

A literary comparison of the necklace and the proposal essay sample

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



The Necklace and The Proposal are two pieces of literary work that parallel each other in ways that include theme, content, and form. While both stories are similar in those perspectives, their only difference seemed to be the style in which the author chose to deliver the story. The Necklace is written in short story form while The Proposal is written in a one act drama form. The theme of each story delivers the same theme of accepting and respecting one another in a unique way. The authors of each literature piece opted for a dramatic presentation of social challenges that people face regarding status and the choices made.

In my opinion, The Necklace has a more in-depth focus regarding social class than The Proposal. Regardless of the depth they each have, they both manage to deliver alike themes. The first piece of literary work is called The Necklace. It is written in short story form in 1884 by Guy de Maupassant. It was first published in Le Gaulois, a French newspaper. The setting takes place in Paris, France. The main character of the story is Mathilde Loisel, who is married to a clerk that works in the Department of Education. The Loisels belong to the middle class but it is Mathilde that longs to be part of the upper class. It is so important to Mathilde that she often daydreams about what it would be like to belong to the upper class. Mathilde is envious of her childhood friend who married a rich man and now belongs to the upper class. Mathilde no longer wants to speak to her. She feels it only serves as a painful reminder of the upper class social status that she will never belong to.

In an opportunity to briefly interact with the upper class, Mathilde is compelled to borrow a necklace from her friend that is missing before the

night is over. Rather than being honest with her friend about the necklace, Mathilde makes a choice to quietly replace the necklace with a look-alike. The Loisels spend the next few years working hard long hours paying off the debt of the replacement necklace. When she runs into her friend years later, her friend barely recognizes Mathilde as she had aged so much. She feels comfortable enough to finally tell her friend the truth about the necklace. It is then that Mathilde realizes she replaced the fake diamond necklace that belonged to her friend with a considerably more expensive genuine diamond necklace. Much like *The Necklace*, *The Proposal* was also written in the 19th century.

The Proposal is a one act dramatic play written by Anton Checkhov in 1860. The main characters are Ivan Vassilevitch Lomov, his neighbor Stepan Stephanovitch Chubukov, and his daughter Natalya Stepanovna. Lomov visits the house of his neighbors for the sole purpose of proposing marriage to Natalya. It does not seem that Lomov wants to marry but in a side conversation to himself, we learn he is talking himself into it. He reasons that he is getting older and needs to find a wife before he is too old. Before Lomov could propose to Natalya, an argument ensues regarding the ownership of a piece of land, Oxen Meadows, which is nestled between their lands. When neither Lomov nor Natalya are validated in their claim of their family owning Oxen Meadows, they begin insulting each other's family. After an episode of his exaggeration stemming from his hypochondria, Lomov storms out of the house. Natalya learns from her father that Lomov was at their house with the intention of proposing to her. Heartbroken, she begins

to throw an overemotional tantrum begging her father to bring Lomov back to their house.

She cries and wails until her father gives in bringing Lomov back for her to have him try again to propose. Stepan is desperate to make his daughter happy, much like Mr. Loisel in *The Necklace*. Lomov returns to the house but once again before he can propose to Natalya, another argument ensues over whose hunting dog is superior. Natalya continues to yell at Lomov throughout the argument. Lomov restarts his bout of hypochondria ending with a fake death. While Natalya and her father think Lomov is dead, they regret all the terrible things they said to him. Lomov comes around and Natalya resumes her arguing with him. In the end, it becomes clear to Stepan that Lomov and Natalya love to argue over everything. Finally, Natalya's father resigns himself to the bickering and forces both Lomov and Natalya to celebrate their engagement as they are continue to fight. In *Journey into Literature*, Clugston defines the theme of a story as, "the idea behind the story." (2010).

There are two themes within each story that consists of marriage and the different expectations people face within society. In *The Necklace*, Mathilde is married to a man who loves her and tries to appease her. It is unclear if Mathilde loves her husband but rather than be appreciative of him, she lacks compassion and feels she has married beneath her. Mathilde feels she should have married a rich man but instead lowered herself to marry "a little clerk in the Department of Education." (Maupassant, 1884). Mathilde has a childhood friend, Mme. Forester, she no longer wants to talk to out of

envy for the simple reason that her friend married a rich man. Mathilde is reminded of her social status she refuses to accept when she has speaks with her friend. Mathilde tells her husband she cannot attend the ball without jewelry even when her husband offers to buy a new dress for her to wear.

It seems Mathilde feels an expectation from the upper class that she wear certain attire which includes fancy jewelry. Attending the ball without jewelry is not an option for Mathilde as she feels she will be disgraced. Out of desperation for fancy jewelry, Mathilde is forced to ask her friend to borrow her fancy jewelry. This illustrates the desperation of Mathilde to fit into the upper class and the lengths she will do to achieve it. In *The Proposal*, Natalya and Lomov have the same wealth yet Natalya views Lomov beneath her when she argues with him over ownership of Oxen Meadows. For years both families have shared the land, yet it is important for Lomov and Natalya to determine who truly owns the land. In the argument over ownership of Oxen Meadows, it reveals the importance they each place on social status.

In an attempt to establish ownership, they begin to discredit each other's families. Like Mathilde, this illustrates Lomov and Natalya's desperation to be considered a higher class and the lengths they will go to in order to achieve it. It is clear throughout the dialogue that Lomov and Natalya do not love each other and only want marriage for reasons other than love. Lomov does not particularly want to marry but feels he is at a critical age to still remain single. He reasons that Natalya is "an excellent housekeeper, not bad-looking, well-educated..." (Chekhov, 1860). Like Lomov, Natalya does not want to marry for reasons of love but rather out of economic necessity. It is

important for Natalya to feel her family is in a higher financial standing than Lomov going into the marriage. In their own ways, each of the stories seem to mock marriage and the upper class.

The story mocks the process of marriage and courtship. The ideal steps in a process of marriage is for a person to find another person he or she loves and moves forward to unite in marriage. Love is not a factor in the union of Natalya and Lomov but rather satirically focuses on a marriage for economic purposes. In *The Necklace*, Mathilde mocks marriage by settling for someone she feels is beneath her rather than someone she is in love with. Both storylines paint accurate images of the desperation people feel in their quest to prove they belong in the upper class. The mockery towards the upper class illustrates they never realize how much better their life is than that of those beneath them. The upper class fails to see this factor because they are too busy obsessing over social status.

Content is another layer of parallelism *The Necklace* and *The Proposal* share. In literature, content is described as the purpose of the piece of literature. (Free Dictionary, 2013). The content of both stories involve characters that are unhappy in their lives as well as the possessions they have. Mathilde has a husband who loves her, a maid who does the cleaning in her house, and is able to purchase a new dress for the ball yet none are enough to satisfy her. She continues to fantasize about a life consisting of living in the upper class. Much like Mathilde, Lomov is unhappy at his age to still be unmarried at the “critical age of 35” and is anxious about finding a girl to marry soon. (Chekhov, 1860). Lomov is argumentative over what he feels are “

principals” and whether his dog is superior then the dog of his neighbors. (Checkhov, 1860). In actuality, he creates his own unhappiness as a result of his pride. Natalya is unhappy as a result of her pride as well.

It is imperative for Natalya to establish the superiority of her family over the Lomov’s family. When the superiority of her family cannot be confirmed, she resorts to extreme exaggerated tantrums instigating her own despair. All three main characters are extreme in their embellishments stemming from their narcissism and selfishness. Each character feels they are the more superior person or family over others around them. When others do not concede to the superiority, the character falls into misery. Mathilde views herself as someone who was meant to be in a higher class and defiantly refuses to accept her social class within her society. Natalya and Lomov have the same wealth yet they each feel their family has more wealth. Both stories are based on lies and opportunistic advancements.

Mathilde was opportunistic in that she only used her friend for her jewelry as she had no desire to speak to her. Mathilde was so obsessed to socially advance herself, she made a choice to do something she did not want to do, which was to speak to her friend that she envied. Mathilde lost the necklace and chose to lie to her friend rather than tell her what happened. It was not until the end when Mathilde had lost everything that she chose to tell her friend the truth. Lomov and Natalya both speak harsh words about each other’s families they do not really mean. Each character has known the neighboring family since childhood and have obviously regarded each other

closely as neighbors. Both stories have characters struggling with what they really want and are prideful in their possessions or lack of.

The Necklace is a satirical short story with irony. Satires are incorporated into literature to illustrate the contradictions characters face of what something should be versus what something is in reality. (Clugston, 2010). In The Necklace, Mathilde consistently fancies the life she feels she should have had, which is to live among the upper class. In reality, she belongs to the middle class and nothing will ever change that. The contradiction is the resisting struggle Mathilde faces as she must live in the social class she belongs in rather than the class she feels she is supposed to be in. Mathilde does not understand that her elaborate fantasizing deepens her feelings of discontent of her social status. The irony for Mathilde is that she loses everything she possesses and drops to a lower social class as a result of the opportunistic choices she makes. The Proposal is a satirical farce which is “ a short play” that also has irony. (Clugston, 2010).

The play orbits around the idea of marriage which should be between two people that love each other. In reality, the play has two people that want to marry each other for reasons other than love. Lomov and Natalya cannot stop arguing long enough for the proposal to even happen. The emotions of both Lomov and Natalya are greatly exaggerated as they raise their voices, throw tantrums, fake injuries, and even fake their death. The irony in The Proposal is that Natalya and Lomov fail to realize the Oxen Meadows would belong to both of them if they were to marry. Instead of realizing this fact, they continue to blindly argue over who has ownership of the piece of land.

The writing style of both stories have more differences than similarities between them. The Necklace has long sentences that are written in an informal manner as a short story tends to have. The story is narrated in a third-person omniscient point of view. The mood is the constant feeling of disappointment from Mathilde as she continually lives in despair outside the upper class she dreams about. In The Proposal, there is limited narration but rather sentences that are short and efficient that make up a dialogue. On a couple of instances, there were moments where Lomov or the father of Natalya spoke to themselves in longer sentences.

In those instances of the longer sentences, the reader is able to better understand each character. The mood of The Proposal is tremendously tense between all characters. It did not take much to upset any one of the characters which caused another onset of exaggerated emotional outbursts. While the lesson learned is relatively the same within both pieces of literary work that were compared, each author decided to add their unique touch. While the theme, content, and form showed similarities, the form in which each story was delivered was the notable difference. One author used a serious approach while the other author delivers a more farcical approach. Both authors are effective in the themes and meanings that poke at marriage and the social roles people play according to their society.

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