more flexible when it comes to the demands of her countrymen. In an early encounter with the Prussian commandant, her companions plead with her to comply with the commandant's first demands to simply speak with the prostitute. Boule de Suif is initially stubborn, but eventually she takes the utilitarian route, saving her companions from a possible backlash. She even states, "*All right…but I'm only doing it for your sakes.*" This decision is in step with a utilitarian code of ethics.

However, there seems to be a limit to Boule de Suif's flexibility. Although it is apparent that she is a jumbled mess of utilitarianism and Kantian ontologism, the prostitute takes an incredibly firm stand against the Prussian commandant's sexual advances. When the officer states that he will hold the passengers captive until Boule de Suif has sex with him, the prostitute exclaims, "*Tell that black-guard, that scoundrel, that swine of a Prussian that I'll never do it. Have you got that clear? Never, never, never!*" Boule de Suif's conviction, at first, carries over to her passengers. In fact one character, Comte Hubert de Breville, even outlines Kantian morality stating, "*no woman could be called upon to make such a painful sacrifice, and that the offer must come from herself*'. Essentially, the Comte's commen is that no one individual should use another person as a means to a desired end. Unfortunately, it soon becomes apparent that all of the people aboard the coach are more concerned with their own individual well-being than with any type of moral or ethical code.

Soon, the other passengers' support of Boule de Suif's moral imperative begins to waffle. They want her to sleep with the enemy so they can get back on the road to Le Havre. The passengers even begin to resort to insults. Madam Loiseau proclaims, "*Seeing that it's that sluts job to go with any man who wants her, I don't think she's any right to refuse one man rather than another.*" Oddly enough, and as crass as Madam Loiseau's comment may be, this statement is at the crux of Boule de Suif's moral confusion. As a prostitute, Boule de suif is a master of the art of pleasure, committing utilitarian acts that return a greater happiness to a greater number of people. However, as a patriot, Boule de Suif desires to follow a stricter code of imperatives that she allows to override her utilitarian principles. While in Totes, Boule de Suif could employ her occupation and give back to the world a greater happiness for the greatest number. Not only would the Prussian commandant be sexually satisfied and thus happier, but also nine of her fllow travellers would be happier in that they would be allowed freedom from their Prussian captives. So herein lies the ethical calamity of Boule de Suif: the impossible decision to follow one moral code in opposition to another. No matter which tenet she selects, her actions will be viewed as immoral by someone.

In the end, Boule de Suif selects the utilitarian dogma and breaks her own personal moral code for the greater good. She caves under the weight of her utilitarian principles, coupled with the manipulation of her fellow passengers, and sleeps with the Prussian commandant. Her actions free her and her travelling companions, but Boule de Suif, crushed under guilt and self-disgust, is reduced to tears. Not only she has broken her own moral tenet, but she also realizes that her companions used her as a means to their own end. Plus, her companions are thankless; they even scorn their liberator, stating that Boule de Suif is “*crying because she’s ashamed of herself.*”

Ironically, Maupassant was frequently banned for his immoral stories and subject matter, and Boule de Suif’s predicament is spawned from her own promiscuity. In an odd twist, Maupassant’s naturalistic dissection of the dueling moral philosophic trends of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries proved not only to question ethical codes but also, sardonically, to support a more puritanical society. Although it may not have been wholly intended, Boule de Suif’s occupation is the catalyst that allows the other passengers to rationalize their coercion. None of them would have felt entitled to manipulate another woman, even a peasant, to commit an immoral act for his or her own benefit. It would have been unthinkable. Yet since in the eyes of her fellow travellers Boule de Suif was already muddied with impurities and immorality, the passengers – even the nuns – were less inclined to stand behind the prostitute’s moral convictions. This left Boule de Suif destroyed and embarrassed, wallowing in a state of moral peril.

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3. Laura Carter

***Carter** is currently employed as a freelance writer. In this essay, carter examines Immanuel Kant's moral argument for God in relation to Maupassant's story.*

The protagonist of Guy de Maupassant's *'Boule de Suif'* learns that virtuous act do not always reap rewards. In fact, her altruism or self-sacrifice jeopardizes, rather than improves, her own life. Boule de suif is a victim of her own good nature. In her acts of charity she refuses to see how others have treated her. Such acts only win her even more disdain or hatred from the group."*So herein lies the ethical calamity of Boule de Suif: The impossible decision to follow one moral code in opposition to another. No matter which tenet she selects,her actions will be viewed as immoral by someone.*"

Much of the interaction among the group of travellers in Maupassant's story revolves around the character nicknamed Boule de Suif. Throughout the narrative, she is put in a self-sacrificing position by a group of strangers who barely recognize or appreciate her generosity. First, because she is a prostitute, Boule de Suif receives the group's disdain. However, when she is the only traveler to produce a basket of food, it is the hungry travellers who eventually dine with her, albeit reluctantly. And, when captured by German and Prussian officers, these same travellers turn to Boule de Suif, insisting she respond to the Prussian soldier's demands to see her despite her resistance to the idea. Ultimately she does accept, exclaiming, “*All right…but I’m only doing it for your sakes.*” Finally, when she learns that the enemy wants to sleep with her, she is appalled, as is the group; yet the group thinks nothing of exploiting her to that end, pressuring her to comply for their sakes.

Generosity in the narrative is not a two-way street. The ladies in the coach react with a ferocious contempt at the sight of Boule de suif’s basket of food, for instance, misinterpreting her generosity as an affront to their pride. This reaction to their travelling companion is one of many indications that the group, with the exception of Boule de Suif, is driven largely by selfish motivations rather than self-sacrifice. After their capture, several members of the party could have easily negotiated their release. Yet they respond not out of generosity, but of greed. Says the narrator: “*The richer members of the party were the most terrified, already seeing themselves forced to pour out sackfuls of gold in the hands of the insolent soldiers in order to save their lives.*” However, rather than resorting to bribery to put an end to the group’s captivity, they spend considerable time concocting or thinking of ways “*to conceal their wealth and enable them to pass themselves off as the poorest of poor.*”

Interestingly, these same group members think nothing of sacrificing Boule de Suif to their own advantage. They put a considerable amount of energy in winning the prostitute over, of convincing her that she comply with the Prussian’s demand for sex for the sake of the group. They feel “*almost annoyed*” with Boule de Suif “*for not having gone to the Prussian on the sly so as to provide her fellow travellers with a* *pleasant surprise in the morning,*" despite the fact that her self-sacrifice in this situation is fraught or filled with dangerous implications. In surrendering herself physically to the Prussian, she could subject herself to violence, even death at the hands of the enemy – indicated when the travellers themselves engage in moments of worried silence for the prostitute. Expecting Boule de Suif to sacrifice her person in the name of group is hardly given a second thought. When it comes to reaching down into their pockets, however, the group is reluctant to part with even a handful of coins to quickly resolve their situation, nor do they feel obligated to do so.

Ironic too is the method that Boule de suif's companions use to persuade her to sacrifice herself to the Prussian. The group engages in a general theological or religious argument, based on their interpretation of the will of God, to manipulate her, an activity one could hardly regard as being the least bit noble or pious. Beginning with a vague conversation on self-sacrifice, the discussion emphasizes the idea that "*a woman's duty on earth was perpetual sacrifice of her person.*" When Boule de Suif is not convinced, the group engages the elder nuns in a conversation about the nature of one's deeds in life, and the ability of the church to grant absolution for those deeds "*committed for the glory of God or the benefit of one's neighbor.*" The Comtesse makes the most of this argument, asserting that no action "*could be displeasing to the Lord if the intention was praiseworthy.*" So persuasive is the Comtesse, she "*eggs on*" the old nun of the group to speak to the moral axiom "*The end justifies the* *means.*" Says the nun: "*An action which is blameworthy in itself often becomes meritorious by virtue of the idea which inspires it.*"

"***E**xpecting Boule de Suif to sacrifice her person in the name of the group is hardly given a second thought.*"

Like Maupassant, Immanuel Kant's interest in the dynamics of human social interaction shaped much of his work. Kant, an important German philosopher who died at the turn of the eighteenth century, makes a "*moral argument for God*" that closely parallels the Comtesse's argument. In his early writings or pre-critical discussion of God, according to Philip Rossi, in his entry in the '*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,*' Kant's moral argument for God rests on the relationship between a person's ability to lead a virtuous, moral life and the satisfaction of that person's desire for happiness. Kant believed that a moral or practical use of human reason constituted the "*highest good.*" Essentially, within the context of his moral argument, our ability to exercise our will to choose actions solely in view of their moral rightness constitutes the practical use of reason. Exercising such choice, according to Kant, means that we will our actions on the basis of a "*categorical imperative*" or highest good. The highest good, therefore, consists in proper proportioning of happiness to match the measure of the virtue each person acquires in willing right moral actions. The highest good thus includes a harmonious balance or proportioning of happiness to virtue for all moral agents. Essentially, actions that one wills to be moral actions, those chosen on the basis of the categorical imperative, must be actions that will effect a proper proportion of happiness to virtue, not only for the person directly involved, but for everyone.

In the case of Boule de Suif's sacrifice, for example, the group justifies putting her in harm's way for the sake of the highest good. In light of Kant's beliefs, revisiting the old nun's version of moral axiom "*the end justifies the means*" reveals an argument riddled with complexities. The group consensus as to the prostitute's fate seems to be that she should be willing to comply for the sake of their freedom, that sleeping with the enemy, because of her line of work, "*was such a trivial thing for her.*" Publicly, all of the women lavish "*intense and affectionate sympathy*" to win over their reluctant companion. Privately, they justify her sacrifice by pointing out that "*it's that slut's job to go with any man who wants her,*" believing she has "*no right to refuse one man rather than another.*" For the group, the end does truly justify the means. For their own sakes, all group members believe, or at least have convinced themselves that Boule de Suif's act of self-sacrifice is for the highest good – to preserve their own wealth as well as their safety, and to ultimately affect their release. In the end, it is their ability to make use of Kant's strong philosophical argument that wins Boule de Suif over.

At the end of the story, however, the prostitute does not emerge triumphantly in the eyes of her travelling companions. After a night with the Prussian, Boule de Suif returns to the carriage only to meet rejection, her companions turning away, "*as if they had not seen her.*"The group, rather than praising her for her sacrifice, engages in open displays of contempt, even disgust. The result of this rejection, states the narrator, is that Boule de Suif "*felt angry with her neighbours, ashamed of having given way to their pleas, and defiled by the kisses of the Prussian into whose arms they had hypocritically thrown her.*" Clearly, the group's rejection of Boule de Suif was not the response she was looking for, or had even anticipated, for that matter. After all, she had agreed to sleep with the distasteful sacrifices she had to make, and that her fellow companions would be pleased, even grateful for her efforts. In light of the group's response, her sacrifice goes unrewarded; the whole exercise becomes, to some agree, a lesson in futility for Boule de Suif.

According to Rossi, despite his hypothesis, Kant himself offered evidence to suggest that such willing of the highest good may be an exercise in futility. First, simply willing one's action to be moral is not sufficient to insure they will effect the happiness appropriate to their virtue, chiefly because of one's tendency to choose morally right actions without consideration of the happiness they might reap as a result of these actions. In some cases, Kant feels that at least some of these choices may have the opposite effect on one's own very nature, forbidindividuals to consider any effects they may have on their own happiness. Consistently, Boule de Suif makes choices that satisfy Kant's moral imperative for the highest possible good, without much regard for consequences. She generously and willing shares her provisions for the trip with the ill-prepared group. She speaks with the Prussian and even sleeps with him to appease her fellow travellers. Yet she fails to recognize or even predict the possible outcome of these actions – that she may go hungry, have to live with the shame of sleeping with the enemy and, in turn, earn the disdain or contempt of the group for doing so.

Immanuel Kant’s moral argument forms the basis for Maupassant’s *Boule de Suif*. The story’s protagonist, Boule de Suif, discovers that despite her heroic acts of self-sacrifice, she cannot rise above her circumstances to win the admiration of the group. Her story mirrors the failings of Kant’s categorical imperative, that it is difficult to make choices for the highest good while realizing happiness portioned to those choices. In this way de Maupassant masterfully weaves his instructional tale, using this philosophical approach to expose the follies of mankind, in its infinite greed, selfish motives and unfounded justifications.