

Text Analysis of “The Necklace”

“The Necklace,” a short story written by Guy de Maupassant, portrays the misleading association between beauty and wealth. This perspective is illustrated by Mathilde as demonstrates how easy it is to assume beauty correlates to value. She portrays damaging this outlook can be as the reader comes to realize this association is perpetuated by itself. Maupassant means to demonstrate how a meaningless thing, such as beauty, can insert into into wealth and perpetuate its own standing to remain there.

The first theme introduced to the reader is that beauty and grace are equated to a wealthier household. This is communicated to reader right from the beginning, as well as the fact that her family is paradoxically not wealthy enough for the fancier things in life. Mathilde grows up being told that she is the epitome of elegance and consequentially believes that she has a right to the wealth other beautiful women are born with. This set up for the story beautifully, illustrating the taught belief that beauty is equitable to someone’s value within society. A research study, done in China, provides a modern example of this through their examination of the early-onset correlation between popularity and beauty. By studying a plethora of children’s friendship networks, the evidence concluded that “better-looking children gain more popularity in their friendship networks,” which contributes to their social capital and consequentially reaffirms their popularity (Zhai 2022). Although attractiveness cannot speak to a person’s character, intelligence, or interests, it continues to play a defining factor in these kids’ social lives. This superficial association of beauty and popularity is comparable to the perspective Mathilde possesses. Without considering the value of her own life or character, she prides herself on her physical appearance, staking her worth in her natural beauty.

When Mathilde's husband surprises her with an invitation to a party, she isn't as pleased as he expects because she's ashamed of how she will be forced to present herself to the other partygoers. Mathilde believes she must be adorned as beautifully as she believes she is pretty or else, she will "look cheap" and will not be accepted by the other guests (Maupassant 3). Mathilde only feels comfortable enough to go when she is allowed to buy an expensive new dress and can borrow a very beautiful, diamond necklace from her wealthy friend, Madame Forestier. Mathilde ends of having a wonderful time at the party, describing herself as being "prettier than all the other women" and how "All the men stared at her, asked her name, and tried to be introduced" (Maupassant 4). Maupassant emphasizes the postulation that her vane desire to dress beautifully did in fact appease the other partygoers, confirming a shared mindset amongst her peers that beauty is equitable to worth. They welcomed her into the party, even paying more attention to her the other wealthier guests, despite her lack of fortune. They took her dress and necklace for their face-values, not hesitating to accept her as she appeared to be. When the readers later find out that necklace was actually worthless all along, it becomes clear that the necklace was an analogy for Mathilde the entire time. They both were seen as beautiful and consequentially society presumed that they were valuable. However, this is far from the truth in both cases, evidence that true worth cannot be determined by appearances alone.

However, despite the postulating the worthlessness of beauty in determining value, Maupassant wants the reader to notice the vicious cycle beauty creates by associating itself with wealth. Due to her beauty, Mathilde garners the attention of everyone at the fabulous party she is able to attend, mentioning that even "The minister noticed her" (Maupassant 4). She found herself surrounded by ample opportunities to increase her network and introduce her husband to men of a higher standing because of her beauty. Being attractive makes increasing one's worth

and wealth much easier when compared to someone people find unattractive, as is seen in the study on popularity and attractiveness. Viewed as a positive, valuable asset to have, being beautiful can open up doors for someone that may make or break their professional lives. Maupassant makes this known with his description of Mathilde's experience at the party, where she ironically squandered a multitude of opportunities at her fingertips. Later in the story, when Mathilde has lost what little fortune she had and was forced to give up every pleasantries she ever knew, the reader is able to truly understand how money allows the wealthy to be beautiful. Becoming much poorer made Mathilde appear much older, rougher, and harder because she had to do all of the household chores, laundry, groceries, and trash all by herself, while her husband worked endlessly. The stress of the physical and mental labors she suddenly had to endure took its toll on her looks. The reader is guided to conclude that the wealthy are able to be more physically appealing because they can pay others to endure the burdens of their lives and then pour the rest of their money into elevating their appearance. This is excellently demonstrated in a study that examined how the attractiveness of a CEO correlates to their firm value. The paper concludes that "more attractive CEO's receive higher compensation," because of their ability to network, as well as their intelligence within their professional field (Halford 2020). This is a perfect example of the cycle beauty and wealth are trapped in. By being more attractive, the CEOs are more likely to further their ventures, becoming wealthier and therefore having easier access to becoming more attractive. Mathilde's wealthy friend, Madame Forestier, is another example of this. In the ten years that Mathilde is working off her crushing debt, Forestier is "still young, still beautiful, still charming" (Maupassant 9). With a convolution of her beauty and wealth, Madame Forestier retains her beauty with her wealth and maintains her wealth through her beauty.

In the short story, "The Necklace," Guy de Maupassant describes how the association between wealth and beauty can lead to misconceptions regarding value. However, while his story explains the superficial depth of beauty, he also postulates how the perception of beauty propagates itself through a reaffirming cycle with wealth. The correlation of the two fulfills itself as they define and produce each other.

Sources

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