



Guy de Maupassant
Mademoiselle Fifi
and Other Stories

A new translation by David Coward

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

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MADEMOISELLE FIFI
AND OTHER STORIES

GUY DE MAUPASSANT was born near Dieppe in 1850 of cultured, middle-class parents. To school he preferred the holidays which he spent swimming and fishing at Étretat, one of the newly fashionable Channel resorts. He enrolled as a law student in 1869, but the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 ruined the family finances and he was reduced to earning his living as a minor civil servant in Paris. To relieve the boredom and to work off his excess energies, he rowed and swam at Argenteuil and Bezons (favourite haunts too of Impressionist painters), where he enjoyed masculine pursuits and feminine company, sometimes to excess. Flaubert, a childhood friend of his mother, encouraged his literary ambitions and helped shape not only the exactness of his style but also his pessimistic view of life. It was Flaubert who introduced him to Parisian literary life then dominated by the new 'Naturalist' movement led by Zola. The publication in 1880 of *Boule de Suif* in *Les Soirées de Médan*, a collection of stories about the War of 1870, made Maupassant famous. Lionized by fashionable society and courted by newspaper editors, he wrote prolifically and was soon France's best-selling author after Zola. In the decade which followed, he wrote nearly 300 stories, 200 newspaper articles, six novels, and three travel books. He earned vast sums of money and spent it all—on yachts and houses which symbolized his success, on travel, on his mother, and on his brother Hervé, who died insane in 1889. By this time his own health was beginning to break down. On New Year's Day 1892 he attempted suicide and was removed to a clinic, suffering from the syphilitic paresis which had driven him mad. He died on 6 July 1893, at the age of 42.

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GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Mademoiselle Fifi
and Other Stories



Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
DAVID COWARD

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INTRODUCTION

GUY DE MAUPASSANT was born on 5 August 1850 in the Normandy which he loved and used as the setting of so many of his stories. His father Gustave, dandy, womanizer, and amateur watercolourist, lived comfortably on his private income. His mother, Laure Le Poittevin, and her brother Alfred had been childhood friends of Gustave Flaubert, the future author of *Madame Bovary*. Flaubert had hero-worshipped Alfred and was grief-stricken when he died aged 30 in 1846. He remained in touch with Laure and it was through her prodding and her ambition for her son to make a mark in literature that Maupassant was later to come under the wing of 'The Master'. Laure was cultured and took a personal hand in the education of Guy and of his brother Hervé, who was born in 1856. But she was highly strung and emotional and suffered symptoms consistent with a malfunction of the goitre. She was restless, suffered migraines, and was at times unable to stand bright light, and it seems likely that the nervous disorders suffered by her sons were to some extent inherited. Maupassant always remained close to both his parents, though he tended to blame his father for the breakdown in their relationship. Divorce, which was not legalized until 1884, was not an option in 1863, when husband and wife finally separated.

Until he was 9, Maupassant lived with his mother in Normandy. In 1859, he was sent to his father in Paris and spent a year at the Lycée Impérial Napoléon, before being returned to Laure, who was by then living on the Channel coast at Étretat, which was turning into a fashionable resort for writers and artists. There Maupassant learned to love boats and the sea, and there too he mixed with fishermen and country people, picking up a store of characters, anecdotes, and speech-patterns on which he would later draw copiously. His education was continued by Laure and the local priest until 1863, when he entered a Catholic boarding-school at Yvetot, where, in spite of the tall tales he later told of his pranks, he was a conscientious pupil. Even so, the discovery of a poem, judged by the authorities to be sacrilegious, led to his expulsion and return to his mother at Étretat in June 1868. There he helped rescue the English poet Algernon Swinburne, who had got into difficulties while swimming. For his

trouble, Maupassant was twice invited to lunch, and observed for himself a collection of engravings and gruesome objects—including a withered hand, supposedly of an executed murderer—which Swinburne, an admirer of the Marquis de Sade, had assembled. It is likely that the experience (and the hand, which he later acquired and used as a paperweight) fuelled Maupassant's interest in horror—a theme of many of his stories.

In the autumn of 1868, Maupassant became a boarder at the lycée in Rouen. By now his literary vocation was becoming clearer and, through Flaubert, he met the city's librarian, the poet Louis Bouilhet, who read his verses, shaped his taste, and disciplined his style. Bouilhet died suddenly only days before Maupassant sat his *baccalauréat* examinations, which he passed modestly. Had Bouilhet lived, Laure believed, her son might well have become a poet.

In the autumn of 1869, he went to live with his father in Paris and enrolled for a law degree. But in July 1870 his formal education was brought to an abrupt end by the outbreak of war between France and Germany. He was mobilized and posted to Normandy, where he served in the stores. When the Prussians advanced on Rouen in December, he retreated with his regiment to Paris and, though he never heard a shot fired in anger, was almost captured when he lost touch with his unit: he walked thirty miles in the snow, he wrote to Laure, and spent the night in an icy cellar. When the armistice was signed in January 1871, he was back at Étretat, where he had ample opportunity to observe the arrogance of the Prussian conquerors and the spineless collaboration of local bourgeois notables. Although he was not demobilized until November, he saw no more of the horrors of the Paris Commune in May 1871 than he had of the late war.

During the hostilities, the family fortunes had suffered. His father was reduced to finding work as a broker's agent, while Guy, instead of resuming his legal studies, was taken on as a junior clerk at the French Admiralty in 1873. He was to remain a minor civil servant until the early 1880s, when he felt confident he could earn his living with his pen. He hated the drudgery, and a good number of his stories describe in sympathetic terms the life of genteel poverty, quiet desperation, and fear led by underpaid, harassed ministry clerks. But there were compensations. Holidays, all too short, were spent at Étretat, while weekends were set aside for rowing expeditions with friends on the Seine around Argenteuil, Bezons, and Chatou. Maupassant was

a fine athlete and revelled in physical activity. He boated, fished, and became a crack shot with a pistol. He also chased girls, and it is likely that it was from a chance encounter in 1873 or 1874 that he caught the syphilis which was eventually to kill him. But he derived more substantial consolation from literature. Each day he remained in his office until six and spent the evening writing. In 1874, through Laure, he renewed his acquaintance with Flaubert, whose friendship and example he was to value above all others. 'For seven years', he confessed in 1888, 'I wrote poetry, I wrote short stories, I wrote long short stories: I even wrote a play which was ghastly. None of it has survived. The Master read it all and then on the following Sunday, over lunch, he would criticize what I had written and gradually drummed into me two or three principles which are the distilled essence of his long and patient teaching.' These principles included the punctilious search for the exact word which conveys what is unique and original in a character or a setting; and objectivity, or the self-effacement of the author who tells a tale but does not make his own views or personality unduly obtrusive. He shared Flaubert's pessimistic view that life is redeemed only by the greatness of art. He was also confirmed in his taste for cheerful obscenity, which Flaubert both practised and encouraged.

Increasingly frequent visits to Flaubert's flat in the rue Murillo brought him into contact with writers and publishers. In 1875 his first tale appeared in a magazine, a horror story based on the Swinburne hand. Two other macabre stories followed in 1876, together with a few poems and book reviews. By 1877, he was a member of the new 'Naturalist' circle which had formed around Zola, who had expanded Flaubert's practice of realism by linking it to a scientific analysis of society: human drives and motives are to be understood as consequences of physiology and circumstances. Or, as the philosopher and historian, Hippolyte Taine, put it, as expressions of 'heredity, environment, and the moment'. Maupassant admired Zola and yet, for all his own temperamental fatalism, he never fully accepted his determinist view of life or his ideas about art. Though he was to ride to fame on Zola's coat-tails, he remained emotionally attached to Flaubert, who had treated him as a son.

Although he began a novel, published a few tales and poems, and even staged a play, he made little headway. His breakthrough came when Zola's young men decided to collaborate on a collection of

stories on the theme of the Franco-Prussian War. The volume was published in the spring of 1880, and Maupassant's contribution, 'Boule de suif', was widely admired. *Des Vers*, a collection of poems, appeared almost simultaneously, but it was his tale of the prostitute who acts with honour which caught the eye of the critics. Flaubert, who had read it in manuscript, had been lavish in his praise and Maupassant was hailed as his natural heir. He was besieged with offers from the editors of newspapers and magazines, who were eager to recruit his brilliant new talent. But Flaubert did not live to see his protégé's success. He died suddenly on 8 May 1880 and Maupassant sincerely mourned his passing: 'It is as though a great emptiness has settled all around me,' he wrote. For the rest of his professional life, he remained true to what he regarded as the spirit of Flaubert and celebrated his memory and art in newspaper articles and, notably, in the essay on fiction with which he prefaced his novel *Pierre et Jean* (1888).

But success was not to be denied, and in the summer of 1880 he began turning himself into what he later described, somewhat wryly, as a 'literary wholesaler'. In the dozen years which followed, his 'industrial output' ran to over 300 tales, six novels, three travel books, and two plays. He also wrote about 200 substantial newspaper articles which express, in less dramatic but more direct form, the rather conservative, even snobbish attitudes which lie behind his tales.

He was a determined élitist in most of his social views. He lamented the passing of the old urbane governing class, which had been replaced by elected deputies who lacked style, talked of little else but industry, progress, and democracy, and had led France to a foolish dream of empire in Indochina; on the contrary, he said, the French would be better advised to withdraw from all their colonies. The middle classes spoke of money, set up as gentlemen on country estates, and lived lives of spectacular vulgarity, of which Monsieur Eiffel's tower was the fittingly awful symbol. The prevailing enthusiasm for universal suffrage was entirely misplaced. Equality does not exist in nature and should not do so in society. The thought of uncultured masses waiting in the wings to rise up and destroy the flower of French culture was simply too appalling to contemplate. The notion that education would improve matters was an absurdity, since schools, 'odious' in his experience, merely brought stupidity and prejudice within the reach of all and enabled larger numbers of people to declaim inane ideas

which hitherto they had been too inarticulate to express. For the common herd Maupassant felt the same cool disdain which he turned on women. The proposition that women should vote or enter parliament or study medicine was quite preposterous, since 'the experience of centuries past has shown that women, without exception, are incapable of truly artistic or scientific endeavour'. Their role is to ensnare men into marriage, and Maupassant subscribed gladly to the misogyny of Herbert Spencer and Schopenhauer.

Broadly convinced by the scientific positivism of his century, he believed that life is a by-product of laws of physics over which we have no control. There is no God. Human thought is a chemical or electrical reaction to external stimuli, and its purpose is to enable us to survive and reproduce. Man is a helpless victim of mechanistic forces, an animal whose instinct draws him unerringly to the lowest denominator: satisfaction of the appetite for pleasure and power. To disguise the sordid realities, we have invented comfortable abstractions. Religion disguises the utter pointlessness of existence, while the idea of Progress masks our inability to change. Love poeticizes the horrible carnality of the procreative process, and Patriotism applies a veneer of respectability to human cruelty, greed, and aggression. These abstractions, which we raise to the status of moral and human truths, are illusions. If there are consolations in life—literature, music, painting, scientific discovery—they are victories over Nature, which is the enemy of the spirit. And they are won by an intellectual aristocracy of artists and thinkers who must be free to pursue truth wherever it leads. Sentimentality in art merely succours the common illusions, and the aim of the writer should be to show 'humanity bleeding' in ways that are neither forced nor fantastic but plain and ordinary. More observer than moralist or preacher, the artist strips life bare and reveals the human condition for what it is: a ghastly cosmic farce.

Maupassant's journalism is strong on impact and heavy-handed irony and probably overstates his case. But even in the twenty tales in this selection his cynicism, which deepened with time, is plain to see. Lawyers are crafty, mayors are pompous, and, like most of the representatives of the middle class, they pay lip-service to morality while ruthlessly pursuing their own self-interest. In time of war, they utter patriotic platitudes and leave the fighting to others. In peacetime, they pursue their compulsions—money and position—with single-minded

complacency. To them Maupassant was inclined to prefer the grimmer obsessions of the uneducated, which, in comparison, were at least honest and refreshing. Indeed, Monsieur Chicot shows far more ingenuity in getting his hands on Madame Magloire's farm in 'The Little Keg' than is displayed by Monsieur Serbois's sordid compromise over the bequest or by the more routine confidence-trick of Lawyer Lebrument, who makes off with his wife's dowry. And if he commends the bravery of prostitutes and peasants like Mother Savage in the face of Prussian brutality, it is in part to emphasize the cowardice and inertia of their betters. For as a group, Maupassant's peasants are cunning, grasping, and violent and merely exhibit in a plainer form the cruelty and selfishness which he defined as the essence of the human soul.

Maupassant does not suggest that there is much to be said for marriage, a breeding-ground for unhappiness. Wives and husbands betray each other, and children are innocent casualties—but only until they grow up and, in turn, spread misery to new generations. The blame usually falls on woman, the crouching beast who is fair without and foul within. Madame Parent and Jean Summer's mistress in 'The Model' reach for marriage as a means of acquiring respectability, and they exploit sexuality, manipulate guilt, and use any weapon to achieve their end—which is to devour the unsuspecting husband who walks into their web. The only unions which work are the result of accident. If Hautot inherits a mistress and, in 'This Business of Latin', old Piquedent abandons Latin and acquires an unexpectedly agreeable helpmeet, it is through no merit of their own. For there is no logic in this world and precious little consolation either. The curé of 'Shepherd's Leap', impelled by a murderous puritanism to stamp a whelping bitch to death, is undone by the religious zeal which he pits against the baseness of his own nature. The Abbé Vilbois, when tested in 'The Grove of Olives', knows that 'there is no help from God or man' and he is left to face his destiny alone. Miss Harriet's faith is no buckler but an illusion, for the only immortality granted her is to be food for worms and for the plants which will flourish over her grave.

Maupassant's clinical pessimism shows humanity finishing a poor second to the forces of nature, the spoiling power of existence, and the yawning gap which separates desire from its realization. Disappointment and disillusion are endemic in these tales, which can

at times feel like a laboratory in which the same experiment is rerun endlessly and nearly always with the same result. The innocent are at the eternal mercy of the cunning, and what is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh: Walter Schnaffs is a temperamental poltroon and it was written that Madame Husson's May King should turn out to be an unredeemable failure. A mixture of scientific determinism and old-fashioned fate overwhelms human dreams and human effort. Nemesis lies in wait for Miss Harriet, Monsieur Parent, and the Abbé Vilbois: a pure heart, idealism, and sincere repentance will not deflect the inevitable.

Yet occasionally, there seems to be a gleam of hope, and several stories actually come close to a happy ending. Monsieur Piquedent settles contentedly into his new life and young Hautot finds domestic peace. Of course, Nature, which is malevolent, is also blind and may well nod now and then. But it is hard to escape the conclusion that odds are beaten only with the complicity of Maupassant, who breaks out of his role as objective narrator and allows personal feelings to redress the balance. If Mademoiselle Fifi's victim eventually finds a good man, and Monsieur Dubois, much to his surprise, emerges victorious in 'The Duel', the reader may well suspect that an old personal score is being settled with the arrogant Prussian conqueror. But the contradictions are not limited to intermittent rushes of the arm-chair jingoism which Maupassant ridiculed in others. His contempt, rock-solid when he dealt with groups, readily evaporates when he gets to grips with individual cases. He may have hated all Prussians, but Walter Schnaffs, a victim of war like his 'Two Friends', clearly has his sympathies. He despised all women, yet he treats Miss Harriet (who is English to boot) with aching tenderness. He considered religion to be an illusion, but respects Abbé Vilbois's brawny Christianity. Maupassant drew many unsympathetic portraits of peasants and sailors, yet the widow Severini of 'A Vendetta' and Mother Savage are not among them. We are all Nature's fools, but holy fools are clearly a protected species: the helpless victims who cannot bear the strain, refuse to compromise, and resist with honour. It is Maupassant's vulnerability to the spectacle of 'humanity bleeding' which breathes, if not hope, then at least a sense of solidarity with suffering into these grim chronicles. The greedy, the cheap deceivers, and the selfish do not merit a second glance: they dig holes for themselves, and Maupassant is happy to push them over the edge. But the wronged,

the fighters, and those, like Miss Harriet, who are 'singled out by the eternal injustice and implacability of nature', are a different breed and he does what he can for them.

Maupassant would be unbearable to read without this instinctive sense of complicity with suffering humanity, which was at root a reaction against cosmic injustice. His stories would also be bleaker without his lyrical feel for nature. The rocks and gales of Corsica may make a suitable setting for 'A Vendetta', but a truer expression of his feelings is given in his highly charged descriptions of the Normandy countryside. Maupassant himself had a full measure of the sense of place which he extols at the start of 'Mother Savage', and while he could not believe with Miss Harriet that the beauty of nature was the handiwork of God, he fully shared her love of rolling landscapes which lift the spirit and quicken the senses. Of course, Nature will always win and the good green earth waits patiently to receive our bodies. However uplifting, the glory of a tree, of a sunset, of a running brook is no more than a stay of execution, an illusion like Love, which merely suspends for a moment the relentless advance of change, decay, and decomposition. In middle age, Monsieur Parent surveys the countryside, which does not beckon to him now but turns into a bleak vision of life which has passed him by. The moment is not philosophical, for he does not generalize. Nor is it cathartic, for he does not learn from it to go forth in newness of life. He does not rationalize his situation: he simply feels it. Maupassant does not suggest that he has a soul, or even much of a brain, but insists, as he always does, that his feelings lie on the surface of his skin. Crises are not a prompt to reflection but a spur to action. He never allows his characters to speculate about their predicament (they do not curse God or revile Man) and indeed are not, properly speaking, rational creatures at all. Their lives are lived on the level of the senses—fear, hope, greed, love, despair—over which they have no power. The joys of life, like the beauties of Nature, are short-lived. But knowing that this is so gives an opportunistic pagan like Maupassant the edge: consciously living life to the full subverts Nature's hidden agenda by enabling us to regain control of our drifting fate. Maupassant's moral strength lies in his determination to resist and his refusal to collaborate.

Maupassant approached his own life with the same defiant pessimism, and after he made his name he exploited his success to the full. He worked hard and quickly and ensured that he was well rewarded

for his labours. Soon he was France's best-selling author after the immensely popular Zola, and he commanded astronomical magazine-fees for his stories, which were quickly republished in volume form. In the autumn of 1880 he had joined his mother in Corsica. It was the first of many journeys, duly recorded in articles and travelogues, which he made mainly in North Africa and Italy. He acquired a series of yachts and named them after his books. He bought homes in Paris, Normandy, and the south of France. He was lionized by fashionable society. He embarked on numerous love affairs, which he wrapped in the tightest security. He enjoyed parties and was fond of playing practical jokes on friends (rather as he does on the reader in certain of his tales). Rich, fêted, independent, Maupassant enjoyed the public image of a successful and fulfilled man. This was how one American caller, Blanche Roosevelt, described him to readers of *The Woman's World* in 1889:

In personal appearance, Guy de Maupassant is of medium height, solid, well-built, and has the bearing of a soldier; he has a fine characteristic Norman head, with the straight line from neck to crane, in the medallions of the old Conquest Warriors; his forehead is low and rather too heavily lined; and his hair, brown and wavy, is now combed straight back in the fashion of modern Roman youth. In short, M. de Maupassant has such a look of cheeriness that he reminds one of a clear autumn day—an agreeable harmony in russet colours and russet tints; dark brown laughing eyes, a shapely mouth half-concealed by a heavy brown moustache, an olive skin mantled with red and a general ruddiness give this character and warmth to his physiognomy.

But behind the confident façade of the successful man of letters, there were strains. Although outwardly fit and healthy, he was increasingly plagued by a series of symptoms none of which responded to treatment. He suffered from migraines, indigestion, and palpitations. His hair fell out and he could not sleep. He experienced memory lapses and severe eye-troubles. The many doctors he consulted diagnosed nicotine poisoning, stress, and—that catch-all—neurasthenia. They recommended travel and warned against overwork. He took pain-killing drugs but also used ether, which had the added advantage of stimulating his imagination. But he had other worries. His mother's health was poor and he accepted financial responsibility for her well-being. More disturbing, his brother Hervé, who had proved unemployable, began to act irrationally. Maupassant set him up in

a horticultural business in the south of France but Hervé grew violent and was eventually institutionalized: he died 'quite mad' in November 1889 at the age of 33. Thus to the intimations he had received of his own mortality were added gruesome family duties and the heavy bills which went with them. Maupassant turned himself increasingly into a money-making machine.

As the 1880s advanced, he wrote fewer tales and began to explore the possibilities of the psychological novel. But though *Pierre et Jean* (1888) was adjudged to be 'faultless' by Henry James, Maupassant is best remembered for his mastery of the short story. He wrote at different lengths and in different inks, in part at least to meet the requirements of the magazines which published him. For *Le Gaulois*, a serious quality daily, he supplied serious, quality stories. He offered lighter, racier, bawdier work to *Gil Blas*, which had a reputation for being witty and scurrilous. He dealt with most levels of society save the urban proletariat, of which his knowledge was limited. But whatever his subject and mood, his natural bent was for the strongly plotted tale constructed on a firm narrative base. He liked dramatic reversals and situations which do not turn out as we expect, though he did not abuse the 'surprise ending' as O. Henry, an admirer, was to do a decade or so later. Indeed, he frequently withholds the final revelation (as in 'Monsieur Parent' or 'The Grove of Olives') and leaves the reader to share an enigma. So sure is his touch that our shock or outrage are directed not at the author but at life itself. Chekhov made stories out of less, and Zola was a more systematic realist. But Maupassant is more disturbing than either, for he turns the coolest of eyes on the illusions by which we live. Situations are peeled back with surgical precision, and his line, as Séan O'Faoláin remarked, is 'as hard and clear as a diamond on glass'. Maupassant does not preach; he simply reveals. His laconic manner and lucid irony make him chilling and uncomfortable reading. There is danger in his tales.

This is most literally apparent, of course, in his stories of the fantastic. Not for Maupassant the ghosts, magic, and diabolism of tradition, which he despised as puerile. On the other hand, he much admired Turgenev's ability to make the skin creep: 'in his books, the supernatural remains so elusive and hidden that the reader is never quite clear that the author actually intended it to be there. It is rather that he conveys what he has felt exactly as he felt it. He implies his uneasiness of mind, his bewilderment at what he has not understood

and the heart-stopping sensation of inexplicable fear which comes to him like a mysterious breath from another world.' These words apply equally well to Maupassant's own tales of the supernatural. There is horror in 'At Sea', but it is physical and unmysterious and provokes no more than physical revulsion. But other tales take us inside minds and have a more alarming resonance. 'Call it Madness?' and 'Who Can Tell?' activate 'sensations' which are all the more alarming for being non-specific. The first is a pathological study of sexual jealousy described from the inside. The second involves strange visions and a wizard, but the focus is squarely on the narrator's fear of a world which has suddenly stopped making sense. Here, the inexplicable does not have a separate reality but is the product of a disordered brain. The terror does not come from outside but grows like some poisonous mushroom in the mind. Maupassant, who knew such terror, turns our own fear of madness against us.

At one level, he may be said to reflect the current fascination with the new interest in the subconscious. He attended lectures given by Charcot (as did Freud) and became interested in hypnotism and early forms of psychoanalysis. In this way he came to a better understanding of the cruelty and the sadistic impulses which feature in so many of his stories. But his interest was not merely academic or professional. He consulted experts about the condition of his mother and, more urgently, of his brother. But he himself had long since been haunted by visions of his double, who he claimed to have seen sitting at his desk or staring back at him from his mirror. His memory lapses upset him and he grew tetchy. He reacted angrily to any attempt to intrude upon his privacy. He took noisy neighbours to law. He threatened his publisher, who had omitted to obtain permission to add his portrait to a new edition of *Les Soirées de Médan*. The strain of meeting deadlines and the ghastly death of Hervé took their toll. To some, in the autumn of 1889—Blanche Roosevelt, for example—he seemed 'lean', 'fit', 'cheerful', and 'talkative'. To others, who noted anxiously the habit of 'perpetual locomotion' with which he tried to ward off 'cerebral fatigue', he spoke increasingly of death, his failing sight, and the memory lapses which prevented him from working.

Although he continued to write and publish, his behaviour became increasingly erratic and unpredictable. In December 1891, while he was wintering at Cannes, his condition deteriorated dramatically. He saw his own ghost. He believed a fishbone had entered his lungs and

was rotting there. On the last day of the year he wrote to his doctor: 'I am utterly lost. I am dying. I have a softening of the brain brought on by the salt water with which I have been washing out my nasal passages. This has made the salt ferment in my brain which drips out of my nose and mouth at night in a sticky slime. It means that Death is near and I am Mad. I am wandering in my head. Goodbye, my friend, you will never see me again.' Five hours later, he tried unsuccessfully to cut his throat with a razor.

He was taken to Paris, to the clinic of Doctor Blanche, suffering from paresis, or 'general paralysis', which was syphilitic in origin. There were periods of lucidity but over the following eighteen months the delusions deepened. Friends visited him and came away appalled. R. H. Sherard, who had known him in his prime, was one such caller:

Poor de Maupassant's madness ran its usual course. He imagined himself the possessor of boundless wealth. His talk was all of millions and billions and trillions. He wanted to dig holes in which to bury his immense accumulations of gold. He shouted into an imaginary telephone orders to his stockbroker to buy the French Rentes *en bloc*. At times, flying into mad passions, he would dash round and round the room in pursuit of some phantom thief. The only mercy that was shown to him was that he died in one of these terrible paroxysms. He died while he still had the semblance and bearing of a man. His friends were spared the spectacle of that awful degradation into a condition lower than anything in animal life, to which general paralysis, where it runs its sacrilegious course, brings its victims. There was no very great change in his appearance when he died. Somebody who saw him after his death said to me, 'He looks like a soldier who has died on the field of battle.'¹

Guy de Maupassant, one of the world's greatest story-tellers, died on 6 July 1893, one month before his forty-third birthday.

Nature, exacting a terrible revenge, had won. But then, Maupassant had always known it could not be otherwise.

¹ *Twenty Years in Paris* (London, 1905), 65.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE most accessible complete collection of Maupassant's short fiction remains Louis Forestier's annotated edition of the *Contes et nouvelles* (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, 2 volumes, 1974–9, reissued 2008). Full listings of materials concerning his life and work can be found through *Guy de Maupassant*, ed. Noëlle Benhamou, Yvan Leclerc, and Emmanuel Vincent (2 vols, 669 pp. and 1,688 pp., 2008) in the series *Bibliographie des écrivains français* (Paris, Memini Éditions).

Of the many works in French devoted to Maupassant, Pierre Cogny's *Maupassant: L'Homme sans dieu* (Brussels, 1968) and Marianne Bury's *La Poétique de Maupassant* (Paris, 1994) offer general overviews. Among recent French biographies, Frédéric Martinez's *Maupassant* and Marlo Johnson's massive *Guy de Maupassant* (1,336 pp.) both appeared in 2012.

There have been no new biographies in English for half a century, but Francis Steegmuller's *Maupassant: A Lion in the Path* (1949, repr. 1950 and 1972), *The Paradox of Maupassant* by Paul Ignotus (1967), and Michael Lerner's *Maupassant* (1975) all remain serviceable. An up-to-date account, however, is provided in Christopher Lloyd's critical life of *Guy de Maupassant* (Reaktion Books, 2020).

On Maupassant's general attitudes, Adrian Ritchie's *Selection of the Political Journalism of Guy de Maupassant* (London, 1999) and *Choses et d'autres*, ed. Jean Balsamo (Paris, 1993, repr. in *Livre de Poche*, 2011) provide useful background.

Edward Sullivan's *Maupassant: The Short Stories* (London, 1962) offers a still valid oversight of the tales. Bernard Demont explores the *Relations spatiales dans les contes et nouvelles de Guy de Maupassant* (Paris, 2005) which allowed Maupassant to create the illusion of truth. On Maupassant's style, George Hainsworth's now venerable 'Patterns and Symbol: Style in the Works of Maupassant' (in *French Studies* (1951), 1–17) is still invaluable. On the vexed issue of Maupassant's patriotism and attitudes to war, see Michael Weatherill, *Maupassant: 'Boule de Suif' and the Tales of the Franco-Prussian War* (Wrexham, 2001).

Further Reading in Oxford World's Classics

Dumas, Alexandre, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, ed. David Coward.

— *The Three Musketeers*, ed. David Coward.

Leroux, Gaston, *The Phantom of the Opera*, ed. David Coward.

Maupassant, Guy de, *A Day in the Country and Other Stories*, ed. David Coward.

——— *A Life: The Humble Truth*, ed. Roger Pearson.

——— *Bel-Ami*, ed. Robert Lethbridge, trans. Margaret Mauldon.

A CHRONOLOGY OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

- 1850 5 August: Birth of Guy de Maupassant, probably at Fécamp. His mother, Laure de Poittevin, a childhood friend of Flaubert, was cultured but highly-strung. His father's family, vaguely ennobled in the eighteenth century, hailed from Lorraine. Gustave de Maupassant was worldly and lazy, and Guy later held him largely responsible for the failure of his parents' marriage.
- 1856 Birth of Hervé de Maupassant.
- 1859–60 Maupassant lives with his father in Paris where he attends the Lycée Impérial Napoléon.
- 1863 Separation of Gustave and Laure formalized. Guy and Hervé live at Étrelat with Laure.
- 1863–7 Maupassant attends a Catholic boarding-school at Yvetot. His teachers consider him able and industrious but finally expel him for indiscipline and for writing 'obscene' verses.
- 1867 Laure moves to Rouen and sends both her sons to the Institution Leroy-Petit.
- 1868 Summer: The English poet Algernon Swinburne gets into difficulties while swimming at Étretat. Maupassant rescues him and is twice invited to lunch at the 'Chateau Dolmancé', where he is lastingly impressed by the macabre and 'perverse' preoccupations of the Sadean Swinburne.
Autumn: Becomes a boarder at the Lycée Corneille at Rouen. Meets Louis Bouilhet (b. 1821), the city's librarian and friend of Flaubert, who encourages his literary ambitions.
- 1869 18 July: Death of Bouilhet.
27 July: Maupassant passes his *baccalauréat* examinations ('*mention passable*').
October: Enrols as a law student in Paris, where he lives with his father.
- 1870 15 July: France declares war on Germany. Maupassant is mobilized and sent to Le Havre where he serves as a quartermasters' clerk.
- 1870 1 September: Fall of Sedan.
27 October: Surrender at Metz.
December: Prussian forces occupy Normandy and Maupassant retreats with his regiment to Paris, narrowly escaping capture.

- 1871 18 January: Maupassant is stationed at Rouen when the Armistice is signed and sees nothing of the siege of Paris (March) or the Commune (May).
November: Demobilized. War having ruined the family business, he is unable to continue his studies.
- 1872 20 March: Becomes an unsalaried minor civil servant. He has no money and complains of loneliness.
- 1873 1 February: Secures a permanent appointment at 1,600 francs a year at the Admiralty, where he remains until 1878, when he transfers to the Ministry of Education. In the summer of 1880, he is granted successive periods of leave until 11 January 1882, when, confident at last of being able to live by his pen, he ceases to be a government employee.
To relieve the boredom of his life, he spends weekends boating and chasing girls, and continues writing poems, plays, and prose, but without success.
- 1874 Begins a lasting friendship with Flaubert, his friend and literary mentor.
- 1875 Publication of *La Main d'écorché*, his first published short story.
- 1876 Becomes part of the new 'Naturalist' coterie headed by Zola.
- 1877 August: Leave of absence granted by the Ministry for a health visit to Switzerland. Though fit and robust, he is bothered by eye trouble, stomach-pains, and headaches.
- 1878 Though he manages to sell a few poems and stories, Maupassant's literary ambitions are far from realized.
- 1879 19 February: *Histoire du vieux temps*, a verse comedy, performed in Paris. It is well received by the critics.
- 1880 14 February: Maupassant accused of publishing an obscene poem. Flaubert writes a letter in his defence.
16 April: Publication of *Les Soirées de Médan*, a collection of stories about the Franco-Prussian War, by 'Zola's young men'. Maupassant's contribution, *Boule de Suif*, is admired by Flaubert and hailed as a masterpiece.
8 May: Death of Flaubert.
Summer: Maupassant begins writing articles and stories for newspapers. He resorts to ether, first as a painkiller, and later experiments with its hallucinatory effects.

- 1881 Divides his time between Paris, Normandy, the Midi. He begins his travels—to North Africa and Italy—to research commissioned newspaper articles. Publication of *La Maison Tellier*, the first of some thirty collections of stories.
- 1882 Begins to be lionized by high society and embarks on a number of discreet love affairs.
- 1883 January–February: Maupassant buys *La Louissette*, a small yacht, the first of a number of boats which symbolize his success.
25 February–6 April: serialization of *Une Vie*, the first of his six novels, which brings him international recognition.
19 March: Dr Landholt relates Maupassant's symptoms to syphilis.
- 1884 Shares his time between Cannes, Étretat, and Paris. Publication of *Sur l'eau*, the first of his three travel books.
- 1885 6 April–30 May: *Bel-Anti*, one of his most popular novels, serialized in *Gil Blas*.
Takes an increasingly personal interest in mental illnesses, as exemplified by the work of the neurologist Charcot. Maupassant's valet, Tassart, becomes aware of his master's occasionally disturbed states.
- 1886 19 January: Marriage of Hervé, who is set up by Guy as a horticulturalist at Antibes.
August: Brief visit to England where Maupassant meets Henry James.
- 1887 Summer: Maupassant writes to *Le Temps* protesting at proposals to construct Eiffel's planned tower, which he regards as a triumph of modern vulgarity.
Autumn: Having broken with *Le Gaulois* in 1885, Maupassant severs his connection with *Gil Blas*, which can no longer afford to pay the rates he now commands. His income rises from 40,000 francs in 1885 to 120,000 by 1888.
- 1888 July: Is treated for his worsening physical and mental symptoms at Aix-les-Bains.
October–March: Further travels to North Africa.
- 1889 August: Hervé's behaviour becomes erratic and he enters an asylum. His condition continues to deteriorate into madness.
13 November: Death of Hervé.
December: Maupassant threatens noisy neighbours with legal action.

- 1890 30 May: Maupassant quarrels with his publisher over the use of his portrait for advertising purposes.
23 November: Inauguration of a monument to Flaubert at Rouen. Although he looks well, his friends are privately shocked at his condition.
- 1891 4 March: First performance of *Musotte* after a difficult period of rehearsal during which Maupassant upsets the director and the actors.
Summer: Still working hard against medical advice, he embarks on health cures in the South of France. His condition worsens.
- 1892 1–2 January: Maupassant unsuccessfully attempts suicide and is transferred to the clinic of Dr Blanche at Passy, where he is diagnosed as suffering from syphilitic paresis. There is no medical record of his decline.
- 1893 6 July: Death of Maupassant, a month before his forty-third birthday.
8 July: Zola delivers the oration at his funeral.
- 1897 24 October: Unveiling of a bust of Maupassant in the Parc Monceau in Paris.
- 1900 June: Monument to Maupassant erected at Rouen.

MADEMOISELLE FIFI
and Other Stories