

# The necklace and the story of an hour essay sample

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



In *The Necklace* and *The Story of an Hour* both Guy de Maupassant and Kate Chopin use irony and descriptive narration to portray Mathilde Loisel and Margaret Mallard as female protagonists whose thoughts and actions are at odds with the expectations of society and the norms of 19th century marriage. These stories were written in a time when women were expected to abide by certain rules and standards placed on them by society and marriage. In both stories the authors use irony to show how the oppression they felt because of these standards negatively impacted the lives of both of these characters.

In *The Story of an Hour* a woman, Mrs. Margaret Mallard is told that her husband has died in a recent train accident. After discovering that her husband has passed she discovers she is happy to be free of the constraints that she feels placed on her by marriage and the expectations of society. It is noted early in the story that she has a weak heart and we discover that in the end this will be her undoing. At the end of the story her husband returns home through their front door from the trip very much alive since he was not aboard the ill-fated train and did not die. Ironically in the end she falls to her death at the sight of his return, it is thought due to her weak heart but as a reader you can't help but think it was due to the fact she was stricken by his return and her loss of freedom. Jennifer Hicks also states that the irony at the end of the story is more than just the mere blindness of man but also represents a picture of what a woman would find if she discovered her own independence (An Overview). It is in an ironic twist that in rejoicing in her own freedom at the death of her husband that she in turn dies.

In Guy de Maupassant's *The Necklace*, Mathilde Loisel feels she was meant for a richer life but must settle for the life she was born into, being the wife of a clerk. She dreams of luxuries beyond her possession and pays a great debt due to that longing. In an attempt to please his wife her husband obtains an invitation to a fancy ball which she refuses to attend because she has nothing fitting in her eyes to wear. After having a gown made she ends up borrowing a diamond necklace from a wealthy friend to wear to the ball only to end up losing it by the end of the night. She ends up spending the next ten years doing menial work to repay the debt incurred to replace the necklace, only to find out in an ironic twist that the jewels were fake. As written in *The Explanation of The Necklace*:

The irony is brought on by the contradiction of her situation in that if she would have just accepted her husband's suggestion of wearing flowers instead of trying to fit the part of higher society her life would have turned out a little happier and if she would have just confided to her friend that she lost the necklace she would have saved herself years of hard work, since she gained nothing from the experience (Explanation). Had she just been up front with her friend about losing the necklace from the beginning she would have been able to live a much simpler life, but because she felt self-pity and oppression from her marriage and status she ironically ended up being what she most despised and spent the rest of her life bitter.

In both stories the female characters feel oppressed by the expectation that are put on them by society and marriage. It is apparent both women feel that their marriage has them confined to live a specific type of life out of

their control. That there is nothing that can be done to change this since it is expected by society that they be dutiful wives to their husbands and stand behind them in support. Jennifer Hicks states in An overview of the The Story of an Hour<sup>1</sup>, that Chopin questions the institution of marriage, perhaps as a by-product or her scientific questioning of mores<sup>2</sup> (Hicks). In The Necklace<sup>3</sup> Masterplots, Virginia Bracketts says that Other critical schools that may provide useful readings of The Necklace<sup>4</sup> include feminism, which would tend to focus on Mathildes restrictions as a member of a nineteenth century patriarchal society<sup>5</sup> (Brackett). She also mentions this is due to women not being able to work for success and must depend on the marriage for their social standing<sup>6</sup> (Brackett). Even though both womens situations and tragic endings are different they still suffer from the same oppression of marriage and the feeling that they must comply with what society deems as appropriate.

Though both women ironically fall prey to the oppression of marriage and social expectations their circumstances are different. Chopins character Margaret meets a tragic end after feeling relief of no longer being held by the binds of marriage and the expectation to stand behind your husband and support his dreams without pursuing your own. Guy de Maupassants character Mathilde ends up paying the price of her beauty and happiness because she felt that her status in life and marriage was beneath her, also bringing her husband down with her. Though both women feel oppressed due to marriage and society they are both different types of characters who let their oppression dictate the path of their lives.

The short stories of *The Necklace* and *The Story of an Hour* show how in different circumstances women in earlier centuries felt that society and marriage dictated how they should live their lives as wives and members of society. By using irony both Guy de Maupassant and Kate Chopin show how the expectation that the characters of Mathilde Loisel and Margaret Mallard felt due to marriage and society impacted their life in tragic ways. Even though both lead different lifestyles in the end, they both felt the oppression of being married in a time when women were not allowed to have a say in the course of their own lives.

#### Work Cited

Brackett, Virginia. "The Necklace." *Masterplots, Fourth Edition* (2010): 1-3. Literary Reference Center Plus. Web. 2 Mar. 2013. "Explanation of: 'The Necklace' by Guy de Maupassant." *LitFinder Contemporary Collection*. Detroit: Gale, 2000. *Literature Resources from Gale*. Web. 2 Mar. 2013.

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