

Revisiting the Marxist Roots: an Analysis of Guy de Maupassant's the Necklace

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Article Received:02/5/2022,

Article Accepted: 07/06/2022,

Published online: 08/06/2022,

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2022.4.6.03

Abstract:

A society is a diversified social institution that combines people from different sections. These different diversified sections are connected with the string of unity. How much it is united, some tints of inequality still exist in one form or another. Marxism holds its roots in a society devoid of social class as a political and economic theory. Marxism can be deciphered as a political ideology that stresses the idea that the hustle between social classes is a significant factor in the history of society and calls for a society in which there are no class divisions. The Necklace by Guy de Maupassant shows the bifurcation of appearance and reality, showcasing the hidden class divisions. The socioeconomic construction, struggles, and beliefs of the different rungs of the society are precisely portrayed in the short story.

Keywords: Marxism, Ideology, social class, class division.

"Even though the society that Marx foresaw is far from being a historical reality, Marxism has penetrated so deeply in history that we are all Marxists one way or another, even unknowingly," remarked Octavio Paz, the Mexican poet, and diplomat. Marxism had a profound impact on global academia, and it opened a new perspective of viewing society and its socio-economic conditions. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and The Communist Manifesto are the most revolutionary chapters of history. "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles"- these words still echo in the world's ears.

Marxist theory suggests that there is something in the world that is continuously dividing the individuals of society and bringing class segregation that needs to be changed. Marx believed that the capitalist system is a political system that evokes the fights and struggles of the class. The theory introduces the term exploitation, which is the suppression of the working class where workers are forced to rent their services to survive. The Marxist theory further presents the concept of feudalism and capitalism. Marx argued that the rich community makes the poorer weak and rules them using power and capital.

In the analysis of capitalism, Marx distinguished between two main social classes: the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat, where class membership depended upon ownership and non-ownership of means of production. Class consciousness is a set of beliefs that a person holds regarding their social class or economic rank. On the other hand, Marxist sociologists use false consciousness primarily to describe how material, ideological and institutional processes are said to mislead members of the proletariat and other classes within capitalist societies, concealing the exploitation intrinsic to the social relations between classes. It is also a scenario where a subordinate class willfully embodies the ruling class's ideology.

Marxism has a significant impact on most the genres of French literature. In French society, class differences have created boundaries among people, and class segregation is considered much more significant than differences in religious tradition and culture. Every member of the French society wants to meet the higher economic class, and each member of the lower class is oppressed; this oppression leads them to social struggle. It can be seen in many of the writings of French literature, especially in the field of short stories.

Guy de Maupassant's short story *The Necklace* presents before the reader the effects of false consciousness, the acceptance of an adverse social system without complaint or inquiry instated by the bourgeoisie, and the effect it has on the proletariats. The story expands upon the ideology of a Marxist society versus a capitalist one and the effects the bourgeoisie has on the superstructure comprising the social, political, and ideological systems and institutions. The young woman, Mathilde, is from a poor financial background and is married to Monsieur Loisel, a clerk. Mathilde always fancies the lifestyle of the upper class, and consequently, she is unhappy in her married life. She throws the invitation down in dismay produced by her husband, saying that she does not have proper clothes and pieces of jewelry to attend the ball. However, he manages to arrange the dress. Still, Mathilde is annoyed and tells him that she cannot attend the ball without the jewels. With her husband's permission, she borrows the jewel from her friend, Madame Forestier. Unfortunately, she loses the Necklace, and they decide to replace it with a new one at the expense of the family's economic balance and are thrown into debt. After ten years, they can finally pay off all of their debts and realize from Madame Forestier that the Necklace did not contain actual diamonds but rather fake diamonds. Maupassant displays that social class is not directly proportional to happiness. Madame Loisel seems more content in her life and her marriage as the poor class than a middle-or upper-class woman.

The Necklace, on the surface level, seems to be just the tale of a woman who loses her Necklace, which she borrows from her friend and ultimately suffers a lot for it. However, within the depths, of reading the story with Marx and Engel's economic theories, we find that the story deals with the structure of the capitalist society. The story's underlying theme is a conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The story begins like this, throwing light over the protagonist Mathilde:

"She was one of those pretty girls who are sometimes as if by a mistake of destiny, born in a family of clerks. She had no dowry, expectations, or means of being known, understood, and wedded by a rich and distinguished man." (271)

The author describes Mathilde as a beautiful woman, but he highlights that she was born into a family of clerks as if by a false slip. At the beginning of the story itself, the writer intends to point out that Mathilde belongs to the proletariat class, a status that is determined by the economic condition. Even though Mathilde belongs to the lower strata of society. She felt that she was supposed to be born into or associated with a society of decadence, glamour, luxury, and attention. She holds a false consciousness that he deserved to live a life with the bourgeoisie and that it was a tragedy that she was destined to be a proletariat for the rest of her life.

According to Marx, the moving force behind human history is its economic circumstances. Therefore, it was not because of some tragic error in false, but because of the economic system that she was enveloped in the cause for her not living a life at the top of the capitalist system. Capitalism divides people into those who own property and therefore control the means of production and those who do not. Since those who control production have the power base position, they have ways to ensure that they will remain in their position.

As the story moves on, the author introduces a wealthy friend of Mathilde,

"She had a friend, a former schoolmate at the convent, who was rich and whom she did not like to go and see again, so much did she suffers as she came away."(272)

Here the story strictly marks the two classes. Madame Forestier is the representative of the bourgeoisie and Mathilde a reflection of the proletariat. The turning point in the story occurs when Mathilde's husband comes home with an invitation to the ball. She is very irritated and gets rude toward her husband. The matter is not that she does not have any dress to wear. She has in her mind that a particular code of dressing is expected out of those who come to attend a ball. Here the class difference is evident, and Mathilde wants to join the elite class party and wear a dress just like the higher class women. The concept of hegemony is reflected here. It is the domination of one group over the other. It is also how capitalists' ideas are disseminated and accepted as commonsensical and usual.

Later in the story, we see that the dress was insufficient for her. She borrows a necklace from her upper-class friend. Though the Necklace was not made of natural diamonds, the friend did not bother to tell it, or she intentionally kept it a secret. Madame Forestier makes the fake diamond necklace seems as though it was accurate to make her position in society better. Being a member of the elite class, she does not want to lower herself by revealing the actual quality of the Necklace. However, by doing this, the friend sends Mathilde and her husband to the lowest place in society. Even though they are friends, there is a class conflict between them, creating a difference.

Because Mathilde was so resolute and adamant about having expensive dresses and jewels, she embodies the attitude Marx refers to as commodification, the attitude of assessing possessions based on their monetary or resale worth and their ability to amaze and impress others instead of understanding their utility. She also suffered from conspicuous consumption, which is the acquirement of things only for their sign value or exchange value. The value accorded to an object because of the social status that it imparts upon the possessor is what Mathilde takes into consideration. The Necklace is representational of conspicuous consumption.

Additionally, Louis Althusser's idea is prominent in the course of the story. There are instances of interpellation, the course of action by which the working class is manipulated to accept the ideology of the dominant class. Mathilde attends the ball and has a beautiful time. All the men noticed her, asked her name, and wanted to be presented. The Marxist term sign value, which is the judgment of something because of its ability to impress and make a person look better, can best describe her thoughts at the party.

After the ball, she hasty escape as she does not want the upper-class members to see her in those shabby clothes. The trends that the society's upper class portrays make the woman lose the Necklace. If she had been comfortable with the elite class seeing her as she was, there would have been no rush and no losing of the Necklace. All she wanted was to be perfect in the eyes of the bourgeoisie. The material circumstances and her urge to change her socioeconomic class made her life harder. Even after she loses her Necklace, the bourgeoisie's ideals ruin her way of life. When she lost the Necklace and realized that they could not retrieve it, they had to buy a new one priced beyond their means. She and her husband were forced to give up their entire life and dedicate themselves to paying off the debt. Althusser had claimed that the dominant class sees the working class as people to be manipulated and accept the ideology of the dominant one. Therefore, they were forced to purchase an expensive necklace to replace the other and were left with no other choice than to put the money and effort into a capitalist system.

"Madame Loisel knew the horrible existence of the needy. However, she bore her past with sudden heroism that dreadful debt must be paid. They dismissed their servants, changed their lodgings, and rested a garret under the roof. This life lasted ten years. Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become the woman of the impoverished household, strong and hard and rough." (275)

This section reveals how much Mathilde and her husband suffered. After losing the Necklace, the family faces many crises, and the prettiest woman gets old and ugly. All these happened to her as she never accepted the social class she belonged to. She willfully accepted the elite class's norms, values, and stigmas. Because of false consciousness, she drew her attention to the socioeconomic facts governing her condition and moved towards pursuits of temporary satisfaction. Reflections are also there in the short story. The theory conveys the

idea that the superstructure of the society mirrors the economic base, and by extension, a text reflects the society that produced it. The story ends on an ironic note:

“ Oh, my poor Mathilde! Why my necklace was paste! It was worth at most only five hundred francs.”(277)

Mathilde borrowed Madame Forestier's Necklace because of its significant value to give her the appearance of having more money and social status than she does. In the end, she loses what she does have, her beauty and happiness. She paid too much, and her entire ten years of hardship were for something with no value. By concluding the story in this manner, maybe Maupassant is warning readers who may be a part of the proletariat not to make the same mistake Madame Loisel did or suffer similar consequences.

The story is a beautiful piece of Marxist writing as most of the characters are determined by the same material condition they are part of. We see how society is divided into two different classes based on the means of production. The people living in the upper strata of society determine the expected behavior in a society. The working class finds no other way except to blindly follow the rules determined by the economically privileged class. Madame Loisel believes she can pass into a higher socioeconomic class by obtaining commodities such as fancy dresses and jewels. However, once she has masqueraded as a member of the bourgeoisie at the party, the loss of the borrowed diamond necklace and the following consequences demonstrate the importance of staying within the boundaries of one's socioeconomic class. Replacing the diamond necklace places an exorbitant economic stream on Madame Loisel and her husband, leading them to drop in socioeconomic status. Thus, Mathilde becomes a victim of false consciousness, the rules, aesthetic values, and social norms of a society determined by a material condition that favors the economically wealthy class.

According to Marx, “reality is material, not spiritual...we are not products of divine design but creatures of our cultural and social circumstances...the material world will show us our reality, making all of our actions interrelated. We can achieve insight into ourselves and our society by examining the relationship among socioeconomic classes and analyzing the superstructure”. Therefore, by analyzing the relationships in the literature between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and capitalism and Marxism, we get further insight into their consciousness and the society they live in.

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