

Glimmer and Burden: A Qualitative Feminist Analysis of Guy de Maupassant's "The Necklace"

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative feminist textual analysis of Guy de Maupassant's "The Necklace" investigates how patriarchal gender roles, restrictive beauty standards, and marriage-centered expectations shape the construction of femininity and constrain female agency. Through close reading of character portrayal, narrative voice, and symbolic motifs, especially the necklace as an emblem of appearance and status, the study showed that women are represented primarily in terms of charm, beauty, and domestic duty. On the other hand, men are depicted as pragmatic providers and decision-makers, and it concludes that the main character's suffering arises not from individual moral failure but from unequal social structures that tie women's worth to appearance and marital position, thereby affirming feminist criticism's claim that the story exposes and critiques the gendered oppression embedded in nineteenth-century French society.

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INTRODUCTION

Feminist criticism is generally defined by its study of literature with female characters and disclosure of unequal relationships between women and men. In "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant, the female character Mathilde Loisel suffers from the pressures of the social expectations put on her because of being a beautiful woman. Her dissatisfaction and suffering finally culminate in a tragic catastrophe. Her dissatisfaction and suffering are mainly caused by the social standards of beauty, wealth, and marriage which are typical of a patriarchal society. This study applies a feminist perspective in order to reveal the various restrictions that are put on women by the patriarchal structures in the given text.

A feminist perspective has been used in this study to carry out an in-depth analysis of "The Necklace" and to illustrate how one text reveals the ways in which women are oppressed in a patriarchal culture.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative textual analysis approach utilizing a feminist analysis. Close reading was applied to the main literary work of "The Necklace" so that the investigation could examine ideas concerning gender inequality, domestic duties, societal pressures, and female identity. Feminist literary criticism guided this specific interpretation, because experts claimed that feminist analysis focuses on women as readers of culture and women as creators of meaning, which aligns with the perspective of Elaine Showalter. This inquiry utilizes the framework of Showalter's literary phases of women. This model supports the interpretation of Mathilde as a person who was molded by male-dominated societal expectations rather than individual liberty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through this textual examination, researchers observe that Mathilde is depicted as a female whose worth is connected to physical attractiveness and public exhibition. This female protagonist experiences unhappiness not because she lacks personal strength, but because she is forced by a male-dominated community to feel deficient when she lacks luxury, public praise, and high social standing.

A distinct division of authority based on gender is revealed within the institution of marriage by the narrative. While Monsieur Loisel displays a realistic and helpful attitude, many people believe that he functions as the sole decision-maker during the period of emergency, whereas Mathilde is represented chiefly through her feelings of longing and dreams of high status.

Ultimately, the borrowed ornament functions as an emblem of deceptive prestige and highlights the heavy expectations that are placed upon females to present femininity successfully. Many literary critics claim that the lost jewelry causes long years of poverty, which shows how the social performance of one female becomes a heavy burden that is shared by the entire household under dominated social norms.

From a feminist perspective, Mathilde Loisel represents a woman shaped by patriarchal ideals rather than free self-definition. Her disappointment with her life reflects how women are taught to measure themselves through external approval, especially through beauty and social rank. This makes her tragedy socially meaningful, not merely moralistic.

The story also reveals that men and women do not occupy equal positions in domestic life. Although Monsieur Loisel is caring, he still functions as the practical decision-maker, while Mathilde's role is largely tied to appearance and social expectation. Feminist criticism helps show that the text is not only about a lost necklace, but about the cost of living in a system where women are valued for display more than agency.

Using Showalter's framework, Mathilde can be read as a figure caught in the "feminine" condition of imitating social expectations rather than defining herself independently. The story therefore becomes a critique of the restrictive cultural standards that shape women's lives.

CONCLUSION

This literary piece functions as a pointed critique of the gender inequality embedded in a patriarchal society, where women's identities and life chances are largely defined by beauty standards, social ambition, and dependence on marriage. The protagonist's suffering emerges not merely from personal desires or choices but from a social order that ties female worth to appearance and status while granting men greater practical authority and social validation. A feminist reading thus deepens the story's meaning by exposing the hidden pressures that shape women's desires, limit their agency, and exact an emotional and material cost for conforming to male-dominated norms. Ultimately, the narrative reveals how structural oppression not individual flaw traps women in roles centered on ornamentation and dependence, affirming the feminist claim that literature can uncover and challenge the inequities of its cultural context.

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