

## **An Analysis of the Necklace from Marxism Perspective**

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*Abstract: The short story, The Necklace written by Guy de Maupassant is interpreted differently by lots of scholars. In this paper, a profound interpretation from the perspective of Marxism will be given to the story by analyzing Mathilde Loisel's false-consciousness and the conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie. The desire to identify bourgeoisie make Mathilde ignore the reality and have desire to become part of the bourgeoisie, which is the main reason of the tragedy. This realistic story reveals the fact that bourgeoisie control the means of production, as well as the people's vanity hidden under the surface of social reality.*

*Keywords: The Necklace, Marxism, false-consciousness, proletariat, bourgeoisie*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Necklace or The Diamond Necklace is a short story by French writer Guy de Maupassant. The story was an immediate success when first published on 17 February 1884. It mainly focuses on a small civil service's wife, Mathilde Loisel uses ten years to put up with all kinds of compensation to a borrowed fake necklace. A large number of scholars have different interpretations of this short story. The struggle that people of the middle class go through when they desire to have social mobility can be seen clearly in the story. From the perspective of Marxism, the main character, Mathilde Loisel, a part of proletariat in society, endured a ten-year struggle due to her false-consciousness, ideology and desire to become part of the bourgeoisie.

### **2. MATHILDE'S FALSE-CONSCIOUSNESS**

Georg Lukács claims that "western Marxist criticism pays attention to the reaction of superstructure to the economic base" [1]. In the The Necklace, Mathilde does not accept her lower class because of her beautiful appearance although she grows up in a working family. She feels herself born for luxurious life and has a false-consciousness of becoming part of bourgeoisie, a class she can never reach. She believes that a woman of her beauty should not have to marry into a low class. Being part of the proletariat is the most terrible thing for her. Her only connection to the upper class is her old school friend. "Madame Forestier's wealth has intimidated Madame Loisel, preventing her from keeping in touch with her old friend" [2]. She

refuses to visit this friend because she cannot help dreaming becoming that kind of woman with despair and misery after returning home. “She imagines silent antechambers, heavy with Oriental tapestries, lit by torches in lofty bronze sockets, with two tall footmen in knee-breeches sleeping in large arm-chairs, overcome by the heavy warmth of the stove” [3]. It can be seen clearly that Mathilde has a bourgeois ideology that she belongs to the upper class and desires to identify as bourgeois. According to Marxist theory, people’s lives are determined by their economic circumstances. Capitalism divides people into those who are the owner and controller of the means production and those who are not. Since those who own property have the great power, they will make sure they remain in the position. Because Mathilde is eager for a life of luxury and power, she desires to be a part of upper class.

From her point of view, “there’s nothing to humiliating as looking poor in the middle of a lot of rich women” [3]. She concerns more with what other people think of her and worried that people from upper class will judge her based on an assumption of her proletariat class. When she attends the ball with the diamond necklace, “she danced madly, ecstatically, drunk with pleasure, with no thought for anything, in the triumph of her beauty, in the pride of her success, in a cloud of happiness made up of this universal homage and admiration, of the desires she had aroused, of the completeness of a victory so dear to her feminine heart” [3]. At that time, she ignores the reality of her own life and is totally addicted into the ideology that she integrates into bourgeoisie due to the honor brought by the diamond necklace. For Mathilde, only money and social status can bring her life happiness.

Unfortunately, Mathilde loses the necklace at the end of dance. She never doubts the real value of that necklace because it belongs to her rich friend. She has the ideology that all the goods that bourgeoisie has are of great value because they are wealthy. She pays a high price for compensating for a new necklace, wasting her beautiful ten years. The huge debt makes her life even poorer and puts her into a hopeless situation. She needs to do everything she used to hate like washing plates and carrying up water. After the painful ten years, “Madame Loisel looked old. She had become like all the other strong, hard, coarse women of poor households. Her hair was badly done, her skirts were awry, her hands were red” [3]. She becomes what she fears of being, a poor and ugly woman, who was even sadder than when she was not living in poverty. She does all this work for what ended up being almost nothing, all because of a fake necklace. When she losses the diamond necklace, she losses everything she had including her beauty. Before her window, she is not thinking of how vain she was as a young woman. Instead, she keeps thinking of that evening at which she had been so much admired. She is not angry with herself for having been so stupid, just simply puzzled at the way life works itself out. Even now, becoming upper class even for a second is still the most attractive thing for her.

### **3. CONFLICT BETWEEN PROLETARIAT AND BOURGEOISIE**

From the perspective from Marxism, it is obviously that the conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie runs through *The Necklace*.

“For Madame Loisel, class is everything. She is so envious of the upper class” [4]. From the very beginning, the story gives a brief introduction to a pretty and charming woman named Mathilde who should have grown up in a rich family. However, fate has blundered over her and makes her born in a family of artisans. She marries to a little clerk in the Ministry of Education although she is eager for delicacy and luxury. She has no other choices because she has no chance to marry any rich or outstanding gentleman who belongs to bourgeoisie since she was born in a proletariat class family. The difference which is determined by economic condition between bourgeoisie and proletariat is so huge that will never be merged.

After her husband gets the invitation to the ball through tremendous trouble, she feels petulant and impatient instead of being delighted. The invitation to a ball “makes her miserable because it reminds her of her dowdy wardrobe and lack of jewels” [2]. At that time, only upper-class people can dress gorgeously to attend the ball. Due to the lack of money and funds, Mathilde has no choice but to borrow some jewelry from her rich friend who belongs to bourgeoisie, Madame Forestier. On one hand, Madame Forestier does not talk about anything about the fake diamond necklace to Mathilde because Mathilde is in the lower class. On the other hand, Mathilde conceals the truth of losing the necklace from her friend because she does not want to be looked down upon which would make her feel much lower. Although they are friends, they still keep secrets from each other. After suffering poverty for ten years in order to pay off the debt, Madame Forestier cannot recognize Mathilde when they came across with each other on Champs-Elysees. Obviously, they did not have any contacts with each other in the ten years owing to the gap between bourgeoisie and proletariat. The great class conflict influences their friendship in depth which makes them nothing in common, neither in appearance nor in mental.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

A Marxist reading of Maupassant’s *The Necklace* displays that Mathilde failed in her life as a result of desiring to be part of the bourgeoisie. As a proletariat, she ignores the reality that she can never integrate into upper class because it is the bourgeoisie who control the means of production. As a realist writer, Maupassant uses *The Necklace* to “reflect society or history” [5]. Maupassant reveals the major conflict between classes and makes a mockery of the middle-class members who cannot find happiness where they are. He exemplifies that as long as people focus on what they don’t have rather than what they do have, they will never be able to appreciate life and all it has to offer.

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