MAUPASSANT AND THE NORMAN PEASANT

GUY DE MAUPASSANT AND THE WORLD OF THE NORMAN PEASANT

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The thesis examines in detail the nature of the contes paysans written by Maupassant and the literary techniques which made this section the most successful in his work. The paper indicates and explains Maupassant's particular affection for the Norman peasant, then examines the different aspects of the peasant's character and the role he plays in the stories. An analysis is also made of other features of the peasant tales, such as the language, the décor, and the social events, while illustrating throughout the literary function of these elements. In the Conclusion, a comparison with other writers serves to demonstrate the reasons for the particular success of the contes paysans.

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Most of the critical works on Maupassant's short stories refer at some point to the success of his portrayal of the Norman peasant and to the artistic merits of the peasant *contes* themselves. Considering the continued popularity of this section of Maupassant's work, it seems surprising that no extensive study has been made on this specific topic. The only critical material devoted to the peasant tales is provided by two articles: "Maupassant, auteur rustique" by Paul Vernois, and "Pays et paysans cauchois peints par Maupassant" by Frédéric Lemoine. It is the purpose of this dissertation therefore to attempt a comprehensive analysis of the world of the Norman peasant as portrayed in the peasant *contes* and in the novel, *Une Vie*. With this aim in mind it was necessary to restrict the scope of the thesis and to refer to the Corsican and Auvergne peasant only as a point of comparison to the Norman peasant.

We have first attempted to illustrate the author's close attachment to the people and the countryside of Normandy, both in his capacity as a writer and as a native son of the province. His affection for the way of life of the fishermen and the peasants, his direct knowledge of their behaviour, and his literary apprenticeship under Flaubert

suitably prepared him for portraying with accuracy the world of the Norman peasant. It is this preparation which forms the central topic for Chapter I. In this chapter we also mention Maupassant's literary outlook and the way in which the peasants became appropriate subject matter for the contes.

To justify the title of the thesis it was essential to refer at some length to the people other than the peasant labourers who re-occur quite frequently in the peasant tales. The village priest, the mayor, the local squire and the guardian of the peace cannot strictly be called peasants, but they play an integral role in the peasant stories by helping to define certain peasant attitudes such as their suspicion of strangers, their fear of religion, and their indifference towards social misconduct. In Chapter II, we have analysed various characteristics displayed by the higher levels of the rural hierarchy. In the second chapter we have included the peasant girls and women, who contribute more directly towards defining the nature of the Norman peasant.

In the third chapter the peasant labourers are described according to their predominant characteristics. Numerous examples are provided to illustrate the peasant's cruel, superstitious, crafty, wise, avaricious and stoical disposition. In analysing the character of the Norman peasant it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the features

of a Norman peasant from those of a typical Norman. Wherever possible we have drawn attention to this possible confusion. The purpose behind Maupassant's contes paysans was not primarily social, so we have tried to demonstrate how various elements of the stories have important literary roles. The characters speak in their local dialect and indirectly reveal their own personalities without any interference from the author. Similarly the countryside details play an organic part in the whole story, by creating an impression of reality and by establishing the desired mood for the particular tale. Finally in Chapter IV we have shown how the peasants behave at social functions, which contribute themselves in presenting a well-balanced realistic picture of rural Normandy.

From the foregoing analysis it becomes gradually possible to place Maupassant's vérisme in its context and it is interesting to compare his pessimistic and realistic conception of the peasant with other writers' interpretations of similar material. Finally we have tried to account for the continued success of Maupassant's contes paysans, drawing particular attention to his admiration and respect for the peasant, which contrasts sharply with his antagonistic attitude towards the bourgeoisie, and analysing the variety of inspiration and artistic merits of the stories themselves.

CHAPTER I

THE WORLD OF THE PEASANTS

In the same way that an examination of Maupassant's life reveals a permanent attachment to Normandy and its peasants, a look at the chronology of his work demonstrates how this province and its rural figures have a substantial and recurring part to play in his stories. From his first major nouvelles, Boule de Suif 1880 and La Maison Tellier 1881, which both reflect Maupassant's love of the Norman countryside, to one of his last tales "Boitelle" 1889, the peasants of Normandy appear along with their own patois in various major and episodic roles in the contes, the nouvelles and even the novels Une Vie and Mont-Oriol. As Maynial declared, until the end of his life "la senteur de la terre normande le hante comme un parfum lointain et inoubliable".[1]

Interesting figures arrived at by Paul Vernois illustrate the percentage of tales from the "terroir normand" compared to stories of different inspiration at various moments throughout Maupassant's literary career:

12% in 1883
14% in 1884
9% in 1885
13% in 1886
5% in 1887
0% in 1888
9% in 1889 [2]

Vernion lists only thirty contes paysans between 1881 and 1889, but if one took into consideration however the stories containing more casual references to the peasants, the list would be much longer and the ratio much higher. Even though the number of tales of rural inspiration declines rapidly from 1885, as Maupassant became preoccupied with more spiritual subject matters, his Norman peasants still form the largest single subject matter in the whole works of Maupassant.

Despite his intention to remove personal and subjective elements from his work, indicated by declarations such as: "nos oeuvres appartiennent au public, mais non pas nos figures",[3] and "ma vie n'a pas d'histoires", his observations and experiences in his native province re-appear most consistently. Maynial is quite correct in asserting that "Les livres de Maupassant sont le reflet même de sa vie".[4] In fact Dumesnil claims that no writer has done for any province what Maupassant did for Normandy. A comparison may be found perhaps with the painter Millet, about whom Paul Watson says:

> Of all the men who have given luster to Normandy, there is none whom she may so justly call her own as Jean François Millet.5

In a similar way to Maupassant, he learned to respect the humble peasant and remained firmly attached to his native area, especially during his insecure years in Paris. Like

Maupassant, he took his inspiration for all his greatest work from his origins in Normandy, although the range of his material is not as wide. Maupassant presents the people, places and manners of rural Normandy. The descriptions of the village inns, the market places and the village traditions provide a varied background to the rural figures: the peasant labourers and their families, the young stable boys, the village priests, the fishermen, the innkeepers, and even some members of the aristocracy. Although there are very few specific examples of his association with all these people, he was certainly well acquainted with all their ways of life and reproduced them accurately in his work.

It seems at first rather strange that Maupassant ever came to be so close to Normandy and to the peasants of le pays de Caux, considering his mother's insistence on his being a literary and philosophical successor to her brother Alfred de Poittevin. In fact Jean de la Varende, himself a Norman writer, affirms that Maupassant was in no way a campagnard, since he never experienced for himself the worries and joys of a peasant's life, nor the dependence upon the land and the seasons. The countryside represented for Maupassant a means of living more energetically rather than simply a means of subsistence, and so he spent the main part of his early life acquainting himself with the people and places of le pays de Caux which he was to reproduce later in his peasant stories.

Although there is still some controversy about Maupassant's actual birthplace,[6] he is really a Norman from the outset. René Dumesnil adequately dismisses the argument when he writes:

> Tourville-sur-Argues, Sotteville-sur-Mer, Yvetot et Fécamp, encore quelques kilomètres les séparent, sont tous quatre en plein pays de Caux, et c'est ce qui importe.7

From his earliest years the places he visited and the adventures he experienced were later to become sources of literary inspiration. Until he was four he lived in the château de Miromesnil, where his birth is generally considered to have taken place. The next three years he lived in another château, this time at Grainville-Ymanville, which is described in Une Vie under the name of "Les Peuples". Later he became acquainted with the château de Cany where his head master, the poet Bouilhet lived, and where Maupassant used to go to have his early attempts at poetry corrected. This château is used as a setting for a lot of scenes, although another name is always used. During this time, as well as learning how the middle classes lived, he used to play with the sons of the peasant farmers nearby, exploring for himself the Caux countryside.

From the age of seven, Maupassant spent most of his early life in Etretat, a small fishing village on the Northern coast of Normandy between Fécamp and Le Havre. After separating from her husband, his mother moved to

"Les Verguies", a villa in Etretat. Maupassant always remained very attached to this house, often referring to it as "la chère maison". From the villa he could quickly go to talk to the local fishermen. It is quite plausible that "Les Verguies" was instrumental to some extent in awakening his interest in all the different facets of nature, considering

> Le beau jardin rempli de bouleaux, de tilleuls, et de sycomores, d'épines roses et blanches, de troux superbes, la maison peinte en blanc, d'aspect rustique, le balcon revêtu de vigne vierge, de jasmin et de chèvrefeuille.8

He was in fact very favourably impressed by the whole area of Etretat and took pleasure in remembering its powerful beauty once he began to write:

> Arrondie en croissant de lune, la petite ville d'Etretat, avec ses falaises blanches, son galet blanc et sa mer bleue reposait sous le soleil d'un grand jour de juillet. Avec deux pointes de ce croissant, les deux portes avançaient dans l'eau tranquille, l'une son pied de nain l'autre sa jambe de colosse; et l'aiguille, presque aussi haute que la falaise pointait vers le ciel sa tête aïgue.9

The six years that he spent in Etretat, before starting his studies at the seminary in Yvetot, were among the most influential years of his life. He met people from all walks of life: tourists from England, farm labourers, fishermen, craftsmen, squires, tramps, artists and shopkeepers. As Paul Ignatius concluded:

> It was this mixture of unrestrained elementary forces, of tenacious husbandry and of easy-going worldliness, that formed Maupassant.10

At the same time he was exploring fruitfully the surrounding areas, since his mother allowed him a free rein. He was particularly friendly with the peasants' sons, whom he deliberately chose as his friends because he admired their care-free, adventurous way of life. Despite his experience of château life and the private lessons from l'abbé Aubourg, Maupassant was never aware of any class differences. He endeared himself to the local peasants and fishermen by this attitude, which he carried out his practice. There is the famous story of Maupassant insisting on carrying the picnic basket that the leader of the group was going to force on to one of the peasant's sons. The readiness with which they accepted his company on local sea excursions demonstrates that, to a large extent, the affection was mutual.

Maupassant spent the most memorable times of his youth talking to the fishermen of Etretat, learning their craft and joining them on excursions that were sometimes quite dangerous. By the time he was thirteen he was very skilled in the art of sailing. Many stories display his excellent knowledge of boats and the different moods of the sea. These formative years by the sea were responsible for his love of water, as Paul Morand points out: "L'eau est comme le thème de toute son existence". From the healthy joy of fishing in the Channel, to his rowing deeds along the Seine and his travels in the Mediterranean in search of a

cure for his nervous disorders, Maupassant had a natural inclination towards water:

> Ce n'est pas le besoin athlétique de dépenser sa force qui le pousse; il court au fleuve comme le ruisseau court à la mer; la pente est aussi naturelle.12

From these early days therefore, he retained a taste for a healthy robust life which survived as long as his illness permitted and which always reminded him of his days as a "poulain échappé", as his mother called him.

His experiences in Etretat also aroused his interest in hunting, and in playing practical jokes, both of which provide a major source of inspiration for the contes paysans. Whenever he was away from Etretat he always looked forward to returning for the hunting season. He became quite an expert at hunting and became aware of all the sensations that the sport involved. In "Les Bécasses" he describes in detail the way the hunter attacked his prey, and also evokes the marvellous experience of rising before dawn and seeing the Autumn scenery gradually reveal itself through the mist and the dark. His experiences with the peasants must have aroused also his interest in gross stories and farces. His own use of these practical jokes was directed largely towards shocking the bourgeois in Paris, but according to Maynial it was in Etretat that he heard of and witnessed "les bonnes farces locales dont il riait d'un rire large et sonore".[13] One of Maupassant's favourite expressions is reputed to have

been "c'est très farce", and Maynial refers to the description of him as "un paysan farceur et superstitieux".[14] Many peasant tales contain farcical situations, whose origins have never been accurately traced. Certainly Maupassant was aware, however, of the Norman peasant's inclination towards practical jokes, which served as a rich source of literary inspiration.

Similarly, no biographical details are available concerning Maupassant's direct experience of certain village functions which he describes vividly in the peasant tales. Nevertheless, no-one has ever doubted the realism of the market scene in "La Ficelle", the christening in "Le Baptême", or the wedding in "Farce Normande". Details about the celebrations in these stories have also been scrupulously observed and provide an accurate picture of special occasions in the life of the Norman peasant.

During his time in Etretat, the influence of his mother was very important. He spent a considerable amount of time with her since his father had left the household. A deep relationship developed which lasted until his death. She was responsible for first awakening in Maupassant a love for nature. As well as interesting him in the garden she designed herself at "Les Verguies", she accompanied her son on many long walks in the countryside, explaining details and returning home often very exhausted. Such was her

interest in Guy's education that she often found herself cut off by the sea and forced to scramble up the steep Etretat cliffs. This devotion was successful since Maupassant's love of nature urged him later to visit for himself the beaches of Brittany, the hills of Auvergne, the Mediterranean coasts, the deserts of Africa and the stark countryside of Corsica and Italy. These travels and the boredom that he felt during them, helped him to appreciate even more the more modest countryside of his own province, as well as strengthening his powers of observation.

His mother's influence was also important from the literary point of view. It was she who began to make Maupassant observe and understand all the features of the countryside and prepare him for his future career as a writer:

> Elle l'intéressait aux aspects changeants de la mer et du ciel, au vol des mouettes sur les vagues, aux jeux du soleil sur la falaise et sur la campagne, avec mille details caractéristiques du riche pays normands.15

Tassart, Maupassant's servant in "La Guillette" also remarks in his Souvenirs that Guy's mother was a competent story-teller herself and would tell her son anecdotes during their walks, thereby fostering no doubt his interest in story-telling. His mother's acquaintance with the works of Shakespeare was also responsible for the large impression that Midsummer Night's Dream made on him:

> Il y retrouva toutes les impressions primitives, ces frissons obscurs et délicieux qu'il avait ressentis, ces rêves fantastiques aux quels il se laissait entraîner dans sa contemplation muette de la mer et des rochers, des plaines et des bois.16

During the many years that Maupassant lived in Etretat, and on his many subsequent visits, he became an expert on the whole area. In his work he likes to situate the scene, affording himself an opportunity to describe the places that had particular memories for him. Although he often changed the actual name of various sites, Etretat itself serves as framework for "Modèle", "Adieu", "L'Ivrogne", "La Roche aux Guille mots", and "Les Anglais". He was also well acquainted with the Normandy coastline, which he describes in Une Vie and "Miss Harriet". Maupassant re-discovers his youth by painting the small events and daily occupations of his characters. In Une Vie the characters ride across wind-swept plains, bring in fishing nets by moonlight and visit caves by the sea, just as the author did himself. In 1887 he visited Le Havre for the specific purpose of obtaining material for Pierre et Jean, in which he describes the Seine bay and the "rade du Havre". To further his own experience with the area, he observed all the coastline in detail from Antifer to Etretat, as part of his research for Flaubert who was writing Bouvard et Pécuchet. As a child Maupassant used to spend some time in Fécamp with his grandfather, and later returned on many occasions with

his own parents. Paul Ignatius discovered that the inhabitants of Fécamp have always maintained a strong attachement to the writer, whereas, following his own investigations, he did not find any signs of affection for him in the towns and villages of Caux. Maupassant situates a number of stories in Fécamp: e.g. "La Maison Tellier", "L'Abandonné","Le Noyé". From all these experiences it is easy to explain why Steegmuller should write: "the reader is well drenched in Norman rains, in Norman sea air and in Norman country smells.[17]

Maupassant was particularly impressed by Mont Saint-Michel and by the small town of Canteleu on the outskirts of Rouen. He describes the castle on the island in Notre Coeur and in "Le Horla". He knew Rouen very well also, since he went to school there and composed his first verses under the guidance of Louis Bouilhet. He particularly remembered the impressive background provided by Canteleu at Flaubert's funeral. Dumesnil describes the significance of this part of Normandy for Maupassant:

> Ce paysage revient à travers l'oeuvre entière de Maupassant, comme un thème musical, grave, profond, harmonieux, évocateur du pays natal dans son aspect le plus grandiose et qui reste associé pour toujours au souvenir le plus douloureux de toute une vie.18

This area is described in the first pages of "Le Horla", in "Un Normand", and in the novel Bel-Ami, when Duroy visits his parents in Normandy. Paul Morand summarises Maupassant's accurate and direct knowledge of his native province and

points to the importance of this preparation in the whole sphere of his writing:

> Ouvrir une nouvelle normande de Maupassant, c'est prendre un billet pour Lisieux ou pour Gisors. Daudet a ses cigales, Huysmans ses vieilles pierres, Baudelaire ses tubéreuses, et Maupassant ses fermes. Il en est, littérairement, propriétaire.19

Maupassant's love of Normandy and its rural folk matured as he grew older. Whenever he was in Yvetot, Rouen or Paris he always felt very nostalgic and would return to Etretat as often as his time and health would permit. He spent four years at the seminary in Yvetot. This small town appears in a number of contes, but basically he missed the local fishermen and peasants. After this liberal discipline at home, he was dismayed by the seclusion and rigid treatment in the seminary, and developed a hostile attitude towards the clergy which is brought out in Une Vie and in "Le Saut du Berger", as well as in many casual references to the clergy. He also met the rich sons of landholders, who were a far more snobbish brand of rural folk than he had frequented before. He wrote very nostalgic letters home to his mother and often tried to run away. His mother was sympathetic to his frustrations and preferred to see him resume his former activities of swimming, rowing, sailing, picnicking, and watching the painters Courbet and Corot paint the Etretat landscapes.

For seven years Maupassant loathed the shabby apartments and the dull bourgeois office clerks that he came

across in Paris while working as a government official. The bright city seemed to hold no attractions for the young man so immersed in his native province. He realised that Paris was essential for his literary career,[21] but he became quite bitter towards the apathy of the office worker and the hypocrisy of the worldly society. He had no sympathy for the weak bourgeois husband, such as Monsieur Parent, or M. Oreille in "Le Parapluie", who become objects of humour for their office colleagues because of their wives' dominance over them. He was equally hostile towards the worldly society into which his literary success brought him. He preferred the calm simple life of the countryside to the rather cold, artificial, hypocritical life of Paris society. In a letter to Comtesse Potocka he wrote:

> Je m'ennuie, tout m'assomme, les gens que je vois et les événements pareils qui se succèdent; peu d'esprits dans le monde élégant et peu d'intelligence; ces gens me font l'effet de peintures détestables en des cadres reluisants.

These unpleasant experiences in Paris made a strong impression on Maupassant. He realised that the higher social classes were capable of behaving just as shamefully as the peasants, the only difference being that the former were capable of hiding behind these very "cadres reluisants". Consequently his sympathetic attitude towards the peasants was re-inforced, while at the same time his love of an energetic natural way of life was being frustrated.

His different attitudes towards Paris and Normandy are reflected in the descriptions of these places in his work. Janssen concludes that Maupassant observed Paris more as a documenter than as a delighted traveller. The décor is included merely because the story takes place there. The descriptions are exact, but there is no effort to give them an organic role in the story. There is no impression of the bustling city life or the magnificence of some of the buildings. The lack of feeling cannot be attributed to his own disposition, since he seems quite moved by the beauty of Mont Saint-Michel and the Normandy countryside. Janssen noticed that the only time Maupassant painted Paris in a positively favourable light was when the change of seasons affects the appearance of the city. The descriptions of Spring in Notre Coeur and Autumn in Fort Comme la Mort reveal more feeling than the large majority of his Paris scenes. As Janssen again points out:

> On sent qu'à Paris, Maupassant est presque comme un étranger qui fait Paris en deux jours en n'y voyant que les banalités.22

Maurice Catinat sympathises with the way Maupassant must have felt in Paris:

> Combien le "poulain échappé" dut-il souffrir d'être transformé en rond-de-cuir.23

Just like Zola, who was brought up in the Aix countryside before leaving to live a miserable existence in the capital, Maupassant was well aware of the difficulties encountered

in adjusting to this new life. In "L'Angélus" he speaks of:

> cette petite nostalgie invincible des dépaysés, dont souffrent, quand ils sont emprisonnés dans les cités, par leur devoir ou leur profession, presque tous ceux dont les poumons, les yeux et la peau ont eu pour nourriture première le grand ciel et l'air pur des champs et dont les petits pieds ont couru d'abord dans les chemins des bois, les sentes des prés et l'herbe des rives.24

Paris made Maupassant realise the beauty of living in the country. His taste for the outdoor life was too deep rooted to ignore. He came to believe firmly that man was not meant to breathe the oppressive air of towns, but should

> vivre au sein de la nature, pour s'enivrer d'air pur et abandonner son corps aux caresses de l'eau ou aux brûlures du soleil.25

Although he never glorifies the countryside in the contes paysans, or presents the idea of the noble savage, his sustained enthusiasm for the rural life of Normandy obviously influenced his favourable attitude toward the peasants as opposed to the Parisian bourgeoisie.

Maupassant's love of nature inspired him to maintain his energetic exploration of the countryside wherever he was. When he visited Sicily, Italy, Corsica and Africa, he always preferred to discover the rural life rather than the town. As he wrote to Princesse Mathilde:

> je suis un paysan et un vagabond, fait pour les côtes et pour les bois et non pour les rues.

During his travels he liked to imagine himself as one of the "vrais routiers qui vont, sac au dos, canne à la main, par les sentiers, par les ravins, le long des plages.[26]

This is precisely what he did when touring Brittany in 1882. In "En Bretagne" he recreates the charm of his adventures:

> Coucher dans les granges quand on ne rencontre point d'auberges, manger du pain et boire de l'eau quand les vivres sont introuvables, et ne craindre ni la pluie, ni les distances, ni longues heures de marche régulière, voilà ce qu'il faut pour parcourir et pénétrer un pays jusqu'au coeur, pour découvrir, tout près des villes où passent les touristes, mille choses qu'on ne soupçonnait pas.27

At the beginning of "Miss Harriet" he enumerates the pleasures of what he called "faire le rapin" along the Normandy coastline. With no worries to disturb him, and free to stop whereever he wanted, he could appreciate being alone and observing the sunsets, the dawns, and the moonlights. He found drinking from springs, sleeping in the open, and gazing at the little village in the distance very pleasurable sensations. The intensity and range of feelings aroused by this way of life was also very rewarding:

> On est gai sur la colline, mélancholique au bord des étangs, exalté lorsque le soleil se noie dans un océan de nuages.28

Following such experiences he was well prepared to describe, understand and sympathise with the simple pleasures of the two soldiers in "Petit Soldat" and with the frustrations of Jacques Randel in "Le Vagabond". At the same time the descriptions themselves add a gay, picturesque and optimistic note to Maupassant's usually bleak world. The people whom he met while travelling and in Normandy obviously provided Maupassant with many ideas for his <u>contes paysans</u> and enabled him

to describe with greater sharpness and accuracy the particular features of his own province and the individual characteristics of the people.

We can see that Maupassant's childhood, his sympathies and his work betray an attachment to Normandy similar to the affection that Jules Renard felt towards his native village, Chitry-les-Mines. Maupassant declared: "J'aime ce pays et j'aime y vivre", and in his nostalgia he can be compared with Jeanne of Une Vie who spent her youth in the Norman countryside and who "a semé partout des souvenirs comme on jette des graines en terre, de ces souvenirs dont les racines tiennent jusqu'à la mort.[29] These memories are those of a terrien and a marin, and his experiences in these two roles form a leitmotif throughout his work:

> C'est qu'en Maupassant se joignent et s'unissent pour former son art, le terrien et le marin, comme en son pays, avancé en éperon dans la mer normande, s'épousent la terre et les eaux.30

In 1882 he bought his own house in Etretat, and called it "La Guillette" because of the association with his name. He was particularly fond of this house, with its hunting dogs, cats, poplars, beeches, and fish ponds. Whenever he was not travelling abroad, he used to spend the summer there, content to become un paysan again and relive all the old sensations of exploring the plains and the

cliffs. The house also afforded a respite from his nervous disorders and his tiring journeys. Henri Fouquier, who met Maupassant many times at "La Guillette", explains why the writer was so fond of Normandy.

> Méprisant les assouvissements de la mode, peu soucieux de tenir sa place parmi les "hommes du monde", il vivait là en campagnard et en marin. En ses longues promenades de chasse, en ses aventureuses pêches en mer, il usait sans péril la force de son tempérament et l'ardeur de son sang. Mélange de rudesse et de grâce, sa Normandie était un cadre reposant et approprié à son esprit.31

To be more specific, Tassart, his faithful servant, relates how his master would rise at eight o'clock in the morning, take a cold shower, and stroll leisurely towards the beach stopping along the way to inhale the odours of the plants and to talk to the dogs and cats he happened to meet. As well as positively enjoying his periods of rest in Etretat, he was also deepening his knowledge of the area and of the rural inhabitants.

There are very few specific biographical details about Maupassant's experiences with the peasants with whom he spent so much of his time. It is indubitable however that the rural life of Normandy inspired many tales in one form or another. There are, on the other hand, various incidents in Maupassant's life which placed him in direct contact with the peasants under particular circumstances. These experiences provide a substantial source of material for his stories.

During the 1870-71 Winter, Maupassant was confined to barracks along with the whole army unit, in the snow-covered forest, Les Andelys. During his stay there, he talked to the local peasants, who told him many stories about the war. He saw for himself the brutal courage of the country folk in times of duress. In his opinion their behaviour was much more worthy than that of the higher army officials who were simply intent on glory and promotion. Just like Martin du Gard who was surrounded by young men from farming families in Normandy during his military service, Maupassant turns to these people repeatedly as a rich source of literary inspiration. He shows the peasants' resistance to the Prussians in "La Mère Sauvage", "Le Père Milon", "Les Prisonniers", and "Saint Antoine".

In "Le Voyage du Horla" Maupassant describes the naive curiosity of the peasants in Belgium when the balloon in which he was travelling came down at 3:30 in the morning. On July 16, 1887 Maupassant's account of the scene appeared in Figaro:

> Sur les lieux habités, nous faisons mugir la sirène et les paysans affolés dans leur lit doivent se demander en tremblant si c'est l'ange du jugement qui passe.

The journey to Auvergne in 1896 and to Corsica in 1880 provided him with much more experience of the peasants, whose company he deliberately sought. The Auvergue peasant appears in Mont-Oriol, while the Corsican peasant inspired

such stories as "Un Bandit Corse" and "Une Vendetta", where the author demonstrates his acquaintance with vendettas. The novel Une Vie also displays Maupassant's knowledge of the Corsican coastline and of the island's peasants. Although these experiences helped the writer of the contes paysans to understand more fully the peasant mentality as a whole, they did not inspire his best stories, which still remain those of the Norman peasant.

His involvment with Normandy can also be explained by a number of features which his temperament and his work betray, and which are generally considered to be typically Norman in origin.[32] Dumesnil claims that Maupassant inherited his melancholic disposition from his Norman origins. It is true that young Guy was very friendly with Alfred de Poittevin, his uncle, who left a strong impression on the writer because of his sentimental and pessimistic disposition. Dumesnil does not underestimate this influence:

> Il exerça autour de lui et spécialement sur sa soeur Laure, une action des plus vives et qu'il importe de noter pour comprendre la formation du génie de Maupassant. Par sa mère, par Flaubert, le flambeau fut transmis.33

His mother and Flaubert were also melancholic, which must have helped considerably in forming Guy's own outlook.

Dumesnil also refers to "l'instinct migratoire" which both Maupassant and his ancestors, the Vikings, possessed, referring to the large amount of travelling that

Maupassant did. At the same time however he always believed in the superiority of his native province, which led him to develop a strong hatred of the English and the Prussians, who both attempted to undermine the strength of the province. Dumesnil traces the origin of this feeling to his identity as a Norman.

> Le Normand porte avec lui-comme l'Anglais - sous tous les climats l'assurance de la supériorité de son propre pays, le normand qui a jadis tant conquis de terres, admet mal qu'on pénètre, même pacifiquement, sur la sienne.34

Critics have tried to establish connections between Maupassant's actual style and typical Norman characteristics. It is difficult to justify such claims, which at best provide easy explanations for the author's stylistic techniques. His prolific writing has been likened to the plentiful supply of fruit that a Norman apple tree bears. This "succession of plateaux and broad valleys watered by streams and unsurpassed as pastures"[35] has been considered responsible for his living and writing so energetically. These postulations have arisen perhaps in the light of quotations by both Flaubert and Maupassant about this matter. Flaubert proclaimed that:

> Normands tous que nous sommes, nous avons quelque peu de cidre dans les veines: c'est une boisson aigre et fermentée qui fait sauter la bonde.36

while Maupassant himself was not totally unaware of the analogy mentionned above:

> Je suis en sève; le printemps de ce pays me

> réveille comme une plante et me fait produire des fruits littéraires.37

By the same stretch of imagination, Georges Dubosc claims that Maupassant's desire for minute, comprehensive observation can be attributed to

> cette ambition de tout parcourir et de tout acquérir par la pensée, comme jadis les marins hardis et aventuriers qui allaient à la recherche d'horizons inconnus.38

People have also found in Maupassant's insistence on the right word and the meaningful gesture an analogy with the Norman's reputation for economy and frugality. Maupassant, his peasant creations, and the ordinary Norman reduce everything to what is considered strictly necessary, as we shall see when we analyse the author's style and his peasant characters. Despite the rather exaggerated nature of these hypotheses, there does exist a unity of inspiration in the contes paysans between the rather cold, impersonal style of the author, and the reticent, slightly suspicious peasant, and this harmony, whether sociologically explicable or not, assures the success of Maupassant's work.

Certain people have also seen in the actual appearance of Maupassant a connection with the Norman race. Zola was of the opinion that:

> in his temperament were combined a breadth of shoulder and a ruddy sturdiness that were typically Norman.39

Steegmuller translates a similar comment by Blanche Roosevelt, one of Maupassant's female admirers:

> Maupassant had a fine characteristic Norman head, with the straight line from neck to crane which we saw in the medallions of the old conquest warriors.39

It is also interesting to note that the author's looks have been compared on many occasions to those of the peasants about whom he wrote:

> En le regardant de près, je trouve qu'il ressemble à ses paysans. Comme eux, il me paraît à la fois misanthrope et farceur, patient et madré, rêveur malgré lui, et libertin.40

Henri Roujon notices the similarity with regard to his complexion: "son teint et sa peau semblaient d'un rustique fouetté par les brises,[41] and the following description of Maupassant by F. Bac could easily refer to the author's own peasants:

> courtaud, chevelu, puissant, l'oeil sombre, le teint cuit par le hâle et le soleil, il donnait l'impression de la timidité; ses manières étaient simples.42

Even more complete is the general description again by Roujon, this time of Maupassant's whole character:

> Sa voix gardait l'allure traînante du parler campagnard. Il buvait sec, mangeait comme quatre et dormait d'un somme.43

Linking him even further with the background of his youth and of his peasant tales, Paul Morand, Flaubert and Taine saw in Maupassant quite a resemblance to a bull. Flaubert first noticed the similarity and wrote: "il a le faciès d'un petit taureau breton".[44] Then Taine said of the

older Guy: "il avait l'air d'un taureau triste".[44] It was left to P. Morand to give a fuller description:

> Il avait la force de la tête, des épaules, le regard fier, le nez court, le cou charnu, la poitrine large, le poil luisant du taureau . . .c'était un taureau à face humaine.45

It is easy to understand how Maupassant, having acquired these characteristics, was suited for a life outdoors with the robust healthy peasants. With his frame he was capable of great feats of rowing strength, and of walking thirty-eight miles in one day, as he once reported to his mother. Unlike most of the nineteenth-century writers, he had no special education or culture. He had neither the wild life of a Baudelaire or a Rimbaud, nor the superior intelligence and heart of a Flaubert or a Hugo. He was simply "un homme de la nature, de la vie, du moment, et de la sensation . . .une âme dure et désolée.[46] He developed a capacity for enjoying life in it, natural state and always retained a certain affection for the simple country folk who lived in permanent proximity to the land.

To complete this picture of Maupassant's attachment to rural Normandy, one should consider his relationship with Flaubert, his "irréprochable maître" as he referred to him. Flaubert was responsible for introducing his pupil into all the literary salons and for perpetuating the theme of pessimism in French literature, that had coloured his own vision and which Maupassant was going to inherit. But more

especially, under Flaubert's tuition, Maupassant became even more acquainted with the scenes and peasants of rural Normandy as he began to observe them with a sharper eye. His master taught him to notice and to describe the distinguishing features about people and places, to find the one word that would individualise a person or a scene; and to search for the hidden quality in very familiar objects. Flaubert's instructions helped Maupassant to describe a setting accurately and concisely, while at the same time making him more aware of all the different features of his native province.

Maupassant was naturally indebted to Normandy for the part it played in his literary success,[47] and it was only to be expected that descriptions of the countryside be loved should be included in his works. There are other reasons as well why this background should figure so prominently. According to the Naturalist theories the writer should reproduce the series that he has directly experienced for himself. It was an obvious choice then to choose Normandy as the setting for many tales. The background was invested, in Naturalist fiction, with the ability to modify and condition a person's character. "Un Bandit Corse" illustrates this theory perfectly. The hard, uncompromising granite rocks of the Corsican countryside seem to instil an adamant desire for revenge in Saint-Lucie.

Irrespective of these literary justifications for the inclusion of a substantial background, the content of Maupassant's contes paysans would suffer from the omission of certain background information. The peasant is attached more solidly to his immediate environment than most people. His land is responsible for his livelihood; he has to toil to make it respond, and he spends his leisure in constant proximity to it. E. Dordau stresses the importance of the land in peasant novels:

> Le sol fait l'homme, sans doute, mais l'homme aussi fait le sol. Action et réaction se complètent pour mieux unir l'homme et la terre; il serait donc impossible d'étudier le paysan de France sans l'analyser en fonction de cette terre qu'il fouille, dont il respire l'âcre parfum, qu'il façonne à sa guise.48

Although the land plays a less significant role in Maupassant than in Zola for instance, the Norman peasant can only be fully understood when one considers the inevitable effects of working so hard on the land and of being so dependent upon it. Michelet indicated the influence of not only the land, but of the whole framework within which the peasant in general carries out his daily tasks:

> Notez que le sol n'est pas seulement le théâtre de l'action. Par la nourriture, le climat, il y influe de cent manières.49

Maupassant was sensitive to the details that surrounded the Norman peasant in his daily life: the animals, the smells, the fields, the behaviour of the youngsters, and the language

spoken. By setting his characters against a realistic setting, we can understand and sympathise with them a lot easier, and at the same time we have the rewarding experience of seeing a whole world presented and described in accurate detail.

The world of the Norman peasant was close to Maupassant's personal experience and was an obvious source of material for his work. There are other reasons however why he should have had such a predilection for writing about peasants. The readers of the daily newspapers which first printed his stories would be amused by the paysanneries and by the surprise endings of "La Ficelle" and "La Mère Sauvage". A more academic reason was the vogue at the time of choosing "les sujets scabreux"[50] as Francisque Sarcey called Maupassant's choice of subject matter. Both Taine and Sarcey regretted his "acharnement à revenir sur ce vilain objet d'études",[50] and Albert Wolff pointed out to him that: "il n'est pas nécessaire de toujours traîner sa plume dans les mauvais lieux pour être un homme de talent".[51] Maupassant defended himself by claiming the right, as a writer, to choose his own subject matter irrespective of its moral implications. As a Naturalist writer in particular he felt obliged to include in his works aspects from all ways of life, since "l'école naturaliste affirme que l'art est l'expression de la vie sous tous ses modes et à tous ses

degrés".[52] Maupassant felt that any subject matter could be treated in art, since all actions have an equal interest in themselves.

Maupassant also shared the Naturalists' interpretation of the writer's function, which was to discover the initial motives and mysterious origins of human behaviour. The peasants were more suitable for this experiment than the higher social classes because their reactions were not influenced by any kind of convention, hypocrisy or social graces. They demonstrate in fact the most natural and instinctive responses. Furthermore, with the peasants, Maupassant could observe the capricious attacks of fate, to which the peasant is more vulnerable than anyone. With his livelihood depending upon the soil and the weather, it is futile to hide behind a refined façade as the bourgeoisie invariably do. V. S. Pritchett makes the interesting comment that the Norman peasants whom he had frequented for so long were responsible themselves for inspiring his vision of the world:

> I think it is from his closeness to the peasants' knowledge of nature that Maupassant got his sense of the pattern of fate or necessity in life.53

Maupassant must have been impressed by the way the peasant had to suffer the ironies of fate as he tried to cultivate the land.

The peasants as people were in harmony with Maupassant's own sense of values. He wanted to escape the mental and

and social awareness in order merely to "vivre comme une brute".[54] His communication and sympathy with the peasant is easy to understand in the light of the following quotation stating his natural temperament: "Je suis né avec tous les instincts et tous les sens de l'homme primitif".[55] In Sur l'eau the author leaves us in no doubt about his appreciation of the primitive way of life and his closeness to the basic sensations and instincts of the animals and the country folk:

> Mon corps de bête se grise de toutes les ivresses de la vie. J'aime le ciel comme un oiseau, les forêts comme un loup rodeur, les rochers comme un chamois, l'herbe profonde pour m'y rouler, pour y courir comme un cheval, et l'eau limpide pour y nager comme un poisson. Je sens frémir en moi quelque chose de toutes les espèces d'animaux, de tous les instincts, de tous les désirs confus des créatures inférieures. J'aime d'un amour bestial et profond, misérable et sacré, tout ce qui vit, tout ce qui pousse, tout ce qu'on voit.56

Maupassant was a firm believer in the value of physical strength and the keen use of the senses, both of which he admired in the peasants. His sense of smell and powers of observation were very acute and became a positive asset when he began to write. In the contes paysans he rarely fails to mention the particular odours or the inconspicuous detail which summarises the whole character of the scene. His eyesight was quick, direct, and discriminating, and produced very successful, vivid and concise descriptions. This acuteness and receptivity

served him well in his role as an "auteur rustique" since he was sensitive to the whole milieu of the peasant. Maupassant consequently measures up to Bazin's expectations for a successful peasant writer:

> Presque toujours les romanciers dits "paysans" sont impuissants, non seulement à traduire la forte poésie de la terre, mais même à nous en donner la sensation, la matérialité. L'observation et la connaissance n'y suffisent point: il y faut de grands dons et une rare puissance de réceptivité. C'est par les sens aussi bien que par l'imagination que les véritables poètes de la nature vibrent à ses moindres pulsations.57

On a literary level, the peasants were ideal characters who suited Maupassant's interpretation of the role of psychology in art. In the preface to Pierre et Jean he declares that psychology should be hidden in art just as it is in real life. In our everyday life we see only the external gestures, the physical appearances and the small details, that do not seem to belong to any motivated design. Only the outside should be presented in literature, which suits his portrayal of the peasant since this person is generally considered to be less complex than most people. His thoughts are easily identifiable from his manners and from his inarticulate way of expressing himself.

On all accounts, the combination of Maupassant and the world of rural Normandy was destined to be successful. The writer had the benefit of being able to participate perfectly in the way of life of Norman peasant and yet objectify his experience to the extent of appreciating the

rural life probably more than a peasant himself. In his own temperament Maupassant also felt himself very close to the rural world and most sympathetic to the values of instinct, sensuality and simplicity. He was particularly fortunate with the choice of the Norman peasant as subject matter, since the whole topic suited both his own and the Naturalists' interpretations of the function and value of a work of art.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

[1]E. Maynial, La Vie et l'Oeuvre de Guy de Maupassant (Paris: Mercure de France, 1907), p. 171.

[2]Paul Vernois, "Maupassant, auteur rustique", Travaux de L'inguistique et de Littérature, II, 1964, p. 117.

[3]Quoted by Maynial, Guy de Maupassant, p. 160.

[4]Maynial, Guy de Maupassant, p. 12.

[5]P. B. Watson, Tales of Normandie (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1930), p. 84.

[6]The confusion arises because his place of birth is given on his death certificate as: "Sotteville près d'Yvetot". Also there is some doubt whether Maupassant was actually born in the château de Miromesnil, or whether he surprised his parents by being born at his grandparent's house a few miles away before his parents had time to move into the château that they had rented.

[7]R. Dumesnil, Guy de Maupassant (Paris: Tallandier, 1947), p. 56.

[8]Maynial, Guy de Maupassant, pp. 27-28.

[9]Maupassant, "Adieu", Contes du Jour et de la Nuit, p. 251.

[10]P. Ignatius, The Paradox of Maupassant (London: University Press, 1966), p. 58.

[11]P. Morand, Vie de Guy de Maupassant (Paris: Flammarion, 1942), p. 160.

[12]Morand, Maupassant, p. 161.

[13]Maynial, Guy de Maupassant, p. 171.

[14]Comment by Henry Fouquier, quoted by Maynial, Guy de Maupassant, p. 171.

[15]Maynial, Guy de Maupassant, p. 31.

[16]Maynial, Guy de Maupassant, p. 33.

[17]F. Steegmuller, A Lion in the Path (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 167.

[18]Dumesnil, Guy de Maupassant, pp. 179-180.

[19]Morand, Maupassant, p. 92.

[20]"La Martine", "L'Odyssée d'une Fille", and "Boitelle".

[21]Steegmuller, in A Lion in the Path, p. 211, translates a passage by Maupassant: "An artist must always come to Paris to stand a chance of flourishing. It is not enough merely to be in Paris, you have to become part of it, quickly get to know its houses, its people, its ideas, its ways and intimate customs. Otherwise you retain a certain awkwardness of talent, a certain something of provincialism".

[22]C. L. Janssen, Le Décor chez Guy de Maupassant (Copenhagen: Munskyaard, 1960), p. 80.

[23]M. Catinat, Les Bords de la Seine avec Renoir et Maupassant (Chatou: S.O.S.P., 1952), p. 76.

[24]Maupassant, "L'Angélus", Oeuvres Posthumes, II, p. 191.

[25]Maupassant, Sur l'Eau, p. 45.

[26]Maupassant, "En Bretagne", Au Soleil, p. 252.

[27]Maupassant, "En Bretagne", Au Soleil, pp. 253-254.

[28]Maupassant, "Miss Harriet", p. 6.

[29]Maupassant, Une Vie, p. 106.

[30]Dumesnil, Le Réalisme et le Naturalisme (Paris: Gigord, 1955), p. 350.

[31]Quoted by Maynial, Guy de Maupassant, p. 167.

[32]Henry James, in his introduction to The Odd Number, seems to believe in the "something in the accumulated heritage of such a province which may well have fed the imagination of an artist whose vision was to be altogether of this life".

[33]Dumesnil, Guy de Maupassant, p. 70.

[34]Dumesnil, Guy de Maupassant, p. 46.

[35]Watson, Tales of Normandie, p. 18.

[36]Quoted by P. L. Robert, Trois Portraits Normands (Rouen: Cagniard, 1924), p. 9.

[37]Quoted by Steegmuller, A Lion in the Path, p. 277.

[38]G. Dubosc, Trois Normands (Rouen: Defontaine, n.d.), p. 170.

[39]Translated by Steegmuller, A Lion in the Path, p. 48.

[40]A comment by Georges de Porto-Riche, quoted by A-M. Schmidt, Maupassant par lui-même (Paris: Editions du seuil, 1962), p. 100.

[41]Quoted by P. Martino, Le Naturalisme Français (Paris: Colin, 1930), p. 123.

[42]Quoted by Morand, Maupassant, p. 107.

[43]Quoted by Martino, Le Naturalisme Français, p. 123.

[44]Quoted by Morand, Maupassant, p. 5.

[45]Morand, Maupassant, p. 5.

[46]Courrier littéraire: réalistes et naturalistes (Paris: Albin Michel, 1954), p. 380.

[47]Robert, in Trois Portraits Normands, p. 115, stresses the large influence of Normandy on Maupassant's career:

> Maupassant sera redevable à ces libres années d'enfance de sa connaissance parfaite, de son amour de la mer, de la terre normandes. Il leur gardera une belle place dans la plupart de ses oeuvres. Pour Maupassant, la race et le terroir ont été des facteurs d'originalité et de valeur.

[48]E. Dordan, Le Paysan Français d'après les Romans du XIX siècle (Toulouse: Imprimerie du Centre, 1923), p. 6.

[49]Quoted by Dordan, Le Paysan Français, p. 6.

[50]F. Sarcey, "La Loi sur les écrits pornographiques", reproduced in Mademoiselle Fifi (Paris: Conard, 1929), p. 271.

[51]A. Wolff, Courier de Paris, reproduced in Mademoiselle Fifi, p. 273.

[52]Maupassant, "Le Roman", Pierre et Jean, p. xv.

[53]V. S. Pritchett, Books in General (London: Chatto and Windus, 1953), p. 102.

[54]Maupassant, Sur l'Eau, p. 92.

[55]Maupassant, "Amour", Le Horla, p. 53.

[56]Maupassant, Sur l'Eau, p. 63.

[57]Quoted by Vernois, "Maupassant, auteur rustique", p. 138.

CHAPTER II

CHARACTERISATION OF THE PEASANTS

In depicting the rural world of Normandy, Maupassant concentrates primarily on the peasant himself, the farm labourer. There are however various other groups of people that have a substantial part in the contes paysans, contributing towards a more colourful and comphehensive portrayal of the peasant community. The people that are most easily identified are the village priests, the local aristocracy, and various officials, e.g. the mayor, the judge, and the policemen. In this category we can also include the peasant girls and the peasants' wives, for they also play an extremely important part in the stories. Each of these groups in fact displays certain features and attitudes that help to define indirectly the psychology of the rural community. They introduce a wide variety of themes and subject matters - hunting, cruelty, insensitiveness, tenderness, promiscuity - which establishes a well-documented background to the Norman peasant. It is interesting to note how certain individuals in Maupassant's peasant tales represent each group of people and at the same time carry certain themes. The success of the stories themselves depends to a large extent on this combination.

The higher rural classes figure quite prominently in the work of Maupassant, often in stories about hunting, to which Maupassant was quite attracted. Hunting, and the rural aristocracy, serve various purposes in the contes paysans. First, they provide the author with an opportunity for evoking the intense sensations that this sport can produce. He recreates very vividly a number of his experiences that left a considerable impression on him. In "Les Bécasses", the story-teller hero, who belongs to the class of society that can afford to spend its time reading and hunting, describes the pleasures of setting out to hunt on a cold winter's morning. With the sensation of "le froid léger qui pique les yeux, le nez et les oreilles et qui a poudré à une fine brousse blanche le bout des herbes et la terre brune des labourés",[1] the hero seems certainly justified in concluding: "Il fait bon chasser au bois par les frais matins d'hiver", ("Les Bécasses", p. 208). The hero of "La Roche aux Guillemots" arrives at the same conclusion: "il n'y a rien de joli comme cette chasse, comme cette promenade matinale".[2] In this story Maupassant describes the picturesque arrival of dawn as the faithful bird hunters leave for "la roche dite 'aux Guillemots', près d'Etretat":

> Les étoiles sont un peu pâlies, la brise est si fraîche qu'on frissonne un peu, puis le ciel s'éclaircit, les ténèbres semblent fondre; la côte paraît voilée encore, la grande côte blanche, droite comme une muraille. ("La Roche aux Guillemots", p. 214)

These descriptions serve various purposes. They allow the author to display his powers of observations and his ability to reproduce accurately certain experiences. In "Les Bécasses" the author is concerned however with illustrating the superiority of the country over the town. The story-teller lives away from Paris because "je préfère la vie libre, la rude vie d'automne du chasseur" ("Les Bécasses", p. 201). In his opinion there is no comparison between apartment living and the outdoor life, for, as he cynically explains:

> Le fait de recevoir de l'eau sur un parapluie quand il pleut ne suffit pas à me donner l'impression, la sensation de l'espace.
> ("Les Becasses", p. 202)

The function of these descriptions is also to announce the passion for hunting which Maupassant shared with some of his characters. The story-teller in "Amour" is fascinated by the life abounding in the grounds of the château:

> Le marais, c'est un monde entier sur la terre, un monde différent, qui a sa vie propre, ses habitants sédentaires et ses voyageurs de passage, ses voix, ses bruits, et son mystère surtout. Rien n'est plus troublant, plus inquiétant, plus effrayant, qu'un marécage.3

He goes on to explain the specific effects that the swamp produces in him:

> Je me sentis saisi par l'émotion puissante et singulière que font naître en moi les marécages. ("Amour", p. 56)

By investing the swamp with peasant attributes, Maupassant has established a tone of mystery and fascination that is capable of completely overwhelming the common sense of the hunter. The actual sadism of the "gentilhomme de campagne" has also been announced by the vivid description of the intense cold that is as insensitive to the hunter, as the hunter is to the faithful male hovering over the dead female:

> L'air gelé fait tant de mal; il est figé, immobile; il mord, traverse, dessèche, tue les arbres, les plantes, les insectes, les petits oiseaux eux-mêmes, qui tombent des branches sur le sol dur et deviennent durs aussi, comme lui, sous l'étreinte du froid. ("Amour", pp. 57-58)

The harshness of the weather and the sinisterness of the swamp prefigure the cold, brutal joy that the hunter felt.[4] There is also a close harmony between the baron and the immediate surroundings. Described as "roux, très fort et très barbu, demi-brute" ("Amour", p. 54), he fits in well among the stuffed animals on the walls: "mon cousin pareil lui-même à un étrange animal des pays froids, vêtu d'une jaquette en peau de phoque. ("Amour", p. 56)

Maupassant had great faith in the value of intense experiences, as his experiments with drugs show. In regard to hunting, however, he was aware that it could easily become obsessive and eventually possible material for farces. The fanatical seriousness of "des vrais chasseurs de guillemots, des anciens, des fanatiques, des

enragés tireurs" ("La Roche aux Guillemots", p. 211) easily persuades one of their members that his anguish about the dead body of his brother-in-law is completely unjustified. The hunters regard the fact that there is a dead body under the carriage more as a joke than as a serious reason for interrupting their hobby. The humour is derived from the concern of the hunters over their companion's sudden loss of form and late arrival, and from the latter's guilty conscience, towards both his relative and his friends. As the hunters explain, such anxiety is unfounded in these trivial circumstances!

Maupassant is mocking the people who are so involved with hunting that they are out of touch with reality and cannot conduct normal relations with other people.[5] In "La Rouille", the baron's ridiculous fanaticism[6] is indicated by the fact that he keeps the underside of his bottom lip shaven in order to blow the horn better. His relationship with a widow is fully exploited by the author for comic effect. He invites her to go hunting, the highest honour he could give to a woman. His falling in love is brought on solely because she is interested in hunting, but ultimately he has to decline the suggestion of marriage on grounds of sexual inadequacy:

> J'ai mangé un tas de choses poivrées qui m'ont perdu l'estomac et . . .et . . .rien . . .toujours rien. ("La Rouille", p. 6)

From the start, le baron Coutelier is painted as a simple character. The repetition of the word "chasse" in the first paragraph establishes him as rather naive with an exclusive interest. His friends exploit his preoccupation and the story becomes very amusing.

In Maupassant's world, the rural aristocracy are not treated very sympathetically. While hunting, they display either sadistic tendencies or social incompetence, and elsewhere they reveal an inclination towards cruelty, hypocrisy, avarice and sexual misconduct. In point of fact the peasant labourer is treated more sympathetically since he makes no pretence of hiding these features, whereas members of the higher classes are often concerned with keeping up appearances, hence their hypocrisy which the peasants do not usually share.

The aristocratic heros in the contes paysans are usually motivated by the desire for money, which is generally considered to motivate the majority of Normans. La mère Malivore in "L'Aveu" has no sympathy for her distressed, exhausted daughter who collapses in the fields and informs her mother that she is pregnant. With typical peasant resignation, she accepts this fact: "Céleste n'était pas la première à qui pareille chose arriverait.[7] She has secret hopes of her daughter marrying into a rich family, which conditions her reaction: "Si c'était un gars bien riche

et bien vu, on verrait à s'arranger. Il n'y aurait encore que demi-mal. ("L'Aveu", p. 50). When she discovers that Polyte, a young peasant, is the father, her language and her reaction undergo an amazing transformation. She is now "affolée de colère" and beats her daughter "avec une telle frénésie" ("L'Aveu", p. 51). The way she expresses herself indicates her anger: "T'avais ti perdu les sens. Faut qu'i t'ait jeté un sort ("L'Aveu", p. 51). This anger is quickly aroused in country folk in Maupassant's work, and is usually to point out how precious to them is the notion of financial gain. The mother's customary "rage de campagnarde" is easily assuaged by the fact that her daughter has been saving money by complying with Polyte's demands. She demonstrates a lack of moral considerations, urging Céleste to continue the arrangement with Polyte.

This story illustrates the rural attitude to sexual relationships. La mère Malivore is more concerned with the financial rather than the moral side of the arrangement. Polyte repeatedly asks Rose if she wishes to comply as if the question was to be expected. When she finally agrees, he casually obliges, not forgetting however to shout to the horse "Hue Donc, Cocotte. Hue donc, Cocotte" ("L'Aveu", p. 55).

Madame Lefèvre, the heroine of "Pierrot", makes a slightly bigger effort than Madame Malivore to disguise her

preoccupation with money, yet she never loses sight of her priorities. As the author says, summarising this kind of person:

> Mme. Lefèvre était une de ces demi-paysannes qui cachent une âme de brute prétentieuse sous des dehors comiques et chamarrés.8

In this story, the heroine does come across as a comic figure, but in "L'Aveu", the author's attitude seems purely hostile. Madame Lefèvre reacts in an extreme manner, which creates an impression of simplicity in her. She exaggerates her dismay, using such words as "désolation", "fureur", "terrifiée", to express her indignation at being robbed. She sees dogs simply as "des avaleurs de soupe à faire frémir" ("Pierrot", p. 49). She is concerned about her reputation in the area and leads people to believe that she is spontaneously generous. The author is criticising "cette race parcimonieuse de dames campagnardes" ("Pierrot", p. 49) who make a show of giving alms to beggars while secretly regretting the gesture. In the same way, the woman feels herself capable of loving the little dog, but she is deceiving herself. She constantly tries to satisfy her own conscience at treating the dog cruelly. At least they are taking the dog themselves to the pit, and they have given it a good meal beforehand: "une bonne soupe avec un doigt de beurre" ("Pierrot", p. 53). The way her affections change is comical. Apparently

distressed to know the dog is dying at the bottom of the pit, she tries to have it brought back to the surface, but learning of the price this would cost, "elle eut un sursaut; toute sa douleur s'envola du coup" ("Pierrot", p. 55). The story is built round the fickle compassion of the woman and her overwhelming concern for money that blinds her to her own motives. Maupassant is criticising this hypocrisy and blindness. It is interesting to note in comparison that the peasants in Maupassant are rarely guilty of these offences.

The character of the dame de campagne can be summarised by the description of Maître Lecacheur's wife in "Le Lapin", who explodes with "toute sa fureur paysanne, toute son avarice, toute sa rage de femme économe".[9] She is furious at the theft of one single rabbit and does not rest until the thief is arrested. Again, it is not very flattering to the higher levels of the rural classes that in the country, "le valet est toujours soupçonné, la servante toujours suspectée" ("Le Lapin", p. 108).

In Une Vie the pretences of bourgeois society are demonstrated alongside the naivety and innocence of Jeanne and the devotion of Rosalie. On the surface Julien is the perfect country gentleman, competent in all social graces, and even impressing the maid by his elegance. His wife soon discovers the more incompetent side of his character

however. He is insensitive to her more delicate feelings,[10] always strives to pay the least possible, is afraid of heights and horse riding, and uses Jeanne's money for his own entertainments. Once married he quickly neglects his appearance, until he wants to impress the countess. He sleeps with the maid, then denies such behaviour, refusing to accept responsibility for her child to whom he is the father. Jeanne's father, after reprimanding Rosalie for her promiscuous behaviour, confesses that he was far from innocent in his youth. The Countess maintains a secret affair with Jeanne's husband while pretending to want to deepen her friendship with Jeanne. The heroine's own son provides a social comment on the upper classes. Brought up to know no hardships, he loses all respect for his mother and becomes a profligate.

In this novel the author presents two kinds of rural aristocracy. The more usual family is the Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Briseville, who write to their relatives all over France all the time, talk to each other in ceremonious terms, discuss insignificant things, and freeze inside their house because they close the shutters to protect the drapings from the sun. The picture of the rural upper class in Normandy is not totally unfavourable, however. Jeanne's father in Une Vie, baron Jacques Le Perthuis des Vauds, expresses some of the author's own ideas that can be

traced back to Rousseau's love of nature and the equality of men: "il a pour la nature, les champs, les bois, les bêtes, des tendresses d'amant". The baron practises the same kind of solidarity with his social inferiors that baron de Treilles and Maître Lebrument enjoy in "Le Fermier". The baron feels guilty towards his servant whose wife died of grief at not being able to stay in the baron's house. Lebrument bears no grudge against his master, and a surprisingly strong and affectionate relationship is built up. These examples of a more enlightened rural aristocracy introduce a healthier tone into the contes paysans and prevent the general picture from being too unfavourable from the upper classes' point of view.

* * *

Maupassant treats members of the clergy with the same ambivalent attitude as the upper rural classes. The village priest is a very common figure in the peasants' world, for the local church plays a major role in their lives. The whole village always seems dominated by the pointed spire of the church summoning them especially on special occasions such as weddings, christenings, and Midnight Mass at Christmas. Although Maupassant's peasant does not openly refer to God's role in his daily work in the fields, he always goes to church, even though it might only be to snigger at the unrealistically harsh measures

attempted by a new ardent young priest.[12] In some stories Maupassant does indicate however a relationship between their religiosity and their daily work. These stories provide some quite sentimental and picturesque descriptions.

In "Les Sabots" we are aware of how much the church is an integral part of village life. Some peasant women have come from quite far and leave their baskets scattered around the aisles. They still wear their bonnets, although some male peasants have made an attempt to tidy their hair. The author invariably mentions the headdress of the peasants as a means of characterising them. The fact that they still wear their usual bonnets indicates that they accept church-going as simply another aspect of their lives rather than as a special occasion. In evidence were "des bonnets blanches des paysannes et des cheveux rudes ou pommadés des paysans".[13] The noises and odours that could be identified from within the church - the smell of flowers, cattle and poultry, the crowing of the cocks and the lowing of the cows - reinforce the impression that the church plays an important role in the peasants' life.

There is a more charming picture in "Un Réveillon", where Maupassant gives an account of Midnight Mass. The peasant is portrayed very sympathetically as he braves the cold: "un froid aigu piquait le visage, faisait pleurer les yeux. L'air cru saisissait les poumons, desséchait la gorge."[14] The church bells and the peasants' shoes seem to

harmonise, reflecting the idea that the only noises to disturb the quiet were part of the same worthy event:

> Au loin sur la terre d'airain, les sabots des paysans sonnaient, et par tout l'horizon, les petites cloches des villages jetaient leurs notes grêles comme frileuses aussi, dans la vaste nuit glaciale. ("Un Reveillon", p. 173)

We can imagine the peasant heading off across the fields, the noise of his shoes resounding, and the "petits feux tremblants" that he carried lighting up the whole countryside. The whole effect of the cold night and the decorated church is successful in impressing these simple people. The whole effort seems worthwhile:

> Ces simples gens, relevés par la nuit froide, regardaient, tout remués, l'image grossièrement peinte, et ils joignirent les mains, naïvement convaincus autant qu'intimidés par l'humble splendeur de cette représentation puérile. ("Un Réveillon", p. 175)

The author has evoked with finely chosen details the atmosphere of the occasion and has presented a charming, sympathetic portrait of the peasants themselves.

It is surprising, in view of Maupassant's opposition to religion, that many priests are presented in a very favourable light in his work. With l'abbé Picot in Une Vie, we have a full portrait of a "un vrai prêtre compagnard" (Une Vie, p. 35). From his first appearance it is difficult to imagine him being harsh: "il était fort gros, fort rouge, et suait à flots" (Une Vie, p. 35). He is friendly towards all the members of Jeanne's family, even though they

fail to appear at church sometimes. He fits perfectly into the peasants' world, for a variety of reasons. He shares their straightforward approach, explaining "avec le franc parler des hommes de campagne" why he chews cigarettes: "C'est pour favoriser les renvois, parce que j'ai les digestions un peu lourdes" (Une Vie, p. 38). He is very skilful at approaching people in exactly the right manner, consoling them in their distress and suggesting practical solutions. Both Rosalie and Jeanne benefit from his advice. He coaxes Rosalie into revealing the truth about her and Julien, and chooses the right moment to say his piece, whereas the baron simply wants to dismiss her. He acts very sensibly towards Rosalie, not forgiving her, but urging her to act more responsibly in the future and helping her to find a husband. His approach proved successful if we are to consider her subsequent life. With Jeanne, he implores her to look to the future and to see her salvation in the child she is about to bear. His mere presence is sufficient to calm her:

> Ce simple contact l'amollit étrangement; cette forte main de rustre habituée aux caresses réconfortantes lui avait apporté un apaisement mystérieux. (Une Vie, p. 181)

L'abbé Picot is very understanding and tolerant of the promiscuity among the young peasants. He puts Rosalie's behaviour into truer perspective, reminding the baron that

Julien is only doing what he himself had done in the past. He realises that nothing can change the situation and that the best approach is to think of practical solutions to the problems that arise rather than try to reform the peasants' morals. In this respect he displays some of the resignation and qualified optimism that are typically Norman:

> La commune rapporte peu et ne vaut point grand' chose. Les hommes n'ont pas plus de religion qu'il ne faut, et les femmes n'ont guère de conduite. Les filles ne passent à l'église pour le mariage qu'après avoir fait un pélérinage à Notre-Dame du Gros Ventre, et la fleur d'oranger ne vaut pas cher dans le pays. Tant-pis, je l'aimais, moi! (Une Vie, p. 260)

The author is therefore using the priest to explain the character of the peasant and to invite our indulgence towards him. As the priest discovered, the peasants are very likeable people despite their sexual misconduct, and have no deliberately malicious intentions.

L'abbé Picot is probably the best described priest in Maupassant's work, owing to the full treatment that the novel form permits. There are many instances however where a member of the clergy figures quite prominently in the stories. L'abbé Chantavoine in "Mademoiselle Fifi" displays very admirable features of patriotism at the time of the Prussian invasion. He was friendly enough with the enemy, but on no account would he let them ring his church bells. This pacific, silent protest gained the respect of all the peasants who were proud of the firmness and heroism

of someone "qui osait affirmer le deuil public, le proclamer, par le mutisme obstiné de son église".[15] He values patriotism so highly that he is prepared to ring the bells so that the prostitute, who has defied the enemy, can escape unharmed. His affection towards her, and the surprise ringing of the church bells adds a very pleasant note to the ending of the story.

Maupassant's priests are often very sensitive. The priest in "Le Baptême"[16] is teased by the celebrating peasants in a good-humoured manner, and then is seen weeping at the side of the baby simply at the idea of its innocence. In "Après", the peasants agree that l'abbé Maudit is "un brave homme, bienveillant, familier, doux, et surtout généreux".[17] He loves children, but was prevented from living a normal life because of his extreme sensitivity to suffering. He had suffered a lot in his youth by being separated from his parents and had become very shy and sensitive. The death of his pet dog upset him so much that he decided to "sacrifier les joies possibles pour éviter les douleurs certaines" ("Après", p. 299). Having become a priest the misery he experienced was transformed into compassion, instead of into personal suffering. The priest in "Clair de Lune", l'abbé Marignan, finally wins our respect by renouncing his rigid interpretation of divine will and his basic suspicions about women and love. One night he

was "ému par la grandiose et sereine beauté de la nuit pâle",[18] as he contemplated the gentle light, the sweet odours of the flowers, and the singing of the nightingales. He realised that the dark provided a perfect background for the young couple who "semblaient, tous deux, un seul être, l'être à qui était destinée cette nuit calme et silencieuse" ("Clair de Lune, p. 11). These reactions on the part of the priests are among the most sentimental in the whole of Maupassant's work. They show that the author was himself capable of realising the beauty of certain emotional responses, and illustrate an aspect of his work that is vastly different from his more generally known cynicism.

There is some evidence, however, of Maupassant's unpleasant experiences in the seminary in Yvetot, which left him with a hostile attitude towards the clergy that is reflected in "Moiron",[19] and in "Le Marquis de Funerol". Moiron, a school teacher, began to kill his pupils systematically as an act of revenge against God, who, according to Moiron, invented all kinds of death to please his own imagination. The dying marquis is furious at the arrival of the priest, since he had become a free thinker. He pointed to the door vociferating:

> Sortez d'ici . . ., sortez d'ici . . .voleurs d'âmes . . . .Sortez d'ici, violeurs de conscience . . .sortez d'ici, crocheteurs de portes des moribonds!20

The young peasant boy, Césaire, in "Le Père Amable", also fosters a similar attitude towards the clergy. In his opinion religion consisted in emptying the peasants' pockets under the pretext of helping people:

> c'était une sorte d'immense maison de commerce dont les curés étaient les commis, commis sournois, rusés, dégourdis, qui faisaient les affaires du bon Dieu au détriment des campagnards.21

Despite these anti-religious declarations which reflect to some extent Maupassant's own viewpoint, there are not many descriptions of the rigorous, ardent priest typified by l'abbé Tolbiac in Une Vie. This successor to l'abbé Picot soon alienates the peasants by his "austérité intraitable, son mépris du monde, et des sensualités, son dégout des préoccupations humaines" (Une Vie, p. 263). In trying to eradicate the peasants' concupiscence, he becomes an object of hatred and humour. He refused communion to the youngsters who had misbehaved; he spied on them and threw stones to interrupt them at play; and he savagely attacks a litter of dogs because he was offended by anything associated with the act of reproduction. The older peasants are annoyed at his harsh sermons condemning immoral behaviour, since they liked to remember their own past and joke about the youngsters' sexual misdemeanours. The young peasants simply sniggered and hurled insults at him. His persecution mania reaches a climax when he pushes a hut over a cliff to kill Julien and his mistress. These

two people are in fact guilty of committing adultery, but in "Le Saut du Berger",[22] which is an exact replica of the episode in the novel, the young couple are not identified, which makes the priest's action all the more uncivilised.

The inclusion of the priests into the peasants' world also serves to introduce a note of humour. "Les Sabots" contains the picture of the amiable old priest stuttering his way through the sermon, collecting together all the pieces of paper scattered about, and trying to warn the youngsters of what might happen if they continue to meet in the cemetery:

> Il ne faut pas que les garçons et les filles viennent comme ça, le soir, dans le cimetière, ou je préviendrai le garde champêtre. (Les Sabots, p. 100)

His embarrassed tone of voice only produces an outburst of laughter.

Maupassant often gives the priest an inflated role in the contes paysans. He describes the ceremonious arrival of the priest in "Le Diable". As he sets off across the fields to visit a dying woman, he is led by a choir boy ringing a bell "pour annoncer le passage de Dieu dans la campagne".[23] The simple peasant folk live in fear of the priest[24] and at the sight of him, stop working, take off their hats, and make the sign of the cross. The farm animals provide a form of satire on the peasants by their similar reaction:

> les poules noires fuyant le long des fossés . . .un poulain prit peur à la vue du surplis et se mit à tourner en rond au bout de sa corde. ("Le Diable", p. 129).

The author is suggesting that the only reason why the peasants are frightened by the priest is because of his impressive clothes.

The priests contribute therefore to the success of the peasant stories by their variety of roles. They can be objects of admiration, indignation, or humour. At the same time they help to demonstrate certain characteristics about the peasants themselves. We learn of their inclination towards sexual misconduct, which is so natural that it should merely be accepted. Any attempt to suppress it will only spread hostility, as L'abbé Tolbiac discovered. We also find that the peasant is embarrassed when faced with his social superiors. Césaire in "Le Père Amable" tells l'abbé Raffin in a very timid voice that Céleste is pregnant. The priest, when first approached, tells Césaire to come straight to the point, and then offsets the tense atmosphere by saying: "elle n'est pas la première à qui ça arrive, depuis notre mère Eve" ("Le Père Amable", p. 228). The naive reaction of the peasant towards the priest, and the latter's regular acceptance of their misconduct, combine to present the peasants in an endearing light.

* * *

In certain stories the peasants come into contact with the members responsible for keeping the peace in the community. Whenever anything suspicious arises there are always judges, mayors, policemen, and gardes champêtres present. They are not described very fully by the author, but they play an important part in directing our sympathies towards the more unfortunate members of the community, the beggars and the unemployed. In these stories we get the impression that the peasant world is not as secure and friendly as we might be led to believe by the conduct of the priests.

Maupassant is perhaps exaggerating the circumstances of the hero in "Le Vagabond", since he wants to contrast the harsh treatment by the officials with Jacque's helpless situation. He was wandering the countryside in search of employment, having left his own village on the advice of the mayor's secretary, but he had become very distressed owing to:

> La fatigue, les refus, les rebuffades, les nuits passées sur l'herbe, le jeûne, le mépris chez les sedentaires pour le vagabond, le chagrin de ne pouvoir occuper ses bras vaillants, le souvenir des parents qui n'avaient guère de sous.25

The author stresses therefore his good intentions, his extreme weariness, and his guilty feelings towards his parents. Even the bad weather seems to have been sent deliberately to plague him. The repetition of "souffrance"

and the listing of the parts of the body that constitute his whole being, adequately suggest his misery:

> La souffrance de ses membres, la souffrance de son ventre, la souffrance de son coeur lui montaient à la tête comme une ivresse redoutable. ("Le Vagabond", p. 229)

The "ivresse redoutable" also announces the moment in the future when he is no longer in control of himself and commits a crime.

"Le Vagabond" illustrates Maupassant's belief in the deceptive nature of appearances, which often hide an unpleasant reality. The carpenter chooses "une bonne figure, un visage compatissant". ("Le Vagabond", p. 233), but ironically, the features belong to the village mayor who promptly advises him to leave the area or he will be arrested. The author makes fun of the serious, stern, inhospitable manner of the policemen, using the comparison with a goose to indicate their ungainly walk: "ils approchaient de leur pas militaire, lourd et balancé comme la marche des oies. ("Le Vagabond", p. 234). The proud policeman makes a pompous speech when arresting Jacques:

> Je vous prends en flagrant délit de vagabondage et de mendicité, sans ressource et sans profession et je vous enjoins de me suivre. ("Le Vagabond", p. 236).

This contrasts quite humorously with Jacque's indifference to the whole situation: "Allez, coffrez-moi, ça me mettra un toit sur la tête ("Le Vagabond", p. 236).

The author invites our sympathy for Jacques and our hostility towards the town officials. Considering the carpenter's weak condition, the serious approach by the policemen is only ludicrous. His appetites have been neglected for so long that he can no longer be held responsible for his acts. Maupassant is conforming here to Naturalist tenets. Jacque's natural instincts have been sharpened by force of circumstances. This is why the author placed so much emphasis on the deprivation of Jacques, to the point where he justifies the theft and the rape that the young man commits:

> Il était ivre, il était fou, soulevé par une autre rage plus dévorante que la faim, par l'irrésistible furie d'un homme qui manque de tout, depuis deux mois, et qui est jeune, ardent, brûlé par tous les appétits que la nature a semés dans la chair vigoureuse des mâles. ("Le Vagabond", p. 234)

The officials do not understand the power of instincts combined with circumstances, which, in the eyes of Maupassant and the reader, are responsible themselves for the crimes. The author, by a clever series of contrasts and details, has directed our sympathies in the direction that he wanted.

The same basic structure of the story is retained for "Le Vieux". The physical disability of the crippled beggar is soon equalled by a profound psychological distress. When everybody refuses to give him food in his own area, he is forced to travel further. He soon gets very confused and

distraught when faced with new people and unfamiliar surroundings. He reacts like a frightened animal at the sight of a policeman. Maupassant stresses his complete isolation:

> Il vivait comme les bêtes de bois, au milieu des hommes, sans connaître personne. Sans aimer personne.26

The author again stresses the completely destroyed mind of Nicolas Toussaint, incapable of coming to terms with his predicament:

> La faim jetait une détresse dans son âme confuse et lourde, torturé par la faim, mais trop brute pour bien pénétrer son insondable misère. ("Le Gueux", p. 178)

He is totally unaware of the fact that to steal one single chicken constituted a crime.

Le soupçon qu'il allait commettre un vol ne l'effleura pas ("Le Gueux", p. 179). Maupassant has adequately inspired our sympathy for this "corps loqueteux et difforme" (p. 174). The author does not omit the chance of making a sardonic observation about the police, who were cautious in arresting the cripple in case he was dangerous! They lock him in prison for the night, ignoring the fact that he was still hungry and bleeding. The final line - "Quelle surprise" - is a bitter attack on their complacency. Without stating directly the nasty characters of the officials, Maupassant has made the point quite obvious. He could be criticised perhaps for making the contrast between

the unfortunate peasant and the stern official much too obvious, but these two stories are successful because of the sardonic humour and the sympathetic portrayal of the two peasants.

In other stories the judge plays a more traditional role, simply judging a certain argument between peasants. These court cases are often the scene of much humour, as the two contestants shout insults at each other and lose their temper. In "Tribunaux Rustiques"[27] the humour is at the expense of the woman whose favours and possessions are exploited by the young boy. In "Une Vente"[28] the wife and the two defendants relate the funny episode of measuring her value by placing her in a barrel of water. The structure of the story allows for this humour. The judge in both stories is quite serious and fair, and gives a final decision that is just. The role of the judge in these stories is less significant than in "Le Vagabond" and "Le Gueux". They are a little more than a part of the court-room scene which allows Maupassant a considerable source of comedy.

The two stories, "Le Vagabond" and "Le Gueux", also serve to illustrate a characteristic that is widespread among Maupassant's peasants. This is their basic mistrust and suspicion of strangers and of people not employed in useful work. Jacques found the people in the country very

inhospitable towards him. The author uses his favourite device of comparing people and animals to achieve the desired effect. Only a cow would allow Jacques to sleep in comfort and share its milk, whereas the peasants acted very miserly. Once he is arrested, they display their tendency to "over-react" and accuse Jacques of being a thief, a murderer and even a deserter. They stared at him:

> avec une haine allumée dans les yeux, comme si chacun eût été volé, comme si chacune eût été violée. ("Le Vagabond", pp. 245-6).

With the peasants in "Le Gueux", "il n'existait qu'une sorte de mépris indifférent et d'hostilité résignée" ("Le Gueux", p. 176). Maître Chiquet attacks the cripple as if he was a serious "maraudeur" and "forcené". The peasants are relieved to be rid of him and jeer at him as he is led away. These stories demonstrate therefore the author's ambivalent attitude towards the peasant. He sympathises with certain predicaments that the peasant often finds himself in, yet he is trying at the same time to give an accurate picture of the rural world of Normandy, and so does not omit the more unpleasant features of the peasant, his cruelty and suspicion.

* * *

Maupassant displays his most sympathetic and sentimental tendencies when dealing with the peasant girl. The young paysannes are usually destined to suffer in life.

They are often employed as servants for masters who simply exploit them; or they find themselves pregnant and forsaken by their lovers. They are capable of deep emotions, and, although inclined to sexual misconduct, are genuine in their affections. In Une Vie and "Histoire d'une Fille de Femme", the author presents an extensive picture of the peasant girl and her various roles in the rural community.

Dumesnil is full of admiration for the creation of Rosalie in Une Vie:

> C'est une des figures les plus étonnantes de tout le roman français que cette servante sournoise et dévouée, avec tous les défauts et toutes les qualités du peuple.29

Her most obvious feature is her efficiency, at first quiet and unobtrusive (she never complains about the clothes that her ailing mistress leaves scattered around), then later positive and authoritative.[30] When she re-appears in the book, she has experienced childbirth and married life and has a right to guide Jeanne away from the gulf that was waiting for her. She now displays her rude awareness of life and her practical disposition. She controls all the money, prevents Jeanne from sending her son money to waste, refuses to forward any money to Paris, knowing very well that Jeanne was being ridiculously generous to her ungrateful, extravagant and immoral son. She deals competently with the Fécamp lawyer, and arranges their removal to the little

country house which will serve them better. She helps Jeanne to forget her misery, keeping her busy and confronting her with very basic, down-to-earth advice. She points out that parents and children must separate sooner or later, and that there are other people as alone as Jeanne in the world. With her more stoical attitude she corrects Jeanne's tendency to emotional self-indulgence. Her statements seem very obvious, yet Jeanne is struck by their very simplicity. Rosalie has led a full, hard life and has acquired the rudiments of "experience".

The role of Rosalie is very important in the book, because she provides a constant comparison to Jeanne and an innate criticism of the heroine's approach to life. Jeanne reacts to her solitude and disasters by resorting to dreaming and lamenting. She does not realise that life means a few pleasures with a predominance of sorrows, as Une Vie shows. Her approach is only conducive to self-deception and ultimate disappointment.

Rosalie shares various features with the more unrefined members of the community. While Jeanne was excited at the thought of her new life in the château, Rosalie remained unimpressed: "Rosalie songeait de cette songerie animale des gens du peuple"(Une Vie, p. 8). She displays her naivety and instinctive response to sexual enjoyment by having an affair with Julien on the grounds that:

"J'ai pas osé crier pour pas faire d'histoire, et de toute façon je le trouvais gentil!" (Une Vie, p. 176). Ultimately, the peasant girl is more equipped to survive personal tragedies than the sheltered, aristocratic Jeanne. Afflicted with an unwanted pregnancy and dismissed from the household, Rosalie finishes up with her own farm, a husband who always works hard, and a son who is industrious and efficient: "un bon gars qui travaille d'attaque" (Une Vie, p. 320). He transports everything to the new house with quiet efficiency. By contrast, Jeanne's own son is living a dissolute life far from home. Similarly, her husband who left her with only a trail of disasters, can be compared to Désiré, Rosalie's husband, "un brave homme, pas faignant, qui a su amasser du bien" (Une Vie, p. 321).

The success of Rosalie makes Jeanne begin to question the idea of justice in which she had always believed. She compares the effortless birth of Rosalie's child with the pain she had to endure to bring into the world a baby that was not at least bastard. The different nature of these births can perhaps be seen to announce the respective peace and pain that the sons will cause later. Rosalie also serves as a mirror to Jeanne. The latter criticises at first Rosalie's lack of discrimination in sleeping with Julien, but later she realises that she had acted almost as instinctively herself in giving herself to him, although in

an emotional rather than a physical sense. Maupassant is referring here to the uncontrollable forces that determine our actions and that exempt people from full responsibility. Rosalie is no more to blame than Jeanne might be, for failing to resist Julien's charms.

Rosalie is also capable, however, of a great deal of affection and establishes a firm bond between herself and Jeanne. She helps the heroine at the heart of her depression, thoughtfully refusing to announce how happy her life has been for fear of evoking any jealousy or regret in Jeanne. Their relationship stands out as the only genuine case of understanding and communication between two characters, not counting the brief, deceptive illusions that Jeanne experiences with Julien. The author seems to indicate that the best attempt to alleviate the inevitable solitude of people is by means of this completely selfless devotion, rather than by the fiery attractions that two lovers feel who "se regardèrent d'un de ces regards fixes, aigus, pénétrants où deux âmes croient se mêler" (Une Vie, p. 78).

Rosalie is therefore a central figure in Une Vie. Her personal role is indicated by the fact that it is she who becomes the mouthpiece of the author in the last line as she echoes his belief in the capriciousness of fate: "La vie, voyez-vous, ça n'est jamais si bon ni si mauvais qu'on croit (Une Vie, p. 380). By means of Rosalie, Maupassant can

introduce a number of ideas, such as the lack of absolute justice in the world, and the difficulty of communication. Her role can also suggest that the peasant's way of life with its basic practical approach is more successful ultimately than the refined, hypocritical world into which Jeanne was unfortunately born.

Maupassant provides us with another substantial treatment of a young peasant girl in "Histoire d'une Fille de Ferme". Rose is rather different than Rosalie in many ways, and in fact resembles more the author's customary portrait of the young paysannes. The atmosphere of the farm induces in her at the beginning a mood of expectancy and general well-being. She is overwhelmed by "les tiédeurs fermentées d'étable, le midi brûlant et l'ardente lumière . . .et les pommiers en fleurs".[31] She becomes particularly happy as she looks forward to her marriage with Jacques. The peasant boy is, however, less romantic than Rose, "avec son idée fixe, tout envahi par le désir" ("FdeF", p. 60), and represents the carefree, indifferent peasant attitude to sexual experiences: "Si on épousait toutes les filles avec qui on a fauté, ça ne serait pas à faire ("FdeF", p. 62).

Rose becomes a very pitiful character as her hopes are unfulfilled and as she devotes herself with admirable maternal affection to her son. Her simple, efficient devotion only seems to prolong "sa vie de torture continuelle" ("FdeF", p.65). Under her supervision the

farm prospers, but she is too embarrassed to ask for a rise. Like all the servant girls, she accepts her fate stoically, never aroused to indignation by the commercial or sexual exploitation of their masters. Rose accepts her work "comme une chose dûe par toute servante devouée, une simple marque de bonne volonté ("FdeF", p. 70). In Maupassant's work the peasants usually display a great deal of affection towards their children. Rose works excessively in order to provide for her son whom "elle se jeta dessus comme sur une proie" ("FdeF", p. 71). She is determined that no harm or shame should come to him.

This tale, "Histoire d'Une Fille de Femme", illustrates many typically peasant reactions. The conversation between Maître Vallin and Rose demonstrates the peasants' tendency to be embarrassed in delicate situations, and their inability often to be explicit. They talked, "sans se regarder en face, à la façon des paysans ("FdeF", p. 72). Her employer expresses his intentions very inarticulately: "Une ferme sans maîtresse, ça ne peut pas aller" ("FdeF", p. 73), from which Rose is meant to understand that he wants to marry her. Rose herself is equally embarrassed and confused by the whole situation:

> Elle restait toujours immobile, l'oeil effaré, tant ses idées tourbillonnaient comme à l'approche d'un grand danger. ("FdeF", p. 73).

The sympathetic portrayal of Rose is maintained

until the end, where she endures her master's callous behaviour and torments. Even the way that she finally succombed to his advances is easily explainable by the author and relieves Rose from all blame. The author is always tolerant of the peasants' sexual immorality, since he considers this instinct to be particularly irresistible in people living so close to the animals' way of life. Maupassant intends us to sympathise with Rose, "luttant elle-même contre l'instinct toujours plus puissant chez les natures simples" ("FdeF", p. 81). The author leaves us in no doubt about his final sympathies. He lets Rose consent to her master's advances, but, as he says: "Que pouvait-elle dire? Que pouvait-elle faire? ("FdeF", p. 82).

Her master resembles several other peasants in Maupassant's contes, in his total indifference to the girl's suffering. He beats her violently when he assumes she is sterile, then never thinks of apologising when he discovers the truth. This abrupt and cold ending emphasises the whole approach of Rose's master, which contrasts with the moving account of her inner anguish and her practical difficulties of raising her child. Maupassant never tends to enter fully into his characters to describe their personal emotions, but with Rose, we see her rearing her child at home, working quietly and conscientiously on the farm, and finally having to suffer the torments of her

employer. In all these situations we never forget her basically admirable motives in maintaining her self-respect and in assuring that her son is in no way penalised for her mistake. Maupassant succeeds therefore in presenting a very real account of the misfortunes and distress of a simple peasant girl.

In his portrayal of the young peasant girl, Maupassant was very consistent. Like Rose and Rosalie, Clochette is devoted and efficient. It is also quite usual for the young paysanne to develop a strong affection for a member of a higher social rank, who exploits her and does not reciprocate the feelings. "Clochette" demonstrates the ravages of fate on "cette âme magnanime de pauvre femme",[32] who is made to jump from a barn merely to save the reputation of a young assistant teacher. She dedicates her entire life to thinking of this coward. The author himself appreciates this gesture of noble self-sacrifice: "cette femme fut une héroine de la race de celles qui accomplissent les plus belles actions historiques("Clochette", p. 87).

There is a similar art of exploitation in "Histoire Vraie". The young noble bought Rose, his servant, from a friend because he rather liked her. Soon he tired of her "cajoleries, des mamours, des p'tits noms de chien, un tas de gentillesses".[33] When he finds she is pregnant, his

decision to leave her is arrived at without many scruples: "Ça y est; mais faut parer le coup, et couper le fil, il n'est que temps ("Histoire Vraie", p. 240). He proceeds to sell her and his lands and calmly went to spend six months with his brother. Rose was inconsolable however. She had come to his château every week, but he treated her feelings very cynically: "C'est bête, les femmes; une fois qu'elles ont l'amour en tête elles ne comprennent plus rien" ("Histoire Vraie", p. 244). She wastes away to "une ruine, un squelette, une ombre, ("Histoire Vraie", p. 245), but M.de Varnetot simply regards her feelings as an inconvenience. Rose soon dies of grief.

In "La Rempailleuse" Maupassant makes a similar contrast between the devotion of the peasant girl and the indifference, in fact indignation, of the bourgeoisie. With the peasants, we have an example of "l'amour, l'amour vrai, le grand amour" which leaves hearts "vidé's, ravagés, incendiés".[34] The young girl gives Chouquet all her savings every time she sees him. On his part, he preferred to ignore her. She continued somehow to see him and even speak to him, even though she never saw him for years sometimes. The reaction of Chouquet and his wife, when they realise the extent of this devotion, typifies the author's portrayal of the upper classes. They are most indignant that his reputation should have been endangered, but they

are quite willing to accept the girl's possessions that she has bequeathed to them. Maupassant invites our criticism of this hypocritical attitude and our sympathy to the girl. After living a sad and wandering life as a child, "haillonneuse, vermineuse, sordide" ("La Rempailleuse", p. 116), she is denied the one tenderness that would make up for her hard life mending chairs.

The Varambots in "Rosalie Prudent" react in the same manner as the Chouquets. They are outraged at the behaviour of their maid, until they discover that the father of Rosalie's baby is their own nephew. Rosalie had been seduced by Joseph, who had disappeared when she became pregnant. Rosalie was so distressed that she inadvertently smothered her two new born children. Maupassant has already directed our sympathies to her by painting her employers in such an unfavourable light, by describing Rosalie's horrible pain during the birth, and by referring to her loneliness:

> Moi, il me plaisait pour sûr . . . .Que voulez-vous? on écoute ces choses-là quand on est seule . . . toute seule . . .comme moi. J'suis seule sur la terre, m'sieu . . .j' n'ai personne à qui parler, personne à qui conter mes ennuyances.35

The author realises the power of circumstances to overwhelm the individual, and so has Rosalie acquitted at the end:

> "Il me tenait la taille . . .pour sûr, je ne voulais pas . . .non . . .non. J'ai pas pu . . .il

faisait clair de lune . . .j'ai pas pu . . . .
("Rosalie Prudent", p. 149).

In these stories about the exploited peasant girl, the tone is usually serious, as Maupassant admires their quality of devotion and affection, and loathes the hypocritical, callous attitudes of the bourgeoisie. In "Les Sabots" the tone loses some of this seriousness, since the heroine is very naive and is given some of the responsibility for what happens. Adélaide is sent as a maid for M. Omont, a retired landowner. The tone of humour is introduced as Adélaide rushes to obey his every command. By repeating: "me v'là, not'maître", on every occasion, she reveals a touch of simplicity about herself. It is therefore to be expected when she consents to sleep with M. Omont. We do not feel the same sympathy towards her when she becomes pregnant, since she herself seems incapable of realising the gravity of the situation. She was unaware that her behaviour could have even produced her condition!

Maupassant's paysannes enjoy for the most part the support of the author. The stories in which they figure usually contain the contrast between the naive behaviour of the farm girl and the ruthless, insensitive master. This exploitation reveals Maupassant's pessimistic interpretation of life, where even the socially refined

are quite capable of possessing unpleasant characteristics. The devotion and unassuming efficiency of the farm girls also provides Maupassant's work with the more positive, optimistic aspects. In the final reckoning, however, their noble stands often go unrewarded.

It is interesting to compare his Normandy girl with the African peasants that he met during his travels in that continent. Marroca and Allouma, the heroines of the two stories of the same name, resemble each other in many ways. They are sensual, mystical, and bestial. Maupassant was very impressed by the fierce sensations of heat and passion that the country and the girls aroused. Their large, statue-like appearance made him think of them as magnificent beings. They are therefore very different from the Roses of his _contes paysans_. Ultimately however, neither wins his highest esteem. The African girl possesses too much animality and not enough sensitivity and intelligence. For Maupassant, the physical and the moral should be in perfect balance in a woman, consequently, both the Norman and the African girl fall short of his standards. The _contes normands_ are however more successful than the African stories because they demonstrate both the author's belief in the world as a rather cruel, unfortunate place, and his ability to sympathise with its victims.

* * *

In several stories the main character is a peasant woman. Although hard-working and faithful for the most part, she is capable of acting quite immorally, cruelly, and even violently. In this respect she approximates more to the peasant himself than to the peasant girl. She is usually rather solidly built, robust and serious. La mère aux monstres is "une grande personne aux traits durs, mais bien faite, vigoureuse et saine, le vrai type de la paysanne robuste, demi-brute et demi-femme".[36] La mère Sauvage possesses the serious disposition of many of the paysannes in Maupassant's work: "une rude vieille, haute et maigre, qui ne riait pas souvent et avec qui on ne plaisantait point.[37] The most complete description of the peasant woman and her general appearance appears in "Le Vieux":

> Son corps osseux, large et plat, se dessinait sous un caraco de laine qui serrait la taille. Une jupe grise tombait jusqu'à la moitié des jambes et elle portait aussi des sabots pleins de paille. Un bonnet blanc, devenu jaune, couvrait quelques cheveux collés au crâne, et sa figure brune, maigre, laide, édentée, montrait cette physionomie sauvage et brute qu'ont souvent les faces des paysans.38

This "physionomie sauvage et brute" often prefigures the rather brutal nature of the woman and serves as a useful introduction to the story.

The peasant woman is capable of being as covetous and avaricious as the paysan himself. She will go to any lengths in order to accomplish her intentions. Mme. Luneau asks Hippolyte Lacour to give her a child so that her dead

husband's legacy will not go to his own family. She promised him one hundred francs for the favour, then refused to pay him. The judge has no sympathy for the woman in "Tribuneaux Rustiques" who gave a young boy some land so that he would live with her. When the boy marries someone else and assumes the right to the land, the woman brings a court order against him, but she is unsuccessful. For the sake of money, a mother is capable of acting quite cruelly towards her own children. The author of "La Mère aux Monstres" suggests in the first sentence the extra-ordinary nature of the woman and of the story: "cette horrible histoire et cette horrible femme" ("La Mère Aux Monstres", p. 245). After listing all the captivating sights of this "petite ville de province", he concludes that no tour is complete without seeing this woman who has made a practice of producing physically deformed babies by varying the way she wears her corsets, and by selling them to circuses. She bargained with the usual "ténacité de paysanne" ("La Mère Aux Monstres", p. 252) to secure the highest prices. The author adopts a critical attitude towards the mother and treats the story in a serious tone. Although there is no medical basis for such a story, Maupassant exploits the idea to demonstrate the harsh and avaricious character of the peasant. The reader's hostility is modified when the author points out a rich,

glamorous woman on the beach whose three children were born deformed because she was so concerned about attracting men by her good figure. Such cruel behaviour is perhaps explainable in the light of the naive, brutal disposition of the peasant, but is totally unjustifiable for these purely vain reasons.

The story "Aux Champs" (Contes de la Bécasse) reveals a similar theme, the priority accorded to money over maternal affections. Maupassant skilfully exploits the two reactions to the opportunity of selling a child. When a rich lady offers to buy the Tuvaches' child, they are amazed and outraged at the idea. Their neighbours' reaction however betrays suspiciously less indignation. The Vallins are more like the peasants that appear in the contes paysans. They are curious to know about the arrangement and only refuse by nodding their head, which indicates that they are still not certain. When money is offered, they readily agree, although not without first securing as much money as possible.[39] In this story Maupassant makes full use of his sense of irony. The Tuvaches, so proud of themselves for maintaining their parental responsibility, begin to envy the easily acquired wealth of their neighbours. Their biggest disappointment comes when their own son blames them for not doing the same thing, so he could live a life of ease. The author

humourously exploits the varying reactions of the Tuvaches to the situation. Their gesture of self-sacrifice proved to be less magnanimous than they originally thought.

The Malandains in "Les Sabots" display the same lack of parental concern as the Vallins. The church service which forms the introductory part of the story serves to present the main body of the conte, since the priest announces that there is a position for a young girl as a maid. The father suggests that his daughter could apply, and then his wife agrees:

> T'entends, grande bête. T'iras chez maît'Omont t'proposer comme servante, et tu f'ras tout c'qu'il te commandera.
>
> ("Les Sabots", pp. 101-2)

She has no scruples about taking her to see her future employer and about leaving her daughter in the hands of someone who first addresses her as "c'te grande bique-là" ("Les Sabots", p. 103).

The female peasant can commit great acts of violence when adequately aroused. La mère Sauvage directs her patriotism and her wrath towards four young likeable Prussian soldiers and kills them without thinking for a moment of the immoral and selfish nature of her conduct.[40] The sinister episode is announced by her name itself and by the decrepit house that was once prosperous with animals and trees nearby. The author seems to want to justify or explain her behaviour by stressing the loneliness and

seriousness of the woman peasant. The male peasant can seek an escape in the local inn, whereas "sa campagne reste sérieuse avec une physionomie sévère . . .elles ont l'âme triste et bornée, ayant une vie morne et sans éclaircie" ("La Mère Sauvage", p. 304). This initial mood of despair is soon dispersed as the Prussians and the woman establish a friendly relationship. To reinforce our final reaction of despair, the author portrays the soldiers as boys with blue eyes and blond hair who were very much aware of how their own mothers must have felt.[41] The tension in the story is built up by a clever use of irony. The Prussians return in a jovial mood after a successful day's hunting and proceed to cut open the animals they have caught. This brings back memories of what the enemy probably did to her dead son. The irony continues with the four boys helping to fill the barn with hay, which the woman uses to burn the boys to death. Just like Mme. Saverini in "Une Vendetta" la mère Sauvage calmly carries out her plot and sits down "tranquille et satisfaite" ("La Mère Sauvage", p. 313), perfectly composed to face the firing squad. The story increases in violence as Maupassant adds a touch of sensationalism by making the bullets cut her in two and by delaying the actual moment of her death. Although extremely sorrowful at the bad news, she does not seem as justified as the prostitute in "Mademoiselle Fifi" in killing the Prussians. When we compare the different descriptions of

the soldiers, as well as the relative consequences of the act, we are likely to agree with Maupassant that this "héroisme était atroce" ("La Mère Sauvage", p. 314).

Throughout the work of Maupassant there are stories about war, patriotism and the violence connected with it. To reinforce the French superiority he often presents the enemy committing atrocities, as in "Mademoiselle Fifi".[42] It is usually at the hands of peasants or prostitutes that the enemy suffers. A supreme gesture of patriotism and bravery is demonstrated by Berthine in "Les Prisonniers" who plays a trick on a group of Prussians and locks them in the cellar until help arrives. The peasants usually react very violently towards the enemy. Saint Antoine follows the example of La Mère Sauvage by killing eventually the likeable Prussian. The most extreme example is provided by le père Milon in the story of the same name. After killing one soldier, Milon develops a fixation that is rendered all the more intense by his peasant mentality. Maupassant's peasants are capable of conceiving a strong and violent hatred for people, once their interests are thwarted. Le père Milon is a typical example:

> Il les haïssait d'une haine sournoise et acharnée de paysan cupide et patriote aussi. Il avait son idée, comme il disait. Il attendit quelques jours.43

As a peasant he is typically cunning and delights in penetrating the Prussians' stomachs with his sword and

cutting their throats. Maupassant often describes his peasants as "abrutis", and nowhere is this impassiveness more evident than at the end of "Le père Milon", just as it was at the end of "La mère sauvage". Milon spits in the face of the officer who tries to defend him and faces his death quite nonchalantly. The two peasants, very conscious of injustices committed in war as well as on market day, go to their death satisfied that the deaths of their near relatives have been avenged.

"La mère Sauvage" and "le père Milon" represent certain aspects of Maupassant's vision of society. They illustrate the suffering of the innocent, lower strata that war brings. The author has sympathy for:

> les humbles, ceux qui payent le plus parce qu'ils sont pauvres et que toute charge nouvelle les accable, ceux qu'on tue par masses, ceux qui souffrent le plus cruellement des atroces misères de la guerre, parce qu'ils sont les plus faibles et les moins résistants". ("La Mère Sauvage", pp. 306-7)

Basically, Maupassant was opposed to war, as the long diatribe in "Sur l'eau" reveals. The two stories, "La Mère Sauvage" and "Le Père Milon", contain the different aspects of his vision. Revenge is achieved and the French appear superior; yet the death of so many innocent people indicates the fundamental brutality of war. The very fact that a female peasant is the main character in one of Maupassant's most famous war stories, with her character presented

most vividly, shows the status that the women peasant enjoyed in the contes paysans.

* * *

As one might expect, the group that re-occurs most frequently is the paysans themselves: the farm labourers, the young stable boys, and the local innkeepers. In Maupassant's stories the normand and the cauchois live their natural and simple life. The author does not exalt their qualities nor hide their faults, and although we only see the peasants from the outside, their motives and remarks still strike a realistic note for the reader of today. As Dumesnil says: "il donne à chacun d'eux, son relief et sa valeur générale, sa portée humaine".[44] Within this group, several interesting cases seem to stand out as representative of certain peasant tendencies. The author will often stress one particular feature - cruelty, humour, avarice, tenderness - and demonstrate the logical outcome when it completely dominates one of his Norman peasants. The heros of his contes are predominantly Norman, but their characteristics could often be applied equally to most peasants. Also, the particular feature will often characterise every Norman, rather than just the Norman peasant. Nevertheless, Maupassant produces some larger than life characters such as Toine, Belhomme, Hauchecorne, and le père Amable, who are among his most memorable creations.

Maupassant is very much aware of the more barbaric side of the peasant's character and portrays him as cruel, insensitive to the suffering of others and infact deliberately violent.[45] "Saint-Antoine" provides a transition infact from the good-natured humour of "La Bête à Mait'Belhomme" to the stark cruelty of "Coco". Saint-Antoine is an excellent farceur in the fashion of Toine himself. His unusual physique - "haut en couleur, gros de poitrine et de ventre, et perché sur de longues jambes qui semblaient trop maigres pour l'ampleur du corps"[46] - reflects his extraordinary character: "il était bon vivant, joyeux, farceur, puissant mangeur et fort buveur, et vigoureux trousseur de servantes. ("Saint-Antoine", p. 217). His idea of fattening the young Prussian soldier and introducing themselves as "Saint-Antoine et son cochon" is an obvious source of delight for the peasants. The author directly reports the humorous remarks of Antoine, thereby establishing a comic tone to the story:

> rien qu'du gras, tout ça d'la couenne . . .il pèse six cents et pas de déchet . . .donnez-li de c'que vous voudrez, il avale tout . . .tu sais, mon cochon, faudra te faire faire une autre cage. ("Saint-Antoine", p. 222)

The humour becomes malicious however, since the Prussian always acts very politely and positively enjoys Antoine's company. Antoine sinks in our esteem because he is basically a coward. He does not live up to his boasts of killing the Prussians, and soon panics at the thought of being

reported by his Prussian friend. He sadistically kills the young soldier, providing an obvious parallel with "La Mère Sauvage" and "Le Père Milon". The ending indicates the author's belief in the basic irony and cruelty that predominate in the world, since an innocent retired policeman was executed for the crime. This final detail also reinforces our antipathy towards Antoine.

Isidore Duval, the hero of "Coco" reacts with similar brutality, although the boy's cruelty seems more persistent. Isidore is representative of the peasants in "Le Vagabond" and "Le Gueux", who adopt a critical attitude towards the people who are no longer serving any useful purpose in the community. The boy sees no sense in wasting so much food and time on an old horse whose owner is keeping it for purely nostalgic reasons. The author explains the peasant's typical and perhaps understandable reaction: "une haine grandissait en son esprit confus, une haine de paysan rapace, de paysan sournois, féroce, brutal et lâche.[47] Once again the character's physical appearance suggests the brutal development of the story:

> un maigre enfant, coiffé de cheveux roux, épais, durs et hérissés, il semblait stupide, comme si les idées n'eussent pu se former dans son âme épaisse de brute. ("Coco", p. 251.)

On the other hand the author inspires our sympathy for the horse by stressing its distressed condition, hardly able to lift up its legs and looking forlorn with its shaggy

coat. The boy relieved his anger by torturing the horse. He savoured his vengeance by pretending to move Coco but leaving him where he could see and smell the fine grass without being able to reach it.[48] The indifference of Isidore contrasts throughout with the futile and painful efforts of the horse to survive. The horse having died, the boy sits on the body "sans penser à rien" ("Coco", p. 155). Right up to the last detail the author is concerned with conditionning our reaction and with giving a more universal significance to the story. The horse has to undergo therefore the humility of having its body eaten away by insects and birds, while some time later very healthy looking grass grew on the spot where Coco was buried, hiding the crimes of humanity.

It is with a similar note of irony that Maupassant introduces "L'Aveugle". He is aware that beautiful sunny days only serve to conceal the unfortunate existence of blind people and the horrors they have to endure. The blind man in "L'Aveugle" had led a life of suffering, no one had ever shown any tenderness to him, "car aux champs les inutiles sont des nuisibles, et les paysans feraient volontiers comme des poules qui tuent les infirmes entre elles".[49] Like Coco, everyone begrudged him the food he ate. They began to equate him with an animal and doubted whether he was conscious of life or had a mind even. This

again is ironic since it is the peasants around him whom the author calls "des brutes". The man's brother-in-law makes him eat horrible things and lets dogs eat out of the same plate, while all the local farm labourers enjoy beating the old man as part of some cruel game. His death is very dramatic. The peasants leave him to starve to death in the snow as he wanders about the countryside stumbling into ditches. The writer builds up the horror of the episode, as he did in "Coco", by describing how the birds ravaged his body, which was only discovered in any case when the snow melted. Maupassant does not directly condemn the peasants. When one takes into consideration their practical outlook, their "haine déchaînéé, impitoyable ("L'Avengle", p. 22), and their delight in practical jokes, the outcome of "L'Avengle" is only to be expected. Nevertheless the story is a very moving one, since Maupassant always tried to do more than simply state various characteristics of his peasants.

In "Les Bécasses" the peasants display a similar lack of sympathy for the unfortunate, who takes the form here of a deaf and dumb shepherd, Gargan. On the one hand the author presents the very honest, upright shepherd, a symbol of happiness as he knits on the doorstep and leads his herd: "un excellent berger, dévoué, probe".[50] On the other hand we see the peasants coming from afar to sleep with La Goutte, his wife, merely to amuse themselves at

his expense. They regard the whole affair as a joke, asking each other: "As-tu payé la goutte à la Goutte? ("Les Bécasses", p. 213). The idea of Gargân knitting, totally unaware of the situation, becomes merely ridiculous. The Norman peasant is capable of feats of violence when his honour is threatened and so he has no hesitation in strangling his wife when he discovers that she is unfaithful. The author condones Gargan's behaviour, since the judge praises his sense of honour: "il a de l'honneur, cet homme-là" ("Les Bécasses", p. 215). The whole story is successful because the shepherd is portrayed in a very sympathetic light, his distress being described very realistically.

Such acts of cruelty have their origins partly in the nature of the peasant himself and partly in their practical, economical disposition. By extension, they often display a total indifference to the dying and the dead, even when they lose a close relative. In "Un Réveillon" and "Le Vieux" this characteristic is humorously exploited by Maupassant, since the peasants are not openly cruel as the characters in the previous stories have been. In "Un Réveillon" the humour is at the expense of a peasant couple who are embarrassed when some visitors insist on seeing the body of the old man. They are very nervous since they had put him in a trunk upon which they were eating their

New Year's Eve meal. The daughter is eager to justify her action, as the broken language indicates:

> Puisqu'il souffre pu, c't'homme, à quoi ça sert de l'laisser dans l'lit? J'pouvons ben l'mettre dans la huche, et je r'prendrions l'lit c'te nuit qui s'ra si froide. ("Un Réveillon", p. 179)

This situation is also an example of the macabre element in the humour of Maupassant. The peasants, earthy and "fundamental" in their values, seem ideal vehicles for this kind of humour.

"Le Diable" is very similar in many ways to "Un Reveillon". The dying woman displays the peasants' sense of resignation: "elle ne se révoltait pas, son temps était fini, elle allait mourir".[51] Practical considerations still dominate the peasants' thoughts however. Her son refuses to stay at her side - "Faut pourtant que j'rentre mon blé" - and his mother readily agrees, "tenaillée encore par l'avarice normande" ("Le Diable", p. 122). The son, "torturé par l'amour féroce de l'épargne" ("Le Diable", p. 122), has obviously been brought up to think along the same lines and calculates at great length before hiring La Rapet, a woman who looks after the dying. This woman is also under the grip of avarice - "méchante, jalouse, avare d'une avarice tenant du phénomène" - and consequently presents a worthy rival to the son. The success of the story depends on the psychological conflict between the son and La Rapet. The duel intensifies as the old woman

struggles on and La Rapet becomes an object of humour, for she is obsessed by the thought of losing money. She finally dresses up as the devil and frightens the old woman to death. In this act of cruelty we have another example of the macabre in Maupassant, which receives a more comprehensive treatment in stories such as "Le Horla", "Qui Sait?" and "Un Fou?".

"Le Vieux" is another example of a story made amusing by the main characters' indifference to the misfortune of others. Again, the success of the story is derived from the embarrassment and exasperation of a dying man's children as he thwarts their plans to arrange the burial and the reunion afterwards. The whole peasant community is indifferent to the condition of the old man. His daughter refers to him as "Ça", and refuses to spare any time looking after him while there is food to prepare. The village official is prepared to forge a certificate so that everything can be arranged more easily, and the whole group of peasants is vastly disappointed when the dying man does not expire in time for them to have the meal. They subsequently gloat over the novelty of actually seeing him die. The author reveals his critical attitude towards the peasants by having the man die just when he has already ruined the arrangements. Maupassant took pains to stress the amount of preparations, so that the reader realises the inconvenience that the old man has caused.

All these stories which contain examples of the cruelty that Maupassant's peasants sometimes display, mention their inclination towards avarice. This is closely linked to the idea of not wasting food, money and time on people that no longer serve any directly useful purpose in the community. In "La Ficelle" and "Le Père Amable" this obsession is not conducive to acts of cruelty, but to personal frustration and ultimate disaster. These two contes are quite different from the light-hearted humour of "Le Vieux" and "Un Réveillon". They display Maupassant's ability to write a story with a tragic undertone and to portray convincingly the mental anguish of a simple character.

Maître Hauchecorne, the hero of "La Ficelle" is portrayed in a sympathetic manner. The reader feels pity for him because he appreciates the mentality of the peasant as described by the author. Hauchecorne becomes involved in a chain of events that gets out of control, simply because, "économe en vrai Normand", he obeyed his instinct which states that "tout était bon à ramasser".[52] The care with which he handled the piece of string indicates the respect he affords to anything that might prove useful. It was certainly no incidental gesture, but an innate response to the situation. The author tries to remove Hauchecorne from all responsibility. The peasant's tragedy stems primarily from his own character therefore. At the

same time he does not possess the sophisticated means of defending himself against the jibes of his old enemy, the harness-worker. He immediately panics when accused of having stolen the wallet. He appears "inquiet, interdit, et apeuré" and indicates his loss of control by breaking into more familiar speech: "Ah! i m'a vu, çu manant!" ("La Ficelle", p. 221). He spits to the side as a sign of honour and integrity (a common practice among the rural community), showing at the same time his contempt for the behaviour of the accuser, intent on redeeming himself in the eyes of the unsympathetic peasants, he goes to great lengths to convince them. He goes into the inns repeating what actually happened and indicating the place where he picked up the string. He was too naive to realise that this eagerness only made him more suspect and ridiculous. The simple peasant grows more and more frustrated and desperate as his reputation remains tarnished by the half-mocking accusations of "gros malin" and "vieille pratique".

Maupassant has cleverly built up a picture of Hauchecorne as a rather simple character who takes minor quarrels too seriously and who is ashamed of noticing this piece of string. We can accept therefore his concern, even obsession, with his innocence. This obsession finally overwhelms him, for, unable to live with the accusations

of being avaricious, he becomes very distressed and dies. The reader feels a certain amount of sympathy for the peasant, despite the fact that he goes rather quickly to his death. However, both the harness-maker and the peasants cannot ultimately be held responsible. In such a society Hauchecome is "fair game", since his obsession with economy is considered almost a vice. The reader's tendency towards pity is corrected by this. It is just unfortunate if the peasant lacks the self-assurance to measure up to his acts. The story presents a perplexed peasant faced with a dilemma for which there is no easy solution. At the same time the author demonstrates the irony of fate, whereby a natural gesture can result in tragedy. The reader appreciates the peasant's despair.

"Le père Amable " illustrates in a similar manner the dire effects produced by an obsession with avarice. M. Amable finds himself overwhelmed by this preoccupation and only death can deliver him from its torments. His decision to kill himself is understandable when one considers his whole outlook. His stubbornness in refusing to accept his son's marriage reminds the author of "une bourrique qui r'fuse d'aller".[53] He simply repeats "cela ne se fera point" ("Le Père Amable", p. 225) in referring to his son's plans. All his life he has been preoccupied with the prices of eggs and vegetables, which has obscured more human values to the extent that animals and human beings

are viewed in the same light: "Il regardait les bêtes et les hommes d'un oeil dur et méchant" ("Le Père Amable", p. 230). The result of this outlook is a frame of mind totally opposed to any kind of waste, and alert to any possibility of economising. His manner of eating his soup summaries his whole character:

> Il enfermait le pot dans ses doigts et se chauffait les mains pour ne rien perdre, ni une parcelle de chaleur qui vient du feu, ni une goutte de soupe, ni une miette de pain. ("Le Père Amable", p. 231)

Concern about money dominates over all moral considerations in the rural code of ethics. As we have already seen, parental affection is often neglected when financial gain is at stake. Le père Amable shares the opinion that "la vertu d'une fille n'a guère d'importance aux champs". He was not objecting to the fact that his son's future wife had already been married. It was merely that he was dominated by "son avarice, son instinct profond, féroce, d'épargne" ("Le Père Amable", p. 232). He had calculated to the last detail all the food that the woman's son would consume.

Such an exclusive obsession becomes a source of great amusement for the peasants. He devours all the free food "avec la ténacité sombre qu'il apportait autrefois à ses labeurs persévérants" ("Le Père Amable", p. 245). Just like Hauchecorne, Amable reveals his character

by these naive gestures. He cannot conceal his tremendous suffering at the sight of the boy eating:

> Il geignait, sans prononcer un mot, poussant une sorte de plainte longue et douloureuse. ("Le Père Amable", p. 265)

The author invites the reader's sympathy for the peasant by describing at length his loneliness and sentimental disposition. He wanders in his beloved fields thinking of his dead son, dragging his weak leg, and weeping. The health of the crops contrasts quite sharply with his own uselessness, solitude and decrepitude, and the old man is very aware of the discouraging situation:

> Comme il était tout seul dans la plaine, tout seul sous le ciel bleu, au milieu des récoltes grandissantes, tout seul avec les alouettes qu'il voyait planer sur sa tête, sans entendre leur chant léger, il se mit à pleurer en marchant. ("Le Père Amable", p. 251)

It seems that he is overwhelmed by the vastness of the plain and the sky, with the beauty of the larks and the crops only serving to accentuate his own wretchedness. The repetition of "tout seul" stresses his isolation in the midst of the general activity. Considering the strength of his obsession as well as his own solitude (both of which have been adequately substantiated by Maupassant), it is a logical step for him to take his own life. Consequently the ending strikes the reader as being realistic. We can share the despair and frustration of the old man struggling against time, his own character, and

his relatives. At the end he becomes a tragic figure, in contrast to his ridiculous stature at the beginning.

The peasants' concern over economy and money provides Maupassant with some of his most amusing material for the contes, as well as his most tragic. Sometimes we enjoy the peasant's sense of humour and his graphic manner of expressing himself, while at times the peasant is a naive character, a mere object of ridicule. In "Toine" the humour is derived from the general situation, although Toine himself contributes indirectly. He was amazing to look at, "tant il était devenu épais et gros, rouge et soufflant".[54] Renowned for his friendliness and joviality, he became the centre of attraction in the village with his ability to "faire rire une pierre de tombe" ("Toine", p. 3). A large part of the humour comes from his relationship with his wife. She, in her typical role as a peasant "housewife", objects to him eating and drinking excessively without working at all. Their petty quarrels are a source of comedy in the story:

> La mère Toine: Ça serait-il point mieux dans l'étable à cochons un quétou comme ça?
>
> Le père Toine: Eh! La mé Poule, ma plance, tâche d'engraisser comme ça d'la volaille. ("Toine", p. 5)

Seemingly above human weaknesses, Toine finally falls victim to the insidious work of fate and destruction.

These forces did not show themselves by means of the gradual progression of greying hair and wrinkles, but by more comical forms:

> Les déformations que la mort inflige devenaient chez lui risibles, cocasses, divertissantes, au lieu d'être sinistres et pitoyables. ("Toine", p. 8)

Finally the words of his wife prove to be true, as he falls ill and is confined to bed:

> Espère, espère un brin; j'verrons c'qu'arrivera, j'verrons bien! Ça crèvera comme un sac à grain, ce gros bouffi! ("Toine", p. 5)

The peasant customers of his inn continue the comic tone by encouraging the quarrels between Toine and his wife. Their physical appearance itself is rather bizarre, but would seem to fit in well with the physical background. One was "un peu tordu comme un tronc de pommier", while his friend is described as "un petit sec avec un nez de furet, malicieux, futé comme un renard" ("Toine", p. 9).

The success of the story comes from the way Toine reacts in a different way to the situation. His wife is impressed by the idea of making use of her husband by having him hatch the eggs while lying in bed. To his dismay, his extraordinary frame, which once was responsible in part for his popularity, is now being exploited. Toine becomes an object of humour, defenceless against his wife's relentless demands. We could never imagine such a reversal of roles; nor, in fact do we expect Toine to take the whole

affair seriously. Toine regains his stature with respect to his customers by means of his tender attention towards the baby chickens, begging in fact to be allowed to keep them in his bed.

It is the woman's concern about wasting anything that brings about the sudden reversal of roles and deflates Toine's prestige. The opening description has indicated however that Toine was almost capable of anything, and so his transformation from the merry inn-keeper to the affectionate 'mother' is not as unrealistic as it might otherwise have been. Repeatedly, Maupassant carefully prepares for the development of the plot by his well chosen details.

Théodule Sabot is another humorous character who, just like Toine, always comes out victorious in one form or another. He was popular with the other peasants because of his jokes against the clergy. When he realises that he might be deprived of a large contract because of his religious views, his mood changes. Two short sentences indicate his dismay: "Theodule Sabot ne riait pas . . . . Theodule Sabot n'en dormit plus."[55] His confidence is completely broken as the priest makes him go to confession and to mass in order to be able to win the contract of repairing the church pews. As the time comes the carpenter is afraid:

> son âme troublée, une âme d'athée mal convaincu, s'affolait devant la peur confuse et puissante du mystère divin. ("La Confession de Théodule Sabot", p. 265)

He is a comic figure as he stumbles his way through confession, but he regains his prestige by his personal and unusual interpretation of religion:

> Dire que s'il fallait perdre cent francs pour l'amour du bon Dieu, pour ça je n'dis pas. Mais j'l'aime bien, pour sûr, j'aime bien tout de même. ("La Confession de Théodule Sabot", p. 267)

The author is indulgent towards both Sabot and the clergy. The priest is very good-natured and lenient towards the carpenter's trivial sins. Sabot's naive belief in his own religiousness is fully described by the author and makes the story amusing.

In some stories the humour is entirely at the expense of a naive peasant. Both Toine and Théodule Sabot have their wit and stature to redeem themselves, but Maître Belhomme and le père Boniface are purely naive figures. As is the case with Sabot and Toine's wife, financial considerations dominate Belhomme in the attempt to remove a flea from his ear. In "La Bête à Mait'Belhomme" the author establishes a comic tone and prefigures the unusual chain of events by describing the strangeness of the whole scene. The coach "avait du monstre dans sa structure et son allure";[56] M. Poiret is "haut, tortu et osseux" and his wife is "pareille à une bique fatiguée"; Mait'Rabot is

perplexed and unsure until pushed forward by his wife, "haute et carrée dont le ventre était vaste et ronde" ("La Bête à Maît'Belhomme", p. 79). As we saw in "Toine", Maupassant often chooses the striking details which particularise the characters sharply and establish the desired mood.

Maît'Belhomme is the main source of humour as he exaggerates his illness and is ridiculed by the other travellers. He begins to groan and paw the ground, convinced that a large beast is nibbling away inside his head. The author skillfully exploits the comic situation by describing Belhomme's inconvenience as "une affreuse souffrance" ("La Bête à Maît'Belhomme", p. 82), and by relating the suggestions for removing the insect. The peasants suggested imitating a deep voice in case it was a rabbit, pouring water down to drown it, or wine in case the beast was used to wine rather than water. Belhomme remains naively serious in the midst of all this humour and has to bear the final ignominy of finding only a flea in his ear after an "operation" consisting of one peasant hitting one ear so the insect would come out of the other. The whole episode is therefore fully exploited by Maupassant who depicts the naivety of a peasant and the sense of humour in the rural world of Normandy.

"Le Crime au Père Boniface" is similar in

inspiration to "La Bête à Maît' Belhomme". The postman misinterprets a situation, panics, and is finally ridiculed by the peasants. The author describes a typical day for Boniface, who hopes to complete his round quicker this particular day. Ironically he had to read a frightening account of a murder then hear a noise that sounded like someone in distress inside a house. He panics immediately: "Une inquiétude l'envahit . . .il demeura immobile, perclus d'angoisse.[57] He frantically runs for help and causes a period of consternation and fear in the whole village. The tension is suddenly released when the town officials burst out laughing and ridicule Boniface by remarks such as: "Et ta femme, c'est-il comme ça que tu l'assassine, hein, vieux farceur ("Le Crime au Père Boniface", p. 4). Maupassant successfully handles three different moods in the story. At the start, he recreates the typical day in the postman's life. He describes the fields and the houses scattered about, as well as the particular detail of the peasant wiping his hand on his trousers before opening the letter. Then he presents Boniface in a state of panic, having already been disturbed by the account of a crime. Finally the postman is revealed in all his naivety, "confus, désorienté, honteux" ("Le Crime au Père Boniface", p. 12).

We have already illustrated how sexual relationships are more readily accepted in the country,[58] but the peasants

also are capable of tender feelings. Such a character is usually as naive as Belhomme and Boniface, being ill-equipped to measure up to the sudden awakening of love. In "La Martine" Maupassant describes in detail the actual anguish that Benoist experiences as he first realises his affections and then sees them unreciprocated. He becomes totally absorbed in thinking of La Martine, refuses to eat and spends hours alone in the country. He shudders at the mention of her name, watches her at mass and compares her to "une mouche emprisonnée"[59] in his head. His complete infatuation is revealed by the fact that "il aurait voulu l'étreindre, l'étrangler, la manger, la faire entrer en lui" ("La Martine", p. 131). When she married someone else he was very distressed and ill for a month, then avoided anything even remotely reminiscent of her. In this story the author adds an interesting psychological development that appears more acceptable than leaving Benoist to pine away the rest of his life. Benoist finds himself delivering La Martine's baby, and the mutual respect they experience serves to heal Benoist's pain.

François in "Mademoiselle Cocotte" displays as much affection as Benoist, but towards a dog rather than a girl. He is rather simple-minded ("un peu lourdaud") and becomes very attached to the animal whom he found in a very distressed state. The dog turns out to be loving,

gentle, intelligent and faithful, and François regards it as a person: "Cette bête-là, c'est une personne. Il ne lui manque que la parole.[60] When he finally throws it into the water, his torment is reinforced by the idea that the dog will be reflecting on the situation: "Qu'est-ce qu'elle pense de moi à c't'heure, c'te bête ("Mademoiselle Cocotte", p. 135). The picture is particularly pathetic since the dog thought he was merely out for a walk. Maupassant builds up the pathos and horror of the scene. Consequently François' reaction is plausible when he sees the putrefied body of the body floating along the river a few weeks later. The shock was enough to send him mad. He has already been portrayed as a person who reacts deeply to an emotional situation, hence the realism of the ending.

Boitelle is announced in a similar manner to François, as being "un peu simple, pourtant",[61] with an obsession that is to prove ironically fatal. He was fanatical about exotic birds. Since this interest was very deep-rooted ("ce gout-là, il l'avait dans le sang") it is only to be expected that he should find the negro woman as captivating as his birds. Being rather naive he was entranced by her unusual black hands and smiling white teeth. He becomes a pathetic figure however as he shows surprise about the fact that she has the same

ideas about work, money, religion and saving, as the peasant girls. Steeped very deeply in the rural culture, Boitelle attaches a great deal of importance to this. So involved is he with impressing the peasants that he does not realise how bizarre the negress appears in their eyes. He accepts his fate stoically however once he realises the distress she causes his parents.

To prevent the story from being too sentimental and sad, the author portrays the naivety of Boitelle and the country peasants. His parent's reaction to the colour of her skin is very amusing:

> Noire? Combien qu'elle l'est. C'est-il partout?
> Noire? C'est-il noir autant que le chaudron?
> Ça ne salit point le linge plus que d'autres,
> ces piaux-là? ("Boitelle", pp. 84-5)

The whole peasant community stops working to stare at this phenomenon, curiosity being a common feature among Maupassant's peasants. Their naive reaction announces a note of inevitability about the outcome. Never is there any hope of changing the attitudes of the peasants. One has simply to resign oneself to disappointments. This is one of the fundamental messages to be illustrated in the contes paysans. Nevertheless these sentimental accounts widen the range of Maupassant's subject matter, providing relief from the pictures of cruelty, suicides and social injustices, and presenting a more complete portrait of the

world of rural Normandy. The idea of the peasant as a tender, sentimental character is not altogether inconsistent with the more traditional picture of a cruel, miserly, stoical being, since simple minds are often capable of great obsessions. This single-minded affection can be considered as merely another illustration of this tendency in the peasant mentality towards fixations.

We have mentionned in "Boitelle" how the peasants react with immense curiosity to the arrival of the negress. This sense of curiosity, mixed with an innate feeling of suspicion towards strangers, is illustrated in a number of situations in Maupassant's oeuvre. George Duroy's parents react in this way in Bel-Ami towards their future daughter-in-law. They are two typical Maupassant peasants and contrast strikingly with the elegance of the Parisian society:

> L'homme était petit, trapu, rouge et un peu ventru, vigoureux malgré son âge; la femme, grand, sèche, voûtée, triste, la vraie femme de peine des champs.[62]

They did not recognise their son immediately, then looked upon Madeleine as some phenomenon. His mother was hostile to her and never spoke during the whole meal, resenting the woman's easy and seemingly immoral life. She had wanted his son to marry a typical farm girl instead of "cette femme de ville qui lui inspirait une répulsion de maudite, de reprouvée, d'être impur fait pour la fainéantise et le

péché" (Bel Ami, p. 256).

A bigger sensation is caused by the prostitutes' arrival in a small village in "La Maison Tellier". People came to their doors, children stopped their games, and ironically an old lady made a sign of the cross. When they proceeded to the church the villagers were amazed. People rushed from all directions to see the city women and even the mayor offered his seat to Mme. Tellier herself. The Belgian peasants in "Le Voyage du Horla" reveal the instincts of suspicion and then curiosity, proving that these features are not restricted to the Norman peasant. When the balloon landed the villagers ran to see what it was, but would not approach too near. It was only after a long period of time that they helped the Frenchmen to unload. These incidental references to the reaction of the peasants add a note of humour into the stories as well as defining the nature of the rural population.

An interesting feature about the Belgian peasants in "Le Voyage du Horla" is contained in the description of them as "complaisants et hospitaliers".[63] These adjectives are never used in Maupassant's work to define the Norman peasant, whose suspicion and avarice seem a far cry from the author's happy recollections of the Norman fishermen and peasants. These unflattering characteristics are reserved in fact for the Norman peasant since in Une Vie

Maupassant gives a very complimentary picture of the Corsican peasant. Julien and Jeanne ask a young couple where to sleep for the night after travelling all day in the hills. The young peasants offer them immediately a mattress. The manner in which the two Normans were received contrasts enormously with their own province's reputation for being suspicious: "On les reçut comme les patriarches devaient recevoir l'hôte envoyé de Dieu" (Une Vie, p. 104). When their guide introduces them to his parents, they are overwhelmed by the Corsicans' enthusiasm. The husband expressed his pleasure to meet them and showed them round the village. His wife kissed Jeanne, took their clothes, and prepared dinner for them. Maupassant had travelled to Corsica before writing Une Vie and appreciated himself the hospitality extended to him. Nevertheless, it remains the paysans normands who are most successfully treated. The Hauchecomes, Belhommes, and Toines are unforgettable characters who make Maupassant's work really come alive.

* * *

One of the most striking features about the contes paysans is the frequent appearance of Norman patois. In this respect Maupassant was really the first major writer to reproduce accurately and authentically a regional way of speaking and to incorporate it successfully into works of literature. Although the peasants in Molière and Marivaux

spoke in their own dialect, it was not until the nineteenth century that a widespread attempt was made to introduce in literature the language of the lower social classes. The result was not often successful. George Sand retained many local adjectives but they were unintelligible to most readers: e.g. "esseuler", "elingauché", "brioler". Jules Renard reproduced stereotyped formulas at first then realised that, if he was to have his works accepted as "authentic" in this respect, it was not sufficient just to replace "pas" by "point", to suppress silent "e" s, negatives and pronouns, and to put the verb in the plural after a singular subject: e.g. "j'voudrais bien", all'est ben morte", "à c't'heure", "qué j'allons faire". Zola used a lot of slang expressions especially in La Terre, but he had to go deliberately to the scene of the novel to gain the necessary documentation. Maupassant on the other hand was intimately acquainted with the Norman peasants and took great pleasure in mastering their accent. It is interesting to note finally that Flaubert, a Norman himself, was not afraid of reproducing a regional expression when the character was a Norman peasant. We find Le père Rouault in Madame Bovary using expressions such as "se dissiper" (to relax), "consequente" (considerable), "bernique" (nothing), and "conci-conça" (so-so).[64]

There are certain problems facing an author who uses his characters' patois in his work. The careful writer, conscious of the problems of literary creation, will reject local colour for its own sake; instead he will strive to make the language reveal various features about the characters or produce a certain mood. Maupassant fully exploits the peasants' language towards these ends. At the same time a character's manner of speaking may be very difficult to understand if reproduced accurately. Maupassant successfully avoids this problem also, otherwise his stories would not contain the same universal appeal.

Anthony Butler, in his very detailed study of the language in Maupassant's stories,[65] lists the chief characteristics of le patois cauchois. "Oi" - "é" (e.g. pourqué, mé, je vé); "oi" - "ẽ" (e.g. je crais, à draitę); "ui" - "i" (e.g. j'li dis qu'c'est eune bonne fille et pi d'épargne"); soft "c" - "ch" (e.g. chinq, chinquante); "ch" - hard "c" (e.g. s'écaper, mâquer, sèque, vaque); and "eau" - "iau" (e.g. biau, morciaux, piau, siaux). There is denasalisation of "j'en ai" and "enfant" to produce "éfant" and "je n'ai". Contractions of all kinds of words are very frequent: "v'là m'n homme; qué qu'vous dites là; all aura; è prend; è sont". Other modifications of standard French are noted by Butler: berqué (berger), cheux nous (chez nous), c'ti-là (celui-là); débiller (déshabiller), frémi (fourmi), un p'tieu (une petit peu),

quin (chien), sef (soif).

Maupassant skilfully exploits the peasants' speech to produce the desired mood for the story. In certain instances the peasants speak in a very hesitating and disjointed fashion. In each case the author uses their expressions and way of speaking to make their portraits more authentic and to display aspects of the peasant mentality. Repetition of a word illustrates a strong stubbornness when faced with an unpleasant suggestion. At the idea of selling her son, Madame Tuvache repeats "non" and "tout" to an extent that leaves no doubt about her indignation:

> Ah, mais non; c'est pas des choses qu'on d'mande à une mère, ça! Ah, mais non! . .c'est tout vu, tout entendu, c'est tout réfléchi. ("Aux Champs", pp. 173-174)

The disjointed style and repetition of "vendre" and "enfant" indicate both her anger and obsession with the idea of selling one's own children:

> J't'ai pas vendu, mé, j't'ai pas vendu. J'vends pas m's éfants, mé. J'sieus pas riche, mais vends pas m's éfants. ("Aux Champs", p. 176)

The old woman refusing to sell her house uses similar language: "Pour ça non. N'y comptez point. C'est dit, C'est dit, n'y r'venez pas.[66]

Repetition of a word can also indicate naive amazement at some unexpected event. The peasant seems overwhelmed by the theft of one rabbit, and a comic tone

is established as the author makes fun of their exaggerated reaction:

> On a volé un lapin, c'te nuit.
> Un lapin?
> V'là qu'on a volé un lapin, l'gros gris.
> Qué qu'tu dis, qu'on a volé un lapin?
> L'gros gris.
> L'gros gris?

The unsophisticated constructions involving simple sentences with rarely even a dependent clause suggest a lack of intellectual agility and a stobid, taciturn disposition. Consequently a peasant, by force of repeating the same idea, gives the impression that he is unable to seize the complexity of the situation. He finds it difficult therefore to communicate with others to any substantial degree. Rose simply repeats to the farmer in "Histoire d'une Fille de Ferme", "j'ai un éfant, moi", while Hauchecome tries to prove his innocence by repeating "une 'tite ficelle". Their naive belief in the adequacy of these utterances detracts from their tragic status and exposes them as incompetent to deal with the simple situation.

Maupassant sometimes exploits for comic effect the repetition of the same sound in a dialogue:

> J'vas au Havre vé Chambrelan
> Qué Chambrelan?
> L'guérisseux donc
> Qué guérisseux?
> L'guérisseux qu'a guéri mon pé
> Ton pé?
> Oui, mon pé, dans le temps.
> Qué qu'il avait ton pé?67

There is another example in "Tribunaux Rustiques":

> Sur la tête d'mon pé, d'ma mé, d'mon grand pé, d'ma grand mé et du bon Dieu qui m'entend, je jure que c'est point mé.

By means of this technique Maupassant establishes a comic tone for the story as well as characterises the peasant as rather inarticulate and naive.

Some conversations are humorous when the peasant deliberately acts very naively in an attempt to disarm someone. This device illustrates the peasant's elusive and cunning nature. It is tried by Polyte's mistress in "Le Lapin" in an effort to gain time and forestall the policemen:

> Ous 'qu'il est vot' beurre?
> Mon beurre?
> Oui, vot'beurre.
> Mais dans l'pot.
> Alors, ous'qu'il est l'pot?
> Qué pot?

By repeating the question the woman tries to give the impression that she is too simple to be aware of the crime that has been committed. In "Le Retour" this technique contains a great deal of psychology, as La Martine and her husband confront each other. The brief repetitions indicate the basic suspicion that each has towards the other:

> Etes-vous d'ici?
> J'suis d'ici
> C'est-y té, mon homme?
> Oui, c'est mé.
> C'est té, Martin?

Oui, c'est mé.
D'où qu'tu r'viens donc?
D'la côte d'Afrique.68

Dumesnil points out the literary value of such a conversation: "La brièveté est une des conditions de la grandeur tragique".[69] The heavy silences which refuse to explain all the motivations and justifications reinforce the "tragic grandeur" of Le père Milon in his conversation with the Prussian colonel:

C'est mé!
C'est vous qui les avez tués tous?
Trétous
Vous seul?
Mé seul. J'ai fait ça comme ça s'trouvait.
("Le Père Milon", p. 4)

These five lines can even be used to summarise the Norman race, since here Milon demonstrates obstinacy, resignation in face of the inevitable, impatience with all tyranny, uncompromising independence and indifference to death. Maupassant reveals in these dialogues his excellent control of language and style as well as his understanding of peasant mentality.

Another feature of the peasants' speech is their use of double negatives. The Norman peasant is essentially suspicious and is consequently very reluctant to commit himself. He does not like to give anyone the impression that he is enthusiastic about something. The old woman replies with "je n'dis point non"[70] to the offer of selling

her house, while the father in "Aux Champs" replies in a sententious tone "J'dis qu'c'est point méprisable" to the offer of selling his child. By modifying their enthusiasm, they can then proceed to bargain for a better deal than initially suggested. The peasant is very careful then in choosing how he answers certain propositions.

The author establishes a comic tone by means of another feature of the peasants' way of speaking. It is a natural reaction to speak in a disjointed manner when annoyed, but when the peasant speaks like this he gives the impression of being a simple character overwhelmed by the circumstances and stubbornly refusing to come to terms with the new situation. Boitelle's mother decides that the negress is simply too black and sees the whole situation in a very uncomplicated way: "J'pourrais pas m'y faire, faut qu'alle r'tourne, alle est trop noire ("Boitelle", p. 91). In "Le Lapin" Severin is extremely annoyed at his wife's infidelity and explains his attitude to the judge:

> C'est bien, pour lors. J'vas vous dire. Eune nuit, vu qu'j'avais d'z' idées je rentrai, l'aut'semaine, et j'les y trouvai, qu'i n'étaient point dos à dos. C'te fois-ci, j'les vu point. J'le sais par l's autres. C'est fini, n'en parlons pu. Mais si j'les r'pince . . .nom d'un nom, si j'les r'pince. ("Le Lapin", p. 120)

Severin's choice of words ("r'pince" and "i n'étaient point dos à dos") are very humorous and detract from his serious attitude. The language is therefore instrumental in

characterising him as rather naive.

Sometimes a peasant will confuse certain words, especially when obliged to defend himself before a social superior such as a judge. In these instances the peasant often characterises himself as socially insensitive by lapsing into lengthy outbursts in his own patois. The result is that he can easily become a comic figure. Theodule Sabot confuses "rédhibitoire" with the correct word "réfractaire" when explaining his religion to the priest. Hippolyte Lacour says "intercepté" instead of "interloqué". The exploitation of these malapropisms is most successful in "Tribunaux Rustiques" where the father was probably trying to impress the judge with vocabulary that he was not in the habit of using normally:

> Le Père Paturon - I n'avait point quinze ans quant a m'la débouché.
> Le Juge - vous voulez dire débauché?
> Le Père - Et pi, quand l'temps fut v'nu qui lui sembla prêt, qu'a la détravé . . . .
> Le Juge - Dépravé. ("Tribunaux Rustiques", pp. 181-2)

One of the most amusing contes is "Une Vente", in which three peasants relate the attempt to measure the value of one of the peasants' wife by forcing her into a barrel of water. Cornu makes the common mistake of confusing his words: e.g. "il me propose à brûle tout le foin" ("à brûle-pourpoint"); "ils nous sacréandent" ("appréhendent"); "ils nous carottent" ("garottent"). The story also derives

its humour from the peasants' vivid way of expressing themselves. Mme. Brument explains her indignation and humility:

> "çu baril, il était grand comme une cure . . . me v'là quasiment comme not'mère Eve . . .ils me prennent comme qui dirait un drap de lessive . . .ils me piquent dans le baril que je n'ai eu une révolution des sangs, une glaçure jusqu'aux boyaux.71

Brument wants to impress upon the judge his consideration for his wife, whom he allowed to wear her stockings and blouse even though financially it was "à mon détriment" ("Une Vente", p. 108).

Paul Vernois cannot praise too highly the literary qualities of the patois in Maupassant's peasant tales:

> Ainsi le patois révèle, cisèle, découpe le personnage. Il en accentue le relief, restitue à l'individu sa hâblerie triomphante ou sa bredouillante naiveté. Il conduit le texte rustique à son triomphe bouffon ou à sa pitoyable issue. Il est le nerf et le ressort de la nouvelle, souvent aussi son coup de fouet final.72

It is interesting to note however a development in the author's use of the Norman accent in his work. At first he was content to let the patois accompany one single idea that was to stand in relief. Hauchecome stammers out "une 'tite ficelle" and Rose clamours "J'ai un éfant, moi". From "Une Vente" (1884) onwards the accent enters freely into competition with normal French. Long dialogues reveal the peasants in direct confrontation, each trying to gain

an advantage over the other, e.g. "Une Vente", "Une Lapin", and "Le Petit Fût". They give an authentic touch to the atmosphere in Toine's inn and in the coach where Maît'Belhomme reveals his "illness". In these later stories the patois contributes in defining the nature of the peasant without any obvious intrusion from the author, and also in maintaining a comic tone. The language reinforces the reader's impression of the peasant as someone who is not too articulate. This is again proof of a remarkably sure aesthetic sense in Maupassant.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II

[1]Maupassant, "Les Bécasses", Monsieur Parent, p. 208. Hereafter the stories quoted are by Maupassant unless otherwise stated. Once the story has been mentioned in the footnotes, it will be incorporated into the body of the text.

[2]"La Roche aux Guillemots", Contes du Jour et de la Nuit, p. 213.

[3]"Amour", Le Horla, p. 55.

[4]There are other stories which contain examples of sadistic treatment to animals. "Un Fou?" (Le Horla) describes the man who took pleasure in hypnotising a dog and seeing it stumble around devoid of all its faculties.

[5]The baron in "Un Coq Chanta" (Contes de la Bécasse) tires himself out so much in killing an animal to impress a woman, that he falls asleep at her side, unable to take advantage of his reward. He was suffering from "l'invincible sommeil des chasseurs exténués". ("Un Coq Chanta", p. 191)

[6]"Il n'avait eu, toute sa vie, qu'une inapaisable passion, la chasse", ("La Rouille", Mademoiselle Fifi, p. 45.)

[7]"L'Aveu", Contes du Jour et de la Nuit, p. 50.

[8]"Pierrot", Contes de la Bécasse, p. 47.

[9]"Le Lapin", La Main Gauche, p. 108.

[10]"il ne comprenait pas ces énervements de femme, les secousses de ces êtres vibrants affolés d'un rien,(Une Vie, p. 105.)

[11]Une Vie, p. 2.

[12] e.g. l'abbé Tolbiac in Une Vie.

[13] "Les Sabots", Contes de la Bécasse, p. 99.

[14] "Un Réveillon", Mademoiselle Fifi, p. 173.

[15] "Mademoiselle Fifi", p. 13.

[16] "Le Baptême", Miss Harriet.

[17] "Après", Oeuvres Posthumes, I, p. 294.

[18] "Clair de Lune", p. 8.

[19] "Moiron", Clair de Lune.

[20] "Le Marquis de Fumerol", Le Horla, p. 100.

[21] "Le Père Amable", La Petite Roque, p. 224.

[22] "Le Saut du Berger", Oeuvres Posthumes, I, concentrates into one story, the role of l'abbé Tolbiac in Une Vie.

[23] "Le Diable", Le Horla, p. 128.

[24] On the coach journey from Criquetot to Le Havre, the peasants in "La Bête à Maît'Belhomme (Monsieur Parent), remain silent out of respect for the priest, leaving him to start the conversation.

[25] "Le Vagabond", Le Horla, p. 228.

[26] "Le Gueux", Contes du Jour et de la Nuit, p. 176.

[27] "Tribunaux Rustiques", Monsieur Parent.

[28] "Une Vente", Le Rosier de Madame Husson.

[29] Dumesnil, Guy de Maupassant, p. 38.

[30]The authority that Rosalie assumes is similar to that of Céleste in "Le Petit" (Contes du Jour et de la Nuit), who "avec une assurance et un air d'autorité" (p. 204), finally protests about the clerk's manner of spoiling the boy, forces the latter to eat soup instead of cakes, and in a violent argument with her master, tells him that he is not the real father of the child.

[31]"Histoire d'une Fille de Ferme", La Maison Tellier, p. 56. The abbreviation "FdeF" will be used to refer to subsequent quotations from this conte.

[32]"Clochette", Le Horla, p. 81.

[33]"Histoire Vraie", Contes du Jour et de la Nuit, p. 240.

[34]"La Rempailleuse", Contes de la Bécasse, p. 114.

[35]"Rosalie Prudent", La Petite Roque, p. 148.

[36]"La Mère aux Monstres", Toine, p. 247.

[37]"La Mère Sauvage", Miss Harriet, p. 304.

[38]"Le Vieux", Contes du Jour et de la Nuit, p. 92.

[39]In the same way, la mère Magloire in "Le Petit Fût" secures the best arrangement for herself when consenting to sell her house.

[40]"Une Vendetta" (Contes du Jour et de la Nuit) contains a similar act of violence, although the cause is justified in this story. A Corsican mother cannot sleep at night, being absorbed in the thought of avenging the treacherous death of her son. She experiences a sensation of ecstatic fervour at the "idée de sauvage, vindicatif et féroce" (p. 141) of training her dog to kill the murderer. She accomplishes her plans and satisfies her animalistic tendancies to the point that "Elle dormit bien, cette nuit-là". (p. 145).

[41]Maupassant's usual description of the Prussians is much less flattering. In "Mademoiselle Fifi" the Prussian officers are brutal, ugly, violent and offensive.

[42]In "Deux Amis" (Mademoiselle Fifi) and "La Folle" (Contes de la Bécasse), the Prussians kill innocent French citizens and simply leave them to die.

[43]"Le père Milon", Oeuvres Posthumes I, p. 5.

[44]Dumesnil, Guy de Maupassant, p. 35.

[45]This characteristic is not restricted solely to the Norman peasant. In "En Mer" (Contes de la Bécasse) Javel, the owner of a fishing trawler prefers that his brother should lose an arm rather than sacrifice the day's fishing load.

[46]"Saint-Antoine", Contes de la Bécasse, p. 217.

[47]"Coco", Contes du Jour et de la Nuit, p. 252.

[48]A comparison can be made here with the two peasants in "L'Ane" who buy a horse from an old lady only to play cruel games with it for their own amusement.

[49]"L'Aveugle", Oeuvres Posthumes, I, p. 20.

[50]"Les Bécasses", Monsieur Parent, p. 211.

[51]"Le Diable", Le Horla, p. 121.

[52]"La Ficelle", Miss Harriet, p. 217.

[53]"Le père Amable", La Petite Roque, p. 228.

[54]"Toine", p. 5.

[55]"La Confession de Théodule Sabot", Toine, pp. 258-9.

[56]"La Bête à Maît'Belhomme", Monsieur Parent, p. 77.

[57]"Le Crime au Père Boniface", Contes du Jour et de la Nuit, pp. 6, 7.

[58]In "Le Père Amable" Céleste has no scruples in admitting she is not a virgin, and claims that every woman has done the same:

> J'ai fauté! J'suis-ti la seule? Ma mé aussi avait fauté, avant mé, et pi la tienne itou. Oui ça qui n'a point fauté dans le pays?

In a humorous outburst she even admits to enjoying the experiences:

> J'ai fauté avec Victor, vu qu'i m'a prise comme j'dormais, et pi j'ai r'fauté que j n'dormais point. ("Le Père Amable", p. 224)

Nevertheless, the priest can still describe her as "eune bonne fille, et pi vaillante et pi d'épargne" ("Le Père Amable", p. 228).

[59]"La Martine", Le Rosier de Madame Husson, p. 129.

[60]"Mademoiselle Cocotte", Clair de Lune, p. 131.

[61]"Boitelle", La Main Gauche, p. 78.

[62]Bel-Ami, Livre de Poche, Albin Michel, p. 252.

[63]"Le Voyage du Horla", Le Horla, p. 268.

[64]These examples are quoted by Georges Dubosc in Trois Normands (Rouen: n.d.), p. 87.

[65]Butler, A.S.G., Les Parlers Dialectaux et Populaires dans l'oeuvre de Guy de Maupassant (Paris: 1962).

[66]"Le Petit Fût", Les Soeurs Rondoli, p. 81.

[67]"La Bête â Maît'Belhomme", Monsieur Parent, p. 84. It is interesting to note that music hall comedians still use this sort of structure in a dialogue to obtain comic effects in their "patter" on stage.

[68]"Le Retour", Yvette, p. 161.

[69]Dumesnil, Guy de Maupassant, p. 48.

[70]"Le Petit Fût", Les Soeurs Rondoli, p.82

[71]"Une Vente", Le Rosier de Madame Husson, pp. 102-4.

[72]Vernois, Paul, "Maupassant, auteur rustique", Travaux de Linguistique et de littérature", (1964).

CHAPTER III

THE DECOR AND ITS LITERARY VALUE

Given the limited length and scope of a Maupassant short story it is necessary that each element has a vital rôle to play, especially the description of the setting. In the contes paysans, the background is treated a lot more comprehensively than in other sections of his work, since he was particularly observant of the Normandy countryside and of the small details that caught his attention. The descriptions of certain social events, or of the countryside, the farmyard, the animals, the crops and the weather, provide an interesting background in themselves. At the same time Maupassant usually invests the details with some functional significance which improves the whole effect of the story.

As a Naturalist writer, Maupassant arrived at presenting faithfully a slice of life seen as if in a photograph with no extra touches by the author. Ideally the subject matter and the background should be in the nature of a documentation, rather than a personal invention, witnessed by the writer himself. Many aspects of the Normandy countryside appear in the stories, all easily recognisable:plains of the pays de Caux, the old

châteaux, and the little villages dominated by the church spire. The Naturalist tenets held that the writer should not add his own comments or opinions. Maupassant skilfully exploits the background therefore in order to establish his own point of view in an indiscreet manner. To achieve this aim, he made use of carefully chosen details that establish a certain tone to the story. His powerful, selective observations, inspired by Flaubert's tuition, were reflected in the quality of phrases and scenes.[1] Each detail has a role to play, and contributes to the whole effect of the story. As Beuchat says: "ses oeuvres brillent par la précision, la concision de l'art".[2]

The Naturalists placed a great deal of emphasis on the décor because of their belief in man determined by his milieu. Man was determined logically and scientifically, not from the inside as the Classicists imagined, but from the outside, from the influence of natural phenomena on the senses. This theory was elaborated upon by Zola in Le Roman Expérimental:

> L'homme ne peut être separé de son milieu, qu'il est complété par ses vêtements, par sa maison, par sa ville et sa province; et dès lors, nous ne noterons pas un seul phénomène de son cerveau ou de son coeur sans chercher les causes on les contre-coups dans le milieu.

The milieu was considered capable of conditioning and modifying to a substantial degree a person's character. In the realist and naturalist works of the time, the

authors devoted a large amount of space therefore to the general social atmosphere of the time, as well as to the actual physical environment surrounding a character. In Maupassant's short stories the background is carefully chosen and described. Sometimes the milieu seems to have a considerable determining effect on a character, while at times it simply serves to establish the mood appropriate to the story by means of either reinforcement or contrast. Very rarely does Maupassant indulge in descriptions for their own sake.[3]

The interdependence of background and subject matter is no more evident than in "La Mère Sauvage". Maupassant is concerned at first in imposing an appropriate impression of inevitability and urgency. To do this, he uses the device of a second narrator and situates the story in the past. The reader knows that something important is about to happen. The initial description of the décor reinforces this impression. The narrator is completely overwhelmed by all the nostalgic charms of nature. The extremely sensitive reaction prefigures the mother's behaviour in killing the four boys, since she is as overcome by her maternal frustrations as the narrator was by the sensuous charm of nature. The individual's will has been depicted already as subject to overpowering influences. Similarly, the narrator experiences "un désir

inapaisé, inoubliable, la sensation du bonheur coudoyé" ("La Mère Sauvage", p. 302), when he remembers the picturesque spots he used to frequent. These are similar feelings to those that the mother experiences once her son is killed. She can never forget her desire for revenge, and until she takes decisive action, her happiness alongside the Prussian soldiers is never complete, but just "coudoyé".

The opening descriptions reflect the contrast between destruction and beauty, which the story itself illustrates. The narrator evokes the Virelogne countryside with its little woods, streams, tall grass and streams. This "bonheur divin", the innocence, beauty and love of nature contrasts with the brutality that comes into human nature with the heartlessness and cruelty of war. At the same time Maupassant uses this description to direct our sympathies towards la mère Sauvage, for the details help to blot out the unpleasant fact of her husband shot for poaching and her son following in his footsteps, "un féroce destructeur de gibier" ("La Mère Sauvage, p. 303). Maupassant wants to show the brutalising effect of war rather than the callousness of the Norman peasant, so directs our sympathies towards the peasant.

The cottage has an important role in the story. Once the epitome of prettiness with its vines and hens, it

now represents destruction: "une maison morte, avec son squelette debout, délabré, sinistre" ("La Mère Sauvage", p. 302). Its present condition prefigures the nature of the subsequent events. The narrator adds that he can never imagine how anything dead could be where he remembered only life before. Maupassant is using the detail of the cottage to suggest that the happiness of people is only transitory, that misfortunes can easily happen, and that consequently humans are capable of extremes in their behaviour: the capacity for love and for hatred are not at all mutually exclusive.

Similarly, at the beginning blood symbolises life, as the narrator refers to the "sang" that the streams carry to the land. Later in the story the animals' blood reminds the woman of her son's death and incites her to acts of cruelty and vengeance. This constant contrast between beauty and destruction, sensuousness and ruin, life and death is a reflection of the development of the story, where the homely farmyard scene ends in the systematic burning of the four young Prussian boys.

The most symbolic farmyard scene is in "Histoire d'une Fille de Ferme". All the introductory details combine to suggests Rose's predisposition towards love and her general feeling of well-being. The midday sun, the heavy heat, the different farm odours and the heavy tick of

the house clock had the effect of inspiring her natural abandonment to instincts and nature. Maupassant describes the way she is dominated by the environment.

> caressée par l'ardente lumière, elle sentit une douceur qui lui pénétrait au coeur, un bien-être coulant dans ses membres. ("Histoire d'Une Fille de Ferme", p. 56)

The idea of the cock standing superb surrounded by hens, the young foal galoping wildly away, and the lush description of the countryside inspired a more energetic disposition in her, and indicates the blossoming of her hopes, as she and Jacques agree to marry. The whole excitement of their romance is reflected in the powerful splendour of the fields:

> L'herbe haute, où des pissenlits jaunes éclataient comme des lumières, était d'un vert puissant, d'un vert tout neuf de printemps. L'ombre des pommiers se ramassait en rond . . . . ("Histoire d'Une Fille de Ferme", p. 58)

The description serves various purposes. We sense that the countryside induces in Rose its own langour and expectancy, while its general prosperity prefigures her future happiness. The peacefulness of the opening description also contrasts quite strikingly with the final misery and disappointments of the young farm girl.

In the contes paysans Maupassant often compares his characters to the animals that surround them. This technique serves two purposes. It provides an amusing

picture of the peasants clucking like hens and dashing around like busy ants as spring arrives, to use two of Maupassant's examples. Sometimes he goes one step further and uses the device of symbolism to give depth to the story and to connect the background details with the main developments.[4] In an article entitled "Pattern and Symbol in the Works of Maupassant"[5] G. Hainsworth points out the symbolism in "Histoire d'Une Fille de Ferme". The hen, the cock and the galloping stray foal symbolise to him the young girl, her passionate lover, and her bastard child respectively. Certainly the descriptions of the animals and of Jacques' behaviour substantiate this point of view. The hens were simply wallowing in the leisurely atmosphere, as Rose was doing before having to thwart Jacque's sexual advances. At the same time the cock stood superb calling to a hen, and then crowing out its triumph. Rose watched this without really thinking, totally unaware that the situation reflected her own. Maupassant means to suggest however that the milieu has nevertheless a subconscious influence on the person.

Maupassant himself was certainly under no doubt about the effect that certain environments could produce on people. He was acquainted with the sensations of walking at dawn across the fields or by the side of the sea. These experiences incite all the senses when "elle

(l'ivresse) entre en vous par les yeux avec la lumière, par la narine avec l'air léger, par la peau avec les souffles du vent".[6] He was very much aware of the weakness of the individual's will when confronted also by the hallucinatory effect of the Orient:

> Il vous prend, ce pays, vous captive, vous pénètre jusqu'au coeur . . .il entre en vous par l'oeil, par la peau, et il vous tient par un invisible fil.7

Similarly, a woman tells her sister in "Clair de Lune" how she came to be unfaithful one night when the moon was full, the air and the mountains combining to inspire in her an insatiable need for love. Maupassant understands how certain unusual behaviour is easily explicable in the light of the milieu:

> On était bien décidé à ne jamais prendre femme; et puis, au printemps on part pour la campagne, il fait chaud; l'été se présente bien, l'herbe est fleurie; on rencontre une jeune fille, v'là! C'est fait. On revient marié.8

In a number of peasant stories the particular décor is meant to influence the behaviour of the characters in a positive manner. In "A Vendre" the author invests his native province, Normandy, with an ability to condition the reaction of a character. In this story the narrator remembers being captivated by the whole environment as he walked along the coast. The beautiful spring morning, like those which "vous rajeunissent de vingt ans, vous refont des espérances et vous redonnent des rêves

d'adolescents", and the perfect harmony of the waves and the fields of corn combine to convince him that he will one day meet the girl in the photograph. Maupassant skilfully describes the perfect setting. Everything was still: "les blés ne remuaient point du tout, et les vagues remuaient à peine". In odours as well as in movements, land and sea were as one: "on sentait l'odeur douce des champs mûrs et l'odeur marine du varech". The picture is completed by the procession of birds in the sky mirroring the string of boats sailing gently down the coast. The author does not later seek to rationalise the hero's behaviour. The introductory description has presented to the reader too an impression of exoticism that carries the story along. As Maupassant himself declared: "Les faits et les personnages seuls doivent parler. Et le romancier n'a pas à conclure, cela appartient au lecteur".

In another country setting, a mayor explains his behaviour in killing a young girl by referring to the particular atmosphere on that day. The heavy air of the plain oppressed him more than ever that day: everything was quiet, all the animals were silent, there was no breeze at all. He suddenly felt an overwhelming desire for a secure and lasting relationship with a woman. Both his body and mind were captured by "une force irrésistible, un emportement bestial qui soulevait toute sa chair, affolait

son âme".[9] The reader feels a great deal of bitterness towards the murderer of the small innocent girl, but when he knows the circumstances, his hostility is moderated, which is what Maupassant doubtless intended.

Perhaps the best example in Maupassant's work of the determining effect of the environment on a character is in "Un Bandit Corse". The description of the Corsican countryside illustrates perfectly the success of the author's technique. In evoking the wildness of the countryside, Maupassant is suggesting how primitive its inhabitants are. At the same time he is indicating the nature of forces that surround Saint-Lucie and that are expressed in terms of the countryside. In this way he prepares us for Saint-Lucie's violence and cruelty, once his character has been modified by his environment. The hero is a naturally timid man with no urge to avenge his father's murder by vendetta. Finally however the environment produces the desired effect, without Saint-Lucie understanding what is happening and without him being able to resist: "Je ne sais pas ce que j'ai eu . . .j'ai bien senti qu'il le fallait; que malgré tout je ne pourrais pas résister".[10] He becomes the most terrible bandit of his day, committing countless acts of vengeance on the enemy's family. The psychological plausibility of the story depends, as do a great deal of Maupassant's plots, on

our understanding the role of the environment. He has described at length the barren, solitary, savage and vast countryside whose stark impersonality prefigures the behaviour of the hero:

> Les sapins démesurés . . .la sauvage vallée, vieux arbres difformes, rochers nus . . .une solitude de pierre . . .pas une herbe, pas une plante, du granit, rien que du granit, un désert de granit chauffé par un furieux soleil . . .cette vallée brûlante, aride, sauvage, impuissante à féconder ces rocs ("Un Bandit Corse", pp. 49-50)

By means of such impressionistic details as "une solitude de pierre" and "cette vallée impuissante", and also by the repetition of "du granit" and "pas une", the author has evoked the wild savagery of the countryside in which his hero lives and made us aware of the forces at work. He does not need therefore to explain or comment on Saint-Lucie's behaviour, but can remain impersonal and detached from his subject as a Naturalist writer is supposed to be.

Sometimes the role of the décor is not as vital as in these stories just mentioned. The background does not determine the behaviour of a character, but rather it establishes a mood that is necessary to the story and that introduces the nature of the plot. An excellent example of this technique is provided in Une Vie. The fairy-tale landscape of the Corsican countryside reflects Jeanne's expectations of an ideal honeymoon. When she went back to Normandy, her hopes had not been fulfilled; Julien had

been revealed as a stingy, weak, insensitive person. The Norman countryside had changed enormously since the previous May when Jeanne had seen it in all its blossom:

> La campagne semblait si triste qu'elle sentait en son coeur une pesanteur de mélancholie. (Une Vie, p. 117)

Instead of the green lawns, the flowers and the strong perfumed aromas, there were only the bare trees, the dead leaves and the frail branches. Even the birds, chirping weakly, looked sad as they looked for a shelter from the cold.

At the beginning of "Le Baptême" the description of the immediate environment suggests a regeneration, an optimistic future and a summer that the new born child himself symbolises. The farmyard is bathed in the clear light of the May sun, not in the heavy heat of summer that overwhelms Rose in "Histoire d'Une Fille de Ferme". The time of year is May, the traditional month of re-birth. The bright colours and sweet odours conjure up an ideal picture:

> les pommiers épanouis, blancs, roses et parfumés . . .un toit de fleurs . . .une neige de pétales menus . . .les pissenlits brillaient comme des flammes, où les coquelicots semblaient des gouttes de sang. ("Le Baptême", p. 245)

The use of images such as "une neige de" and "un toit de" suggest the fullness of the ideal background. The picture is completed by two details that take the eye up from the

land towards the radiantly blue expanse of sky. These are the flight of swallows and the church steeple, a permanent reminder to the peasants of their religious obligations. There is also a sow sleeping and resting her "ventre énorme, les mamelles gonflées", other symbols of re-birth. She has a right to be resting, secure in the knowledge that all her piglets are around her, and that the family is being perpetuated. This idea is as equally important to the peasant family, hence the ceremony of this special day.

In a very different kind of story, "Les Conseils d'Une Grand'mère", the background still serves the purpose of harmonizing with the subject matter. Still situated in Normandy, the décor is a Norman château, surrounded by woods and ponds containing marble statues of sea nymphs. Inside the walls are covered with pictures of shepherds and shepherdesses, beautiful ladies and galant noblemen. The description provides the appropriate setting for the introduction of the old woman implanted in her Louis XIV style armchair reminiscing about her generation's inclinations towards sublime loves. The whole background symbolises the past, as the author explicitly says:

> tout semble parler encore des coutumes anciennes, des moeurs d'autrefois, des galanteries passées et des élégances légères.

In "Aux Champs" Maupassant uses the décor of a

muddy swamp to establish moods of mystery, sinisterness and even resurrection, that are appropriate throughout the story. At first the landscape presents a troubling image of death, violence, and destruction. The beautiful hunting grounds with magnificent trees, rare game, eagles and lush grass are simply the scene of destruction once the hunters smell blood. The swamp itself is covered in weeds where boats pass silently through the stagnant water. The swamp is a world in itself, with its own voices and life, its deep silences, calm nights, strange mists and the imperceptible lapping of water. The darkness and coldness reinforce the impression of a cold, silent world where the forces of destruction are at work. The author piles up words to stress the inhospitality of the situation; the extreme cold "déchire . . .coupe . . .pique . . .tord . . .et brûle", while the frozen air is "figé, immobile; il mord, traverse, dessèche, tue les arbres, les plantes, les insectes, les petits oiseaux" ("Aux Champs", p. 58). The choice of vocabulary to describe the moon and the light evoke a scene full of lifelessness. The moon is "toute pâle, défaillante, faible, paralysée" while the light is "sèche et triste, mourante et blafarde" ("Aux Champs", p. 58). The purpose of this pessimistic description is to create the mood for the brutal killing of the bird that was faithfully hovering over its female

companion. The author is referring basically to the dark, mysterious forces that work in man as well as in nature, causing inevitable callous manifestations of destruction. Given the existence of these forces, the succession of events in the story is only to be expected.

At the same time however, there is a hint of resurrection, a promise of new life in the processes of transformation. Both the swamp and the time of day establish this mood. The swamp, although containing "un secret inconnaissable et dangereux" also contains "le mystère même de la création", for was it not in these very conditions - muddy, stagnant water, swampy land, hot sun - that the first sign of life appeared? As day dawns there is also a transformation from the cold to an awakening of nature as the animals are spotted and the first noises identified. This initial awakening creates a deep impression on the narrator: "ce cri fuyant emporté par les plumes d'une bête est un soupir de l'âme du monde" ("Aux Champs", p. 60). The gradual awakening of the forest and of the inner life of the swamp indicate the final note of optimism to arise from the story: the act of fidelity on the part of the male bird and the disgust that the narrator feels in witnessing the cruelty of the hunters. Maupassant therefore achieves a balance in the story and in the background, both of which demonstrate

the unity and rhythm in nature, and the universal forces of destruction and resurgence.

Occasionally the peasant tale achieves its dramatic effect partly because of a stark and sudden contrast between the initial impression created and the final outcome of the story. This contrast was inspired in part by Maupassant's attitude to life. He was very much aware of the little dramas that work themselves out under the glittering surface that often masquerades as life. Happiness is so fragile and insecure in his opinion, and so he often portrays with an ironic grin the sudden reversals of fate, of which "La Parure" and "La Ficelle" are the best known. Maupassant's whole work bears testimony in fact to his personal disillusionment with life and to his belief in the underlying irony of life. Even optimistic openings are capable of ending in acts of violence and cruelty.

He expresses this point of view directly in "L'Aveugle". The narrator explains how the joys of the first sunshine of the year, the green countryside, blue skies and pretty white houses fill him with happiness and a desire to run, sing and frolic. Then he remembers the blind in their eternal darkness, who never experience these wild flights of fancy. The story of the cruel martyrdom of the blind man rejected by his community contrasts vividly with the joyful opening.

The introductory paragraphs of "Le Père Milon" evoke an impression of optimism, order and harmony. The sun is blazing down, the trees are covered with domes of red and white blossom, the smells from the flowers are combining with those from the stables, and the peasant family is eating its mid-day meal in silence. Soon however the mood of the story changes and the reader is suddenly confronted with the demented mind of le père Milon nonchantly killing as many Prussian soldiers as he can.

The description of the countryside in "Un Aveu" also acts as a framework for the sorrowful account of the young peasant girl. In this story the author displays his talents at evoking a very colourful portrait of the Normandy countryside. The time is mid-day, with the sun at its fiercest, revealing all the colours of the crops. The undulating fields stretch out into the distance; the barley is ripe, the oats green, the wheat yellow. Again Maupassant uses an image to give an impressive account:

> Ils étalent un grand manteau rayé, remuant,
> et doux sur le ventre nu de la terre.
> ("Un Aveu", p. 47)

The interminable line of cows and the "trèfle vaste comme un lac" suggest the vastness of the scene. The lushness of the countryside eventually comes to form a vivid contrast with the suffering and misfortune of Rose.

Similar countryside lulls Boniface into a false sense of security in "Le Crime au Père Boniface". The introductory picture is quite serene as the village postman delivers his letters, the farmer wipes his hand on the back of his trousers, the farm dog barks noisily, and the postman greets everyone with a smile. The fields are green and full of flowers while the postman is dwarfed by the long grass. Against this ordinary background Boniface's sudden apprehensions seem unrealistic and in fact comical. By means of these details the author establishes a ring of naivety around the postman, whose subsequent behaviour justifies this initial characterisation.

The description of the background helps to provide an artistic unity to many of Maupassant's stories and to the contes paysans in particular. It was the Normandy countryside which inspired his best tales and his best compositions, since he was very sensitive to its features. The background also serves the purpose of enabling the author to create a particular mood or reveal his own sympathies without directly intervening in the story. The conte consequently gains in dramatic effect, with the writer apparently absent from the scene and therefore unable to change the course of events. This impression is especially valid when the décor has a conditioning effect on a character, as in "Un Bandit Corse". The predominance of the

Normandy countryside in Maupassant's work serves also to establish a unity of action for all the peasant tales. The background helps us to situate and understand the character of the peasants and provides a solid basis in reality against which the author can relate his occasionally unrealistic stories.

* * *

In many contes paysans Maupassant often describes a particular social event as the background to the story. Marriages, christenings and market days are also important in themselves, for they illustrate certain characteristics of the peasant community as well as bringing a note of gaiety to the peasant tales. In "le Baptême" he describes in a comic tone the preparations and celebrations that surround a christening. In introducing the reader to various characters, the author is intent on stressing the exaggerations made by the women peasants. Both the men and the women make an incongruous impression in their attempt to heighten the sense of occasion by wearing special clothes. One peasant is described as "courbé et déformé, noueux comme un tronc de chêne, avec des poignets bossués et des jambes torses" ("Le Baptême", p. 246)

The women go to greater lengths to mark the importance of the day. Maupassant makes their entry quite dramatic, since for some time, their male counterparts have

been urging them to come out. The suspense turns into humour as they make their systematic appearance. The individual description also adds to the humour by giving the impression of a procession. Despite their withered and heavy look they try to assume a touch of elegance which only serves to reveal their lack of taste. The tall bonnets and red shawls are unfortunately "éclatants comme un incendie". This comic effect is reinforced by the idea of them heading off across the fields, leading the solemn procession ("cortège").

The author includes a humorous parody of the women and of the procession in general by describing the reaction of a group of ducks who, curious to know what all the disturbance is about, come over to the peasants and then simply proceed slowly to their pond, unimpressed by all the superficial glamour and excitement. Maupassant understands that it is only natural for the women peasants to want to enjoy this day, because such occasions are the only distractions available to them. In the role of social observer here, Maupassant adds that the men can always relax in the inns. Nevertheless, the serious attitude of the women is a source of amusement to him and to the reader, although not to other peasants, who, since Maupassant does not present any note to the contrary, no doubt consider gaudy dresses to be in good taste.

Such a rare event naturally assumes great importance in the eyes of the peasant community. The people react with curiosity; the youngsters climb onto hedges and fences, and young girls drop their milk pails to watch. When the procession is returning from church, the youngsters swell the ranks. The author describes their antics, and omits the church service. This is deliberate on the author's part; it is a reflection of the importance that the peasants attach to the peripheral matters of dressing up and of celebrating. The omission also adds something of literary value to the story since the priest's sentimental outburst is all the more unexpected, the child having received very little mention throughout.

The peasants consider the celebrations an essential part of the event and hasten their step with this thought in mind. The tale becomes very amusing as the author describes directly the coarse humour, the loud noises and the lack of modesty on the part of the women. The latter delight in swear words, in the sexual implications of various remarks and in the jibes made at the expense of the priest as he awkwardly holds the child: "donne-lui à téter, l'abbé".

Weddings possess even greater importance in the peasant world than christenings, although in "Farce Normande" much the same preparations and celebrations take place. As in "Le Baptême" the festivities take precedence over the

religious implications of the occasion, since the peasants are on their way back from church when we see them. Although there is no record of Maupassant ever attending a peasant wedding, he was well acquainted with the "moeurs normands" and portrays the peasants accurately, if at times taking a sly pleasure in the humorous picture that they present.

The author concludes the story with another important feature of peasant life, the farce or practical joke. The husband becomes a source of humour as his passion for hunting takes him away from his marriage bed and into the hands of some local peasants who make him spend the entire night in the woods. This farce is accepted as part of the way of life. The husband resignedly says: "Pour une farce, c'était une bonne farce. Ils m'ont pris dans un collet comme un lapin, les salauds!" The author, as a social observer again, informs us that: "voilà comment on s'amuse les jours de noce, au pays normand."[12]

The composition of "Farce Normande" may most successfully be examined within four categories, all of which play an important part in recreating the whole atmosphere. These sections are the dress of the peasant, the décor, the procession and the meal. The members of the procession are defined primarily by their headware, which betrays a class difference as well as a desire for

coquetterie. The richer peasants are now wearing "les hauts chapeaux de soie luisants", as opposed to their customary "casquettes". They are more intent now on affirming their respectability to their poorer neighbours. In the process they demonstrate a lack of social sensitivity, since the hats in fact produce an incongruous effect: "ces chapeaux semblaient dépaysés en ce lieu" ("Farce Normande", p. 88). Less affluent peasants would choose some old hats, no doubt to bring some eccentric note to the occasion. Even the most humble peasant seemed concerned with creating a good impression: "les plus humbles étaient couronnés de casquettes". The word "couronnés" suggests that the hats were new and worn with a special pride and that they felt awkward and conspicuous, since the humble peasant does not possess the necessary natural elegance.

The women's dress is equally unusual and indicative of their over-reaction to the occasion. They wore "châles" simply to impress. This dress seemed in fact superfluous in the boiling mid-day heat. Another notable feature was that every woman wore a "châle" and that they all wore it exactly the same way:

> toutes les femmes avaient des châles lâchés dans le dos, et dont elles tenaient les bouts sur leurs bras avec cérémonie. ("Farce Normande", p. 89).

This indicates a lack of initiative and imagination, qualities that are usually missing in animals also. The

author is establishing a connection therefore between the peasants and their background. The amount of animal illusions in the story reinforces this link. The affectation that the women peasants display is unintentional, but their effort to look the part is considered with wry complicity by the author. The loud gaudy colours, chosen for their spectacular effect rather than for their quality or harmony - "les châles rouges, bigarrés,flamboyants" - produce a striking effect to the observer. The author skilfully camouflages his own judgment, but notes the reaction of the hens: "leur éclat semblait étonner les poules noires" ("Farce Normande", p. 89). Their appearances must have been quite extraordinary for the animals to notice this show of affected elegance.

The reaction of the animals forms part of the general background, which Maupassant deliberately recreates in order to contrast its calm monotony and gentle colours with the exceptional atmosphere of the wedding day ceremonies. The animals, although surprised, remain in their usual positions, unperturbed by the occasion:

> les poules noires sur le fumier, les canards au bord de la mare, et les pigeons sur les toits de chaume. ("Farce Normande", p. 89)

Similarly the gentle green of the grass and trees contrasts with the violent, gaudy "pourpre ardente" of the women's dresses. The author gives the countryside human reactions

to stress the shock that this unpleasant contrast makes. Just as the animals are "étonnés", the countryside is referred to as "exaspéré". R. Dufeu is right in concluding that "les paysannes gauchement endimanchées jurent avec le cadre habituel de leur existence".[13]

The general background is also used to indicate the importance of the meal. The farm is described as waiting, the odour is thick, the building vast, and the smell comes from all sides. The reader feels that the house has been suitably prepared to enhance the huge celebration about to take place. The actual procession is well described by the author, who chooses the right detail in the right place to produce the desired effect. The ceremony of the occasion is suggested by the repetition of "puis": "les jeunes mariés venaient d'abord, puis les parents, puis les invités, puis les pauvres du pays" ("Farce Normande", p. 87). The size of the procession is indicated by the reference to the "suite des invités" winding its way "comme un serpent". By the time it had reached the farmyard it had spread out indiscriminately: "les premiers . . ., là-bas, il en entrait toujours". Gradually however the sense of ceremony is forgotten as "une grosse gaieté saisit les hommes". The transition is indicated by various details such as the traditional rifle shots, the youngsters clambering over ditches and the bridegroom

firing a shot at a servant. The author refers to the unrefined nature of the peasants by using a comparison taken from their immediate environment. The youngsters were swarming around the peasant "comme des mouches", while the groom bounded after the servant "en gambadant comme un poulain". Even on this special day the peasants remain firmly attached to their background, despite the attempt to be very refined.

The mood of the peasants changes as the celebrations draw near. The author builds up the atmosphere of the meal by describing their actions. The women feel awkward in their "habits de fête" and find it difficult to know what to do with their hands. They are most relieved to be able to take off their "ornaments". This indicates how unnatural it was for the women to dress up. The peasants' seriousness during the religious ceremony has been abandoned, but now "ils redevenaient graves en s'approchant du repas". The meal therefore assumes a serious importance in the eyes of the peasants.

Maupassant stresses the length of the celebrations by the juxtaposition of "deux heures" and "huit heures" and by the use of "encore" in the sentence: "on s'assist à deux heures. A huit heures on mangeait encore" ("Farce Normande", p. 90). The size of the meal is brought out by

reference to the large kitchen and the large glasses. During the meal the peasants are defined further. Their vulgar, hearty indulgence contrasts quite startlingly with the "artificial" solemnity of the afternoon. Their excessive festivities become a source of humour since the men are "pleins comme des barriques" and the women "gonflées du haut en bas" ("Farce Normande", p. 91). We see them in a truer light now, as they laugh uncontrollably at the crude comments. Their emergence at the end as fun-loving peasants makes the reader even more aware of their effort in dressing for the occasion in the first place.

The market day is another important social event in the rural community. In "La Ficelle" Maupassant provides us with a colourful picture of the scene and an interesting portrayal of the peasants themselves. The description of market day also provides an introduction for the story about Maître Hauchecorne. The characters are again defined according to the nature of their clothes, which indicate an uneasy elegance. The men are wearing their customary "blouse bleue" but it has a touch of elegance for this occasion, it is "brillante, comme vernie, ornée au col et aux poignets d'un petit dessin de fil blanc" ("La Ficelle", p. 215). The author discreetly refers to the note of simplicity that this dress gives to the peasants, since the light jacket "semblait un ballon

prêt à s'envoler" and entirely covered the peasant except for one head, two arms, and two feet! The women also present a comic impression with their heads "enveloppée d'un ligne blanc collé sur les cheveux". The humour directed at them is reinforced by the detail of the ducks and chickens whose necks were sticking out in all directions from the women's baskets, just like the heads of the peasants in their unfamiliar dress.

The author continues to relate the characters to their background. The peasants and the animals combine to form an indiscriminate mass, "une cohue mélangée d'humains et de bêtes", and the peasants' voices are described in terms more appropriate to animals "glapissantes, sauvages, criardes" ("La Ficelle", p. 216). The really distinct shouts of the exuberant peasants are likened to the long mooing of a cow, while the smell from the market mingles with that "particulier aux gens des champs" to produce an odour that was at once "humaine et bestiale" ("La Ficelle", p. 217). These references to the general harmony of the countryside indicate quite clearly the closeness of the peasant to his background, as his voice, odour, and dress find an equivalent reflection in the scenes around him. He will tend therefore to act in accordance with his immediate surroundings. Ther herd-like processions in "Farce Normande" and "Le Baptême" become understandable

in this light, especially since Maupassant was a firm believer in the influence of the environment on an individual.

Market day also shows certain important characteristics of the peasants. They are afraid of being cheated and so scrutinise not only the animals, but the sellers. They are always suspicious in case the seller is dishonest and the animal worthless. The women peasants are equally astute and remember all the alternative prices before finally committing themselves. In transactions they are taciturn, since it is the eye that has been trained during the work in the fields to help in judging the climate, the soil, and the animals. The author also stresses however the large quantities of food and drink available in the local inn afterwards. The huge fire, the delectable smell of cooking, and the yard full of coaches suggest the importance given to the activities after the business had been conducted.

The descriptions of these social events serve various purposes. Clearly, in the works of a careful writer such as Maupassant, they are of sociological interest, an accurate record of certain special occasions in the rural Norman villages. But this is not their chief function. In most cases Maupassant exploits the event in order to bring our attention to certain peasant features

which are best revealed on these very occasions, for instance their exaggerated comic reaction to special events, and their gross vulgarity and excitement during the celebrations. The events also possess a literary value by serving to introduce quite naturally the main story. We are already familiar with the priest in "Le Baptême", with the victim of the farce in "Farce Normande" and with Maître Hauchecorne in "La Ficelle", so that the main story can progress without further elaboration. The descriptions are made entertaining in themselves, since the author seems to delight in making fun of the peasants' incompetent attempt to impress. The social events have consequently an organic role in the contes paysans.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER III

[1]In this respect, Maupassant can fruitfully be compared to the realist painter, Monet, who is quoted by Maurice Catinat as saying: "Trois coups de pinceaux valent mieux que deux jours de travail du chevalet". (Les Bords de la Seine avec Renoir et Maupassant, Chatou: 1952, p. 79).

[2]Beuchat, Charles, Histoire du Naturalisme Français, Vol. II (Paris: 1949), p. 79.

[3]Even the view of Rouen from Canteleu, which Maupassant describes in "Un Normand", is connected to the story, although by tenuous means. After describing "un des horizons les plus magnifiques qui soient au monde" (Contes de la Bécasse, p. 143), referring to the church spires, gothic towers, the winding Seine and the adjacent woods and plains, Maupassant introduces a character who is equally extraordinary in his own way, le père Mathieu, "un des merveilles du monde".

[4]In Maupassant, the Short Stories, D. Sullivan indicates the symbolism in "La Reine Hortense". The heroine of the story is surrounded by animals that suggest the love and companionship that has been denied her all her life. The author stresses the "bataillon de poussins", "un peuple d'oiseaux", and "deux inséparables dans une autre cagette". Similarly the two cats reflect the spinster's own situation, since they were resting with their eyes closed as if dead.

[5]Hainsworth, G., "Pattern and Symbol in the Works of Maupassant", French Studies, V (January, 1951). Also lists briefly other examples of the symbolism that can be found in Maupassant's work. Two chimneys in a clouded valley represent the mental confusion of a woman hesitating between two lovers, ("Reveil"); the storm raging against the coast reflects the drunken fisherman beating his wife, ("L'Ivrogne"); the fog in Pierre et Jean represents the gropings and uncertainty of the hero, as well as reflecting the impure and distasteful world that he suddenly discovers.

[6]"A Vendre", Monsieur Parent, p. 95.

[7]L'Orient", Miss Harriet, p. 318.

[8]"Ma Femme", La Maison Tellier, p. 266.

[9]"La Petite Roque", p. 46.

[10]"Un Bandit Corse", Oeuvres Posthumes, I, p. 52.

[11]"Les Conseils d'Une Grand'mère", La Maison Tellier, p. 280é

[12]"Farce Normande", Contes de la Bécasse, p. 95.

[13]Dufeu, R., "Texte Commenté: Noce Normande", Humanités, Classes de Lettres, Sections Modernes (March, 1965), p. 22.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In order to understand the success that Maupassant's peasants have enjoyed with the reading public, it is useful to compare them with the peasants of other writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From the point of view of chronology and interpretation, Maupassant provides a basis from which we can observe the idealistic conceptions of Sand, the brutal creations of Zola and the poetic, almost mystical portraits of Giono, the most successful regionalist writer of the twentieth century. Maupassant, with his realist ambitions of painting "l'humble vérité", contrasts sharply with the social aims of Zola and with the efforts by Sand and Giono to glorify the noble savage.

One aspect of Maupassant's treatment of the Norman peasant is at least consistent with the pessimism that characterises the appearance of the peasants in literature and art towards the end of the nineteenth century. Inspired by the more sombre and realistic paintings of Millet and Courbet, writers tended to concentrate on the more brutal and ugly features of the peasant. Cladel portrays him as a drunkard and a brute, who is never at peace with his environment. In La Terre, Zola describes

every kind of debauchery, immorality and cruelty that the peasants commit in order to acquire land.

In Maupassant's world, as we have seen, there are also acts of tremendous cruelty, committed against helpless victims such as animals, the blind, the crippled, and the innocent youths of the Prussian army. The difference between Zola and Maupassant lies in the former's concept of man and in the sociological and psychological importance of his works. Although Maupassant's vision of man was pessimistic, it did not contain the same rigid physiological determinism that pervaded the works of Zola. Maupassant's peasant is not conditioned by the constant struggle against the social background, or against the weather, the land and the crops. We never see Maupassant's peasant working hard in the fields to earn enough money, nor do we actually witness obscene acts in the hay-stacks. It is rather against the cosmic forces that Maupassant's peasant struggles, against the unavoidable incidents in life that suddenly disturb the whole course of his life. Nothing, or nobody, in particular is responsible for Hauchecorne's death, or for la mère Sauvage's anguish. Similarly, we cannot explain rationally the cruelty of certain peasants in Maupassant's work. It is simply a part of their character to be indifferent to the suffering of others. The boy tortures

the donkey, the blind man is abandoned in the snow, but the author does not attempt to understand this behaviour by referring to the overwhelming physical or social environment, or to the predominantly physiological constitution of the character, or to the process of inherited characteristics. Maupassant's décors simply reflect for the main part the mood of the story, whereas Zola's, in keeping with his didactic purpose, assist in controling the psychological development. In brief, Maupassant's world is unchangeable; neither the peasant, nor the order of things, can be corrected.

The idea of social exploitation of the peasants, which forms an essential part of La Terre, is therefore almost completely absent from the contes. There are very few instances where a social superior exploits a peasant, and the conflict in any case never possesses the force of Zola's clashes. Julien, for example, makes the peasants grant him the use of their horse in Une Vie; the servant girl in "Un Aveu" is severely rebuked and mistreated; Rose in "Histoire d'Une Fille de Ferme" and Adèle in "Les Sabots" both have to endure their masters' unpleasant sexual advances. Even so the peasants never feel the same indignation of Zola's characters, and a lack of solidarity prevents any serious opposition from being formed.

Maupassant's portrayal of the peasants is even

further removed however from the idealistic portraits of George Sand and Alphonse Daudet. François, the hero of François Le Champi, brings to mind Rousseau's Emile in the way that he is brought up in total ignorance of the evils of the world, "sans connaître la moindre malice, sans avoir l'idée du mal, sans que sa bouche ait jamais répété un vilain mot et sans que ses oreilles l'aient compris".[1] We are far from the picture of Jacques stealing up on Rose and placing his hand over her breast. In the same way, the peasants of Lettres de Mon Moulin react in a very different manner than Maupassant's heroes. The Norman peasant in the contes would never sentimentally evoke the superiority of the countryside over the town as does the hero of "Installation". He would not openly lament his fate, as the hero of "L'Arlésienne" does. The peasant heroes of the war stories, both in Daudet and Maupassant, are martyrs without a cause. Daudet's characters are motivated by ideals of pure chauvinism, whereas la mère Sauvage and le père Milon act from motives of brutal revenge. Maupassant does not enter as much into his peasants to present them in such a sentimental way, although in stories about the distress of peasant girls, he does include a sentimental note.

It is more interesting perhaps to compare Maupassant's peasant stories with those of Flaubert,

Tolstoy and Renard, who were all writing at approximately the same time. Flaubert also situated his scenes in Normandy, although both Félicité in Un Coeur Simple and le père Rouault bear curiously little resemblance to Maupassant's peasants. Félicité resembles Rosalie of Une Vie in her humble dedicated service to Madame Aubain, and in her efficiency. But she is much less realistic and earthy, and actually reminds one of Jeanne in her capacity for illusions and in her naive, selfless identification with all her close friends. Similarly, le père Rouault possesses a number of features that are denied the peasant in Maupassant's work. In welcoming Charles, he displays none of the typical Norman's suspicions towards strangers. Even more striking is the fact that he possesses a deep inner life, philosophically expounding to Charles his stoical disposition, and nostalgically reflecting on his own past as he watches Emma's carriage disappear through the gates for the last time.

Of Maupassant's contemporaries, Jules Renard and Tolstoy come closest to Maupassant's portrayal of the peasant. The young, naive, ignorant, boastful hero of Poil de Carotte brings to mind the more comical of Maupassant's characters: Maît'Belhomme, Toine, and the two peasants in "Une Vente" who argue over the value of the woman. Among Tolstoy's peasants, as portrayed in

The Power of Darkness, we also find a stupid young girl, but the main impression is one of sinisterness as scheming, adulterous and drunken peasants pursue their selfish ways.

Although Maupassant's conception and portrayal of the peasant has certain connections with works by other writers of roughly the same era, no traces of his influence can be found in the other great regionalist writer, Jean Giono, who was to succeed Maupassant in a very different vein. The characters in Regain, especially Le Panturle, are more representative of certain mystical forces than identifiable human figures. The barren, windswept plateau reflects in poetic terms the utter isolation of primitive man who is gradually brought back into civilisation as the land produces a successful crop. The optimistic significance of the couple producing a baby destined to perpetuate rural happiness untouched by the corruptions of society, contrasts with Maupassant's basically pessimistic conception of life. Despite some solidly realistic scenes from the country fair at Banon, which remind us of the "Comices Agricoles" and of the market day in "La Ficelle", the whole treatment of the peasants is devoid of the earthy humour and selfish instincts of Maupassant's country folk.

* * *

In analysing the peasant contes, one becomes

aware of certain recurring themes and ideas. In fact these stories occupy a central position in Maupassant's work partly because they do illustrate the author's vision of the world and indicate the direction in which his basic sympathies lie. His visionwas one of despair, nurtured by a variety of sources. He had been exposed at an early age to the bleak tenets of Naturalism, to the melancholy of Flaubert and his cousin Alfred de Poittevin, and to the unsuccessful marriage of his parents. From 1883 he began to read Schopenhauer and to be impressed by the philosopher's nihilistic interpretation of the world. These experiences help to explain Maupassant's pessimistic outlook. In his opinion, man was simply the victim of powerful forces beyond his control. Unfavourable circumstances or a sudden twist of fate could alter one's life, as the irony of "La Ficelle" indicates. On many occasions man is also reduced to the instinctive responses of animals satisfying their brutal appetites, as the stories of peasant cruelty demonstrate. Above all, the peasants fit into Maupassant's vision of the world quite naturally since their basically more bestial behaviour helps the author to illustrate his belief that the more natural and physical aspects of life are its controlling forces.

In Maupassant's peasant stories therefore the world is an unhappy place where cruelty abounds. We have seen how a horse is tortured because the stable boy refuses

to "waste" food and time on an old, useless animal. A dog is abandonned in a pit, and children are sold or deliberately deformed by their own mothers. The dying and the dead are treated with complete indifference. A young baby is left to die in the snow; the relatives of a dying man arrange the funeral even before he has died; and a family eats its Christmas meal over the dead body of a close relative. The cruel are not punished for their deeds, because Maupassant is simply copying reality and showing us the natural character of the peasant. The peasant has his own values which are real to him although they might surprise the modern reader. Basically there is nothing much that can be done to change the nature of these characters.

In Maupassant's peasant world suffering is inevitable, for the innocent as well as for the guilty. An unemployed man desperately looking for work has to tolerate the jibes of the peasants and is finally driven to stealing and rape; a simple peasant is awakened for the first time to the joys of love only to see the whole affair doomed; a mother has her husband and son killed in war; and a young tender girl is successively abandonned by her lover and exploited by her master. Maupassant also arouses our sympathy for the characters who do possess unpleasant characteristics but who find it impossible to

change them. The author realises that their whole environment and upbringing has been responsible for inculcating them with their values. Maître Hauchecorne and le père Amable are therefore compelled by forces outside their control to think always of economy. Consequently Hauchecorne picks up the piece of string and Amable opposes his son's wedding. They eventually suffer because other people do not fully understand their overwhelming preoccupations, but Hauchecorne's frustration and Amable's loneliness do finally endear the reader to the two peasants and compensate for the derision levelled at them by the other peasants. Even behind the noisy joviality and coarse remarks there lies a certain disquiet. The humorous conversations after market day only serve to accentuate Hauchecorne's misery; as do the celebrations in "Le Baptême" when we are left with the picture of the sentimental priest weeping at the side of the baby. Suffering is never far below the surface.

The poet Norbert de Varenne explains to Bel-Ami that the hopes of youth soon turn to bitter disappointments, that death is present everywhere and that solitude is a basic condition of man. Joys are short-lived and are usually based on the illusion that love can eradicate the basic isolation of every individual. Maupassant's peasant tales substantiate these beliefs and illustrate the failure

of spiritual values. Clochette and La Martine spend their life remembering the men who did not return their affection; Jacques has no scruples about leaving Rose pregnant in "Histoire d'Une Fille de Ferme", and Rosalie Prudent is denied the joys of maternal love, so despondent is she at giving birth to two children for whom she could not possibly provide. The heroine of Une Vie finally realises that:

> deux personnes ne se pénètrent jamais jusqu'à l'âme, jusqu'au fond des pensées, qu'elles marchent côte à côte, enlacées parfois, mais non mêlées, et que l'être moral de chacun de nous reste éternellement seul par la vie. (Une Vie, p. 100)

The hero of Pierre et Jean finds himself at the end in the lonely position of ship's doctor, a symbol of man's utter isolation and despair.

Like Pierre, disillusioned by the misbehaviour of his mother, Maupassant's peasants find themselves alone when they have to face reality. Although never directly aware of their solitude, they are usually presented without any family or any solidarity with others who might be able to lend them support. Their despair, unlike that of Zola's characters, is quite personal and thereby easy to remove by means of self-sacrifice. La mère Sauvage sees revenge as the only solution, although she knows what the consequences of her act will be; the mayor who kills la petite Roque would find it difficult to communicate his

frustration and despair; and no one is sympathetic to the futile efforts of Hauchecorne to exonerate himself. Similarly the only solution that the young soldier in "Petit Soldat" sees, once his beautiful friendship has been destroyed, is to jump off the same bridge that used to remind both of them of their home province. Suicide is an obvious answer to the frustrations of fighting constantly against the hostile cosmic forces that reduce the individual's dignity.

Are there no positive values then in the contes paysans? They are very rare, but they occasionally do appear before the inevitable suffering takes over. The Normandy countryside sometimes provides an idyllic background for some episodes of love and affection. The maternal love of la mère Sauvage for her child, and of Rose for her baby are matched by the friendship of the two soldiers and by the affection bestowed by the young boy on the dog, Mademoiselle Cocotte. Genuine love is felt in his own way by Boitelle for his negress, but there are no examples in the peasant stories of a relationship blossoming and maturing. Nevertheless, the innocent loves described in these stories offer a welcome respite from the predominant mood of misfortune, cruelty and suffering. Also indicative of a certain optimism are the various group activities such as weddings, christenings, market and

hunting days, which are eagerly awaited by the peasants as much for the huge festivities afterwards as for the events themselves. In Maupassant's portrayal of the rural world of Normandy, the priesthood receives on the whole a favourable treatment, as the priests in "Le Baptême" and Une Vie demonstrate. They accept the peasants' misgivings as simply a part of the rural folk's way of life that cannot be altered.

Perhaps the most charming aspect of the contes paysans is the many descriptions of the Norman countryside and the farmyard scenes. In a number of stories Maupassant describes the undulating fields full of deep colours stretching out into the distance under the burning mid-day sun, and dotted with animals gently grazing:

> La vie radieuse éclôt sous cette averse de feu; la terre est verte à perte de vue. Jusqu'aux bords de l'horizon, le ciel est bleu. Les fermes normandes semblent de petits bois. De près, on croit voir un jardin géant, car tous les antiques pommiers sont en fleurs. Les vieux trônes noirs, crochus, tortus, alignés par la cour, étalent sous le ciel leurs dômes éclatants blancs et roses. ("Le Père Milon", p. 1).3

In "Le Fermier" the author evokes the peacefulness and the general well-being of the situation as the farm prepares for meal time:

> La cuisine enfumée était haute et vaste. Les cuivres et les faïences brillaient, éclairés par les reflets de l'âtre. Un chat dormait sur une chaise; un chien dormait sous la table. On sentait là dedans, le lait, la pomme, la fumée, et cette odeur innommable des vieilles maisons paysannes, odeur du sol, des murs, des meubles,

> odeur des vieilles soupes répandues, odeur des bêtes et des gens mêlés, des choses et des êtres, odeur du temps, du temps passé. ("Le Fermier", p. 267)

The sense of rest, of traditions and of harmony between animals and people constitute the charm of this setting and indicate that Maupassant was particularly sensitive to such scenes. In "Le Bonheur" he goes so far as to refer to the superiority of the country life over the town life. A Parisian society woman had married a peasant and chosen to live in Corsica forsaking all her luxuries for straw chairs and mattresses:

> Je pensais à cette étrange et simple aventure, à ce bonheur si complet, fait de si peu. (Le Bonheur", p. 87).

Although Maupassant gives the peasants many unfavourable features, he is even more critical of the bourgeoisie. He attacks those who seek self-advancement in any form. Those who appear better than they actually are run the risk of regretting their efforts, as the famous story, "La Parure", illustrates. Conceited notions about their own skill can easily result in their exposing themselves to ridicule, as demonstrated by "A Cheval". In both these stories it is the bourgeoisie who are criticised. In the stories concerning the Prussians, the author reveals where his basic sympathies lie. "La Mère Sauvage" and "Le Père Milon" describe the suffering of the innocent lower strata during war time. On the other hand, war brings the foibles

of the bourgeoisie into sharper focus. In "Boule de Suif", "L'Aventure de Walter Schnaffs", and "Un Coup d'Etat", they are revealed as self-seeking, cowardly and hypocritical. In "Boule de Suif" only the prostitute is genuinely patriotic and unselfish despite all the professed values of the bourgeois members of the coach.

Maupassant is particularly critical of bourgeois women and the failures of marriage at that level of society. These women are very deceitful. The heroine of "Rouerie" persuades her lover that she is pregnant just so he will give her money; Mme. Walter is attracted to Bel-Ami out of sensuality; and the woman in "Souvenir", having disposed of her inept husband in no uncertain manner, is more than prepared to spend the night with a complete stranger. His peasant women never behave in this manner and one cannot felp feeling that he has much more respect for the faithful, hard-working peasant wife than for the glamorous Parisian woman.[4] Viewed alongside the bourgeois women, those of the lower classes achieve a stature which is more impressive than one would tend to believe in the work of a writer labelled so often as "pessimistic".

* * *

Most critics have subscribed to the opinion that the peasant tales constitute the most successful section of Maupassant's work. One of the reasons for their continued

success is the variety of inspiration and treatment within this one category. Maupassant disclaimed any affiliation to a literary movement, but rather he imposed his own vision of reality onto his work. One is reminded of Flaubert saying that material truth should be but a spring board to raise one to something higher. This "something higher" is a personal vision of some part of reality. Maupassant's vision is responsible for inspiring him with a sense of farce, absurdity, horror and sympathy, to which the peasant tales bear witness.

Maupassant's taste for farce is readily observed in Maît'Belhomme undergoing an "operation" to remove a flea from his ear, in Toine incubating chickens' eggs and in the husband pleading for leniency after putting his wife into a barrel of water. Alternatively we react with horror at the silent vengeance of the Corsicans, la mère Sauvage and le père Milon, and we protest at the cruelty of the peasant with regard to animals and the infirm. Not withstanding, we can still sympathise with the country boy who loses his dog, and with Boitelle whose unrealistic affection for the negress is doomed to failure.

There is also a variety of moods within each story. The gay revelry in "Le Baptême" and "La Ficelle" end on notes of sentimentalism and tragedy respectively. Our sympathy towards Boitelle is tempered by the sense of

farce which has been triggered by the naive reactions of his parents. Again, the loud joviality of Toine's inn is transformed into a mood of serious curiosity and motherly joy as Toine dramatically succeeds in hatching the eggs. The widest variety is probably provided by "Histoire d'Une Fille de Ferme" since the heroine passes through many stages of emotions. Her feeling of expectancy is fulfilled when Jacques promises to marry her, but she is left bitterly disappointed when he breaks his word. Her joy resumes with the birth of her child and she has a new life centred around him. Finally however she has to undergo the torment of succumbing to her master. In Maupassant's work there is consequently a permanent sense of tension. His world is very unstable; joys are short-lived. Because of the author's realistic portrayals, we participate both in the characters' ambitions and in their disillusionments.

It is interesting to see how Maupassant's outlook underwent certain modifications as he began to feel the effects of his illness. His fear of death and experience of strange visions are reflected with increasing frequency in his works after 1884, ("Lui" 1884, "Le Horla" 1887, and "Oui Sait" 1890). With the publication of Une Vie in 1883 his whole approach became less humorous and less cynical. He began to reveal a trace of sympathy for the victims of

life's cruelties and frustrations. Between 1881 and 1884 Maupassant seems to have concentrated on depicting the extremes of farce and of cruelty. The farces written during these years include "Un Normand" 1882", Farce Normande" 1882, "Saint-Antoine" 1883, "Le Cas de Madame Luneau" 1883, "L'Ivrogne", "Idylle", "Une Vente", and "Tribunaux Rustiques", all published in 1884. At the same time Maupassant brought out an equally large number of stories involving deliberate and unjustified cruelty: "Pierrot" 1882, "Aux Champs" 1882, "L'Aveugle" 1882, "La Mère aux Monstres" 1883, "L'Ame" 1883, "Saint-Antoine" 1883, and "Le Père Milon" 1883.

From 1884 onwards Maupassant became more and more pre-occupied with his belief in the predominance of solitude, suffering and illusions. After this date there are only three stories published that can legitimately be called farces: "La Bête à Mait'Belhomme" 1885, "Toine" 1885, and "Les Vingt-Cinq francs de la Supérieure" 1888. For the main part his stories toward the end of his literary career reveal a deep sympathy for the peasants whose efforts to seek more spiritual values end in failure. The change in inspiration can be best illustrated by the different rôles of the priest. In "Le Saut du Berger", 1882, the young ardent priest condemns the loose behaviour of his youngsters and pushes a hut over a hill when he sees

a young couple inside. Two years later, in "Le Baptême", the priest is welcomed into the celebrations and finishes by weeping at the sight of the new baby. Similarly the author is indulgent toward the young peasant girls whose love for certain social superiors is ignored or abused, as in "Rosalie Prudent" 1886, "Histoire Vraie" 1885, "Clochette" 1886 and "Le Fermier" 1886.[2] During this time however Maupassant did not exclude from his revised outlook the simple, honourable feelings of young male peasants. The silent friendship between the two soldiers in "Petit Soldat" 1885, foreshadows the naive and charming efforts of Boitelle and Hautot fils to establish positive relationships with members of the opposite sex. In the Preface to Pierre et Jean Maupassant lists the customary demands of the reading public:

> Consolez-moi. Amusez-moi. Attristez-moi. Attendrissez-moi. Faites-moi rêver. Faites-moi rire. Faites-moi frémir. Faites-moi pleurer. Faites-moi penser.5

We have seen therefore how Maupassant, with his varied inspiration and changing vision, went a long way towards achieving his aim of satisfying these heavy demands of the public.

Certain criticisms have been levelled against the peasants and the peasant contes. Jean de la Varende objects to the unrealistic picture of Normandy and its inhabitants. The critic found no examples of people strange

enough to deform their babies deliberately or to hatch eggs in bed. On the other hand Paul Morand lived in Normandy from 1926 to 1930 and claims that he found the peasants exactly as Maupassant had described them, but obviously without the exaggerations that our author often included. Edmond Glesener refers to Maupassant's tendency to "se contenter d'avoir le rire trop gros on la larme trop facile". It is true to a large extent that his characters are simple people often dominated by one single feature: their exclusive affection, their naivety, or their sense of humour. The author abandons his realist and objective aims in order to create larger than life characters who are purely comic figures or victims of life's ironies. Because of Maupassant's pessimistic and deterministic interpretation of the world, and his Naturalist inclinations to search for the ugly, the crude and the vulgar, we must expect a certain amount of character deformation and rigid conclusions.

It would be easy for an exclusive interest to become ridiculous to the extent of making only a superficial impact on the reader. Maupassant prevents this by a number of skilfull devices. He establishes the basic character of his hero by means of various details scattered throughout the story. Seemingly insignificant details about the background (such as the cock singing its triumphs and prefiguring Jacques' sexual advances to Rose),

or various unobtrusive gestures and remarks, reinforce the character of the peasant in a very inconspicuous manner. Without being specifically aware, the reader is inclined to identify with the hero and thereby accept the final outcome, however unlikely this is. The realistic background - a country inn, a farmyard or simply the Norman countryside - helps also to produce this effect. A good illustration of this technique is found in "Toine". We infer Toine's wife's maliciousness from her practice of upsetting the plank on which her husband and his friends play dominoes. Her vindictiveness is revealed by her repeated warning: "Espère un brin; j'verrons c'qu'arrivera, j'verrons ben! Ça crèvera comme un sac à grain, ce gros bouffi!" ("Toine", p. 5). We anticipate therefore the accident that confines Toine to bed and also the revenge manufactured by his wife. It is only natural that Toine, given his tremendous popularity with his customers, should find an original way of impressing them. Consequently the reader participates in the joke, although the situation is obviously impossible. It is this ability to involve the reader with the comic situation that forms one of the chief successful qualities of the writer.

Another reason for the success of the peasant stories is the perfect sense of balance within each story. Everything is simplified. The countryside is the immediate surroundings that the peasant can see for

himself. There is no notion of the peasant being overwhelmed by any exotic or grandiose evocations. The language is either the peasant's own patois or the simple narrative of the author. Although the narrative does not contain the peasant's own patois, it is kept on a very simple level, consistent with the character's own elementary thought processes. The concision of the language combines with the reserve in gestures and feelings. The peasants themselves provide Maupassant with his best character portraits because they are devoid of any deep inner-self that needs explaining or analysing. Their characters are revealed by their physical appearance, external gestures and by apparently insignificant details. The lack of complicated psychological analysis is in no way detrimental to the success of the stories, for the peasants do not possess any unusual forces of motivation beyond those that are readily explicable. Hauchecorne would be aware himself that he was acting "en Normand économe", which is the sum total of the author's psychological elaborations. No element is introduced therefore that is in any way more complicated or varied than the peasant's life itself. Meanwhile the various aspects of style and character behaviour combine to assure the success of the short story form.

The lasting success of Maupassant's contes paysans may be attributed to the manner in which this harmony is

so unobtrusively achieved. The author presents the world of the Norman peasant in such a direct way that the reader will always be able to recognise him, just as Fernand Lemoine is reminded of the opening description of "La Ficelle" every time he sees the market at Goderville. Something of the quality of the "Normand économe" can be seen therefore in Maupassant. His picture of the peasant character conveyed by gesture, by speech and by selected references to his environment admirably fulfills Zola's definition of the work of art as "un coin de la nature vu à travers un certain tempérament". The world of Maupassant's Norman peasant has been presented in such a vivid manner that its natural charm has established the peasant _contes_ among the classics of its _genre_.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER IV

[1]All the heroes of Sand's novels possess ideal features: Landry (La Petite Fadette), Germain (La Mare au Diable), and Grand Bûcheux (Les Maîtres Sonneurs). The women peasants, Fadette and Marie, both display qualities of devotion and fidelity.

[2]"Histoire d'Une Fille de Ferme", written in 1881, is an exception to this trend.

[3]There is a similar description at the beginning of "L'Aveu":

> Le soleil de midi tombe en large pluie sur les champs. Ils s'étendent, onduleux, entre les bouquets d'arbre des fermes, et les récoltes diverses, les seigles mûrs et les blés jaunissants, les avoines d'un vert clair, les trèfles d'un vert sombre, étalant un grand manteau rayé, remuant et doux sur le ventre nu de la terre. ("Un Aveu", p. 47)

[4]In fact Maupassant's sympathies go consistently towards the lower rungs of society. The two prostitutes, Mademoiselle Fifi and Boule de Suif, are admirably patriotic, as is the heroine of "Le Lit 29" who gives a Prussian officer syphilis out of patriotism. Also, the girls in "La Maison Tellier" react very sentimentally when they witness the young girls's first communion.

[5]Pierre et Jean, p. ix.

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