

Chagrin, woman versus the society

Technology



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James Joyce's "Clay" and Guy de Maupassant's "The Diamond Necklace" satirize the conflict between woman and society. They illustrate the lives of two very physically different women of the common class and how they struggle against their environment, for society and fate seal their lives with chagrin.

Joyce is more effective than Maupassant in revealing the fictional character in relation to community and social environment, because Joyce uses plot, design, perspective, and language to show subtly what the clay means in the story, wherein the clay depicts Maria's frailty and commonness, and a life of conflict with herself and her environment, which she is not aware of, while Maupassant employs more of plot, narration, and character to enact a woman's satirical lifelong struggle to resist her fate, which led her, paradoxically, to become her destiny, after all.

Joyce does not reveal the meaning of the title "Clay" in the plot, which makes it quite difficult to understand the plot and its connection with clay. Soon the plot exposes itself- it is a story about how something so simple can be so complicated too. Maria's simple life has its own complications, because she struggles with society and her destiny. Joyce provides details about Maria's life and how she goes about it, day in and day out. For Maria, she is an efficient and reliable person, and a peacemaker. She feels proud of her work, which is portrayed in the barmbracks that she confirms she made herself.

She also states that she is happy with her life, even if she has no companion, and she tells Fleming that "she didn't want any ring or man either" (Joyce

184). The ring represents the synecdoche for marriage. The ring is also mentioned several times in the story, once by Fleming, once by Maria, and then during the game at Joe's house. This ring represents Maria's struggle. Apparently, there exists a gap between her self-perceptions and social perceptions of herself. Maria thinks of herself as more superior. She views Fleming as having the "notions of a common woman" (Joyce 184), and yet Maria herself is exceedingly common.

When Maria thinks about how many minutes her travels are, "twenty minutes" here and there, it underscores how empty her life is in that she fills it with ordinary numbers. Maria also wants to think that she is happy with being single, but when Fleming jokes her about it, she "laughed... with disappointed shyness" (Joyce 184). "Disappointed" juxtaposes with the satisfaction that Maria feels, which accentuates that she is not at all content with her life. The plot expresses, nevertheless, the cluelessness of Maria about herself, which makes it more effective to depict chagrin in several ways.

Readers will also feel chagrin, because Maria is not just physically frail; she is also mentally and emotionally frail too. Maupassant employs plot that also does not readily give away the ending. His story satirizes a woman's struggle to resist her fate, which led her, ironically, to become her destiny. Loisel feels that she is born for something greater, and yet, as Maupassant illustrates, she was born: "as if through an error of destiny, into a family of clerks" (Maupassant 297). This "error" implies how Loisel sees her whole life: a huge "error" of fate. But "error" takes in a new life, as Loisel makes the biggest of all- borrowing Mme.

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Forestier's diamond necklace. This necklace brings Loisel the happiest day of her life, when she receives the life she dreams of—attention, richness, and fame. Ironically, this necklace also seals Loisel's fate to poverty and toil, both of which she detests. She loses the diamond necklace and she and her husband paid for it for ten years, only to discover in the ending, that the necklace is false. The ending shows the climax of the struggle and underlines that women cannot fight society and their destinies. The language that Joyce uses portrays the common language of Maria's class.

Joyce uses the words "spick and span" and "nice and bright," which are words of commoners and their life of toil (Commentary 192). Words are also frequently repeated, which symbolizes the lack of sophistication in Maria's life. The repetitive use of "And...And.... And" and "always...always" (Joyce 183) is a "syntactical pattern" (Commentary 192) of the disproportionate plainness of Maria's viewpoint of her life, and how readers also come to understand how "boring" her life is. The language reinforces the plot that depicts Maria's humdrum life, and exposes the struggle against society and fate.

Maria ardently believes that she needs no man or ring, but when a common man gives her some attention, she floats in the air enough to forget her expensive plum cake. Thus, Maria cannot deny it; she yearns for a lifelong companion, someone her fate has denied her, and someone society is quick to point out as the source of her loneliness and unhappiness. Maupassant uses narration to illustrate the satire of Loisel's conflict with her life. He narrates the thoughts of a woman's yearning for a wealthy life. Loisel dreams of "elegant dinners, of the shining silver" (Maupassant 298).

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This narration represents the perspective of Loisel and her endless chagrin. The narration contrasts her life before and after, however, of a dream come true. Before the diamond necklace, Loisel has at least a maid and comfortable lodgings. After the loss of the diamond necklace, Loisel is forced to be who she does not want to be- a common working woman. Furthermore, Maupassant also uses strong characterization, as he narrates the changes in Loisel. From a “ charming” young woman, Loisel transforms into “ strong, hard woman, the crude woman of the poor household” (Maupassant 303).

Loisel has become the person she hates, and she has learned to embrace the life she could not ever cherish. Maupassant, however, seems to want to rub it in on Loisel, when he ends the story with the revelation of the false diamond necklace. Loisel must have fainted, or even unsurprisingly, died from chagrin, after this revelation. Joyce predominantly uses the perspective of Maria, from his choice of words, although in a way, it is also revealed that Maria is not who she thinks she is, in the viewpoint of other people. In general, she believes that: “ Everyone was so fond of Maria” (Joyce 183).

However, the snide remarks about her spinsterhood, in the laundry shop and at her friend’s home, accentuates that people look down on her or pity her, because of her homeliness and state of singlehood. When Joyce says: “ the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin,” this remarks of how people slate her homely features (Joyce 183). Joyce also designs the story in a way that is not always too obvious, and he compels readers to do extra work, which makes the story more effective in revealing the character’s need for companionship.

As readers analyze and research about the missing lines of the song “ I Dreamt that I Dwelt,” this pursuit for something more about Maria ironically responds to the “ attention” that Maria craves for. Joyce’s story design is also different from Maupassant’s “ Moonlight,” because “ Clay” has a different and more meaningful connotation. The clay represents Maria’s emotional and mental frailty. When she chooses clay, a joke of the next-door girls on her, and which is not even directly stated by Joyce, clay represents the mortality of human beings (Commentary 190).

Clay also reinforces the meaning of the omitted song lines. Joyce illustrates that Maria unconsciously forgets these lines, because it tells of “ suitors” and “ vows” that fate neglected to give her. Clay hints that Maria will soon die without living life, wherein society says that a lived life equals to a married life. Joyce is more effective than Maupassant in disclosing the fictional character in relation to community and social environment, because Joyce uses plot, design, perspective, and language to show delicately what the clay indicates in the story.

The clay portrays Maria’s frailty and commonness, and her conflict with her society and destiny. It is also a suggestion of her mortality, which is limited to a life of loneliness that she has to bear with. Maupassant, on the other hand, addresses the same conflict with dark humor and satire. Of the two, Joyce creates a more distinctive image of a woman who has nothing, who is more pitiable, because of her lack of awareness and admission of her life’s perpetual struggles.