

## **A Comparative Study of the Short Story Styles of O. Henry and Guy de Maupassant**

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to analyze and compare the short story styles of renowned authors O. Henry and Guy de Maupassant. By closely reading their works and reviewing existing literature, the study examines their unique literary characteristics and artistic styles in terms of language use, narrative techniques, character portrayal, and thematic elements. Adopting a comparative literature approach, combined with close reading and literature analysis, the research involves a detailed examination of their classic short stories. The process includes the following steps: outlining the authors' literary achievements and stylistic backgrounds; analyzing the language, narrative methods, character depiction, and thematic differences in their representative works; exploring cultural and social factors influencing these stylistic traits based on domestic and international research; and finally, summarizing their unique contributions and artistic innovations through a multi-faceted comparison. The findings indicate that O. Henry is known for his humorous language, unexpected endings, and profound depiction of ordinary people, while Maupassant excels in concise language, intricate plot design, and deep social critique. Despite their stylistic differences, both authors exhibit high literary creativity and social awareness within their cultural contexts, significantly impacting subsequent literary works. This study not only enhances the understanding of O. Henry and Maupassant's works but also provides valuable insights for modern short story writing.

**Keywords:** O. Henry; Guy de Maupassant; Short Stories; Literary Style; Comparative Study

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Research Background**

As a literary genre, short story has attracted the attention of a large number of readers and literary researchers with its concise length and profound connotation. This genre not only provides readers with the pleasure of quick reading because of its short form, but also lies in the rich meaning contained in its condensed language and structure. Two representative writers in the field of short stories, O Henry and Maupassant, not only made outstanding achievements in their respective countries and times, but also left an indelible mark in the history of world literature. O Henry, born William Sydney Porter, is one of America's most famous short story writers. His creative activities mainly focused on the American society in the early 20th century. During that period of social transformation and rapid economic development, O Henry carefully depicted ordinary people living in American cities through his unique perspective and humorous brushwork. His "O Henry ending", which sets a dramatic reversal at the end of the story, makes the reader deeply reflect on the theme of the story while being amazed, and becomes his most significant creative technique. His works, such as *The Gift of Maggie* and *The Cop and the Hymn*, satirize social phenomena and explore the complexity of human nature through simple but thought-provoking narratives. Maupassant, known as "the King of short stories", is an important representative of French realism. Most of his works are set against the background of French society at the end of the 19th century, and show the life of various strata of French society through delicate depiction and realistic narration. With concise writing and exquisite structure, he deeply analyzes the human heart and social phenomena, and contains profound philosophy and criticism in a short space. Maupassant's novels, such as *The Necklace* and *The Ball of Suet*, not only show his superb narrative talent, but also expose the hypocrisy

of the society and the complex nature of human nature.

The obvious differences in the writing styles of the two writers reflect the literary traditions and concepts under different cultural backgrounds. O Henry's works pay more attention to the plot design and dramatic effect, the language style is humorous, and the emphasis is on the irony of life. Maupassant, on the other hand, is famous for his meticulous psychological description and realistic narrative language, which often reveals sharp social criticism and deep human nature discussion. This difference in style, of course, is related to their respective creative personalities, but more closely related to the cultural tradition and social background. The United States, where O Henry lived, was in a thriving era, with the vigorous development of economy and the rapid advancement of urbanization, making people's lives full of various possibilities and uncertainties. Such a social environment prompts O Henry to pay attention to the little people who struggle in the turmoil, and to express the joy and tragedy of life with his optimistic and humorous language style. France, where Maupassant lived, was experiencing the upheavals and social divisions of the Third Republic. Political turmoil and social unrest breed cultural contradictions and conflicts. Through careful observation, Maupassant integrates these contradictions and conflicts into his creation, in order to reveal the essence of society and the truth of human nature. By studying the writing styles of O Henry and Maupassant's short stories, we can deeply understand the differences and similarities in expression techniques and theme ideas of Eastern and Western literature. Such a comparative study not only helps to reveal the unique contributions of the two writers in the history of literature, but also provides a lot of enlightenment for modern literary creation. At the same time, in today's world characterized by globalization, strengthening the comparative study of literary works in different cultural backgrounds is conducive to promoting cross-cultural communication and understanding, and promoting the development of literature and culture.

### **1.2 Research Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this study is to compare and

analyze the short story writing styles of O Henry and Maupassant, and to reveal the similarities and differences in the use of language, narrative skills, characterization and theme thoughts of the two famous writers through in-depth exploration of their works. Through this comparative study, we can better understand the literary achievements and artistic contributions of the two writers, broaden the field of literary research, and promote the exchange and integration of Eastern and Western cultures. At the same time, under the current social background, strengthening the study of excellent literary works will help to enhance cultural self-confidence and cultural inheritance, and provide beneficial reference for literary creation in the new era.

### **1.3 Review of Research Status at Home and Abroad**

In China, the research on the short story writing styles of O. Henry and Maupassant has achieved rich results. Scholars have made an in-depth discussion on the writing styles of the two writers from different angles, mainly focusing on language features, narrative skills, characterization and theme ideas. Chen Shaoqiong (2012) pointed out in *An Essay on the Concise Beauty of Maupassant's Short Stories* that Maupassant's short stories are famous for their concise language and exquisite structure, showing his superb artistic skills. She believes that Maupassant successfully creates a rich and diverse character image through concise language and exquisite plot Settings, revealing profound social problems and human complexity. Wang Fan (2018) analyzed the writing characteristics of O. Henry in *A Brief Analysis of O. Henry's Writing: A Case Study of The Police and Hymns*, pointing out that his works are characterized by humorous language, unexpected endings and profound descriptions of small characters. Wang Fan believes that O Henry shows the diversity and complexity of American society through his attention and description of small people, which has important social significance. Chen Yanyan (2008) discusses the artistic characteristics of Maupassant, Chekhov and O Henry in her essay on the commonalities of Artistic characteristics of novels, pointing out that they have commonalities in language use, plot

setting and character shaping. She believes that the three writers successfully show the complexity of human nature and the diversity of society through their unique artistic methods. In addition, Wang Yao (2013) made an in-depth analysis of the images of female characters in Maupassant's novelettes and short stories, pointing out that Maupassant successfully created diverse female images through delicate psychological description and vivid language, and revealed the status and situation of women in society.

In foreign countries, the research on the short story writing style of O'Henry and Maupassant has also achieved fruitful results. Scholars have made an in-depth discussion on the writing styles of the two writers from the aspects of literary theory, cultural background and social influence. In the study of European and American literature, O'Henry is known as the "father of the American short story", and his works are famous for their humorous language and unexpected endings. Foreign scholars believe that O'Henry shows the diversity and complexity of American society through the description of small people, which has important social significance. Zhang Fengzhu (1988) pointed out in *Film and Television Comics No. 5: Griffith and Eisenstein* that O'Henry's novels not only have an important position in the field of literature, but also have a profound impact on film and television art. Maupassant is known as "the father of the French short story", and his works are famous for their concise language and exquisite structure. Foreign scholars believe that Maupassant reveals the complexity of human nature and the diversity of society through his profound description of social reality. Feng Jicai (2021) pointed out in *The Eyes of the Novel* that Maupassant's novels successfully shaped rich and diverse characters through delicate psychological description and vivid language, which has important literary value.

Under the current social background, the spirit of the Second meeting emphasizes cultural self-confidence and cultural inheritance, which requires us to pay attention to the inheritance and development of excellent traditional culture in literary research. O'Henry and Maupassant, as representatives of Eastern and Western literature, not only have important literary value, but also have great significance

in cultural inheritance and social concern. First of all, the works of O'Henry and Maupassant show the diversity and complexity of society through the description of small people, which has important social significance. Sun Ying (2015) pointed out in *Big Feelings of Little People - Appreciation of O'Henry's Short Stories* that O'Henry showed the diversity and complexity of American society through his attention to and description of little people, which is of great social significance. In *Short Stories Are Not Short: O'Henry's Critical Spirit and the Art of Language Expression*, Wang Jingyi (2020) points out that O'Henry successfully reveals social problems and the complexity of human nature through humorous language and unexpected endings, and has an important critical spirit. Secondly, Maupassant's works reveal the complexity of human nature and the diversity of society through the profound description of social reality, which has important literary value. In *A Brief Analysis of the Linguistic Features of Maupassant's Short Stories*, Linschen (2015) pointed out that Maupassant successfully created a rich variety of characters and revealed profound social problems and the complexity of human nature through concise language and elaborate plot settings. Chen Ying (2013) pointed out in *A Brief Discussion on Maupassant's Artistic Achievements in Short Stories* that Maupassant successfully created a variety of characters through his delicate psychological description and vivid language, which is of great literary value. In addition, the works of O'Henry and Maupassant are significant in terms of cultural heritage and social concerns. Chen Yanyan (2008) pointed out in *A Review of the Common Artistic Characteristics of the novels of Maupassant, Chekhov and O'Henry* that O'Henry and O'Upassant successfully demonstrated the complexity of human nature and the diversity of society through their unique artistic techniques, which has important cultural inheritance significance. Wang Yixuan (2018) points out in *Exploring the Similarities and Differences between Maupassant's and O'Henry's Artistic Styles* that the works of O'Henry and O'Henry reveal the complexity of human nature and the diversity of society through the profound description of social reality, which is of great social concern.

Under the current social background, the study

of the similarities and differences between O. Henry and Maupassant's short story writing styles has not only important academic value, but also important practical significance. Through the comparative study of the writing styles of the two writers, we can deeply understand the similarities and differences of Eastern and Western literature, promote cultural exchanges and integration, and enhance cultural self-confidence and cultural inheritance. First of all, through the comparative study of the writing styles of O Henry and Maupassant, we can deeply understand the similarities and differences of Eastern and Western literature, and promote cultural exchanges and integration. Chen Yanyan (2008) pointed out in *A Review of the Common Artistic Characteristics of the novels of Maupassant, Chekhov and O 'Henry that O 'Henry and O 'Upassant* successfully demonstrated the complexity of human nature and the diversity of society through their unique artistic techniques, which has important cultural exchange significance. Ye Yuheng (2019) points out in *An Analysis of the Creative Techniques of O Henry's Novels* that O Henry successfully reveals social problems and the complexity of human nature through humorous language and unexpected endings, which has important cultural communication significance. Secondly, through the comparative study of O. Henry's and Maupassant's creative styles, cultural self-confidence and cultural inheritance can be enhanced. Chen Yanyan (2008) pointed out in *A Review of the Common Artistic Characteristics of the novels of Maupassant, Chekhov and O 'Henry that O 'Henry and O 'Upassant* successfully demonstrated the complexity of human nature and the diversity of society through their unique artistic techniques, which has important cultural inheritance significance. Chen Meixuan (2015) pointed out in *Chekhov's Image of a Doctor* that Maupassant successfully created a variety of characters through his delicate psychological description and vivid language, which has important cultural inheritance significance. Through the comparative study of the short story writing styles of O 'Henry and Maupassant, we can not only deeply understand the similarities and differences of Eastern and Western literature, promote cultural exchanges and integration, but also

enhance cultural self-confidence and cultural inheritance, and provide rich inspiration and reference for literary creation in the new era.

#### **1.4 Research Methods and Ideas**

This study uses comparative literature research method, combined with close reading method and document analysis method, to analyze the classic short stories of O Henry and Maupassant in detail. The research ideas mainly include the following steps: First, through the life of the two writers and their creation background, summarize their literary achievements and works style; Secondly, take representative works as examples, one by one from the language characteristics, narrative techniques, character description and theme level analysis; Thirdly, based on the relevant research results at home and abroad, the cultural factors and social background behind the above style characteristics are discussed. Finally, through the multi-angle and multi-level comparison, it summarizes the unique contribution and artistic innovation of the two writers in the creation of short stories.

## **2. Writing Style of O Henry's Short Stories**

### **2.1 Language Use**

O Henry's short stories are famous for their unique humorous language. He is good at showing the everyday life of ordinary people through exquisite language, infusing interest and profound insight. In his works, language is not only a tool to express plots, but also an important means to shape characters and promote the development of stories. The language in his works is not only full of wit and wit, but also often mixed with deep social irony.

In O Henry's works, humorous language is everywhere. When he describes the dialogue of the characters, he often adds some funny and witty, which makes the characters more vivid. In *The Gift of the Magi*, for example, O Henry uses warm humor to describe a poor couple who sell their beloved objects in order to give each other the most precious Christmas gift, only to find that each other's gifts cancel out their sacrifices. Through this humorous inversion, the work not only conveys the accident and drama of life, but also shows the profound love and mutual care between husband and wife.



In addition, O Henry also often uses vivid metaphors and exaggerated rhetoric, so that readers can feel the power of language in the process of relaxed and pleasant reading. For example, in *The Cop and the Hymn*, he describes the main character, Sophie, as trying to get a warm winter by going to jail for various offences. In the development of the story, humorous language appears many times, adding to the fun and irony of the story. Through artistic language processing, O Henry skillfully reveals the plight and helplessness of the people at the bottom of the society.

His language is also full of local colors and ethnic customs, so that readers can experience the atmosphere of a specific region and era through the text. O Henry carved the details, so that ordinary events and characters have a vivid literary image. As scholar Wang Jingyi (2020) points out, O Henry's language expression art not only improves the readability of the story, but also enhances the artistic appeal and social criticism of the work.

## **2.2 Narrative Skills**

O Henry's narrative technique is famous for its unexpected endings, which are known as "O Henry endings". This kind of ending often reverses the plot at the last moment of the story, allowing the reader to experience an emotional upheaval while deeply feeling the power of the theme. This kind of ending often echoes back and forth, so that the plot logic is closely connected, highlighting the author's careful planning and layout ability.

*The Policeman and the Hymn* is a classic example of the "O Henry ending", in which the master, Richard the Policeman, attempts to gain the warm refuge of prison by committing crimes, only to be accidentally arrested after finally deciding to turn his life around. This reversal is not only unexpected, it also reveals a profound social irony, demonstrating the impermanence of fate and the contradictions of human nature. Through this ending way, O Henry enables readers to enjoy the story while also deeply reflecting on the social reality and human nature issues.

In addition, O Henry's narrative skills are also reflected in his control of rhythm and emotion. Most of his short stories are not long, but within the limited length, he can quickly bring the readers into the story situation through concise and powerful narration and compact

and rhythmic plot development, and keep the readers' interest. *The Last Leaf*, for example, closely integrates Johnnie's illness with Berman's artistic creation through a progressive narrative, culminating in an emotional climax through a surprising ending. When analyzing O Henry's works, Ye Yuheng (2019) pointed out that his narrative techniques not only reflect superb artistic skills, but also make readers feel emotional fluctuations during the reading process and have a deep resonance with the story.

## **2.3 Characterization**

In O Henry's short stories, the portrayal of characters is particularly vivid and full of personality. Most of his works take the small people at the bottom of society as the main characters, and through delicate description and vivid language, he deeply shows the struggles and humor of these people in life. O Henry is good at depicting the details of ordinary people's lives and spiritual world through simple and full strokes.

In O Henry's classic work "*The Last Leaf*", the heroine Johnnie lost hope of survival because of serious illness, but because of seeing the last leaf stubbornly sticking out of the window, she rekindled her desire to live. In order to make this leaf never fall, painter Berman risked his life to paint this leaf in a snowstorm. This detail shows the noble soul and selfless dedication of the characters through concise descriptions, making the whole story full of human warmth.

O Henry's characters depict not only their external images, but also their inner struggles and the brilliance of their souls. In *Twenty Years Later*, for example, in just a few sentences, O Henry creates two very different friends, one who becomes a cop and one who becomes a criminal. Although the trajectory of their lives is completely different, their friendship has been preserved in the long river of time. Through this contrast, O Henry reveals the impermanence of fate and the complexity of human nature. At the same time, he makes the characters more three-dimensional and real through the description of dialogue and behavior.

When analyzing the characteristics of O Henry's writing, Wang Fan (2018) mentioned that he gave ordinary people's lives extraordinary meaning through his unique

brushstrokes and profound insight. Although the little people in O Henry's works struggle at the bottom of society, they have great hearts. This kind of attention and description of the little people make his works full of social concern and human warmth.

### **2.4 Theme Ideas**

O Henry's short stories contain a wealth of thematic ideas, including not only the discussion of human nature, but also the profound criticism of social reality. His works show the diversity and complexity of life through vivid plots and profound language expression, and have far-reaching social significance. In *20 Years Later*, two friends agree to meet again, one becomes a police officer, the other turns to crime. Through this clever plot design, O Henry reveals the great influence and change of time and fate on human relations. This theme not only shows the unpredictability of individual fate, but also reflects the profound influence of social environment on life fate. In addition, O Henry's works often show a deep reflection on social injustice and human good and evil. In *Ransom for the Red Sheik*, two kidnappers are so overwhelmed by the clever child that they eventually have to pay the ransom to send the child home. This plot is not only full of humor and irony, but also reveals the interweaving of good and evil in human nature, as well as the complex relationship between social law and morality.

Through these rich themes, O Henry's works not only have a high degree of literary artistry, but also have important critical significance in the social level. Through the detailed description of ordinary people's lives, his works reveal the survival predicament and inner world of the people at the bottom of society, thus triggering readers to think deeply about the social reality and the nature of human nature.

## **3. Maupassant's Writing Style of Short Stories**

### **3.1 Language Use**

Maupassant's language style is famous for its simplicity. He pursues the precision and conciseness of language and strives to convey profound ideas through concise language. For example, in the *Ball of Sheep's Fat*,

Maupassant vividly depicts the hypocrisy and hypocrisy of people of all levels in French society through concise and concise language. His language is exquisitely crafted, and every word is carefully selected to express rich content and add artistic beauty to the work.

### **3.2 Narrative Skills**

Most of Maupassant's short stories are famous for their delicate plots and tight structures. He is good at revealing the deep complexity of human nature through delicate plot design. For example, in *The Necklace*, the heroine borrows the necklace for vanity, but loses her good life prematurely due to the loss of the necklace, only to find out several years later that the necklace is a fake, and the final stroke reveals the theme, making the whole novel have a shocking effect. Through exquisite plot design, Maupassant makes his works strictly structured and gives people a strong artistic shock.

### **3.3 Characterization**

Most of the characters in Maupassant's short stories are ordinary people. He reveals the characters' character and fate through delicate psychological description and vivid language. He is good at showing the inner world of ordinary people by describing the details of daily life. For example, in *Ball of Suet*, Maupassant's delicate portrayal of the heroine shows her tenacity and tolerance in the face of social injustice, revealing the complexity of human nature and the ruthlessness of society.

### **3.4 Theme Ideas**

The themes of Maupassant's short stories are profound, focusing on the social reality and the complexity of human nature. He often reveals the truth of human nature and the nature of society through the description of social reality. For example, in *"Pretty Friends"*, he reveals the corruption and hypocrisy of the French Third Republic through the ascent of the main character, Georges Duroy, to high society. Through these profound themes, Maupassant's novels show his deep insight and sharp criticism of the complexity of social reality and human nature.

## **4. A comparative Analysis of The Creative Styles of O Henry and Maupassant**

### **4.1 Comparison of Language Use**

O Henry and Maupassant have their own characteristics in the use of language. O Henry's language is full of humor and drama, and through vivid metaphors and exaggerated rhetoric, he creates a vivid image of the little man. Maupassant, on the other hand, pursues the conciseness and precision of language and conveys profound ideas through concise and concise words. Although the two writers have different language styles, their works are full of artistic charm through their unique use of language.

#### **4.2 Comparison of Narrative Techniques**

O Henry and Maupassant also have significant differences in narrative techniques. O Henry is known for his unexpected endings, often giving readers a shocking twist at the last minute. Maupassant, on the other hand, is known for his exquisite plot design, which makes his works full of artistic shock through tight structure and delicate description. Although the two writers are different in narrative techniques, they both show their literary talents through exquisite narrative techniques.

#### **4.3 Comparison of Characterization**

O Henry and Maupassant each have their own characteristics in the characterization. Through humorous language, O Henry portrays all kinds of small characters, showing their struggles and humor in life. But Maupassant reveals the inner world and fate of ordinary characters through delicate psychological description and vivid language. Although the two writers are different in the characterization, they both make their works full of human warmth and social concern through the in-depth characterization of the characters.

#### **4.4 Comparison of Theme Ideas**

The short stories of O Henry and Maupassant also have different emphases on the theme. O Henry's works have a variety of themes, including both the discussion of human nature and the criticism of social reality. Through humorous satire, O Henry reveals the diversity and complexity of life. On the other hand, Maupassant pays more attention to the social reality and the complexity of human nature, and reveals the truth of human nature and the nature of society through the depiction of people from all social strata. Although the two

writers are different in theme ideas, they both make their works have profound social significance through in-depth social observation and human nature insight.

### **5. Cultural and Societal Influences**

#### **5.1 Influence of Eastern and Western Cultural Backgrounds on Creative Styles**

The writing styles of O. Henry and Guy de Maupassant are profoundly influenced by their respective cultural backgrounds. O. Henry, living in the United States, imbues his works with the optimism and individualism characteristic of American culture. His humorous language and unexpected plot twists reflect the diversity and complexity of American society. Conversely, Maupassant, writing in France, is influenced by French Realism. His concise language and intricate plot designs reveal societal realities and the complexities of human nature. While their styles reflect their cultural contexts, both authors exhibit unique literary talents through distinct narrative techniques.

#### **5.2 Influence of Societal Realities and Historical Backgrounds on Creative Styles**

The societal and historical contexts also shape the creative styles of O. Henry and Maupassant. O. Henry's works mirror America's rapid development and social diversity, highlighting societal conflicts and contradictions through the depiction of ordinary characters. Maupassant's works reflect the corruption and hypocrisy of the French Third Republic, revealing societal cruelty and human complexity across different social strata. Despite these contextual differences, both authors' deep social observations and insights into human nature confer significant societal relevance to their works.

### **6. Conclusions**

#### **6.1 Main Research Conclusions**

The comparative study of O. Henry and Maupassant's short story styles yields several conclusions: O. Henry is renowned for his humorous language, unexpected endings, and profound portrayals of ordinary people, whereas Maupassant excels in concise language, intricate plots, and deep social critique. Despite their divergent styles, both

authors demonstrate high literary creativity and social concern within their cultural contexts, profoundly influencing subsequent literary creation.

### 6.2 Insights for Modern Short Story Writing

The study of O. Henry and Maupassant's styles offers valuable insights for modern short story writing. O. Henry's humor and plot twists suggest that contemporary writers should emphasize dramatic and surprising elements to enhance engagement and artistic impact. Maupassant's concise language and intricate plots highlight the need for precision and brevity in language while deeply revealing societal realities and human complexities through skillful storytelling.

### 6.3 Research Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study provides a comparative analysis of O. Henry and Maupassant's short story styles, it has some limitations, such as insufficient in-depth analysis of specific cultural and historical contexts. Future research could expand on these aspects. Additionally, this study primarily uses close reading and literature review, lacking in-depth exploration of the authors' biographies and creative motivations. Future studies could incorporate biographical sources and correspondence to further understand the authors' styles and thematic concerns.

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