

A Literary Overview of the Short Story – ‘The Umbrella’ by Guy de Maupassant (The brief note highlights significant literary views and is meant for internal circulation only).

‘The Umbrella’ by Guy de Maupassant is a short story of great mirth and engaging humour that unfolds in a manner likeable as a tale befitting the extraordinary talent of a writer. The short story that runs in an episode of ordinary event, of an ‘umbrella’ being damaged, is Maupassant’s way of fashioning fiction to a reader’s delight where the most mundane events are enlarged and made interesting in the literary stretch of a writer’s talent.

For the protagonist of the story being ‘Madame Oreille’ whose comprehensive introduction in the opening passage, seems like a discovery as to how the writer builds his story around the uniqueness of character/s portrayal and the eventualities that they face in the likeness of a real life situation. For the story that has a bearing in the domestic affairs of a couple living together and with the lady of the house exercising great economy and taking pride in the pecuniary discretion as a definitive antidote to a human trembling that clouds the most reasoned imagination as if struck by an unmet premonition, invariably leads to a comic display of events in the story.

Her “frugality” that marks the novelty of her character portrayal, also singularly draws the basis from where the story takes off and meanders. Apparently what is visible in the story is a humour that is sparkling in its depiction and also lends a sympathetic stance towards bringing to light animated sketches of its characters that find mention worth noticing. It revolves around the domestic affairs of a couple where ‘Monsieur Oreille’ whose request for a new umbrella from his wife, in lieu of the “old gamp”, is a cherished desire that he entertains in the unfulfilled dreamy and fanciful opulence of plenty. But in reality he is met with a stern injunction from his wife, bidding him to observe a cautious frugality that is learnt in an attitude of life lessons, signifying the observable variance of attitudes of different characters and their significance in the story.

However the character portrayal of ‘Monsieur Oreille’s’ appearance in the short story is of one, who cannot further submit to the marked analogies and adages of refined husbandry and control. It is he who also convincingly draws his wife’s lessons of caution for often being seen as a reckless spendthrift, at least makes her relent to his demand for a new ‘buy’ that leads to an interesting turn of events. However having laid his claim over his prized possession of having a new umbrella, ‘Monsieur Oreille’s’ happiness is short lived. The story’s simple yet very riveting accounts of life’s minor imbroglios has the story’s movement deepening in its focussed analysis emerging from the majorly minor question which they face in the unfolding of the plot. For the couple to have inched further into stretching their financial limitations, are fraught with an undesirable discovery of a hole in the umbrella. For ‘Madame Oreille’ to have discovered this unbearable truth unsettles her deeply as she gives into her proclamations of vociferous chiding and lessons of prudence to be exercised in the regular affairs in lessons of domestic economy to be practised, has for its signifying echo its humorous quips and sallies brought alive in the verbal engagements of the duo in the narrative.

For her to make instant repairs that manifests in the doings of a speedy repairer, as she is aghast to find that her husband's new possession is destroyed even more the next day. For the mystery that accompanies their sad discovery has no possible explanation to their intellectual comprehension and only leads to a rise of daunting emotions criss-crossing the playful interplay of unanticipated sorrows becoming obvious within the environs of the plot.

After having given into the hopelessness of what appears as an unredeemable situation, has a silver lining, in the promise of an insurance claim that comes as a handy suggestion to 'Madame Oreille' by a visitor who comes by... But the delicious imagination of a great rescue that could overcome the horrors of their appalling vicissitudes of having lost "eighteen francs" is an unbearable thought that finds its way in the workings of the mind of 'Madame Oreille'. She thinks that going to the insurance company the 'La Maternelle', is a resolution that needs to be designed in the careful craft of a story, of a mishap brought about by a tiny blaze that ruined the silken fabric of the umbrella. The writers' interesting delineation to unfold the mannerisms of its characters has a comic undertone that finds a movement not only in the progression of the story but also in the gingerly progressions of 'Madame Oreille' as she walks toward the insurance company, that portrays her character sketch as an individual who remains diffident and yet nurturing a desire to lay her claim of overcoming her monetary loss incurred in the inexplicable mishap that has ruined 'the umbrella'.

The episodes that follow her distance to the insurance company is also a moment of uncovering her psychological and emotional apprehensions. It is only in the end that her remorseful descriptions to the manager that are woven in serious tones of strong conviction and an emotive pursuance of her request that accompanies her unbelievable honest sincerity, ultimately leads to her victory, for the insurance manager submitting to her demand for a "compensation" to have her damaged umbrella "re-covered" has a subtle humorous and satirical end.

Work cited for reference:

Maupassant, Guy de. 'The Umbrella.' *Gems of Short Fiction*, ed. Madhu Mehrotra. Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd., 2013.

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