Boule de Suif Study Guide

Boule de Suif by Guy De Maupassant

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Introduction

"Boule de Suif" was first published in 1880 in the anthology *Les Soirées de Medan*. Often considered his greatest work, "Boule de Suif" was published the same year that Guy de Maupassant made his poetic debut with *Des Vers*. The theme of the anthology of short stories was the Franco—Prussian War from a decade earlier. Other writers contributed, including Émile Zola and J. K. Huysmans, but it was Maupassant's short story, often considered the best example of naturalism, that has reigned as the most famous.

Maupassant is known for his insightful descriptions of characters and their actions and dialogues. His ability to capture a scene and recreate it in literary form has earned him a notable place in the history of naturalists. Maupassant's "Boule de Suif" is not only a sound reflection of retreating France during the Franco—Prussian War, but a resounding exploration of morality and ethics in a divided society. The title character is caught in a repetitious cycle of self-examination that has forced her into a circular ethical conundrum. All the while, her position is created not on her own accord, but through the manipulation of spiteful members of the *respectable* social order. The complexity that lies beneath Maupassant's imagery, his representation of humanity, and his ability to convey vibrant humor separates him from his contemporaries, placing him in a class only matched by Gustave Flaubert.

Author Biography

Guy de Maupassant, a nineteenth-century naturalist author, is one of France's most distinguished and celebrated writers of short stories. An incredibly productive writer, Maupassant achieved recognition quickly in France, and the amazing bulk and quality of his work left an impressive and permanent mark on the literary world of short fiction.

It is believed that Maupassant was born at Château de Miromesniel on August 5, 1850, although it is speculated that his parents moved him from their humble house in Fécamp to the imposing Miromesniel mansion to give their first-born child a high-sounding birthplace. Château de Miromesniel is located in a small village outside of Dieppe, called Tourville-sur-Arques. His parents separated when he was eleven years old, and he lived all of his early years in his native Normandy. Maupassant was born with the gift of a photographic memory, and this innate talent helped him to remember the nuances of Norman people that later made his stories so descriptive.

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

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

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

of the twentieth century, yet it cannot be denied that his work influenced, and has been imitated by, countless authors across the globe.

Plot Summary

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

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

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

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

Section 1

Section 1 Summary

Boule de Suif by Guy de Maupassant centers around ten coach passengers who are from all walks of life, traveling through occupied France during the Franco-Prussian War. The running themes of *Boule de Suif* are self-sacrifice, manipulation, and the separation of social classes.

For days now, defeated soldiers wander through the town, aimless and without clear purpose. The men, who pass through in small casual groups, look tattered, worn, and tired. They are a mix of volunteers, enlisted men, and the once eager career soldier. Yet now they are all one and the same: beaten. These wandering soldiers each look as if they are solely responsible for France's defeat.

The unconfirmed rumor in the town is that the Prussians will soon enter Rouen. The National Guard members, who had until recently been shooting from the woods, are all back at home. Their uniforms and guns all packed away. Every one of the French soldiers has crossed the Seine and all are on their way home, if not having already arrived. The last of the men, a General walking behind his defeated men, is in disbelief that so great an army from such a brave country had been defeated.

The town is silent in wait for the conquerors to arrive. The citizens are overly nervous in their everyday activities, attempting to make sure that nothing they do could be looked upon as a hostile act. The citizens are aware that the invading army may consider common items such as kitchen knives and garden tools as weapons. It is as if all life has stopped in the town as the people lie in wait. The shops are closed and no children play in the streets.

The next day a few of the invading soldiers enter the town. This is soon followed by a greater number of the German men until the enemy overcomes the small city, The German soldiers look very orderly in the eyes of the French townspeople and fear is further instilled in the citizens by the shouting of orders in an unfamiliar foreign language. The villagers do nothing to fight back: they only cower silently in their homes, for it is the right of the Germans, as the victors, to take whatever they wish. One by one the Germans knock and then enter the houses of the French villagers. The people choose to be civil to the winning enemy, as they do not desire any further conflict.

After some initial nervousness, the Prussian soldiers are well fed at the table of the townspeople. In turn, the German officers are polite and kind to the people that they had defeated. Overall, the French people of the town decide to make peace with the situation in which they now find themselves. The townspeople of Rouen no longer show the bravery for which they used to be known.

Little by little, life in the town returns to some sort of normalcy. German soldiers walk the town, neither being bothered nor agitating others. Businesses reopen, and sidewalk cafes are filled with customers. However, just below the surface, there is the feeling that something is amiss. It is this slight feeling that something is wrong that keeps everyone from completely doing away with their nervousness. The people of Rouen know that nothing will ever truly be the same and that even though the German soldiers act with civility toward them, they are in the presence of the enemy.

The Germans are indeed still the enemy and as such, they demand a great deal from the conquered townspeople. The villagers are rich and they want no trouble so they willingly give what they are asked. Soon German bodies are found, every once and awhile, by fishermen six or seven miles down the river. Angry Frenchmen who are fed up with their conquerors have killed these German soldiers. Even though the German soldiers have not committed any heinous monstrosities against any of the townspeople, the French villagers have been slowly gaining courage and acting out of the frustration of their situation.

Some of the local merchants are also upset about the strict controls the Germans have placed on their commercial interests. They wish to do business with some of their contacts in Havre, which is occupied by the French army. The group obtains passes from the German officers to leave the town. They plan to travel in a four-horse coach, leaving in the middle of the night. It is cold when they leave and the men are still sleepy. The first three men arrive at the designated meeting place and begin to talk. Each of these three men has brought their wives with them and they all agree that they will not return to Rouen. If the Prussians reach Havre, they will travel to England.

Suddenly a door is heard closing and all goes silent. Finally, the man who is harnessing the horses advises the men to get inside the coach. The men, who were too nervous to think of this, quickly get into the coach with their wives. The women busy themselves with lighting the chemical feet warmers they have brought. Once the six horses have been harnessed, the carriage begins to slowly move. The thick snow makes it difficult to gain any speed. Soon it is early dawn and the passengers are able to see one another. First, there is Monsieur and Madam Loiseau. Monsieur Loiseau is a wholesale wine merchant who has done quite well after buying his former boss's interest in the company. He was known for selling poor quality wine, at normal prices, and thus being a liar and a cheat. Monsieur Loiseau is known for playing practical jokes and looks very funny, being of small stature but with a potbelly. Madam Loiseau, on the other hand, is tall and slim, yet strong and not particularly dainty. She is known for being loud and jovial and has a good mind for numbers. Her skills in accounting are of great benefit to her husband's business.

Monsieur Carre-Lamadon sits next to the Loiseau's. Carre-Lamadon is a very important man in the cotton trade. He is also an officer of the Legion of Honor and a member of the General Council. This gives him an air more of a dignified King and less like a common man. His wife is much younger than himself. She is rather pretty and full of grace; however, at the very moment, she remains wrapped in her furs, looking either bored or disgusted at their current predicament. Next to the Carre-Lamondons sits

Comte and Comtesse Hubert de Breville, nobles of one of the oldest and most respected names in Normandy, and very rich. Comte Hubert is a vain man who tries very hard to artificially enhance his appearance. He is also a fellow member of the General Council, and thus a working colleague of Monsieur Carre-Lamadon. The details surrounding his marriage to his wife are not well known, but it is common fact that she is a daughter of a ship owner and looks to be of excellent breeding, made apparent by her refined features and impeccable manners. It is considered an honor to be able to visit with the Comtesse; many can only hope to make her acquaintance.

These six people, three pairs of husbands and wives, represent the Society in the cabin. By Society, it is meant that these were the good, respected people. They had an income and purpose. Each wife sits across from her husband, with the women sitting on one side of the carriage and the men lined up on the other. Comtesse Hubert de Breville is the woman who sits next to one of the other people in the carriage, a common person. Sitting next to her are two nuns, each with rosaries in their hands. Neither of these nuns is pleasant to look at. The older of the two had been badly disfigured by small pox and the other one might have been pretty at one time but now looks wasted away by illness.

It is the man and woman opposite these nuns that attract the attention of the rest of the passengers. The man, Cornudet, is well known and disliked among Society. He is a democrat who has squandered the large amount of money left to him by his father in an attempt to obtain a position in the Republic. Other than this ambition, he is regarded as a likeable and good man. He had worked diligently in defending his town and now believes that he will be of more use in Havre, a town yet to be defeated. The final passenger, a courtesan, is known as Boule de Suif, meaning, "tallow ball." This was the name given to her because of her enormous girth at such a young age. Despite her overly large figure, she is still quite attractive and is highly sought after by her male customers. As soon as the members of the Society in the carriage recognized the courtesan, they begin to whisper quite loudly about her, calling her names. Boule de Suif hears their accusations and boldly looks them in the eye until they are silent. It seems as if the appearance of a lady of disrepute has bonded the married women in solidarity against those representing unmarried sexual relations.

Similarly, the three married men are united by the presence of Cornudet, in an attempt to preserve their conservative values. They soon begin a conversation about money, which seems to give the impression that they have no respect for people with none. The talk soon centers on the amount of money and assets they have lost since the beginning of the war and the occupation of their town. Even though each of these men have lost great deals of money they speak of it in such a way that is only possible for those who are very rich and can afford such losses. Even more so, these men have all taken precautions against further loss. Count Hubert was beyond rich; Monsieur Carre-Lamadon sent a large sum to England for safekeeping, and Loiseau worked out a great deal in which he sold his remaining stockpile of wine to the French government, which now owes him a great deal.

The heavy snow continues to make traveling difficult for the horse-drawn carriage. Several times the men left the warmth of the cabin to walk beside the horses while they

trudged up difficult inclines. Yet, by ten in the morning, the group had only traveled 12 short miles from their starting point. The coach has moved along so slowly that at ten o'clock in the morning it has not covered twelve miles. At this point, all of the passengers have become quite nervous at their situation, as they had looked forward to lunching at Totes. The group grows hungrier at the passing of each abandoned farmhouse or business. It is well past one o'clock and each of the passenger's bellies is protesting to their loud rumbling hunger. Again, it is Boule de Suif who raises suspicion as she leans over herself several times as if rearranging her coats and surveys her fellow passengers before once again sitting upright. It is at this time that Loiseau offers to pay a thousand francs for a small piece of ham. His wife, tight with money, protests at his off-the-wall suggestions. Each of the married couples chastises themselves for not thinking of taking food on their journey. Upon hearing this, Cornudet offers a taste from his bottle of rum to everyone in the carriage. Only Loiseau, who tells the rest of the cart that the rum warms him and seems to keep his hunger at bay, accepts this offer. After a few sips of the rum, Loiseau seems to be in quite a better mood. Loiseau, the joker of the group, laughs that they should eat the plumpest person if their hunger persists.

Finally, a couple hours later, near three o'clock in the afternoon, Boule de Suif reaches below her seat and produces a large basket covered by a white napkin. From this basket, she produces a plate and drinking cup, and a large jellied dish with two whole chickens. Indeed the basket looked large enough to contain all Boule de Suif would need for a three days journey, such as this. She, unlike her traveling companions, was not planning on dining at any cafes along the way. Boule de Suif even thought to bring four bottles of wine for her journey. Therefore, she began to eat silently in a polite manner while the rest of the carriage stared at her in wonder. They begin to smell the delicious food and are once again reminded that they have not eaten all day.

The married women looked at the courtesan with contempt in their eyes, for they covet something of someone with such a lowly stature. Loiseau was the only one who speaks, and comments that Boule de Suif seems to be the only one with any fortitude to pack food. Upon hearing this, the woman offers him some chicken to which he is in no position to refuse. Loiseau quickly eats the offered chicken leg. Meanwhile, Boule de Suif quietly offers the two nuns to a helping of the chicken as well. They murmured their thanks before quickly eating, as does Cornudet after being offered some of the food.

Finally, Loiseau ask Boule de Suif if his wife may have a portion. His wife will not ask for herself. Boule de Suif readily agrees and passes out some food. The first bottle of wine is then opened, to wash down the food. Since there only is one cup from which to drink from, it is passed around the cabin. Each person wipes the rim of the cup before drinking, except for Cornudet, who seems to not want to offend Boule de Suif whom he is sitting next to.

Still the remaining four members of the carriage do not eat for they have not asked Boule de Suif if she would share her meal. Suddenly Madame Carre-Lamadon turns white as a sheet and faints. No one in the cabin knows what to do for the young wife except for one of the nuns, who drips a few drops of the wine down the fallen women's throat. The woman quickly awakens and is convinced by the nun to drink a cup of the

wine to revive her. At this, Boule de Suif begins to offer her food and drink to the remaining travelers. Upon seeing his peer's hesitant and weary looks, Loiseau steps in and convinces the remaining two couples that they are all ten in this trip together and must not rest on their laurels. Finally, the count accepts Boule de Suif's kind offer on behalf of the four.

In order to feed all ten of the passengers, Boule de Suif empties the rest of her basket. There are meats, desserts, and appetizers. Once the married women begin to eat the food of the courtesan they also begin to talk to her, for it is the right thing to do. Conversation is awkward at first, yet it soon becomes less formal. The talk of the group quickly moves to the war. Each takes turn telling horror stories about the egregious deeds of the enemy and the brave French army that was eventually overcome. The passengers also share their personal stories of how the war directly affected them.

Boule de Suif calmly explains how she found herself in the cabin leaving her home. At first she had thought it would be best to stay, as she had enough food and supplies and could afford to feed the enemy soldiers. She felt that it was safer to stay then venture out to the unknown. However, when she first saw the enemy army her anger surfaced as to how the French had been defeated and the townspeople now had to bow down to these brutes. She attacked the first Prussian soldier that entered her home and after that was forced to hide. So now she finds herself fleeing her old home in hope that she will find somewhere safer.

Upon the finish of her tale, the fellow passengers congratulate her on her bravery. Her character, in their minds, is slightly elevated, for they had not been as brave as she. Cornudet, as a democrat, was especially happy, for in the end Napoleon was defeated. However, Boule de Suif did not agree with him for she supports Napoleon Bonaparte. Boule de Suif accuses men like Cornudet for the fall of France, for without their support, Napoleon was bound to fail. Before Cornudet can respond, the count interrupts the brewing argument and calms Boule de Suif. He tells all of the passengers that everyone's opinion should be respected. To their own surprise, the countess and manufacturer's wife both speak up saying that they agree with Boule de Suif's viewpoint. They cannot believe that their opinions are so similar to a woman of her social standing.

Soon the basket of Boule de Suif's food, her rations for the entire trip, is empty. As the food runs out, conversations between the passengers also stagnates as darkness falls. With nightfall, colder temperatures invaded the carriage. Boule de Suif begins shivering from cold and in response, Madame de Breville offers her foot warmer. The woman gladly accepts, and the nuns accept Mesdames Carre-Lamadon and Loiseau's similar offers. For a while, all is quite between the passengers until some movement is detected between Cornudet and Boule de Suif. Loiseau looks over and believes that Boule de Suif elbowed Cornudet. No one speaks of the incident, or the cause.

Section 1 Analysis

The exposition of *Boule de Suif* describes a small town in France during the Franco-Prussian War. The French are losing the war effort, which is evident by the various groups of sad looking soldiers roaming the countryside. The fact that the National Guard members, or the reservist soldiers, have already arrived back at home and packed away their uniforms and guns is symbolic of the feeling of defeat that runs not only through the town but all of France. The Prussians are advancing and it is understood that they will eventually occupy the town. As the town lays quite in wait for their conquerors, the plot element of suspense is implemented. The suspense is a way of foreshadowing possible conflict that will occur between the French villagers and the Prussian soldiers.

As the Prussian officers slowly descend on the village, the earlier foreshadowing elements of the plot reveal itself as a plot twist. Instead of conflict between the two groups, there is an understanding that each must play their roles of capture and detainee. Even though everything on the outside appears to be fine, there is the first suggestion that the French people are secretly seething with anger and contempt for the very Prussian soldiers they feed. The feeling is further elevated when the Prussian soldiers begin to demand more from the villagers. This escalates the tension between the two groups and thus reintroduces the plot elements of suspense and conflict. The discovery of the dead soldiers confirms a rising action in the plot and signifies growing danger for the French villagers.

Finally it is described that ten people have decided to leave the town, under the guise of visiting business contacts, in order to escape to a not yet occupied part of France. It is from there that the story follows these ten passengers, whose identities are not revealed until they are well into their journey. It is described that there are ten people of different walks of life, income levels, and places in society. These differences are a common theme throughout the rest of the story. The three married couples are all of the proper, upper class. These characters demand the utmost respect from others. The nuns, who have taken a vow of poverty, are still respected for they serve their purpose within the religious community. The last two passengers command the least respect. Cornudet is seen as an eccentric political reformist. Boule de Suif, the title character, is described as a very heavy, but beautiful prostitute. She therefore demands the least respect from the group as she is seen as living an improper and unreligious life. It is also important to note that she not even referred to her given name, and rather is called Boule de Suif, which means ball of fat. This further symbolizes the place in society that she occupies.

The differences in the place that each member holds in society are evident by what each member of the group brought with them in the carriage. The rich married women thought to bring feet warmers, a non-necessity. These small appliances are for those who wish to travel in comfortable luxury. Only Boule de Suif had been practical enough to pack food for her travels. She was not planning on spending any money at roadside cafes. When the group finds themselves in a situation such that they cannot stop for food, Boule de Suif is finally looked upon as being somewhat smart for her forethought.

While Boule de Suif readily asks the nuns and Cornudet to partake of her provisions, she only does so for the rest of the group when asked. The women find it especially hard to ask someone of her standing for anything. The countess even goes so far as to fake a fainting spell in order to gain her share of the food without formally asking. The other women have their husbands ask for them. These methods employed by the travelers introduce a reoccurring theme in the story of manipulation. This scene is also the first instance of another theme, that of self-sacrifice, which is a hallmark of the story. Boule de Suif is asked, as the situation, and her unprepared fellow travelers demand, to share her entire provisions with the group.

In return for her sacrifice, Boule de Suif receives some of the kindness and respect afforded to the other women in the group. They begin to include her in their conversation and even offer her one of their foot warmers when she catches a chill. The mood of inclusion extends to the inn, when they finally arrive in time for dinner. The group decides to take their meals together.

Section 2

Section 2 Summary

Finally, after eleven hours traveling and three hours resting time, the coach reaches the town of Totes, far behind their anticipated arrival time of midday. The horses take them through the tiny, quaint village before stopping in front of the Hotel du Commerce. The coach comes to a stop and a German voice is heard outside. The passengers freeze, afraid to leave the confines of their cabin for fear of what will happen next. The driver castes a light into the cabin illuminating the ten faces of the travelers. Beside the driver stands a young German soldier.

In French, the German officer tells the passengers to get out of the carriage. One by one, the passengers obey. Each tries to maintain their dignity in the face of great fear. The German soldier leads the group into the kitchen of the inn where he examines each of their passports. Satisfied, he leaves. After breathing a sigh of relief, the group orders super. While the food is being prepared the travelers look in the rooms. The group enters the dining room and sits to dinner, but before the food is served, the innkeeper arrives and asks for a Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset. Boule de Suif answers to the name and is informed that the Prussian officer wishes to see her right away.

Boule de Suif tells the man that she will not go. At her announcement, everyone in the room once again looks nervous. The count tells her that if she refuses to obey the order then they may all be under suspension. She would be risking the safety of not only herself, but also the entire group. However, there is probably nothing to worry about, just a small detail that she needs to clear up. Finally, she announces that she will go but only because it may affect the group. The countess takes Boule de Suif's hand as she tells her how thankful they all are for taking the group into consideration.

Boule de Suif leaves the room and the rest of the travelers wait before beginning their meal. While waiting, they each individually wish that the young woman will not do anything impetuous, as she is known to do. They also think about what they will say if they are summoned as well. After ten tense minutes, Boule de Suif returns. She calls the soldier a scoundrel but refuses to elaborate. She reveals only that it does not concern the welfare of the group. Everyone takes his or her place at the table as the first course is served. Dinner is quite cheerful, in spite of everyone's circumstances. Beer, wine, and cider are ordered; cider for the nuns and Loiseaus as a way to reduce their costs, beer for Cornudet, and wine for the rest. Cornudet seems to have a great knowledge and love of beer and studies his glass carefully before drinking.

After supper, everyone retires to bed. Everyone but Loiseau who amused himself by looking out of the bedroom keyhole at what he called "the mysteries of the corridor." After an hour of alternating looking through the keyhole and putting his ear up to it he hears a rustling before he sees Boule de Suif walking down the hall dressed in a blue dressing gown. She walked to a room at the end of the corridor, where a door is slightly

ajar. She returns down the hall with Cornudet. They speak near the young woman's door and, although Loiseau is unable to hear everything, he senses that Boule de Suif seems to be denying Cornudet entrance into her room. Loiseau hears her telling Cornudet that it would be shameful with Prussians in the same building. After some more arguing, Cornudet gives her a kiss and goes back to bed. Loiseau, satisfied that he will not witness any more interesting activity from the corridor, goes to bed.

At eight o'clock in the morning, as previously agreed upon, the group convenes in the kitchen. However, they soon realize that the coach is without a driver or horses. After searching the coach-houses and barns, the men head out to search the small town and countryside. The men soon find themselves in the town square where they find Prussian soldiers. The first soldier is peeling potatoes, the second is washing out a barbershop, and the third is coddling a crying baby. It seems as if the women of the village, whose husbands must be at war, are telling the Prussian soldiers what work needs to be done.

The count asks a young man coming out of the church why these peasant women are leading around the Prussian soldiers. The man tells him that the soldiers are not Prussian after all; rather, they are from somewhere far away. In addition, the men are not so bad; they have all left wives and children behind and so they can empathize.

Cornudet does not like to see that the soldiers and peasants are happily coexisting with each other. He is so disgusted that he goes back to the inn. Loiseau, in his fashion, makes a joke that the soldiers are taking the place of the men. Monsieur Carre-Lamadon states that the soldiers are simply righting the wrong that their side has done. After some time, the men finally find the stagecoach driver socializing at a cafy. They ask why he had not harnessed the horses at the agreed upon time. The driver answers that he has since received other orders. A Prussian officer told him not to harness the horses for the travelers. When pressed to tell them why he was asked not to harness them, the driver answered that he does not know as the innkeeper had relayed the order to him last night.

The men go back to the inn and ask for Monsieur Follenvie, the innkeeper. A servant tells them that because of his asthma that he does not get up before ten o'clock, and that they are strictly forbidden from waking him. The travelers had been strictly forbidden to rouse him earlier, except in case of fire. They then ask to speak to the officer whom issued the order, but are again refused. The men wait, while the women go to their rooms.

Cornudet sits before the fire with a jug of beer and his pipe. Cornudet settles down, Loiseau walks around trying to sell his wine, and the count and manufacturer talk amongst themselves. Inevitably, the talk turns to the war, politics, and the future of their country. At precisely ten o'clock Monsieur Follenvie appears. The waiting men immediately surround him. He tells them that the officer simply ordered him to tell the coach that he cannot harness the horses for travel. The innkeeper goes on to say that the soldier forbid their travel until he orders otherwise. Monsieur sends a card with his name and credentials to the soldier, requesting a meeting. They are soon notified that the Prussian soldier will allow two men to see him during his lunch at one o'clock.

After some time, the ladies rejoin the men and the group eats lunch. Everyone appears nervous, especially Boule de Suif. As the coffee is served, the men, excluding Cornudet, leave to meet the Prussian soldier. The three men are allowed to enter a finely decorated room where the Prussian officer sits smoking a pipe. He is still wearing his dressing gown and does not stand up upon the entering of his guests. The soldier asks the men in broken French, what they want. The count answers that they simply wish to continue on their trip, to which the soldier answers no. The count politely asks for the reason and the soldier tells them because he does not wish it to be so. The count points out that it was this Prussian's general who gave them permission in the first place; however, the soldier simply repeats that he will not let them go and orders them to leave.

The group reconvenes in the kitchen and comes up with many reasons for why they are being kept. The idea that they have become hostages or prisoners of war is introduced. This awakens the imagination of each person. It is very easy for the rich in the group to think they will be forced to part with their fortunes. With these thoughts, they try to make themselves look poorer then they are. The men hide their watches. The afternoon is thus wasted by worry.

As night falls, Madam Loiseau suggests the group play a card game to distract their thoughts until dinnertime. Just before dinner is to be served, the innkeeper arrives and announces that the Prussian officer has sent him to ask Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset, known as Boule de Suif, if she had changed her mind. Suddenly everyone turns to look at the young woman who has turned a bright shade of red and is noticeably angry. She tells the innkeeper that she will never consent and calls the Prussian several unkind names. After the innkeeper leaves to relay the message, Boule de Suif is assaulted with questions. At first, she assures the group that it has nothing to do with them, but finally, in anger, she reveals that the Prussian officer wishes to make her his mistress.

The group rallies around Boule de Suif, expressing their outrage against this Prussian officer. The women especially are offended that the officer would make such a request. After the initial shock wears off, the group quiets down and eats supper. After the meal the women go to bed while the men smoke their pipes and play another round of cards with the innkeeper. The men try to use this time to question the innkeeper about the Prussian soldier's possible motives for keeping the group, but the innkeeper's attention is focused on his cards.

Section 2 Analysis

It is right before dinner is to begin that Boule de Suif's real name is revealed as Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset. This occurs when a Prussian soldier summons her. At first Boule de Suif, who is fiercely patriotic, refuses to obey the order. However, her fellow passengers convince her to go by telling her that her refusal could adversely affect the rest of the group. Again, the two themes that are working in tandem are manipulation and self-sacrifice. The other travelers are worried for their own safety and

interests and therefore prey upon Boule de Suif's kindness for her fellow man in order to bend her to their will. Boule de Suif, ignoring her instincts, meets with the Prussian officer, sacrificing her own safety.

While the group waits for Boule de Suif to return, they are quite nervous that they may be next. The plot elements of suspense and foreshadowing of future conflict are used. After she returns the group is put to ease; however, it is a mystery as to why she was summoned to appear before the officer. After dinner, everyone retires as they plan to leave early the next morning on the second leg of their journey.

Only not everyone goes directly to sleep. Loiseau plays a spying game that he calls "the mysteries of the corridor." This illustrates his nosey nature as well as foreshadows the fact that what he learns by spying on his fellow travelers will be important to the storyline. What he sees is Cornudet trying to convince Boule de Suif to allow him into her room. It is not clear as to if they have a romantic relationship or if he is a paying customer. Either way he does not gain entrance, as Boule de Suif does not think it is advisable when the Prussian officer is in the inn.

The next morning the group is surprised to find that their carriage has not been readied for travel. After the men search out the coach driver, it is revealed that the Prussian soldier has ordered the group to stay in the town. A reason is not given for such an order and while they wait, tensions and suspicions increase. It seems as if Boule de Suif is especially nervous, which shows the plot element of foreshadowing the fact that their detainment may be a result of her meeting last evening with the officer.

When the men are finally allowed to meet with the Prussian officer, he gives no clue as to why he has suddenly decided to keep the group from further travel. Briefly, the group entertains the idea that they may be prisoners of war. This brings up the theme of a difference in social classes between the travelers. The rich, married couples would perhaps be allowed to pay off their captor's and leave the poor behind. This idea is soon dispelled when it is revealed that the Prussian officer wishes something of Boule de Suif that she is refusing. The favor is to spend the night with him as his mistress; or, more accurately, as his prostitute. Boule de Suif reveals his request, causing the other women to rally around her. They are shocked at his request.

Section 3

Section 3 Summary

The next day the group awakens and assembles even earlier. They do so in hope that perhaps they will be allowed to leave; however, the horses remain in the stable. Lunch is very quite and has an odd mood cast upon it. The members of the group have had the night to think about the proposition made to Boule de Suif and have thus had time to reconsider their position. They seem cool toward the young woman for they had hoped that she would have become the soldier's mistress so that the rest of the group may leave. Of course, no one speaks his or her wishes out loud, but each thinks that it would really have made no difference to a woman such as Boule de Suif.

After lunch, the count proposes that the group take a walk around town. Everyone but Cornudet and the nuns take him up on his offer. It is cold and bleak which makes the mood of the travelers that much more depressed with each step. The four women walk in front of the men, just out of earshot. Loiseau calls Boule de Suif a trollop and asks the other two men if they thought she would hold out on the soldier much longer, thereby keeping them from their journey. The count replies that it is up to the woman when she will make that sacrifice. Monsieur Carre-Lamadon makes the comment that the enemy is advancing and that they might be in the thick of things soon. Loiseau brings up the option of leaving by foot, which is readily shot down. The snow is too thick and the women would be unable to make the journey. Additionally, the group would move so slowly that it would not take long for the Prussian soldiers to catch up with them and haul them back, as prisoners. Suddenly the group passes the Prussian officer, causing Boule de Suif to instantly blush. The women are embarrassed for being seen with a woman that the man thinks so little of and the men show their resentment by not raising their hat in greeting. After the Prussian soldier passes the woman talk about how handsome the officer is and how if he were French he would certainly make a good catch.

The group arrives back at the inn, rejoining the nuns and Cornudet. Dinner is a silent affair and everyone goes to bed directly afterward. The next morning tempers are visibly deteriorating. The women hardly speak to Boule de Suif now, as they are upset that she has not succumbed to the soldier's wishes so that they may leave. After breakfast, church bells are heard which signify a baptism. Boule de Suif, who has a child who she only sees once a year and hardly ever thinks of, suddenly feels a longing for her son and so she decides to go to the stranger's ceremony.

With Boule de Suif gone, the other members of the traveling party gather to talk about their situation. Loiseau has the first reasonable solution, according to the group,. He suggests that the group talk to the Prussian officer and convince him to keep only Boule de Suif and allow the rest of them to leave. The group decides this is a good idea and Monsieur Follenvie is chosen to complete the task. He leaves but comes back very quickly. The officer turned him down immediately. When she hears the news, Madame

Loiseau erupts into a fit of anger. She announces that since it is Boule de Suif's chosen career then she has no right to refuse anyone. She reveals that Boule de Suif is even known to oblige coachmen. Madame Loiseau goes on to say that she believes that the Prussian officer has behaved quite gentlemanly. As anyone would rather prefer one of the other women, he respects married women and chooses instead the girl who is known as "common property." She reminds them that he has the power to take any of the other women by force but instead he asks Boule de Suif if she would consent. This speech easily convinces the other woman that she is right.

The men, who had been talking among themselves, join the women. Loiseau is thinking along the same lines as his wife and wishes to deposit Boule de Suif at the officer's door. He, like his wife, calls Boule de Suif all sorts of names. The count, ever the diplomat, is of the opinion that they should instead convince Boule de Suif to consent. The group agrees that this is the best option, as their first plan did not work.

The group draws together and lays out their scheme. The plan is so disguised in pleasant language and allusions that a stranger overhearing would never realize what they were conniving to do. As the conversation grows to an end, the members of the party begin to become excited and merry. Even the nuns let out a sly allusion to their devious plan. Others, such as Loiseau, are not so subtle in their jokes. It is only Cornudet who does not participate in the planning or the celebration of the ruse.

The count notices Boule de Suif approaching and quiets the celebration. His wife, who is the first to recover, asks the young women how the baptism went. Boule de Suif replies that it did her good to go to church. Soon it is time for lunch and everyone sits down. As planned, the group brings up a conversation about self-sacrifice. Stories are told of how one person sacrificed something for the greater good. Soon this conversation narrows to describe specifically the women throughout history who have sacrificed themselves. They make it seem as if the only purpose of a woman is to sacrifice herself. Throughout this conversation, it is only the nuns and Boule de Suif who do not contribute much.

After lunch, Boule de Suif spends the rest of the day alone. This is part of the plan where she is left to mull over their previous conversation. As the group sits down to dinner, the innkeeper arrives to tell Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset that the Prussian officer wishes to know if her decision has changed. Boule de Suif answers that she has not changed her mind. Throughout dinner, the group once again talks of self-sacrifice; however, it is become increasingly difficult to come up with good examples. Just as it seems their plan is unraveling, the countess strikes up a conversation with the nuns concerning the different saints. The nuns tell the group that some of the people whom they revere so much in their religion actually committed crimes in order to help the greater good. The church pardons these crimes because they were committed with the intention of goodness, not malice. These comments by the nuns affect Boule de Suif more than any of the other stories of self-sacrifice. The nuns realize this and continue by announcing that if they are to remain in this town then many people may die, for the nuns are on the way to visit a hundreds of soldiers with smallpox. The nuns are specialists in treating this disease and their skills are much needed.

Following dinner the group retires to their rooms. The next day begins much the same as the rest; the travelers have breakfast and then reconvene for lunch. The group is letting Boule de Suif have time to think over the conversations of yesterday. After lunch, the group goes on a walk. The count uses the opportunity to walk with Boule de Suif some paces behind the others. As they walk the count talks to Boule de Suif in a slightly condescending, yet firm way, as if she were a misbehaving child. He asks her if she is going to continue to refuse to do something she has done so many times before and in doing so keep the others in danger. Boule de Suif remains quiet as the count tries to change her mind through other emotions. He even tries to change tactics by telling Boule de Suif that she would be doing a kind service to the Prussian soldier, allowing him to have a French woman.

After the walk Boule de Suif goes to her room, she is fully aware now that the group desires her to change her mind concerning the officer's offer. She takes some time alone to contemplate the decision before her. Dinnertime arrives and, as it has happened each night they have been at the inn, the group assembles. However, Boule de Suif does not come down and finally the innkeeper arrives to tell the group that the young woman is not feeling well and will not join them. The count motions Monsieur Follenvie over to him and asks if Boule de Suif is with the officer. The innkeeper confirms his suspicions and the count passes along the information to the rest of the group via a quiet nod.

The mood in the dinning room is instantaneously changed to one of merriment. Loiseau says that this news calls for champagne and soon the innkeeper produces four bottles. The conversation amongst the group is hopeful and happy as they drink the champagne and think over their good fortune. Plied by the champagne, even the women make alluded references to what Boule de Suif and the officer are doing. Suggestive glances are also shared around the room. Throughout this celebration, only Cornudet does not join in. Loiseau notices this and asks why the other man is not happy. Cornudet gives a glance toward the celebrating group and tells them they have, "done an infamous thing!" With that, he leaves. The dinning room falls silent for a moment until Loiseau bursts out laughing. He explains to the others what he observed through the keyhole during their first night at the inn. Loiseau reveals that Cornudet wanted to go into Boule de Suif's room but she would not let him because of the Prussian. Everyone laughs at the fact that Cornudet is so uncomfortable with their plan and its results. Soon the party breaks up as everyone retires to their rooms.

Section 3 Analysis

However, the next morning reveals a quite different mood among the travelers. They now all secretly wish that Boule de Suif had slept with their captor that night so that they would be free. They once again see her as a prostitute, one who is only being asked to do something she has done many times before. They no longer think of her as the kind young woman who offered her food to them in the carriage. As their thinking changes, so do their actions toward Boule de Suif. The women find it harder to treat her with kindness and openly disparage her when she cannot hear. As the group goes on a walk

and passes the Prussian officer in question, they mention, in the company of Boule de Suif, that he is a handsome man. This comment foreshadows any plans that the others may have to manipulate the young woman once again.

The next morning spirits are even lower as they find that their carriage is again not ready, meaning that Boule de Suif had not changed her mind. Once she has left, the group decides to form a plan to manipulate the prostitute to their will. This continues the themes of manipulation and self-sacrifice, as they desire to manipulate Boule de Suif to sacrifice herself. The first plan that they come up with shows how little they now think of Boule de Suif and illustrates the character of the rest of the travelers. They quickly decide to try to convince the Prussian officer to keep only her and let the others go. Once that plan fails, as the Prussian officer no doubt feels he has a greater power over Boule de Suif if he places consequences on her refusal, the group is undeterred. Clearly, they believe, they will simply have to change Boule de Suif's mind themselves.

After the group is satisfied with their plan, they begin to celebrate. Although they feel that what they are manipulating Boule de Suif to do is quite beneath them, they have no problems making crude jokes about the subject. Overall, everyone is pleased except for Cornudet who does not take part in either the plan or the celebration. This signifies that Cornudet may actually have feelings for Boule de Suif and was not merely trying to gain entry to her room as a paying customer.

The theme of manipulation is further carried out during the conversation about women in history who have sacrificed themselves. The group feels that this approach is best, for Boule de Suif has already demonstrated that she is an extremely proud, patriotic woman, one who is willing to sacrifice her comfort for that of others. Boule de Suif begins to realize the purpose of the conversation and leaves to contemplate their wishes alone, until dinner.

At dinner, the group's persuasion of Boule de Suif intensifies, heightening the conflict in the plot. There is both conflict between Boule de Suif and the others in the traveling party, and internal conflict within Boule de Suif over her decision. The nuns, betraying their holy affiliation, begin to take part of the conversation to urge Boule de Suif to sleep with the officer. Their comments insinuating that Boule de Suif will be forgiven by the church and, in turn, by God, are very affective in prompting her consideration. The nun's comments appeal to Boule de Suif's slight religious tendency and her desire to not have any more of the French citizens die at the hand of the Prussians or by disease.

Although the coach is still not ready the next morning, the passengers are confident that they will succeed in changing the young woman's mind. While on the walk that day, the count implements another approach in the plan to manipulate Boule de Suif. He puts her in her place as a woman who is below him in social stature and age. His chiding weakens her self-respect and resolve. This scene brings up not only the theme of manipulation, but differences in social class. It also seems to be the final act in their campaign to change Boule de Suif's mind and, judging from the fact that she is absent at dinner, it works. When the reason for her absence is confirmed, the group, minus Cornudet, rallies in celebration. All of the travelers are quite proud of themselves for

pulling off their plan. Cornudet is so upset and leaves after telling the others that they have done a deplorable thing. Loiseau reveals the previous foreshadowing element where Cornudet was discovered in the hallway with Boule de Suif. This causes the group not to feel remorseful for their actions but rather to laugh at Cornudet's pain.

Section 4

Section 4 Summary

The next morning is unlike the other mornings the travelers have spent at the inn, for the coach is ready and waiting outside. As the driver is making final preparations for the next leg of the journey, the passengers busy themselves with stocking the carriage with provisions. Finally, Boule de Suif arrives, looking embarrassed and flustered. As she approaches the group they refuse to look at her, much less speak to her. Boule de Suif walks up to one of the women to greet her hello, but is only rewarded with a stiff nod. The group quickly gets into the coach, each sitting in the same place as before. No one speaks to Boule de Suif; however, Madame Loiseau exclaims her relief out loud that she does not have to sit next to her.

The journey begins in silence until the married women of the coach begin speaking to each other. Likewise, the married men also talk amongst themselves while the nuns pray on their rosaries. Cornudet is silent lost in his own thought, while Boule de Suif is silent lost in her own shame. She cannot believe that she had surrendered herself so that the group may leave and now they would not even talk to her, when it had been their very idea. Three hours go by in this manner until Loiseau announces that he is hungry. Slowly each member of the group produces the food that they have brought with them.

It is only Boule de Suif who, in her hurry to make it to the coach, forgot to bring anything to eat. As she looks around at her fellow passengers eating silently, her embarrassment and shame slowly turn to rage and shock. Only a few days ago Boule de Suif had shared her entire basket of food and wine with the rest of the group and now she is not even being offered a morsel. The group is taking pains to not look in her direction or catch her eye as they eat. Boule de Suif tries to remain calm but her fury is bubbling up inside of her, finally she lets the tears fall silently down her cheeks. It is quite an effort to remain silent and not move as she cries profusely.

Despite her effort, the others slowly notice that the young woman is crying. Most of the women think it is funny that the girl is shameful of her actions, the actions they pushed her into. The men seem to act indifferent to the situation. Cornudet, who has finished eating, begins to whistle and then hum a song. The song is about one's love for their country and having to fight for freedom with our own special defenses. Cornudet relentlessly continues with his humming, as the only other sounds in the cabin are that of the gentle sobbing of Boule de Suif.

Section 4 Analysis

The next morning the coach is ready, as Boule de Suif has done her duty to the group by sacrificing herself. Boule de Suif is ignored by all of the passengers and the married

women go as far as to call her names as they had done in the beginning of their journey. This causes great confusion for the woman as she has just sacrificed herself so that the group may leave the town. She had done what they wished and yet now they were throwing her away, betraying her. When it is time to eat, her confusion and embarrassment turn to anger. It is important to note that on this leg of the trip the other characters have remembered to pack food and drink, which is something they have learned from the young prostitute. It is ironic, or rather just mean, that they will not share the food with her, because without her they would never have thought to bring. Boule de Suif is so hurt that she cannot contain her tears and begins to cry in silence, in an attempt to not embarrass herself any further. The young woman has immense pride in the face of being manipulated and betrayed following her self-sacrifice for the group. The third theme of the story, the difference in social classes, is displayed by the fact that Boule de Suif is once again treated as if she was part of the lower class, just as she was in the beginning of the journey. The first time she sacrificed herself she was rewarded with further respect and inclusion in the group. After her second sacrifice, she is, once again, looked at as merely a prostitute.

Characters

Boule de Suif

Boule de Suif is the title character of Maupassant's short story. She is one of ten passengers in a coach, bound for Le Havre, which is leaving Rouen to flee from the advancing German army. She is traveling alone. Her birth name is Mademoiselle Élisabeth Rousset; however, it is her appearance that has earned her the nickname, Boule de Suif, or in English "Ball of Fat." Boule de Suif is a short, perfectly round, fat little woman with plump, sausage-like fingers, shiny skin, and enormous breasts. Her face is reddish and round with black eyes and large lashes, a small mouth with nice lips, and tiny teeth. Boule de Suif carries herself with dignity and a freshness that makes her attractive and desirable. It is well known that she is a prostitute, and although she is sought after, her seemingly honorable travel companions deem her an immoral woman, even though she helps them on several occasions. Without Boule de Suif as their companion, the entourage would have suffered greatly, as they all forgot to bring provisions for the long trip. During the first leg of the journey, the sophisticated prostitute provided her condescending companions with food and drink when the group was near fainting from hunger. Next, in Tôtes, which was already occupied by Germans, Boule de Suif compromised her own categorical imperative□not to have sex with a man against her own wishes□and slept with the Prussian commandant to free herself and her companions. If she had not made such a utilitarian sacrifice or, even worse, if she had not been on the coach at all, then there was a chance that the German officers would have kept them indefinitely in Tôtes or possibly even raped the female travelers. Boule de Suif is emotionally damaged from the event that saved her companions, but she is even more deeply hurt when they turn against her, once again regarding her and her actions as immoral: On the trip out of Tôtes, Boule de Suif is hurried and does not have time to pack provisions, but none of the other passengers will share food with her, speak with her, or thank her in any way.

Madame Carré-Lamadon

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

Monsieur Carré-Lamadon

Monsieur Carré-Lamadon is one of the ten travelers in the coach bound for Le Havre. He is traveling with his wife, Madame Carré-Lamadon. He, like the Comte, is a member

of the superior social class. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon holds a substantial position in the cotton business, owning three spinning-mills. In addition, he is a member of the Legion of Honour and the General Council, where he serves with Comte Hubert.

The Coachman

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

Cornudet

Cornudet is one of the ten travelers aboard the coach bound for Le Havre. He is traveling alone. He is a well-known democrat, and thus his liberal and social beliefs are a threat to all *respectable* people, such as the Carré-Lamadons, Hubert de Bréville, and the Loiseaus. He has a long red beard and loves to drink beer. Cornudet has spent a good portion of his fortune inherited from his father, a retired confectioner. Although he is a democrat who professes to be eagerly awaiting the coming republic, Cornudet is quite lazy, politically active only in that he frequents democratic bars. For some unknown reason, he believed that he had been recently appointed prefect. Yet when he tried to take up duties, no one recognized his position, and he was forced out of the office. Cornudet is generally quite harmless and accommodating and is a thoroughly kindhearted man. In Rouen he worked to organize the fortification of the town, and upon leaving he hopes his skills can be used in Le Havre. Throughout the story, Cornudet is in verbal opposition with the respectable men and women with whom he is traveling. He disagrees with their politics and their social views. During the first night in Tôtes, Cornudet tries to persuade Boule de Suif to sleep with him. She refuses his advances because she believes it would be shameful with all the Prussians about. Given this patriotic spin, Cornudet complies, kisses Boule de Suif on the cheek, and returns to his room. Cornudet is the only one of all the travelers that is unflinchingly outspoken about the shameful act of coercion the travelers impose on Boule de Suif in forcing her to have sex with the commandant to benefit their own desires. Yet, in the end, even Cornudet, like the others, denies Boule de Suif food, sympathy, and appreciation as they leave Tôtes.

Madame Follenvie

Madame Follenvie is the innkeeper in Tôtes. She and her husband, Monsieur Follenvie, run the inn, which has been taken over by Prussians. The ten travelers stay at their inn with the German soldiers. Madame Follenvie does not appreciate the German soldiers,

first of all because they have cost her so much money and second because she has two sons in the army. She is a pacifist at heart, not appreciating any killing whatsoever. However, Cornudet challenges her, stating that killing in defense is sacred. Madame Follenvie responds stating that it would be much easier to kill all the kings, as she believes that would end all war. Cornudet is impressed with the peasant innkeeper's comment, as he, too, is opposed to the aristocracy.

Monsieur Follenvie

Monsieur Follenvie is the innkeeper in Tôtes who hosts the ten travelers. He runs the inn with his wife, Madame Follenvie. He is the only direct link between the Prussian commandant and the ten travelers. No other civilians are allowed contact with the officer, unless otherwise specified by the commandant. Monsieur Follenvie is a fat, wheezy man who has asthma. He has so much trouble breathing that he cannot talk while he eats. Also, when he sleeps, he snores at a tremendous volume and rises no earlier than ten o'clock. He is kind but sluggish and oaf-like.

Comte Hubert de Bréville

Comte Hubert de Bréville bears one of the oldest names in all of Normandy. Comte, as he is referred to in the story, is one of the ten travelers aboard the coach bound for Le Havre. He is traveling with his wife, the Comtesse. He dresses like Henry IV, hoping to accentuate a resemblance to the king, because it is a family legend that King Henry IV impregnated a de Bréville and gave her husband a governmental position, accelerating their family's standing in the social classes. Comte Hubert serves with Monsier Carré-Lamadon on the General Council, representing the Orleanist party. His fortune, all in landed property, produces an annual income of over half a million francs. The Comte Hubert is the most distinguished and gentlemanly of all the men. When Boule de Suif first tells her companions of the commandant's offensive, immoral proposition, Comte Hubert is the most disturbed and outspoken even as the others begin to wish Boule de Suif would sleep with the commandant stating that no woman should be called upon to make such a painful sacrifice. Oddly enough, it is his final prodding that convinces Boule de Suif that she should, for the good of the others, sleep with the Prussian commandant. Although he carries himself with an air of chivalry, Comte Hubert is just as self-centered and self-righteous as the other, despicable, passengers.

Comtesse Hubert de Bréville

Comtesse Hubert de Bréville is one of the ten travelers bound for Le Havre. Her husband and companion is Comte Hubert. The Comtesse is the daughter of a small Nantes ship-owner. She has very distinguished manners, is an impressive hostess and entertainer, and is believed to have been a mistress to one of Louis-Philippe's sons. Thus, she was familiar with the local aristocracy, and they often frequented her salon.

Madame Loiseau

Madame Loiseau is one of the ten travelers aboard the coach bound for Le Havre. She is traveling with her husband and business partner, Monsieur Loiseau. Madame Loiseau is a wine merchant in the Rue Grand-Pont. She is a tall, thick, bullheaded woman. Her voice is annoyingly shrill, and she makes quick decisions. She is determined and runs the firm, doing all the bookkeeping. Her attitude and voice make her an ill representative of the company, as she often makes insulting or coarse comments. Her husband is the jovial front man of the winery and has little interest in the day-to-day management; thus they make an excellent team. Madame Loiseau is never courteous to Boule de Suif, even after the prostitute feeds her and her husband. She is also the first to call the prostitute shameful after she sleeps with the commandant and saves the travelers from captivity in Tôtes.

Monsieur Loiseau

Monsieur Loiseau is one of the ten passengers on the coach headed for Le Havre. He is traveling with his wife, Madame Loiseau. Monsieur Loiseau is a wine merchant from Rue Grand-Pont. He is a fat hedonist, with a red face and graying beard. Originally, he was a clerk at the winery. Eventually, when the former owners had driven the winery into bankruptcy, Monsieur Loiseau purchased the floundering company, turned it around, and made a fortune. He makes terrible wine and sells it at a very inexpensive price. He is considered a jovial scoundrel, almost a crook, because of his low-quality wine. He is widely recognized throughout the region surrounding Rouen as a practical joker, and most everyone knows that he is full of duplicity, yet no one seems to mind because he is so merry. Monsieur Loiseau's attitude is noted throughout the story. In the coach, he looks hungrily upon Boule de Suif, both for her body and her food. Later, when Boule de Suif finally complies and sleeps with the commandant, Monsieur Loiseau is so excited that he buys everyone champagne and makes jokes about what is going on upstairs in the commandant's chamber.

The Old Nun

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

The Prussian Commandant

The Prussian commandant is staying in the best room at the Follenvie's inn. Although he is scarcely seen, the commandant is obviously egotistical and self-centered, as he does not allow the travelers to leave even though they have documents from his superior authorizing their safe passage. He sends comments down to the travelers through Monsieur Follenvie. Most frequently, he inquires as to whether or not Boule de Suif is yet willing to sleep with him. At one point, the Prussian commandant allows for a meeting with the *respectable* men□Monsieur Loiseau, Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, and Comte Hubert□to discuss their departure, but he quickly turns the men away. All the commandant desires is to conquer Boule de Suif and then let the travelers go ahead with their journey.

The Puny Nun

The Puny Nun is one of the ten passengers bound for Le Havre. She is traveling aboard the coach with her companion, the Old Nun. The Puny Nun is very slight, with a pretty, but sickly face. She has a narrow body that appears to be devouring itself. She is so petite that she appears to be caving in. The Puny Nun spends most of her time praying over her beads and has little impact on the course of the story.

Themes

Naturalism

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

Social Order and Scandal

Maupassant uses the social order to create a hierarchy inside the coach. The entourage is composed of differing social orders: two nuns, a prostitute, a democrat, and respectable, socially elite individuals. The nuns are dedicated to God. Appropriately, they engage in very little regarding scandal or squabble in the social order. The prostitute is a fringe element of the social order, dedicated to hedonism and immoral earnings. The democrat, a political leftist, is available to voice opinion against the aristocratic government and the respectable, socially elite travelers. Finally, the respectable individuals are in the vast majority, as it is expensive to flee to Tôtes. The respectable travelers look down upon the lower social classes. However, Maupassant, with a keen naturalist eye, unfolds several scandals. First of all, the respectable individuals damage their reputation when they give in to their carnal desires and feed upon the prostitute's wealth of food and drink. Later, they are again dependant upon Boule de Suif to rescue them from the Prussians. Their greed and selfish desires propel them into another damaging scandal. The *respectable* passengers manipulate and coerce Boule de Suif to commit an immoral act. They do not take the respectable, moral high ground□standing behind the prostitute's categorical imperative not to sleep with the Prussian Commandant□instead, the respectable characters push her over the precipice of immorality only to commit their last and final scandal. In the end, with Boule de Suif flustered and emotionally damaged by her actions, Maupassant unfolds the final scandal as the respectable individuals not only grant her no appreciation for her act, but they actually shun her and show her great disrespect, calling her shameful and immoral. Maupassant uses the social order and scandal to unearth the heart of his characters through their interactions with each other.

Promiscuity and Moral Confusion

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

Style

The antihero is a central character who lacks traditional heroic qualities. Antiheros are not strong or physically powerful. Rarely do they muster up great courage to defeat a monster. Antiheros are usually outside the social norm, and they appreciate their position. Antiheros are usually distrustful of conventional values and are plagued with an inability to commit to any one set of ideals. The title character in Maupassant's "Boule de Suif" is no different. She is an exceptional antihero. She is not physically powerful. In fact, she is quite short, fat, and soft. She is certainly outside the social norm, as she is a prostitute□a profession not only considered fringe, but immoral. She is incredibly distrustful of the aristocratic government and often makes her opinions on such matters heard. On a final and most potent note, Maupassant's Boule de Suif cannot commit to one set of ethics. She waffles between categorical imperatives and a flexibility that is loosely bound to utilitarian principles. Boule de Suif holds to her moral rules only to be convinced that there is a better set of ideals. Nonetheless, her actions are heroic because she does them for the benefit of others. In the end, Boule de Suif saves her companions, entitling her to her antihero status.

Historical Context

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

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

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

The French were quickly and soundly defeated in multiple battles, due exclusively to the military superiority of the Prussian forces. Most notable was the battle at Sedan, when Napoleon III was captured along with 100,000 troops. Another significant defeat was at Metz, where an additional 180,000 soldiers were surrendered. However, the workers of Paris refused to accept defeat, and revolutionaries seized control of the capital. Unfortunately, the French army did not embrace the rebellion and, under the tacit support of the Prussians, the French soldiers took Paris from the revolutionaries and executed tens of thousands in what was known as *Bloody Week*.

From the earliest moments of the Prussian invasion, it was apparent that their forces were far too powerful for the French forces. During this time, most French troops and many citizens began a steady retreat toward the coast of the English Channel. Anyone with the means to leave planned to escape to England. Maupassant witnessed this mass exodus and his keen eye and photographic memory enabled him to absorb and store a vast collection of imagery and emotions from his fellow Frenchman. Eventually this collection of images and memories spawned his masterpiece "Boule de Suif." As a

soldier in the retreating French forces, he had a front row seat for the emotional responses to war and the results of aristocratic narcissism, both of which played key roles in his character development and plot construction.

Critical Overview

The literature of Guy de Maupassant, while widely read, has received little in the form of critical study. It may be that Maupassant's large readership has made it of little interest to critics, in that much of what is considered popular is often considered unworthy of analysis. It may also be that Maupassant has received little attention from critics and academics because his subject matter was considered immoral for so many decades. Regardless of the reason, his lack of attention is seemingly unmerited, considering the scope and clarity of his writing. However, Maupassant's own talent may be the reason so many critics have turned their backs on his work. Roger Colet, a rare Maupassant scholar and translator, states in his "Introduction" in *Selected Short Stories*, "[Maupassant] is the victim, in a sense, of his own perfect art."

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

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, this trouble goes even deeper because Boule de Suif also acts in accordance with her own set of a priori imperatives. Most prominent are her axioms established in relation to patriotism. For example, when the Prussian officer orders the passengers to exit the coach, Boule de Suif and Cornudet stay inside. Maupassant writes, "They [Boule de Suif and Cornudet] were anxious to preserve their dignity, conscious that in encounters of this kind everybody is to some extent the representative of his country, and both were disgusted at their companions' obsequiousness." Boule de Suif is enraged that her companions are so subservient to the occupying Prussians. She sees their weakness as an immoral action. Yet, on the other hand, Boule de Suif is easily swayed. Although Boule de Suif is opposed to bending under the oppression of

Prussian demands, she is more flexible when it comes to the demands of her countrymen. In an early encounter with the Prussian commandant, her companions plead with her to comply with the commandant's first demands to simply speak with the prostitute. Boule de Suif is initially stubborn, but eventually she takes the utilitarian route, saving her companions from a possible backlash. She even states, "All right . . . but I'm only doing it for your sakes." This decision is in step with a utilitarian code of ethics.

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

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

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

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

Source: Anthony Martinelli, Critical Essay on "Boule de Suif," in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Critical Essay #2

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

The protagonist of Guy de Maupassant's "Boule de Suif" learns that virtuous acts do not always reap rewards. In fact, her altruism or self-sacrifice jeopardizes, rather than improves, her own life. Boule de Suif is a victim of her own good nature. In her acts of charity she refuses to see how others have treated her. Such acts only win her even more disdain or hatred from the group.

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

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

Interestingly, these same group members think nothing of sacrificing Boule de Suif to their own advantage. They put a considerable amount of energy in winning the prostitute over, of convincing her that she comply with the Prussian's demands for sex for the sake of the group. They feel "almost annoyed" with Boule de Suif "for not having gone to the Prussian on the sly so as to provide her fellow travelers with a pleasant surprise in the morning," despite the fact that her self-sacrifice in this situation is fraught or filled with dangerous implications. In surrendering herself physically to the Prussian, she could subject herself to violence, even death at the hands of the enemy□indicated when the travelers themselves engage in moments of worried silence for the prostitute.

Expecting Boule de Suif to sacrifice her person in the name of the group is hardly given a second thought. When it comes to reaching down into their pockets, however, the group is reluctant to part with even a handful of coins to quickly resolve their situation, nor do they feel obligated to do so.

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

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

In the case of Boule de Suif's sacrifice, for example, the group justifies putting her in harm's way for the sake of the highest good. In light of Kant's beliefs, revisiting the old nun's version of the moral axiom "the end justifies the means" reveals an argument riddled with complexities. The group consensus as to the prostitute's fate seems to be that she should be willing to comply for the sake of their freedom, that sleeping with the enemy, because of her line of work, "was such a trivial thing for her." Publicly, all of the women lavish "intense and affectionate sympathy" to win over their reluctant companion. Privately, they justify her sacrifice by pointing out that "it's that slut's job to

go with any man who wants her," believing she has "no right to refuse one man rather than another." For the group, the end does truly justify the means. For their own sakes, all group members believe, or at least have convinced themselves that Boule de Suif's act of self-sacrifice is for the highest good□to preserve their own wealth as well as their safety, and to ultimately affect their release. In the end, it is their ability to make use of Kant's strong philosophical argument that wins Boule de Suif over.

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

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

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

Source: Laura Carter, Critical Essay on "Boule de Suif," in *Short Stories for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

Adaptations

"Boule de Suif" was adapted as a film by Christian-Jacque in 1945, starring Micheline Presle, Berthe Bovy, and Louis Salou. It was released in the United States as *Angel and Sinner* and *Grease Ball*.

The Short Stories of Guy de Maupassant, Volume I was published as an audio-book recording through Audio Connoisseur in 1999. The recording includes "Boule de Suif" and four other short stories.

Topics for Further Study

The title character, Boule de Suif, is unwilling to do something that is against her own understanding of right and wrong□sleeping with the Prussian commandant□to appease her companions. However, she is pressured to do so by her companions, who push utilitarian principles upon her, stressing that sometimes one is forced to do wrong to produce a good end. Explore this situation, and try to come up with at least three examples, either personal, historical, or literary, in which you may or may not believe that the ends justify the means.

Morality is at stake in Maupassant's tale. The prostitute seems to be the noblest character in that she has a code of ethics and makes the greatest sacrifice for others. But after they get her to do what they want, her companions shun her and draw back to their supposedly more respectable morality. Choose a historical event, such as a presidential election or a modern war, and evaluate how morality is applied, abused, or assessed in these historical events as compared to "Boule de Suif." Present a comparison to the class of the morality invoked by these historical events alongside the morality of the characters in the short story. Defend your own ethical position in light of your research.

Other authors writing in Maupassant's era were also exploring unscrupulous characters. Take, for example, Gustave Flaubert or Emile Zola. Look into the publishing history of these authors. Were they ever banned? Did they have any trouble with the law because of their works? What impact, if any, did the translation of these works into English have on the puritanical societies in the United States and Britain?

Maupassant met a bitter demise at the hands of syphilitic infection. Although it is likely that he contracted the disease from a prostitute, Maupassant did not transfer any anger to his characters, often making prostitutes his heroines. Yet the madness brought on by his infection helped to create his most horrific work "Le Horla." Read this short story and compare and contrast the style to "Boule de Suif."

Compare and Contrast

1870—1880: In 1870, Germany invades France after France declares war on Germany, which starts the Franco—Prussian War and signals a rise in German military power and imperialism.

Today: Following many decades of war and upheaval, Germany and France have made amends and have united under peace as two of the strongest and most prosperous European nations.

1870—1880: In 1877, Queen Victoria was named the empress of India, illustrating a rise in European and, most notably, British imperialism.

Today: India is a free country and, although overpopulated and struggling, it has become a powerful nation through its contributions to progressive politics and technology.

1870—1880: In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone, sparking a new dawn in communication.

Today: A large percentage of the developed nations' populations carry a cellular telephone with them at all times. Communication has been established via satellite, cable, digital, and wireless networks, linking the world together.

1870—1880: In 1871, Charles Darwin publishes *The Descent of Man*, challenging creationism and putting into use the term *evolution* for the first time.

Today: The battle over creationism and evolution rages on, with one side defending evolution on the basis of scientific knowledge and the other side defending creationism on the basis of faith.

What Do I Read Next?

A Life: The Humble Truth, by Guy de Maupassant, was originally published in 1883. The book chronicles the life of a Norman woman whose kindliness is both a virtue and a vice.

Bel-Ami (1885), by Guy de Maupassant, depicts the life of a journalist lacking moral scruples, whose success is built upon hypocrisy, lecherousness, and corruption.

Pierre et Jean, by Guy de Maupassant, was originally published in 1888. The book is crafted around the psychological study of adultery involving a young wife and two brothers.

Guy de Maupassant, Mademoiselle Fifi, and Other Short Stories, by Guy de Maupassant, was published as a collection in 1999. This collection contains many short stories that are not available in the Penguin Books collection, *Selected Short Stories*.

Madame Bovary, by Gustave Flaubert, was originally published in two volumes in 1857. In a depressing, but rich, tale of adultery and love gone amiss, Flaubert has created what is often considered one of the greatest books ever written.

Nana, by Emile Zola, was originally published in 1880. It is a risqué novel that tells the story of a ruthless prostitute's rise from poverty to the height of Parisian society.

First Love and Other Stories, by Ivan Turgenev, was published as a collection in 1999. This book contains the famous title story, plus five other well-known tales from this exceptional Russian writer of the nineteenth century.

Further Study

Christiansen, Rupert, *Paris Babylon: The Story of Paris Commune*, Penguin Books, 1996.

Christiansen gives a detailed description of Parisian political and social life both before and after the Franco—Prussian War.

Hartig, Rachel M., *Struggling under the Destructive Glance: Androgyny in the Novels of Guy de Maupassant*, Peter Lang Publishing, 1991.

Hartig's book is a challenge to the prevailing critical analysis of Maupassant's novels, purporting that his heroines do, in fact, undergo substantial change.

Howard, Michael Eliot, *The Franco—Prussian War: The German Invasion of France 1870—1871*, Routledge, 2001.

Howard provides a definitive history of one of the most dramatic invasions and decisive conflicts in European history.

Milner, John, *Art, War and the Revolution in France, 1870—1871: Myth, Reportage and Reality*, Yale University Press, 2000.

This collection surveys the response made by artists to the massive upheaval caused by war and revolution in France during the Franco—Prussian War.

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Kant, Immanuel, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated by James W. Ellington, Hackett Publishing, 1993, p. 36.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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