

The Devil

Guy de Maupassant

The Devil is a short story written by Guy de Maupassant. It is said from the third person point of view. It is a humorous story but it reveals some bitter truths about the life of peasants in the 19th century. It revolves around a poor peasant whose mother is going to die very soon, and he must get his wheat. As a result, he decides to bring his mother Rapet who watches over the dead. Consequently, they have a deal of a fixed price till the old mother's death. Mother Rapet plays the role of the devil in order to gain a franc out of the whole matter. In fact, Maupassant wants to highlight major themes which are poverty as the main devil, life as more important than death and to show that poverty pushes people to be materialistic and very practical.

To begin with, the condition of the old mother is very bad, she is ninety two years old and she accepts this fact that she is going to die soon. She sees her son Honore and the doctor talking about her miserable condition. The doctor orders the son to stay beside his dying mother, however, he must get his wheat and his mother encourages him to do so because she understands very well that they are very poor and they need the money. However, the doctor insists on keeping Honore, but there is no use. As a result, the doctor asks Honore to bring mother Rapet who watches over the dead. Then, Honore asks about the money that mother Rapet is going to take. Consequently, he brings mother Rapet and they have a deal that she takes one franc at noon and two at night. Of course, Honore struggles not to give her six francs, but both of them are stubborn. Mother Rapet stays with the old mother for three days and she feels that she is going to lose. She thinks of playing the role of the devil in order to kill this "stubborn, obstinate and pig headed" woman. Actually, she has succeeded in killing the old mother and she wins a franc. As a result, she becomes very happy and Honore very angry.

In fact, the reaction of the old mother with her son is very strange. She encourages him to go and sell his wheat. She orders him not to stay with her. In other words, poverty makes her practical and realistic because she understands very well that her son needs the money to live. Moreover, she is aware that she is going to die and she believes that life is more important than death. In addition, the old mother's character seems to be very strong and she has strength, "tenacity" and "power of resistance" which means that she uses to struggle in life and death as well. The hard life has made her struggle to survive. Though she is ninety years old, she is wrinkled; she does the work of ten men. The old mother's reaction with her son is a proof for their poor condition that the peasants use to

suffer from at this time. Moreover, the reaction of the doctor with the son is completely the opposite.

The doctor insists on keeping Honore with his dying mother. He tries to prevent Honore from going out to sell his harvest. He believes that his mother is more important than selling the wheat. Then, he orders Honore to bring mother Rapet to watch over his dying mother and he does not care for how much she will cost Honore. In fact, the doctor's reaction sheds light on his life and his character. He is highly educated and he is in a good condition. In addition, he belongs to a highly social standard. In other words, he is rich and has a big chance to be emotional. He sympathizes with the old mother and does not care about the son's poor condition. He can order Honore because he is in control. He is not materialistic or practical like Honore or even the old mother. In addition, he does not care for spending money and this is shown when he gets angry when Honore asks him "how much does it cost to bring mother Rapet?"

Honore's extreme poverty is clear in several situations. First, when he leaves his mother to die alone. Then, when he asks mother Rapet to come and watch over his dying mother. He tries to make a fixed price with mother Rapet. He suggests paying a fixed price because he knows that his mother is not going to die so soon. However, both Honore and mother Rapet are stubborn as mother Rapet insists on taking three francs every day for two days. As a result, Honore is obliged to pay and he is sure that he is going to win. Moreover, mother Rapet also believes that she is going to win. In fact, this game or deal shows that both Honore and mother Rapet are materialistic and practical. On the hand, Honore is very miser because he does not want to pay at all and he prefers that his old mother dies before he brings mother Rapet so as not to pay. On the other hand, mother Paret believes that the old mother is going to die so soon. As a result, she tells Honore that she will take money for two days. She thinks that she could win the deal. However, she finds the old woman a life till the next day. Thus, she decides to play the role of the devil in order not to lose and to win a whole franc.

Mother Rapet is a very poor old woman. She is wrinkled and she is bent double. Moreover, she is envious and she is fond of talking about death. Her outside looking is like her inside. In other words, she looks wicked. She cares a lot about money. She has two jobs at the same time as she irons the linen of the living, sews and watches over the dead. In addition, she is very materialistic and practical. She does not like to waste time or money. She has one option in life which is to survive no matter how. That is why she decides to play the role of the devil in order to win a franc, and not to waste money or time. In other words, the death of the old woman is her life. Thus, she chooses her life as life is more important than death. There is no place for emotions in her life.

The Devil is a very significant title as it sheds light upon the real devil. In fact, the real devil is poverty which pushes both Honore and mother Rapet to prefer money to emotions. In other words, poverty makes them practical, materialistic and emotionless. On the one hand, the wheat represents life for Honore. On the other hand, the death of the old mother represents mother Rapet's life. That is why both of them have their own calculations about life because they are badly in need of money.

Maupassant uses some techniques in order to convey his message. He chooses the title to be the devil in order to show that poverty is the real devil and mother Rapet and Honore are the victims not the criminals. Moreover, the name Honore is very significant as the son prefers the money to his honour due to his bad need. Moreover, at the beginning of the story, Maupassant uses the word "the peasant" in order to generalise. In addition, Maupassant uses humour when he makes mother Rapet wear the sheet and the iron pot, and she holds the broom in order to frighten the dying woman. Of course, this plan adds humour to the short story which is full of the death mood and extreme poverty. Moreover, Maupassant does not want the reader to judge people because we do not know their real circumstances. In other words, there is no moral lesson to learn in this story. Moreover, he uses the irony in making both mother Rapet and Honore wait for the death of the old mother. Furthermore, he uses the priest and the devil that waits for death.

In conclusion, Maupassant has succeeded in proving that poverty is the real devil. He also shows that man can be a devil because of poverty and difficult circumstances. In addition, he has succeeded in making the story humorous by the simplest means and by adding undertone of the evil from the beginning till the end of the story. Furthermore, he shows that we do not have to judge people because we do not know the whole truth about their real circumstances.