

# Greed and loss in the necklace and disabled

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Greed and Loss are dominant themes in both Disabled and The Necklace. Both writers explore these themes in different ways, but their pieces ultimately imply that greed is bound to result in a loss. Both writers also emphasize on the elusive nature of fame and riches which both main characters fall for. The war appeared magnificent to the soldier in Disabled but it was actually a damaging death plagued battle with no riches or glory to hope for. Likewise, Mathilde in The Necklace thought the necklace was diamond and after draining the life of all her youth, she finds that it was fake. The quest to fulfill superficial desires and its inevitable consequences are at the core of both pieces.

Both the main characters in the pieces experience loss and are both ruined, one physically and one financially - and perhaps both mentally. They both start out with a desire for something superficial and not needed, which ultimately leads to them both ironically losing out.

The writer of The Necklace, Guy de Maupassant, was born in 1850, in Dieppe, France. He lived with his mother after she was disgraced and ostracised by all those who knew her, for the one reason that she left her husband. Known largely for his skill of executing denouements effortlessly, de Maupassant has often been referred to as a protege of Gustave Flaubert, also an 18th Century French writer. He was a very secluded person, and he had a personal loathing of society. Perhaps this was a motive for his writings that occasionally villainized modern society and characterized it as superficial and corrupt. The Necklace is a direct critique of society's fascination with glamour and jewels, and the common desire for the superficial.

Both the boy in Disabled and Madame Loisel in The Necklace are not content with what they have, even though they are both very privileged. De Maupassant explains in The Necklace: " She was unhappy all the time..." Although Mathilde lives a perfectly acceptable life with maids and food on her table, she is not content with her lifestyle - the unhappiness she exhibits is because of her greed. To accentuate this, De Maupassant uses the words ' she dreamed' on a number of occasions: " She dreamed of exquisite dishes served on fabulous china plates." To draw the reader's attention to Mathilde's unhappiness, many emotive words are used. De Maupassant writes: " Sometimes, for days on end, she would weep tears of sorrow, regret, despair, and anguish." Although some would argue that this makes us feel compassion towards her, it also makes her seem spoilt. She is characterized like a little girl who is having a tantrum when she doesn't get what she wants, highlighting her predominant characteristic as greedy.

Wilfred Owen, who was born in 1893, is one of the leading First World War poets. He served in the Manchester Regiment after he enlisted at the age of 22. He is best known for his shocking accounts of the trenches, gas and the deaths of his fellow soldiers. His most proclaimed poem, Dulce et Decorum Est, explains the results of cowardice. Perhaps Owen believes that those who sacrificed nothing are cowards and that soldiers like the ones in his poem Disabled are the real heroes of the war.

In Owen's poem Disabled the soldier is also made to seem childlike, for quite similar reasons. He is not content with being the hero on the sports field, and nor is he content with the attention he gets from girls. He must have more

glory, and he must impress those around him. Owen writes: "That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg..." Just as Mathilde wants to look like a goddess in a ball gown, the young boy imagines himself as a god in a kilt. This characteristic is somewhat childish because he wants to be the 'cool kid' that everybody respects. It is selfishness and the quest for self-glorification that motivate the soldier to join the army, rather than a sense of duty to his country. He wants glory for selfish reasons so that he can show off. The poem reads: "Germans he scarcely thought of... he thought of jeweled hilts for daggers in plaid socks." In reality, he doesn't care about his country, but only about himself. He takes pride in going off to join the army, but then finds that his hopes are not wholly fulfilled when he returns home: "Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer a goal." People no longer show him the care nor the respect that he wants to be shown, and they no longer celebrate his actions as they used to, which is a somewhat ironic outcome.

Another prominent reason that the soldier in Owen's poem joined the army was for the sexual attention he expected he would receive for it. However, ironically, the consequence of him going to war means that his now broken body will no longer enjoy the female attention or 'their slim waists' only to be replaced by the memory of blood spurting from his thigh, which could, in fact, be a metaphor for male ejaculation.

Mathilde also exhibits a lot of pride in herself throughout de Maupassant's short story. She has her moment of glory when she is at the party: "She danced ecstatically, wildly, intoxicated with pleasure..." She has reached

ecstasy when she finally has what she wants. But as we see soon after, 'pride goeth before destruction...' Her delight is not only transient but, as the final twist reveals, illusory.

Self-obsession is a predominant factor in the loss that both of the characters experience. Mathilde loses ten years of her life which she spends working to repay debts she owes - her body wastes away and she loses her youth. Her self-obsession is clear from the outset of the story, as de Maupassant writes: "She was one of those pretty, delightful girls..." and almost immediately it seems as if she is talking about herself. She thinks she is better than her own lifestyle, and that she deserves more. This arrogance makes us show less sympathy for Mathilde, as it encourages us to take the view that she deserved to lose what she had. De Maupassant emphasizes this by adding the contrast of her husband's contentment when he exclaims: "'Ah! Stew! Splendid'". De Maupassant deploys this contrast to emphasize that it is greed and self-obsession that drive Mathilde. This same self-obsession is also seen in Disabled. The soldier is now old; his youth consumed by the war that he thought would make him even more attractive. He is obsessed with himself, and loves being shown off: "After the matches, carried shoulder high." Both the characters love showing off and clearly think very highly of themselves. They both exhibit greed for attention. The arrogance that they demonstrate makes us less sympathetic towards their characters in their sufferings.

The desire for the past that has been lost is shown in Disabled by Owen's repetitive use of references to the past to show that it is all the unknown boy

thinks about. Owen writes: " In the old times..." and multiple paragraphs are written in the perfect tense to reinforce the desire of the soldier for what used to be.

In 48 different countries, there are tombs that represent the ' unknown soldier'. The remains that have been interred there commemorate the death of all those who died in the war. Perhaps Owen's reluctance to say the name of the soldier mentioned in the poem, thus making him an ' unknown soldier', is a hint that nobody really cares about him - he is just one of the many who fought in the war. Perhaps he hopes to imply that nobody cares about what he wants, or what he has lost - or even his regrets. This is somewhat ironic because that is all he really wanted.

The soldier has sacrificed everything. He used to have four limbs, all the glory on the football pitch he could possibly want, and attention for his attractiveness: " There was an artist silly for his face," But now that he has sacrificed everything, he has nothing to give, and nobody cares for him: " Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes passed from him..." We feel sympathy for him because he clearly regrets the naive choices he made when he was younger. We feel a lot more sympathy for the soldier in Disabled than we do for Mathilde because, although he showed ignorance in his youth, he was motivated by a naivety rather than pure greed, which is a much less desirable trait.

Once Mathilde realizes that she has wasted ten years of her life and all the family's money, she experiences the same regret and feeling of loss. Guy de Maupassant uses very emotive language to emphasize Mathilde's memories

of the past. He writes: " She would sit by the window and think of that evening long ago when she had been so beautiful and admired." This regret that Mathilde feels is the more predominant impact of her loss. She feels annoyed and upset about the unlucky circumstances that she fell into. She thinks that it is unfair, as she says: " How little is needed to make or break us!" Both characters exhibit self-pity throughout the pieces of writing. In *The Necklace*, it reads: " She had no fine dresses, no jewelry, nothing; and that was all she cared about." She is sad for herself, and we feel not pity but anger at her for this, because she has no reason for it. However, in some ways, both their reasons for self-pity are somewhat justifiable, as it is a very normal desire to want to look nice at a ball or to attain respect amongst one's companions. Are they undesirable characters, or are they justifiably pitied?

It is clear from both pieces that the writer intended to underline that greediness is what caused Mathilde's and the soldier's loss, and that regret soon follows. The hope and desires of both characters are dashed and lost as a consequence of their greedy pursuit of the superficial. However, I think both writers also intended for society to be criticised for the way that it glorifies war and how it glamorizes jewels (which in reality are only glass). Perhaps Mathilde and the soldier were conditioned by society to act as they did and to be greedy? Maybe we are left with the feeling that we are all partly responsible for their loss by glorifying war and glamorous parties which contributed to their greed? Overall, both characters had a desire and fascination for the superficial, and although this is put across differently by both writers, the ultimate theme of inevitable loss is the same.