

## Literary Analysis of Maupassant's "The Necklace"

One of Guy De Maupassant's literary influences was Gustave Flaubert, who taught him to write. Flaubert's teaching principles suggested that the "writer must look at everything to find some aspect of it that no one has yet seen or expressed," thus providing the reader a new or different view of life (Charters, "Maupassant" header 523). Maupassant succeeded in being a writer "who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes," according to Kate Chopin (861). He wrote "realistic fiction" and greatly influences writers still (Charters, "Brief History" 998). "The Necklace" was written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Literary Realism period. The story focuses on "everyday events, lives, [and the] relationships of middle/lower class," and it provides a glimpse of normal people and how they are influenced by "social and economic forces" (Agatucci 4).

The meaning of "The Necklace" is developed through the depiction of the characters and the plot of the story. Maupassant stated that the story is not only a form of entertainment but a tool "to make us think and to make us understand the deep and hidden meaning of events" ("Writer's" 896). I found that the theme of "The Necklace" exhibits the importance of honesty and being happy with who you are. It shows that things are not always what they seem, material things do not define the person and that money cannot solve all problems and may in fact create them. Donald Adamson describes the main character, Mathilde, as a "poor but an honest woman," I disagree with his opinion. Mathilde's dishonesty changes her life and forces her to know "the horrible existence of the needy" (Maupassant 528). "The Necklace" is a story about Mathilde, a miserable and selfish wife of a "little clerk" who suffers "from the poverty of her dwelling," and dreams of a rich and elegant lifestyle where she is beautiful and "envied" (Maupassant, "Necklace", 524). This conflict within Mathilde drives her throughout the story. Her dedicated husband, M. Loisel, is content with their life and

wishes to make her happy despite everything he must endure. After obtaining an invitation to a ball that was an "awful trouble to get," he eagerly takes it home to his wife who is ungrateful because she does not feel that she has anything suitable to wear (525). After having a new dress made, Mathilde can't imagine going to the ball without "a single jewel" so she borrows a beautiful necklace from her friend Mme. Forestier (526). The day of the ball proved to be everything Mathilde imagined, but it all ends when she loses the necklace. Although M. Loisel and Mathilde find a replacement necklace, they spend "ten years in grinding poverty until they finally paid off their debt," only to discover that the necklace was not a diamond necklace but just "mere costume jewellery" (Adamson).

Charters defines plot as the "sequence of events in a story and their relation to one another as they develop and usually resolve a conflict" ("Elements" 1003). In the exposition of "The Necklace," Maupassant provides a detailed "character portrait" of Mathilde and offers some important details about M. Loisel (Adamson). It is obvious that conflict exists inside of Mathilde. She feels she is too good for the life she leads. She is unhappy with who she is and dreams of being someone else. On the contrary, M. Loisel is happy and satisfied to come home to his wife who prepares him an "economical but tasty meal" (Smith). Mathilde is very materialistic and believes that riches would end her suffering, she won't even visit a rich friend and "former classmate at the convent" because she is so jealous and envious.

The rising action of the plot begins when M. Loisel presents the invitation to Mathilde. This presentation only aggravates the conflict that exists within Mathilde and she cannot imagine going to the ball in any of her old dresses. Mathilde sheds two pitiful tears and M. Loisel "quickly decides to sacrifice his savings" so that she may purchase a new dress (Smith). Mathilde is not satisfied with just a new dress! She

believes it would be a disgrace to show up at the ball without jewelry. She must not "look poor among other women who are rich" (Maupassant 526). So she borrows a "superb necklace of diamonds" from Mme. Forestier (526). In this passage Maupassant convinces the reader that the necklace is real diamonds; "he misleads the reader into believing that the necklace really is valuable" (Adamson). This creates more excitement for the climax of the story when Mathilde loses the necklace on her way home from the ball. M. Loisel responds by going to search for the necklace to no avail. He does not find the necklace and instructs Mathilde to lie to Mme. Forestier and tell her that she has broken the necklace and will need time to have it repaired. If Mathilde would have chosen to be honest at this point, Mme. Forestier would have told her that the necklace was only "paste...worth at most five hundred francs" (530). Instead they find a suitable replacement necklace that costs thirty-six thousand francs. After one week M. Loisel "had aged five years," and was forced to use his inheritance and borrow money "risking his signature without even knowing if he could meet it" to buy the replacement necklace (Maupassant, "Necklace" 528). Upon returning the necklace to her friend, Mathilde discovered the "horrible existence of the needy" (528). They "dismissed their servant" and gave up their flat. Mathilde became a "woman of impoverished households - strong and hard and rough" (529). She was forced to haggle and defend their "miserable money" (529). It took them ten years to pay off all of their debts. Mathilde was no longer pretty and charming, she now had "frowsy hair... and red hands" (529).

These trials and tribulations represent the falling action of the story, where the conflict is moving toward a resolution (Charters, "Elements" 1005). Guy De Maupassant's narrator and Donald Adamson use the term hero when describing Mme. Loisel, but I do not feel that her actions were heroic. She was just fulfilling the duties that were always expected of her, but that she felt she was too good for. I do not

believe that dishonesty is a trait of a hero. Perhaps if Mathilde would have been honest with Mme. Forestier from the beginning about losing the necklace, she would have explained that it was not real diamonds and they could have avoided all of the hardships they endured. Some may argue that Mathilde was heroic because she took responsibility for her mistake, gave up her lifestyle and worked to repay the debt. It was admirable that she did not expect her husband to bear the burden alone. The conclusion of "The Necklace" undoubtedly contains an element of surprise. Mathilde discovers that the necklace was not made of diamonds, but imitation gems. This devastating discovery leaves many unanswered questions.

Maupassant's narrator uses limited omniscient narration by describing Mathilde with her thoughts. She is a round character capable of choosing alternative responses to the situations presented to her (Charters, "Elements" 1007). I believe Mathilde is both a dynamic and a static character. She is dynamic because she does undergo a significant change and takes on the duties of a poverty stricken housewife. Yet she remains static in that she is still not content with her life and dreams of that "gay evening long ago, of that ball where she had been so beautiful" (Maupassant, "Necklace" 529). Her husband M. Loisel is also a round character, the "play and pull of his actions and responses to situations" could be observed throughout the story (Charters, "Elements" 1007). When Mathilde is unhappy with the invitation to the ball he offers to buy her a new dress. When she wants jewelry he recommends borrowing from Mme. Forestier and when she loses the necklace he collects the money to replace it. Although M. Loisel does experience some change, he is a static character. I believe he is content and happy with his life throughout the story. He continues to work hard and stays dedicated to Mathilde. The themes of "The Necklace" are evident throughout the plot of the story. If only Mathilde would have been honest with Mme. Forestier and happy with who she was, she could have prevented the whole ordeal.

Her misfortune proves to the reader that honesty is the best choice. Maupassant warns the reader of the afflictions that vanity may cause. There was no need for Mathilde to wear a diamond necklace; she was too concerned about what others would think of her. The fake diamond necklace proves that things are not always what they seem, although Mme. Forestier appeared to be rich, she chose or may have only been able to afford costume jewelry. I believe "The Necklace" serves as a reminder of the importance of being happy and proud of who we are regardless of the amount of material things or money that we possess.

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