

Modern short story essay



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Modern Short Story Essay Early 20th Century authors often wrote about the strange things and discrepancies found in society and used irony to criticize them. Katherine Mansfield's "A Cup of Tea" and Virginia Woolf's "The Duchess and the Jeweller" both use irony to condemn and show inconsistencies in social classes. The short stories demonstrated how being upper class or rich doesn't necessarily mean you are secure, generous or a good person. A main topic found in the two stories is that money can't buy someone self esteem if they never had it. Both main characters seem to have everything but use material things to fill their insecurity and neither of them have what they really want. The Jeweller had become very wealthy and admired. He was envied by every man he encountered yet inside the Jeweller still felt inferior and as though "...he was a little boy in the alley where they sold dogs on Sunday." (Woolf 6) At the end of the story the Jeweller sits back and thinks of how he was tricked and is the same fool he will always be. In "A Cup of Tea" Rosemary is "[A] young, brilliant, extremely modern, exquisitely well dressed, amazingly well read in the newest of the new books," (Mansfield 1) woman. The only thing Rosemary lacks is physical appearance. She was not the best looking female and unfortunately that flaw bothered her and was one of the reasons she was so insecure. Rosemary is also rich and able to purchase anything she wanted. The only thing Rosemary couldn't purchase was self esteem and this showed at the end of the story when she asks Phillip the simple question of "' Am I pretty?'" (Mansfield 8) Both stories show how the main characters satisfy their selfish needs instead of just doing the right thing. The Jeweller is an experienced and successful jeweler and knows he should make sure the pearls presented to him to purchase are authentic. The Jeweller didn't see what he was losing,

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“...he saw not the houses in Bond Street, but a dimpling river; and trout rising and salmon; and the Prime Minister; and himself too, in white waistcoat; and then, Diana. He looked down at the pearl in his hand. But how could he test it, in the light of the river, in the light of the eyes of Diana? But the eyes of the Duchess were on him. ” (Woolf 6) Once he believes will get Diana and pictures himself as royalty, he quickly buys the pearls without testing them to fill his own selfish desires. As a result, he is tricked. In the other story Rosemary wants to bring home the little girl so she can show her off and play with her like a little toy doll to keep to herself. Instead of just helping the poor girl by giving her money, Rosemary thinks of her own selfish desires. When deciding whether or not to bring home the nameless girl Rosemary thinks “...such an adventure. It was something out of a novel by Dostoevsky, this meeting in the dusk. Supposing she took the girl home? Supposing she did do one of these things she was always reading about or seeing on the stage, what would happen? It would be thrilling. And she heard herself saying afterwards to the amazement of her friends: ‘ I simply took her home with me,’ as she stepped forward and said to that dim person beside her: ‘ Come home to tea with me.’”(Mansfield 3) Rosemary thought this would be her chance to impress her friends and show how much of a good woman she was. One final similarity found in the two stories is the demonstration of the upper wealthy class behaving immorally and manipulative. In the Duchess and the Jeweller the Duchess uses manipulation to cheat the Jeweller and get what she desires. The Duchess enters the Jeweller’s store claiming that she only has ten pearls, she states on page 4 that those ten pearls are “‘ All that’s left me, dear Mr. Bacon,’” (Woolf 4). Not only was the Duchess able to guilt the Jeweller into getting she

wanted she made him believe he was getting rewarded with the gift of spending a long weekend with her daughter and becoming part of royalty class. In "A Cup of Tea" Phillip was able to manipulate his wife Rosemary by aiming at her weak spot, which was her insecurity. Phillip believes that Rosemary bringing home the little girl is not amusing and an absurd thing to do. To trick Rosemary into getting the little girl to not stay for dinner Phillip attacks very sneakily. Phillip simply states "' Good Lord!' Phillip struck a match. ' She's absolutely lovely. Look again, my child. I was bowled over when I came into your room just now. However... I think you're making a ghastly mistake. Sorry, darling, if I'm cruse and all that. But let me know if Miss Smith is going to dine with us in time for me to look up The Milliner's Gazette'. " (Mansfield 7) As soon as Phillip tells Rosemary all these things about the little girl Rosemary is came over by jealousy and wishes the little girl to leave. So not only does Phillip manipulate Rosemary but she then allows her own jealousy to overcome her desire to help the poor girl. In conclusion, the two stories both successfully used irony to point out the how the upper class can be envied by all but still be insecure. They both exhibited main characters who are wealthy and seem to have it all but can still behave selfishly and when they do it can backfire with opposite results then they desired. The last realization is that even the highly regarded upper class can behave immorally and manipulate others.