

The wiles of woman: In the shadow of materialism

¹ Srashti Srivastava, ² Dr. Satendra Kumar Mishra

¹ Research Scholar University of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

² Assistant Professor Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Abstract

The “Women Wiles” story of Guy de Maupassant is well reflecting the gap and the conflict existing in the personality of a woman. The imagination for a life embracing the luxuries of the world is the demand of the woman portrayed in the story. Her identity deflects between the firm beliefs of materialistic pleasures and inquisitive desire for solace which she herself is confused about. The desire to be loved or to settle for something of this sort is far taken to the back front in her space for identity. Her story telling has been the weapon used in her world of creation that she loved for her existence. The pain or pleasure reflected in her art of living is indeed a question that readers will find out as they understand the story and the thought process of the author in detail. Trust, as a concept evolved in the journey of evolution is well reflected from the personality of the protagonist. Though she was trusted upon by her lover, but she got the sadistic pleasure in misusing the underline idea of trust. The audacity to be seen is in the fact she never denied the claim that she never took undue advantage of that trust. The rest remains to the readers to find out. The present research paper is an attempt to explore the objectives mentioned above to transform into interpreting literary reality.

Keywords: Wiles, Woman, Materialism, Identity, Personality, Trust

1. Introduction

The ‘wiles’ of a woman can be the attraction for her personality? Can that reflect her identity in any light? Is identity just a positive term or can it ooze out another sphere for itself, which might not be morally correct according to the norms of our society? The identity always reflects the art of growing and experiencing the evolved nature of personality. It can make you cherish the newness of one. The woman in the story cherishes the traits of her identity, she is pretty aware of the pros and cons of it. The comfort she had drawn from the evolved identity of herself is something that can attract the readers to a greater extent. The vulnerability of her personality is meek and wandering. She insists on the productivity of her identity. She portrays herself in the strong light, emerging the sound and strong female, capable of conducting injustice in love but with audacity. This is a special feature of her personality.

This research paper is based on a French story so the research paper contains both English and French as the medium of expression. This is deliberately done to have a better understanding of the theme of materialism.

2. The Woman in Veil of Truth or Lie

The woman of the story has created a new space for herself. The research in this paper is about her identity, her confidence and her determined attitude to accept her lust for money. She was married to a clerk but was dissatisfied to a greater extent. She was very beautiful and alluring too. Her beauty demanded her to play with the pleasures of life that her poor husband cannot afford. She, in her own agreement decided to be the ‘self’ who could satisfy her own wants, by making herself as a tool to exploit or let’s say indulge the other being into it. The question would always remain – Did the mode of indulgence or her tool of indulgence was fair enough? The answer will vary according to the societal norms of each society, but her personality will not. She is depicted in the story as the main character, who through her

steamy wave of beauty and emotions could indulge a minister for three long years.

The minister provided her with money, emotional comfort, she was pleased and so was the minister in return. He grew fond of her. The money was her necessity as her personality was such, which demanded the world’s best luxury which she herself could never have afforded. Her personality stood the test of time. Her talent and her strong identity (of course in the dark light) are reflected in the believable story she made which even had characters like ‘a child’ and ‘letters from Italy’. However, the fact of matter remains that she never travelled to Italy and she never had a child. These were the two tools she used to indulge the minister emotionally so that he could support her with more money.

Now, my last question of the story – Was it all about the money did the woman merely exploited the minister of the game just revolved on the mutual contract of the needs? The ending paragraphs to a certain extent reflect though money could have been a major criteria or the main idea behind the intensions of the woman. But it will be wrong to say that merely money was the bond that bonded Madame Léon and the minister together.

Madame Léon grew fond and passionate about the minister. The identity would have varied between the two. There was a thin bond indeed that existed between the two. The identity of this female made her strong enough to let emotional bondages be behind and move solemnly ahead just to live life of an existential being, who is actually a non-thinking being.

In the opening paragraph, Guy de Maupassant has deliberately used the opening dialogue “She persuades him that a thing costs so much because he would kick up a row if its price were higher”, which very clearly shows the materialistic thought of the Ex Minister. He claims to have understood the lady with his remarks mentioned above that the lady has persuaded him by her actions so much, so that the more a lady is spendthrift, the more is her value.

In another paragraph, Guy de Maupassant has used a

ceremonial sentence “the very rustle of her skirt fills the marrow of your bones with desire” for the so called independent lady who is carefree enough to have casual post marital affairs. The ex-minister throughout the story has never used a single word or sentence to spray his attachment towards the lady. The keen observation of the beauty and the skirt and the minute observation of her body reveal the same. “No, better than that: her waist was too slight, her shoulders too narrow, her breast too full, no doubt; but I prefer those exquisite human dolls to that great statuesque corpse, the Venus of Milo”, Comte de L-- has never mentioned a single word or sentence in praise of any emotional attachment. Maybe, it was a matter of mandatory pleasure and above all the same was with Madame Léon.

The protagonist of the story actually had wiles. Her nature was unpredictable as is clear by the upcoming dialogues. Her dissatisfaction from her clerk husband seems natural. Her husband’s inability for financial freedom may be a reason for the same but is this reason enough to betray? Her attachment to the ex-minister also seems too natural at that time but the end reveals her materialistic nature. Infact, she was not attached to anyone. In one of the conversation, the ex-minister suggested her to go and join her husband in Italy which was the most relevant suggestion. “She answered: ‘Yes, but my husband has been away in Italy for the last two months, and he will not be back for some time.’

“I was determined at any cost to get out of my responsibility.

“I said: ‘You must go and join him immediately.’

“She reddened to her very temples, and with downcast eyes, murmured: ‘Yes - but - She either dared not or would not finish the sentence.

She looked confused but she was not. She looked emotionally attached to the minister but she was not. Her ‘Yes – but-’ speaks a lot. This may be utter ignorance on her side but her bold and planned steps which were revealed afterwards needs no explanation. In another conversation which followed after their initial intimacy. “After the first moment of stupor, she regained her composure, took a seat, and gazed with a smile at this man who was sitting in judgment on her. “She answered simply: “No; I have no child.”

Léon was not awed by the abrupt revelation about her child. The ex-minister’s brother questioned her very existence. Here ‘very existence’ means, the character of a lady. Anyone, other than the husband, if questions the moral of a lady is actually questioning her very existence. The revelation would have been a shock for a normal lady but Léon ‘regained her composure’ and above all ‘gazed with a smile’. This is not an art to be developed in a day or two. This it is enough to reveal her identity. Any other lady would have cried or left or begged for an apology but she confronted. It was all pre-existing in her mind. It can’t be said that the ex-minister was blind in her love but it can also not be said that this rational abilities were sound. It can be said that he was pretty aware of the wiles of Léon. Somewhere, Léon knew it and was prepared for the future in the very next dialogue of her in which she answered simply; this ‘simply’ states the same. This one word justifies the title of the story <<Woman’s Wiles>>. Guy de Maupassant would have done a deep research in selecting an appropriate title of the story which now seems to be the best.

Maupassant’s end note: “And bowing to him with a rather mocking smile, she left the room without any emotion, an

actress who had played her part to the end”, actually states his mindset which presents his predetermination to have a judgmental end of the story. The words “rather mocking smile” and to more clarify it “without any emotion” were deliberately used by Maupassant to put forward a basic approach of woman wiles for the readers. To give more weight to this prerequisite ‘wile’ he adds a moral to his story which is often not added by the writers.

“So take care about putting your trust in that sort of turtle dove!” “Fiez-vous donc à ces oiseaux-là!”

The last but most important statement or better to say, a caution by Maupassant, tracks the readers on two lines of thought moving parallel to each other. One is the plain and simple way of judging the nature of Léon which was presented as it is by Guy de Maupassant but the other line of thought speaks something else. Guy de Maupassant used many idioms and phrases to reveal the nature of woman in the character of Léon but either he deliberately ignored the wiles of man in character of ex minister i.e. Comte de L— or he was predetermined to show the wiles of woman over man. He seems to be too judgmental in the character of Léon whose identity and nature was very much induced by the ‘not so good’ ex minister. In the story, the lady lives her life breaking all the norms of society. She is bold enough to accept the truth of her affairs even if she was guilty as per the societal norms. Her straight forward vision of her life and lifestyle may be applauded at times but at times it looks unethical. Marriage institution is one of the institutions established to civilize the uncivilized society which requires strong foundation of self-sacrifice and accountability towards family. The protagonist may be accepted by many readers as a modern self-dependent lady but in an ideal society such behavior and sense of belongingness must be demotivated. Mistakes in character or intentional breach of social norms break the societal structure. In my research paper, the protagonist has broken the norms of the society which in any case cannot be appreciated and esteemed. I have tried to leave a message for my mature readers to be careful enough to identify the nearly visible boundaries between the modern and so called ethical laws which are actually unethical. It is our responsibility to preserve the ethics of the ‘ethical’ and civilized society.

Leon’s life can be related with many in the society. In a classical work, the writer not only reveals the true character of protagonist but also leaves a message which the readers are supposed to read in between the lines. Many of the readers may not agree with my interpretation but in my research paper, I have taken the liberty of both to think conservatively and also to think beyond the social norms. Leon’s post marital affair with the minister may be accepted as normal but in any case it cannot be justified.

3. Conclusion

While giving a finishing touch to this research paper, I came across a French quote which seemed relevant with this current topic ‘woman’s wiles’: “Vous pouvez trouver des femmes qui ont jamais eu une affaire, mais il est difficile de trouver une femme qui n'a qu'un seul.” i.e “ You can find women who have never had an affair, but it is hard to find a woman who has just one.” – Francois de La Rochefoucauld. “So take care about putting your trust in that sort of turtle dove!” – Guy de Maupassant As the turtle doves don’t stay at

one place for a longer period of time and that is why they cannot be entrusted. Mannered the same, before developing our trust or belief to anybody, one has to stay back and take time to throw judgments.

The story depicts a woman of strength (In whatever positive or negative light it can be interpreted). A woman who knew how to make her way in this world where 'pleasures are difficult to buy and pain is sold free', she chose the path to get luxuries by leaving aside the bond of emotions, to the major extent. The pain of playing hard, to get what she wanted, has not so well been reflected in her personality. She made choices and took the responsibility for her sins, facing the consequences with full confidence when encountered, with questions at the latter end of the story. She didn't keep the brother of the victim away from the truth, rather faced it boldly, expressing it all fearlessly, if nothing else we judge positive about her identity following the social norms. At least, the truth behind the big veil should be applauded and respected. Her audacity should be adored and her determination to lead a life which she desired to attain. The means can be contested by which she wanted to attain those ways. Her personality is indeed contested in the whole story. It very well depends on the individual which way one wants to perceive the personality of such female. The morals of the society might depict her tale with different perspectives. So let us keep the conclusion open ended itself.

The people, having picaresque instincts, don't win the trust of their belongings. It brings us to an understanding where one is expected to develop trust, belief and devotion to those who contribute to the holistic development for a longer span rather flash like a twinkle or resides like a turtle dove.

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