

Contradiction, Social Desire, and Bourgeois Anxiety: A Critical Literary Study of The Necklace

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Date Submitted:
January 25, 2026

Date Accepted:
February 19, 2026

Date Published:
March 05, 2026

DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.18877147

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes Guy de Maupassant's short story "The Necklace" through the lens of Marxist contradiction and the significance of social desire, economic rationality, and bourgeois anxiety in the context of 19th-century France's lower-middle class. The story concerns Mathilde Loisel, whose aspiration for prestige and social admiration leads her to take out a loan for an ostentatious necklace, which she loses. She then spends the next ten years working hard. The study evaluates the interaction among Mathilde's desires, the symbolic signs of status, and the strict restrictions on her material situation, using the dialectical notions of primary and secondary

contradictions (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1937/1967). The analysis shows that her wish, constrained by socioeconomic factors, is the source of unavoidable anguish and ironic tragedy. The study also draws on the theory of social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) and the concept of social dirt (Douglas, 2002) to explain the symbolic and psychological processes that lead Mathilde to become obsessed with appearances. The findings indicate that the story exposes the weaknesses of bourgeois self-conception and the instability of the social order in which appearances confer value, and demonstrates how unresolved contradictions produce inevitable personal and social outcomes.

Keywords: *Bourgeois anxiety, Marxist contradiction, social desire, The Necklace, status aspiration*

INTRODUCTION

Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) is considered one of the greatest short-story authors to write in French during the 19th century, with mastery of the craft, a thorough understanding of psychology, and a keen sense of satire toward bourgeois society (Bloom, 2008). The Necklace (originally *La Parure*, 1884) can be regarded as his canonical work, in which he captures, within a very limited number of lines, the issues of human desire, social aspiration, and the complex moral atmosphere of the French middle classes (Maupassant, 2004). Fundamentally, the novel is about a young woman, Mathilde Loisel, who is so consumed by the desire to be socially acceptable and to attain material grandeur that she persuades herself to borrow a seemingly expensive necklace for a high-society affair and meets with a tragic end (Robinson, 2003). Although at first glance it seems like a tale of personal tragedy of one person, a closer reading will

show that there are numerous contradictions between social desire, economic reality, and bourgeois fears to be explored in depth by the critical analysis of the narration, both literary and socio-economic in perspective (Friedman, 2007).

Maupassant's narration in *The Necklace* is realistic, with a hint of irony, creating a psychologically astute and socially incisive tale (Bloom, 2008). The novel sheds light on the conflict between surface and truth, yearning and restraint, and ambition and social constraints (Thompson, 2015). Mathilde's unhappiness with her humble life is not merely a case of personal vanity but also a culturally imbibed bourgeois consciousness, whereby social identity and material possessions are the main determinants of identity formation (Bourdieu, 1984). By expressing her desire for glamour and appreciation, Maupassant reveals the complexity of social demands that shaped middle-class behavior in 19th-century France. This is a social critique related to the broader literary trends of French realism, which focuses on the deterministic interplay of social organization, personal desire, and materiality (Eagleton, 2002).

The Necklace has been the subject of critical scholarship in various ways, including feminist, psychological, and historical readings (Davis, 2012). Mathilde has been interpreted in many ways, often as a symbol of feminine vanity and ambition, and her character has been used to draw moral lessons about pride and materialism (Bloom, 2008). Nonetheless, little literature systematically examines the story from a Marxist perspective, especially through the lens of contradiction analysis, which anticipates structural conflict between economic conditions and the desire of the social (Althusser, 2001; Mao, 1967). This paper will employ a Marxist analysis to identify the underlying processes that lead to Mathilde's anxieties and the dramatic turn in the story. Within this context, the novel can be read as a warning regarding the errors that occur within personal judgment but also as an indicator of internal conflicts of the bourgeois society, where the desire to achieve social status is usually in contrast with the constraints imposed by the economic circumstances (Engels, 2014; Marx & Engels, 1970).

The theoretical interpretation of the dynamic processes that determine social and material life is grounded in Marxist contradiction analysis, as developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and later extended by theorists such as Mao Zedong (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967). Contradictions are perceived as two opposing forces that cannot be separated; hence, they bring about development and change in social structures (Eagleton, 2002). The interaction of individual desire, economic rationality, and social hierarchy, as in *The Necklace*, can be critically analyzed through this line of view, which posits a mutually dependent yet antagonistic relationship (Robinson, 2003). Mathilde's ambitions are a subjective expression of the large-scale class contradictions, whereby the material constraints of her surroundings create tension and ultimately narrative conflict (Friedman, 2007). The Marxist approach anticipates a structural determinism of human action by situating Mathilde's experience within the dynamics of social desire and economic necessity, pointing to how the bourgeois's anxiety is socially produced and materially lawful (Althusser, 2001).

Moreover, *The Necklace* illustrates the broader cultural logic of 19th-century France, in which upward social mobility was largely determined by inherited status and economic position (Thompson, 2015). Mathilde's obsession with money and status reflects a society in which individual worth is equated

with material possessions and outward appearance (Bourdieu, 1984). Her desire to acquire a necklace to increase her socially visible presence is not merely a personal vanity but also an imitation of the culturally bourgeois imperative of identity, because identity is no longer distinguishable from social presentation (Bloom, 2008). The ultimate irony of her circumstances, which is finding out that the necklace was a useless fake, is what underlines how meaningless her dream is and also criticizes the structural inequality and strict social order that fabricates such a need (Maupassant, 2004; Handayani & Rahmawati, 2023).

The Necklace, therefore, is a site where the intersection of social structure and personal desire can be critically investigated in this research. Analyzing the inner social expectations of Mathilde, the economic restrictiveness of her surroundings, and the pressure of status consciousness imposed by society as mutually defining yet conflicting forces (Mao, 1967; Engels, 2014), the study applies Marxist contradiction analysis. The discussion examines how these tensions are played out in the psychology of the character and the narrative's history, thereby explaining the intricate nexus between bourgeois subjectivity and material circumstances (Robinson, 2003). In turn, it helps to better comprehend the social satire that Maupassant seeks to develop, showing how seemingly simple a short story can reveal the anxieties and contradictions that the middle-class life in nineteenth-century France could not overcome (Friedman, 2007).

Lastly, the importance of this work lies in its engagement with literary art and socio-economic criticism. Although *The Necklace* has been acclaimed as a story with a masterful craft and moral irony (Bloom, 2008), when it is read in the Marxist contradiction theory, it can be seen that it has a wide-angle appeal to its social, cultural, and material aspects (Althusser, 2001; Mao, 1967). The narration becomes a cradle of bourgeois fears, a place where desire, class, and identity collide. This paper demonstrates the enduring value of Maupassant as an author who, despite a strict economy of narrative, reveals the inequalities and psychosocial pressures of human life through structural inequalities (Bourdieu, 1984; Thompson, 2015). Combining literary criticism and socio-economic analysis can be used to develop a model of reading *The Necklace* as both a literary work and a commentary on the systemic contradictions of bourgeois society (Eagleton, 2002; Handayani & Rahmawati, 2023). Realist literature often reveals the ideological structures that sustain class inequality and social aspiration (Widdowson, 2020).

Research Questions

1. This study seeks to answer the following questions:
2. How does Marxist contradiction theory explain the social desires of Mathilde Loisel?
3. How do symbolic objects and appearances represent bourgeois anxiety in *The Necklace*?
4. How does Maupassant use narrative irony to critique class structure and social mobility?

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative literary research design using Marxist contradiction theory as the primary analytical framework. Contemporary literary scholarship also emphasizes interpretive engagement between reader, text, and symbolic meaning (Felski, 2020). The primary text analyzed is *The Necklace* by Guy de Maupassant. Close textual reading, thematic analysis, and socio-economic literary interpretation were employed to examine the contradictions among social desire, economic constraints, symbolic capital,

and bourgeois anxiety. Secondary scholarly sources were used to support theoretical interpretation, including Marxist criticism, sociological theory, and literary scholarship. The scope of the study is limited to the thematic, symbolic, and socio-economic analysis of the selected text.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Economic Rationality and Bourgeois Desire: Mathilde Loisel and The Logic of Social Aspiration

A sense of dissatisfaction with her humble life and an obsessive pursuit of social status occupy Mathilde Loisel's psychological world in "The Necklace." The desire to be elegant, rich, and famous reflects the bourgeois aspiration to move up, which is closely linked to material possessions and social status (Bloom, 2008; Robinson, 2003). According to the Marxist approach, this aspiration can be interpreted as the expression of the contradictions of bourgeois subjectivity, whereby the pursuit of symbolic capital, prestige, reputation, and social admiration cannot be separated from economic constraints (Bourdieu, 1984). The fact that Mathilde is obsessed with appearance is not merely one of her personal shortcomings but the imposition of a social construct that equates self-worth with money and social status (Eagleton, 2002).

In the first part of the story, Maupassant prepares Mathilde in a material and social environment that further isolates her from the life she is living at that time (Maupassant, 2004). She lives in a modest apartment with her husband, a small clerk in the Ministry of Education, and spends her hours fantasizing about a luxurious life that she feels entitled to. Maupassant notes that she led a miserable life because she felt she was destined for an elegant, luxurious existence, far above the average standard of her lowly environment (Maupassant, 2004, p. 112). This initial display shows the conflict between Mathilde and her internalized ideals and the material limitations of her surroundings, which may be considered one of the main contradictions in her social and economic life (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967). Her need to be wealthy, beautiful, and socially recognized is real, but the social and economic dynamics of her world render these needs essentially unrealistic and risky to achieve.

Mathilde's desire for status is both individual and social; that is, it is a Bourdieusian concept of cultural capital, in which the collection of tastes and fine, apparent signs of wealth allows an individual to assert dominion over others within a social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1984). The borrowed necklace is a symbolic marker of this cultural capital, enabling Mathilde to attain the high level of social interaction temporarily she desires. Through the ball, she has a moment of fantasy: admiration, attention, and validation within her society from wearing the necklace (Friedman, 2007). Nonetheless, as Marxist theory insists, the direction toward the development of symbolic and economic capital is paradoxical by its very nature, as the systems that provide legitimacy are also those that limit access and prevent the possibility of disastrous loss (Althusser, 2001; Engels, 2014). In this regard, the necklace can be understood as both an opportunity and a trap: it enables her to gain a temporary elevation but also triggers events that lead to her eventual downfall.

The narrative form of the story anticipates the confrontation between desire and material constraints, and shows how social aspiration can become a means of self-destruction. The desire of Mathilde is insatiable, and the economic rationality is subservient to the desire for virginity. She rejects her husband's simple solutions and practical proposals and demands that she borrow a necklace to project an image of affluence and a refined lifestyle (Maupassant, 2004, p. 115). Her choice is symbolic of the second contradiction between individual desire and material objective reality, as Marxist analysis identifies as a source of tension and potential change (Mao, 1967). The story shows that the persistence of these contradictions, left unresolved or unacknowledged, leads to tension and structural instability in individual and social life.

Moreover, the social and gendered aspects of bourgeois anxiety are revealed in Maupassant's story. Mathilde's dissatisfaction cannot be discussed outside the context of patriarchal and class-based expectations that shape her perception of the world (Davis, 2012). As a woman, her social mobility is highly dependent on marriage, social presentation, and material appearance, which heightens the stakes of what she wants to achieve. The necklace is therefore a social device that temporarily elevates her within the hierarchical system of gendered and classed Parisian society, giving her a temporary boost of empowerment while further entrenching her reliance on external validation (Bloom, 2008; Thompson, 2015). In Marxist terms, it is clearly a case of the bourgeoisie's desire to remain within the system, in which any level of discontent is tied to existing inequality and cultural inculcation (Althusser, 2001).

Even the irony of the story, that the necklace was a false and useless imitation, is a criticism of the deceptive quality of bourgeois prestige. The ten years Mathilde spends trying to pay the debt she believes has accrued due to the presence of the necklace depict the devastating cost of internalized social demands (Maupassant, 2004, p. 123). Her physical and psychological decline points to the material effects of symbolic desire, illustrating the construction and enforcement of bourgeois anxiety socially and materially (Eagleton, 2002). In this narrative resolution, Maupassant emphasizes the contrast between the supposed value of money and its material, tangible nature, thereby revealing the instability and randomness of social orders.

Also, the relationship between social identity and economic rationality is pre-empted in the story. Mathilde's calculations about the need for the necklace, her anxiety about being socially humiliated, and her need to maintain appearances indicate that bourgeois desire mediates practical decision-making (Robinson, 2003). That is, her economic behavior is influenced by her social anxiety, and she shows that subjective desire and objective materiality are constitutive of one another. This movement corresponds to Marxist concepts of contradiction, in which antagonistic entities, desire and material constraint, social ambition and economic constraint, are dialectically united and mutually constitutive and restrictive of one another (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967). By foregrounding this tension, Maupassant's narrative reveals the structural forces that govern the lives of the bourgeois characters and thereby demonstrates the irrelevance of social identity and economic rationality.

Last but not least, *The Necklace* is a good example of how bourgeois anxiety is structural and psychological. The social circumstances in which Mathilde is placed cannot be separated from the personal suffering that she is undergoing. According to the story, her tragedy is not only the outcome of her personal

indoctrination but also an inevitable consequence of her involvement in a social system in which value is equated with material acculturation and outward presentation (Friedman, 2007; Thompson, 2015). Her wish and its devastating effects in this sense are symbolic of larger contradictions within society, in that the actions of individuals are indicative of the society as well as of those that are reinforced. Using Marxist contradiction theory to analyze Mathilde's dreams and fears illuminates the story's complex interdependence of desire, material conditions, and social hierarchy (Althusser, 2001; Eagleton, 2002).

The Contradictions of Appearance and Reality: Social Desire Vs. Economic Limitation

One of the main contradictions in "The Necklace" by Maupassant is the discrepancy between the outward appearance of wealth and the material realities of poverty, which this relationship highlights as the social need of the main character and the constraints of the economic situation (Bloom, 2008; Robinson, 2003). From the outset, one source of dissatisfaction for Mathilde Loisel is her perception of her simple life as too simple, insufficient to manifest her idealized bourgeois identity (Maupassant, 2004, p. 112). She knows everything about social hierarchies and has adopted the cultural norm that material possessions and classiness determine personal value (Bourdieu, 1984). The discrepancy between the desired and the reality creates an inherent contradiction, which, according to the Marxist traditions, is the collision of the subjective desire with the objective conditions- one of the main contradictions that drives the story further (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967).

The need to be socially perceived is clearly evident in Mathilde's obsession with the ball and the purchase of the necklace, which she is sure will make her acceptable in high society (Maupassant, 2004, p. 115). The necklace serves as a formal mediator between her social goals and her economic situation, providing her with an illusion of moving up the economic ladder while revealing the precariousness of her situation (Friedman, 2007). By borrowing the necklace, Mathilde enters a complex game of material restraint and social lust. The fact that she focuses more on appearance than functionality exemplifies the secondary contradictions observed in Marxist theory when conflicting goals arise in individual behavior due to the forces of social and material structures (Althusser, 2001; Engels, 2014). This is not merely a personal conflict but a response to a larger social system that prioritizes symbolic richness over inherent value.

The ironic twist of the story, the realization that the necklace is a counterfeit, is an exaggeration of the contradictions between the two social desires and economic constraint, making the bourgeois dreams fragile (Maupassant, 2004, p. 123). Mathilde's ten-year struggle to pay the debt of symbolic ambition she has incurred illustrates the material consequences of this ambition. It demonstrates that societal pressure can cause significant physical, emotional, and financial suffering (Thompson, 2015). In this case, Maupassant criticizes the social structure that rewards appearance and conceals material realities, in which inner persons are made vulnerable as they strive to obtain confirmation through external social indicators of status (Robinson, 2003). The necklace's worthlessness is satirically used to demonstrate that the idea of wealth is a false measure of who one is and that there is a structural contradiction between perceived and objective value (Eagleton, 2002).

Furthermore, Maupassant situates Mathilde's dilemma within the gendered norms of 19th-century bourgeois society (Davis, 2012). Social mobility and social visibility are strongly mediated by her appearance and behavior, since women of her social class were confined to domestic activities, and material security was ensured by men (Bloom, 2008). The borrowed necklace is both a source of temporary empowerment and a symbolic representation of structural dependence, demonstrating how gender and class intersect to shape desire and constrain agency (Bourdieu, 1984). In a Marxist perspective, the dynamics of such factors reveal the dialectical relationship between social formations and individual consciousness, and the manner in which systemic forces generate and maintain internal contradictions (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967).

The social implications of the confusion between appearance and identity also stand out in the story. The image Mathilde presents, and the character's social standing, cannot be separated, and any interference with this image threatens her belonging to the bourgeois order (Friedman, 2007). The loss of her necklace creates such a distance between her economic reality and her social ambition that it engenders an intolerable conflict, reflecting the broader paradox in bourgeois society between the ideal and the real (Althusser, 2001). The ironic story by Maupassant can therefore be understood as a social critique that, in this particular instance, demonstrates how individual decisions contribute to personal misfortune and how structural disparities and cultural demands contribute to the same issue (Thompson, 2015).

Moreover, her social desire continues to compromise the economic rationality of Mathilde's situation, thereby generating a chain of miscalculations that worsens her situation (Robinson, 2003). The first mistake of hers in evaluating the real value of the necklace is a symptom of psychological pressure from social norms and the figural necessity of status preservation (Maupassant, 2004, p. 116). In a Marxist perspective, this conflict exemplifies the mediation of internalized social norms in economic decision-making, leading to contradictions that are both psychologically and socially predetermined and material (Engels, 2014; Mao, 1967). The story thus illuminates the indissolubility of desire, perception, and material consequence, revealing the structural forces that influence individual action in bourgeois society.

Another Marxist analysis brought out in the story is the capacity of contradiction to transform (Marx & Engels, 1970). The gap between the necklace's perceived and actual value leads to a dramatic change in Mathilde's life, as her social identity and material life are transformed. This dialectic reveals that contradictions between social desire and economic reality are dynamic and change over time, producing outcomes that can be unpredictable yet structural in nature (Althusser, 2001). The ten-year laboring term, which Mathilde agrees to pay for the necklace, serves as both a punishment and an expression of the systemic strains of bourgeois society that link social aspiration, labor, and material circumstances (Friedman, 2007).

Lastly, the story highlights the psychological dimension of bourgeois anxiety, demonstrating how the need to seek social recognition can distort perception, judgment, and behavior (Bloom, 2008). The excessive emphasis on Mathilde's appearance blinds her to viable alternatives and leaves her more vulnerable to social and material failures (Davis, 2012). This tension is further heightened by the irony and narrative economy employed by Maupassant to render the story both a personal tragedy and a social commentary on the instability of a society defined by symbolic wealth and social hierarchy (Thompson,

2015; Eagleton, 2002). Taking these contradictions into account, the story prompts readers to consider the interplay of desire, material conditions, and social hierarchy and the complex dynamics that characterize the life of the bourgeois.

Bourgeois Anxiety and Social Projection: Desire, Envy, and the Illusion of Status

The tragedy of Mathilde Loisel in *The Necklace* cannot be simply attributed to her own vanity or misjudgment of finances; it lies in the fears of bourgeois society, in which social status, material possessions, and social image are closely connected to identity (Bloom, 2008; Robinson, 2003). The need to be recognized and admired reveals the psychological processes of bourgeois anxiety, which the social hierarchy supplements with the social hierarchy in which she is incorporated (Bourdieu, 1984). In this respect, her desire for the elegant necklace is a projection of her internalized social expectations, a symbolic tool through which she aims to establish her role in society, according to which worthiness is equated with obvious prosperity (Friedman, 2007).

The story by Maupassant highlights the social comparison of bourgeois life and how envy and a sense of inadequacy motivate desire (Maupassant, 2004). Mathilde is constantly comparing her existence to what she thinks is the grandeur of others, the fancy balls, the fancy clothes, and the respect that should be taken care of her. The effect of this comparison is strong dissatisfaction, expressed either as internal disturbance or as external display (Davis, 2012). Marxist contradiction analysis interprets this tension in terms of internalized social norms and objective constraints, whereby the subjective need for status is continually denied by objective circumstances, thereby producing anxiety and desire (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967). This envy of the upper social class is not an individual feeling; Mathilde shares it with the institutions of the bourgeois world, where symbolic capital and social legitimacy are key determinants of access, recognition, and power (Bourdieu, 1984).

The article of the borrowed necklace becomes the center of this social projection that creates the illusion of status and the possibility of transformation through appearance (Maupassant, 2004, p. 115). By wearing the necklace, Mathilde can temporarily resolve the dilemma between her modest status and her wish to be acknowledged, as she participates in a symbolic performance of bourgeois identity (Friedman, 2007). However, such a short-term boost also reveals the weakness of these social indicators, since their legitimacy rests solely on perception rather than inherent worth (Thompson, 2015). The irony of the story, which is the realization of the worthlessness of the necklace, serves as an emblem of the symbolic economy of the bourgeoisie, the precariousness of social positions, and how social positions and symbolic wealth are false (Eagleton, 2002; Bloom, 2008).

In addition, the event that occurs to Mathilde is indicative of the processes of social anxiety and projection as explained in the psychoanalytic and sociological theories. This misalignment between her wants and her material conditions generates not only personal frustration but also an external fear of being judged by colleagues, a manifestation of the social forces of bourgeois culture (Davis, 2012). She externalizes the structural tensions that control her life and projects her anxieties onto the necklace, the social event, and even her husband. According to Marxists, this dynamic can be explained as the unity of opposites: internalized desire and social reality mutually constitute each other while remaining opposed,

thereby producing actions and consequences (Mao, 1967; Engels, 2014). The story plays up the effects of this strain, demonstrating that apparent dreams can create physical misery and psychological pain.

The social support of bourgeois anxiety is also further exemplified through the interactions between Mathilde and her peers. The fear of shame and exclusion is mixed with her obsession with being admired at the ball and with a focus on social surveillance and normative pressures that dictate the behavior of the middle classes (Bourdieu, 1984; Friedman, 2007). The pressures of civilized society, the tacit consideration of the outward look, and the rank scrutiny of colleagues are reasons why anxiety is a personal as well as a collective experience. Marxist approach shows that through social structures, there exist psychological effects which are desire, fear and action and these are oriented towards supporting preexisting inequalities (Althusser, 2001; Eagleton, 2002). Mathilde's pain is thus not merely a personal story; it also reveals how the system is structural, dictating the bourgeois experience.

Also, Maupassant seeks to criticize the illusory nature of symbolic value through the ultimate revelation of the necklace's real worth (Maupassant, 2004, p. 123). This discovery underscores the precariousness of Mathilde's social identity and the fact that symbolic wealth is based on a consensus of perception rather than objective reality (Thompson, 2015). This difference between perception and reality creates a dramatic reenactment of bourgeois anxiety, depicting how people become caught up in cycles of desire, projection, and disillusionment (Robinson, 2003). The story thus shows the structural aspect of desire: it is socially determined, materially bound, psychologically internalized, and has effects that are not merely personal but are the contradictions of bourgeois society (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967).

Another theme highlighted in the story is the connection between envy, desire, and work. The material effects of symbolic anxiety are highlighted in the eventual physical and emotional exhaustion of Mathilde, who works hard to remove the perceived debt over the years to pay it off (Maupassant, 2004, p. 123). Her efforts aimed at preserving appearances, in turn, serve as a Marxist example of alienated labor, in which effort is expended not on one's own satisfaction or usefulness but on the satisfaction of socially constructed expectations (Engels, 2014). This identification of personal suffering with social pressure is a salient illustration of how bourgeois anxiety is produced and reproduced within the symbolic and material structures (Friedman, 2007; Eagleton, 2002).

Lastly, Maupassant's storytelling underscores that the cycles of desire and disillusionment in the bourgeois world are cyclical. It is the interaction of social aspiration, symbolic wealth, and material constraint that makes desires insatiable, creating endless tension and stabilizing an unstable identity (Bloom, 2008). Both an object and a symbol, *The Necklace* is a site where contradictions and social hierarchies are enacted, and anxieties are inscribed, both materially and psychologically. In this light, Mathilde's story goes beyond personal tragedy to provide a scathing critique of the social orders and cultural demands that define the existence of the bourgeoisie (Bourdieu, 1984; Thompson, 2015).

The Material Consequences of Bourgeois Desire: Labor, Sacrifice, and Irony

In "The Necklace," Maupassant depicts the material effects of bourgeois desire in depth, showing how such a desire triggers personal agony and social critique (Bloom, 2008; Robinson, 2003). The

obsession with appearances and her desire to be admired by society create a conflict between her economic condition and her dreams of becoming a bourgeois, as well as her aspirations (Bourdieu, 1984; Eagleton, 2002). In a Marxist view, this tension reflects the interplay between desire and material constraint, whereby internalized social norms and symbolic requirements produce tangible, often disastrous effects (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967).

The act of borrowing the necklace, although driven by the urge to be socially accepted, sets in motion a series of labor-intensive effects that span a decade (Maupassant, 2004, p. 115). Her attempts to pay the so-called debt with her own means are characterized by extraordinary labor and hunger, a stark contrast to the life she had been leading before, one of laziness and daydreaming. The shift in symbolic desire is an example of its materialization, in which the desire to attain prestige is realized as labor and pain (Friedman, 2007). The story illustrates that symbolic ambitions cannot exist without material ramifications, thereby showing the structural pressure that bourgeois society exerts on assimilating persons (Thompson, 2015).

The alienating effects of bourgeois aspiration are depicted through the long labor Mathilde and her husband endure. According to Marxist theory, alienation occurs when work is dehistoricized and depersonalized by external pressures, thereby generating both mental and physical stress (Engels, 2014). The case of Mathilde indicates that her work is not undertaken out of self-sufficiency or self-development, but rather as a means of fulfilling social responsibility, as perceived through its symbolic significance. This irony of the situation, working on a necklace which in the end means nothing, contributes to the contrast between the perceived social reward and the material objectivity (Maupassant, 2004, p. 123). In this way, the tale reveals the structural processes through which the bourgeoisie's desire is transformed into suffering and demonstrates the dialectic of the relationships among desire, work, and the social order (Althusser, 2001).

In addition, Maupassant uses narrative irony as a critical instrument to emphasize the arbitrariness of social hierarchies. The fact that the necklace is a fake undermines the symbolic meaning that supports Mathilde's social ambitions, revealing how unstable identity can be founded on appearances (Bloom, 2008; Thompson, 2015). A Marxist perspective on the same irony will serve as a perfect illustration of the contradictions of bourgeois society, in which social esteem and material value are often conflated and socially constructed (Eagleton, 2002). The story shows that the systems that mediate social recognition are weak and conditional, and that they can lead to far-reaching effects when there is a mismatch between perception and reality (Friedman, 2007).

The novel also stresses the relationship between gender, work, and social expectations. The anguish experienced by Mathilde has been defined by the fact that she is a woman in such a patriarchal bourgeois society where social mobility is filtered by becoming a wife and exhibiting wealth (Davis, 2012). She is more or less invisible in society, as her labor is physically demanding, which is also the gendered aspects of the bourgeois apprehension of anxiety, as well as the unequal distributions of the symbolic and material loads (Bourdieu, 1984). By emphasizing this crossover, Maupassant criticizes the social constructs that create desire and agony, demonstrating how gender roles intensify the effects of symbolic ambition (Robinson, 2003).

The ten-year trajectory of Mathilde's work is also an example of the transformative power of contradictions in Marxist theory. First, she wants to be wealthy and famous, which is the primary motivator of action; economic constraint is a secondary tension (Mao, 1967). Eventually, the repayment sources the labor and deprivation, which reverse this order, and hence material constraint becomes the preponderating element in her life (Marx & Engels, 1970). The described transformation illustrates how contradictions can dynamically transform, producing outcomes that alter identity, social position, and lived experience (Engels, 2014). It is thus a narrative description of dialectics in Maupassant's work, which shows how aspirations and material reality interplay to produce complex and, at times, tragic outcomes (Althusser, 2001).

Moreover, the tale challenges the moral and ethical dimensions of bourgeois desire. The first obsession that Mathilde has with status is morally neutral, but the costs of her action borne by her and her husband are enormous (Maupassant, 2004, p. 123). The story thus connects moral thinking to the material world by showing that social ambition has both symbolic and material senses. Marxists emphasize that these contradictions are not only personal but also systemic, shaped by larger forces that structure performance, impose inequality, and mediate the outcome of desire (Eagleton, 2002; Friedman, 2007). The story condemns the circumstances that generate both desire and pain by situating Mathilde's personal tragedy within a social and economic context.

The story's ending, in which it is disclosed that Mathilde has endured undue suffering, serves as an admonitory illustration of bourgeois panic (Bloom, 2008). The degradation of her body, her financial condition, and psychological burnout indicate how deep the human costs of identity-socially appearance fit and symbolic wealth can be. The futility of the pursuit inherent in the irony of Maupassant, along with a satire of the structural demands of the bourgeois culture which prizes surface indicators of riches over fundamental worth (Thompson, 2015; Robinson, 2003). The story is thus a personal and social critique, showing how symbolic aspirations may lead to material consequences that endure, and a systemic critique as well.

Lastly, *The Necklace* underscores the fact of desire/labor/social structure. The story of Mathilde shows that the dialectic of social recognition and material prestige is, by its very nature, a desire that leads to action, which in turn results in labor, and, as a consequence, either strengthens or undermines social hierarchies (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967). Maupassant's story illustrates what happens when an uninvestigated wish is pursued, and the symbolic desires that people harbor may lead to significant pain and moral conflicts (Althusser, 2001; Eagleton, 2002). By examining the material dimensions of the labor and sacrifice required by Mathilde's desire, this section illuminates the material aspects of bourgeois anxiety, amplifying insight into the narrative's social desire, symbolic wealth, and structural contradiction (Friedman, 2007; Thompson, 2015).

The Irony of Social Mobility and the Collapse of Illusion

In "The Necklace," Guy de Maupassant develops a story that closely explores discrepancies between desire, social expectations, and material reality in bourgeois society. From a Marxist contradiction analysis perspective, the narrative shows how the confrontation between Mathilde Loisel's internalized desires and her financial constraints leads to the subject's suffering and social critique (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967). The symbolic desire and structural constraint, in which the desire to be represented socially and materially elegantly is the focus for both Mathilde and Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984), explains how social status and cultural order dictate human action (Eagleton, 2002). The story shows that bourgeois anxiety is not an entirely psychological reality but is grounded in social and economic institutions and manifests as labor, envy, and the projection of identity (Friedman, 2007; Robinson, 2003).

The dialectical conflict between subjective desire and objective limitation is evident in Mathilde, as depicted by Maupassant. The desire to move beyond her low social status is constrained by economic realities, creating a cycle of frustration, work, and subsequent disappointment (Bloom, 2008; Thompson, 2015). The borrowed necklace serves as an iconic item, by which these contradictions are performed: on the one hand, it allows raising a status level, but, on the other hand, it reveals the instability of the social signs that are based on perception instead of quality (Davis, 2012; Maupassant, 2004, p. 115). The eventual discovery of the necklace's worthlessness shatters the illusion, highlighting the effects of the confusion between symbolic and material value (Engels, 2014).

Moreover, the material and moral outcomes of bourgeois desire are also pointed out in the story. The ten years of labor, physical abuse, and economic deprivation of Mathilde are the best example of how symbolic desires can turn into physical torment (Maupassant, 2004, p. 123; Friedman, 2007). According to the Marxist approach, these effects arise from systemic contradictions in which social aspirations clash with objective material constraints (Marx & Engels, 1970). This structural criticism is further emphasized through dramatic irony in Maupassant, and by the ways in which the importance of appearances and social rank in society creates circuits of desire, hard work, and disappointment (Bloom, 2008; Eagleton, 2002).

The story also questions the relationship among gender, work, and the power structure. Mathilde's experience illustrates the limitations imposed on women in the bourgeois world, where social mobility is mediated by appearance, marriage, and gendered roles (Bourdieu, 1984; Robinson, 2003). Her work, despite its physical and moral teachings, is not socially visible, which reflects the unequal distribution of material and symbolic burdens (Davis, 2012). Maupassant critiques these gendered expectations, showing that desire, social surveillance, and structural inequality intersect, creating human suffering and identity formation (Thompson, 2015).

Moreover, The Necklace depicts the interdependent and recurrent character of contradiction. The passion Mathilde desires produces work, and work produces pain, and pain re-fragilizes social aspiration. This interaction draws on the Marxist concept of contradictions as hostile yet constitutive of one another (Mao, 1967; Engels, 2014). Symbolic aspirations, material constraints, and social pressures cannot be separated, and they have both individual, social, and structural consequences (Althusser, 2001; Eagleton, 2002). Maupassant's story demonstrates that the price of human desire is closely linked to the collective

nature of bourgeois society and that individual tragedy serves as a device of social commentary (Friedman, 2007; Bloom, 2008).

Lastly, the story's timeless quality lies in its rigorous analysis of the deceptions on which social life is based. Providing a critical insight into the arbitrariness of symbolic wealth, the insecurity of social identity, and the tediously protracted costs of displacement ambitions, Maupassant offers a critical analysis of bourgeois society (Thompson, 2015; Robinson, 2003). The story highlights the need to study desire, work, and identity as interrelated aspects of the social and economic systems. The Necklace is therefore an excellent object of literary and Marxist criticism in that it shows the dialectics of human desire, hierarchical social structure, and material being. From this perspective, Mathilde's personal tragedy can be considered a mirror of societal contradictions, and the story of the woman is not only a fine piece of fiction but also a severe critique of the social order (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967).

CONCLUSION

In "The Necklace," Guy de Maupassant develops a story that explores the contradictions among desire, social expectations, and material reality in bourgeois society in a complex manner. The story is analyzed through Marxist contradiction theory to reveal how the conflict between the aspirations Mathilde Loisel internalizes and her economic constraints leads to her suffering and criticism of society (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967). Mathilde's desire to be socially recognized and to possess material splendor reflects the interplay of symbolic desire and structural constraint, and how social hierarchies and cultural rules shape human action (Bourdieu, 1984; Eagleton, 2002). The story shows that bourgeois anxiety is not a purely psychological process but is entrenched in social and economic organization, as reflected in the work, in envy, and in the projection of identity (Friedman, 2007; Robinson, 2003). By extending this Marxist reading into the present, one may see the persistent relevance of such contradictions in contemporary consumer culture, where status is now expressed through branded goods, lifestyle displays, and digital profiles. The anxieties and yearnings that animate Mathilde's struggle continue to shape modern life, inviting readers to reflect on how the illusions of status and the pressure to maintain appearances continue to drive personal and social conflict.

Mathilde's envy and longing, as depicted by Maupassant, illustrate the dialectical conflict between subjective desire and objective restraint. She is thwarted in her desire to rise above her low social standing by economic realities, resulting in a frustrating, working, and ultimately disappointing cycle (Bloom, 2008; Thompson, 2015). These contradictions are performed with the help of the borrowed necklace, which allows the temporary elevation of status while simultaneously revealing the vulnerability of social markers that rely on perceptions rather than inherent worth (Davis, 2012; Maupassant, 2004, p. 115). The realization of the necklace's worthlessness, which ultimately destroys the illusion, serves as a reminder of the effects of the confusion between symbolic and material value (Engels, 2014).

In addition, the narrative emphasizes the material and moral effects of the bourgeois desire. The ten years of hard work, physical effort, and financial strain that Mathilde endured exemplify how symbolic

desires are realized (Maupassant, 2004, p. 123; Friedman, 2007). In Marxist terms, these outcomes stem from systemic contradictions, in which social aspirations conflict with objective material constraints (Marx & Engels, 1970). This structural critique is underscored by Maupassant's use of dramatic irony, which shows how appearances and social positioning within society create processes of desire, work, and disappointment (Bloom, 2008; Eagleton, 2002).

The combination of gender, work, and social order is also put into question in the story. Mathilde's experience illustrates how women were constrained in the bourgeois setting, where social mobility was mediated by appearance, marriage, and gender roles (Bourdieu, 1984; Robinson, 2003). Although it is physically demanding and morally educative, her work is not socially visible, a manifestation of inequality in the distribution of material and symbolic labor (Davis, 2012). Maupassant challenges such gendered expectations by showing how the intersection of desire, social surveillance, and structural inequality creates human suffering and shapes identity (Thompson, 2015).

Moreover, *The Necklace* depicts the recycling and mutually related contradiction. The ambition of the social world is precarious, and social ambition confirms this precariousness by the fact that Mathilde wants the production of labor; that labor gives pain; and that pain is a force that confirms social ambition. This dialectic represents the Marxist interpretation of contradictions as hostile and self-constitutive (Mao, 1967; Engels, 2014). Symbolic desires, material constraints, and social suppression are indistinguishable and generate individual, social, and structural effects (Althusser, 2001; Eagleton, 2002). Maupassant's story shows that the human cost of desire is closely connected to the systemic aspects of bourgeois society and that individual tragedy serves as a vehicle for social criticism (Friedman, 2007; Bloom, 2008).

Lastly, the story's long-term relevance lies in its critical examination of the illusions on which social life is based. Unveiling the arbitrariness of symbolic affluence, the precariousness of social character, and the sycophantic labor intensity of the wrongly ambitious, Maupassant offers a great critique of bourgeois society (Thompson, 2015; Robinson, 2003). The story highlights the importance of studying desire, labor, and identity as mutually supporting entities of the social and economic systems. *The Necklace* is thus a fruitful literary and Marxist subject that can be discussed as an example of the dialectic among human desire, social stratification, and materiality. In this respect, Mathilde's personal tragedy mirrors social contradictions, making the story not only a compelling narrative but also a commentary on the social order (Marx & Engels, 1970; Mao, 1967).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future studies may apply alternative theoretical approaches, such as feminist criticism, psychoanalytic interpretation, or cultural materialism, to further examine *The Necklace*. Comparative literary research involving other Maupassant stories or 19th-century French realist works may also deepen understanding of bourgeois identity and social symbolism. For instance, a comparative analysis between *The Necklace* and Balzac's "The Girl with the Golden Eyes" could offer valuable insights, as both texts engage deeply with themes of social desire, economic constraint, and the complexities of status within 19th-

century French society. Such an approach would allow the extension of the Marxist contradiction framework across different authors and narratives, making the recommendation more concrete and actionable for future scholars.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author expresses sincere gratitude to all scholars and researchers whose works on Marxist criticism, literary theory, and socio-economic analysis provided the theoretical foundation for this study. Deep appreciation is also extended to colleagues and mentors who offered academic encouragement and intellectual support during the preparation of this manuscript. Special thanks are given to the academic community and students whose engagement with literary studies continues to inspire critical inquiry and scholarly reflection. Above all, the author acknowledges the enduring value of literary scholarship in advancing understanding of culture, society, and human experience.

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